

Challenging Philosophy

Rorty's Positive Conception of Philosophy as Cultural Criticism

Colin Koopman

Richard Rorty is often described, and just as often derided, as the most unabashedly anti-philosophical philosopher of recent vintage. No one has been more incisive in provoking anxiety within our philosophical establishments—for no one has been more unrelenting in offering detailed criticisms of the failures of we philosophers to deliver the desiderata we have been promising to the rest of culture for the past few hundred years. But how should we construe Rorty's criticisms of philosophy? Was Rorty writing the death of philosophy itself on its own walls? Or was Rorty offering an internal critical challenge to philosophy, meant as a provocation toward a transformation of philosophy itself?

Insofar as Rorty was the paradigmatic, anti-philosophical philosopher of the twentieth century, he resembled in more ways than one David Hume, who was the most unabashed philosophical critic of philosophy back in the eighteenth century when modern philosophers first began making the kinds of earnest promises that Hume and Rorty were both dubious about.¹ Not only did Hume's central intellectual project aim at debunking much of what was taken as 'philosophy' (both in his day and in ours), but indeed after he completed his monumental *Treatise of Human Nature* and his two popularizing *Enquiries* he largely abandoned what we today think of as philosophy for pursuits that are more properly seen as historical and cultural-critical, producing a number of inflammatory writings on religion, plus a massive *History of England* in six thick volumes. Hume, long before Rorty, and with equal verve and wit, had also said that philosophy was capable of precious little.

Interestingly, no serious thinker today would dream of denying that Hume was a philosopher despite the fact that a wide number of philosophers, in their

fullest seriousness, deny that Rorty was a philosopher in any meaningful sense. Why does nearly everyone today insist that the eighteenth-century skeptical ironist is a paradigmatic philosopher and that the twentieth-century pragmatic ironist ought to be stripped of that honorific title?

Challenging philosophy

Rorty's philosophical contributions should not be dismissed, if only because the challenges they pose to contemporary philosophy come from deep within the center of the very philosophical establishments and traditions he provokes. It is in this respect that he is most like Hume. And as Hume had his Kant, so too Rorty deserves his retort. Not that Kant refuted Hume. The point is that Kant knew how to take Hume seriously in a way that other post-Humean philosophers who persisted in traditional empiricisms and rationalisms (most of whom are now obscure figures in most narratives of modern philosophy) did not. By analogy, we today ought to find ways of taking Rorty seriously, lest we persist in parading down paths that Rorty has shown to be severely out of touch with current cultural requirements.

Rorty's criticisms of the philosophical tradition are known by so many to be so forceful because they were issued by an insider who possessed a deep fluency with the very traditions, systems, and programs he criticized. Rorty possessed a sophisticated grasp of a wide range of philosophical territory, not to mention an almost-equally expansive range of literary, historical, and social scientific territories. Few philosophers of his day managed to be inside so many different philosophical traditions. Rorty ranged, seemingly effortlessly, across Davidson, Derrida, and Dewey in a single sentence and with indisputable erudition. His combination of range and depth suggest that Rorty's provocations to contemporary philosophy, like Hume's skeptical provocations, cannot be simply dismissed. Hume knew how to unravel the consequences of the Lockean and Cartesian assumptions that Kant saw he would have to overcome. Rorty, likewise, has rolled out the implications of Davidsonian disquotationalism and Derridean deconstruction with the result of decided disquiet. After Rorty, there is no going back to Russell and Husserl.

For much of modern philosophy, the philosophers had fashioned themselves as intellectuals capable of delivering on certain promises that they were never really able to make good on. Many of Rorty's arguments can be read as attempts

to show that we philosophers had failed to make good on these promises such that it is now high time for them to find a different description of their value in the context of liberal democratic culture. Taking Rorty's arguments seriously implies that we cannot respond to his challenge by simply making some new move midst the existing range of philosophical positions. To take Rorty seriously means accepting that the existing philosophical positions really do need to be rearranged in their entirety. We might say that Rorty provokes a kaleidoscopic shift in philosophy's self-image—grasping the force of his challenge requires only the smallest of nudges in our existing philosophical frameworks but the nudge is on a level at which an ever-so-slight turn changes everything—all that had once seemed stable quickly goes tumbling such that an entirely new vision suddenly and brilliantly appears before us.

Rorty's challenge was dismissed by so many because it was so often taken to be a polemic against the very idea of philosophy itself. But a criticism of one mode of philosophizing is not for that reason a polemic against all modes. Rorty should be read as having sought to establish a counter conception of the work that philosophy might yet become. Against the stale crust of the systematized and professionalized philosophical culture he challenged, Rorty sought out a more enlivened conception of philosophy as the criticism of culture. So I shall argue in what follows. For, admittedly, Rorty's elaborations of a positive image for philosophy were not often as clear and concise as his negative briefs against all the old philosophical fashions. They require some teasing out. This is my task in what follows. I begin by offering some distinctions that help us sort out Rorty's negative briefs against (professionalized) philosophy from his positive calls for a new conception of (cultural-critical) philosophy. I then turn to leveraging these distinctions by offering a reading of an arc of writings from across the full length of Rorty's own philosophic career.

The very idea of a Rortyan philosophy

I want to propose some new terms that I think enable us to capture the spirit of Rorty's intellectual agenda better than those existing interpretations that always end up with a casual dismissal of Rorty. One reason why Rorty is so often dismissed by philosophers is because he sometimes offered bold pronouncements of a hopefully-imminent end of philosophy. One point I hope to establish in what follows is that Rorty never thought that *philosophy* must

come to an end. What he thought should come to an end is a certain inherited self-image of philosophical practice as *professional, foundational, and systematic philosophy*. Once we have dispensed with this pernicious self-image we can, and Rorty thought we positively should, go on to continue to contribute our critical intellectual abilities to the most serious problems facing our liberal democratic culture. Rorty sometimes referred to his alternative to traditional philosophy as akin to cultural criticism. My claim here is that a post-foundationalist and post-universalist philosophy should be understood as a *cultural-critical philosophy* that locates itself in its own time and place.

It is helpful to begin by stating what is quite likely already painfully obvious to most readers. The overwhelming majority of his commentators and critics fail to illuminate the positive side of Rorty's metaphilosophy. Most, indeed, are downright hostile to the very idea. Rorty, we are told, is not so much wrong as just wrong-headed, not so much a gadfly as a gaffe. One of Rorty's most incisive critics amongst his philosophical contemporaries, Joseph Margolis, offers a representative read of Rorty's standing in his strong claims about Rorty's 'unbridled rejection of every form of philosophical discipline' and of Rorty as 'never ventur[ing] any *philosophical* improvement' (2002, pp. 76, 75). It needs be underscored that nearly everyone agrees with Margolis here, whose criticisms of Rorty (unlike those of most of the other critics) are always well-argued and carefully-posed (and hence, unlike most of the other critics, actually worth arguing with). Despite these merits, the criticism on this point is also, at least to my thinking, quite wrong. There are, to be sure, a handful of prominent exceptions to the rule in the work of a small number of scholars who discern something more promising, and most positive, in Rorty's philosophical imaginary.² But the drift, on the whole, is decidedly in the other direction.

I should like to offer here some terminology that might help us make sense of Rorty as a philosopher who, after all, had something positive to say about philosophy's relevance for our lives, our politics, our cultures, and our selves. Those who deny that Rorty was a philosopher in any positive sense are probably operating with some entrenched conception of what philosophy is and can be. Those of us who take Rorty's challenge seriously, by contrast, worry that this entrenched conception will make philosophy soon go stale. Those who take Rorty's challenge seriously tend also to want to fashion a different conception of philosophy than was prominent 50 years ago and which has, in many quarters, already begun to fade from view, though *without sufficient self-consciousness* regarding what new forms of philosophy are emerging in the stead of the increasingly-discarded entrenched models. If these newer conceptions of

philosophical practice add much depth and breadth to philosophy itself, then one way of understanding Rorty's metaphilosophical writings are as an attempt to help us *gain additional self-consciousness* regarding how we might achieve the new requirements we have begun to impose on ourselves. Thus, instead of taking Rorty as sounding the death knell for philosophy, we might instead take him to have insisted upon a profound transformation within philosophy such that it might one day again be able to amply inform the modern liberal democratic culture in which we all today find ourselves.

Rorty's work makes the best sense when read in light of an implicit metaphilosophical distinction. Rorty tended to write about philosophy in two senses. This has led to enormous confusions, insofar as critics exploit the ambiguity in thinking it an equivocation. But, as I shall argue, Rorty's ambiguous uses of philosophy can be parsed according to a workable, if not always working, distinction. The device of distinct senses of philosophy enabled Rorty to both offer negative portraits of philosophy as practiced by some of his professional peers and at the same time put forward positive alternatives to what he regarded as a professionalized deformation. In the first place, the operative distinction can be described in temporal terms, as between *philosophy-as-it-has-been* and *philosophy-as-it-might-be*. A closely-related distinction can be cast in more purely conceptual terms, as one between *systematic-professional philosophy* on the one hand and *cultural-critical philosophy* on the other. There are doubtless other ways of casting these distinctions as they appear in Rorty's work.³ My point is just that the tension inherent in each of these ways of carving out a distinction between two ways of conceiving philosophy should not be seen as a confused ambiguity so much as a distinction through which is released a crucial challenge to contemporary philosophy.

This clarifying distinction, and the challenge it mounts, is valuable just insofar as the general shift in philosophical practice that Rorty was urging is already underway in many quarters of contemporary philosophy, though again without sufficient self-consciousness. Many philosophers in our midst have begun important new research projects that break from the traditional self-image of philosophy that dominated the discipline throughout much of the twentieth century. Many of these new projects are interdisciplinary, or better yet cross-disciplinary, to the core (such as the work taking place at the intersection of epistemology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive psychology or at the intersection of moral philosophy, moral psychology, and sociology, or at the intersection of political theory, political history, and political anthropology), some are forthrightly and proudly both empirical and philosophical

in orientation (such as work in science and technology studies on a range of scientific enterprises from studies in probability to psychiatric assessment or, in a different vein, recent work in analytic ethics and epistemology under the banner of 'experimental philosophy'), others involve metaphilosophical projects attempting to reread and rewrite the history of philosophy for the purposes of a more effective cultural criticism in the present (such as can be noted in feminist histories of philosophy), and still others are engaged in a deep reconstruction of philosophy itself for radical political, social, and moral purposes (recent debates over the status of ideal theory in political philosophy are one instance of this, though clearer cases are found in much recent work in critical philosophy of race, feminist philosophy, and queer theory).

