

Hope, Literature, and Romanticism: The Political Philosophy of Richard Rorty

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the political philosophy of Richard Rorty, and to examine the three main pillars of his liberal thought: hope, romanticism, and literature. These concepts are central to Rorty's political philosophy because they are necessary to create an ideal future. In the first chapter, I describe Rorty's reconceptualization of the political spectrum. He proposes that we abandon the traditional, value neutral political spectrum and replace it with one that assigns value to political perspectives that produce hope in the future and encourage political participation. In the second chapter, I examine the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of the progressive political perspective that Rorty espouses. He advocates for a shift toward literary thinking and rhetoric from the insistence upon scientific, philosophical, and logical thinking. He believes we should embrace the ideals of Romanticism and literature as the model of progress, and that it is the most cacophonous way to effect change. In the third chapter, I examine the salient features of Romanticism and the emphasis on literary truth. I also put forward what I think are problematic aspects of Romanticism that Rorty ignores, and that the excessively individualistic ethos it promotes is not necessarily a model we ought to emulate. In the conclusion I put forth my criticisms of Rorty's political philosophy, and describe how his ideas can be applied to Canada. I also compare and contrast his approach to identity and politics with those of prominent Canadian thinkers to see what kind of impact or change Rorty's political philosophy can bring.

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Introduction

This thesis will examine the political face of neo-pragmatism: Richard Rorty's political philosophy. I will focus on what I think to be its salient aspects; hope, Romanticism, and literature. These are the means through which we are supposedly going to achieve not only a better society, but also a more productive philosophical and intellectual environment. By redirecting the effort put into discerning and discovering what is thought to be objective Truth or Reality, we will supposedly be better able to bring about moral progress. We will no longer be preoccupied with absolute concepts that have ceased to be productive. Instead, we will determine what is right for the political, social, and philosophical context we find ourselves within. These goals are the establishment of a fair and equitable society that is founded upon providing dignity to those within it. In order to achieve this, Rorty proposes that we reorient our politics toward promulgating hope in achieving the goals that define what a country is supposed to be.¹ This will require accepting the fact that there is no finality or end to these goals. There is no point at which we can stop working toward a better society or a more productive intellectual environment. This is a goal that must be held in perpetuity. For instance, there is no form of state that, when created, will bring about an end to the problems of societies. Rorty firmly rejects a utopian end. Rorty believes that a liberal state will aid in the instigation of better circumstances, but it is not a panacea that will bring an end to all our tribulations. As we progress toward a better society founded upon solidarity, new problems will arise which will require new solutions. We must have a

¹ Rorty is writing for Americans and an American context, but I believe his work can be applied to Canada. For this reason, I will not be referring to his audience as Americans. Instead, I will use 'us' or 'we' in regard to who he intends to influence or affect with his philosophy.

pragmatic approach to truth, politics, and philosophy in order to adequately grapple with our current and future problems.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I will examine concepts that are integral to achieving this more productive intellectual and political environment: the promulgation of hope in politics and political life, the rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, and the redirection of philosophy toward literary thinking. In the first chapter I will explore the reconceptualization of the political spectrum that Rorty puts forth. Instead of being a dichotomy between individual and group rights, or liberalism and communism, it is a dichotomy between agency and spectatorship. It is not a value-neutral political spectrum. Agency is preferable to spectatorship because it is how we will improve our country. Rorty believes a country will not improve without the active participation of its citizens. Therefore, each political perspective Rorty identifies has value based on how well it encourages political participation, if at all. He suggests that the new political spectrum have four perspectives: the political Right, the cultural Left, the eschatological Left, and the progressive Left.

Each perspective has its own view of history, the future, epistemology, and secularization. These characteristics are important because they not only show the nature of each perspective, but they are also the criteria Rorty uses to determine whether the perspective is constructive. In order for them to have any worth, they must meet the standards that Rorty sets: (i) they must put forth a narrative or history of the nation that promotes pride; (ii) they must give people hope that the country can address and solve its problems, and move beyond them toward an ideal future; (iii) they must have a constructive, dynamic, and pragmatic view of truth; (iv) they must be thoroughly secular.

For Rorty, the “progressive Left” alone can fulfill each of these requirements. It is the political manifestation of neo-pragmatism,

In the second chapter I will explore Rorty’s epistemology. An examination of this will reveal in greater detail the ideas central to Rorty’s conception of the progressive Left. As the political incarnation of neo-pragmatism, it is important to gain some understanding of the philosophical justification for his political philosophy. His epistemological views are largely founded upon a repudiation of the correspondence theory of truth, and an endeavour to replace the dominance it has on philosophy with a criterion of truth based on usefulness. I believe that Rorty’s arguments against the correspondence theory of truth have some merit, but only insofar as they challenge the dogmas of the philosophical tradition. The argument that we abandon our search for objectivity and objective truth should be seen as over-zealous. I think a better approach to the matter would be that we soften our need to find objectivity in politics, and work toward ending what we view as wrong right now.

In the third chapter, I will examine the relation between Rorty’s neo-pragmatism and Romanticism. Instead of emphasizing the role of the Enlightenment in the creation of our modern philosophical environment, Rorty urges us to embrace the ideals of Romanticism. The Enlightenment may have been useful for encouraging secularism, but Romanticism ought to be emulated for its epistemology and inspirational literature. According to Rorty, it is a more constructive intellectual tradition because of its literary character, which makes it more conducive to change. Furthermore, it does not rely on monolithic concepts such as Reality, Truth, or Objectivity. Instead, Rorty believes that it

is a more dynamic intellectual tradition, and adopting its ideals will be crucial to achieving the goals of America.

However, I take issue with his arguments in favour of Romanticism. He seems to believe that it is an intellectual tradition that is unsullied by the monolithic concepts he so derides, but it is not without its own set of problems. To illustrate this, I compare Rorty's view of the literary intellectual with that of Albert Camus. Instead of being an intellectual tradition that promotes change and moral solidarity as Rorty maintains, Romanticism promotes inwardness and moral exceptionalism. To illustrate this, I will compare some of his ideas to those of some romantic poets and writers.

In the conclusion, I will critically examine key features of Rorty's political philosophy and its implications. In particular, I will focus on his concept of solidarity, which is the end of his political philosophy. I will argue that it is a valuable goal for any society, but only if it is kept in the realm of social fraternity. However, I do not believe that it should be held up as a model for truth, and while there may be some merit to the idea of intersubjectivity, I think that the concept is illiberal and conducive to coercion. His political views are so clearly nationalistic that I believe it becomes problematic for his arguments. I will also examine whether Rorty's claim that his political philosophy, based on hope, is only viable for the United States of America.. I believe that his political philosophy can be useful to Canada, and that the national exceptionalism he suggests is problematic and misguided. The principles of national hope and pride are constructive and useful for any country. I do not think that Rorty is not suggesting we simply forget or play down the troubling events in a nation's past, but that we create a narrative showing how they are have been overcome. If the United States of America is

able to do this, then other nations ought to as well. However, we should be cautious in embracing his ideas because I believe they are susceptible to extremism. I think the idea that for meaningful change to occur, the citizenry must feel pride in their country, is true and useful. The paralysis caused by resentment and disgust in history is not helpful in fixing the problems of the present.

I will also put forth my analysis of literary works that embody the political perspective of hope that Rorty endorses to evaluate whether literature can serve as an alternative to philosophy. I will explore some examples of literature mentioned by Rorty as well as others. I will put forth works of literature that are representative of the political perspectives described in the first chapter. The purpose for this is to show that Rorty is correct to a certain degree: literature can serve as a viable alternative when thinking about political philosophy. However, I do not think that the works of literature that he gives as examples are necessarily accurate representations of the political perspectives that he describes. I will contrast his interpretation of the texts with my own, and offer examples of how works of literature that embody other political perspectives are just as able, if not better, at promoting and instilling hope. The texts that I examine are Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and some works of poetry by Ezra Pound. This exploration of literature is important because it is simultaneously an evaluation and execution of Rorty's argument that literature can serve as a viable alternative to philosophy. I believe that Rorty's claim has some merit to it. However, I believe that if a society takes its cues from literature, it will be best served if that literature is complemented by philosophy.

Chapter 1: The New Political Spectrum: Agents vs. Spectators

In this chapter I will describe the four perspectives Rorty identifies on the political spectrum and the criteria he uses to evaluate them. He suggests that we should not think of political views in terms of the traditional conservative-liberal spectrum and puts forth the agent-spectator dichotomy as an alternative. I will explore the facets of this new dichotomy and the importance of Walt Whitman and the Enlightenment in formulating this thoroughly secular vision. Even though the Enlightenment made no attempt to subvert the dictatorship of the correspondence theory of truth and Reason, its secular vision of society is a legacy that Rorty thinks we should not abandon entirely. Ultimately, I intend to show the ubiquity of hope in Rorty's political philosophy and the epistemological foundation on which it rests.

Rorty is attempting to undermine what he sees as deleterious dogmas that render philosophical and political unprofitable. They constrain our ability to move beyond the political circumstances we find ourselves in, and inhibit progress. The two dogmas that he sees as being the most problematic to the reformation of politics and philosophy are the conventional political spectrum and objectivity. The conventional political spectrum is a deleterious dogma because it stifles progress since it does not place value in political perspectives that move us toward an ideal future. The second dogma that endangers philosophical and political thought is the need to speak and think of politics from an objective point of view. This is problematic because if we are encouraged to be impartial, we will not support and value perspectives that move us toward an ideal future. To address and overturn these dogmas, Rorty suggests we rethink politics by placing political perspectives in a spectrum that values progress, fosters hope, and instills

individuals with pride for their country. This new political spectrum will define political perspectives as either agents or spectators.

For Rorty, the criterion of excellence in a political philosophy is not truth, but how effective it is at producing hope so that individuals will be encouraged to affect the moral and political climate by instigating progress. Thus, he puts forth the notion that there are two identifiable groups within the political spectrum: agents and spectators. Rorty is not advocating that we abandon the idea of a political spectrum, but that we reorient it based on the usefulness of the perspectives within it. Instead, he proposes a new kind of political spectrum that assigns value based on whether a political perspective encourages moral and political progress. In his view, the political perspectives that are best able to achieve the goal of creating a better future are agents. They extol a participatory, constructive, and progressive political philosophy. They are exclusively found in the progressive Left. They are the only group able to promote national hope in American society: “The Left, by definition, is the party of hope.”² In this passage, he is not referring to the Left in general, but only to the Left that believes in moral progress. There are other political perspectives that may come close to fulfilling the requirements that Rorty describes, but there are usually one or two fatal flaws that prevent them from deserving his praise. Americans must also have patriotic pride for their country. This is not to say that they are blind in their devotion to their country, but that they use it as a means through which they can describe their ideal future. Thus, agents are able to be critical of the present state of their country, but they must not see it as a lost cause or irredeemable: “Those who hope to persuade a nation to exert itself need

² Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 14

to remind their country of what it can take pride in as well as what it should be ashamed of.”³ Agents must be critical, but should also reinforce the value of achievements already made. They can never be satisfied with their country. Agents should always be seeking to improve their country, and want to live in a utopia that does not exist. Rorty is essentially arguing that Americans should be proud of their country. They should be made to feel proud of the achievements made in the past, and not overemphasize the tragedies, mistakes, and missteps.

Spectators are those on the political Right, eschatological Left, and cultural Left. These perspectives foster passivity for a variety of reasons. The Right believes America has already achieved its goals as a country or had done so in the past. This leads to stagnation and spectatorship because it denies the value or possibility of further progress. The eschatological Left adheres to grand philosophical theories, and is closer to a religious worldview than a political or philosophical one. This leads to spectatorship because if the road to the future has already been mapped and is inevitable, there is no need for individuals to take an active and participatory role. The cultural Left believes there is nothing about America worth salvaging. Rorty is not entirely dismissive of this perspective because he would rather have a culturally oriented Left than no Left at all. However, it is an unpatriotic political perspective that breeds spectatorship because it forwards the notion that America is not an enterprise worthy of participation. These political perspectives are determined by Rorty to fall into the category of spectators because they dilute the role the individual can and must play in the movement toward an

³ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 3

idyllic society, or, they make the individual feel their efforts are better suited for other projects.

In order to determine whether a political perspective falls into the category of agents or spectators, Rorty puts forth four loose criteria. Throughout his writings he describes the need for a political perspective to encourage hope and pride through its epistemology, view of the future, view of the past, and whether it has successfully secularized its beliefs in the tradition of the Enlightenment. If a political perspective meets these four criteria then it is seen by Rorty as deserving the designation of agent. If it does not entertain these concepts or fail to promote the kind of hope and pride that Rorty is describing then it is relegated to the spectator category.

Epistemology is the most salient criterion used by Rorty to judge whether a political perspective promotes agency or spectatorship. It is a criterion that plays a crucial role in his discussion of the agent-spectator dichotomy. He sees epistemologies as differing forms of justification. He does not believe we should talk about objective truth because there is no way of verifying whether it is objectively true. The reason for this is he believes we cannot verify if our means of verification are accurate. Thus, he deplors epistemological perspectives that are overly certain about their assumptions or beliefs.⁴ Rorty's epistemology, like his political philosophy, revolves around hope, pride, and preference. His goal is to overturn the dictatorship that the correspondence theory of truth has had over western philosophical thought. He is not concerned with attempting to establish objective criteria through which we can determine whether something is true or false; he wishes to free western civilization from its traditional modes of establishing certainty. His main target is Platonic dualism. He believes that it is deleterious to

⁴ Rorty, Richard. "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 5

philosophical thought, and that it must be overturned. It is a philosophical structure that must be done away with because it is a remnant from a bygone age that only serves to retard our moral progress. Rorty agrees with John Dewey because: “He saw all the baneful dualisms of the philosophical tradition as remnants and figurations of the social division between contemplators and doers, between a leisure class and a productive class.”⁵ For Rorty, spectatorial epistemologies are unconstructive and do not foster hope because they do not allow room for any possibility of change, and maintain the structured dualisms that Rorty is critical of. Rorty’s epistemology is heavily influenced by John Dewey and William James. He feels there is little value to a discussion of truth, and that philosophers should restrict themselves to exploring justification.⁶ What is considered true today is based on the fact that it has been justified better than the alternatives: “I shall try to show how the things which James and Dewey said about Truth were a way of replacing the task of justifying past custom and tradition by reference to unchanging structure with the task of replacing an unsatisfactory present with a more satisfactory future, thus replacing certainty with hope.”⁷ Rorty describes this process as the Americanization of philosophy, and it is ultimately what he values.⁸ If a political perspective has an Americanized epistemology it garners the title of agent. A political perspective that adheres to Rorty’s epistemology by refusing to participate in a fruitless conversation about the existence of objectivity and objective truth garners his praise, and is one of the qualities needed to foster agency. Americans must be open to new ways of thinking about truth. Only when we have reached this epistemological

⁵ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 29

⁶ Ibid. p. 32

⁷ Ibid. p. 31-2

⁸ Ibid. p. 32

perspective can we work toward achieving the goal of creating a more just society. This epistemological perspective will require us to jettison any belief or dogmatic hope that there is a utopian future awaiting us.

A political perspective must not attempt to lay out the path to a utopia or stubbornly adhere to one form of society or another, but it must be open to new ways of thinking about ourselves and society. Perspectives that promote utopian ends may be effective at promulgating hope, but it is the idea of a predicted and defined end which is problematic. Rorty gives the example of Marxism and Christianity: “Failed prophecies often make invaluable inspirational reading Consider two examples: the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto. Both were intended by their authors as predictions of what was going to happen... Both sets of predictions have, so far, been ludicrous flops. Both claims to knowledge have become objects of ridicule.”⁹ The problem with prophetic descriptions of the future is that when they fail, their ability to inspire hope is far less potent. To avoid this, Rorty believes we should look for sources of hope that are not bound to prediction: “It would be best, in short, if we could get along without prophecy and claims to knowledge of the forces which determine history... Some day perhaps we shall have a new text... which abstains from prediction yet still expresses the same yearning for fraternity.”¹⁰ Rorty is not entirely condemnatory of prophetic texts describing a utopian future, but believes there are more constructive ways to foster hope. We cannot know what the future will be like, and thus we should avoid attempts to make claims of how it will unfold. We must acknowledge that there is still much to be discovered and learned about ourselves. Rorty believes we must look beyond the

⁹ Rorty, Richard. “Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 201

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 209

philosophical tradition and religion to find the means through which we can promote hope and create a better future. If we do not, then we will cut ourselves off from exploring new ways of thinking about ideas and concepts. This is one of the main reasons why Rorty positions philosophical truth as being further towards the spectatorial side of the spectrum than literary truth: “the intellectuals of the West have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy, and now from literature.”¹¹ For Rorty, philosophy is a reactionary discipline. It only responds to social problems after they have already taken root. It is up to literature to blaze new trails of truth, and only when this has been done can philosophy and contemplation follow in its footsteps. For Rorty, philosophy and epistemology in particular, represents an intellectual structure that binds and constrains thought in a way that prevents us from finding new ways of thinking. Instead, it is literature that is more effective at promoting hope because it is not bound by a structure that moulds our thinking about the future in the same way that philosophy does. In an essay written shortly before his death, Rorty referred to another piece he wrote about the relationship between pragmatism and Romanticism. He states: “At the heart of Romanticism, I said, was the claim that reason can only follow paths that the imagination has first broken. No words, no reasoning. No imagination, no new words. No such words, no moral or intellectual progress.”¹² This summation shows Rorty’s heartfelt appreciation of literature and poetry, and highlights the role it has in his epistemology and philosophical writings in general. His essay, “Pragmatism and Romanticism” explores this notion with great detail, but is not a comprehensive description of his

¹¹ Rorty, Richard. “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 91

¹² Rorty, Richard. *The Fire of Life*. Editorial. Poetry Foundation, 18 Nov. 2007. Web.

perspective. This is the most important aspect of Rorty's philosophical and political view because replacing structure with hope is a theme present in the other three criteria.

