

## INTRODUCING THE NEO-PRAGMATIST VOCABULARY

We hope to replace the reality-appearance distinction with the distinction between the more useful and the less useful. So we say that the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology – the vocabulary used in what Heidegger called “the onto-theological tradition” – was a useful one for our ancestors’ purposes, but we have different purposes, which will be better served by employing a different vocabulary. Our ancestors have climbed up a ladder which we are now in a position to throw away. We can throw it away not because we have reached a final resting place, but because we have different problems to solve than those which perplexed our ancestors.

Richard Rorty,  
Debating the State of Philosophy

“Imagine a person whose memory could not retain *what* the word ‘pain’ meant - so that he constantly called different things by that name - but nevertheless used the word in a way fitting in with the usual symptoms and presuppositions of pain” - in short he uses it as we all do. Here I should like to say: a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it, is not part of the mechanism.

Ludwig Wittgenstein,  
Philosophical Investigations

This chapter explores Rorty’s recontextualization. As I established in chapter one, Rorty wants to replace the current modern vocabulary with his neo-pragmatist vocabulary (whether this leads us to call Rorty a “modernist” or a “postmodernist” we leave an open question). In order to do this, he can’t appeal to “normal arguments” - to the typical criteria of argument evaluation utilized by modernists - but must, rather, employ a tactic of recontextualization. If we think of vocabularies as systems of questions, Rorty wants to convince us that a new system of questions can better orient our intellectual and cultural pursuits. He writes in the hope of “providing contemporary liberal society with

a *vocabulary* which is all its own, cleansing it of the residues of a vocabulary which was suited to the needs of former days” (italics added, CIS, 1989: 55). He wants to "set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines" through a description of a new "form of intellectual life in which the vocabulary of philosophical reflection inherited from the seventeenth century would seem. . .pointless" (PMN,1979: 6).

However, this move isn't easily accomplished. As I claimed in the second chapter, moral universalism and representationalism structure the way participants in the modern vocabulary see their world. The assumptions contained in those questions constrain the rhetorical world of modernists. In this world, individuals who don't take those questions for granted, or don't understand why those questions are important questions to ask, seem naïve, unintelligible, and intellectually irresponsible. Rorty's job, then, is to describe a new world, a world where individuals who assume those questions, and the traditional modern vocabulary, appear quaint and out of touch. He wants us to start thinking in a different vocabulary, one that no longer clings to the hope for metaphysical comfort.

Rorty can't merely describe this new world though; he can't merely tell us stories. He must also make sure this new world, and the stories he tells about it, address the deeply felt fears and hopes of modernists. He must show us how this new way of thinking still gets at some of the functions universalists and representationalists hoped the modern vocabulary would perform. Since he is dealing with an audience that has been socialized into thinking that certain needs are paramount, he must address those needs, either by telling us how we can satisfy them in a different way or telling us why we

shouldn't have them - these are the constraints within which Rorty's recontextualization operates.

I've said that Rorty doesn't see himself as trying to bridge the gap between the modern vocabulary and the neo-pragmatist vocabulary. Emphasizing the radical incommensurability between vocabularies, he doesn't acknowledge the functional continuity between vocabularies. Nevertheless, he is pretty good, I think, at responding to these functional considerations. Because he is acutely sensitive to his audience, he tells stories designed to make his rhetorical world look attractive to adherents of the modern vocabulary. This sensitivity amounts to him doing a good job of addressing (both deflating and reoccupying) the function-positions outlined in chapter two.

In this chapter, then, I look at how Rorty manages to dissolve some of the function-positions associated with the modern vocabulary and how he succeeds in reoccupying other associated function-positions. Continuing to see the modern vocabulary as roughly divided between two key questions, the moral universalist question and the representationalist question, I look at how Rorty responds to the rhetorical constraints that naturalize those questions.

## **A Post-metaphysical Vocabulary (yes, god finally is dead)**

The biggest problem that Rorty has with both the moral universalist question and the representationalist question is their metaphysical tone. The vocabulary a modernist thinks through suggests a world where there is a strong distinction between what appears to be true and what really is true. This metaphysical distinction traditionally has been associated with the idea that underlying our relative experiences there is a metaphysical world, which consists of objects that have immutable, permanent, universal essences. The moral universalist is looking for the essence that defines the human, which she thinks will have an interesting moral importance if only we can discover it, while the representationalist thinks that if we find the right sort of justificatory methods we will be able to correctly map the contours of the real world. Both viewpoints rely on metaphysical currency; they both trade in the assumption that our mutable, contingent, relative beliefs might some day be straightened out by accessing the metaphysical world that underlies those beliefs. They both try to fulfill the *stability function*: to provide knowledge of an eternal and objective reality in order to secure ourselves against a shifting and chaotic world.

This metaphysical preoccupation is misleading, according to Rorty, because it orients us towards trying to discover and internalize a metaphysical reality. The pursuit of metaphysical truth is undertaken under the assumption that this truth should be our only guidance. The idea is that if we can only escape the contingency of our culture, we can figure out the proper metaphysical algorithm. Rorty suggests that the choice between

the adoption of his neo-pragmatist vocabulary and the maintenance of the traditional modern vocabulary rests on a fundamental choice:

between accepting the contingent character of starting-points, and attempting to evade this contingency. To accept the contingency of starting-points is to accept our inheritance from, and our conversation with, our fellow-humans as our only source of guidance. To attempt to evade this contingency is to hope to become a properly-programmed machine. This was the hope which Plato thought might be fulfilled at the top of the divided line, when we passed beyond hypotheses. Christians have hoped it might be attained by becoming attuned to the voice of God in the heart, and Cartesians that it might be fulfilled by emptying the mind and seeking the indubitable. Since Kant, philosophers have hoped that it might be fulfilled by finding the a priori structure of any possible inquiry, or language, or the form of social life. If we give up this hope, we shall lose what Nietzsche called "metaphysical comfort," but we may gain a renewed sense of community (CP, 1982: 166).

This obsession with metaphysics has led us to distrust the potential of our particular communities and underemphasize the ways in which we can, through beliefs and language, cope with our world. Rather than actively expanding our vocabularies or trying to invent new vocabularies, we have tried to weed out the metaphysically incorrect vocabularies. We have assumed that discovering this metaphysical vocabulary will allow us dispense with the varied vocabularies developed over the centuries by human communities. Historically and culturally varied prejudices will be suppressed by an ahistorical and objective knowing.

For Rorty, such an end to adaptation and variation is impossible, beside the point, and distracting. Rorty doesn't think we should ask the metaphysics question at all. He thinks we should not desire the sense of stability supposedly provided by metaphysics. Rather than trying to find some way of stopping the evolution of our species, Rorty thinks we should place more emphasis on finding creative ways to advance this evolution. We should reevaluate how we think of our culture. Where we once disparaged the

contingency of our cultural starting points, we should embrace, respect and encourage these different alternatives.

Rorty wants to dissolve the desire for metaphysical comfort that has shaped the metaphysics question and, as derivatives of that question, the universalist and representationalist questions. His claim is that this sort of desire is unfulfillable, inappropriate and in tension with a general liberal democratic orientation. In ways which will become clearer when we examine the universalist and representationalist questions, Rorty believes we can, and should, excise our desire for metaphysics. We should simply stop asking the metaphysics question.

Despite his problems with metaphysics in today's world, Rorty acknowledges that metaphysics once served a purpose. He writes that "the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology - the vocabulary used in what Heidegger called 'the onto-theological tradition' - was a useful one for our ancestors' purposes, but we have different purposes, which will be better served by employing a different vocabulary" (DSP, 1996: 37). Our problems today have more to do with how to further our rapid adaptation to a complex world and how to deal with differences between cultural worldviews. The problem with metaphysics is that it is an intellectual orientation ill suited to the demands of a cosmopolitan, cultural sensitive liberal culture. While it once might have seemed promising to attempt to connect to something outside of our culture, something divine, today it seems that our different moral and epistemic cultures have a lot to offer us as culturally different communities. Rorty thinks we need to emphasize our abilities to cope with the world and the pursuit of the creation of a common, liberal,

democratic moral culture that can include alternative perspectives on morality. This shift in problems demands that we realize that “our ancestors have climbed up a ladder which we are now in a position to throw away.” We can throw this ladder away “not because we have reached a final resting place, but because we have different problems to solve than those which perplexed our ancestors” (DSP, 1996: 37).

This reevaluation of the worth of metaphysics is reflected in Rorty’s endorsement of the world disclosing aspect of language. While normal arguments within vocabularies are responsible for much good, Rorty often emphasizes the potential in developing new vocabularies for thinking about our ethical, epistemic, and practical problems. Permitting and encouraging ethical and epistemic communities to develop a worldview that works for them is central, Rorty believes, to a well functioning liberal democratic society.

Ignoring metaphysics is not, however, to ignore the external world or our personal selves. Both the world and our selves “have power over us - for example, the power to kill us. The world can blindly and inarticulately crush us; mute despair, intense mental pain, can cause us to blot ourselves out” (CIS, 1989: 40). This sort of power is best dealt with, however, by coping with it, rather than trying to know our intrinsic selves of the true nature of the world. In other words, rather than trying to overcome contingency and adaptation by appropriating metaphysical truth, Rorty claims we should acknowledge and emphasize our contingency and actively engage in our adaptation. We should accept that we are all in Neurath’s boat. We have nothing more stable than a boat to sail in and no way of dealing with rough waters except by rebuilding our boat plank by plank from the inside.

Rorty wants us to stop living in a metaphysical world, to stop trading in metaphysical currencies. He wants us to start thinking in terms of a post-metaphysical world, a world where we see ourselves as merely a certain type of biological species causally interacting with our environment. We are different (but not absolutely or inherently different) from other biological species in that we, through the use of language and imagination, have found a way to work collectively and intelligently for our common good. Dispensing with metaphysics, we will see ourselves as collectively endeavoring to cope with a world that sometimes frustrates our hopes. Rorty wants us to internalize the conviction that “instead of looking for the influence of the eternal on the temporal, or the unconditioned on the contingent, we should just forget about the relation between eternity and time. We should concentrate on the relation between the human present and the human future” (DSP, 1996: 25).

The disclosure of this post-metaphysical worldview first began, Rorty suggests, in the writings of Emerson. Two intellectual camps picked up on this Emersonian vision, one lead by Nietzsche, the other by James, and began to flesh out what life would look like once you got rid of metaphysics. While, clearly, Nietzsche and James each elaborated a *different* version of this post-metaphysical world, Rorty claims they both share some fundamental post-metaphysical assumptions.<sup>1</sup> Rorty sees “pragmatism, as well as certain trends in post-Nietzschean European philosophy, as emphasizing the contingent character of both attempts at cognition and attempts to achieve moral responsibility” (DSP, 1996: 27). Siding with the pragmatists over the post-

Nietzscheans (though still incorporating many of the insights of post-Nietzschean philosophy), Rorty wants to “replace the search for universal validity with utopian social hope” (DSP, 1996: 26), specifically liberal democratic social hope. Whereas metaphysics takes “our ability to know, and more specifically to know nonhuman reality, as the crucial human potentiality,” the pragmatist wants “to put social hope in the place that knowledge has traditionally occupied” (DSP, 1996: 26).

One of the definitive differences between Rorty’s vocabulary and the modern vocabulary is that the latter sees human beings as trying to access a metaphysical world, whereas Rorty sees human beings as trying to collectively cope with an external world. While the metaphysical world is supposed to be objectively knowable, immutable, and built of essences, the external world, for Rorty, is only relationally knowable, mutable, and built of shifting chunks of mass. These chunks of mass move about because of causal force which are independent of our beliefs about them, but we only know them through our relations to them. Since there is no way to access this causal world except through our subjective experiences of it, we should think of our beliefs as habits for causal interaction with the world, and words as conceptual tools. Rorty thinks we should treat our beliefs not as mini-maps of a metaphysical world, but as habits for action. Treating beliefs “not as representations but as habits of action, and words not as representations but as tools, is to make it pointless to ask, Am I discovering or inventing, making or finding? There is no point in dividing the organism’s interaction with the environment up in this way” (DSP, 1996: 40). If we emphasize thinking of ourselves as

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<sup>1</sup> The fundamental difference between the Nietzschean camp and the Jamesian camp, for Rorty, is that the former is

merely a quirky sort of organism dealing with our environment through beliefs and language, we have no need to posit metaphysical realities. Positing these realities only serves to obscure our interests and limit our imaginations. Instead, we should take pride in our own forms of social hope, we should work to make our community more successful.