Many of these projects could barely have been envisioned from the entrenched vantage points of the highly-professionalized and discipline-centric practices of philosophy that dominated academic philosophy in the middle decades of the last century. Despite that erstwhile dominance, many of us today are traveling down the paths that Rorty himself was encouraging us to explore well before we took our first few steps in this direction (this is literally true in my case, for I was taking my first *real* steps when a 48-year-old man published his first book). My hope, then, is that the very idea of Rortyan philosophy can be of some use in helping us to gain a little more self-consciousness about what we are doing when we are in the midst of reconstructing the practice of philosophy itself. We could all use a little more self-consciousness about what it means to be interdisciplinary, empirical, historically revisionary, radical, and political in our philosophical work. Very few of us were trained (not just by our mentors but above all by our selves) to do any of these things very well. We shall all do them better if we have a clearer sense of what is at stake in our new forms of philosophical self-fashioning. Rorty knew well how high these stakes can be.

Two conceptions of philosophy across Rorty's thought

To help develop my argument I shall draw on a wide range of Rorty's writings that help flesh out an implicit distinction therein between, on the one hand, a *professionally-dominant* and *presently-entrenched* mode of philosophy, and on the other hand, a more *cultural-critical* and *potentially-future* mode. Before doing so, I begin with a brief clarification of the terms of this distinction that will help organize the discussion to follow.

Rorty quite often wrote about philosophy as if he were merely offering a descriptive account of contemporary philosophical practice, namely as the kind of thing that the Analysts were doing in philosophy departments in the 1960s and the Continentals were doing in the 1980s (but mostly in literature departments rather than philosophy departments). This conception of philosophy is generally featured in contexts where Rorty is debunking the pretensions of the philosophical canon, insisting that philosophy does not play the great role in the story of humanity that it thinks it does, and holding that philosophy is best regarded as a private pastime which some of us are lucky enough to get paid for. When Rorty is debunking philosophy, in other words, we should read him as debunking the puffed-up claims of 1960s-era Analytic and 1980s-era Continental philosophy, insofar as those two philosophical eras can be characterized as making some pretty grand world-historical promises on their own behalf.

At other times Rorty wrote about philosophy in a more positive and prescriptive sense as a kind of intellectual exercise that is of abiding value for modern liberal democracies like America. Here is where Rorty invoked Dewey and James and Emerson in the context of defending a kind of pragmatist engagement in cultural criticism that amounts to thoughtful reflection about our most serious ethical, moral, social, and political problems. Rorty used a variety of labels for this more positive side of philosophy in his early work, but as the years went on he increasingly gravitated around the idea of what he once called, in a throwaway reference to Hegel in an early 1977 essay on Dewey, 'philosophy-as-criticism-of-culture' (*CP*, p. 74). Where philosophy is an achievement for Rorty, where it is a kind of practice capable of normative success, it functions as a means for criticizing our selves and boldly whomping up new concepts that help us make sense of who we are becoming and who we have been.

My argument is just this: in seeking to nudge things over from *professional philosophy* toward *cultural criticism*, Rorty was not abandoning philosophy at all. Rather, Rorty sought to abandon only a provincial self-conception of philosophy which had dominated the discipline through the middle of the twentieth century and which has in recent decades begun to give way to a broader image for which we can take Rorty as one of our models. Rorty should be seen as someone who sought to champion those of us who aspire to a more capacious conception of philosophy. Rorty would not agree with all of us all the time about what we say when we do all these things. But we need not solicit his agreement on everything. The point is that from a Rortyan perspective, these are exactly the kinds of things a philosopher should be doing once he/she has learned how to give up on the professionalized pretences of foundationalism.⁴

At this point, I shall shift gears and turn to matters more gray. In what follows, I offer what amounts to a barrage of textual evidence for the claims I have thus far been making. The evidence comes from a range of writings that, despite their multiplicity, comprise only a small portion of Rorty's extensive discussions of metaphilosophy. The writings I shall consider are drawn from across the full arc of a philosophic career that spanned more than half a century, the earliest dating from 1958 and the most recent from 2007. Seen together, these writings show a lifelong interest in the idea that philosophy can continue to play a positive role after the demise of foundationalist forms of philosophy. To be more specific, the narrative I offer below shows that Rorty in his earliest writings lacked the full degree of self-consciousness about the uses of philosophy he would only gradually come to develop in later work, after no small number of halting early starts. Early stammers notwithstanding, Rorty's work *always* evinced at least some positive image of philosophy. By the time we come to his most original philosophical contribution, namely his 1989 book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, we find a developed conception of the positive role of cultural critique that philosophy may someday soon come to play.⁵

"The Philosopher as Expert" (1958)

I begin with an early, unpublished essay of Rorty's that only recently made its way into print as an appendix to a new edition of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.⁶ At the core of Rorty's discussion in "The Philosopher as Expert" is a question about whether or not the 'professional' philosophy of the 'experts' is getting its due in contemporary intellectual life. In other words: are we philosophers being unjustifiably ignored by the literate public at large? Rorty answers this question in uncharacteristically circuitous fashion (indicating that the trademark clear prose of his mature work was not automatic to him but an achievement that first had to be perfected). The answer he develops can be boiled down to the essay's core contrast between philosophy as science and philosophy as art. According to the latter conception, philosophy is something like cultural criticism, for it involves clear articulation and assessment of 'the unexamined assumptions of a previous philosophy, or of culture' in a fashion that 'will make itself felt in a rapidly expanding series of extraphilosophical concerns' (*PMN*, p. 406). This is cultural criticism on a grand scale, to be sure, but Rorty's conception here in many ways anticipates what he would later think of when he wrote of certain canonical philosophers as changing the terms in which some historical culture was able to see itself.

Interestingly enough, this early essay is in many ways focused on a different conception of philosophy, one less centered on 'vision' and more focused on 'method' (*PMN*, p. 406). According to the picture of philosophy as science, philosophy is a technical discipline, of which one might gain a mastery sufficient to establish oneself as an expert. Rorty describes the philosopher as expert in this way:

Insofar as he does this kind of job, the philosopher puts aside the role of questioner of questions and sets himself the task of working within a quite restricted framework of questions, assumptions, and criteria. He is no longer a spectator of all time and all eternity, but is simply asking 'If we say X, can we then consistently say both Y and Z?'

(*PMN*, p. 410)

Philosophical expertise, in this more scientific sense, is a matter of squaring the work of the visionary philosophical artists with certain of our other beliefs as well as with certain of the assumptions internally assumed by whatever visionary program is under consideration. These expert philosophers are in many ways under-laborers whose job it is to explicate those compelling creative visions fashioned by the artists (philosophical and otherwise) who possess a truly culture-wide range. Rorty's conclusion in the essay is simply that expert-scientific philosophy performs a crucial role in our culture, but that it is not the kind of role that deserves to get more attention than it actually does. The expert-scientific philosopher talks in a highly technical language that only other experts can understand, but this is the only way in which they can get their job done. This is justifiable even if this technicality can be purchased only at the expense of unintelligibility to the broader culture at large. The division of labor that gets us to expertise, in other words, also implies a disciplinary divide that is not easily crossed. Rorty, at least in 1958, appears quite content with all of this.

The central contrast in this essay between the big synoptic capacities of intellectual thought as artistic cultural criticism and the narrower rigorous charge of intellect as methodical expertise would persist throughout Rorty's career. This contrast is just the earliest iteration of what I described above in terms of the distinction between two senses of philosophy that we find in any number of Rorty's writings. Yet what is most interesting in this early essay is not the contrast between scientific and artistic philosophy (for the terms in which this contrast gets developed are somewhat clumsily formulated in the essay). Rather, what stands out is how Rorty appears quite content with the first of

these conceptions, such that philosophy might seem to be rightly restricted to the technical matters of its own self-produced arcana. Whereas in many of his later writings, Rorty would favor a conception of the intellectual as a synthetic thinker with big ideas and wide cultural-critical capacity, in this essay Rorty offers a brief on behalf of a narrow, indeed almost bureaucratic, kind of philosophical professionalism.

What this essay shows, then, is that Rorty had long wrestled with the metaphilosophical questions at the heart of his best mature work. It also shows, I think, that Rorty was very early on quite willing to simply give the professionals free reign over the way in which we conceive of philosophy. Rorty throughout his career would remain ambiguous about whether 'philosophy' should refer to the narrow practice of the professionals or to the broader possibilities of a long historical tradition. In this early essay, Rorty is happy to let the professionals own the word (perhaps because he was at this point still an early-career junior scholar defending his own career choice). His strategy here might be seen as analogous to institutionalist definitions of art according to which 'art' just is whatever passes as such in the institutions of the art world. Those who, by contrast, insist on purveying a theory of what 'art' is against the grain of the art world too often find that they are simply not talking about the same thing that contemporary artists, curators, gallery owners, and gallerinas are talking about—they tend to slowly and surely slip into the kind of quaint irrelevance destined for those who display no interest in the chic.

In many of his later writings, Rorty would somewhat surprisingly continue to define philosophy in terms of what these expert-scientist professionals tend to do. These are the writings in which Rorty suggests that we do our best when we leave 'philosophy' (i.e., professional philosophy) behind in order to take up 'literary criticism' (i.e., cultural-critical philosophy). Observing Rorty's tendency toward a sociological or institutionalist definition of 'philosophy' in terms of 'what professional philosophers do' helps clear up the target of many of his criticisms of philosophy. It enables us, at the very least, to affirm a point that should have been obvious all along, namely that when Rorty disparages philosophy he is not disparaging the activities of his favorite philosophers like Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger.