The second criterion that a political perspective must fulfill in order for it to promote agency is that it must advocate some form of moral progress. It must instill hope by promising an end to moral iniquity and fill individuals with hope in the possibilities the future holds. There cannot be an explicit or defined end to this moral progress. A country has and always will be a work in progress. If we were to describe the future, it would only be through the lens of the moral goals we wish to achieve now. We cannot know what specific moral characteristics the country of the future will have, but they must expect it to be an improvement on the present circumstance. This will ensure they feel a sense of hope. Rorty likens it to fantasizing:

A lot of fantasies can stand on their own without being twined around some large conceptually graspable object... They are concrete fantasies about a future in which everybody can get work from which they derive some satisfaction and for which they are decently paid, and in which they are safe from violence and from humiliation.¹³

This fantasizing will be a source of hope. It is not that "agents" despise the present, they merely prefer the future. The criticisms levied by a political perspective about the current state of society should aid in the movement toward an ideal end without causing others to enter into a state of despair or nihilism. This end cannot be described with a great amount of detail because it is still unknown to us, and will unfold in time. It is crucial for a political perspective to embrace undefined moral progress, and think of it in terms of increasing sensitivity towards other individuals: "it is best to think of moral progress as a matter of increasing *sensitivity*, increasing responsiveness to the needs of a larger and

¹³ Rorty, Richard. "The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope." *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. p. 232

larger variety of people and things.”¹⁴ Americans can think of what they want in the future, but should not expect their fantasies to come to fruition exactly as they envision them. If a political perspective attempts to elucidate a specific path to a defined end then this will be poisonous to the promulgation of hope. It risks becoming a failed prophecy. Thus, Rorty argues that spectators either deplore the notion of progress or only want it to happen a specific way. He does not see agents as attempting to promote a form of naive utopian idealism. Instead, they believe that we must have faith that even though there may be setbacks, or, in some cases, even regression, we will achieve our goals at an undefined time. The other area in which agents and spectators are differentiated is the millenarian character of the latter’s ideas. Agents do not believe that there will be a point at which the struggle for achieving the moral character of America can end. It is struggle in perpetuity. This will not be poisonous to the promulgation of hope, so long as it is coupled with a view of history that recognizes the moral achievements that the country has already made. Agents must always be promoting a view of America that values its history, but remains unsatisfied.

The third criterion that a political perspective must fulfill to earn the title of agent is to inspire us to feel proud of their history of the country. Rorty is not suggesting that we have an overly romantic view of the past. Instead he is arguing that history should not only be a tale of woe. Fantasy plays an important role in giving hope in the future, but has no place in thinking of the past: “We should stop using ‘History’ as the name of an object around which to weave our fantasies of diminished misery.”¹⁵ Rorty believes that history must be thought of as being part of the movement toward the realization of

¹⁴ Rorty, Richard. “Ethics Without Principles.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 81

¹⁵ Rorty, Richard. “The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope.” *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. p. 229

an improved future. We must highlight the miseries of the past, so that it illuminates the successes we have had. It is understandable for a political perspective to be critical of the moral climate of the past, but we cannot view those in the past as being ignorant. For Rorty, the moral deficiency of the past should be thought of in the same way we think of scientific progress.¹⁶ It is crucial to recognize the moral achievements that have been made, and that should not diminish the significance of what has been accomplished. A political perspective must promote a view of history that is critical, but does not reinforce a negative view of the actors or circumstances of the past. It is crucial for a political perspective to utilize a positive historical narrative to understand the past rather than a theoretical lens because a positive narrative is a necessary component to the realization of an ideal future: “The appropriate intellectual background to political deliberation is historical narrative rather than philosophical or quasi-philosophical theory... it is the kind of narrative which segues into a utopian scenario about how we can get from the present to a better future.”¹⁷ Rorty is critical of those who would embrace the philosophy of Hegel as dogma, but he argues that his view of history is what we should strive for. Americans should view their country’s history as a narrative moving toward an ideal end regardless of whether we have full or exact knowledge of what it would be like. We can identify the role progress has played in the past through the acceptance of moral progress. If a political perspective is overly critical of the past, has detrimental reverence for it, or views it through an overly theoretical framework it is deemed by Rorty to fall into the category of spectator. If a political perspective promotes a view of history that encourages an individual to be proud of the achievements their

¹⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Ethics Without Principles.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 81

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 231

country has made, but orients them toward continuing the work of those in the past, then it would garner the title of agent.

The fourth criterion that must be met is whether it has successfully secularized its religious beliefs. A political perspective is secular if it has transferred the effort and spiritual devotion away from utopian ends and from belief in an afterlife and otherworldly retribution to concern for individuals and the public good. Our concern should be with ourselves, and with progressing toward an ideal future: “We are the greatest poem because we put ourselves in the place of God... Other nations thought of themselves as hymns to the glory of God. We redefine God as our future selves.”¹⁸ Secularism depends on redirecting the effort that hitherto went into achieving individual spiritual salvation and well-being into humanistic and common ends. Rorty saw the secularization of Western society that began during the Enlightenment to be one of its most important achievements: “The ones who, like me, agree with Habermas typically see the secularization of public life as the Enlightenment’s central achievement, and see our job as... getting our fellow citizens to rely less on tradition, and be more willing to experiment with new customs and institutions.”¹⁹ However, it was not until the twentieth century that this concept truly came to fruition and agents successfully replaced the concept of eternity with a focus on human values. Rorty likens this to an increasing sense of self-awareness: “we are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal.”²⁰ Agents no longer put their faith in religious dogmas, but in concrete civic faith. Spectators have not fully

¹⁸ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 22

¹⁹ Rorty, Richard. “Religion As Conversation Stopper.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 168

²⁰ Rorty, Richard. “Human Rights, Rationality, Sentimentality.” *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. p. 170

expunged the idea of eternity from their ideologies and remain in a stagnant religious mindset. It is not simply that they still believe in God, but that they have not focused their attentions on planet earth or on human matters. They have not transformed their faith into a civic religion. It must be stated that in an American context, the individuals most responsible for bringing about this transformation are John Dewey and Walt Whitman:

They [Dewey and Whitman] hoped to separate the fraternity and loving kindness urged by the Christian scriptures from the ideas of supernatural parentage, immortality, providence, and – most importantly – sin. They wanted Americans to take pride in what America might, all by itself and by its own lights, make of itself, rather than in America’s obedience to any authority – even the authority of God.²¹

The spectatorial political perspectives may not have a belief in the supernatural, but they maintain a stubborn adherence to theoretical lenses that obscure their ability to produce a feeling of hope in Americans. They become constrained by these spectres in their thought. An interesting component to this aspect of Rorty’s political philosophy is the role of what can be called the patron saints of a political perspective. He often mentions one or two individuals who act as figureheads of a political philosophy. For the eschatological Left he sees the main figure heads as Marx and Hegel. For the cultural Left there is Michel Foucault, but it is to the progressive Left that he devotes the largest amount of writing. He sees John Dewey and Walt Whitman as playing not only an intrinsic role in the formation of his ideas, but also in the progressive Left in general. Thus, I will end the chapter by exploring a selection of Walt Whitman’s writings in order to understand why Rorty ascribes to him such great importance. But first, I will examine

²¹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 16

each political perspective and explore the reasons why Rorty deems it to be an agent or spectator.

The Political Right

Rorty sees little value in the philosophy of the Political Right. It is a political venue for those who romanticize ‘the good old days.’ It would be incorrect to describe it as the antithesis to the progressive Left because Rorty is attempting to create a political spectrum based upon hope. His political spectrum either places value in a political perspective for its role in promulgating hope, or dismisses a perspective because it is politically stultifying. Rorty positions the Right alongside the eschatological Left and the cultural Left. The Right is, however, the political philosophy of which he is most critical. Rorty is dismissive of the Right, and because of this he does not discuss it to the same degree as the perspectives on the Left. He views the Right as promoting political and moral stagnation: “the Right never thinks that anything much needs to be changed: it thinks the country is basically in good shape, and may well have been in better shape in the past.”²² It is a strictly reactionary ideology.

The Right fails to fulfill Rorty’s epistemological criteria because it presupposes objective truth and proudly advocates the use of a sclerotic picture of Reason. The Right is also locked into “democratic dogmatism.” Its hard-headed adherence to objectivity and objective truth coupled with its democratic dogmatism is problematic for Rorty: “Rightist thinkers don’t think that it is enough just to *prefer* democratic societies. One also has to believe that they are Objectively Good, that the institutions of such societies are grounded in Rational First Principles.”²³ The other fatal flaw of the Right’s epistemological views is its desire to discover a fundamental human nature. It does not concern itself with what humanity should, or can be, but with what it is. One of its

²² Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 14

²³ Rorty, Richard. “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 4

central tenets is that within each person is the natural ability to discern and comprehend objective truth through Reason. The Right assumes that once the individual is no longer encumbered by material or earthly desires, he or she can gain access to truth:

The Right usually offers a theory according to which, if you have truth, freedom will follow automatically. Human beings, says this theory, have within them a truth-tracking faculty called 'reason', an instrument capable of uncovering the intrinsic nature of things. Once such obstacles as the passions or sin are overcome, the natural light of reason will guide us to the truth.²⁴

The desire of the Right to discover a static human nature prevents it from seeking to understand humanity's potential. It is fundamentally directed toward intellectual stagnation. It cannot produce a feeling of hope because it does not seek to overturn the structures that constrain thought. As stated, Rorty is not necessarily hostile to structured thought as long as it remains open ended and is able to encourage an individual to feel hope. The Right is only concerned with what purportedly is, rather than what can be. If truth and human nature are constrained, there is no possibility for change; this is why it ultimately fosters despair rather than hope. If human nature is believed to be brutish and nasty, the individual cannot envision an idyllic future where the moral character of American society can be achieved. The Right is not amenable to Rorty's epistemological view that literature and poetry are valuable means through which we can learn about ourselves, because it has a strong devotion to the "triumph of reason."²⁵

Rorty's view of the Right can be best summed up in his discussion of education and the political divide regarding its nature and purpose: "When people on the political Right talk about education, they immediately start talking about truth."²⁶ This passage is the

²⁴ Rorty, Richard. "Education as Socialization and as Individualization." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 114

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 115

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 114

clearest example of Rorty's criticism and shows us why the political Right cannot be deemed an agent. It is far too concerned with discussions of truth and the nature of things rather than providing students

The political Right does not believe in progress; it assumes that there will be no salvation from the current ills of society. It has its gaze set on the past, so it cannot foster feelings of hope and pride. For the Right, the future should be nothing more than a continuation of the present, or, a return to the past. Due to the fact it sees the country as having already achieved its moral goals--either in the present or the past--there is nothing else that needs to be done: "The Right thinks that our country already has a moral identity, and hopes to keep that identity intact. It fears economic and political change, and therefore easily becomes the pawn of the rich and powerful – the people whose selfish interests are served by forestalling such change."²⁷ This passage shows that the political Right is diametrically opposed to the sort of positive change that Rorty values. Furthermore, he is showing that if it advocates a form of progress it is only a narrow, self-interested kind that is not for the benefit of the many. It is a political perspective that promotes stagnation or the kind of progress that Rorty deprecates. For Rorty, change and progress are not synonymous. A political perspective may espouse a kind of change, but this does not mean it will be progress. I believe that for the political Right, the change it proposes are often based upon undoing the achievements of the Left. The change proposed may be framed as moving society toward an ideal future, but the changes it wishes to make Rorty does not believe we can know what true progress is, and we should instead concern ourselves with conversations about what kind of progress is more

²⁷ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 31

useful. If our goal is to create a more equitable society that is free from cruelty, progress must not undo previous changes that have helped us work towards it.

The political Right almost succeeds in giving individuals pride in the past, but it does so at the cost of destroying hope in the future. The Right encourages passivity because it is a perspective that views America as already having achieved its goals as a country. It wishes to remain in the current moral climate, or to return to a bygone age. Regress would be an inaccurate term to describe how the Right views history because it accepts some of the achievements in the past, but worries that they have been lost. It is a perspective that harkens back to bygone days and views them with an overly reverential lens. As a result, it tends to make cultural issues important to political dialogue. Interestingly, this focus on cultural issues is shared by the cultural Left. But, unlike the Left, the Right seeks to return America to the past.²⁸

The Right does not fulfill the requirement of secularizing its belief in eternity because it continues to believe – and to demand that conversations take for granted – notions of an eternal and everlasting human nature. It has not taken up the struggle that has been bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment. It could be said that this is entirely in line with the tenets of the Enlightenment, but that is not the aspect of the Enlightenment that Rorty emphasizes. The desire to uncover human nature has no place in Rorty's narrative of the Enlightenment. Thus, it is more accurate to say that the Right has focused on the wrong part of the Enlightenment. Rorty denies that the Enlightenment has made any *epistemological* progress; it is the Romantic critique of Enlightenment whose view of truth Rorty endorses. In contrast, the Enlightenment thinkers have perpetuated an

²⁸ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 14

antiquated view of truth. The Right clings to the Enlightenment's antiquated view of truth, while abandoning its progressive and utopian secularism.

For Rorty, the political Right is the best example of a spectatorial perspective. Its thought is oriented toward the past, and its effort to find foundational truths about human nature that stand in the way of progress. It breeds stagnation and resignation because it weaves a tale of woe about America's future. It believes that the past and present are superior to the future. In short, the perspective of the Right is characterized by its fanatical adherence to understanding and discovering immutable truth, its reverence for the past, fear of the future, and failure to secularize its beliefs by valuing the wrong aspects of the Enlightenment. All these qualities make it a fundamentally spectatorial political philosophy.

The Eschatological Left

Rorty describes those who subscribe to grand philosophical theories like those of Marx and Hegel as belonging to the eschatological Left.²⁹ They view the future as unfolding through a determinable theoretical framework with a specific path and a fixed end. Eschatological Leftists see the ideal goal of America only through their ideological lens. Rorty believes that they cannot be seen as agents because their adherence to theory prevents them from adequately inspiring individuals to take a participatory role. He admits that the eschatological Left can inspire hope through its prophetic predictions, but argues that our ignorance of the future assures the failure of these predictions. Rorty argues that individuals believe in these political ideologies mostly due to their inability to handle secularism.³⁰ It is as if they compensate for the vacuum left by an absence of religion with an overly theoretical philosophy.³¹ He believes that they are simply too weak and retreat into these theoretical perspectives.³² For Rorty, Marxism is the most damaging philosophy on the Left because its allure causes many to join the eschatological Left. It is more of a religion than a philosophy: “Marxism was, as Paul Tillich and others rightly noted, more of a religion than a secularist program for social change.”³³ The eschatological Left is the political perspective which is closest to earning the title of agent. This does not prevent him from putting forth scathing criticisms, and he argues that it ultimately falls short of meeting the requirements of being an agent and fostering agency.

²⁹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 38

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 38

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 38

³² *Ibid.* p. 37

³³ *Ibid.* p. 45

The epistemology of the eschatological Left is dependent on grand theories that are used as lenses through which the perspective interprets history, progress, and America. It utilizes concepts like capital, commodification, and ideology to view society and events.³⁴ It may be helpful to think of these notions, but the problem with the eschatological Left is that they adhere to the theoretical perspectives of Hegel and Marx in an extremely dogmatic manner. The eschatological Left can provoke a sense of hope because it provides people with a clear example of what the future can look like, and provides objectives to work toward. However, this ultimately restricts the eschatological Left because it creates a hostile intellectual atmosphere: “We should repudiate the Marxists’ insinuation that only those who are convinced capitalism must be overthrown can count as Leftists, and that everybody else is a wimpy liberal, a self-deceiving bourgeois reformer.”³⁵ The eschatological Left does not create a more inclusive society and epistemology. It shuns those who do not subscribe to it and creates new structures that are not conducive to the promulgation of hope.