Rorty thinks we ought to reject the assumption that language is a medium of expression or representation. Rorty rejects “the idea that there is a fixed task for language to perform, and an entity called ‘language’ or ‘the language’ or ‘our language’ which may or may not be performing this task efficiently” (CIS, 1989: 13). He doubts the utility of an understanding of language that sees language as "a medium of expression or representation" (CIS, 1989: 41). “To drop the idea of languages as representations, and to be thoroughly Wittgensteinian in our approach to language, would be to de-divinize the world” (CIS, 1989: 21). To say that both the self and the world are de-divinized “is to say that one no longer thinks of either as speaking to us, as having a language of its own, as a rival power. Neither are quasi persons, neither wants to be expressed or represented in a certain way” (CIS, 1989: 40). For Rorty, language is a tool for adaptation. He suggests we think of language “as tool using, of language as a way of grabbing hold of causal forces and making them do what we want, altering our self and our environment to suit our aspirations” (ORT, 1991: 81). Different vocabularies allow us to pull different things out of the world. Conceptual tools, housed in vocabularies, enable us to cope with our certain problems in different ways. Within a

vocabulary, language serves as a lubricant for coordinating social action. A vocabulary gives us a common linguistic framework for doing, through normal routines, the everyday sorts of problem-solving we want to do. Rorty thinks we should naturalize language and the mind “by making all questions about the relation of either to the rest of universe causal questions, as opposed to questions about adequacy of representing or expression” (CIS, 1989: 15).

The above suggests that the post-metaphysical world Rorty recommends is highly influenced by a certain sort of naturalist/physicalist understanding of how the world works. Rorty wants us to fully extend the insights that Darwin originated. He wants to “start with a Darwinian account of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment - doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain” (DSP, 1996: 38). According to Rorty, metaphysical attempts to picture the world correctly or to discover our universal moral nature don’t have any role to play in this Darwinian story. Representations seem beside the point if we are concentrating on how to causally interact with the world. If all we need to know is which beliefs allow us to cope with the world, we won’t be interested about whether some beliefs accurately picture the world and others don’t. Likewise, biology doesn’t seem to suggest an interesting moral nature possessed by all human beings. Most of the interesting moral beliefs we have are the product of cultural socialization, not biological adaptation.

This physicalist understanding, however, is not collapsible into a barren, scientific outlook on the world. Rorty emphasizes that our heightened abilities to act

together, to structure our environment, and to determine how we see the world makes us remarkable as a species. They enable us, as communities, to develop moral, artistic and scientific perspectives on the world. As human beings, we hang together trying to cope with a changing, complex world. We see ourselves with “meaning;” we are not merely robots running out preprogrammed algorithms; we give sense to our communities, our morals, our projects. For Rorty, the significance of our lives shouldn’t stem from some immediacy to a metaphysical world; it should be an outgrowth of our human solidarity.

According to Rorty,

in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible. . . . The process of de-divinization. . . . would, ideally, *culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, moral, contingency existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, moral, contingently existing human beings*. In such a culture, warnings of ‘relativism,’ queries whether social institutions had become increasingly ‘rational’ in modern times, and doubts about whether the aims of liberal society were ‘objective moral values’ would seem merely quaint (italics added, CIS, 1989: 45).

A post-metaphysical world would not be nihilistic or meaningless, but its sense of meaning would no longer stem from an assumed link to a metaphysical truth - it would be a product of our culture, our socialization, our collective identities.

Rorty wants to get rid of our metaphysical intuitions. He wants to denaturalize and reject the metaphysicist question. This therapeutic aspect of his philosophy requires that he jettison the traditional moral universalist and representationalist questions. Since both of these questions are derived from the metaphysicist question, they both are informed by metaphysical assumptions. Nevertheless, not all of the function-positions

these questions responded to are metaphysical in nature, which leads Rorty to reoccupy some of the function-positions associated with the universalist and representationalist questions. Over and over, the line that Rorty has to draw when dealing with the modern vocabulary is between the metaphysical and the non-metaphysical function-positions associated with the vocabulary. The next section explores how Rorty attempts to therapeutically dissolve the former and reoccupy the latter in regards to the moral universalist question.

### **Anti-universalism: Substituting “Solidarity” for “Universality”**

Moral universalists see moral behavior in terms of a common moral nature located in all human beings. The life-world they participate in interprets all sorts of ethical behaviors in terms of individuals being in touch with (or being alienated from) their intrinsic moral natures. Further, in this life-world they act as if moral behavior had everything to do with our common moral natures, e.g., they try to get other people in touch with their true moral natures, try to explain why a particular moral nature makes their ethical intuitions legitimate, and try to use a notion of a moral nature as a critical leverage point against the de facto morality of their society. Moral universalists have internalized the belief that thinking of morality in terms of a universal moral nature is the way to assure an enlightened moral utopia. Hence they try to unearth and demonstrate a common moral nature we all inherently possess. They hold that asking the question - What is our common moral nature? - is the first step in permitting us to accomplish the explanative function, the legitimacy function, the persuasion function and the critical function.

Rorty wants to unsettle our commitments to this question by demonstrating that the assumptions contained in the question, the way the question structures how we see our world, have historically frustrated our expectations, the achievement of a moral utopia and a fulfillment of the functions listed above. Part of Rorty’s strategy is to genealogically trace the historical origination of this question and document the inability of modernists to compellingly answer this question. Having schematically presented the

moral universalist question in terms of assumptions and function-positions, I, however, will forego investigating Rorty's genealogy and instead canvass Rorty's argument that the moral universalist's question is a nuisance. This argument, while involving the citation of historical "facts," focuses on the unproductivity and counterproductivity, in reference to the function-positions elaborated in the last chapter, of the moral universalist question. Utilizing the Blumenbergian notion of function-positions, I will look at Rorty's claims in terms of the function-positions outlined in the last chapter.

Once I cover those arguments, I will look at Rorty's proposed substitute question.

Rorty recommends we adopt a neo-pragmatist vocabulary. Within this vocabulary, he supplies us with a new question which, I think, relates nicely to the function-positions outlined in chapter two. While Rorty does not adopt all of the universalist's function-positions en masse, he does address these function-positions, attempting to reoccupy or deflate them. He proposes a new way of seeing moral behavior that is still intended to help us forge the Enlightenment's moral and political utopia.

In Rorty's new world, it would be commonly accepted that it's better to drop the moral universalist question than continue to ask it. By layering on deeper and deeper levels of description, Rorty hopes to provide a concrete feel for this new world. In this new world, we will think the object called a "common moral nature" is as fanciful as dragons and unicorns. We will look at people who once asked this question (or who, perhaps, antiquatedly still continue to ask this question) as confused, ignorant, or curious.

We will see moral behavior as the product of acculturation. From this perspective it will make more sense to cultivate moral virtues in others and ourselves than try to

discover them. Rorty thinks we should adopt a neo-pragmatist vocabulary, one where the notion of common moral natures no longer is intelligible and where moral issues are thought of in terms of socialization.

So, let's begin to examine Rorty's story. The first thing to note is that rather than trying to demonstrate that the universalist is simply wrong, that we don't have a moral nature, or that a notion of a moral nature is unintelligible, Rorty endeavors to demonstrate how the moral universalist question has been unsuccessful, from which he concludes that we shouldn't assume that we possess a common moral nature. Rorty's argument, then, is very different from the sort of argument which claims that these moral universalist assumptions just don't get things like they really are - so we should probably get rid of them. In contrast, Rorty's argument:

has the same form as an argument for cutting off payment to the priests who are performing purportedly war-winning sacrifices - an argument which says that all the real work of winning the war seems to be getting done by the generals and admirals, not to mention the foot soldiers. The argument does not say: Since there seem to be no gods, there is probably no need to support the priests. It says instead: Since there is apparently no need to support the priests, there probably are no gods (HRRS, 1993: 118).

Rorty is interested in the question of whether moral universalism is doing any intellectual work not being done by other ethical mechanisms we already possess. He thinks there are good reasons to refuse to even entertain the universalist question. He is arguing that "since no useful work seems to be done by insisting on a purportedly ahistorical human nature, there probably is no such thing, or at least nothing in that nature that is relevant to our moral choices" (HRRS, 1993: 119). In short, his "doubts about the effectiveness of an appeal to moral knowledge are doubts about causal efficacy, not about epistemic status" (HRRS, 1993: 119).

Rorty is also not claiming that our preoccupation with a common moral nature has *always* been a waste of time. He admits that initially the universalist attempt to locate some universal rational/moral nature was “essential to the beginning of liberal democracy” but claims that searching for that universal nature “has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies” (CIS, 1989: 44). For Rorty, the issue of whether we should keep asking this question hangs on what we think is the best way “to bring about the utopia sketched by the enlightenment” (HRRS, 1993: 118).

So, why does Rorty think the moral universalist question: “what is our common, intrinsic human nature?” unproductive? One reason this question, according to Rorty, isn’t very useful today is that we haven’t been able to make good on the moral universalist promise. We haven’t been able to find a morally interesting intrinsic nature, or at least we haven’t found one that has been relatively accepted, relatively uncontroversial over the long term. Since Darwin, we are more likely to see ourselves as merely “exceptionally talented animals, animals clever enough to take charge of our own future evolution” (HRRS, 1993: 120), than animals which have a special rational nature which sets us apart from other animals. While we haven’t seen the signs of an interesting moral core to the human being, “we have learned that human beings are far more malleable than Plato or Kant had dreamed” (HRRS, 1993: 121).

Although we haven’t found a rational core inside the human shell, we have discovered a lot of scientific knowledge that seems to define us as a *species*. Consistent with his general naturalist orientation, Rorty won’t deny that there are contingently

common characteristics that define the human - physical and/or psychological universals that characterize us as homo sapiens. However, he doesn't think these universals are morally interesting or useful. Rorty denies "the existence of morally relevant transcultural facts" (HRRS, 1993: 116). He doesn't see these physicalist facts doing the sort of work the moral universalist wants done, because they don't settle any moral controversies. These physical facts are based on scientific observation, and insofar as they can be established universally, all they prove is that homo sapiens tend to behave in certain universal patterns. This, however, doesn't do much good when we're dealing with issues of moral controversy, because anything that is controversial, of course, will involve humans following different behavioral patterns. Looking to these empirical facts doesn't furnish much help deciding whether killing an infant is ethically appropriate, because in some cultures people do commit infanticide - for them, such actions are ethical. Moral controversies seem to have to do with cultural norms rather than biological laws. It seems suspect, then, to try to deduce normative rules from scientific observation, which is just another way of realizing the naturalist fallacy - we can't get from "is" to "ought."

Unable to convincingly demonstrate a common, intrinsic, moral nature, moral universalists have not been able to make good on their promises to fulfill the functions associated with the universalist question. Further, in certain situations, this universalist orientation has, according to Rorty, impeded the fulfillment of those functions. Without an uncontroversial, popularly accepted idea of what our moral nature truly is, universalists have not been able to ground the Enlightenment project, to make that project

more concrete, justified, self-critical or expansive.

Let's first look at the relationship between the universalist question and the *legitimacy function*. Rorty claims that the universalist's inability to find a compelling rational core to justify the moral superiority of our moral commitments has, at least recently, problematized our sense of ethical legitimacy. The moral universalist thought that by answering the universalist question, she could provide us with a universal and compelling reason to think our value commitments superior to all other value commitments. In effect, this would provide us with a strong sense of metaphysical legitimacy - a sense that we had found the true morality, that there were no worthier value commitments. If, however, the moral universalist is unable to provide such a rational grounding for our liberal values, the moral universalist's emphasis on a metaphysical moral foundation becomes a reason to think our values *illegitimate* - our moral universalism becomes counterproductive to our fulfilling function-position (2). From the universalist perspective, if we can't find a reason to think our ethical intuitions match up with a metaphysical intrinsic nature, we begin to think that those intuitions are on the wrong track.

