Chapter 4
Truth and Contingency

I. Introduction:

The end of inquiry is not the discovery or even the approximation of absolute truth but to keep expanding our sense of “us” as far as we can. Solidarity should therefore replace objectivity as truth is nothing more than what members of a community have intersubjectively agreed as something that is good for them to believe. There is always room for improved belief, since new evidence, or new hypotheses or a whole “new vocabulary” may come along. Thus in Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Rorty declares that we have no permanent access to the truth; all we have are the vocabularies we create:

“Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind -because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own - unaided by the describing activities of human beings - cannot”. 1

This chapter is an investigation into the above argument, which forms the basis of Rorty’s views on truth as offered in his book Contingency, Irony and Solidarity. The first part of this chapter is a description of Rorty’s views on contingency and in particular, Heidegger’s influence on Rorty. The second, third and fourth part of this chapters will focus on Rorty’s view that not just language but even the self and the community are contingent creations. A careful study of Rorty’s view reveals that he also borrows to a great length from Davidson, Nietzsche and Freud. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a careful examination of the various criticisms of Rorty’s views as put forward by various thinkers.

II. Truth - A Human Creation:

What lies beneath Rorty’s position is the belief that while most people, including intellectuals, are still preoccupied with “knowing the truth about the world,” the fact is, truth is
not discovered but made. This has led to a split within Philosophy between those who still see truth as being "out there" to be discovered by Science (or Philosophy or Religion) and those who think that truth is actually created within the spheres of arts and politics: "For most contemporary intellectuals, questions of ends as opposed to means – questions about to give a sense to one’s own life or that of one’s community – are questions for arts or politics, or both, rather than for religion, philosophy, or science." In Duncan’s view, if this diminishes the role of the traditional philosopher, it enlarges the role of the artist.

Rorty does not deny the service rendered to us by the Enlightenment project but he feels, we no longer should preoccupy ourselves with trying to ground it in universal ahistorical principles: “Democracies,” Rorty urges, “are now in a position to throw away some of the ladders used in their own construction.”

Rorty is very careful to make the distinction between "the world out there" and "truth out there." He explains, “To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are human creations.” For Rorty then, the term “true” is only a linguistic attachment to sentences within language, a wholly human creation. Consider however, the proposition “organic life exists on Mars.” It seems plain that, regardless of how we choose to define “organic life,” this proposition is true or false and its being true or false depends not the slightest on who thinks it is true or false. If there is organic life on Mars and I think there is not, then I am simply mistaken, and not because of my language; and he who thinks there is does in a rather straightforward way possess the truth, regardless of the language in which he is conditioned to express the proposition.

Besides, Rorty makes it clear that it is not just one description that is the “truth.” In other words, there is not one true description of the world. Speaking of the various descriptions or language games that are found in this world, he is of the opinion that none of these perfectly describes the world as it is and hence are not to be preferred over any other. Hence he concludes: “When we consider examples of alternative language games – the vocabulary of
ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson’s, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud’s, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden—it is difficult to think of the world as making one of these better than another, of the world as deciding between them.” Likewise, “To say that Freud’s vocabulary gets at the truth about human nature, or Newton’s at the truth about the heavens, is not an explanation of anything. It is just an empty compliment—one traditionally paid to writers whose novel jargon we have found useful.”

Dennis Dutton however thinks otherwise. Although he feels it isn’t hard to go along with Rorty’s objections to the Enlightenment picture of the scientist as high priest, it is quite another thing to agree with what he says about “the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle”—that “it is difficult to think of the world as making one of these better than another, of the world as deciding between them.” “It’s not difficult,” he maintains, “for people in the business of launching earth satellites.” Further, he argues, to describe, say, the introduction of the germ theory of disease as just invoking a new vocabulary, a bit of novel jargon—as though it were all a fuss over “bacteria,” and had nothing to do with bacteria seems to him ludicrous.