But Rorty's strange move, offering what amounted to an institutionalist definition of philosophy, was not the only move in this essay. For Rorty here also at least gestures toward a different conception of philosophy, one that exceeds the confines of the professional under-laborers, and that is more akin to expansive artistic practice than to cold technical expertise. In his later

writings, Rorty would come to favor this image of the philosopher. Those are the writings in which he would suggest that perhaps we ought to retain the word 'philosophy' for a more important mission of cultural criticism. In this early essay Rorty indeed wrote about 'the role of critic and conscience of culture' and noted that 'the professional philosophers have abdicated it' in a way that enabled 'literary intellectuals to take over' (*PMN*, p. 397). One hears in these words an inchoate expression of the worry that the 'professional' philosophers have given up precisely what matters most. If the younger Rorty, then only a budding early-career philosopher, wanted to gloss over this worry, then the older Rorty, by then a thinker capable of dazzling the philosophical establishment, found the worry incurable within the confines of the bounds of philosophy as it then existed.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979)

Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was without doubt the landmark event of his career. It is the book that both made him a philosopher whose work is obligatory for every philosopher to know and that made him a philosopher that many, perhaps most, philosophers love to despise. The book itself is rather curious in terms of the philosophical genres it situates itself within. *Mirror* is best read as a mix of modern intellectual history and metaphilosophy, both of which are combined with a solid dose of rigorous argumentation in his contemporary philosophical vernacular. This combination produced a brilliant rhetorical maneuver. Rorty used the best tools of contemporary philosophy in order to show why those tools, and the broader intellectual contexts in which they were situated, can always be outflanked by using other tools that had long fallen out of favor in the discipline, namely the tools of interrogating philosophy for its own history (intellectual history) and its own presuppositions (metaphilosophy). Rorty, in short, used marginalized philosophy against centralized philosophy in order to put the margins back at the center. After Rorty, it is clear that no philosopher can now afford to ignore the history and meta-critique of their own discipline.

In the final part of this book, the part where the metaphilosophy really comes to the fore, Rorty surveys the conclusions of the historical criticisms he developed in exquisite detail across the first 300 pages. If the upshot of that criticism is that the modern project of epistemology at the heart of contemporary professional philosophy has failed, then the upshot of the final part is that modern intellectual culture is now in a good position to develop new projects under

the guidance of new conceptions of the work of thought. With epistemology finished, Rorty suggests, we might begin to turn finally to hermeneutics. At the core of the contrast with which Rorty ends one of the most infamous books of the second half of the twentieth century is a restatement of his basic, career-long contrast between the professionalized philosophy of technical expertise and the visionary philosophy of cultural criticism. Rorty's conception of hermeneutics offered at the end of *Mirror* is an early but still-halting iteration of what I have been referring to as Rorty's cultural-critical philosophy, just as the conception of epistemology that is his prey throughout the book should be seen as a paradigm of what I have been calling modern professionalized philosophy. *Mirror*, in short, is the first work in which Rorty really presses this contrast into service for the sake of metaphilosophical argument. While *Mirror* thus crystallized this contrast central to so much of Rorty's philosophical force, it did not in the end fully deliver the contrast in a way that Rorty would remain content with. As he admitted years later in an autobiographical piece written in the last months of his life: 'Part III [of *Mirror*] now strikes me as a false start: the contrast I drew there between "systematic" and "edifying" philosophy was not the one I wanted' (2010, p. 13).

Rorty is at his best in *Mirror* where he presses his critique of epistemology-centered systemic philosophy. He summarizes that critique as follows: 'the desire for a theory of knowledge is a desire for constraint—a desire to find "foundations" to which one might cling, frameworks beyond which one must not stray, objects which impose themselves, representations which cannot be gainsaid' (*PMN*, p. 315). Epistemology provided us with a constraint that is bigger and better than ourselves such that we can submit ourselves to its undeniable authority. The demise of the foundational project, Rorty notes, 'is often felt to leave a vacuum which needs to be filled' (*PMN*, p. 315). But Rorty's offering is not that hermeneutics will perform the role left emptied by the impending endgame of epistemology. It is rather that a culture which has abandoned epistemology will find itself freed up to turn its attention elsewhere, that is toward pursuits more hermeneutical in orientation, such that 'our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt' (*PMN*, p. 315).

Rorty much later wrote of himself that,

I am a hedgehog who, despite showering my reader with allusions and dropping lots of names, has really only one idea: the need to get beyond

representationalism, and thus into an intellectual world in which human beings are responsible only to each other.

(2004, p. 474)⁷

Once philosophy can get beyond foundational epistemology, and the representationalism that has been its most convincing iteration, it can assume a new self-conception according to which the only form that constraint takes is self-constraint (and yet is no less normatively authoritative for that reason).⁸ But this raises a problem, central to the argument of *Mirror*, and indeed central to all of Rorty's metaphilosophical meditations thereafter. What remains of philosophy on such a self-conception of philosophy? Why, in other words, insist on preserving the 'philosophy' in 'post-foundational philosophy'?

Rorty wrestles with this tension, but unsatisfactorily so, in the last chapter of *Mirror*. He contrasts his humble edifiers from the despised bully systematizers as follows: 'Great systematic philosophers, like great scientists, build for eternity. Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their own generation' (*PMN*, p. 369). Rorty's idea of edifying philosophy takes its cues from philosophical hermeneutics and existentialism. The final hundred pages of *Mirror* are peppered with generous references to Heidegger, Sartre, and especially Gadamer. Rorty would later recast the image of post-foundational philosophy in an idiom more Deweyan than Gadamerian, confessing that he had never really understood what Gadamer was up to.⁹ At the time, though, Rorty's best efforts went something like this:

To drop the notion of the philosopher as knowing something about knowing which nobody else knows so well would be to drop the notion that his voice always has an overriding claim on the attention of the other participants in the conversation.

(*PMN*, p. 393)

The image given in *Mirror* is strongly Gadamerian in its focus on the philosopher's familiarity with the history of philosophy. Under the greater influence of Dewey in subsequent writings Rorty would come to emphasize more and more the idea of post-epistemological philosophy as attending to a diverse range of pressing cultural subjects. The Gadamerian strain remains in the Deweyan idea insofar as a cultural-critical philosophy is one that will proceed through a thorough saturation in the history of philosophy, the history of ideas, and the history of culture itself. Gadamer embraced history because he was obsessed with the ancient Greeks. By contrast, Dewey embraced history because he was

obsessed with his contemporary America. Gadamer, like Heidegger, gives the impression through learned historical discourse of something like *profundity*. Dewey, like James, gives the impression through colloquial talk of something much more like *engagement*. The common thread that runs through both lineages, though, is that we philosophers should become edifiers who do not claim to know what we know by virtue of what we know about knowing, but rather claim to know what we know by virtue of our having patiently learned a great deal about whatever topic we happen to be talking about as well as having put hours of study into the various pitfalls and potentials of the various argumentative positions commonly assumed in debates about that topic.

The impending shift toward an explicitly pragmatist conception of philosophy was indeed already anticipated in *Mirror*. In that book Rorty had already appeared uncomfortable with his proposed alternative to epistemology. 'The notion of an edifying philosopher is, however, a paradox,' he admits (*PMN*, p. 370). The paradox, in part, has to do with insisting that post-systematic philosophy really is philosophy. Rorty announced at the outset of *Mirror* that the book is 'therapeutic rather than constructive' (*PMN*, p. 7). But cures are not really a part of the diseases they cast away. If edifying philosophy teaches us to give up on philosophy, then in what sense is edification still philosophy? Why not call *Mirror* something else instead, such as a contribution to 'the culture of the man of letters' (*PMN*, p. 4)? This term would indeed prove fecund for Rorty later in his life, but in *Mirror* he appears wanting with respect to how what he does remains philosophy. 'It is difficult,' Rorty finally confesses at the end of the book, 'to imagine what philosophy without epistemology could be' (*PMN*, p. 357). Yet Rorty is firm that he wants to find his way to this brave new form of philosophy. He explicitly affirms on the final page that "There is no danger of philosophy's 'coming to an end'" (*PMN*, p. 395). All that will end, Rorty argues, is epistemology. This ending frees us from the desire for confrontational constraint such that we can take seriously another modality of philosophy that will pursue only conversational constraint. But the details of what this other philosophical modality might be spells out a challenge not only at the heart of both *Mirror* itself and Rorty's many metaphilosophical exercises after *Mirror*, but more poignantly the difficulty of late-twentieth-century philosophy itself, at least insofar as we are willing to finally give up on all the foundationalist, metaphysical, and epistemological pretense that contingently characterized our discipline over the past few centuries. Working out the dialectic of these concerns would be one of Rorty's central philosophical preoccupations in nearly everything he would subsequently write.

Consequences of Pragmatism (1982)

The publication of *Mirror* with its claims about the roles and potentialities of philosophy was the cause of no small stir amongst many cliques in the profession of philosophy. Rorty soon found himself leaving Princeton philosophy for a non-departmental university professorship at Thomas Jefferson's University of Virginia. Rorty may have officially departed philosophy as a profession at this time, but I shall be arguing that he did so *only* in an official sense. As the author of *Mirror* prepared for the move down the East Coast he put the finishing touches to a volume of essays most of which were written at the same time as *Mirror*. A central concern in many of the essays in his 1982 *Consequences of Pragmatism* is what happens to philosophy once we take pragmatism, that is, the conclusions reached in *Mirror*, seriously.

Just as Rorty's answer to this question in *Mirror* was uneasy and ephemeral, so too is the discussion found in most of these essays. In a 1976 paper on Wittgenstein he asks, 'Does it make sense to speak of a new philosophical view as bringing an end to philosophy?' (*CP*, p. 22). In another 1976 essay on Heidegger and Dewey he spends a good deal of time worrying about varying claims about tendencies toward 'a disastrous abandonment of philosophy's proper function' (*CP*, p. 45). And in yet another 1976 paper explicitly thematizing the rise (and potential fall) of professional philosophy Rorty confidently states that 'philosophy as a technical academic subject will remain as remote from highbrow culture as is paleontology or classical philology' (*CP*, p. 65). That asserted, he nonetheless struggles to explain what philosophy might become such that it may be more proximate to 'highbrow culture'. One suggestion arrived at as the third of these 1976 essays meanders is what Rorty refers to as the 'genre' of 'literary criticism' (*CP*, p. 66). And though he does not manage to be at all clear about this notion in any of his writings that year, the suggestion would prove fruitful half a decade later. After flirting with the idea of 'edifying philosophy' as an alternative in his 1979 book he would return, in the 1982 'Introduction' to *Consequences*, to the idea of philosophy as literary and cultural critique. He would remain with that idea, more or less, until the end of his career.

Rorty claims in the first sentence of his introduction that the point of the book is to explicate the consequences of pragmatist philosophy (p. xiii). But consequences for whom? For philosophers? Or for non-philosophers? Rorty, in fact, was split between these two questions. Probably the best way of resolving the tension is to see Rorty as asking about the consequences of pragmatism for

philosophy as judged by the rest of culture. Thus, consequences of pragmatism for philosophers *according to* culture at large. Pragmatists can (though need not) remain philosophers, but their pragmatism advises them to see the value of their philosophical practice in terms that are not professionalized so much as drawn from cultural criticism. The rhetorical strategy Rorty adopts in the essay for splitting the differences is to distinguish little-p philosophy from big-P Philosophy. Thus his thesis is that, 'Pragmatists are saying that the best hope for philosophy is not to practice Philosophy' (CP, p. xv). In other words, pragmatists can (though need not) continue to think of themselves as philosophers so long as they accept their standards for their work from something more capacious and ranging than a systematic and technical effort at professionalization.