Rorty suggests that this explains the phenomena he terms "wet liberalism." In the case of wet liberals, the liberal realizes her liberalism is "just one more example of cultural bias" not morally universal truth, and she begins "to lose any capacity for moral indignation, any capacity to feel contempt." She "can no longer feel pride in being [a] bourgeois [liberal], in being part of a great tradition, a citizen of no mean culture" (ORT, 1991: 203). While we thought that asking the moral universalist question would be a

means of convincing ourselves that we were on the right track, it has turned out, especially recently, to be a reason to think we're just like everyone else - just one more ethnocentric culture. If you accept universalist assumptions, the inability to find a philosophical foundation for our ethical commitments is a reason to think our values are *not* legitimate. Rorty claims that liberals "who are both connoisseurs of diversity and Enlightenment rationalists cannot get out of this bind," since "their rationalism commits them to making sense of the distinction between rational judgment and cultural bias" and "their liberalism forces them to call any *doubts* about human equality a result of such irrational bias" while their "connoisseurship forces them to realize that most of the globe's inhabitants simply do not believe in human equality, that such a belief is a Western eccentricity" (ORT, 1991: 207). Moral universalists "hold on to the Enlightenment notion that there is something called a common human nature, a metaphysical substrate in which things called 'rights' are embedded, and this substrate takes moral precedent over all merely 'cultural' superstructures." The preservation of this notion "produces [a] self-referential paradox as soon as liberal begin to ask themselves whether their belief in such a substrate is itself a cultural bias" (ORT, 1991: 207).

In regard to the *persuasion function*, trying to answer the moral universalist question has not enabled us to expand our Enlightenment moral culture, by persuading others that they should adopt our ethical commitments. Rorty claims that the assumption that "the way to get people to be nicer to each other [is] to point out what they all [have] in common" has historically not worked. Even if we could have developed an idea of

what this common thing is, as a practical question, "it does little good to point out" to morally reproachable people this supposedly common nature (HRRS, 1993: 124). For instance, assuming we take cleverness and learnedness as indicators for being worthy of moral respect, "Nazi toughs were quite aware that many Jews were clever and learned, but this only added to the pleasure they took in beating them up" (HRRS, 1993: 124).

The problem is that "everything turns on who counts as a fellow human being" and no matter what we say to people like the Nazi's, they are not going to see certain individuals as human beings, because they have a different understanding of what a human being is (HRRS, 1993: 124). The Nazis had a sense of what the human is, the Serbs have a sense of what the human is, the Chinese have a sense of what the human is.

"Such people are offended by the suggestion that they treat people whom they do not think of as human as if they were human" (HRRS, 1993: 125). It's implausible that a philosopher's argument of the sort Kant developed will help us to change these people's minds. The suggestion that we "should extend the respect [we] feel for people like [ourselves] to all featureless biped" is an "excellent suggestion, . . . but it has never been backed up by an argument based on neutral premises, and it never will be," at least as far as we can anticipate (HRRS, 1993: 125). These sorts of understandings, even our own Enlightenment understandings, are culturally embedded; and thus, there seems no way to neutrally, persuasively argue that they are universally superior.

The likelihood of increasing encounters between our culture and cultures unlike ours, cultures which do not have historical ties to Christian or Greek conceptualizations of the "human," suggests that the moral universalist question, in regards both to the

legitimacy and the persuasion function, will become increasingly cumbersome. While it may seem promising to focus on universal senses of morality when you're dealing with other closely related cultures, it becomes clear that this sort of appeal doesn't do much good when you're dealing with people who just don't buy into your understanding of morality. The Enlightenment doesn't have a monopoly on the idea that humans have a certain moral nature; in fact, this sort of idea is common in many different cultures. The problem is that moral universalists have developed no convincing argument about why our sense of shared moral value is somehow outside of culture, somehow in touch with things as they really are. This leaves us no way to philosophically rebut claims about morality made by cultures not as inclusive in their understanding of what a "human" is. In the cosmopolitan situation that has increasingly characterized ethical dilemmas in a multi-cultural world, appealing to supposedly "rational" and "universal" understandings of human nature is not going to prove efficacious.

This moral universalist orientation, additionally, has inhibited the fulfillment of the *critical function*. The idea behind much Enlightenment ethical thinking was that if we could think through our ethical natures clearly enough, we could perceive whom to treat with moral respect. The problem with this is that this "thinking through" is done by people heavily socialized into cultural understandings of what humans are, which leads to conservative definitions of who humans are. Trying to specify an intrinsic moral nature for all humans has often been complicitous with the exclusion of certain groups of humans from the category of "truly human." This is why Thomas Jefferson "was able both to own slaves and to think it self-evident that all men were endowed by their creator

with certain inalienable rights" (HRRS, 1993: 112). Because he "had convinced himself that the consciousness of Blacks, like that of animals, 'participate[s] more of sensation than reflection'" (HRRS, 1993: 112), he thought blacks didn't have the same sort of moral make-up as whites which meant they were legitimately disenfranchised. Since moral universalists posit a *static* moral essence, they have a tendency to use this notion of essence to conserve what later turn out to be de facto moral prejudices.

So, all-in-all, Rorty claims the preoccupation with answering the moral universalist question has been unproductive and counter-productive. It has constrained our imaginations without doing the work it was supposed to do. Rorty suggests that we should adopt a new question that better accords with our post-metaphysical times. This question, as I hope to show, reoccupies many of the function positions outlined in chapter two. Rorty continues to attempt to charm us out of the metaphysical needs that his new post-metaphysical question doesn't fulfill.

Let's now begin to develop the ethical dimension of Rorty's neo-pragmatist vocabulary. In light of the historical difficulties associated with thinking of morality in terms of a shared, intrinsic, moral nature, Rorty suggests that we think of morality in terms of moral communities. In this view of morality, moral actions are not the result of being in touch with or alienated from an underlying metaphysical nature, but are, rather, a question of upholding or criticizing culturally supported moral norms. Correct moral intuitions and actions stem from one's participation in a moral community. Rorty aligns himself here with what he considers to be a historical school of philosophy that has:

denied that there is such a thing as 'human nature' or the 'deepest level of the self.' Their strategy has been to insist that socialization, and thus historical

circumstance, goes all the way down - that there is nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human (CIS, 1989: xiii).

Rorty objects to seeing the human as a natural kind, as some category that has common and immutable characteristics. There are different moral communities, and from the perspective of these communities, certain actions are morally sanctioned and others are not, but it's unhelpful to say, as Rorty suggests universalists have, that there is something common to these communities which makes moral actions decidable in the same way for everyone.

Rorty suggests that the most useful way of thinking about morality is in terms of moral communities. His understanding of morality is premised on the assumption that the moral intuitions people hold have been taught to them. Some people have been taught moral intuitions that diverge from ours, and others have been taught to behave in ways that satisfy our intuitions, but either way people think about moral issues the way they do because of socialization. Individuals who act unethically do so either because they are participating in a different moral community or have acted, perhaps because of self-interest, negligence or madness, contrary to their community's own social norms.

Individuals are socialized, through parents, neighbors, novels and other means of moral education, into a moral universe which structures how they think about morality. Rorty claims that "nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals except historically contingent facts of the world, *cultural facts*" (italics added, HRRS, 1993: 116). If you give up the idea that there is some metaphysical reality which serves as the foundation for the one, true morality, you can still have a productive way of

thinking of about morality, Rorty suggests, if you think in terms of the relative moral communities one can be involved in. Making this shift amounts to letting go of the need for metaphysical moral comfort and embracing the contingent starting points of different moral communities.

From this perspective, the key question to ask is not “what are we?” but “who are we?” It’s not fruitful, from his perspective, to try to discover a common moral nature that underlies our contingent moral selves. We should, instead, accept that morality is a contingent social affair and then realize that this acceptance calls upon us to decide which moral camp we want to belong to - calls upon us to ask the question “who are we?” To ask this question is to abbreviate a related set of related questions, such as “what is our coherent moral identity?” “how do we go about making this identity more clear?” “who should receive, from the point of view of our moral community, moral recognition?” “how do we go about making this moral community stronger?” These related questions all revolve around the issue of what moral community we should try to create, where “we” is given a meaning in the context of answering the question and “create” is seen as a practical issue.

Rorty, of course, has a favorite answer to this question. He holds that the sort of community we should forge is a liberal, democratic and post-metaphysical one. This society will be liberal, where *liberals* “are people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do” (CIS, 1989: xv). It will be democratic, in that it will be committed to a publicly accessible conversation about “who are we.” And lastly, it will be post-metaphysical, in that participants will no longer look to philosophy (or science, or religion) to provide

some access to a metaphysical reality which is supposed to secure our moral intuitions against the vagaries of contingent, historic, relative moral communities. Rorty suggests we should all be liberal ironists, where liberal *ironists* are people who believe “there is no answer to the question ‘Why not be cruel?’ - no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible” (CIS, 1989: xv). To be an ironist, in this Rortyan sense, is to no longer be caught up in metaphysics.

Rorty suggests that we all have our “final vocabularies” which are the “words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes” (CIS, 1989: 73). These vocabularies are the manifestations of the moral community we participate in; they mark us as belonging to one moral community versus another. They are *final* in the sense that “if doubt is cast on the worth of those words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse” (CIS, 1989: 73). These vocabularies, like other sorts of vocabularies, are systematically coherent but have no justification beyond this coherency. If they are challenged, say by a group like the Nazis, there may come a time when the only way to defend them is the non-linguistic resort to force. A liberal ironist is someone who “faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires - someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance” (CIS, 1989: xv).

The turn Rorty makes here is a profound one. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers commonly saw themselves as unearthing (enlightening) an underlying moral nature

common to all humanity which provided the Enlightenment moral culture with a metaphysical foundation, Rorty sees himself as acknowledging the situatedness and contingency of the Enlightenment viewpoint. Rorty reverses the enlightenment's scorn for tradition by claiming that we ought to think of our Enlightenment culture *as a tradition*. Rorty makes a virtue of necessity, and gives up on the enlightenment's metaphysical urges, by arguing for the Enlightenment's worth on the basis its virtue as a tradition.

Turning to one's community as the basis for moral decisions has a deep effect on how Rorty thinks about fulfilling the *legitimacy function*. For the moral universalist, being committed to one's moral community was impossible without a belief that that moral community had some metaphysical privilege. Moral universalists think that the legitimacy for one's moral community must be supplied by some notion of a universal moral nature. For Rorty to convince the moral universalist, then, it seems that he must supply a metaphysical sense of legitimacy or convince the moral universalist that she doesn't need this strong sense of legitimacy.

Continuing his antagonism towards metaphysics, Rorty adopts the latter therapeutic strategy. He wants to convince the moral universalist that she really doesn't need a metaphysical sense of legitimacy to think her moral values worth holding. Rorty claims that we can get rid of this metaphysical mechanism for legitimacy, because we already have a sense of legitimacy that is naturally provided by our acculturation into a moral community. We don't need to do any sort of intellectual work to establish the legitimacy of our ethical framework, according to Rorty, because our socialization into

our ethical framework allows us to ethnocentrically defend that framework. Our moral commitments are legitimate, because we *believe* in them; and we believe in them because we were *taught* to believe in them. Rorty believes that being acculturated into a moral community provides an *ethnocentric* legitimacy for that community. We still have reasons for participating in a community, because we've learned, from that community, that our participation is a good thing.

This justification is, of course, *circular*, but that's the only sort of legitimacy Rorty thinks we can get or should need. He wants us to accept that "a circular justification of our practices, a justification which makes one feature of our culture look good by citing still another, or comparing our culture invidiously with others by reference to our own standards, is the only sort of justification we're going to get" (CIS, 1989: 57). This sort of justification is *ethnocentric* in that it doesn't claim to offer cross-cultural legitimation for our ethical intuitions, but, rather, draws upon the resources of our own moral community for justification. The coherence and comprehensiveness of our moral commitments becomes an endosystemic means of justifying those commitments. Holding on to our value commitments is not something for which we need a metaphysical reason.

In other words, the cultural inertia of being acculturated into certain moral and political commitments is enough to justify those commitments for ourselves. Without having a means of stepping outside of her vocabulary and neutrally adjudicating between different vocabularies and the ethical, moral and political commitments those vocabularies entail, the liberal ironist will see no reason to *give up* those commitments

she holds. Since, for the liberal ironist, “there will be no such activity as scrutinizing competing values in order to see which are morally privileged. . . no way to rise above the language, culture, institutions, and policies one has adopted and view all these as on part with all the others,” there will be no way for the liberal ironist to find her value framework illegitimate. Rorty’s ethnocentrism amounts to “the claim that people can rationally change their beliefs and desires only by holding most of those beliefs and desires constant - even though we can never say in advance just which are to be changed and which retained intact” (ORT, 1991: 212).