Rorty sees a great deal of value in the writings of Hegel, and admits that Marx’s writings can inspire hope. However, it is the degree to which the followers adhere to these theories that ultimately serves to weaken the movement. The eschatological Left searches for axiomatic laws in society and history to discern objective criteria through which change and progress can be understood and predicted. Rorty agrees with Dewey’s summation of eschatological Leftists as being constrained by their desire for axiomatic

³⁴ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 42

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 42

laws in society and history: “Dewey concluded that Marx had been taken in by the bad, Greek, side of Hegel--the side which insisted on necessary laws of history.”³⁶

The eschatological Left believes in progress, but it attempts to describe the path that the future will take with specific detail. It does not accept any other means of change except the kind it describes. There is only one motor that powers the change in society. In the case of Marx, it is class conflict that brings about new forms of social, political, and economic organization. For Hegel, it is Spirit. Rorty sees this as problematic because it is a naive form of utopian fantasizing. Marxism has managed to position itself as the dominant ideology on the political Left, but this has come at great cost—disappointment and disillusionment. The result is that Marxism opens itself to ridicule. He likens it to the failed prophecy of Christianity:

Consider two examples: the New Testament and the Communist Manifesto. Both were intended by their authors as predictions of what was going to happen – predictions based on superior knowledge of the forces which determine human history. Both sets of predictions have, so far, been ludicrous flops. Both claims to knowledge have become objects of ridicule.³⁷

The means through which the eschatological Left--particularly Marxism--will achieve its goals are primarily through bottom-up initiatives. This is something Rorty is very critical of: “We need to get rid of the Marxist idea that only bottom-up initiatives, conducted by workers and peasants who have somehow been so freed from resentment as to show no trace of prejudice, can achieve our country.”³⁸ This is different from the ways in which the American Left has managed to achieve moral progress: “The history of Leftist politics in America is a story of how top-down initiatives and bottom-up initiatives have

³⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 30

³⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 201

³⁸ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 53

interlocked.”³⁹ He continues to state that while it may not be a perfect relationship, it has managed to make significant strides:

Although these two kinds of initiatives reinforced each other, the people at the bottom took the risks, suffered the beatings, made all the big sacrifices, and were sometimes murdered. But their heroism might have been fruitless if leisured, educated, relatively risk-free people had not joined the struggle. Those beaten to death by the goonsquads and the lynch mobs might have died in vain if the safe and secure had not lent a hand.⁴⁰

This passage shows how the eschatological Left is inappropriate for America. It flies in the face of the successes made by the American Left by negating the role played by the upper echelon of society. This stubborn adherence to its theoretical perspectives not only limits itself to the future and how change will take place, but also ignores significant aspects of the past.

The eschatological Left views the past only through a theoretically driven perspective. Past events only serve to corroborate the theory that is being posited. History is a story of moving toward the ideal end it has described in great detail. This may be constructive and helpful in making an individual feel proud of his or her country but there are aspects that are incongruent. Like religion, it has an unrealistic need for finding the moral purity of those in the past: “If we look for people who made no mistakes, who were always on the right side, who never apologized for tyrants or unjust wars, we shall have few heroes and heroines. Marxism encourages us to look for such purity.”⁴¹ Furthermore, this need for purity is only detrimental to the Left: “The divisions which plagued Marxism are manifestations of an urge for purity which the Left

³⁹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 53

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 54

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 45

would be better off without.”⁴² This desire for purity of those in the past is detrimental because it is seeking something that does not exist or is an error on the part of the actors in the past. It is important for members of the proletariat to recognize their class standing. If they do not they are deemed ignorant, and working against their own self-interest.

The eschatological Left is successful in its attempt to put forth a positive narrative of history. It is a narrative that is characterized by the overcoming of inequalities and obstacles. However, with each new era come new conflicts and difficulties. This is not poisonous to hope because it allows the individual to see how, even though there are challenges that face America, they can be overcome. The only difficulty with such a narrative is that it has a foreseeable millenarian ending. This is what characterizes it as a spectatorial political perspective.

The eschatological Left has some relation to the Enlightenment’s project of secularization, but it has not been fully able to remove the religious aspect of doctrinal dogmatism. It is able to decentre the theological worldview, but can only achieve this by putting forth a theory that is similar in character. The eschatological Left comes closer than any of the other spectators to meeting Rorty’s requirement for a civic religion, but the negative ramifications of the perspective outweigh the positive. It does not believe there to be an immutable human nature that exists through time, and understands it and truth as transient. This is something Rorty values, but the perspective is bogged down by its theoretical dogmatism.

⁴² Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 52

Rorty describes the eschatological Left as a political perspective that can foster a feeling of hope in the future. It is a forward thinking ideology because it views history in relation to the ideal end it values, but sees the past and the future only through an ideological lens. It encourages individuals to fantasize about the world that the individual wants to live in, but since it is described in such great detail, it can quickly become a failed prophecy. Rorty goes as far as arguing that Marxism is a ‘catastrophe’.⁴³ Rorty’s dismissive attitude should be taken with a grain of salt. He admits that he has read very little of Marx’s work: “There is a lot of Marx I have never read, and am no longer ambitious to read.”⁴⁴ Despite this, he still manages to put forward some form compliment about Marxism and the eschatological Left as producing hope:

Most of us can no longer take either Christian or Marxist postponements and reassurances seriously. But this does not, and should not prevent us from finding inspiration and encouragement in the New Testament and the Manifesto. For both documents are expressions of the same hope: that some day we shall be willing and able to treat the needs of all human beings with the respect and consideration with which we treat the needs of those closest to us, those whom we love.⁴⁵

Rorty’s admission that the eschatological Left and Marxist thought in particular can produce hope is indicative of his more general attitude toward the perspective. It comes close to meeting the requirements needed to be considered an agent, but ultimately falls short. It gives an individual hope in the future. However, it does so through positing an excessively explicit conception, and attempts to describe the means through which change will occur. It is almost successful in its drive to decentre humanity from its need for God, but ultimately replaces the notion of eternity with another similar idea. The

⁴³ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 42

⁴⁴ Rorty, Richard. “A Spectre is Haunting the Intellectuals: Derrida on Marx.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 211

⁴⁵ Rorty, Richard. “Failed Prophecies, Glorious Hopes.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 202-3

comparisons between Marxism and Christianity accurately describe why Rorty sees it as a spectatorial political perspective. It fosters resignation in the face of a plan that does not actually exist.

The Cultural Left

The cultural Left is the group that Rorty is most critical of because it is antithetical to the goals of the progressive Left. Thinkers such as Foucault and Lacan are its intellectual leaders.⁴⁶ It is a post-modernist political perspective. Rorty categorizes feminists, race theorists, and anyone who subscribes to a “‘politics of difference’ or ‘of identity’ or ‘of recognition’”⁴⁷ as a cultural Leftist. Rorty argues that academics and intellectuals who uphold these values are harmful to American society because they promote hopelessness: “Hopelessness has become fashionable on the Left--principled, theorized, philosophical hopelessness.”⁴⁸ By promoting difference and division in America they detract from the need to create a classless society. For Rorty, the cultural Left wants nothing more than the complete destruction of American society and its way of life, because it regards it as an unsalvageable monstrosity. However, Rorty is conciliatory toward the cultural Left because he would still rather have it than no Left at all. This does not shield it from his poignant criticisms. The first aspect of the perspective that he takes aim at is its epistemology.

The cultural Left does not focus on the truly pressing issues created by economic disparity. Instead, it devotes its time to “spectres” in society: “The cultural Left is haunted by ubiquitous specters, the most frightening of which is called ‘power’... But one cannot block off power in the Foucauldian sense. Power is as much inside one as outside one.”⁴⁹ Rorty sees little value in discussing ideas such as power relations and

⁴⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 38

⁴⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Ethics Without Principles.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 77

⁴⁸ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 37

⁴⁹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 94

‘otherness’ because there is little or no discussion of how these issues could be resolved.

The cultural Left uses theory to search for the root causes of the power relations that shape the individual. Furthermore, it offers no solutions to the problems it describes:

The Foucauldian Left represents an unfortunate regression to the Marxist obsession with scientific rigor... But Foucauldian theoretical sophistication is even more useless to leftist politics than was Engels’ dialectical materialism... they have little interest in designing new social experiments.⁵⁰

The cultural Left’s preoccupation with theory eclipses that of the eschatological Left, and utilizes it to a purposeless end. The cultural Left is so immersed in theory that it that it prevents it from putting forth meaningful alternatives. The cultural Left’s use of theory differs from the eschatological Left because the eschatological Left is using theory to try and uncover where we are in relation to a utopian end. The cultural Left, however, uses theory without any desired end. It does not use theory to effect progress. Rorty believes this paralyzes society. The cultural Left’s criticisms distract us from the real problem faced by society: economic inequality. He writes: “This cultural Left thinks more about stigma than about money, more about deep and hidden psychosexual motivations than about shallow and evident greed.”⁵¹ The cultural Left searches for problems that are not readily apparent. Their preoccupation with theory means that they ignore immediate and pressing problems. These psychosexual motivations are so deeply rooted that there is no solution other than to abandon the system altogether. This makes it self-destructive and leads to a denial of any value in America. Rorty maintains that America can be a great country that is morally equitable and is far from unsalvageable. The cultural Left sees America as a society that is “dominated by an odious ethos of ‘liberal individualism’, an

⁵⁰ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 37

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 77

ethos which produces racism, sexism, consumerism, and Republican presidents.”⁵² The epistemology of the cultural Left is not constructive and does not fill an individual with a feeling of hope because it is solely oriented toward discovering the problems within American society. This could be a positive attribute, but it does not suggest a solution to these difficulties, which are made to seem insurmountable. Despite Rorty’s criticisms of the cultural Left, there are some ideas to which he is conciliatory. He writes: “I think the so-called post-modernists are right in most of their criticisms of traditional philosophical talk about ‘reason’.”⁵³ Rorty and those on the cultural Left do have some common beliefs in regard to Reason, but he repudiates the cultural Left for not having an epistemology that is oriented towards hope. This means that it cannot fulfill Rorty’s epistemological criterion because it is unable to take pride in the past or the present. It denies the notion that there will be a future in which the moral character of America has been achieved, and is ineffective in bringing positive change: “An unpatriotic Left has never achieved anything. A Left that refuses to take pride in its country will have no impact on that country’s politics, and will eventually become an object of contempt.”⁵⁴

Rorty puts forth two ideas that could be useful to the cultural Left and allow it to have an impact by bringing about change. He states: “the Left should put a moratorium on theory. It should try to kick its philosophy habit. The second is that the Left should try to mobilize what remains of our pride in being Americans.”⁵⁵ The theory used by the cultural Left is one of the main things preventing it from being a constructive political perspective. It is far too concerned with jargon and intellectual exploration of our faults.

⁵² Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 4

⁵⁴ Rorty, Richard. “The Unpatriotic Academy.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 254

⁵⁵ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 91-2

It must reorient itself so that it can become proud of some of the achievements made, and focus on the immediate problem of economic inequality. The cultural Left should focus on becoming a political movement rather than an academic endeavour. Furthermore, it must not see America as an unsalvageable mess that must be abandoned. Rorty states: “This Left [the cultural Left] will have to stop thinking up ever more abstract and abusive names for ‘the system’ and start trying to construct inspiring images of the country.”⁵⁶

The cultural Left does not fulfill Rorty’s requirement of promoting pride in the past, because it does not believe there is anything to be proud of. It views history as a curse rather than a legacy. It deems national pride as simple-minded and arrogant nationalism.⁵⁷ The cultural Left denies the existence of moral progress, and focuses on the negative aspects of the past without tempering it with hope for the future. It is a political perspective that would rather set its country on fire rather than help it bloom. The cultural Left is the furthest from fulfilling the criterion of instilling pride in America’s history because it is overcome by shame. This prevents it from effecting any meaningful change and progress: “Like every other country, ours has a lot to be proud of and a lot to be ashamed of. But a nation cannot reform itself unless it takes pride in itself--unless it has an identity, rejoices in it, reflects upon it and tries to live up to it.”⁵⁸ Unless the cultural Left can accept this notion of promoting pride in American history it will ultimately be detrimental to the country, and possibly prevent it from achieving its goals. The cultural Left only describes a country that is characterized by despair. It does

⁵⁶ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p p. 99

⁵⁷ Rorty, Richard. “The Unpatriotic Academy.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 253

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 254

not advocate for Americans to be proud of “being the heirs of Emerson, Lincoln, and King.”⁵⁹ Ultimately the cultural Left fails to meet Rorty’s requirements for being an agent because it does not encourage the individual to take an active role in shaping his or her country. The masochistic tendencies seen in the way it understands and views the past are indicative of the perspective in general. However, Rorty takes a more conciliatory tone with his treatment of the cultural Left and focuses more on ways in which it can become more active and positive. It utterly fails in meeting his criteria, but Rorty is optimistic about its ability to change.

Rorty views the cultural Left as being stuck in a religious mindset, and that it fails to live up to the legacy of the Enlightenment. It may be a secular political perspective that repudiates notions like God, but Rorty believes it has only replaced a theological foundation with the ideological equivalent of Satan: “The ubiquity of Foucauldian power is reminiscent of the ubiquity of Satan, and thus the ubiquity of original sin--that diabolical stain on every human soul.”⁶⁰ Rorty believes the reason for this is its strict adherence to theory. He states that this leads it to be a perspective that operates similarly to a religion: “in committing itself to what it calls ‘theory,’ this Left has gotten something which is entirely too much like religion. For the cultural Left has come to believe that we must place our country within a theoretical frame of reference, situate it within a vast quasi-cosmological perspective.”⁶¹ The cultural Left’s love of theory means that it seeks to understand America in terms of its relation to a God-like plan. Thus, it shares some qualities with the eschatological Left in this respect, but differs in that it

⁵⁹ Rorty, Richard. “The Unpatriotic Academy.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 254

⁶⁰ Rorty, Richard. “The Banality of Pragmatism and the Poetry of Justice.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 95

⁶¹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 95

sees nothing but despair. There is no identifiable end to the misery of modern society other than to overturn it entirely. It therefore fails to meet Rorty's requirement for a secular political perspective.

Rorty's criticisms of the cultural Left are not without reason. It is not that he has some form of vendetta or personal grudge which leads him to be overly harsh; on the contrary, he believes it has made some positive achievements regarding human fraternity. It is a political perspective that Rorty would accept if there was no alternative: "any Left is better than none, and this one [the cultural Left] is doing a great deal of good for people who have a raw deal in our society: women, African Americans, gay men and lesbians."⁶² He continues his praise of the cultural Left by stating: "This focus on marginalized groups will, in the long run, help to make our country much more decent, more tolerant and more civilized."⁶³ However, he tempers this compliment by stating its fatal flaw: "but there is a problem with this Left: it is unpatriotic."⁶⁴ Thus, Rorty sees a great deal of potential in the cultural Left, but it fails to create hope. It has forced us to think of the down-trodden and dispossessed. The only problem is it has not supplied us with tools to rectify these dilemmas.

⁶² Rorty, Richard. "The Unpatriotic Academy." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 252

⁶³ Ibid. p. 252

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 252

The Progressive Left

The progressive Left is the only political perspective that fulfills the criteria needed to be considered an agent. It instils hope in the individual because it describes a future that is the fulfillment of the moral character of America. It is a future-oriented perspective but does not attempt to describe the means through which the change will occur in great detail. The most important aspect of the progressive Left is the trust an individual must have in his or her country and the future. This is not a blind trust, the kind that would make an individual fall into spectatorship and not desire to take a participatory role, but the kind that makes an individual feel that his or her struggles are not in vain. Americans cannot assume that their country will fail at achieving its goals. An idealized future may not be achieved in their life time, but they must still have hope that their descendants will be able to live in a morally equitable society.

The progressive Left is essentially the political venue for Rorty's epistemology. It refrains from adhering to intellectual structures that are not conducive to promulgating hope. It still values philosophy as a discipline, but acknowledges that literary truth has validity in a reality shaping capacity. The progressive Left considers philosophy to be a useful literary genre with many insights to offer, but does not see it as the ultimate bearer of truth. Rorty and the progressive Left view objective truth as being nothing more than the "intersubjective consensus among human beings."⁶⁵ Due to its repudiation of objectivity, it focuses more on preference. The only aspect in which this is not consistent is its pride in America. The progressive Left advocates an attachment to one's country as long as it is not over zealous. Pride for one's country cannot be a blind love, and must be moderate: "Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism; just as

⁶⁵ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 35

excessive self-respect can produce arrogance.”⁶⁶ This passage shows an underlying characteristic of the progressive Left’s epistemological views: moderation. It is not overly fervent in its beliefs and repudiates the notion of objectivity because it disapproves of anything that might cause an individual to become a denizen of this perspective. This allows it to promote hope because if an individual is not excessively attached to his or her beliefs then he or she will be willing to accept other, differing ideas that are better in some sense or another. As stated, the progressive Left has a pragmatist epistemology. This means that it earns the title of agent from Rorty.