The shift toward positive philosophy is framed by Rorty as a move toward 'a culture in which neither the priests nor the physicists nor the poets nor the Party were thought of as more "rational," or more "scientific" or "deeper" than one another' (CP, p. xxxviii). Such a culture, he continues, 'would contain nobody called "the Philosopher" who could explain why and how certain areas of culture enjoyed a special relation to reality' (CP, p. xxxix). There would be no need for figures who claim for themselves an unconditional authority, because everyone would recognize such claims as nothing more than dressed-up authoritarianism on an intellectual par with earlier and more naked displays of theoretical aggression. Either we do not need to be bullied by the experts because with a little more training we too can see what they see or we will remain forever ignorant to their insight in which case the onus is on them to show how their expertise really rises above bullying. Such a culture has no place for authoritarian expertise because it has learned that it is better served by 'all-purpose intellectuals who [are] ready to offer a view on pretty much anything, in the hope of making it hang together with everything else' (CP, p. xxxix).

Here Rorty finally begins to unpack the metaphor for philosophy that he would find most productive, namely the idea of the philosopher as the freewheeling intellectual who, following Hegel, aspires for nothing more, but also nothing less, than holding their own time in thought. On this view, philosophy is best seen as 'much like what is sometimes called "culture criticism"—a term which has come to name the literary-historical-anthropological-political merry-go-round' (CP, p. xl). What are the qualities of the philosopher as cultural critic? As Rorty describes this figure, clearly writing the description for the new job he has just taken, 'he feels free to comment on anything at all,' 'he is a name-dropper,'

and 'he is the person who tells you how all the ways of making things hang together hang together' (CP, p. xl).

Philosophical cultural criticism is not premised on the idea that cultural criticism is inherently philosophical. Rather, all it needs to get off the ground is the quite plausible idea that somebody trained in philosophy can make a wider contribution to his or her culture by way of leveraging their learning toward discourses (inclusive of style, language, audience, and subject matter) that are of wider significance than those circumscribed by professionalization. Navigating this tension between professionalism's persistence and cultural criticism's cachet will never be easy. But it may prove fruitful, and precisely because it is difficult. In any event, Rorty's suggestion here is that it is bound to be more fruitful than keeping everything on the side of a professionalized Philosophy that claims to have both rigorous standards for expertise (it is, after all, a profession) and an ability to transcend the contingencies of history (it aims, after all, at the eternal objects of Philosophy).

In offering views as to how otherwise disparate things hang together, the philosophical cultural critic 'does not tell you about how all *possible* ways of making things hang together *must* hang together' and so 'he is doomed to become outdated' (CP, p. xl). Rorty is prepared to let philosophy, and thus himself, go the way of the cultural wind. If the seasons shift, and his philosophy perishes, then so be it. If the price of making ourselves relevant to the world in which we live is that we self-consciously assume the finitude imposed on the terms of that world, then this cost should be born so that we can stop promising to ourselves and one another that Philosophy will help us transcend all context into eternity. Are the gains worth the costs? There is no knock-down answer to this question. Your answer to this question will depend on what you want philosophy to do. That, precisely, is what is at issue. If the cost of cultural relevance is ephemerality, then the cost of transcendence on the other side is the enormous confidence that eternity is in our grip.

To think about how we might answer this question, consider as an example recent work in the philosophy of race. This is, surely, one of the most active and important subfields in contemporary philosophy. It also, more to the point, deals with one of the most philosophically fecund areas of contemporary culture. The status of race is widely contested in our culture today. That we lack adequate concepts for these conflicts is obvious to many, and it is also why we need something like a philosophy, or rather philosophies, of race. Despite their clear importance for us today, however, philosophers of race are quite obviously

destined for eventual irrelevance. Nobody believes that race will be a permanent category of human social organization, and certainly not a permanently-central socio-organizational category. Even if our descendants 20 generations downstream still think of themselves as racialized, it is not likely that they will think of their racialization as an important marker of social organization. That acknowledged, there is important work for us around here right now concerning the centrality of race for social organization and the oftentimes negative effects of that centrality. We need philosophical criticism of the concept of race and the way that concept is made (and allowed) to function in a diversity of contexts. What are the ethical implications of racial categorization? What are the ontological presumptions of such categorization? What are the historical conditions of possibility of such a mode of categorization? These are all questions to which philosophers can, and already are, contributing important reflections. These important reflections are destined for dusty archival deaths, because the very questions in virtue of which they are coherent are destined to become innocent arcana which future generations will be amused at with the same curious condescension with which we tend to treat certain theological disputations of centuries past. And yet the contributions of contemporary philosophers of race are not unimportant just because they are stamped with an indeterminate but certain expiry. These contributions are important just because the questions are important. To whom are the questions important? To us, of course. Nobody who succeeds at gaining even the smallest modicum of intellectual self-awareness in contemporary culture can fail to grasp the centrality of race to contemporary culture. Philosophy of race and other such ephemera matter, then, just because ephemera such as race matter a great deal within our current cultural paradigms.

Even if we are prepared to accept philosophy as an ephemeral practice bound to the finitude of our context, we might still ask what forms such philosophy as cultural criticism might take. What, in other words, does philosophy as cultural critique look like? The best way to answer such a question is probably to look at what forms philosophy as cultural critique has taken. This, at least, is what Rorty did as he became increasingly comfortable with cultural-critical philosophy as a preferred alternative to edifying philosophy. As he did so, his survey of the best historical exemplars of this conception of philosophy increasingly gravitated around the work of his pragmatist hero John Dewey. Indeed already in 1977 he had written, 'Dewey is just the philosopher one might want to reread if one were turning from Kant to Hegel, from a "metaphysics of experience" to a study of cultural development' (CP, p. 76).

"Introduction" to Vol. 8 of *The Later Works of John Dewey* (1986)

One central aspect of Rorty's increasing adoption of an idea of little-*p* philosophy as cultural criticism, in contrast to competing alternatives such as edifying philosophy, was the prominence of philosophical pragmatism in his intellectual outlook. If Dewey was one of the three principal heroes of *Mirror* and pragmatism just one of the names for the philosophical perspective adumbrated therein, then *Consequences* explicitly names pragmatism as Rorty's view, and Dewey increasingly became his primary hero.¹⁰ By the time Rorty wrote his most important book, namely *Contingency*, he clearly saw himself as a Deweyan intellectual. The rising prominence of Dewey in Rorty's self-narration of his intellectual inheritance was, I believe, coterminous with the increasing centrality of cultural criticism in Rorty's self-description of his philosophical practice.¹¹ This is just to say that pragmatist philosophy was central to Rorty's development of the idea of philosophy as cultural politics.

A key, but almost entirely neglected, essay for understanding this shift in Rorty's metaphilosophical vocabulary is his Introduction to Volume 8 of *The Later Works of John Dewey*. One reason this piece is especially worth considering is because it clarifies Rorty's attempt to articulate what he takes as valuable in Dewey's philosophical writings. This clarification is valuable insofar as many contemporary Deweyan pragmatists have argued (quite mistakenly I think) that Rorty's downbeat assessment of professionalized philosophy gains little warrant from Dewey's pragmatist metaphilosophy.¹²

Rorty discerns a tension in Dewey's own practice of philosophy between:

the image of the philosopher as social activist, concerned to keep the spirit of reform alive by constant criticism of the adequacy of current practices and institutions, and the philosopher as politically neutral theoretician—a specialist in, and authority upon, such peculiarly philosophical topics as the rules of logic, the nature of science, or the nature of thought.

(1986, p. x)

Rorty favors the first Deweyan image of philosopher as social critic. He finds the second image of philosopher as neutral theoretician to be largely an impediment to the first. For the latter kind of philosopher says things like, quoting Rorty parroting Dewey, 'You should share my desire for social reform, for it is grounded upon my philosophical research, certified by that "scientific method" which I have identified as the best way of thinking' (1986, p. xi). Rorty notes that

Dewey did not find this latter image of the philosopher to be an obstacle to the former. But Rorty suggests that in his attempts to be 'neutral' (Rorty's term) and 'scientific' (Dewey's), the pragmatist faces the trouble of spelling out exactly how we are to attain scientific neutrality in a way that does not beg all the important questions that are up for grabs in the space of social reform. Rorty thinks this is an impossible task that takes philosophy straight back to its shopworn self-image of epistemological expertise. In Dewey's case, Rorty suggests, the attempt to spell out 'scientific method' confronted an irresolvable ambiguity between method as 'a well-defined procedure—a method in the sense of a set of directions for what to do next, something like a recipe' and method as 'a mere recommendation to be open-minded, undogmatic, critical, and experimental' (1986, p. xiii). To the extent that Dewey shades toward method-as-procedure he risks falling back into the authoritarian rationalism that his pragmatist empiricism is meant to avert. But to the extent that Dewey shades toward method-as-experimentation he disabuses us of the idea that such 'method' is something that 'epistemologists' have special province over and unique 'expertise' about. Rorty himself clearly prefers the looser liberal conception of method, and wishes only that Dewey had too in a way that would have enabled him to fully adopt his philosophical self-image as a 'social activist' in preference to the sporadic self-image of a 'politically-neutral specialist' whose special brand of metaphysics guarantees a political payoff. Philosophers, Rorty thought, are not especially equipped to be neutral specialists at anything. We are not, for instance, more moral than the undergraduates to whom we teach moral philosophy. We are, pretty much by design of training, much worse at the sciences than the scientists whose practices of knowledge we claim specialties in. What we are especially well-equipped for, Rorty wants to propose instead, is a rigorous study of the possible moves on the philosophical chessboard combined with a capacity for gaining a synthetic vision of our cultural present. This does not make us useful specialists so much as it makes us potentially useful engaged practitioner-critics. It equips us to undertake a criticism of our own culture.

I find Rorty perceptive to have discerned in Dewey a tension that inhabits the vast majority of his major writings. I think Rorty's favored modality of philosophy as cultural critique is about as good a description as one can get of what Dewey is up to in some of his best contributions to social and political theory, many of which almost read as short little cultural-critical tracts for the times. But other of Dewey's books, especially those massive tomes where he is working out technical matters in philosophical logic or a systematic

metaphysics of experience, do not easily fit the mold in their technical style and philosophical abstraction.