Rorty admits that this sense of legitimacy will feel lightweight to the universalist, but his response is that what the moral universalist wants isn’t a good thing to want. Rorty is forced to do some Blumenbergian therapy here, because both the sense of legitimacy the modernist pines for is infected with a need for metaphysical comfort. As we examined above, Rorty thinks that this desire for metaphysical legitimacy is unsatisfiable and becomes an impediment to embracing an ethnocentric sense of legitimacy. Rorty claims that the need to find some moral north star is a thorn in our side which needs to be removed. We need to learn how to be comfortable with an ethnocentric, contingent sort of legitimacy - a sense of legitimacy already culturally provided. For Rorty, it’s hard to understand why “a moral claim is ill-founded if not backed up by knowledge of a distinctly human attribute,” because it is “not clear why ‘respect for human dignity’ - our sense that the differences between Serb and Muslim, Christian and infidel, gay and straight, male and female should not matter - must

presuppose the existence of any such attribute" (HRRS, 1993: 116). He hopes that others will also learn to find such a presupposition unnecessary.

Rorty wants to decouple our desire to answer the moral universalist question from our sense of moral legitimacy. By decoupling questions of legitimacy from questions of moral universalism, he thinks he can, among other things, avoid the wet liberal's cynical attitude towards our liberal commitments. Rorty's ethnocentrism "is an attempt to cope with the phenomena of wet liberalism by correcting our culture's habit of" grounding itself on "a philosophical foundation" (ORT, 1991: 204). Rorty thinks our liberal culture and ethical commitments superior, but he thinks they are superior because of reasons a liberal (and perhaps only a liberal) would find convincing. They are superior, because they minimize suffering and cruelty while allowing many different perspectives to exist together.

Rorty's ethnocentrism leads him to think that intellectual efforts to provide liberal, democracies with a philosophical and metaphysical foundation are a waste of time. Since we already have, in Rorty's view, the cultural resources to develop a workable sense of cultural legitimacy, efforts to intellectually furnish a deeper sense of legitimacy are unproductive and, by encouraging us to still seek metaphysical comfort, dangerous. According to Rorty, we should conceptualize our liberal, democratic community in purely secular, post-metaphysical terms. Rorty sees a liberal society as a fully secular one, where part of secularism is giving up the need to have any outside force - either metaphysical or theological - provide sense to our lives. In Rorty's understanding of what a liberal society is, there is something odd and inconsistent in the project of

trying to ground, justify or provide a universal legitimation for that society. Liberal “open-mindedness should not be fostered because, as Scripture teaches, Truth is great and will prevail, nor because, as Milton suggests, Truth will always win in a free and open encounter. [Liberal open-mindedness] should be fostered for its own sake. *A liberal society is one which is content to call ‘true’ whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be*” (CIS, 1989: 51-2). Rorty’s ideal liberal society would merely see itself as a project of a particular community trying to live up to its own ideals, trying to answer the question “who are we?”

The universalist project, to find a metaphysical foundation for liberalism, is in tension with this ideal of a liberal society, because “the attempt to supply such foundations presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between old and new vocabularies” (CIS, 1989: 51-2). If a liberal society is really one that is fully tolerant of any view and allows any view to be tossed out for public consideration, then an attempt to circumscribe an incontestable set of beliefs and patterns of behaving doesn’t sit well with liberalism. That is what philosophical foundations are supposed to do; they are supposed to forestall conversation by giving us a framework that will dictate the answer.

Rorty’s opposition to philosophical foundations is the fundamental point of contention between him and Habermas. The two agree on a lot of the substantive understanding of what a liberal society is, they both hold that “it is central to the idea of a liberal society that, in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes” (CIS, 1989: 51), but they disagree on whether a liberal democracy

needs to claim any sort of metaphysical foundation. This difference concerns “only the self-image which a democratic society should have, the rhetoric which it should use to express its hopes” (CIS, 1989: 67). From Rorty’s perspective, Habermas’ continuation of the Enlightenment project is unwise, because historically that project has been unproductive, and, at least of late, has crippled the efficacy of liberal communities. This project also seems to be incoherent with the openness to conversation definitive of a liberal community. Rorty simply believes that the intellectual work being motivated by the universalist question is useless.<sup>2</sup>

There still is some intellectual work to be done, however. Rorty proposes that we can increase our natural sense of legitimacy by making the intuitions of our moral culture transparent, coherent and comprehensive. Among other things, the question “who are we?” is meant to spur a discussion about our liberal community. This discussion will enable us to develop a clearer, more coherent understanding of what our moral society is.

While Rorty does not think trying to intellectually discover philosophical foundations is productive, he does think that providing well thought out descriptions of our moral culture, of the sort provided by Rawls and, if we strip out the metaphysical parts, Habermas, is a good thing to do. He sees "our task as a matter of making our own culture - the human rights culture - more self-conscious and more powerful, rather than of demonstrating its superiority to other cultures by an appeal to something transcultural" (HRRS, 1993: 117). Rather than grounding our intuitions, we should "summarize our

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<sup>2</sup> While conversely from Habermas’ perspective, Rorty’s abandonment of the hope of grounding liberal democracies mires Rorty’s liberalism in relativism, historicism and colloquialism. People like Habermas reject Rorty’s sort of liberalism because “such relativism seems to them incompatible with the fact that our human rights

cultural influenced intuitions about the right thing to do in various situations" by expressing them philosophically, legally and socially (HRRS, 1993: 117). "These accounts do not ground democracy, but they do permit its practices and its goals to be redescribed" (CIS, 1989: 44).

Summarizing our intuitions allows us all to have a clear understanding of our moral community. This clarity will intensify our identification with this community by enabling us to know how to behave in this community, and understanding our role in this community. "Such summarizing generalizations" increase "the predictability, and thus the power and efficiency, of our institutions, thereby heightening the sense of shared moral identity which brings us together in a moral community" (HRRS, 1993: 117). These summaries aid us in developing a strong, but still ethnocentric, sense of legitimacy for our moral community. Asking this neo-pragmatist question "who are we?" enables us to reoccupy a revised, post-metaphysical legitimacy function-position.

To depart from the order we outlined in chapter two, let's now move to function-position four, the *critical function*. Since socialization plays such a strong role in Rorty's reconceptualizing of morality, it seems that Rorty's understanding of morality, which suggests that moral issues are decided by the prevailing moral opinion, makes it hard to fulfill this critical function. Appealing to accepted cultural norms for legitimacy seems to reinforce conservative norms and chill criticism of our moral community. Assuming that the prevailing sense of moral opinion will typically be conservative, and thus tend to define "individuals-due-moral-respect" narrowly, Rorty's turn to dominant

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culture, the culture with which we in this democracy identify ourselves, is morally superior to other cultures"

opinion smacks of moral conservatism. Rorty's comfortableness with our ethnocentric tendencies complicates his ability to explain how we can be critical of our society. If Rorty claims that our ethical intuitions are legitimate for us because we've been socialized to think they are legitimate for us, how can we break free enough from this socialization to critique these intuitions? Rorty cannot follow the moral universalist line that attempting to discover our intrinsic moral nature will provide us with a focus imaginis, an ideal, to aim at, because he doesn't hold that there is a universal properly ethical way to act. So, how are we, within Rorty's vocabulary, able to be critical of our moral community?

Rorty suggests that, at least within liberal, democratic communities, asking the question "who are we?" can initiate criticism of our moral culture. Asking the question "who are we?" opens up a democratic conversation and dialogue about which moral community we should be a part of. This dialogue, by allowing different voices to enter into the fray, opens up the social space for new, more progressive, understandings of our moral community to emerge and replace dominant, conservative understandings. In fact, Rorty finds liberalism remarkable particularly in its enthusiasm for new and creative answers to the "who" question. In his view of liberalism, the culture of liberalism:

is a culture which prides itself on constantly adding on more windows, constantly enlarging its sympathies. It is a form of life which is constantly extending pseudopods and adapting itself to what it encounters. Its sense of its own moral worth is founded on its tolerance of diversity (ORT, 1991: 204).

The decentering of power in a liberal society, the relative economic security of the polity and the abundance of critical institutions like the press enable widespread conversation

about our ethical and political behaviors. Rorty suggests that this conversation promotes the reexamination of received ethical intuitions.

The tensions within society, the differences between religious, ethnic, racial and sexual groups, not to mention others, ensures that this discussion will be unpredictable. These tensions, which tend to flower in liberal democratic societies where different groups with different moral intuitions come into conversation, are the only mechanisms we have to transcend our ethnocentric prejudices. As Rorty writes:

We can only hope to transcend our acculturation if our culture contains (or, thanks to disruptions from outside or internal revolt, comes to contain) splits which supply footholds for new initiatives. Without such splits – without tensions which make people listen to unfamiliar ideas in the hope of finding means of overcoming those tensions – there is no such hope (ORT, 1991: 13-4).

We can witness this sort of dynamic in the civil rights movement where, among other things, a difference in how to read the American platitude “all men are created equal,” permitted a discussion about whether black individuals should be treated as “men.” Fortunately, from our perspective, this discussion, after blood and courage were expended, led us to include blacks as “men,” at least under law.

Rorty’s ethnocentrism doesn’t preclude this multi-vocal discussion, because his ethnocentrism only says that we have to retain a majority of our ethical intuitions. Because there is no way to rationally change our moral intuitions except by keeping the bulk of them, we have to keep most of our intuitions constant even when we modify them. Rorty doesn’t posit that our understandings of a liberal society will not change, will not become enlightened by some new perspective on our community provided say by the civil rights movement, or the universal suffrage movement. Even if liberty was still

restricted to whites, or males, or heterosexuals, or the wealthy (or some other discriminatory classification) social movements would be able to expand this base. His point is that these movements would not have revised our sense of moral community if they did not, at least on some level, rely on already existing moral assumptions. Without an already existing liberal framework these social movements would not have been able to revise our sense of moral community. Rorty doesn't believe in radical moral revolutions, at least if you mean by "radical" the jettisoning of the bulk of our moral intuitions.

Despite the impossibility, in his opinion, of radical revisions in our final vocabularies, piecemeal change does come about. The most important thing to remember about this sort of change is that we can't know what direction change is going to come from. Although in Rorty's opinion "people can rationally change their beliefs and desires only by holding most of those beliefs and desires constant," we must remember that "we can never say in advance just which are to be changed and which retained intact" (ORT, 1991: 212). The fact that we can't know beforehand which moral intuitions we'll come to think antiquated, colloquial, or prejudiced necessitates that we embrace a democratic discussion about our moral community. This discussion, by refusing to artificially limit the realm of possible moral views, is sensitive to the unpredictability of moral change. In this democratic discussion, where the vocal points are dispersed across society, new understandings of "who-we-are" will emerge.

The "who" question is particularly suited to the fallible, provisional nature of this discussion, because it is a *political* rather than a *metaphysical* question. Whereas the

moral universalist question tended to be conservative, because it wanted a static, eternal answer, the “who” question is political, and therefore contestable and dynamic. Rorty observes that:

The question 'who are we?' is future-oriented in a way in which the question 'what are we?' is not. The "what?" question enshrines the pre-Darwinian notion of a human essence, which has its place in a Platonic heaven of other essences. The 'Who' question sets aside the notion of essence, of intrinsic reality, and thus, . . . of the distinction between reality and appearance. It thereby stops asking a timeless question, and ask a question about future time. But this question about the future is not a request for a prediction, but rather for a project. To ask who we are becomes a way of asking what future we should try, cooperatively, to build (MUET, 1995: 4).

The “who” question, as a political question, calls for contestable, fallible, provisional answers, the sort of answers that will be challenged later on by a new political group. Asking the “who” question acknowledges the shifting and cooperative nature of our moral community. It suggests that we have to build a moral community, not merely discover one.

Asking this question “who are we?” also provides us with capabilities for fulfilling the *persuasion function*. Part of the responsibility in answering the “who” question, at least for an Enlightenment liberal, is trying to figure out how to strengthen and extend her moral community in order to realize the Enlightenment utopia. While Rorty asserts that we should not try to metaphysically ground the Enlightenment project, he also feels that that project, the attempt to get others to "extend moral respect to all people," is an appropriate project. Rorty believes that the “who” question, as a question which involved a consideration of the practical ways to make our moral community strong, will give us a direction for thinking about how to make the Enlightenment Utopia real.

This “who” question provides us with a new sort of direction in that it focuses on the *practical* issues of strengthening our moral community. It leads us to think about how to make our ideals concrete. Rorty has contributed some suggestions on how we can do this. He suggests that what we need to do in order to strengthen our moral community is to get individuals to feel a sense of solidarity with all human beings. *Liberal solidarity*, the feeling that all “featherless bipeds” are part of the same moral community and thus worthy of moral respect, is the spring, Rorty claims, for well functioning liberal democratic societies. Creating this sense of solidarity involves getting others to see different ethnic, racial, sexual groups as like themselves, or as sufficiently like themselves to be morally considered.