The progressive Left garners the title of agent because it believes in an ideal future for American society. This is best characterized in Rorty’s essay “Looking Backwards from the Year 2096.” It has a literary character that is written from the vantage point of an American living at the end of the twenty-first century. Rorty is not attempting to map out a philosophical guide to achieving what he describes, but is putting forth an imaginative view of what the future could be. He refrains from describing how society has achieved its successes, and focuses on comparing and contrasting the late twentieth century America with his view of the future. He alludes to tragedies such as the second Great Depression and a military dictatorship that ruled America during the Dark Years, but these are only devices he uses to criticize contemporary society.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the problems and tragedies he describes are not outweighed by the praise he has for his country. America is still a work in progress, but it has a great deal to be proud of and is capable of hope. This essay is an excellent

⁶⁶ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 3

⁶⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Looking Backward from the Year 2096.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 248

example of Rorty's view of what a critical political perspective should be like. It is not promoting despair; and has suggestions on how the problems of contemporary society can be solved.

The progressive Left meets Rorty's criterion for instilling pride in American history because it believes that it must be told as a story of triumph. Moreover, it does not think there is an objective narrative to history. It believes the past must be told as a story of overcoming moral inequity, and it must highlight the achievements already made. It might be seen as downplaying the more problematic aspects of the past, but this sort of criticism might only be made by an individual on the cultural Left. As a perspective characterized by moderation, it tends to not lean toward overly glowing praise, or venomous condemnation of those in the past. It meets Rorty's criterion of instilling pride in the past because it values the telling of stories that are characterized by their achievements, and encourages individuals to take up the noble struggles of those in the past.

The progressive Left is the only political perspective that has successfully secularized its view of eternity by orienting itself toward the creation of a civic religion. The individuals that serve as the figure heads of this perspective are Walt Whitman and John Dewey. Rorty views them as the best examples of American intellectuals who promoted a feeling of hope in the future of their country. They were some of the first individuals to promote an American civic religion. Rorty defines them as "prophets of this civic religion."⁶⁸ He believes Dewey and Whitman are so ideologically similar that discussing one would mean discussing them both: "There is, I think, little difference in

⁶⁸ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 15

doctrine between Dewey and Whitman.”⁶⁹ For Rorty, they are not philosophically identical, but they make similar contributions to the American civic religion. Thus, an analysis of only Dewey or Whitman will suffice. They have both made unique and important contributions to America and philosophy. However, I am not evaluating Rorty’s claim that they have both made similar contributions to the idea of an American civic religion. Instead, I take Rorty’s argument to be true, and will examine their contribution to the idea of this American civic religion, and its place in Rorty’s political philosophy.

Whitman’s “Democratic Vistas” offers scathing criticisms of American politics and society that are paired with a heartfelt advocacy of the importance of literature. What makes him a part of the progressive Left and a prophet of the civic religion is the hope he advocated, and the inspirational nature of his writing. He puts forth poignant criticisms of politicians and political parties: “America, it may be, is doing very well, upon the whole, notwithstanding these antics of the parties and their leaders, these half-brained nominees, and the many ignorant ballots, and many elected failures and blatherers.”⁷⁰ The solution he proposes is that individuals should attempt to enter politics, but not within the confines of a political party: “As for you, I advise you to enter more strongly yet into politics. I advise every young man to do so. Always inform yourself; always do the best you can; always vote. Disengage yourself from parties.”⁷¹ In a democratic society it should be hoped that by simply participating in politics one can affect change. This is congruent with Rorty’s belief that a political perspective should be critical, but in

⁶⁹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 25

⁷⁰ Whitman, Walt, and Ed Folsom. *Democratic Vistas: The Original Edition in Facsimile*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2010. Print. p. 43

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 43-44

doing so should also suggest how problems can be rectified. It could be said that this is a naive approach to adopt in a modern democratic state, but that would be missing the point of Whitman's writings. We should see Whitman's work as a love-letter to democracy. Whitman is not putting forth a comprehensive description of the means through which change can be affected in his society. It might not be possible for such a change to occur in contemporary society, but this should not discredit the political system entirely. It should light a fire within any democracy-loving individual to attempt to change their society so that such actions are possible.

"Democratic Vistas" is an example of the civic religion and epistemological tendencies of the progressive Left because of its call for democratic works of art.

Whitman believes democracy requires justification that is not restricted to intellectual venues. There must be artistic works that promote reverence and devotion to democracy:

I say that democracy can never prove itself beyond cavil, until it founds and luxuriantly grows its own forms of art, poems, schools, theology, displacing all that exists, or that has been produced anywhere in the past, under opposite influences. It is curious to me that while so many voices, pens, minds, in the press, lecture-rooms, in our Congress, &c., are discussing intellectual topics, pecuniary dangers, legislative problems, the suffrage, tariff and labor questions, and the various business and benevolent needs of America, with propositions, remedies, often worth deep attention, there is one need, a hiatus the profoundest, that no eye seems to perceive, no voice to state.⁷²

This passage shows that Whitman views intellectual justification as insufficient for the success of democracy. It must also be reinforced through emotional means. There is another similarity between Whitman and Rorty that can be seen in this passage. They are both concerned with attempting to siphon others away from what they see as being

⁷² Whitman, Walt, and Ed Folsom. *Democratic Vistas: The Original Edition in Facsimile*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2010. Print. p. 5

unconstructive activities. Rorty is attempting to rectify the Left, and Whitman is attempting to get individuals to engage in artistic means of justifying democracy.

A second example in “Democratic Vistas” of the importance of literature and literary truth is the importance Whitman places on the imaginative works of literature and poetry. He believes that it is not enough to have the apparatuses of the state and government working well, but the people must be filled with a sense of pride for their country. This can be brought about through literature. He states: “Literature tills its crops in many fields, and some may flourish, while others lag. What I say in these Vistas has its main bearing on imaginative literature, especially poetry, the stock of all.”⁷³ It is crucial for America to produce such works because its citizens must feel a sense of devotion to their country. Literature will allow this to occur:

For not only is it not enough that the new blood, new frame of democracy shall be vivified and held together merely by political means, superficial suffrage, legislation, &c., but it is clear to me that, unless it goes deeper, gets at least as firm and as warm a hold in men's hearts, emotions and belief, as, in their days, feudalism or ecclesiasticism, and inaugurates its own perennial sources, welling from the centre forever, its strength will be defective, its growth doubtful, and its main charm wanting.⁷⁴

The progressive Left, the kind which Whitman represents, is fixated on the future. Whitman’s criticisms of his country are not cold castigations, but instead a call for change. This is a quality shared by Rorty. It is the hope in the future that is important to Rorty and the progressive Left. It will always be focused on a form of perpetual moral progress, but will have an eye on the achievements it has already made. If one was to think that one’s country had finally achieved its goals, one would become a part of the Right. It is as if Rorty believes those in the progressive Left are discontented Rightists.

⁷³ Whitman, Walt, and Ed Folsom. *Democratic Vistas: The Original Edition in Facsimile*. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2010. Print. p. 8

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 9.

Their desire is to live in a country that has achieved its goals, but they accept that their country will never fully achieve these goals. We will always be confronted with new inequalities and moral dilemmas, and be forced to forge ahead to greater moral standards. This may in part explain the allure of the eschatological Left. It gives people a defined goal. We can not only understand what we are working toward, but also know when we have achieved our aim. The defining or distinctive quality of the progressive Left might be its vagueness. Rorty is critical of the eschatological Left for its need to constantly qualify its failed prophecy and the ambiguity of the progressive Left is thus its greatest strength. If the goal of America is always in the future, there is no need to backpedal or alter its predictions. The progressive Left can respond to its critics by stating that the future it describes simply has not been brought to fruition yet. For example, if asked why something like American political parties has yet to be expunged from American politics, they can simply ask their critics to have more patience. This may give people hope, but I am concerned that it might not adequately motivate them to participate in the political life of their country, state, or city. There are many facets to the progressive Left that must be present for an individual to feel the kind of hope that Rorty values. If they err toward having an overly critical view of their history they might enter into a state of despair when faced with the difficult task of affecting change in the future. Faith is, however, the most crucial aspect to the progressive Left. As stated, it is a future oriented perspective, but it requires individuals to have faith that their country will achieve its goals even if they have evidence that would make them think otherwise. One only needs to turn to a contemporary newspaper for such faith-shaking ideas.

The progressive Left is a political perspective that meets all of the requirements that Rorty puts forward in order for it to be deemed an agent. It is the perspective best able to achieve the moral character of America because it allows and promotes new forms of thinking about ourselves, gives hope in the future, has a positive view of history that instils pride, and is secular. If Rorty does have a criticism of the progressive Left, it is that it has allowed itself to be overshadowed by the other Leftist perspectives. It has a daunting task ahead. It must defend itself from the Right, overturn the legacy of Marxism, and combat the cultural Left's promulgation of despair. Rorty is correct in his assertion that the progressive Left is able to promote hope, but it is not an easy task. The other political perspectives have their own allure that must be shown to be less useful. The value placed on literary truth is crucial for the success of this political perspective. Without it, it will be unable to blaze new trails and give people new means through which they can love their country.

In this chapter I have explored the agent-spectator dichotomy and given a detailed analysis of the political perspectives that Rorty describes. I have shown that while the eschatological Left might be able to instil some degree of hope in the future it does not live up the standard set by the progressive Left. It is important that we view their past as a movement toward an idyllic future. The agency promoted by the progressive Left will inspire individuals to take an active role in shaping their country. It might not be the only or overwhelming means through which the country achieves its goals, but it is what Rorty prefers. As I stated, he would rather have something like the cultural Left than no Left at all. It must be noted that Rorty might criticize my analysis for overemphasizing the relationship between philosophy and politics, but I think that

my examination reveals themes and characteristics of his writings that might not otherwise receive the emphasis they deserve. I have shown that the Right has a devotion to Reason and objective truth, the eschatological Left is the political venue for Marxism, the cultural Left is the means through which post-modernists criticize America, and how the progressive Left is best suited to achieve the goals of its country. The first three perspectives promotes spectatorship because they places too much importance in abstract ideals, unreachable goals, or do not provide for a sense of hope in one's country or the future. The progressive Left promotes agency because its view of the future is not tethered to any sense of teleology, does not view the past through a nostalgic lens, and is overall more hopeful that there can be change at all. This means that it is a political perspective that will not try to undo moral achievements, induce disillusionment if its goals are not met, and provoke moral stagnation.

Chapter Two: The Epistemology of Neo-Pragmatism

In this chapter, I will examine Rorty's epistemology. I will examine his conception and criticisms of the correspondence theory of truth, and the theory of knowledge that he endorses as a substitute. I will explore the role that the imagination and reason play in his epistemology. Rorty's epistemology is pivotal to his political philosophy because if we eliminate our preoccupation with seeking objective and absolute truth, we will be better able to effect change. I will be asking the following questions: is Rorty's portrayal of the correspondence theory of truth accurate? Is the force of Rorty's arguments against the correspondence theory of truth diminished by making a straw man of the theory? Rorty believes that literature is constructive when it fosters solidarity and gives us hope, but can it serve as a viable alternative to traditional philosophy for exploring and thinking about socio-political issues?

Rorty views philosophy as a reactionary intellectual endeavour. This is the legacy of Plato and prevalence of the correspondence theory of truth. In this chapter, I will examine Rorty's conception and criticisms of the correspondence theory of truth, and the theory of knowledge that he endorses as a substitute. The former was first put forth by Plato for whom there is a realm of phenomena or appearances that is changing or in flux, known to us through the senses. There is also a realm of forms or ideas that are constant or unchanging, known to us through reason. Reality is the latter, not the former. Our beliefs are true when they correspond to the independent reality represented by the realm of unchanging ideas or forms. The correspondence theory of truth holds that our opinions, perceptions, and beliefs are true when they correspond to the objective forms, facts, and truths of reality. We understand the empirical world because it corresponds in

some way to an objective truth, independent of our needs, desires, or volition. We know the real or objective world through Reason and contemplation.

There are also cultural applications for the correspondence theory of truth. Our culture provides us with morals and values. The worth of these cultural principles and values depends on their correspondence with objective, universal, eternal, and unchanging moral and intellectual truths that can be discovered through reason, contemplation, and education.

Rorty regards the correspondence theory of truth as a belief that has outlived its usefulness. At its core has been the attempt to show that what has been called the mind and the ideas it entertains mirror nature or reality. It was a movement within philosophy that tried to systematize thought as something that provided us with objective truth. Rorty aims to set aside the ideas that are contingent to the tradition of the correspondence theory of truth: “The aim of the book is to undermine the reader’s confidence in ‘the mind’ as something about which one should have a ‘philosophical view’. In ‘knowledge’ as something about which there ought to be a ‘theory’ and which has ‘foundations’”⁷⁵ For Rorty, the correspondence theory has simply outlived its usefulness. It may have had some relevance to discussions of philosophy at one point, but is no longer as profitable as it once was:

“They [Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey] do not devote themselves to discovering false propositions or bad arguments in the works of their predecessors... Rather they glimpse the possibility of a form of intellectual life in which the vocabulary of philosophical reflection inherited from the seventeenth-century would seem as pointless as the thirteenth-century philosophical vocabulary had seemed to the Enlightenment.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. p. 7

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 6

The correspondence theory of truth is an artefact from philosophy's history that has outlived its usefulness. It is no longer the more useful way to deal with the rigours of modern philosophical problems. To replace the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty suggests that we replace it with a more conversation-oriented form of doing philosophy: "Once conversation replaces confrontation, the notion of the mind as Mirror of Nature can be discarded. Then the notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible."⁷⁷ Philosophy without the correspondence theory of truth will be more grounded in social practice and will not make attempts to appeal to abstract, objective, or universal ideas. The reason for this is that we will no longer see them as useful as ones that are grounded in conversation. He writes: "If we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a metapractice which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practice."⁷⁸ A repudiation of the correspondence theory of truth will provide us with a platform to have meaningful and useful discussions about ideas outside of some sort of overarching, all-reaching system of thought.

One of the more significant challenges to overturning the correspondence theory of truth is that it has become so deeply ingrained that it has become a philosophical dogma, and is viewed as so intrinsically linked to it that we cannot envision philosophy without it. Moreover, he views it as nothing more than dogma that philosophers have been mindlessly repeating for centuries: "Our opponents say that the correspondence theory of truth is so obvious, so self-evident, that it is merely perverse to question it. We

⁷⁷ Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. p. 170-171

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 171

say that this theory is barely intelligible, and of no particular importance--that it is not so much a theory as a slogan which we have been mindlessly chanting.”⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it is so deeply ingrained in the philosophical tradition that it not only shapes the questions that are asked, but also the answers that are reached.

The only occasions when Rorty comes close to giving a description of the supposed philosophical dogma he understands the correspondence theory of truth to be, come in the form of radical oversimplification: “The Platonist dream of perfect knowledge is the dream of stripping ourselves clean of everything that comes from inside us and opening ourselves without reservation to what is outside us.”⁸⁰ Rorty views Platonists as philosophers who attempt to strip themselves of their proclivities, tastes, beliefs, and values in order to attain some kind of unmediated representation of objective Reality. Rorty uses the term Platonist as a rhetorical device. A philosopher does not need to adhere to Plato’s philosophy to be called a Platonist, but is merely a philosopher that does not work within the pragmatist tradition.

Rorty thinks that we must replace the intellectual traditions left to us with ones that are more constructive. We must encourage ways of thinking that are more inclusive than traditional philosophical thought. If we insist on the supremacy of concepts like Reality and Reason, we will be unable to encourage more people to engage in constructive intellectual endeavours. He writes: “The difference between a good old poem and a new better poem is not the difference between a bad representation of Reality and a better one. It is the difference between a smaller circle and a bigger one.”⁸¹

⁷⁹ Rorty, Richard. “Preface.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. XVII

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.XXXVII

⁸¹ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 117

For Rorty, the problem isn't one of right and wrong, but one of usefulness. It will be a more inclusive epistemology that will lead toward more productive ideas: "On the pragmatist view I am putting forward, what we call 'increased knowledge' should not be thought of as increased access to the Real, but as increased ability to *do* things – to take part in social practices that make possible richer and fuller human lives."⁸² Rather than rely on truth determining faculties like Reason to discover what is 'Real', we should promote a constructive epistemology. We will achieve this by no longer be preoccupied with concepts that are removed from the human experience.

Rorty believes the search for objective truth was caused by a belief that humanity was alienated from objective truth. The correspondence theory of truth is an attempt to regain the knowledge that has been lost. He writes: "The old story was about how human beings might manage to get back in touch with something from which they had somehow become estranged--something that is not itself a human creation, but stands over and against all such creations."⁸³ Rorty is arguing that we have been told that objective truth is something separate from humanity and only attainable through what has been believed to be pure thought, and that the objective of philosophy has been to reconnect us with it. We must subvert the supremacy of the correspondence theory of truth so that we no longer seek a form of truth that is separate from humanity.

One of the goals of Rorty's philosophy is to reorient our thinking so that we see ourselves as creating our perceptions of the world rather than thinking that the world is determining our perceptions. To do this, we must recognize that thought is directed outwards rather than imposed on us by the world: "Nietzsche was right to think of the

⁸² Rorty, Richard. "Pragmatism and Romanticism." *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 108

⁸³ *Ibid.* p. 117-118

world as our poem rather than something that communicates information about itself to us through our sense-organs.”⁸⁴ We should no longer think of the world as something that reveals itself to us, but must recognize that we have an active role in shaping our perceptions of it.