Having said so much about descriptions as being the only ones worthy of being called “true” or “false”, Rorty admits that most of reality however, is indifferent to our descriptions of it.” Hence, he feels, our descriptions are useful creations rather than adequate or inadequate expressions of it. Truth then, according to Rorty, is whatever we agree upon after free and open discussion of our creative descriptions.

What is truly interesting to Rorty is the invention of new metaphors that other people begin to use. What happens is that we lose the habit of using one set of words or vocabularies and get the habit of using another. We change languages and social practices and produce different human beings (e.g. ‘adolescents’, or ‘people who can live with contingency’). We keep redescribing the world until people adopt the vocabulary we are using and adopt new ways and institutions.

This is to see language not as a medium, either of representation or of expression for language can never completely represent or express the thing judged due to its complexity. It is
to see, as Wittgenstein did, language as a matter of different tools. Say, the language of causation enables us to do one job, the language of intentionality another. To put it differently, Rorty is interested in the function of our ideas and statements and their effects rather than the sources and conditions of their production.\(^{12}\)

Hence for Rorty, Philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. It is, he says, “implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things.”\(^ {13}\) To put it another way, traditionally philosophers proceed rationally—by constructing arguments, avoiding contradictions, functioning logically, rationally responding to objections—as if there is truth and essences to be known. Rorty’s method, however, relies on the dialectic of persuasion rather than on rational justification: he tries to make his descriptive vocabulary more attractive than older ones.\(^ {14}\)

To sum up what we’ve been saying so far, once we turn away from traditional philosophy’s attempts to arrive at final truths and essences, we recognize the contingent nature of our vocabularies—particularly their temporary nature and their dependence upon historical circumstance. Further, Rorty’s claim to contingency does not end only with our vocabularies or language. For Rorty, to change the way we talk is to change the way we are.\(^ {15}\) That is to say, any change of vocabulary would certainly involve a change in the individual self and community. Hence, Rorty concludes, the self and the community are also contingent creations.

**III. Heidegger’s Influence:**

It is said that it was Martin Heidegger who influenced Rorty in the direction of process over permanence. Going over to *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger gives his analysis of human existence, he stresses his claim that “the world is the condition we engage with and inhabit; it is constitutive of our lives. We are not to see the world simply as a physical object against which we are set as individual thinking subjects; rather, we are “beings-in-the world” and *Dasein*, our human reality or mode of being, is that multitude of ways in which we inhabit life; that is, by “having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and
looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining.\textsuperscript{16}

Labeling the history of Western metaphysics “the ontotheological tradition,” Heidegger postulated that an underlying assumption had persisted in the West from Plato down to the positivists: the assumption that truth is somehow a matter of the stronger overcoming the weaker. This notion of overcoming is what is common to suggestions that intellect can overcome sensual desire, that Grace can overcome sin…\textsuperscript{17} Consequently, each thinker in his own way have tried to seek a force that would overwhelm the subject as it makes its project evident. When this happens, Heidegger believes, the individual ceases to create and live his own projects in deference to the presence of the stronger influence.\textsuperscript{18} Using Heidegger’s terms, the individual’s \textit{Dasein} or “mode of existence” having lost its authenticity i.e. “having a full sense of their situation in the world” becomes inauthentic, or “near-automatons, unthinkingly conforming to established routines and patterns.”\textsuperscript{19}