How do we adjudicate this tension in Dewey's thought? Who, some have asked, is the real Dewey? Rorty might have mentioned on behalf of his favored interpretation of pragmatist philosophy that the majority of Dewey's prolific output in his mature period was writings more in a cultural-critical vein, namely thousands upon thousands of pages of almost constant contribution to pressing social, political, and cultural topics of the day. He might also have mentioned that Dewey himself often made explicit brief on behalf of a conception of philosophy as connected criticism. The most famous example of this comes from Dewey's 1917 essay "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy." Dewey there wrote, 'Philosophy records itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men' (*MW* 10, p. 42).¹³ There is, in other words, no distinctive set of problems that are specifically philosophical in nature. Philosophy, accordingly, ought to address itself to the most pressing problems of its culture. Dewey here and elsewhere explicitly and proudly claimed philosophy as a resource for the criticism of its own culture.

Rorty's point, then, could be read as saying that it is in such passages as these that we come into contact with the real Dewey. But his point is probably best put not in terms of finding out who the real Dewey was (a controversial matter that could probably never be settled) so much as in terms of figuring out for ourselves which Dewey we would do best to model ourselves after. If there is anything controversial that remains in Rorty's more modest claim, then it is simply his insistence that we cannot easily be both kinds of Dewey at once. To try to do so is to take back with one hand what we give with the other. The contentious point, in other words, is just that Philosophy tends to get in the way of philosophy insofar as systematic specialization often pulls against the efficacy of cultural criticism.

Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (1989)

Over the course of the 1980s, Rorty began spending more and more of his time hanging around departments of literature. In hindsight, then, it is no surprise that Rorty increasingly referred to the kind of philosophy he wished to nudge toward as 'literary criticism.'¹⁴ Yet at the time, this terminology was indeed surprising to many of his occasional readers including his colleagues in

philosophy departments who had rather closely followed his earlier contributions to internecine disciplinary debates. In the 1989 volume that Rorty would later describe as 'still my favorite among my own books' (2010, p. 17), the pragmatist unabashedly modeled philosophy on literary criticism, which he describes, in a kind of direct affront to professionalized philosophers, as 'the presiding intellectual discipline' that deserves to occupy a position of 'preeminence within the high culture of the democracies' (CIS, pp. 83, 82). The idea of philosophy as literary criticism forwarded in *Contingency* was thus decidedly not an attempt to specify something like a *Fach* to which academic parishioners might aspire—an aspiration elegantly mocked at the outset of the century by William James in his humorous description of 'the gray-plaster temperament of our bald-headed young PhD's boring each other at seminars' (quoted in Rorty, *PMN*, p. 136).¹⁵ Rorty offered literary criticism as a model for philosophy not because it would serve professionalization, but rather because it is just about as expansive a term as one can get for what the humanistic intellectual might do.

In a personal letter sent by Rorty to Jonathan Lear in November of 1981, as some of the ideas for *Contingency* were already brewing, he offers a formulation that nicely frames the idea:

I don't want to say that 'where we're going is literary criticism' but rather that something like 'culture criticism'—illustrated by Carlyle and Goethe and Arnold and Mill (in the parts of Mill which don't get assigned in philosophy courses) [—] is an all-embracing genre within which it doesn't pay to divide out the lit. crit. from the philosophy. If both literary criticism and philosophy get dissolved into this wider thing, that would be fine with me.

(RRP, Box 30, Folder 2; bracket inserted)¹⁶

Rorty is here clearly not fully confident with the vocabulary he would come to settle on by the end of the decade. But terminology notwithstanding, the idea is what matters. What matters is the full breadth of the thing that Rorty is after. That he would call this 'culture criticism' at one point and 'literary criticism' at another matters little to the underlying vision of philosophy's future. Both are gestures to something much more capacious than philosophy's erstwhile gray-plaster temperaments would have let themselves imagine.

Contingency begins with a version of that contrast between two images of philosophy I have been tracking. Rorty focuses on 'a split within philosophy' between those 'faithful to the Enlightenment [and] the cause of science' and a Romantic strain in philosophy less impressed with the scientist who pretends to represent reality in itself and more in favor of 'the political utopian and

the innovative artist' for whom the whole metaphor of truth as representations of a world that is discovered rather than developed is 'pointless' (CIS, pp. 3, 4). While the first part of *Contingency* focuses on negative criticisms of Enlightenment-style philosophy, the second part begins to roll out the more positive image of a Romantic-styled philosophy. In a chapter titled 'Private Irony and Liberal Hope' Rorty begins with a conception of philosophy as a 'dialectical' project, one that is modeled not around 'argumentative procedure' so much as around 'literary skill' (CIS, p. 78). Rorty's exemplar for this is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book which 'helped turn [philosophy] into a literary genre' by helping to 'de-metaphysize philosophy' (CIS, p. 79). With this Rorty executes his subtle but enormous kaleidoscopic shift. A more up-to-date word for what I have been calling "dialectic"; Rorty simply says, 'would be "literary criticism"' (CIS, p. 79).

Rorty immediately explains the idea in terms of its full-scale capaciousness:

the term 'literary criticism' has been stretched further and further in the course of our century ... [such that] instead of changing the term 'literary criticism' to something like 'culture criticism,' we have instead stretched the word 'literature' to cover whatever the literary critics criticize.

(CIS, p. 81)

The term itself may be uncomfortable, Rorty confesses, but this has as much to do with the academic origins of our ill ease as with the term itself.

Once the range of literary criticism is stretched that far there is, of course, less and less point in calling it *literary* criticism. But for accidental historical reasons, having to do with the way in which intellectuals got jobs in universities by pretending to pursue academic specialties, the name has stuck.

(CIS, p. 81)

The important point, again, concerns not literature or philosophy or science or art so much as a preoccupation that would come to seem increasingly central to Rorty.

Rorty wrote about literature with as capacious a sensibility as is imaginable: "The word "literature" now covers just about every sort of book which might conceivably have moral relevance—might conceivably alter one's sense of what is possible and important' (CIS, p. 82). We philosophers should become literary critics, Rorty seemed to be saying, because the object of our concern really ought to be measured in terms of the contribution to the wider moralities of

our wider culture. Literary criticism, or cultural critique, brings into focus the important contributions that philosophy *can* make to the liberal moralities of the West. All the argumentative arcana and technical tedium of our journal articles, anthologies, and monographs will, Rorty suggests, ultimately be judged by whether or not they 'facilitate moral reflection' (*CIS*, p. 82). Rorty's point, of course, is not that professional philosophical work cannot facilitate moral reflection. Rather his point is just to challenge philosophy to take this aspect of its brief much more seriously. We have tended to increasingly think of ourselves over the past few centuries as discharging a particular set of duties that involve forms of expertise and professionalization which have less and less to do with broader matters of cultural morality. This is to our discredit. But it is redeemable. We can do better. And indeed we might, if only we bother to try.

Rorty was suggesting that we philosophers should feel free to treat what he called 'literary criticism' as the centermost province of our intellectual mission. This, Rorty was suggesting, is likely the best general job description we can give ourselves if we are at all serious about the pragmatist challenge to foundationalism, representationalism, dualism, and so on (in short, to the 'Philosophy' *Fach*). Many philosophers these days buy that negative critique. Yet they still balk at Rorty's suggestion that philosophy should see itself as a kind of literature. But if all that Rorty meant by this is that philosophy should see itself as an all-purpose and free-wheeling attempt to facilitate moral reflection, then what's the problem? Isn't Rorty really just telling us to do what we all wish we really did do better than we tend to?

Philosophy as Cultural Politics (2007)

Most of Rorty's many metaphilosophical musings after *Contingency* contain ample reference to a positive image of philosophy as literary and cultural critique. Less than half a decade after *Contingency* he urged, in a widely-read 1993 reply to Hilary Putnam, that we philosophers ought to 'move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics to cultural politics, from claims to knowledge and appeals to self-evidence to suggestions about what we should try' (*TP*, p. 57). Nearly two decades worth of writings, including publications both in highly-professionalized journals and more cultural-critical venues, return time and again to this core and crucial theme of philosophy as cultural politics.

We can retrospectively recognize a kind of culmination of this theme in a brief two-page preface to the fourth and final volume of his *Collected Papers*

published in 2007. Here, in one of his very last writings printed just months before he passed away, the indefatigable critic of foundationalist philosophy offered a final, and incisively concise, characterization of the positive role that he hoped philosophy might yet come to play. Many were surprised to find such a bold endorsement of philosophy from one of philosophy's staunchest self-critics.¹⁷ But, as I have argued, Rorty was *always* of two minds about philosophy. Weary of the obsolete pretensions of foundationalist philosophy he wholly embraced the imaginative engagements of literary philosophy. That Rorty was of two minds about philosophy is not a symptom of metaphilosophical deficiency on his part. Philosophy, after all, is just the sort of thing that we *ought* to be of two minds about. This has always been the case with would-be and may-be philosophers from Socrates to Hume to Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein (and now Rorty).

Rorty's focus in his 2007 preface is on philosophy's possible relevance to 'humanity's ongoing conversation about what to do with itself' (*PCP*, p. ix). Since we no longer hold any foundationalist pretensions of being able to either predict where this conversation will wind up, we should be content to see ourselves as contributors to the conversation about who we are. This way of putting things, of course, hearkens back to claims in *Mirror* to the effect that 'edifying philosophy aims at continuing the conversation rather than at discovering truth,' but without couching the concept of conversation in terms of an edifying philosophical hermeneutics-cum-existentialism (*PMN*, p. 373).

Rorty was now explicitly thinking about 'conversation' in terms of an idea of cultural criticism: 'The progress of this conversation has engendered new social practices, and changes in the vocabularies deployed in moral and political deliberation. To suggest further novelties is to intervene in cultural politics' (*PCP*, p. ix). Rorty appeals to his pragmatist hero, who had long since come to the fore of his personal pantheon of heroes pushing aside Heidegger and Gadamer, to make his principal point: 'Dewey hoped that philosophy professors would see such intervention as their principal assignment' (*PCP*, p. ix). According to this brief for cultural-critical philosophy, our job as philosophers is to contribute to an ongoing conversation about who we are and may yet become. But what would this look like in practice? In response, consider two features of the positive conception of philosophy exhibited in Rorty's final preface.