Getting the enemies of liberalism to see others as they see themselves involves, providing they have a sufficient level of economic security,<sup>3</sup> getting them to emotionally attach themselves to the groups they typically despise. Expanding their sense of solidarity, if a group is relatively economically and politically secure, is a process of acquainting "people of different kinds with one another so that they are less tempted to think of those different from themselves as only quasi-human. The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms 'our kind of people' and 'people like us' (HRRS, 1993: 123). If we can get the enemies of liberalism to see others as they see themselves, through the use of sentimental moral education, we can begin to extend the Enlightenment utopia to new frontiers. We want to point out to the enemies of liberalism that there are morally relevant similarities between themselves and

the people they despise. In Rorty's view, "the relevant similarities are not a matter of sharing a deep true self which instantiates true humanity, but are such little, superficial, similarities as cherishing our parents and our children - similarities that do not interesting distinguish us from any nonhuman animals" (HRRS, 1993: 129). The trick is to emphasize the mundane commonalties that we experience day-to-day. It is to focus on our emotional attachment to other others rather than some universal nature philosophically demonstrable.

Rorty thinks that this move towards morally reeducating non-liberals will be a lot more effective than trying to bang them over the head with weighty philosophical systems. One of the reasons it will more effective is that the universalists' approach tended to discount individuals who did not follow the norms of our moral community as irrational, implying that they were unsalvageable. Rorty thinks "it is not a good idea. . .to label 'irrational' the intolerant people" we "have trouble tolerating" (HRRS, 1993: 127). Rorty believes that "the bad people's beliefs are not more or less 'irrational' than the belief that race, religion, gender, and sexual preference are all morally irrelevant - that these are all trumped by membership in the biological species" (HRRS, 1993: 127). It's a bad idea, because it makes us think of changing their behavior in terms of getting them in touch with their moral, rational selves - a tactic that has proven to be causally ineffective. Rorty believes, in contrast, that we should think of their behavior as a result of a lack of proper moral education coupled with fear and insecurity. He thinks this is a better way of thinking of these people, because it is "more specific, more suggestive of possible

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<sup>3</sup> Rorty thinks that economic well-being is a necessary condition for a well functioning liberal democratic society.

remedies" (HRRS, 1993: 128). If we think of the cause of these immoral behaviors in these terms, we will want to reeducate these people and provide them with financial and political security.

From this Rortyan view, it follows that real moral work is not done by philosophers like Kant, but by authors, anthropologists, and documentarians. These people create texts that can create a cross-factional and inclusive sense of common solidarity. Rorty has given up the hope that "Nazi or Marxist enemies of liberalism" could be "refuted, by driving the latter up against an argument wall -forcing them to admit that liberal freedom has a 'moral privilege' which their own values lack" (CIS, 1989: 53). From Rorty's point of view, "any attempt to drive one's opponent up against a wall in this way fails when the wall against which he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing thing" (CIS, 1989: 53). Enemies of liberalism, according to Rorty, can best be combated by trying to expose them to new experiences, new modes of ethical behavior, either received first hand or passed down through some medium like literature. To attempt to create this sense of solidarity is to bypass the question of whether we *really do* have an intrinsic nature that necessitates moral respect, whether "human beings really have," for instance, "the rights enumerated in the Helsinki Declaration."<sup>4</sup> Our task is more straightforward from this perspective. It is simply to cultivate in others the moral virtues we esteem in ourselves.

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Only when people are not in direct competition with others will they be able to extend moral respect to all.

<sup>4</sup> Rorty's attitude towards human rights is illustrative of his position in general. Rorty thinks we should go about creating a human rights culture by trying to get other people to acknowledge, through the manipulation of sentiment and the creation of solidarity, that others should be treated as if they had inalienable human rights. Whereas most human rights theorists have hoped to prove, metaphysically, that all people do have these rights, Rorty thinks the

Rorty claims that despite the claims of universalist philosophers, the manipulation of sentiment has done the bulk of the work, at least recently, in creating the Enlightenment utopia. He thinks “that most of the work of changing moral intuitions is being done by manipulating our feelings rather than increasing our knowledge, which is a reason to think that there is no knowledge of the sort which philosophers like Plato, Aquinas, and Kant hoped to acquire” (HRRS, 1993: 118). He believes it is now time to consciously articulate this and to rally around a new moral question - “who are we?”

What is called for, then, is the extension of sentiment, not the declaration of liberal foundations. We don’t respond to people like the Nazis by pointing out Habermasian ideal-speech situations and telling them to start playing by the rules, we respond by trying to reeducate them into our moral community. People like the Nazis aren’t going to become good liberals by us telling them they have to be, they’ll most likely respond that we need to become more like them. Though it is far from certain, they might, however, become good liberals if we give them the right sort of economic conditions and get them to listen to people like Martin Luther King, read novels like Dickens’ Bleak House, examine anthropologists’ reports, etc. These education processes are not all that dissimilar to how the Nazis educated their kids, except, and this is crucial, they are being educated to be good Enlightenment humanists not Nazis.

In this section, we’ve seen how Rorty’s recontextualization works in regards to ethical issues. On a number of fronts, we’ve seen how Rorty’s recontextualization illustrates how the universalist question has been unproductive and counterproductive.

We've also seen how Rorty suggests, in light of these historical failures, that we try a new post-metaphysical question. This new question - "who are we?" - will motivate us to do much of the intellectual work that that the universalist question was supposed to motivate, but it will lead us to better solutions to our problems. Utilizing the Blumenbergian notion of "function-position," we can see that although Rorty doesn't want to reoccupy the full set of function-positions associated with the universalist question, he does make claims to occupying many of them. And yet, importantly, Rorty abandons the hope for metaphysical comfort that leads us to significantly reorient our intellectual activities. His perspective on moral issues emphasizes the acculturation that produced moral norms rather than the metaphysical notion of a universal moral nature. His perspective, then, profoundly reorients our approach to moral, ethical and political matters.

## **Anti-representationalism: Substituting “Coping” for “Knowing”**

The second facet of the typical modernist worldview is a concern with representationalism. Representationalism, the tendency to view truth in terms of a correspondence between beliefs (or language) and the real world, has affected how the modernist views inquiry, knowledge, and the external world. A representationalist lives in a life-world where the point of inquiry is to map a metaphysical world in a way that, ultimately if not immediately, will allow us to truly know the world and control the world. Following this orientation, the central philosophical project has been to develop a theory of representation, either in conceptual, cognitive or linguistic terms, which will explain how we can hook up to the metaphysical world.

For Rorty, this sort of life-world has proven to be unfulfilling, unenlightening and historically frustrating. Through intensive descriptions of a hypothetical new world, Rorty wants to develop a new conceptual scheme, a new way to think of our interaction with the external world. In this new life-world, we will simply not be interested in pursuing the representationalist question: “what is the nature of the true world?” Rather, we will motivate our energies around a new post-metaphysical question: “how can we cope with the external world?” This new sort of question, focusing on issues of coping, the adequacy of our habits of justification, and evaluations of how successful our beliefs are, provides us with a new conceptual framework that enables us to do, in Rorty’s opinion, all the interesting intellectual work the modern vocabulary supposedly enabled

us to do, while avoiding the pernicious problems associated with the representationalist question.

This section will describe how Rorty goes about trying to persuade representationalist adherents of the modern vocabulary to adopt a new anti-representationalist question. My analysis of Rorty's rhetorical moves will not merely concentrate on the new world Rorty is attempting to describe, but will additionally relate the descriptions of that world to the functional conditions participants of the modern vocabulary think a satisfactory vocabulary should fulfill. By focusing the comparison on the functional considerations that motivate the attachment to a particular vocabulary, I hope to add a level of clarity, perhaps otherwise not attainable, to the discussion between Rorty and his critics, while, at the same time, offering a framework with which to evaluate the success of Rorty's recontextualization. This section, then, will analyze Rorty's recontextualization, as it relates to epistemic matters, from this Blumenbergian framework.

The first thing to note about Rorty's anti-representationalist recontextualization is that it has the same argumentative form as the anti-universalist recontextualization we examined above. Once again, Rorty is not making epistemic or metaphysical arguments - arguments that are conceptually reliant on representationalist assumptions - about whether our beliefs have any relation of correspondence to a real world. He is not saying that he has found that objective truth does not exist. Since these sorts of arguments still rely on representationalist intuitions for their force, they are unable to do the sort of work that Rorty wants to do - they are unable to consistently question the representationalist

orientation. Rather, Rorty wants to shift the argumentative ground in his favor by reframing the issue of the tenability of representationalism in terms of utility. Is representationalism useful or not? Does it still seem useful to ask the representationalist question? Those are the rhetorical questions, questions that avoid the reliance on representationalist assumptions, that Rorty asks the representationalist.

Rorty's argument is that representationalism has proven to be an unproductive and counterproductive intellectual orientation, as can be seen by looking at the history of modern philosophy. Unable to answer their own question, representationalists have, Rorty claims, been unable to develop a workable and popularly compelling theory of how we can discern when beliefs or bits of language correspond to the world. And thus, representationalists have been unable to practically employ a theory of representation in guiding inquiry, in creating a workable criterion of progress, in explaining the causal forces of the world, and in discerning useful beliefs from unuseful beliefs. The form of Rorty's argument resembles, once again, the argument for why we should stop allowing the priest to do purportedly war winning sacrifices to appease the Gods. The argument is that we haven't really seen those sacrifices accomplish the function they're supposed to, so we might as well stop believing that those Gods are out there to be appeased. In contrast to the misleading representationalist question, Rorty proposes a new post-metaphysical orientation towards traditional epistemic issues.

Rorty's main attack on representationalism focuses on the historical unproductiveness of the representationalist question, more specifically, the historical fruitlessness of attempts to develop a workable and convincing theory of representation.

Rorty's historical claim, made in the genealogy set out in *PMN*, is that unless we can give a sense to representationalism, by developing an operational theory of representation, something we have historically been unable to do, there is no point in holding on to our representationalist assumptions and preoccupations (ITGE, 1995: 287).

Over and over again, the stabs we've made at developing a theory of representation, a theory that would explain how we can know the true contours of the world, have been insufficient. We've never been able to "find a way of picking out true beliefs by some other means than applying our best present criteria for justification" (RP, 1995: 149).

Since we haven't been able to develop a theory of representation, we haven't been able to fulfill the function-positions outlined in the last chapter. We haven't been able to guide our search for knowledge with a notion of truth, or use this notion as a way of defining cumulative progress. We haven't been able to use our theory of representation to figure out which beliefs really are useful or to causally control the world. With our notion of truth merely a vague intuition, we have been unable to do the sorts of intellectual work we expected to do. Rorty's argument is that without a workable theory of representation, the notion of truth serves no *explanatory use*. What Rorty means when he says that "truth has no explanatory use" is that a representationalist account of truth doesn't shed any light on why certain beliefs are successful and others aren't. As Rorty remarks, the "claim that 'true' has no explanatory use was a misleading way of putting the point that 'it is true' is not a helpful explanation of why science works" (ITGE, 1995: 286). Antirepresentationalists view the representationalist attempt to explain the utility of a belief as being a result of its correspondence as "no more enlightening than 'opium

puts people to sleep because of its dormative power” (ORT, 1991: 6). Without an independent theory of representation, there’s no way that we can check to see if a successful belief is in fact a representation of reality, and a non-successful belief is not a representation of reality.

Rorty’s claim that no candidate for a theory of representation has proven adequate is a long drawn out historical claim that it took all of PMN to make. Lacking the historical command and adequate space and time to develop an analysis of the historical persuasiveness of Rorty’s claim, I will content myself with accepting the claim that we have yet to find a workable theory of representation. Rather than go through the historical theories of representation presented by philosophers such as Kant, Locke and, more recently, philosophers like the early Wittgenstein and Dummett, I will follow popular opinion by remarking that we have yet to find a workable theory of representation.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than audit this historical claim, let’s look at some of the counterarguments Rorty has had to respond to. These arguments, though made by representationalists, are consistent with the utility calculus Rorty has introduced into the debate. In a general way, they dispute Rorty’s argument that the representationalist question has been unproductive, although they don’t dispute the claim that all known candidates for a theory of representation have been unsatisfactory. These counter arguments are doubly important because they make sense from within Rorty’s larger vocabulary whereas

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<sup>5</sup> It’s been commonplace in Analytic philosophy to remark on the failures of these theories. Notably, Putnam and Nagel make such observations. What to do in light of these failures, however, remains a more complicated debate.

claims like “Rorty is just wrong” or “truth does exist” do not. This is why Rorty is sensitive to these particular counter arguments.