Rorty says he agrees with Heidegger that the “quest for certainty, clarity, and direction from outside can also be viewed as an attempt to escape from time, to view \textit{Sein} as something that has little to do with \textit{Zeit}.”\textsuperscript{20} As a matter of fact, according to Rorty, what Heidegger wanted to do was “recapture a sense of what time was like before it fell under the spell of eternity, what we were like before we became obsessed by the need for an overarching context which would subsume and explain us – before we came to think of our relation to \textit{Being} in terms of power.\textsuperscript{21} To put it differently, he wanted to “recapture a sense of contingency, of the fragility and riskiness of any human project – a sense which the ontotheological tradition has made it hard to attain. For that tradition tends to identify the contingent with the merely apparent.”\textsuperscript{22} In particular, says Rorty, that tradition has advocated the view that the particular words we use are unimportant. Whether a sentence is spoken or written does not, on the traditional philosophical view, greatly matter for the very reason that words are considered to be mere vehicles for something less fragile and transitory than marks and noises. As Rorty puts it: “Philosophers know that what matters is literal truth, not a choice of phonemes, and certainly not metaphors. The literal lasts and empowers. The metaphorical – that which you neither argue about nor justify, that for which you can find no uncontroversial paraphrase – is impotent. It passes and leaves no trace.”\textsuperscript{23}
In contrast, what Heidegger is telling us, according to Rorty, is that words do matter: “that we are, above all, the people who have used those words.” Rorty further says, “It is important to emphasize at this point that there is no hidden power called Being which designed or operated the escalator. Nobody whispered in the ears of the early Greeks, the poets of the West. There is just us, in the grip of no power save those of the words we happen to speak, the dead metaphors which we have internalized...To see that there is just us would be simultaneously to see ourselves – to see the West – as a contingency and to see that there is no refuge from contingency. In particular, it would be to accept Heidegger’s claim that “Only as long as Dasein is (that is, only as long as an understanding of Being is ontically possible) ‘is there’ Being...”

Interestingly, the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy has defined “Being-in-itself”, as “the self-sufficient, lumpy, contingent being of ordinary things.”

Furthermore, according to Grippe, the use of the term “Being” by Heidegger is, for Rorty, somewhat problematic. What Rorty claims is not that there is a work of reality that Being “writes” but rather “that there is no meta-vocabulary to distinguish the adequacy of one final vocabulary above others.” In short, “there is no way to escape the contingencies of language to get at Being-in-itself.” Thus Heidegger can be said to be a precursor of Rorty’s dismissal of the realism-antirealism debate and his construal of Western tradition as the development of pragmatic practices designed to cope with contemporary conditions while remaining open to future descriptions.

Nevertheless, according to Grippe, for Heidegger the evolving pattern of power relations that has been the history of Western metaphysics culminates in the “technical,” pragmatic interpretation of thinking. Rorty however rejects this view for he believes that it is impossible to rank understandings for the very reason that there can be no descriptive account that can better help us get behind that which is poetically construed. In short, “There is no validating reality behind our narrative; Being and interpretive narrative arise together.” What Rorty appropriates from Heidegger therefore, is only the latter’s sense of contingency and the transitory condition of human life, along with the ability to radically redescribe Western culture. After this Rorty parts ways with Heidegger and aligns himself more with Dewey’s brand of anti-essentialism and anti-foundationalism. This is because according to Rorty, Dewey’s vision of a democratic
utopia includes ""technical,"" pragmatic thinking that is put in service to social practice for the purpose of achieving the integration of inquiry and poetry, theory and practice."" 31

In fact Rorty says his preference for Dewey over Heidegger is based on the conviction that while Heidegger was ""never able to see politics or art as more than epiphenomenal — never able to shake off the philosophy's professor's conviction that everything else stands to philosophy as superstructure to base,"" Dewey by contrast, ""never lost the sense of contingency, and thus the sense of gratitude, which Heidegger thought only an unimaginably new sort of Thinking might reintroduce."" 32 Here Rorty quotes Derrida who says, ""Heideggerian hope is the reverse side of Heideggerian nostalgia. Heideggerian hope is the hope that Heidegger himself, his Thinking, will be a decisive event in the history of Being."" 33 On the other hand, says Rorty, Dewey had no similar hope for his own thought: ""Pragmatists like Dewey hope that things may turn out well in the end, but their sense of contingency does not permit them to write dramatic narratives about upward or downward escalators. They exemplify a virtue which Heidegger preached, but was not himself able to practice."" 34