Rorty believes that discussing much further the existence of a Reality beyond reach of our senses is unproductive. Rorty does not deny the existence of an objective reality or objective truth, but merely asserts that there is nothing of substance to say about it. In some instances he uses the term Reality, but most of his discussion refers to what is ‘really real.’⁸⁵ He claims that Platonist philosophers believe it is accessible through contemplation, and without the use of language or reference to empirical information. Rorty thinks that Platonist philosophers have come to this position out of disdain for the imagination. He suggests that philosophers have been hesitant to acknowledge the importance of the imagination because the idea would legitimize relativism. In Rorty’s view, the emphasis placed on Reason instead of imagination has been one of the most fundamental flaws in the western philosophical tradition, and has been done in a misguided attempt to ground knowledge and truth in something outside thought itself.

Rorty defends the imagination by arguing that it is intrinsically linked to our thinking because it is directly correlated to our language. He believes we cannot think without language, and we cannot have language without the imagination. For Rorty, imagination is the well from which language springs. He writes: “At the heart of both philosophy’s ancient quarrel with poetry and the more recent quarrel between the

⁸⁴ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p.. p. 117

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 105

scientific and the literary cultures is the fear of both philosophers and scientists that the imagination may indeed go all the way down.”⁸⁶ From this passage we can see that Rorty believes that philosophers attempt to reach pure representation that is removed from language in order to escape from the problem presented by our imagination and subjective opinions. To Rorty this is a crucial error. He thinks that philosophers are apprehensive about the primacy of the imagination because it might force them to accept a form of relativism. If the content of our minds is our imagination, and there is no common faculty through which we can have knowledge of the objective world, then we will need new concepts and ideas through which we can discover commonalities, and make justifications. He surmises that this is a state of affairs that philosophers are not willing to face.

The ‘really real’ is something philosophers have been striving to understand because it gives them access to pure ideas that are unsullied by the material world. Rorty finds that deep discussion of this has become a fruitless endeavour. For Rorty, thought cannot exist without language, and we cannot have knowledge of anything that is unmediated by it. Furthermore, it is the imagination that creates language, and it is a dissent against the imagination that has set so many philosophers on the futile journey to commune with the world of the ‘really real’: “the imagination is the source of language, and thought is impossible without language. Revulsion against this claim has caused philosophers to become obsessed by the need to achieve an access to reality unmediated by, and prior to, the use of language.”⁸⁷ Thus, Rorty believes the correspondence theory of truth distracts philosophers from more productive, edifying conversations. It breeds

⁸⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 107

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 107

stagnation because it causes the philosophers to seek the underlying nature of what is, rather than what should be. This is a crucial aspect of Rorty's political philosophy because, in order to affect change and move society toward a better state, the first hurdle to overcome is changing the way Americans do philosophy.

For Rorty, imagination is the engine of progress. It allows us to think of the means to remove ourselves from the stultifying trappings of the past. We can envision a world we want to live in. One that differs from the past and our present circumstance: "intellectual and moral progress is not a matter of getting closer to an antecedent goal, but of surpassing the past."⁸⁸ The imagination is the first to explore new ideas, and reason is used to convince others that they are better than our contemporary and past beliefs. Imagination is further distinguished from Reason in that it is not a faculty that exists within each and every one of us. This does not mean that some people have no imagination, but they lack the imagination to envision better ways of acting, and of bringing about moral progress. For Rorty, the imagination is not just something that allows us to daydream; it is a faculty that can inspire progress: "We should try to think of imagination not as a faculty that generates mental images but as the ability to change social practices by proposing advantageous new uses of marks and noises."⁸⁹ It would be a good idea to set aside the search for an objective reality, and replace it with a concern for humanity that leads us to imagine a world that is better than our own. It is the imagination, and not reason that can accomplish this. Instead of being preoccupied with searching for the way the world is, we are better off imagining a world that is better for us.

⁸⁸ Rorty, Richard. "Pragmatism and Romanticism." *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p.108

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 107

Rorty does not mean to say, for example, that the colour red or a round shape did not exist before language, but that our language informs our understanding of these things.⁹⁰ We are able to see the colour red and a round shape, but could not conceive of them without words. The terms red and round are what we assign to the world around us. There is no immutable Reality that can be discovered by humanity. We see things that are red and round in the outside world, and we affix sounds that act as symbols for them. Again, it is important to note that Rorty is not denying the existence of an objective physical world. He is merely saying that our knowledge of it will always be mediated by language, and is thus subjective. Even if we were to somehow stumble upon an objective truth about the outside world, we would not know it: “The trouble with aiming at truth is that you would not know when you had reached it, even if you had in fact reached it.”⁹¹ It is unconstructive to utilize the correspondence theory of truth because there is no way to verify or know whether objective truth has been reached. I think this is a crucial aspect of Rorty’s philosophical views. We cannot know whether an idea or concept is objectively true because we cannot be sure if our means of verification are correct. The truth will always be something that is beyond our reach. He does not deny the existence of objective truth and he certainly does not deny the existence of a reality independent of human mental states, but believes there is simply nothing meaningful to be said about it. Rorty’s claim that there is nothing meaningful to be said about objective truth implies that it would be a good idea to no longer invest time in what have become unconstructive discussions about ultimate truths or metaphysics. However, this does not mean that he does not see any value in metaphysics.

⁹⁰ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 117

⁹¹ Rorty, Richard. “Ethics Without Principles.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 82

Rorty argues that we must not think of metaphysics as anything but a thought experiment, the repudiation of which will move us closer to having a fully secularized worldview. He writes of metaphysics: “metaphysics is not a discipline, but a sort of intellectual play space.”⁹² Metaphysics should be a topic of discussion, but only if it is constructive and serves a purpose. One should not take it as a serious attempt to have a meaningful discussion about the underlying nature of Reality or human existence. For Rorty, the quest to understand objective Reality and objective truth is akin to the quest to know if there is a god:

The question ‘Do you believe in truth or are you one of those frivolous postmodernists?’ is often the first one that journalists ask intellectuals whom they are assigned to interview. That question now plays the role once played by the question ‘Do you believe in God, or are you one of those dangerous atheists?’⁹³

Rorty is ultimately attempting to secularize philosophy by moving it away from monolithic concepts, and to orient it toward humanity and the written word.

If we are to abandon our search for ontological and metaphysical truth, and our desire to search for the world of the ‘really real,’ and focus instead on our linguistic conceptions of the world, we will have successfully secularized our outlook: “It would complete the process of secularization by letting us think of the desire for non-linguistic access to the real as being hopeless as that for redemption through a beatific vision.”⁹⁴

Rorty believes that the need for objective truth and certainty are coping mechanisms for those who cannot endure a secular life. He states: “they [pragmatists] think that the quest

⁹² Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 106

⁹³ Rorty, Richard. “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 89

⁹⁴ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 119

for certainty--even as a long-term goal--is an attempt to escape from the world.”⁹⁵ For Rorty, we will never have access to truth that is unmediated by a means of verification that we have created. We will not be able to verify if our means of verification is correct. Even if something we believe to be objectively true is objectively true, we would have no way of knowing it. A belief in objective truth can offer similar intellectual comforts as those of a monotheistic religion. Objective truth was a concept first suggested to us by Greek philosophers to help us justify our beliefs. It continues to linger in our way of thinking. It has meant that we have been distracted by the quest for certainty when we would have been better off focusing on hope and self-creation: “one should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one’s present beliefs.”⁹⁶ For Rorty, the quest for certainty is essentially a neurotic one. If we were to abandon our desire for objective truth and absolute certainty by replacing it with hope for edifying results of our experimental conversations, we would become more confident and thus be better able to affect change. What then does Rorty suggest we use as a criterion for determining whether something is true or not? How does removing the certainty offered to us by the correspondence theory of truth make us less neurotic? Rorty suggests that we start by abandoning the dualism of appearance-reality. Instead, we should adopt criteria for truth that are based upon usefulness. He writes: “We hope to replace the reality-appearance distinction with the distinction between the more useful and the less useful.”⁹⁷ He would like philosophers and students of philosophy to question

⁹⁵ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 33

⁹⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 34

⁹⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Preface.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. XXII

the dogmas within the philosophical tradition, in the hope of replacing them with neo-pragmatist values.

For Rorty, truth is exclusively instrumental. It must serve a purpose. This purpose is the creation of a better future: “When the question ‘useful for what?’ is pressed, they [pragmatists] have nothing to say except ‘useful to create a better future’.”⁹⁸ Truth must aid in progress. The search for objective truth will only obstruct the desire to create a better future by rendering intellectual and political endeavours inert. If we are too preoccupied with the here and now, we cannot think about the hereafter. But by what criteria can we say that the future is better or not? How can we know whether we have achieved the future that we desire, or, know that we are correct in our desires of it?

Rorty does not give a definitive explanation of what will be better about the future. He is perfectly content with not being able to speak about the character of the future. All that we can hope for in the future is that it will be better. He writes: “Better in the sense of containing more of what we consider good and less of what we consider bad. When asked, ‘And what exactly do you consider good?’ pragmatists can only say, with Whitman, ‘variety and freedom’, or with Dewey, ‘growth’. ‘Growth itself,’ Dewey said, ‘is the only moral end.’”⁹⁹ Rorty defers to these thinkers, but is even less inclined than they are to hint at what the future will bring. He believes there are no definitive qualities we can ascribe to, or seek out, in the future. Rorty believes this is because we must expect the future to astound and amaze us. He writes: “They are limited to such fuzzy and unhelpful answers because what they hope is not that the future will conform to a plan, will fulfil an immanent teleology, but rather that the future will astonish and

⁹⁸ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 27

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 28

exhilarate.”¹⁰⁰ There is no trajectory on which humanity finds itself. We create our future, and there is no underlying plan or telos for humanity to discover.

Individuals who are truly imaginative are able to envision new ways to think about the past, but more importantly, new ways to think about the future. Rorty writes: “To be imaginative, as opposed to being merely fantastical, one must both do something new and be lucky enough to have that novelty adopted by one’s fellows--incorporated into their ways of doing things.”¹⁰¹ However, it is also not enough for this imaginative person to simply have the ideas, but he or she must also be lucky enough to be taken up by others. In other words, an imagination that has the power and capability to move society toward an ideal future is something that is possessed by only a select few, and its impact can be unpredictable. In contrast, the ability to be fantastical is something that is possessed by most people. The creation of a better future can only be brought about by a few select individuals. They change the way we think about the world, but more importantly about each other--through their works of literature.

Rorty agrees with William James’ romantic view of progress—namely, that most of us imitate the patterns established by geniuses.¹⁰² These geniuses possess imagination and are what Rorty calls literary intellectuals: “The sort of person I am calling a ‘literary intellectual’ thinks that a life that is not lived close to the present limits of the human imagination is not worth living.”¹⁰³ The literary intellectual or, genius, is someone who is always attempting to push the frontiers of the human imagination. He is constantly trying to transcend the contemporary moral climate through the use of his imagination.

¹⁰⁰ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 28

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 107

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 108

¹⁰³ Rorty, Richard. “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 94

He lives a creative life, and produces greater solidarity. Thus, he is more familiar with humanity than the average individual. His gaze is directed outward and seeks to understand humanity: “For the Socratic idea of self-examination and self-knowledge, the literary intellectual substitutes the idea of enlarging the self by becoming acquainted with still more ways of being human.”¹⁰⁴ The literary intellectual must do more than simply portray humanity in more and better ways. Literary intellectuals must also be able to convince others that their vision is the correct one. This is not to say that they have the only, or, the absolute best vision, but that it is merely a more useful and better one than those held by others. They must use rhetoric within the conversation of philosophy to convince others that theirs is a preferable worldview.

Rorty believes in the existence of reason, but views it differently from the thinkers of the Enlightenment. He does not characterize it as a faculty that is found within each of us, but instead thinks of it as a deployment of socially acquired terms and criteria: “we need to think of reason not as a truth-tracking faculty but as a social practice--the practice of enforcing social norms on the use of marks and noises, thereby making it possible to use words rather than blows as a way of getting things done.”¹⁰⁵ This passage shows that Rorty is not only sceptical of reason as something that exists beyond language games, but thinks that it has little to do with determining truth. I think Rorty’s use of the word ‘enforcing’ is unfortunate. I do not think he is trying to convey an understanding of reason that portrays it as nothing more than violence with nouns and verbs rather than with sticks and stones. An example of Rorty’s use of reason can be

¹⁰⁴ Rorty, Richard. “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 94

¹⁰⁵ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 107

found in the case he makes for pragmatism. He states: “If pragmatism is of any importance... it is not because it got something right that Platonism got wrong. It is because accepting a pragmatist outlook would change the cultural ambition for the better.”¹⁰⁶ This passage is a clear example of Rorty’s understanding of reason because he is not attempting to force his views on others or to show why pragmatism is the absolute best philosophical tradition. Instead, he is – in good pragmatic form - attempting to convince the reader through persuasion why pragmatism is a more constructive and useful philosophical position. This is a significant component to his epistemological views. He believes that discussions regarding truth have little value, and we should only concern ourselves with justification: “Others, like Dewey (and, I have argued, Davidson), have suggested that there is little to be said about truth, and that philosophers should explicitly and self-consciously *confine* themselves to justification.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, we should not concern ourselves with attempting to find the truth of a matter, but instead, attempt to justify our arguments with greater clarity and persuasiveness. He does not want reason to be thought of as a faculty that can determine objective truth, but as a tool that is employed in justification or persuasion. It is not an epistemological divining rod.

I believe Rorty’s approach to epistemology differs from the Platonists and Kantians that he so derides. However, is his portrayal of the correspondence theory of truth accurate? Is there another thinker who defends the correspondence theory of truth against Rorty’s claim that the theory is barely intelligible? I believe that exploring

¹⁰⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 119

¹⁰⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Truth Without Correspondence to Reality.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 32

Bertrand Russell's description of the correspondence theory of truth will help elucidate this point.

Russell believes we can talk meaningfully about the nature of objective truth. There are criteria for something to be considered true, and we can talk about the nature of truth itself. Russell believes that we can speak of both, and that they are not necessarily separable. Russell defends the correspondence theory of truth by pointing out that a truth must have a correlating or corresponding falsehood. He writes:

Our theory of truth must be such as to admit of its opposite, falsehood. A good many philosophers have failed adequately to satisfy this condition: they have constructed theories according to which all our thinking ought to have been truth, and have then had the greatest difficulty in finding place for falsehood.¹⁰⁸

For something to be true, it must be shown how it is not false. For example, we can know that there is a table before us because we can admit that there is not an absence of the table. There is always a corresponding falsehood to something that is posited as truth. It can either be something material or something intellectual. The second criteria Russell puts forth is that truth must be distinct from belief. He writes: "It seems fairly evident that if there were no beliefs there could be no falsehood, and no truth either, in the sense in which truth is correlative to falsehood."¹⁰⁹ Russell is saying that we do not and cannot live in a world of nothing more than absolute truth and falsity. We must have opinions and beliefs because there is more to human existence than mere matter and physics. If all objective truth were to be readily apparent to us, this would eliminate the need for inquiry and human thought. There would be nothing thought or discovered. All truth would be available to us. The third criteria put forth by Russell is that truth or falsity of a belief must be related to something outside the belief itself: "the truth and falsehood of

¹⁰⁸ Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1959. Print. p.188

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p.188-9

a belief always depends upon something which lies outside the belief itself... truth and falsehood are properties of beliefs, they are properties dependent upon the relations of the beliefs to other things, not upon any internal quality of the beliefs.”¹¹⁰ It is with this third criterion that Russell establishes the necessity of the correspondence to Reality. We cannot determine something to be true if there is nothing to which a statement or proposition can be verified to. Truth cannot rely on thought alone. This goes against what Rorty is arguing. Rorty states that there is nothing to be said about the nature of truth, but I find Russell’s points to be reasonable. He is making a good argument about the nature of truth, and these criteria may appear as if they are adequate to determine whether something is true. There are also some aspects to his defence of the correspondence theory of truth that can be helpful in determining whether something is true.

As a logical empiricist, Russell relied on determining truth through sense datum and logic. For example, one does not need to refer to an objective idea or Reality of what a table is to know what it is, but that the qualities of it can be determined by our senses. They may not tell us what the nature of a table is, but this is of little consequence to Russell. His view of the correspondence theory of truth is also one that does not rely on there being a monolithic Reality that is the source of our ideas, beliefs, and knowledge. For example, there will always be a degree of plurality to our ideas and perceptions, even with things as simple as the description of a table. If two people were to look at the same table, they would each view it differently. These two people would see the table as being of a different size or shade of brown because they would be viewing it from different angles, and could not observe it from the same location or vantage point. Thus, if we

¹¹⁰ Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1959. Print p.189

were to rely on our senses to derive truth about the outside world, we must always admit of its imperfection. Russell's defence of the correspondence theory of truth is helpful because it uses simple criteria and its reliance on the material world makes it a well-reasoned and moderate defence.