First, it would seem to involve a more expansive notion of the problems that philosophy ought to take as its primary subject matter. Dewey had claimed, of course, that we should shift our attention from purely philosophical problems to more practical problems confronted by persons in the course of

actual experience. Rorty notes in this preface that 'The professionalization of philosophy, its transformation into an academic discipline, was a necessary evil' (*PCP*, p. x). The best way to make good on philosophy is for we philosophers to involve ourselves as much as is possible in debates going on outside of philosophy: 'not just natural science, but art, literature, religion, and politics as well' (*PCP*, p. x). We should become wide-ranging inter-disciplinarians with a capacious concept of our charge as critics.

Second, the practice of philosophy as cultural criticism would presumably also involve an assessment of rival philosophical disputes in terms of the difference they make to the cultural conversation in which they should be properly located. On this point, Rorty urges that 'we look at relatively specialized and technical debates between contemporary philosophers in the light of our hopes for cultural change' (*PCP*, p. x). Philosophical disputation, in other words, should not be seen as an affair to be autonomously judged by the disputants. We must come to practice and assess philosophy in terms of its relevance to and yield for the culture that is its context. So, for example, a dispute between Kantian and Deweyan moral theory ought to be resolved not just in terms of the force of the better argument with an eye toward the clarification of our moral concepts but also with an eye toward how we might take up each of these competing moral theories in the contemporary moral life and what results we might expect from their being thus operationalized.¹⁸ Rorty refers to this in terms of philosophy as an intervention into cultural politics. He might just as well have called it philosophical cultural critique. For that is a term that is suitable for many of us today.

Conclusion: Pragmatist philosophy as cultural critique

Richard Rorty challenged philosophy—he did not conclude it. In the course of issuing his provocations and ironizations, Rorty had a great many positive things to say about philosophy, its function in contemporary culture, and its future potentialities. This may come as a surprise to critics who reject his work for its supposed insistence on the necessity of an imminent end of philosophy. As a final piece of evidence, consider an instructive metaphilosophical piece published in 1992 where Rorty addresses this criticism head-on:

I am often accused of being an 'end of philosophy' thinker, and I should like to take this occasion to reemphasize (as I tried to do on the final page of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) that philosophy is just not the sort of thing that can

have an end—it is too vague and amorphous a term to bear the weight of predicates like 'beginning' or 'end.' What does have a beginning, and may now be coming to an end, is three hundred years' worth of attempts to bridge the gap which the Cartesian, representationalist picture of knowledge and inquiry led us to imagine existed.

(*LT* [from the 1992 introduction], p. 374)¹⁹

It is more misleading than helpful to criticize Rorty's erstwhile claims that make him sound as if he wanted philosophy to come to an end. It would be more instructive for us to consider instead Rorty's idea that it is high time that philosophy gets its act together.

Rorty challenged philosophy to better discharge its obligations to its culture, to its practitioners, and to its many other audiences. As it happens, a great many philosophers now practice philosophy in ways that suggest that we have begun to take this challenge quite seriously indeed. Philosophy over the past few decades has become much better situated vis-à-vis its culture. This is exemplified by much recent work in feminist philosophy, critical race philosophy, much work in philosophy and history of science and philosophy of technology, empirically-informed philosophy of mind, wide swaths of political philosophy, environmental philosophy, embodied philosophy, and countless strands of discipline-centering contributions in analytic, continental, and pragmatist philosophy. What we can witness in all of this work is, as Philip Kitcher puts it in an essay also drawing on Dewey, philosophy turning itself 'inside out' such that those concerns that were once core to the discipline are becoming increasingly peripheral in order to make room for pressing cultural-critical matters that everyone understands the value of philosophical reflection upon (Kitcher, 2011).

It is not clear that Rorty himself had anything to do with this major turning in the work of philosophy. But neither is it clear that he had nothing to do with philosophy's ongoing work in turning itself inside out. What is clear, though it has not yet been clearly seen by enough philosophers, is that Rorty offers a positive self-image for these reconstructed practitioners of philosophy who have been springing up in recent decades. Rorty nowhere systematically set out the terms of this new positive self-image for philosophical practice. But this is because such systematicity would not be in good keeping with the self-image he had in mind. Without backsliding into the authoritarianism that is corollary with systematicity we can, nevertheless, arrive at a positive self-image of philosophical cultural critique.

Rorty's achievement should be understood in terms of challenging a highly-professionalized tradition of philosophical experts to transform themselves into a breed of more capacious intellectuals who eagerly and confidently push themselves toward a more engaged practice of philosophy as cultural politics. Rorty was not alone amongst late-twentieth-century philosophers pursuing such reflexive provocations.²⁰ That Rorty was not a singular gadfly, but rather just one particularly prominent entrant midst a whole magazine of entreaties, should give us greater confidence in hoping yet for better cultural-critical philosophies in the near future.²¹

Notes

- 1 The depth of Rorty's debt to Hume seems to me underappreciated by most of his commentators. Certainly it is underexplored in the existing scholarship. For an important exception, drawing attention to the sort of metaphilosophical analogies between Rorty and Hume I here seek to exploit, see a discussion by Michael Williams (2003). Whereas Williams looks to make the connection in order to point out a problematic ambiguity in Rorty's metaphilosophy, I seek to use the connection as the basis for highlighting a productive tension in Rorty's conception(s) of philosophy.
- 2 Alan Malachowski, long a sympathetic expositor, notes that Rorty wanted, 'to change our conception of what philosophy is, what it involves, the ways in which it ought to be practiced and the topics that it should deal with' (2002, p. 3). Christopher Voparil explicates at length a positive conception of 'politics and vision' in Rorty's work (2006). Eduardo Mendieta describes Rorty as having helped us see that, 'Philosophy can help transform the world only if it first transforms itself, and it transforms itself by ceasing to be deluded about its royal mission' (2006, p. xvii). Michael Bacon describes Rorty's pragmatist anti-representationalism in terms that aim to make sense of 'the glory' of this philosophy idea in terms of 'its relevance for social questions' (2009, p. xii). David Rondel similarly claims of Rorty's 'evangelical metaphilosophy' that 'it recommends that philosophers should seek to remake their own discipline in exactly the open-ended fashion that the ironist seeks to remake herself—with hope, open-mindedness, and a refusal to accept that any such remaking represents the final word' (2011a, p. 165). I am also happy to report that many of the contributors to the present volume have argued that we can find a positive conception of philosophy in Rorty. What I offer here thus might be described as a kind of synthesizing framework in which some of the views well represented in this collection can be situated. A short sample from authors

herein includes Bjørn Ramberg ('A fundamental aspect of Rorty's contribution to philosophy in the spirit of pragmatism consists in drawing up, and attempting to implement, proposals for how we may, using language, do various things differently from the way we have been doing them up to now' [this volume, p.53]), Richard Shusterman ('a life of bold and wide-ranging philosophical inquiry' [this volume, p. 107]), and Esa Saarinen ('That the philosopher could, and should help, is the very essence of Rorty's point' [this volume, p. 146]). Robert Brandom, in an earlier essay, writes, 'Rorty sees philosophy as having an absolutely crucial cultural role to play in the current situation—a role far more significant than that envisaged by most analytic philosophers' (2000a, p. x).

- 3 See Wojciech Mąlecki (2009) on Rorty for a related distinction drawn up in terms of 'vertical' and 'horizontal' philosophy.
- 4 I thus fail to see why so many contemporary philosophers who are critical of our entrenched parochialization take Rorty's elegant criticisms of the same as an affront to their own efforts. I suspect that the lingering differences between Rorty and most other contemporary post-foundationalist philosophers can be boiled down to this: Rorty was less sanguine than most of us are about the hopes of converting our discipline to one that operates with a post-foundationalist and post-professionalized self-image. While many of us think that philosophy is capable of nudging itself in a post-foundational direction, Rorty rarely made much noise about any hopes he had for such a prospect, preferring instead to talk in terms of intellectual culture going post-philosophical. This is because Rorty thought that we post-foundationalists would find more allies in literature, history, and anthropology departments than we would in our own departments. I am not sure if Rorty's predictions will be born out or not. But I would insist that his lack of optimism on this score should not be taken for a lack of meliorism—Rorty tirelessly wrote and read on behalf of his favored image of philosophical practice and in so doing offers us a model for what we might yet become.
- 5 It may be useful to situate my argument vis-à-vis two recent essays from a symposium on the subject of cultural politics in Rorty's metaphilosophy. Both essays offer nuanced readings of the place, and time, of cultural criticism in Rorty's conception of philosophy. David Hiley, with whom I pretty much agree, writes that, 'Rorty gave various names at different times to the activity that might help once we abandon [systematic philosophy], going on to name 'edification,' 'pragmatism,' 'post-modernist bourgeois liberalism,' and 'liberal irony' (2011, p. 47). My minor tweak is just to suggest that 'cultural criticism' is the best description that Rorty finally settled on, after having expressed some doubts about (nearly) all of the others. In contrast to my agreement with Hiley, I pretty much disagree with Christopher Voparil (usually one of my favorite Rorty commentators) when he writes that 'Rorty has gone from inviting but being rather noncommittal about

philosophy getting involved in cultural politics in the 1970s, to believing in the 1980s and 1990s that novelists, poets, and journalists alone can do the work, to thinking in his final collection [of 2007] that the intervention of philosophers is absolutely necessary' (2011a, p. 115). My argument below is that Rorty was from the beginning (as early as 1958) working toward an illumination of philosophy's positive role. Where Voparil holds that 'At this early stage [the 1970s], Rorty is noncommittal about a positive role for philosophy in this broad practice of culture criticism' (p. 117), I hold that Rorty's early writings rather evince a lack of commitment about *how* to best conceptualize philosophy's positive role. More importantly, I see an increasing clarity over time in Rorty's work concerning how to conceptualize positive philosophy. It is mostly on this point that I am in disagreement with Voparil, who claims that 'by the late 1980s Rorty's developing position pretty clearly writes off philosophy' (p. 117) only to begin 'a revision' of that stance beginning around the time of his 'Feminism and Pragmatism' Tanner Lectures given in 1991 (published as Rorty [1993a]). My view is that Rorty developed increasingly clearer ways of distinguishing two forms of philosophy, such that the only thing Rorty *ever* seriously 'wrote off' was highly-professionalized philosophy.