One of the central responses representationalists have made against criticisms such as Rorty’s is that despite our inability to develop an acceptable theory of representation, there are good reasons to think we will be able to find a theory. One variation on this sort of argument draws on the widely held belief that there is a connection between *truth* and the *utility of a belief*, where utility is thought of in terms of prediction and control. When pushed to define a workable theory of representation, many representationalists will grant that they don’t have a compelling way of defining truth, but at the least we know that truth is a quality that makes certain beliefs useful. Since this is so obviously true, we should assume that somewhere out there we will find a true theory of representation.

Rorty’s reply to this sort of argument is that it falls flat when we remember that a theory of representation is supposed to *explain* why a true belief is useful. It seems odd, then, that we should use this intuition itself as proof that correspondence ideas are on the right track. After all, a theory of representation was supposed to supply us with a substance to the intuition that truth is the quality that makes beliefs useful. Anti-representationalists think the representationalist cluster of concepts “dispensable because they see no way of formulating an *independent* test of accuracy of representation - of reference or correspondence to an ‘antecedently determine’ reality - no test distinct from the success which is supposedly explained by this accuracy” (ORT, 1991: 6).

Another sort of counter argument Rorty has countenanced was most persuasively articulated by Nagel in The View From Nowhere. In that book, Nagel argued that despite our failure to develop a promising theory of representation, the idea and hope of a theory of representation are valuable in themselves and should be maintained. So, despite our inability to answer it, the representationalist question is useful in itself. In other words, this line of argument claims that “the fact we can never know whether a ‘mature’ physical theory, one which seems to leave nothing to be desired, may not be entirely off the mark is. . . no reason to deprive ourselves of the notion of ‘being off the mark’” (Nagel, 1986: 9). This argument claims that the notion of an ideal theory of representation is useful because it gives us something to shoot for and inspires criticism of our proposed candidates for a theory of representation.

Rorty’s response to this sort of position is that a notion of being off the mark isn’t helpful unless it *too* has a clear practical application. The problem is that we don’t have an understanding of what a mature theory would look like. We can’t say that we’re closer to figuring the whole thing out, because we don’t have any idea of what we’re trying to figure out. We can’t use the concept of a theory of representation as an ideal, something we’re trying to approach but haven’t quite gotten to yet, because “we shall never be able to measure our distance” from such a notion (RP, 1995: 151). The notion doesn’t provide a measure for progress. It’s not like we have been coming close to developing an adequate theory, we don’t even know what it would look like if we did hit on it - “we could not recognize it when we had found it” (RP, 1995: 151).

So, according to Rorty, history is witness to the failed attempts to develop a useful theory of representation. Rorty, at times at least, backs up this historical observation with a theoretical position that, following the lead of Putnam and Davidson, holds that theories of representation are conceptually problematic. They are problematic, because in order to be satisfactory they require, on some level at least, that we escape the perspective of our own minds – something that seems conceptually impossible to do – in order to check the relation between our beliefs (or pieces of language) and the world. Rorty cites approvingly Putnam’s statement that the representationalist’s attempt to explain the success of astrophysics or the failure of astrology is “bound to be merely an empty compliment unless we can attain what [Putnam] calls a God’s-eye-standpoint - one which has somehow broken out of our language and our beliefs and tested them against something known without their aid.” But unfortunately for the representationalist “we have no idea what it would be like to be at that standpoint.” (ORT, 1991: 6). Further, this standpoint seems to be inaccessible. In Davidson’s words, “there is no chance that someone can take up a vantage point for comparing conceptual schemes [e.g., the astrologer’s and the astrophysicist’s] by temporarily shedding his own” (Davidson, 1984: 185). The problem is that it’s hard to understand how we can transcend our own perspective to check that perspective against a reality that is independent of our perspective.

Such arguments about the theoretical difficulties in the intelligibility of correspondence theories of knowledge are, however, tricky for Rorty to maintain. If you’re thinking of the intelligibility of a vocabulary in terms of the coherence between

segments of the vocabulary with other segments of the vocabulary, as Rorty suggests we do, then it is difficult to claim that the representationalist vocabulary is, in some obvious way, incoherent. Rorty thinks that any vocabulary, such as the modern vocabulary, which has been a vital part of some intellectual community will be, by and large, coherent and therefore intelligible. While it may seem problematic to imagine that at some point we will be able to develop a test for truth that escapes our own limitations, it isn't impossible.

Rorty is forced back, then, on his pragmatic argument. When it comes down to it, Rorty's argument is that the historical candidates for theories of representation *are intelligible*, they do pass tests of conceptual clarity, but they have not proven to be *satisfactory*. They have been controversial, short-lived, unpractical and unconvincing. Since Rorty cannot claim inherent conceptual difficulties in the *idea* of a theory of representation, he cannot claim that we will *never* develop a workable theory of representation. While Rorty cannot rule out the case that we will, suddenly, come up with a useful sense of what it would mean for a belief to correspond to reality, he thinks that the presumption should be against such a possibility due to the prolonged historical failures in the attempt to accomplish the task. Though it may not be insane to think that something fruitful may come from such attempts to define a sense of correspondence, "the history of philosophy shows them to have been fruitless and undesirable" (ORT, 1991: 7). Rorty thinks that the representationalist should be forced to either demonstrate a workable understanding of how we know whether a belief is true or not true, or we

should try and find out what happens when we start ignoring issues of representationalism.

So, Rorty asserts that the representationalist question has been useless. Our attempts to develop a workable theory of representation - our attempts to answer the question: how can we distinguish mere justified belief from true belief? - have not proven satisfactory or even useful. Even the widely held assumption that true beliefs are intimately related to useful beliefs, Rorty claims, has not provided insights that *explain* how truth, in a correspondence sense, points to utility. It follows that the representationalist orientation has not enabled us to fulfill the functions outlined in chapter two. Rorty, however, doesn't stop there; he claims, further, that the representationalist question has been a nuisance in our intellectual endeavors. Primarily, these criticisms are related to the representationalist's fulfillment of the *inquiry function*. Rorty thinks that the concern with answering the representationalist question has tended to mislead us in our academic inquiries. Specifically, Rorty alleges that the concern with representationalism has led us to a pernicious sort of *reductionism*, a dangerous sort of *scientism* and a pointless sort of *skepticism*.

First, let's look at the problem of reductionism. The representationalist question assumes that there is one truth that we can theoretically separate out from bias and ignorance. The representationalist wants to find this one truth, the way things really are independent of our beliefs about them. At times, this quest for intellectual purity has motivated certain groups of intellectuals to claim that another group of intellectuals is fundamentally misguided. One group will argue that the topics another group has been

concerned with are properly their area of specialty. They will try to reduce the other discipline to their own. Because representationalists believe that there is one objective description of the world, and the goal of inquiry is to reach that one real description, there has been a tendency for advocates of one discipline to claim that that discipline has access to this one real truth and that similar disciplines should stop bothering with their activities because they are inferior, out of step with truth. Consider the tension between neuropsychology and psychoanalysis in the field of psychology. The metaphysical assumption that there is one true account of why we psychologically behave as we do has led to bickering among psychologists over what sort of psychology really is *good* psychology, what methods *really* get at an understanding of people's psyches.

A closely related phenomena, these metaphysical assumptions have also led us to dismiss certain areas of academic inquiry as uninteresting, *prima facie*. Traditionally, representationalists assume that scientific modes of inquiry, exhibited by such hard sciences as physics and chemistry, actually discover the true contours of the world, whereas other modes of inquiry, such as literature and the softer social sciences, don't have much to do with truth. If we think the aim of inquiry is to scrape away the layers of bias until we get down to the hard truth, then it's easy to think that certain disciplines aren't doing a very good job at this. While the humanities may have cultural worth, their worth stems from their potential for refining our higher sensibilities. The common attitude that physics is somehow more intellectually important than literature is an outgrowth of these sorts of metaphysical assumptions. Moreover, the general scientism that has characterized modern culture is premised precisely on the assumption that

scientific inquiry is somehow more in touch with truth and independent of bias than other forms of inquiry.

Besides this propensity towards reductionism and scientism in representationalist academic cultures, Rorty suggests that the concern with truth and representation has led us, at least us philosophers, to a sterile interest in the problem of skepticism. According to representationalists, the skeptic's experiment, the sort of thing Descartes tried to do, can help us think about truth. By imagining a situation where everything we believe could be false, where every way of justifying our beliefs could simultaneously misfire, we might be able to discover a set of beliefs or some means of justifying beliefs which is infallible, indubitable. Since Descartes at least, one of the tests a satisfactory theory of representation must pass is the successful resolution of such situations. However, this skeptic challenge has never been convincingly resolved. Popularly, philosophers don't think Descartes, or any of the other philosophers concerned with this sort of problem, have been able to provide such a skeptic-resistant foundation to knowledge. Rorty suggests this indicates that there is probably no way to answer this sort of skeptic challenge, probably because there is no way in which we can bypass justification and concentrate on issues of truth (ITGE, 1995: 281). Global skepticism, then, is tellingly a manifestation of the hopelessness of the philosophical preoccupation with developing a theory of representation.

So, all in all, Rorty's argument works by showing that the representationalist question has not been productive and, in certain cases at least, has proven counter-productive. Despite our intuition that the representationalist question is leading us in the

right direction, it's been historically evident that it is not a productive direction. The question has been unanswerable, only serving to lead us into reductionism, scientism and skepticism.

In light of the historical failures of the representationalist project, Rorty suggests that we adopt a new intellectual orientation centered around the question: "how can we best cope with the world?" The constructive, epistemic aspect of his neo-pragmatist vocabulary is oriented around redefining knowledge as "a matter of acquiring habits of action for *coping with reality*" rather than "a matter of *getting reality right*" (italics added, ORT, 1991: 1). Rorty believes that this new orientation will still allow us to do most of the interesting work we hoped the representationalist question would, but it will avoid, because it is not metaphysically oriented, the problems associated with the representationalist question. He believes that "we can still make admirable sense of our lives even if we cease to have what Nagel calls 'an ambition of transcendence'" (ORT, 1991: 12).

Accompanying this new question will be a rethinking of how we relate to the world. Rorty wants to replace the view that sees "a picture of human beings as machines constructed (by God or Evolution) to, among other things, get things right" with "a picture of machines that continually adjust to each other's behavior, and to that of their environment, by developing novel kinds of behavior. These machines have no fixed program or function; they continually reprogram themselves so as to serve hitherto undreamt-of functions" (ITGE, 1995: 292). Whereas the representationalist's

conception of knowledge suggested that humans were reporters of the true world, from Rorty's perspective we are tool using, we use language to cope with the world.

Although Rorty wants to get rid of representationalism, he doesn't get rid of the notion of truth altogether (though he does get rid of the correspondence notion). Rorty is a *minimalist* in regards to truth (ITGE, 1995: 282). He wants to keep the word, but drop the attempt to define truth as a correspondence between beliefs and the world. Rorty wants to use truth as an "endorsement," a "caution," and, in a technical sense, "as the outcome of a disquotationalist schema." He thinks that none of these understandings of truth have much to do with representationalism. As he concludes "none of them seems to me to offer a handle for the epistemologist who wants to justify the truth-indicativeness of our contemporary practices" (RP, 1995: 150).

Let's look in greater detail at the first two ways that Rorty thinks truth is still a useful concept.<sup>6</sup> The first way that Rorty suggests we can still use the word "truth" is as an *endorsement* for a belief. In this sense, we say a belief is true when it seems so justified that we recommend adopting it. Truth, in this sense, is a compliment we pay a belief. This sort of compliment doesn't have to do with whether we think the belief accurately describes anything, it's merely a summation of our conclusion about the justifications for holding the belief.

The second sense Rorty thinks the word "truth" can appropriately be used, the *cautionary* sense of truth, is a bit more complicated. Rorty thinks that in some cases the

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<sup>6</sup> In the *disquotationalist* use of truth, "true" is used to "signify the property preserved in valid inferences, and perhaps still other uses" (RP, 1995: 150). This sense of truth, primarily of philosophical significance, is connected to philosophical positions developed by Tarski and Davidson.

word “true” helps to remind us that some beliefs which seem justified today might not seem justified later on. This cautionary use of truth, “as when we say. . . ‘justified to the hilt, but maybe not true’” merely “suggests that maybe somebody will come along with a better idea, a better epistemic community, a better form of life - thus reminding us that inquiry is not over yet, and, indeed that we cannot imagine what it would be like for it to be over ” (RP, 1995: 150). This sense of truth is connected to the idea that our habits of justification are contained within a vocabulary which we might, someday down the line, want to replace with a new vocabulary. Accepting the cautionary sense of truth is to accept the fact that even in cases where “at present there is every justification for believing,” somewhere down the road, a “world may be disclosed in which this proposition is not even a candidate for justification, in which the whole question of this proposition’s truth is no longer raised” (DSP, 1996: 50).