Rorty's treatment of Russell's work is far more forgiving than that of most other Platonists, and his tone is not entirely dismissive. Instead, he is quite complimentary of what he believes to be an imaginative take on the correspondence theory of truth:

The sort of optimistic faith which Russell and Carnap shared with Kant--that philosophy, its essence and right method discovered at last, had finally been placed upon the secure path of a science--is not something to be mocked or deplored. Such optimism is possible only for men of high imagination and daring, the heroes of their times.¹¹¹

From this passage we can see that Rorty is not entirely critical of thinkers like Russell despite the fact they helped to further entrench the correspondence theory of truth in philosophical thinking. Despite the fact they worked to make logic and philosophy into a science, he believes they still deserve high praise. Despite these complimentary remarks, Rorty's belief that the correspondence theory of truth is ultimately an unproductive dogma in philosophy is unchanged. I think this in part shows that Rorty is more critical of thinking in absolutes and of philosophers who do not question the correspondence theory of truth rather than of the theory itself. Rorty's epistemology does not preclude the correspondence theory of truth from being true. It does, however, mean that we cannot properly verify if the correspondence theory of truth is actually correct. Thus, thinkers like Russell can be applauded by Rorty as being imaginative in their approach to the correspondence theory of truth, but the emphasis that is placed on discovering certainty is something Rorty is critical of.

¹¹¹ Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980. Print. p. 173

For Rorty, Russell is still perpetuating the philosophical dogmas of objectivity, subjectivity, belief, and fact. He also thinks that Russell's philosophy is dependent on the ability of the senses to commune with Reality in order to determine the basic principles upon which we can develop logical inferences. This dependence on logic and absolutist language is for Rorty a failing of Russell's ultimate purpose in his philosophical writings: "Russell and Nagel share Plato's taste for universalist grandeur. They also share his conviction that there is no middle way between acknowledging the claims of the unconditional outermost framework of thought and simply saying whatever you find agreeable to say."¹¹² In other words, Rorty believes that Russell is perpetuating the Platonic way of thinking, because he emphasizes a correspondence theory of truth. Rorty is also critical of Russell in that he not only has beliefs in common with Plato, but that he also has many similarities with Kant.

One of Rorty's more significant criticisms of Russell is due to the fact that he believes logical empiricism to be nothing more than what Rorty calls linguistified Kantianism. He writes: "The logical empiricists had, with the help of Frege and Russell, linguistified all the old Kantian distinctions which Dewey thought Hegel had helped us overcome."¹¹³ I take Rorty to be saying that Russell and others helped to justify and entrench the ideas of Kant by shielding it under layers of terminology. Rather than take philosophy in a new direction, as Hegel did, the logical empiricists attempted to revitalize the ideas within Kant's work. Rorty also attacks those who would put too great an emphasis on logic. He views logic as a product of language, and to see it as an

¹¹² Rorty, Richard. "Grandeur, Profundity, and Finitude." *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 76

¹¹³ Rorty, Richard. "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 31

absolute reality capturing principle that exists separate from humanity is problematic. It could be objected that logic is an idea that exists in the objective world, and that it is easily demonstrated to those who have no understanding of the principles of logic. It also requires no specific reference or material grounding. However, I think this would again be missing the point of Rorty's argument. He is not, for example, critical of the basic applications of logic in everyday life, but of aspirations to treat it as corresponding somehow to the workings of the really real. He does not want logic to be thought of as something that has revealed itself to us, but rather as something we have created in order to understand and interpret the world around us.

Logic is not considered to be a human creation, but as something we have identified in the outside world and throughout our patterns of thought. Rorty believes the tradition of logic was started by Plato. Plato began a tradition that has been difficult to undermine. Rorty applauds philosophers who have worked to try and change the way we think of logic. He writes: "Quine and Goodman, taking a leaf from Skinner, pointed out that it might be better to view logic as a pattern of human behavior rather than as an immaterial force shaping such behavior."¹¹⁴ This statement is indicative of Rorty's agreement with other philosophers who argue that logic is something that we have created to try to understand the world. Rorty believes that this social construct has been wrongly elevated above other ways of thinking that would be more constructive in the creation of a better future. This becomes apparent in his description of the works of Thomas Kuhn, a thinker who Rorty saw as working toward goals similar to his own, and

¹¹⁴ Rorty, Richard. "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks, and the Laws of Physics." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 177

whose writings helped to undo the influence of Platonic thought on philosophy. Rorty writes of Kuhn:

Kuhn's major contribution... was to help us see that the natural scientists do not have a special access to reality or to truth. He helped dismantle the traditional hierarchy of disciplines, a hierarchy that dates back to Plato's image of the divided line... In the hierarchy Plato proposed mathematics (which uses pure logic, and no rhetoric at all) is up at the top and literary criticism and political persuasion (which use mostly rhetoric, and practically no logic at all) are down at the bottom.¹¹⁵

Plato's hierarchy of disciplines rests upon the idea that logic, and logical thinking will be better able to reveal truth than rhetoric. Kuhn's contribution was to remove the epistemological exceptionalism that natural scientists were believed to have. This is a position that was adopted by Rorty: "What counts as evidence is relative to a theory... If you think you step outside your intellectual community with logic, you're dreaming. You will have no evidence, as *evidence* is societally determined."¹¹⁶ I believe this passage shows that Rorty's approach to logic is shaped by Kuhn's concept of the paradigm. We cannot rely on logic to provide us with the means to form an argument that is free from theory. However, I do not think that this prevents logic from being a useful tool. Kuhn did not negate the idea of logic, but simply removed it from its place at the top of the hierarchy of disciplines. Furthermore, I think Rorty's characterization of the Platonic hierarchy is unfair. He states that mathematics and pure logic are at the top, but logic is used and is useful throughout the different aspects of the hierarchy. Rorty's rhetoric distracts from a position that logic can still be quite useful for political persuasion and

¹¹⁵ Rorty, Richard. "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks, and the Laws of Physics." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. p. 176

¹¹⁶ DeBakcsy, Dale. "Recovering from Rorty" *Philosophy Now | A Magazine of Ideas*. N.p., Feb 2015. Web

rhetoric, and that it is logic that makes these things to be convincing within conversations.

I think that Rorty's treatment of the correspondence theory of truth is ultimately the creation of a straw man. Moreover, he uses the terms Kantian and Platonic synonymously. I do not think it is a fair treatment of the theory, but I also do not think these are reasonable grounds to dismiss his works or philosophy either. He is attempting to describe the correspondence theory of truth as a dogma that philosophers accept without any genuine criticism. Regardless of whether this is true or not, we should value Rorty's work for working to keep the correspondence theory of truth from becoming a dead dogma of philosophy.

I think Rorty would respond to the argument that his criticism of the correspondence theory of truth is the construction of a straw man by saying that the correspondence theory of truth is barely intelligible to begin with, and thus invites such muddled descriptions. Furthermore, even when philosophers attempted to criticize the correspondence theory of truth, they met only failure because the western philosophical tradition and the language it imposed on us is so deeply ingrained that it is inescapable. Thus, even when philosophers believed they were putting forth criticisms of the correspondence theory of truth, they were instead reinforcing it. Rorty believes that to overturn this tradition, we must have a radically new approach to philosophy that begins with a change in education: "The views we hope to persuade people to accept cannot be stated in Platonic terminology. So our efforts at persuasion must take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than of straightforward argument within old

ways of speaking.”¹¹⁷ This passage shows Rorty’s apprehension toward the use of the terminology imposed on us by Plato, and the criticisms he has of the correspondence theory of truth. This also shows why Rorty is critical of Russell, who simply made a more convincing defence of the correspondence theory of truth based on logical empiricism rather than a world beyond the senses. In order to circumvent the problems presented to us by the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty and the neo-pragmatists propose that we emphasize a way of doing philosophy that is more in accordance with Hegelian principles than with Kantian ones. This would entail focusing less on ideas like logic, Reason, and objective truths, and principles. In its place they suggest emphasizing philosophical thinking that is useful for the circumstances we find ourselves in. They are convinced that through education and literary thinking, we can avoid the restrictions imposed on us by traditional philosophical language.

Rorty contends that the neo-pragmatists desire to speak in language outside the culture they find themselves in is a characteristic shared by feminism. Both are attempting to assert their own ideas and values, but are constrained by language that has managed to keep them in a weaker and inferior position. Rorty writes:

Only if somebody has a dream, and a voice to describe that dream, does what looked like nature begin to look like culture, what looked like fate begin to look like a moral abomination. For until then only the language of the oppressor is available, and most oppressors have had the wit to teach the oppressed a language in which the oppressed will sound crazy--*even to themselves*--if they describe themselves *as* oppressed.¹¹⁸

Rorty’s point is that language is used to affirm perspectives and types of knowledge that are privileged in society and culture. For feminists, the language available to them was

¹¹⁷ Rorty, Richard. “Preface.” *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. XIX

¹¹⁸ Rorty, Richard. “Feminism and Pragmatism.” *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. p. 203

created by men and patriarchal systems of oppression. For pragmatists, the language was used by Platonists and those who adhere to the correspondence theory of truth. Thus, if Rorty's arguments against the correspondence theory of truth sound ludicrous, it is because he lacks the language necessary to criticise the Platonic tradition. Feminism and neo-pragmatism are similar because they are attempting to subvert traditions and ways of thinking that have existed for thousands of years. The women's rights movement has, however, been successful in being able to overturn many of the aspects of the patriarchal system of oppression that affected women. For Rorty, the modern feminist movement, one that is concerned with continuing to challenge assumptions, has goals similar to the neo-pragmatists. Rorty believes that they are a natural fit with one another. He writes: "Yoking feminism with pragmatism is like yoking Christianity with Platonism, or socialism with dialectical materialism. In each case, something big and important, a vast social hope, is being yoked with something comparatively small and unimportant."¹¹⁹ If pragmatism were to be yoked to feminism, it would be a definite boon for both movements. The relationship would be mutually beneficial. Pragmatism would gain credibility by being taken up by a significant and serious social and political movement, and feminism would gain greater philosophical grounding.

An aspect of Rorty's dismissal of the correspondence theory of truth is that he is suggesting we set aside over two millennia of philosophical tradition.. I think this contradicts the principles of the progressive Left. The kind of progress we should be encouraging in politics as well as philosophy is one of incremental change from within, and not a complete reorganization and reorientation. I believe the abandonment of the Platonic tradition would be tantamount to a revolution in philosophy. A better approach

¹¹⁹ Rorty, Richard. "Introduction." *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. Print. p. 12

would be to lessen our preoccupation with objectivity and objective truth, and not abandon the Platonic tradition altogether. This would also respond to Rorty's argument that there are similarities between Platonist philosophers and priests. Both are only concerned with understanding or knowing God's will, or objective truth. Rorty goes as far as stating that if someone were to ask him if he believed in objective truth, this would be tantamount to asking if he believed in God. He believes there is nothing that can be said about what it is because we cannot have knowledge of its essential nature. It is best not to worry about God or objective truth, and to focus on finite human things.

Rorty's epistemology emphasizes usefulness, and the finite approach philosophy that will always be mediated by our language. If we were to abandon objective truth, how would we be able to justify our political aims? Objectivity and objective truth may be absolutely necessary to create a more tolerant and inclusive society. It can remove prejudice from arguments and ideas. However, Rorty sees this argument as problematic because it is not separating politics from redemption.¹²⁰ The goal of his politics is not to create a world that is perfect, but merely one that is increasingly free from cruelty. The correspondence theory of truth retains a redemptive style of thinking because if we could only discover the 'really real' through non-linguistic contemplation, then we could ascertain what would be an ideal form of society.

The desire for a scientific kind of truth in politics is one way in which this desire for redemptive truth unfolds. He writes: "Both when choosing between alternative scientific theories and when choosing between alternative pieces of legislation, we want people to base their decisions on arguments--arguments that start from premises which

¹²⁰ Rorty, Richard. "Philosophy as a Transitional Genre." *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 102

can be made plausible to anyone.”¹²¹ Rorty’s argument against scientific truth and the role it has in political deliberation is analogous to his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. However, he is somewhat conciliatory toward science, and thinks scientific discourse can serve as a template for political discourse and deliberation, but not truth: “the only way in which science is relevant to politics is that the natural scientists provide a good example of social cooperation, of an expert culture in which argumentation flourishes. They thereby provide a model for political deliberation--a model of honesty, tolerance, and trust.”¹²² The way in which scientists discuss science is a model for philosophers of politics to discuss what an ideal society should be. The cordial nature through which they interact is a preferable model. I think Rorty is correct in this argument. All intellectual discourse should be done with a degree of impartiality. We must be open and willing to hear and discuss new ideas, and especially those that might run counter to our central beliefs.

However, science can also be unconstructive for political deliberation if it attempts to assert a ‘theory of everything’: “my argument on behalf of the literary culture depends on the claim that getting rid of spooks, of causal agency that does not supervene on the behavior of elementary particles, has exhausted the utility of natural science for either redemptive or political purposes.”¹²³ Rorty is not attempting to say that science is useless for humanity, but it should not be relied upon as a source of objective truth in politics. Instead, Rorty suggests we look to the many useful aspects of science and the conversations that occur within it as a way of thinking. It has a culture of fair and

¹²¹ Rorty, Richard. “Philosophy as a Transitional Genre.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 102

¹²² Ibid. p. 103

¹²³ Ibid. p. 103

thoughtful discourse, honesty, and mutual trust should serve as a model for politics. These are the qualities Rorty wishes us to adopt and emulate.

If we are to remove ontological and metaphysical truth from our ways of thinking, another difficult question arises: how can we justify the need for solidarity and the abolition of cruelty in a liberal society without believing it to be an objective value? Rorty answers this question by arguing that American society is not held together through metaphysical philosophical justification, but with language and narrative. He writes: “The idea that liberal societies are bound together by philosophical beliefs seems to me ludicrous. What binds societies together are common vocabularies and common hopes.”¹²⁴ This could be interpreted as a cultural relativist argument, but this is not the case. All liberal societies strive to create a better world that is forged through progress. He writes: “To retain social hope, members of such a society need to be able to tell themselves a story about how things might get better, and to see no insuperable obstacles to this story’s coming true.”¹²⁵ It is not necessary for Americans to have a metaphysical justification for the need to create solidarity because the idea that we could ever have such validation is an intellectual red herring. Rorty believes that changes should occur while we are socializing the young, but that reason can also play an important role. He distinguishes his view of reason from that of the Enlightenment thinkers by emphasizing a persuasive, rather than truth determining definition.

Rorty’s epistemology, and advocacy of literary thinking for politics can be beneficial in our attempt to achieve the goals of a country. It is crucial to the promulgation of hope. I see his epistemology as an attempt to transform facts into social

¹²⁴ Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989. Print. p. 86

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 86

convictions. Ideas and concepts are not true through an appeal to an external authority, but because they can be agreed upon. I do not think this diminishes the power or importance of what we call truth, but strengthens it. We would no longer have a duty to a truth that is outside of us, but one that we willingly agree upon. It is a democratic model of truth, and will be more conducive to experimentation and progress. I think my main criticism of Rorty's epistemological views is that he places far too much importance on trying to diminish the role of the correspondence theory of truth in philosophy. I agree with his epistemology, but do not think that it is antithetical to the correspondence theory of truth. We cannot know whether it is objectively true, but we can know if it is a constructive model of truth.

I believe Rorty's epistemology should be thought of as a refined scepticism. We cannot know if anything is objectively true, and should be critical of anything that claims to be absolutely and unreservedly true. We must acknowledge that when we believe something to be objectively true, it is because we have agreed on the method for determining truth. If we are to adopt Romanticism and its values for our political goals, we can achieve the epistemological values that Rorty is arguing for. However, we must be aware of the problems that Rorty does not discuss. Romantic notions must be tempered and complemented by concepts and values from other intellectual traditions and movements. Literature is helpful to achieving our goals, but it should not be thought of as being able to solve all the problems and challenges that we must overcome in order for a country to achieve its goals.

Chapter Three: Why Romanticism?

The purpose of this chapter is to show how Rorty's epistemological and political views are grounded in the tradition of Romanticism. He suggests that we jettison the problematic traditions of the Enlightenment in favour of the useful and constructive ones that can be adopted from Romanticism. For Rorty, Romanticism was an intellectual and artistic movement that valued imagination over Reason, promoted a view that understood perceptions of the world to be created or shaped by language, and held progress in high esteem. Rorty and the neo-pragmatists hold many of these beliefs in common. However, I believe that the commonalities between the neo-pragmatists and the romantics run deeper than what Rorty explicitly states. There are also some problematic aspects to Romanticism that Rorty overlooks. This is in keeping with his belief that we must emphasize the positive aspects of history and not be overcome by cynicism; but I think that the problematic characteristics of Romanticism that he does not acknowledge are contradictory to the aims of his philosophical and political views.