- 6 I first came across this piece when working as an archival assistant for sociologist Neil Gross who was at the time preparing his intellectual biography-cum-sociology of Rorty (cf. Gross [2008]). I left Stanford one Spring day, thanks to Gross and to Rorty, with two copies of this early essay, one dating from Rorty's time at Wellesley in the late 1950s and another dating from Rorty's first years at Princeton in the early 1960s. I mention the story of these multiple drafts for two reasons. First, Rorty evidently took this metaphilosophical piece seriously enough to work on it over the span of more than a few years, during which he was to produce some highly-regarded philosophical work of his own. Second, Rorty's correspondence reveals that he took the piece seriously enough to send it off for publication, though he failed to find a suitable venue. Gross subsequently helped arrange to have the piece published in Princeton University Press's re-edition of *PMN*.
- 7 Note that the shortened version of this essay included in Rorty's *PCP* collection of papers excerpts the crucial quoted line.
- 8 See Rorty (*CIS*, p. 189) on the remaining normative force of self-conscious post-foundationalism, an idea that I develop in detail vis-à-vis Rorty in Koopman (2011).
- 9 Rorty later wrote that 'my invocation of Gadamerian hermeneutics was feeble and unproductive' (2010, p. 13), but contrast Raymond Geuss's (2008, p. 86) recollection of Gadamer's importance for Rorty at the time.
- 10 As Rorty put it in a 1991 introduction to a collection of papers, Dewey is 'the figure who, in the decade since I wrote *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, has, in my imagination, gradually eclipsed Wittgenstein and Heidegger' (*ORT*, p. 16).

- 11 For similar arguments see recent work by Rondel (2011b, p. 57) and Voparil (this volume, p. 107).
- 12 These arguments on behalf of Dewey against Rorty need to be read as situated in a much wider terrain of debate over Rorty's credentials as a Deweyan pragmatist. See, for instance, criticisms from contemporary classical pragmatists such as James Gouinlock (1995), Susan Haack (1995), and Ralph Sleeper (1985), as well as Dewey scholars such as Larry Hickman (2007) and intellectual historians of pragmatism such as Robert Westbrook (2005). For two recent and important re-evaluations of Rorty from within the center of contemporary classical pragmatist philosophy see Vincent Colapietro (2011) and Michael Eldridge (2009). For more recent responses to the disputes amongst the previous generations of pragmatists see Mark Sanders (2009), David Rondel (2011b), Chris Voparil (2012 [this volume, p. 107]), and in a broader sense my own prior efforts at offering terms for a rapprochement between what I have referred to as debates between 'paleopragmatists' and 'neopragmatists' in Koopman (2007, 2009). Another carp I have not emphasized before but which I may as well go ahead and air now is that it is not clear to me how there is anything quite Jamesian or Deweyan about insisting that Rorty is not entitled to make what use of James or Dewey he needs to in order to fashion himself into the kind of situated cultural critical philosopher that James and Dewey were before him. Rorty, I should think, ought to be free to leverage the spirit of pragmatist methods and orientations against the letter of any particular pragmatist theory with which he disagrees on pragmatic grounds. In borrowing the spirit of a self-image, and not always the letter of a doctrine, from the classical pragmatists, Rorty renewed that spirit so that pragmatist philosophical thought might continue to contribute to a wider public discourse in the manner of what I am calling cultural criticism.
- 13 Dewey went on to famously adumbrate this metaphilosophical pragmatism in issuing the following provocative challenge to his philosophical contemporaries: 'philosophy in America will be lost between chewing a historic cud long since reduced to woody fibre, or an apologetics for lost causes (lost to natural science), or a scholastic, schematic formalism, unless it can somehow bring to consciousness America's own needs and its own implicit principle of successful action' (*MW* 10, p. 47).
- 14 See Rorty (*CP*, pp. 66, 139) for two early (from 1976 and 1981 respectively) uses of the term that rose into prominence in Rorty's writings across the 1980s.
- 15 James to George Santayana, May 2, 1905, from James 1920, p. 228, and quoted in Rorty, *PMN*, p. 136.
- 16 The letter is from Rorty to Jonathan Lear, dated Nov. 17, 1981, and can be accessed at the UC Irvine collection of the Richard Rorty Papers, Box 30, Folder 2.
- 17 See the opening paragraphs of the discussions by Shusterman (this volume, p. 165) and Voparil (2011a, p. 115), and my response above in note 5.

18 I am here glossing the argument given in Rorty's 2004 essay 'Kant vs. Dewey: The Current Situation of Moral Philosophy' included in the *PCP* collection.

19 Almost a decade later Rorty would write,

Would [the end of authoritarian epistemology] be the end of philosophy? Certainly not. There would still be the need to reconcile the old and the new—to reshape old metaphors and vocabularies so as to accommodate them to new insights. That is why philosophy will last as long as cultural change does. But philosophy may eventually cease to be thought of as a super-science, or as supplying a foundation for science, or as a substitute for religion, or as supplying weapons to be used to defend either religion or science against their cultured despisers. Philosophy would be a matter of conciliating the human present with the human past.

(2000c, p. 218)

20 Two other thinkers of stature who immediately spring to mind are Bernard Williams (thinking of defected high church analytic philosophers who finally forswore analytic boasts about scientific rigor) and Michel Foucault (thinking of paradigmatic continental philosophers who rejected the pretences of phenomenological rigor). My claim is that all three of these thinkers were striving to make room for a positive image of philosophy as cultural critique, an image that serves up particularly useful self-conceptions for those many strands of cultural critical philosophy referenced in the previous paragraph. For readings of the work of these other two philosophers along these lines see my interpretations in Koopman (2010) on Williams and Koopman (2013) on Foucault.

21 For insightful comments on earlier versions of this material I would like to thank Christopher Voparil, David Rondel, Alan Reynolds, Alexis Dianda, Elena Clare Cuffari, and members of an audience (especially Vincent Colapietro) at a *Society for Advancement of American Philosophy* panel on the work of Richard Rorty.

Pragmatist Philosophy and Enlarging Human Freedom

Rorty's Deweyan Pragmatism

Christopher J. Voparil

My perspective in this chapter goes against the grain of received views about Rorty's relation to Dewey. I argue that the basic motivation behind Rorty's thinking and writing is a fundamentally Deweyan one: promoting ethical, social, and political change by reconceiving our understanding of philosophy and its role in the culture. More specifically, I suggest that the idea of 'philosophy as cultural politics' that emerges in Rorty's final collection of essays can be read as a culmination of an effort begun in the mid-1970s to rejuvenate the 'celebrations of American democracy, naturalism, and social reconstruction' he associated with the 'heroic period of Deweyan pragmatism' between the wars (*CP*, pp. 64, 61), albeit with a few key revisions. Not only do I see these two thinkers as having more in common than most commentators, I locate their particular points of divergence differently. As a result, ways in which Rorty may be seen as assuming the mantle of Deweyan pragmatist philosophy that have not sufficiently been recognized come into view.

The focus of this chapter is what Matthew Festenstein has called 'the political meaning of the pragmatist tradition in philosophy' (2001, p. 203). I read both Rorty and Dewey as committed to a conception of philosophy as an instrument of social change embodied in what Rorty called, borrowing a phrase from Sidney Hook, the project of 'enlarging human freedom' (*CP*, p. 69). The differences arise when Rorty objects to particular elements in Dewey's work, like the project of constructive metaphysics in *Experience and Nature*, that he believes get in the way of reconstructing philosophy as an instrument of social change. Stated most starkly, Rorty's approach can be summed up by his notion of 'putting politics first and tailoring a philosophy to suit' (*ORT*, p. 178).¹ He

Bloomsbury Studies in American Philosophy

Bloomsbury Studies in American Philosophy presents cutting-edge scholarship in both the history of and contemporary movements in American philosophy. The wholly original arguments, perspectives, and research findings in titles in this series make it an important and stimulating resource for students and academics from across the field.

America's First Women Philosophers, Dorothy G. Rogers
Feminist Epistemology and American Pragmatism, Alexandra L. Shuford
John Searle and the Construction of Social Reality, Joshua Rust
The Legacy of John Rawls, edited by Thom Brooks and Fabian Freyenhagen
Nozick, Autonomy and Compensation, Dale F. Murray
Peirce, James, and a Pragmatic Philosophy of Religion, John W. Woell
Peirce's Philosophy of Communication, Mats Bergman
Peirce's Pragmatic Theory of Inquiry, Elizabeth Cooke
Philosophy of History After Hayden White, edited by Robert Doran
Pragmatist Metaphysics, Sami Pihlström
Quine on Meaning, Eve Gaudet
Quine's Naturalism, Paul A. Gregory
Reality and Its Appearance, Nicholas Rescher
Relativism in Contemporary American Philosophy, Timothy M. Mosteller
Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism, Edward J. Grippe
Thomas Kuhn's Revolution, James A. Marcum
Varieties of Pragmatism, Douglas McDermid
Virtue Ethics: Dewey and MacIntyre, Stephen Carden

Richard Rorty

From Pragmatist Philosophy to
Cultural Politics

Edited by

Alexander Gröschner, Colin Koopman,
and Mike Sandbothe

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Contents

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

175 Fifth Avenue
New York
NY 10010
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2013

© Alexander Gröschner, Colin Koopman, Mike Sandbothe, and Contributors, 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury Academic or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4411-5426-2

ePub: 978-1-4411-0669-8

ePDF: 978-1-4411-7131-3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Fakenham Prepress Solutions, Fakenham, Norfolk NR21 8NN

Printed and bound in Great Britain

Contributors	vii
Preface <i>Alexander Gröschner, Colin Koopman, and Mike Sandbothe</i>	x
Abbreviations of Works by Richard Rorty	xiii
Introduction	
1 From Pragmatist Philosophy to Cultural Politics: An Overview of the Contributions in this Volume <i>Alexander Gröschner and Mike Sandbothe</i>	3
2 “... And to Define America, Her Athletic Democracy”: The Philosopher and the Language Shaper. In Memory of Richard Rorty <i>Jürgen Habermas</i>	9
Part 1 Pragmatist Philosophy	
3 An Arc of Thought: From Rorty’s Eliminative Materialism to His Pragmatism <i>Robert Brandom</i>	23
4 The Contingent Status of Epistemic Norms: Rorty, Kantian Pragmatisms, and Feminist Epistemologies <i>Susan Dieleman</i>	31
5 For the Sake of His Own Generation: Rorty on Destruction and Edification <i>Bjørn Torggrim Ramberg</i>	49
Part 2 From Pragmatist Philosophy to Cultural Politics	
6 Challenging Philosophy: Rorty’s Positive Conception of Philosophy as Cultural Criticism <i>Colin Koopman</i>	75
7 Pragmatist Philosophy and Enlarging Human Freedom: Rorty’s Deweyan Pragmatism <i>Christopher J. Voparil</i>	107

Part 3 Cultural Politics

8	The Transformation of Citizenship: Rorty's Concept of Cosmopolitan Patriotism <i>Saskia Sassen</i>	129
9	Kindness to Babies and Other Radical Ideas: Rorty's Anti-Cynical Philosophy <i>Esa Saarinen</i>	145
10	Pragmatism and Cultural Politics: Variations on a Rortyan Theme <i>Richard Shusterman</i>	165
	Bibliography	191
	Index	203

Contributors

Robert Brandom, Professor of Philosophy
University of Pittsburgh, USA

Selected Publications: *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (Harvard University Press, 2011); *Reason in Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 2009); *Between Saying and Doing* (Oxford University Press, 2008); *Articulating Reasons* (Harvard University Press, 2000); *Making It Explicit* (Harvard University Press, 1994).