This sense of truth doesn’t tell us anything about truth as correspondence, however, because it comes back down to a case of justification. All that saying “a belief is justified but perhaps not true” means is that we might later realize that we made a mistake, that in light of new evidence, or new ways of looking at old evidence, we shouldn’t have claimed the belief was justified. Rorty remarks that:

granted that *true* and *justified* are not interdefinable, any more that *approved of* and *good* are interdefinable, this ambiguity does not in itself show that there is anything substance to be said about truth or goodness once we have finished talking about justification. Indeed, it seems to guarantee the opposite. For as Putnam has pointed out in his ‘naturalist fallacy’ argument, it always makes sense to say ‘\_\_\_\_\_, but maybe not true,’ just as it does to say ‘\_\_\_\_\_, but maybe not good,’ no matter what you put in the blank. The gap between either truth or goodness on the one hand, and justification on the other, is forever unbridgeable, but this unbridgeability is not a result of the fact the former notions have criteria of application distinct from the application of the latter. On the contrary, it is a result of the fact that we have no independent criteria of

application for the former” (RP, 1995: 149-50).

We can’t say whether a belief is true except by saying that it appears justified. All that true does here is remind us that we may revise our opinion later on. “The fact that a belief can be justified without being true does not entail that two norms are being invoked. It merely shows that what we can justify to some audiences cannot be justified to others” (ITGE, 1995: 288).

So, from Rorty’s anti-representationalist perspective, we are attempting, with the help of our habits of justifying beliefs, to cope with the world. Knowledge, in this view, is not about having accurate representations of the world, but about having useful beliefs. Following the Blumenbergian analysis we developed in the first chapter, however, we will remember that Rorty cannot merely tell us that we should start asking this coping question. In order to be persuasive to representationalists, he must address the functions representationalists hoped to accomplish through their vocabulary. The following examines how Rorty goes about addressing these function-positions.

Let’s first look at how Rorty handles the *inquiry function*. Rorty believes that his new “coping” question will allow us to do interesting sorts of inquiry without getting bogged down in reductionism, scientism, or skepticism. In Rorty’s estimation, the need for correspondence produces “no behavior not produced by the need to offer justification” (ITGE, 1995: 287) – except, of course, the negatives sorts of behavior we want to get away from.

Rorty’s “coping” question will refocus our intellectual activities on questions of whether our mechanisms for justifying beliefs are producing useful, reliable, insightful

ways of viewing the world. Asking this “coping” question will get us motivated to engage in inquiry, because it will make us want to find useful beliefs (ITGE, 1995: 297).

This “coping” question also makes it clear what we expect from our beliefs which provides us with a standard to criticize our practices of justifying beliefs from. We will be able to criticize our methods for justifying beliefs, in the context of the “coping” question, in the same way as we do now - by seeing if our practices of justification are working, if they’re reliable, if they give us what we want. Thus, though there “may be little to be said about truth” Rorty holds that there is “obviously a lot of regional things to be said about justification of beliefs in various particular areas (though nothing global to be said about justification in general)” (ITGE, 1995: 281). The “coping” question gets us thinking about what are the best ways for getting to useful beliefs.

This new question will redefine how we think about justifying beliefs. Whereas the representationalist view tended to make our habits of justifying seem like intermediary steps to truth, from Rorty’s perspective, our mechanisms for justifying beliefs are our best indicators of useful beliefs. Rorty is comfortable with the position that certain methods of justifying beliefs are better than other methods. He’s comfortable, for instance, granting that rolling dice is probably a bad way of deciding whether to get married. However, these superior means of justification do not, in Rorty’s consideration, gain their force from some connection between the means of justification and the true nature of the world. It’s not like these justification habits are the best indicators of the metaphysical reality they approximate. In Rorty’s anti-representational vocabulary, successful methods of justifying beliefs are just that,

successful methods of justifying beliefs. For Rorty, “justification does not call for metaphysical activism, but truth, as understood by contemporary, Representationalist common sense, does” (ITGE, 1995: 300). We determine whether our methods of justifying beliefs are adequate by testing them in the real world and seeing if the beliefs they sanction enable us to cope with the world. Unlike the preoccupation with truth, the test for the utility of a belief is pretty straightforward: when a belief works in practice, it is useful.

For different sorts of needs we may find more adequate patterns of justifying beliefs. The “coping” question, then, leads us to embrace a divisions of labor structured by pragmatic considerations between disciplines. Rorty embraces the ability of specific communities of inquirers to make wise decisions about how they prove their claims. Different disciplines may have different ways of justifying beliefs and each should be allowed to make their own decisions about how to justify beliefs. As Rorty did with moral issues, he redirects epistemic issues back to the community that is interested in them. Good academic inquiry is a product of upholding a discipline’s ideals in practice. While the representationalist wanted objectively validated practices of justifying beliefs, Rorty suggests that these practices are validated by de facto ideals, they are the summations of academic opinion in the particular discipline. So, in the case of physics, a physicist’s results are good when they follow proper scientific method as recognized by other physicists. In Rorty’s account, different intellectual camps have their own vocabularies for inquiry. These vocabularies structure the way they think about the

world, how to justify claims and what intellectual problems are interesting. Different academic camps participate, to speak hyperbolically, in different intellectual worlds.

This runs counter to how representationalists usually think of academic inquiry. Under the influence of ideas of “objectivity,” representationalists often think that social factors only enter into inquiry as impurities, as distractions. So, representationalists suggest that bad scientific knowledge is the product of prejudices contaminating the search for objective knowledge. In contrast, Rorty suggests that inquiry, including scientific forms of inquiry, is profoundly praxis oriented, the fruit of culture and society. The things that make science good are social practices, and what makes science bad is departing from these practices. Turning sociologist of knowledge, Rorty claims that the results of inquiry are to be judged according to how well the process of inquiry followed social convention. This does not mean that a particular discipline might not end up, somewhere down the road, revising its justification habits and deciding that what we once considered faulty discoveries were in fact appropriate. It just means that the standard of judgment will always be connected to the social practices of justification held at the time.

Rorty’s “coping” question allows him to avoid the reductionism and scientism characteristic of the representationalist orientation. In the case of scientism, Rorty’s position avoids an overly heavy emphasis on the natural sciences by acknowledging the usefulness of disciplines like poetry, the fine arts, and anthropology. For the anti-representationalist:

various areas of culture answer different human needs, but there is no way to stand outside of all human needs and observe that some of them (e.g., our need for predictions of what will happen in various circumstances, our need for simple and elegant ways of saving the phenomena) are gratified by determining

‘objective sameness and difference in nature’ whereas others are gratified by womping up what Lewis calls ‘miscellaneous, gerrymandered, ill-demarcated’ objects (ORT, 1991: 8).

In this sense, we are “in touch with reality in all areas of culture -ethics as well as physics, literary criticism as well as biology - in a sense of ‘in touch with’ which does not mean ‘representing reasonably accurately’ but simply ‘caused by and causing’” (ORT, 1991: 9). Different disciplines and different methods of justifying beliefs are appropriate insofar as they let us obtain different ends. Just like a toolbox contains many different types of tools, culture contains many different forms of academic inquiry.

Rorty believes that what is usually thought of as “objectivity” - being in touch with the real world -- is just the sociological fact that in certain areas of inquiry what counts as justifying a belief is more agreed upon. So, in areas like scientific inquiry, it’s not because scientists have found the truth that they all seem to agree, it’s merely that they tend to agree on how to decide controversies. “Scientific noises” are handled differently by scientists than “literature noises” are handled by literary critics. When confronted by the same physical stimuli, a group of physicists is more likely to react the same way than a group of literary critics (ORT, 1991: 84). However, each, in their own way, may allow us to cope successfully with the world. Rorty wants to “offer an account of inquiry which recognizes sociological, but not epistemological, differences between such disciplinary matrices as theoretical physics and literary criticism” (ORT, 1991: 1).

Rorty’s view also diminishes the reductionist tendencies in academia. Whereas in representationalist inquiry there was a natural tendency for different intellectual approaches to compete when dealing with similar topics, in Rorty’s anti-

representationalist vocabulary, reductionism is only appropriate when different intellectual approaches do the same sorts of intellectual work. The “coping” question calls on all sorts of disciplines to help us cope with different problems. Different disciplines can appropriately deal with what appears to be the same topic<sup>7</sup> so long as they have different things to offer us. Psychoanalysis may help us deal with some psychic problems, like child abuse, while neuropsychology may help us to understand diseases like schizophrenia or manic depressiveness. From Rorty’s perspective, intellectual endeavors only compete when they are duplicating work. Only when you’ve come up with a hammer that does the job of a screwdriver would you think about giving up one or the other. Reductionism from Rorty’s point of view, then, is generally not a healthy tendency.

Additionally, by ignoring the question of truth, Rorty’s “coping” question sidesteps the skeptic’s challenge. From Rorty’s perspective, the skeptic’s challenge, because it relies on a distinction between justification and truth, doesn’t seem to have any point. The skeptic’s challenge assumes that we can learn something interesting about our epistemic situation by suspending our usual assumptions about the world. This sort of experiment is supposed to help us distinguish between merely traditional ways of justifying beliefs and ways of justifying beliefs that get to the Truth. Rorty, in contrast, thinks that there is no real reason to, or possible way of, isolating truth from our habits of justifying beliefs. And thus, the skeptic’s challenge is unanswerable as well as unhelpful in discovering anything about our epistemic situation. Neo-pragmatists “do not

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<sup>7</sup> We can’t, of course, say it really is the same topic within Rorty’s view, because that appeals to the

countenance any generalized skepticism about other minds or cultures, or the external world, but only detailed skepticism about this or that belief or cluster of beliefs - detailed suggestions about how to reweave” (ORT, 1991: 97). Global skepticism doesn’t seem to help us answer the “coping” question. Because the skeptic’s question is unresolvable, there really isn’t much point in asking it. If we are anti-representationalists, we will think the skeptic’s challenge pointless (ORT, 1991: 2).

So, this new “coping” question will, for the most part, be able to serve the inquiry function-position. This new anti-representationalist conception of inquiry will not, however, provide us with metaphysical knowledge. Rorty is suggesting that we change our demands when it comes to inquiry. Rather than searching for Truth, he suggests we should search for pragmatically useful beliefs. Rorty does not want to fully occupy the metaphysical dimensions of the inquiry function.

Rorty’s revised idea of the role of inquiry is most noticeable in his redefinition of progress. Perhaps the function Rorty most clearly rejects is the *critterion of progress function*. This function, metaphysically infected, has to do with developing a way of making sure that our base of knowledge, where knowledge is defined in correspondence terms, is continually growing. The idea is that we should be able to continually amass a greater and greater body of accurate information about the world. A theory or representation would, presumably, provide us with a criterion for making such observations about our progress.

Rorty cannot accept the challenge of fully occupying this function, because he doesn't think we should think of "progress" as acquiring more and more true claims about the world. In light of this, Rorty thinks, we should develop a post-metaphysical notion of progress. Instead of viewing progress as gradually moving towards knowing the real nature of the world, we should think of progress as the story we tell about how we got to the place we are. For Rorty "we can tell a story of progress," if that story describes "how the liberalization of certain metaphors served the purpose of making possible all the good things that have recently happened" (CIS, 1989: 55). This story will always be shaped by where we are right now. This notion of progress-as-coping, while it still may give us a linear, cumulative sense of progress, is not easily collapsible into ahistorical standards of progress, because it is intimately tied with our goals at any given time. "For we latecomers can tell the kind of story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot" (CIS, 1989: 55). Rorty thinks we should be "switching from progress toward focus imaginarius to improvement on the historical past. This amounts to switching from pride in being closer to Reality to pride in being farther from the cavemen" (Rorty, WDYDWTCYR: 175). This criterion of progress, of course, is not as strong as the representationalist hoped for, but, Rorty thinks, it's all we should need.

The "coping" question, then, helps us understand Rorty's new idea of progress. This question gets us thinking of progress as indexed to our needs. We have progress when we're closer to getting what we want. While what we want may change at any give point, we can always evaluate whether we are closer to getting what we want today than we were yesterday. If we are closer, we have "progressed." If we are not closer, we

have not “progressed.” Progress, either way, should be an evaluation we make about the relation between the past and the present in reference to our contemporary desires.