Romanticism and neo-pragmatism both value literature and literary thinking over logic, Reason, and the search for objective truth. Rorty feels that works of literature are not only able to serve as a viable alternative to works of philosophy, but that literature is the inevitable successor to philosophy. In contrast to philosophy, literature allows us to explore new ideas and ways of thinking about the world by emphasizing the imaginative aspect of ourselves. Rorty surmises that literature will replace philosophy just as philosophy replaced religion. Most importantly, Rorty believes that literature is more able to effect change and produce progress because it can create solidarity, and lead us toward an ideal future. Good works of literature replace a 'they' or 'I' with a 'we.'

Supposedly, literature is likelier than objectivist, logical accounts to promote a world that is free from cruelty. Rorty is not arguing that logic and objectivity promote cruelty. Instead, he believes they create an intellectual environment that alienates and divides because they are meant to discover objective truth rather than promote dialogue and understanding. This is why Rorty believes politics should be grounded in literature and literary thinking instead of having a philosophical or scientific justification.

Rorty maintains that if Americans are committed to improving their society, they must embrace literature as a constructive alternative to philosophy when thinking about the future. To Rorty, neo-pragmatism is the school of thought that would be best able to instigate this change because it is epistemologically similar to Romanticism, and holds literature and literary thinking in high esteem. Rorty feels that we must abandon the problematic aspects of the Enlightenment, which run counter to the aims of neo-pragmatism and Romanticism. The Enlightenment has valorized concepts such as Reality, Reason, and Truth. The Enlightenment may have been successful in secularizing thought and society, but for Rorty, the only significant epistemological achievement it made was dethroning religion as the authority on Truth. Despite this, it served to reinforce the prevailing theological qualities of Truth, Reality, and Reason.

For both Rorty and the Romantics, our access to reality will always be mediated by things like language. The Romantics accepted this notion and believed they must shape the world with their imaginations and language. This distinguished them from the Enlightenment thinkers who believed in the existence of an objective Reality and that Reason would allow them to access it: “Just as the Enlightenment had capitalized and

deified Reason, so Shelley and other romantics capitalized and deified Imagination.”¹²⁶

This passage encapsulates Rorty’s understanding of the epistemological difference between Romanticism and the Enlightenment. The former is concerned with human concepts like emotions, imagination, and fantasy. The latter is concerned with ontological concepts like Reason, Truth, and Reality. The Enlightenment may have been beneficial because it set us on a path toward creating a secular society, but it did not orient western civilization toward creating a better future through the use of imagination in the same way that Romanticism can.

Rorty claims that we should not think of the world as something that reveals itself to us, but that we have an active role in shaping our perceptions of it. We should accept the epistemological principles of the literary arts in order to envision and bring about a better future. The romantics were concerned with framing humanity as the source of thought. This is similar to what the poet Percy Shelley described in his essay *A Defence of Poetry*, and it is a view that Rorty shares. Shelley argued that poets and poetry have a much more important impact in shaping our understanding of the world, than most would realize. He writes: “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”¹²⁷ Shelley is stating that poets play a crucial role in shaping our thoughts of the world and the things that comprise it. This is because the human experience, culture, and our perception of the world are shaped by poetry and literature: “But poets... are not only the authors of language and of music, of the dance, and architecture, and statuary, and painting; they are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life, and the teachers, who draw into a certain propinquity with

¹²⁶ Rorty, Richard. “Pragmatism and Romanticism.” *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 109

¹²⁷ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry and Other Essays*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., 2004. Print. p. 90

the beautiful and the true.”¹²⁸ This passage echoes Rorty’s views. There is no world beyond what the poets and those engaged in the literary arts have described for us. Literary intellectuals create our perceptions and thoughts of the world, and there is no fixed reality from which they draw their ideas. Shelley’s view of how poets create our perceptions of the world is also part of the reason why Rorty redefines philosophers as poets. Rorty was very much in agreement with this notion, and felt that philosophy is simply another literary genre. The ideas and concepts they discuss do not reveal any kind of special or privileged knowledge. For Rorty, philosophy is no better at accurately describing the world and humanity than literature or poetry. This should not be viewed as a slight against philosophy or philosophers. They are especially deft at providing us with written work that allow us to expand our vocabularies and sense of solidarity.

Rorty’s view of imagination is similar to Shelley’s. This is very much in line with what Shelley views imagination to be. He describes it as something that is at the forefront of human progress because it seeks unity, whereas reason seeks to categorize and sort:

Reason is the enumeration of quantities already known; imagination is the perception of the value of those quantities, both separately and as a whole. Reason respects the differences, and imagination the similitude of things. Reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance.¹²⁹

In this passage we see a salient example of the similarity between pragmatism and Romanticism. The imagination may discover ways of bringing about greater solidarity, but it cannot implement them without the assistance of reason. Reason cannot reach the goal; it can however provide the means for its attainment.

¹²⁸ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry and Other Essays*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., 2004. Print. p. 19

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 12

It could be objected that the primacy that Romanticism places on the imagination is antithetical to the goals of pragmatism, and that rather than foster solidarity and fraternity, it has an opposite effect. In Albert Camus' *The Rebel*, such a view is put forth. Camus does not view Romanticism as being a well from which great imaginative works sprang and fostered solidarity. Instead, he sees the type of rebellion against the intellectual and moral status quo to be encouraging an insular and ultimately deleterious culture. He writes: "Romanticism, Lucifer-like in its rebellion, is really only useful for adventures of the imagination."¹³⁰ Camus' reference to Lucifer in this passage stems from the fact that he views Romanticism as embracing all that is base in humanity rather than what is good and noble. The imaginative adventures he is describing only exist in the mind. For Camus, the imagination is only useful as a solitary activity. It can whisk a person away to a mountaintop in their imagination, but does not envision ways through which we can remove ourselves from the past or create a better future. When the romantics used their imagination to think about mankind, it often led to evil actions and policies. Camus does not deny that they were rebels, but asserts that they rebelled against things that were beneficial for humanity. Thus, what they used their imagination for was damaging to humanity.

Camus argues that the romantics had secular beliefs, but in taking this position they viewed the positive qualities of humanity to be aberrations. He writes: "Since God claims all that is good in man, it is necessary to deride what is good and choose what is evil. Hatred of death and of injustice will lead, therefore, if not to the exercise, at least to the vindication, of evil and murder."¹³¹ It may seem from this passage that Romanticism

¹³⁰ Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York, New York. Random House. 1991. p. 47

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 47

is similar to the Enlightenment in the sense that both sought to subvert the authority of God, and to place humanity in higher standing. However, Camus is trying to show how the romantics were attempting to elevate themselves to the same stature as God. He writes: "Thus he [the romantic] does not absolutely deny the existence of God. He refutes him in the name of a moral value. The romantic rebel's ambition was to talk to God as one equal to another. Evil was the answer to evil, pride the answer to cruelty."¹³² Camus grasps the dark side of Romanticism, and I think this is something Rorty overlooks. The romantics are simply attempting to envision ways in which they can live alongside God, and be free of the conventional morality. I think Rorty would respond by criticizing Camus' attempt to characterize Romanticism as an insular intellectual movement that valued violence. Rorty is not attempting to give an objective view of what Romanticism is, but one that is constructive and useful for his purposes. The imagination does not have the seemingly redemptive qualities that Rorty is ascribing to it. If we place too much value in the imagination, and remove reason as the most important tool available to the mind, there may be dangerous consequences. I agree with Rorty that the imagination can be useful, and that it can play a role in the envisioning of an ideal future, but it must always be tempered by reason. One must not take precedence over the other. Instead, we must attempt to use them simultaneously to both conceive of a better future for humanity.

Rorty characterizes the literary intellectual being solely concerned with fostering solidarity. He seeks to know and portray every aspect of the human experience. Literary intellectuals depict a world that contains characters, ideals, or themes that can serve as our examples. It is in this way they can bring about progress. It will be helpful to look to

¹³² Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York, New York. Random House. 1991. p. 55

Camus for criticisms that can help temper Rorty's romantic view of the literary intellectuals.

Camus' approach to the idea of the literary intellectual stands in stark contrast to the image that Rorty describes. Camus is quite critical of the idea, especially when informed by Romanticism. For Camus, literary intellectuals inspired by Romanticism usually emerge in the form of the dandy. He would agree with Rorty's belief that the literary intellectual is a person who lives at the limits of the human imagination, but would disagree that they do this in order to create solidarity, even inadvertently. Camus thinks that the literary dandy lives only according to his own ideals, and they are rarely good. It is an existence characterized by eccentricity, but is also fundamentally conservative. Camus writes: "The dandy, therefore, is always compelled to astonish. Singularity is his vocation, excess his way to perfection. Perpetually incomplete, always on the fringe of things, he compels others to create him, while denying their values."¹³³ I take Camus' point to be that the dandy will always seek change even at the cost of something good. They will attempt to overturn the status quo, regardless of whether meaningful and valuable achievements have been made. It could be objected that this is actually an asset because they might be able to see problems within the present circumstances that others may not. However, this is not the argument that Camus is making. He is trying to show that dandies will always be in a state of perpetual moral revolution. They will chastise the moral climate of their time simply so as to stand out or not conform.

Contrary to Rorty's claims, Camus maintains that the dandy is not acting to create moral solidarity, but moral exceptionalism. I believe Camus agrees with Shelley

¹³³ Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York, New York. Random House. 1991. p. 52

that poets can be the legislators of the world, but disagrees that poetry and art are necessarily acts done for the community. Shelley writes: “Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be ‘the expression of the imagination’: and poetry is connate with the origin of man.”¹³⁴ This passage shows that Shelley believes poetry to be an act of creation. The imagination was used to create man, but it was Romanticism that turned the imagination inward. Camus also believes that the romantics and the dandies were engaging the community, but did so in order to elevate themselves from others. He writes: “For the dandy, to be alone is not to exist. The romantics talked so grandly about solitude only because it was their real horror, the one thing they could not bear.”¹³⁵ From this passage we can see that Romanticism inspires the dandy to be oriented toward the community, but only for his own benefit.

I think that Camus has a view of progress that is similar to Rorty’s. It is not constructive to rebel against things that are beneficial to humanity. Rebellion may be perfectly acceptable, if not outright promoted, but it must be rebellion that is directed toward building something for humanity. The dandies are only concerned with fame, and constructing a life for themselves that rests on the backs of others. I think Camus rightly points out that there is a conservative element to the life and works of the dandy. They long for the ethical and moral climate of the past. Thus, it might be accurate to characterize them as being figures that have more in common with the conservative, political Right rather than being the great figures of the progressive Left that Rorty believes them to be. Camus writes: “In its conventional forms, dandyism admits a nostalgia for ethics. It is only honour degraded as a point of honour. But at the same time

¹³⁴ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry and Other Essays*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., 2004. Print. p. 12-13

¹³⁵ Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York, New York. Random House. 1991. p. 52

it inaugurates an aesthetic which is still valid in our world, and aesthetic of solitary creators, who are obstinate rivals of a God they condemn.”¹³⁶ This passage shows that in terms of Rorty’s political perspectives, they would most certainly not meet the criteria needed to be considered part of the progressive Left. They have not fully secularized their thinking and goals. They are envious of God, and wish to be his equal.

Camus also attempts to position the romantics as being fearful of progress in a certain sense. He contrasts them with what he calls the ‘conquerors’ of the twentieth century.¹³⁷ The romantics were far too concerned with an inward and individualistic form of progress that had not yet made the leap into the realm of social and political action. They had not yet put the betterment of humanity as their main goal. It could be objected that the twentieth century revolutionaries were not acting on behalf of progress and that the changes they brought about were in fact regressions. However, I think the revolutionaries did more to exemplify progress and imagination than the romantics did. The revolutions that were instigated may have ultimately failed, but they still attempted to rethink the human condition. I think, in the end, this is what matters most. They dared to act against the prevailing forces in society, and to bring about a new form of society and social organization. This is another point in which I disagree with Rorty because he stresses the continuity of political institutions and traditions. He is most certainly not against progress, but only progress that will jettison achievements that have been made. Americans should not abandon their constitution or country, but attempt to fix what already exists. I think this is also what makes Rorty’s belief in the romantics to be somewhat peculiar. He might be rightly applauding their ability to use their imaginations

¹³⁶ Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York, New York. Random House. 1991. p. 53

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 52

to move humanity away from the problematic circumstance, but they will attempt to change anything and everything regardless of its value. This point highlights Rorty's tenuous position regarding the literary intellectual. I think he is right to say that it is only through luck that change has and will occur, but I am hesitant to agree that we should place so much value in the works of the literary intellectuals.

I believe that Rorty might respond to my critique by stating that there is no way to prove him wrong, or, Camus right. His treatment of the romantics is perfectly in line with his thinking, and that he is giving an interpretation of Romanticism that relies upon rhetoric and not reason. I would respond to Rorty by arguing that his portrayal of Romanticism fails to acknowledge the shortcomings of the movement. He is simply not as critical of it as he is of the Enlightenment. There is no acknowledgement of its failings, and an attempt to show how we can take what is best from the movement and make it better. It is something that ought to be emulated and recreated. I believe this illustrates a problematic aspect of Rorty's philosophy. If we place too great an importance on attempting to persuade people then we might overlook the failings of the examples we point to.

I think there is value to Rorty's argument in favour of emphasizing the importance of Romanticism. Literature has many insights to offer us about humanity, truth, and politics. However, I think that there are many problematic aspects to Romanticism that should be recognized if it is to take precedence in our history and teachings over the Enlightenment. Neither of these intellectual movements was without problems, but one should not have value over the other. They should be taken in tandem, and complement each other. Yes, there are aspects that might seem to be contradictory,

but I believe that Reason can benefit the imagination, emotions can complement Truth,
and fantasy can help to inform us about Reality.

Political Implications: A Critical Evaluation

In this thesis I have examined the most salient themes in Richard Rorty's political philosophy: hope, Romanticism, and literary thinking. These are important because they are the means through which he believes we can affect moral progress and bring about a more ideal future. They will allow us to set aside objective and absolute truths, and focus on useful conversation. It is the literary character of his political philosophy and the importance it places on hope that is particularly compelling. The belief that great works of literature will inspire change and promote hope is one of Rorty's most valuable contributions to political philosophy.

I have great admiration for Rorty and his work; I accept the premises of his arguments, but I reject some of his conclusions for being too extreme. I believe that his philosophy should be taken in moderation. There are some problematic aspects—his emphasis on solidarity, his denunciation of the Cultural Left and the literature that represents it, and his nationalism.

Solidarity is the ideal future we should be aspiring to create. It may appear to be the most salient concept in Rorty's political philosophy, but I do not think it is particularly interesting, important, or unique. It overshadows the other facets of his philosophy, and I think if it is emphasized as being its most central concept it will ultimately weaken and detract from his ideas. Solidarity is the indistinct goal to which, he argues, the United States of America ought to be working toward. With no clearly defined end, solidarity is more of a general direction society ought to be moving in rather than being a clearly definable and achievable end. I believe the only thing that sets Rorty's view of solidarity apart from the objectives espoused by other political

philosophers is its indistinct and nationalist character, and his claim that it requires no justification in terms of correspondence to reality.

There is value in Rorty's concept of solidarity if we think of it as a placeholder term for the ends that most political philosophers are trying to achieve. As a concept, solidarity exists in one form or another in almost every political theory that espouses an ideal form of society or state--the character of which is often shaped as a response to a social or political problem. Indeed, Rorty explicitly states: "philosophy is responsive to changes in amount of political hope, rather than conversely."¹³⁸ In other words, philosophy reacts to socio-political problems. It does not anticipate them, or arise without a problem to which it can respond. Even though I agree with Rorty, I believe that this creates difficulties for the role of solidarity in his political philosophy in particular. The challenge to and purpose of Rorty's political philosophy is the reduction of cruelty. We achieve this desired end through the promotion of literature that will promulgate solidarity or otherwise change the way we speak about certain matters. The goal is ending cruelty for all of humanity, and this occurs by enlarging what we see as our community. However, this is problematic for two reasons. The end to cruelty is not clear or specific enough. What political movement would not espouse an end to cruelty? Without a clear and definable end or goal, a political movement it is less likely to succeed. What is the source of the cruelty? Unlike Rorty, other political philosophers identify specific social problems as the source of the cruelty. I think it is for this reason that they are more successful. Even when they are not successful in achieving their goals, they are more likely to be influential. For example, solidarity is to Rorty what

¹³⁸ Rorty, Richard. "Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope." *Philosophy and Social Hope*. New York: Penguin, 1999. Print. p. 229

communism was to Marx. However, Marx was writing in response to specific social problems. He was writing in reaction to the problems caused by industrialization and modern capitalism. Communism was a way of organizing society that would end the material inequalities afflicting society. The starkly unequal distribution of wealth created a cruel and disparate existence among the proletariat. It could be argued that Marx was unsuccessful because the kind of communism he espoused was never realized, but he still managed to raise awareness of the problems inherent in capitalism and effect some change. His political philosophy proved to be influential. Rorty's goal is as indistinct as his solution. Bringing an end to cruelty is a problematic objective because it lacks any concrete means of measuring its success. This problem lacks a clearly identifiable problem like the dilemmas presented by industrialization and modern capitalism, and even a means to know whether we are progressing toward that goal. Thus, while I agree with his argument that there will never be an end to politics or the perfection of society, I do not think this should negate any possibility for there to be obtainable and measurable ends. Open-ended problems such as ending cruelty do have merit in some regard, but I do not believe they are strong enough to bring about meaningful change. Marx's criticisms of capitalism and industrialization brought about change because they were specific, and were directed at a particular source of cruelty in society. It could be argued that Rorty's ideas may not have had enough time to permeate throughout our social and political culture, but again the example of Marx shows that a political philosophy can be immediately influential with a firm and definable end.