Having been influenced by Heidegger, Rorty went on to use the word ""contingency"" in his own idiosyncratic style. Though frequently invoked by Rorty yet its meaning is quite elusive. As simplified by Topper, in its general sense, it has been used by Rorty to refer to the idea that things and events ""might have been otherwise."" 35 However, when Rorty speaks of contingency in a more specific manner, he usually uses the term in one of two ways. First, he uses it in a way that connects it to notions of ""novelty, innovation, originality, and creativity."" In such instances, contingency is meant to identify some domain or space that lacks any immanent nature or logic and hence open to innovation, transformation, and redescription. On the other hand, Rorty frequently uses the term contingency in a quite different manner, linking it not with the powers and possibilities of human innovation but with notions of ""chance, luck, accident, randomness, and fortuitousness."" 36 Whether explicit or implicit, however, the meaning of contingency in all of these passages is in effect the same: ""it implies uncontrollable and unpredictable forces or events that shape our lives in decisive ways."" 37
IV. The Contingency of Language:

To Rorty, language is neither a medium of representation nor expression of reality. What then is his view of language? A careful study of Rorty’s view of language reveals that he borrows to a great length from Davidson and Nietzsche’s philosophy of language.

1. Davidson - Language as Tools:

Rorty paints a picture in which language is a tool useful for various purposes but not a medium for representing the way the world is, in which truth is created not discovered. Taking from one of his favorite philosophers, Donald Davidson, (though Rorty himself has remarked that Davidson is not responsible for the interpretations he is putting on his views) Rorty has come to view vocabularies as merely tools for coping with certain kinds of organisms. In his “Introduction” to Consequences of Pragmatism he explains, for instance, how “Physics is a way of trying to cope with various bits of the universe; ethics is a matter of trying to cope with other bits. Mathematics helps physics do its job; literature and the arts help ethics do its” He then went on to say that “the question of what propositions to assert, which pictures to look at, what narratives to listen to and comment on and retell, are all questions about what will help us get what we want (or about what we should want).”

Now according to Rorty, Davidson’s view of language is neither reductionist nor expansionist. It does not, as analytical philosophers sometimes have, purport to give reductive definitions of semantical notions like “truth” or “intentionality” or “reference.” Nor does it resemble Heidegger’s attempt to make language into a kind of divinity, something of which human beings are mere emanations. Thus in Rorty’s opinion, Davidson in avoiding both reductionism and expansionism, resembles more like Wittgenstein who treat alternative vocabularies as alternative tools rather than like bits of a jigsaw puzzle. For to treat them like puzzle is to “assume that all vocabularies are dispensable, or reducible to other vocabularies, or capable of being united with all other vocabularies in one grand unified super vocabulary” and this Rorty can never concur.
So instead of asking whether our beliefs are contradictory, it is more useful Rorty says, to ask instead, "Does our use of these words get in the way of our use of those other words?" And because vocabularies do get in the way of each other or interfere with each other there is a need to create or invent a new vocabulary that will replace both. Revolutionary achievements in the arts, sciences, and also in moral and political thought have all come about, according to Rorty, due to the realization of this need. For this reason, Rorty says, such a vocabulary can never be reached by an inferential process, that is, by starting with premises formulated in the old vocabularies. The proper analogy, as pointed out by Rorty, is that of "the invention of new tools to take the place of old tools."

Consider his assessment of our ancestors' obsolete vocabularies from another of his book Philosophy and Social Hope: "So we say that the vocabulary of Greek metaphysics and Christian theology - the vocabulary used in what Heidegger has called the onto-theological tradition - was a useful one for our ancestors' purposes, but that we have different purposes, which will be better served by employing a different vocabulary. Our ancestors climbed up a ladder which we are now in a position to throw away... not because we have reached a final resting place, but because we have different problems to solve than those which perplexed our ancestors."

Nonetheless, Rorty feels this Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools has one obvious drawback. While the craftsman typically knows what job he needs to do before picking or inventing tools with which to do it, a Rortian philosopher by contrast, is unable to make clear exactly what it is that he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose.