Susan Dieleman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Selected Publications: "The Roots of Rorty's Philosophy: Catharine A. MacKinnon" in *Pragmatism Today: The Journal of the Central-European Pragmatist Forum* (2011); "A Feminist Pragmatist Account of Epistemic Inclusion" in Maurice Hamington & Celia Bardwell-Jones (eds.), *Contemporary Feminist Pragmatism* (Routledge, 2012).

Alexander Gröschner, Post-Doctoral Researcher
TUM School of Education, Technische Universität München, Germany

Selected Publications: *Pragmatismus als Kulturpolitik [Pragmatism as Cultural Politics]* (co-edited with Mike Sandbothe, Suhrkamp, 2011); *Innovation als Lernaufgabe [Innovation as a Learning Task]* (Waxmann, 2011).

Jürgen Habermas, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy
University of Frankfurt, Germany

Selected Publications: *The Crisis of the European Union* (Wiley, 2012); *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays* (Wiley, 2008); *The Future of Human Nature* (Blackwell, 2003), *Truth and Justification* (Polity Press, 1998); *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Beacon Press, 1981).

Colin Koopman, Assistant Professor of Philosophy
University of Oregon, USA

Selected Publications: *Genealogy as Critique: The Problems of Modernity in Foucault* (Indiana University Press, 2013); *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey, and Rorty* (Columbia University Press, 2009); "Rorty's Linguistic Turn: Why (More Than) Language Matters to Philosophy" in *Contemporary Pragmatism* (2011).

Bjørn Torgrim Ramberg, Professor of Philosophy
Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature (CSMN), University of Oslo, Norway

Selected Publications: *Reflections and Replies: Essays on Tyler Burge* (MIT Press, 2003); *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language* (Blackwell, 1989); "Rorty, Davidson, and the Future of Metaphysics in America" in Cheryl Misak (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of American Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

Esa Saarinen, Professor of Applied Philosophy
Aalto University, Finland

Selected Publications: *Essays on Systems Intelligence* (co-edited with Raimo P. Härmäläinen, Systems Analysis Laboratory, Aalto University, 2010); *Systems Intelligence in Leadership and Everyday Life* (co-edited with Raimo P. Härmäläinen, Systems Analysis Laboratory, Helsinki University of Technology, 2007); *Imagologies* (co-edited with Mark C. Taylor, Routledge, 1994).

Mike Sandbothe, Professor for Culture and Media
Ernst Abbe University of Applied Sciences, Jena, Germany

Selected Publications: *Pragmatic Media-Philosophy* (online publication: sandbothe.net, 2005); *The Pragmatic Turn in Philosophy* (co-edited with William Egginton, SUNY, 2004); *The Temporalisation of Time* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

Saskia Sassen, Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology and Co-Chair, The
 Committee on Global Thought
Columbia University, New York, USA

Selected Publications: *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Princeton University Press, 2008); *A Sociology of Globalization* (W. W. Norton, 2007); *Cities in a World*

Economy (4th edn. Sage, 2011); *Denationalization* (Princeton University Press, 2005).

Richard Shusterman, Dorothy F. Schmidt Eminent Scholar in the Humanities
 and Director of the Center for Body, Mind, and Culture
Florida Atlantic University, USA

Selected Publications: *Thinking through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); *Body Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); *Surface and Depth* (Cornell University Press, 2002); *Performing Live* (Cornell University Press, 2000); *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (Routledge, 1997); *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (Blackwell, 1992, and translated into 14 languages).

Christopher J. Voparil, Graduate Faculty
Union Institute and University, Cincinnati, USA

Selected Publications: *The Rorty Reader* (co-edited with Richard J. Bernstein, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); *Richard Rorty: Politics and Vision* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

Preface

Alexander Gröschner, Colin Koopman, and Mike Sandbothe

This volume of essays offers a series of reflections on the work of one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century from the pens of a diverse set of scholars, both international and interdisciplinary in its scope. The book, we hope, attests to the enormous impact of Richard Rorty's work today. Few thinkers from the past century, and even fewer philosophers of recent memory, have achieved quite the orbit and gravity of Rorty. Observe how Rorty simultaneously appealed to and aggravated academics and non-academics across the spectrum. For instance, to those on the radical left end of contemporary academic culture (and their non-academic readership), Rorty's combination of revolutionary philosophy and moderate politics was a curious source of inspiration and frustration. To those on the political and cultural right, Rorty's style of philosophy was often received as a dangerous set of ideas, even though that same style was often disparaged by those on the left as culturally conservative. Meanwhile, moderates in all kinds of center positions (politically, culturally, and morally) found, and continue to find, in Rorty's works a characteristically fluent expression of the ideals of tolerance and inclusiveness that so many of us recognize as the lingua franca of our liberal democratic sensibilities.

An eminent intellectual historian, whose work often brought him into contact with Rorty, once remarked to one of us that—despite his own quite strong philosophical and political disagreements with Rorty—it would be nearly impossible not to admire the generosity with which Rorty made his thought available as a public terrain upon which contemporary intellectuals could debate the issues of their day. How Rorty's work first became such a public terrain is no doubt one of those inexplicable contingencies of the ever-present world of letters; but surely one important factor was Rorty's often-noted willingness to engage his critics in dialogue after dialogue once his work became a subject of simultaneous criticism and celebration. Hoping to carry forward the spirit of that engagement, this volume attests to the importance of the debates that continue over Rorty's work.

The history of the volume you hold in your hands begins in June 2007 in Scandinavia, specifically in Denmark, and to be completely precise in the Café

'Ib Rene Cairo' in the Danish university town of Aalborg. On June 24, 2007 the *Reading Rorty Memorial* was held there. We quote from the announcement: 'Suzie Neslund reads out passages of Rorty's "Love and Money", Mike Sandbothe comments on Rorty, and Sine Bach Ruettel (Copenhagen) plays banjo between readings.' And a few days later, in 'Café Wagner' in the German university town of Jena: 'Alexander Gröschner, Yvonne Förster, and Kenton Barnes read passages from Rorty's autobiographical "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" as well as from some of his more political and philosophical essays; music by Indikat. That is how it began for two of the three editors of this book.

Later on, in 2009, Colin Koopman joined the editorial team, having himself learned much from Rorty's work in the context of his dissertation. This joining was made possible by Barry Allen, of McMaster University in Southern Ontario, Canada. In the 1990s, Barry along with Dick Rorty attended a conference at the University of Bamberg in Germany that had been organized by Mike Sandbothe. Dick introduced Barry and Mike to each other, and the resulting friendship between like-minded pragmatists endures to this day. Later, just as Dick had brought Barry and Mike together, Barry mediated the collaboration between Mike and Alexander in Germany and Colin (who had written his dissertation with Barry's guidance a few years previous) in North America. The resulting synergy and the common faith in the editorial project made the emergence of this book possible. For this, we all three thank Barry.

In Germany, most of Richard Rorty's books have been published by Suhrkamp Verlag. Eva Gilmer—Rorty's editor—supported Alexander and Mike with the planning and realization of the German ancestor of this book. It was published in 2011 under the title *Pragmatismus als Kulturpolitik*, and thereby laid the foundation for the present volume, which reprints (now in English) selected papers from the German edition along with a selection of newer papers from a set of upcoming North American scholars of Rorty's work. We thank Eva Gilmer and her colleagues Philip Hölzing and Janika Rüter for making the successful cooperation between Suhrkamp and Bloomsbury possible.

All three co-editors would like to thank Alan Reynolds (who is among the next generation of Rorty scholars) for his help in preparing the essays for final publication and his many helpful suggestions about the pieces included herein. We thank Karl Hughes for his support as translator. We also thank our fellow pragmatists Wojciech Małecki and Eric T. Weber for their supportive insights regarding the structure and content of the volume on the whole.

We are all also grateful for the opportunity to acknowledge the Oregon Humanities Center, the Department of Philosophy, and the College of Arts and

Sciences at the University of Oregon for their support that helped make possible the preparation and production of this volume. We thank Rachel Eisenhauer and Sarah Campbell of Bloomsbury for their faith in this project. For permissions involved in reprinting previously-published material, we would like to acknowledge Suhrkamp Verlag for permission to reprint Jürgen Habermas ‘... And to Define America, Her Athletic Democracy’. Im Andenken an Richard Rorty, in Gröschner, A./Sandbothe, M., *Pragmatismus als Kulturpolitik. Beiträge zum Werk Richard Rortys* © Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main 2008, 2011. All rights reserved by and controlled through Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin and Esa Saarinen, ‘Freundlichkeit gegenüber Babys und andere radikale Ideen in Rortys antizynischer Philosophie’, in Gröschner, A./Sandbothe, M., *Pragmatismus als Kulturpolitik. Beiträge zum Werk Richard Rortys* © Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main 2011. All rights reserved by and controlled through Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin and Johns Hopkins University Press for permission to reprint an adapted version of Richard Shusterman’s ‘Pragmatism and Cultural Politics: From Rortyan Textualism to Somaesthetics.’ first published in *New Literary History*, 41, 1 (2010), 69–94 (©2010 New Literary History, The University of Virginia). Our final and most special thanks go to Mary Varney Rorty, who supported the idea and development of both the German-language and English-language volumes and kindly supported the project from the beginning. The collaboration with the authors was characterized by respect for the work of Richard Rorty and his memory.

Abbreviations of Works by Richard Rorty

- AOC *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- CP *Consequences of Pragmatism.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982.
- CIS *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- EHO *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- LT *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, 2nd edition, ed. Richard Rorty. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992 [1967].
- ORT *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- PSH *Philosophy and Social Hope.* New York: Penguin Books, 1999.
- PMN *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009 [1979].
- PCP *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 4. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- RRP Richard Rorty Papers, MS-C017, Special Collections and Archives, the UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.
- TCF *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself: Interviews with Richard Rorty*, ed. Eduardo Mendietta. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.
- TP *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 3. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.