If anything, solidarity should be thought of in terms of what it tells us about the character and nature of political philosophy itself. Most political philosophies that

espouse a utopian solution to social and political problems are problematic. Philosophers should not propose grandiose resolutions that will end all strife and suffering. Instead, they should be more conservative with their goals in order to be more successful. We should not see the ends proposed by philosophers as absolute, but merely as solutions to the problems they are addressing.

If we examine the literature that Rorty believes to be espousing his view--the view of the progressive Left--the shortcomings of his conception of solidarity may become more apparent. For example, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is a work that Rorty considers the best illustration of the concept of solidarity, and how it is achieved after some sort of crisis or catastrophe.

Rorty thinks that authors such as Steinbeck felt that America would become the world's first truly equal society, and that it "would be one in which income and the wealth are equitably distributed, and in which the government ensures equality of opportunity as well as individual liberty."¹³⁹ To achieve this goal, America would have to undergo great change: "Transformation would be needed because the rise of industrial capitalism had made the individualist rhetoric of America's first century obsolete."¹⁴⁰ For Steinbeck, it is the Great Depression that serves as a catalyst and backdrop for which the characters can be heroic and act in a way that can bring about solidarity. The character, Tom Joad, exemplifies the claims of Rorty. However, Joad's heroism and actions are not without their dark side. The better life that he is striving for is ultimately one that he must kill to achieve. National solidarity comes at great cost. Rorty views Joad to be an admirable character, but glosses over the troubling acts he must commit to

¹³⁹ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 8

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 8

safeguard his family. Contrary to Rorty's claims, there is no reason for thinking that a crisis will create solidarity. Indeed, it may well have the opposite effect; it may bring about greater discord and antagonism. Indeed, *The Grapes of Wrath* also shows us the darker aspects of striving for solidarity.

Harold Bloom's view of Steinbeck raises some interesting points that are absent from Rorty's complimentary treatment. He writes: "Steinbeck's naturalistic humanism itself seems confused: do his characters fall into animal-like behaviour because of society's oppressions, or because they simply revert to their true identity when they are uprooted?"¹⁴¹ Bloom does not see the characters in Steinbeck's work as embodying the heroism and solidarity that Rorty finds. In fact, the opposite is the case. The characters are driven by their circumstances to act in a way that is the exact opposite of solidarity. They do not bring about the 'me' to 'we' transition, but exacerbate and entrench discord and antagonism.

The second concern I have with Rorty's political philosophy is his dismissal of the Cultural Left and the literature that represents it. As we have seen, Rorty distinguishes between his own progressive Left and the cultural Left. Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* challenges some of Rorty's notions. Rorty categorizes it as part of the cultural Left because it espouses a view that deems America to be inherently corrupt, and does not offer any hope of progress. There are some examples that seem to confirm this: "Zoyd had come to consider the "legal system" a swamp, where a man had to be high-flotation indeed not to be sucked down forever into its snake-infested stench."¹⁴² The characters in *Vineland* view the institutions of America to be corrupt, and only of value

¹⁴¹ Bloom, Harold. *The Grapes of Wrath*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005. Print. p. 8

¹⁴² Pynchon, Thomas. *Vineland*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin, 1997. Print. p. 310

to those with the resources to be able to utilize it properly. This corruption is something some of the characters actually enjoy and take pleasure in: "The law's brand-new, the intentions behind it are as old as power. I specialize in abuses of power, I'm good, I'm fast, I enjoy it." The legal system within *Vineland* has no semblance of justice or fairness. The protagonist is taken aback by this cynical view of American justice, and this exchange is follows: "“What about 'innocent till proven guilty'?" “That was another planet, think they used to call it America, long time ago, before the gutting of the Fourth Amendment. You were automatically guilty the minute they found that marijuana growing on your land.””¹⁴³ This example challenges Rorty’s notion of the cultural Left. The characters of *Vineland* do not see the justice system as utterly and completely corrupt; they simply believe that America has lost what once made it great. These characters are not without hope. Harold Bloom again offers an interpretation of the text that challenges not only Rorty’s, but also the political perspectives he describes.

Harold Bloom rightly interprets texts like *Vineland* as being accurate descriptions of our current age, and that the characters have attempted to bring about change but have met only failure.¹⁴⁴ Pynchon’s works are not simply about rueful acquiescence. Bloom states: “What is more startling about Pynchon is that he has found ways of representing the impulse to defy the System, even though both impulse and its representations always are defeated.”¹⁴⁵ This defiance is significant, and the difference in interpretation between Rorty and Bloom illuminates the former’s view of the cultural Left. For Rorty, it is a perspective that views America to be wholly corrupt throughout its history, but I think that *Vineland* serves as an example that this is not the case. It may view the problems

¹⁴³ Pynchon, Thomas. *Vineland*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin, 1997. Print. p. 310

¹⁴⁴ Bloom, Harold. *Thomas Pynchon*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003. Print. p. 1

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2

currently faced by Americans to be almost insurmountable, but that does not mean they believe the country to always having been this way nor does it stop them from trying to change it. The rueful acquiescence that Rorty argues is the defining feature of the cultural Left is inaccurate.

The third concern I have with Rorty's political philosophy is its nationalist character. This may well be the most problematic aspect of his political philosophy. However, if we abandon some of its more extreme aspects, it can be useful for Canada. Even though his political philosophy is ultimately a nationalistic one, this should not deter us from finding value in it. In order to demonstrate this, I will explore how it can be used in a Canadian context, and how this country's literary tradition can be conducive to the adoption of his political concepts. Rorty uses the idea of American Exceptionalism to engage in a conversation about how national self-esteem can be useful. He goads his audience with audacious statements about how America is the only country that can achieve solidarity, and it is only that country's Progressive Left and its attendant literary tradition that can affect meaningful change. I do not think Rorty should be taken at face value when he espouses views that only America can achieve success, but we should take seriously his belief in the importance of national self-esteem. . He writes: "National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement."¹⁴⁶ I agree with this statement. We cannot affect change unless we believe there is something worth changing, or salvaging. However, Rorty believes it is also not enough to simply feel pride in one's country; there must also be emotional involvement. He writes: "Emotional involvement with one's country--feelings of intense shame or of

¹⁴⁶ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 3

glowing pride aroused by various parts of its history, and by various present-day policies--is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive.”¹⁴⁷ We must not only feel a sense of pride about our country, but must also be emotionally involved. We are supposed to feel love for one’s country, and in Rorty’s case, it is strictly monogamous. Feeling pride for one’s country means that there cannot be love or pride in the history of another. One cannot divide one’s loyalty between two countries. However, despite the need for emotional involvement and feeling of pride, Rorty appears to be putting forth a moderate position. He writes: “Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism, just as excessive self-respect can produce arrogance.”¹⁴⁸ This passage is taken from the beginning of a section in *Achieving Our Country* that delves into its Exceptionalism through an examination of the poetry and philosophy of Walt Whitman and John Dewey, and is ostensibly an ode to its perceived greatness. Rorty is attempting to find the middle ground between fervent nationalism, and resentful stagnation caused by a lack of national pride. I do not think he is successful in this endeavour. I think he comes across more as a fervent nationalist. His view is supposedly one of moderate pride, but in my view, his belief that the United States alone that can ensure a better future for the world belies his moderation. Here is a test of his claims to moderation: can Rorty’s ideas be adopted by any other country? Can they be applied to Canada?

According to Rorty, for a country to achieve its ultimate political goals, it must be successful in crafting a narrative that promotes hope, forgoes resentment, and fosters solidarity. That is the foundation of Rorty’s political philosophy. It would seem that this

¹⁴⁷ Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print. p. 3

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 3

politics of hope can be applied to Canada. But Rorty could not imagine his ideas to be applicable to any other country. What prevents him from looking to any other nation is his nationalism.

Canada's history is no less stained by blood than America's. It is for this reason that a narrative of hope should be crafted. Furthermore, Canada's strong literary tradition makes the creation of a positive narrative even more possible, and can be reinforced and hope fostered through culture. In my view, Margaret Atwood's *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* serves as an example of the status quo that must be overturned. Atwood confirms Rorty's thesis that it is only American literature that brings about a politics of hope. She argues that there is a single unifying concept that underlies a nation's literature, and writes: "every country or culture has a single unifying and informing symbol at its core. The symbol, then – be it word, phrase, idea, image, or all of these - - functions like a system of beliefs which holds the country together and helps the people in it to co-operate for common ends."¹⁴⁹ Atwood is arguing that to each country, there is a single, over-arching concept that can be found throughout their culture. It is not merely an identity, but an idea or theme that underpins it. I believe this is in agreement with Rorty. There may only be some national concepts that will be able to work toward achieving a better future. Atwood's characterization of American literature would again seem to be in agreement with Rorty's arguments. She believes that the common idea for America is that of the frontier. She writes:

the symbol for America is The Frontier, a flexible idea that contains many elements dear to the American heart: it suggests a place that is *new*, where the old order can be discarded; a line that is always expanding, taking in or "conquering"

¹⁴⁹ Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972. Print. p. 26

ever-fresh virgin territory; it holds out a hope, never fulfilled but always promised, of Utopia, the perfect human society.”¹⁵⁰

Atwood’s description of the American idea not only describes its literature, but should also be seen as describing Rorty’s portrayal of America. It captures the character of his theories and the goals he sets for America, and shows that his work is more the embodiment of the national character of the United States than any viable political theory.

Atwood’s characterization of Canadian literature and national idea also confirms Rorty’s theory. She states that it is the concept of survival that defines the Canadian identity. It is subsistence in the face of the harsh environment and grim circumstances that defines the Canadian identity. She writes: “The central symbol for Canada... is undoubtedly Survival, *la Survivance*... For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of ‘hostile’ elements and/or natives: carving out a place and a way of keeping alive.”¹⁵¹ For Atwood, the Canadian national idea is not one that denotes thriving expansion, but mere subsistence. It is not about taking chances or doing something daring, but always doing what is safe in order to prevent potential catastrophe. It would seem that life in Canada is tenuous at best. This survival mentality seems to be diametrically opposed to the politics of hope and progress that Rorty espouses. I see Atwood and Rorty as making a similar argument in terms of their characterization of national character, and of the American identity in particular.

I think if Rorty’s goal of emphasizing redefinition and positive narratives should be embraced and be made useful for other countries such as Canada. If Rorty’s political philosophy were to be applied to Canada, it would require placing the culture and

¹⁵⁰ Atwood, Margaret. *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*. Toronto: Anansi, 1972. Print. p.. 26

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 27

literature of the nation within a new narrative, and working to create new ideas and symbols for the nation. However, I do not believe this to be an insurmountable task; we can overturn the survival mentality that Atwood describes. Furthermore, I do not believe the nation's character has always been one of survival nor must it remain so. In a speech given around the time of confederation, Darcy McGee characterized the nation's character in a way that stands in contrast to that of Atwood. Darcy McGee, a journalist and father of confederation, delivered a speech at the end of the nineteenth century that espoused the strengths and value of Canadian literature, and the country's printing industry. *The Mental Outfit of a New Nation* is a lecture that describes the Canadian idea as not being one of mere survival, but of learning and communicating through the written word. He also characterizes the country as having a frontier-mentality. However, it is not one of territory, but of the mind. He believed that the young nation must battle against books that do not satisfy the curiosity and wanderlust of the people. Canadians are not content with reading about survival, but wish to expand the horizons of their minds, and learn about their country and the world. He wrote: "we must battle bad books with good books. As our young people in this material age hunger and thirst... there is not better corrective for an excessive imaginative reading than the actual lives and books of travel."¹⁵² McGee saw this kind of literature to be satisfying a need felt by the young people of Canada. They are not merely concerned with survival, but with exploration and adventure. This will not only satiate this need, but will also expand their minds. He wrote: "these are books which enlarge our sympathies, and do not pervert them; which excite our curiosity and satisfy it, but not at the expense of morals; which give certainty

¹⁵² McGee, Darcy *The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion*. Montreal, Quebec. 1867 p. 4

and population to the geographical and historical dreams of our youthful days.”¹⁵³

McGee believed that encouraging the reading of works of non-fiction will enrich the moral sensibilities and minds of the young. This differs significantly from Rorty, who believes that it is works of poetry and fiction that are likelier to bring about change and solidarity. McGee shows us that there is more to the Canadian narrative and idea than simply survival. If we emphasize the tradition described by McGee and change the national narrative so that it incorporates McGee’s view, it can be helpful in overturning the conservative narrative that has been given to us about our history and culture as survival.

I think that Rorty’s nationalism endangers a diplomatic and moderate approach to politics. Rorty mistakes reconciliation and moderation in politics with an attempt to reach objectivity. A degree of impartiality in democracy is necessary to ensure that politics will not be reduced to factionalism and partisanship. Wilfred Laurier’s account of Canadian liberalism shows us what Rorty’s philosophy neglects. Searching for value or truth in a perspective other than your own can help temper the fervour that can often be found in politics. Laurier also offers us alternatives to the political spectrum put forth by Rorty. His is value neutral, but without any attempt to be objective, or reach to some sort of godlike truth. His definitions are borne out of a need for fairness and reconciliation. He writes:

I now ask whether between these two partly organized ideas [the political Left and Right] there seem to be moral difference; is one radically good, and the other radically bad? Is it not manifest that both are, what are called moral *indifferent*? That is to say, that both are susceptible to appreciation of thought and choice. Would it not be as unjust as absurd to condemn or approve either one or the other, as absolutely good or bad?¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ McGee, Darcy *The Mental Outfit of the New Dominion*. Montreal, Quebec. 1867 p.4

¹⁵⁴ Laurier, Wilfred *Lecture on Political Liberalism*. Quebec City, Quebec 1877 p. 7

Laurier views the political dichotomy in Canada to be characterized by a need to accept that one's political beliefs are not absolute truths. Moreover, we cannot have an emotional attachment to the political party that represents our beliefs, but that we must be indifferent. This differs from Rorty's approach because he separates national pride and emotional involvement from politics.

Rorty thinks that justice is synonymous with loyalty. He claims that our attempts at universalistic approaches to justice quickly crumble when faced with adversity: "Our loyalty to such larger groups will, however, weaken, or even vanish altogether when things get really tough. Then people whom we once thought of as like ourselves will be excluded."¹⁵⁵ We must instead focus our efforts on maintaining values and justice for ourselves, rather than become bogged down in a fruitless endeavour to bring the standards we have for ourselves to all of humanity. Rorty applies this to issues of progress, and argues in favour of ethnocentrism: "I think that the rhetoric we Westerners use in trying to get everyone to be more like us would be improved if we were more frankly ethnocentric, and less professedly universalist."¹⁵⁶ I believe Rorty is advocating a form of imperialism that places social justice at its core. Rather than appealing to objective or universal rights, it would be better for us to advocate change based upon how our values make for a better society. This could be beneficial for two reasons. First, it would be better to frame a conversation about moral progress through a concrete example. Second, it would serve as a basis for instigating a greater need to work toward a more ideal society. If we are going to use ourselves as an example for what a morally

¹⁵⁵ Rorty, Richard. "Justice as Larger Loyalty" *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print. p. 42

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 55

just and productive society is, it will mean that we must live up to the rhetoric we are using rather than to simply appeal to universal principles.

I think Rorty's political philosophy has many interesting facets, but it is his politics of hope, the primacy of literature to progress, and his denial of absolute grounds for philosophy that are his most valuable contributions. If his philosophy was to be adopted as a whole, it could lead to a caustic political environment. If his views were to be moderated by a sense of impartiality toward conflicting political views and nations, this would make it a much more viable political philosophy. I greatly admire his work, but I have serious reservations about certain aspects of it. Solidarity, its nationalist character, and the dismissal of universalism are the points I believe to be most problematic. I think that we should not abandon all universalistic appeals to concepts like justice because universalism can be just as useful to achieving our ends. I believe that like the abnegation of universalism, Rorty takes many of his arguments too far. I think that Rorty raises interesting points, but for them to truly be useful we must exercise moderation when adopting or attempting to utilize them. Literature can be helpful to achieving our political ends, but it should only be used in tandem with philosophy. Rorty's approach of emphasizing either the Enlightenment or Romanticism, and spectators or agents should be moderated by embracing both the concept he endorses and the one he denies. We should not wholeheartedly embrace a political philosophy that does not value or utilize the arguments made against it. I think that this is the most crucial criticism I can put forth. Rorty believes that liberal democracy is preferable to all others, but his almost extremist views contradict the moderation on which that style of politics and society is built.

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