In regards to the *utility function*, Rorty contends, that asking the “coping” question will point us towards finding practically useful beliefs, thereby reoccupying this function. Asking this question will spur us to examine our patterns of justifying beliefs in order to discover which patterns are reliable indicators of usefulness. Rorty claims that this function has really been occupied by our notions of how to justify a belief, which indicates that we don’t really need “truth” as a way to get to utility. Our habits of justification, Rorty claims, have been doing all the real work when deciding how to get useful beliefs. As we’ve already examined above, without a workable theory of representation there is no practical way of separating justified but untrue beliefs that are not useful from true beliefs that are useful. As a practical matter, without a workable theory of representation the representationalists “assessment of truth and assessment of justification are, when the question is about what I should believe now (rather than about why I, or someone acted as we did), the same activity” (ITGE, 1995: 281). Our habits of justification, habits that vary across different communities of inquirers, are sufficient to guide us in inquiry and the attempt to find useful beliefs. As Rorty claims “the difference between true beliefs considered as useful non-representational mental states and as accurate (and therefore useful) representations of reality, seem[s] a difference that could make no difference to practice. No one profits from insisting on the distinction” (ITGE, 1995: 282). All that we should do when trying to find a useful belief is to see whether that belief seems justified and then test it out in practice.

This, however, is not foolproof. Rorty thinks there is no way to tell before hand whether a belief we think completely justified in theory will work out in practice, which leads him to rest content with our fallible habits of justifying certain beliefs. The dimension of this function that Rorty does not want to reoccupy is the dimension connected to the hope that one day we might never be wrong about which beliefs are useful. Rorty believes this sort of goal is illusionary. We may be able to develop more reliable standards of justification, but it is unlikely that we will be able to find a completely reliable method of justification. So, Rorty cannot fully reoccupy this functional consideration, because he cannot claim that we will discover some magical mode of justification that will directly indicate the utility of a belief. For Rorty, however, this desire is itself suspect. The desire to move to a stage where we have such an intimate connection with a metaphysical reality that we no longer, at times, fail to cope with this world is a pointless daydream.

Reinterpreting knowledge in terms of coping and justification has ramifications on how Rorty wants to fulfill the *causality function*. Orienting our intellectual pursuits according to the “coping” question changes how we think about causality. As we examined in the last chapter, for the representationalist, the sense of the world’s independence from us is given force in terms of correspondence notions. The world, as a bunch of real objects and real causal relations between objects, is independent of our beliefs about it. Rorty suggests, in contrast, that our knowledge of this causal reality will always be mediated by our experience of it and, thus, we can’t ever say that we’ve figured out what the real objects are or which causal relations govern the movement of

those objects. For Rorty, we become aware of the world's causal power only in our efforts to cope with the world. We realize the world is causally independent of us by observing that our beliefs about the world are sometimes disappointed. We expected our car to start; it didn't. The best way to explain why this sort of event happened seems to be that it happened because the world is independent of us.

While Rorty gets rid of representationalist notions of truth and concentrates on our habits of justification, he retains a notion of a causally independent real world that interacts with those habits. To drop the representationalist question is not to suggest that our justification processes are independent of the world. A justified belief turns out to be useful or not depending on how it interacts causally with the world. If it harnesses the causal powers of the world correctly, it is successful. If it doesn't harness those powers, it is not successful. It's not like our social conventions swing free of the world.

Rorty thinks we can have a strong notion of causality that is decoupled from representationalist notions. He wants to think of the "relations between human organisms, their beliefs, and the rest of the universe in merely casual terms, rather than dragging in representational relations in addition to causal ones" (RP, 1995: 193). He thinks that we can accept the "causal independence of the gold or the text" without thinking that that means we "can or should perform the impossible feat of stripping . . . .[the] chosen object bare of human concerns, seeing it as it is in itself, and the seeing how our belief measures up to it" (ORT, 1991: 83). Rorty claims that the world does indeed have an independent causal power over us, but we only *experience* this causal power as *mediated* through our language. He grants "that our language, like our bodies, has been

shaped by the environment we live in” (ORT, 1991: 5), but thinks that this “shaping” doesn’t offer a useful handle for understanding truth, since we can never see exactly what is shaping what.

When we have a preaccepted vocabulary, the world will interact with our language in ways independent of our beliefs about the world. In this sense, the world can “cause us to hold beliefs,” but only “once we have programmed ourselves with a language,” accepted a particular vocabulary (CIS, 1995: 6). Rorty believes that “the world may cause us to be justified in believing a sentence true” (CIS, 1995: 5), but that doesn’t mean that the world is imprinting us with truth - only that according to the vocabulary we hold, some beliefs seem justified in the light of certain evidence. What sorts of beliefs we are caused to hold varies with the vocabulary that we have accepted. While there is a definite sense in which causal things happen, these causal givens are beyond our knowledge until they enter language. Rorty claims:

the way in which a blank takes on the form of the die which stamps it has no analogy to the relation between the truth of a sentence and the event which the sentence is about. When the die hits the blank something casual happens, but as many *facts* are brought into the world as there are languages for describing that causal transaction. . . . Facts are hybrid entities; that is, the causes of the assertability of sentences include both physical stimuli and our antecedent choice of responses to such stimuli (ORT, 1991: 81).

What an individual considers a “fact,” despite the interaction of the *same* casual stimuli, will *vary* depending on what vocabulary an individual holds. Facts, in this view, are still the products of interacting with an independent world; but they are not somehow beyond interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> It’s unclear how this position jells with Rorty’s endorsement of Davidson’s arguments against conceptual schemes. What Rorty seems to be suggesting is that we all have conceptual schemes but that we can’t ever know what they’re organizing.

Vocabularies, as patterns of responding to causal stimuli, let us cope with the world in specific ways. Rorty thinks of descriptions of the world as tools for getting what we want out of the world. He writes that:

we describe giraffes in the way we do, as giraffes, because of our needs and interests. We speak a language which included the word “giraffe” because it suits our purposes to do so. The same goes for words like “organ,” “cell,” “atom,” and so on - the names of the parts out of which giraffes are made, so to speak. All the descriptions we have of things are descriptions suited to our purposes. No sense can be made, we pragmatists argue, of the claim that some of these descriptions pick out “natural kinds” that they cut nature at the joints. The line between a giraffe and the surrounding air is clear enough if you are a human being interested in hunting for meat. If you are a language-using ant or amoeba or a space voyager observing us from far above that line is no so clear, and it is not clear that you will need or have a word for “giraffe” in you language. More generally, it is not clear that any of the millions of ways of describing the piece of space-time occupied by what we call a giraffe is any closer to the way things are in themselves than any of the others. (PDS, 1996: 41).

There are no causal forces that float free of our descriptions of them, but likewise, there are no descriptions of the world that float free of causal forces. Rather, descriptions of the world are means of organizing the world into sensible and productive constructions. We describe the world the way we do because we want to make sense of the causal forces in a productive way. Making sense only means making language harness those causal forces in a productive way. When we’re looking at a particular description, “all we need to know is whether some competing description might be more useful for some of our purposes” (PDS, 1996: 41).

A helpful analogy here is with games. Think of games as systems of agreed upon conventions for responding to certain events. Rorty thinks that we really do interact with

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Despite Rorty’s endorsement of Davidson’s arguments against the idea of a conceptual schemes, this position relies on this notion of conceptual scheme. See Davidson “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.

the external world. When the ball misses the line, it is out. But, he points out, how we react to this world is a product of our accepted language games. We only think the ball is “out,” because the game provides rules that suggest we react to certain stimuli in certain ways - one of which is when the ball hits a certain area it is “out.” Like other sorts of games, language games are a combination of rules and stimuli.

Rorty doesn't believe that studying the world can give us the one right language, or inform us if one vocabulary is better than another. Though the “object can, given a prior agreement on a language game, cause us to hold beliefs, . . .it cannot suggest beliefs for us to hold. It can only do things which our practices will react to with preprogrammed changes in beliefs” (ORT, 1991: 84). Rorty takes exception with people who say:

that we achieve accurate representation because, sometimes, nonlinguistic items cause linguistic items to be used as they are - not just in the case of particular statements within social practices (as when the movement of a tennis ball causes the referee to cry ‘Out!’) but in the case of social practices as wholes. On this account, the reason why physicists have come to use ‘atom’ as they do is that there really are atoms out there which have caused themselves to be represented more or less accurately - caused us to have words which refer to them and to engage in the social practices called microstructural physical explanation. The reason why such explanation meets with more success than, say astrological explanation, is that there are no planetary influences out there, whereas there really are atoms out there (ORT, 1991: 5).

Rorty doesn't think we can do this - that we can say that one vocabulary is more in touch with reality. He believes that's like saying tennis is a more accurate game than basketball. The interaction between our practices of justifying certain beliefs and the external world does not furnish us with some insights about how truth does, after all, have something to do with representational notions, because these causal-processes-in-themselves aren't knowable. Rorty doesn't think we can “separate out ‘the world's

contribution to the justification-making process from our own” (ITGE, 1995: 295). All we can do is note whether the language game we have adopted is yielding what we expected to gain from that language game - whether it is allowing us to cope or not. We can only check the success of a language game as relative to our needs, desires and interests. Though the pragmatist “agrees that there is such a thing as brute physical resistance,” she doesn’t think that this resistance offers us an indication about how we should think about truth (ORT, 1991: 81).

In other words, there is no way of distinguishing causal relations from the language we describe them in. There is no way of discerning the physical stimuli amongst all the antecedently accepted responses to such stimulus. We can’t focus on the first and come up with a “pure language” that cuts reality up at the joints, which gets the stimuli like they are before they enter language. There is no way of isolating the “causal physical force of the event” from the “merely social force of the consequence of the event” (ORT, 1991: 80). If we think of our language, our selves and the world as three sides of a triangle, Rorty suggests that while it is useful to think that “I, the other language-users, and the rest of the universe all are what we are because the other two sides of the triangle are what they are,” it is also useful to think “that there is no point in trying to break down ‘are what they are’ into more specific processes of projection or reflection” (RP, 1995: 193-4). We can’t do this “because there is no way to examine only one of these three sides in isolation from each other, in order to see who is doing what to whom” (RP, 1995: 194). Or, at least, we haven’t come up with such a way.

Rorty believes this understanding of causality warranted not because he "finds" it

in the real world, but because a notion of causality is deeply ingrained into our web of beliefs. This notion of causality, while traditionally associated with representationalism, is not reliant upon representation for its force. Rorty believes that the fact that we do “describe most objects as *causally* independent of us. . . is all that is required to satisfy our realistic intuitions” (ORT, 1991: 101). We don’t need the representationalist baggage to provide more substance to our intuitions. The fact that we constantly describe things as causally independent of us indicates that this idea of causal independence is a central node in our web of beliefs, it is one of our “difficult-to-imagine-revising-beliefs.” So, unless being an anti-representationalist gives us reason to reject our belief in causality, which it doesn’t, we will retain a “lively appreciation of the utility of expressions like ‘the world’s causal power’ and ‘Look out, you’re about to be hit by a truck!’” (RP, 1995: 224). While it may seem hard to conceptualize causality without thinking of a world independent to us with which we can check our descriptions against, Rorty asserts that we can do so.

Further, this notion of causality is intimately woven into the “coping” question. While we naturally see the world as causally independent, this notion of causality is emphasized when we think of ourselves as coping with the external world. Thinking of ourselves as coping with the world demands that we have a notion of the world that is causally independent of us. After all, what would we be coping with if the world was causally dependent on us? Rorty’s new post-metaphysical “coping” question, then, reoccupies, for the most part anyway, the causality function.

So, to conclude this section, Rorty wants to ask a new post-metaphysical question - “how can we cope with the world?” Because the representationalist question has historically been unproductive and at times counterproductive, Rorty thinks we can better orient our epistemic considerations with this new “coping” question. This question, while avoiding the metaphysical assumptions of the representationalist question, allows us to do much of the intellectual work the representationalist question was supposed to perform. This question, however, does not allow us to accomplish the metaphysical functions the representationalist hoped to accomplish. Rorty’s counsel is that we should simply stop seeing these metaphysical functions as worthwhile.

### **In Summary**

Rorty’s recontextualization tries to get us to stop thinking in metaphysical ways. Because Rorty challenges the legitimacy of this metaphysical obsession, he must recast the questions moral universalists and representationalists want to ask. Despite this, in many of the cases we’ve looked at, Rorty reoccupies these function positions with post-metaphysical content. This reorients our intellectual horizon towards more adaptive and evolutionary ways of seeing ourselves. The next chapter continues to examine other, more complicated, cases of reoccupation and therapy.