That's why for Davidson as well as for Rorty, the account of language as a third thing intervening between self and reality should be dispensed with. As Davidson puts it, "We should realize that we have abandoned not only the ordinary notion of a language, but we have erased the boundary between knowing a language and knowing our way around the world generally. For there are no rules for arriving at passing theories that work... There is no more chance of regularizing, or teaching, this process than there is of regularizing or teaching the process
creating new theories to cope with new data— for that is what this process involves... Then again as Rorty confirms "To say that one’s previous language was inappropriate for dealing with some segment of the world (for example, the starry heavens above, or the raging passions within) is just to say that one is now, having learned a new language, able to handle that segment more easily." 

2. Nietzsche - Language as Metaphors:

Since no language is privileged over any other, all languages being contingent in their origins and not mediums for expression or representation, our "intellectual and moral progress [becomes] a history of increasingly useful metaphors rather than of increasing understanding of how things really are." Rorty thus rests his argument, more than anything else, on Nietzsche's well known image (to which he refers repeatedly) of truth as a "mobile army of metaphors." 

"What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins..."

Following along the same lines Rorty thus asserts, "Old metaphors are constantly dying off into literalness, and then serving as a platform and foil for new metaphors." But in order to accept this picture of language Rorty suggests that we first do away with the traditional understanding of the literal and the metaphorical as two different meanings or interpretations. Ha asks us to see it the way Davidson saw it, "not as the distinction between two sorts of meaning, nor as a distinction between two sorts on interpretation, but as a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar uses of noises and marks. The literal uses of noises and marks are the uses we can handle by our old theories about what people will say under various conditions. Their metaphorical use is the sort which makes us get busy developing a new theory."
Accordingly then, language in Rorty’s philosophy do not have meaning. He puts this point emphatically by saying, “To have a meaning is to have a place in a language game. Metaphors, by definition, do not.”

He says further, “(Any) attempt to state that meaning would be an attempt to find some familiar (that is, literal) use of words -- some sentence which already had a place in the language game – and, to claim that one might just as well have that. But the unparaphrasability of metaphor is just the unsuitability of any such familiar sentence for one’s purpose.” To put it simply, once it acquires a familiar place in the language game – in Ian Hacking’s terms, a “truth-value candidate - it will, according to Rorty, cease to be a metaphor. It will become what most sentences of our language are, a dead metaphor.

Rorty wraps up his argument by comparing the Nietzschean and Davidsonian philosophy of language with those of the Platonist and the Positivist on one hand and the Romantics on the other. While the Platonist and the Positivist sees language as fulfilling one serious purpose, namely, representing reality outside us and the Romantist sees it as expressing a reality which lies within us or the imagination, Nietzschean and Davidsonian philosophy of language see language as we now see evolution – not to accomplish a higher purpose, but blindly. To illustrate his point further he says, “Whereas the Positivists sees Galileo as making a discovery – finally coming up with the words which were needed to fit the world properly, words which Aristotle missed – the Davidsonian sees him as having hit upon a tool which happened to work better for certain purposes than any previous tool. Once we found out what could be done with a Galilean vocabulary, nobody was much interested in doing the things which used to be done (and which Thomists thought should still be done) with an Aristotelian vocabulary.”

In Rorty’s view then, Philosophy is no longer about discovering the nature of truth or reality. It is as he says, “changing the way we talk, and thereby changing what we want to do and what we think we are.”
V. The Contingency of Selfhood:

Generally speaking, most foundationalist philosophies take for granted the existence of "a stable self, unchanging in basic identity and possessing abilities shared among persons and across time, as an anchor for truth." William I. Buscemi, for instance has cited a few examples: "For Plato, self was the possessor of dialectical powers which, when educated, could grasp the reality behind appearances; for Christianity, self is the possessor of a soul which opens onto God; for Kant, self is equipped with incorrigible categories of understanding, and for positivists the properly trained self is the possessor of reliable perceptions. Furthermore this inner self, as the feature shared in common among all selves, is taken to be the hallmark of the truly human, thus serving as a criterion for morality and justice." All the same, Rorty has rejected this traditional notion of the self, with its center as possessor of will and beliefs. To put it simply, whereas the self was always known to possess an essence or nature, Rorty is of the view that there is no essential human nature; humans are the contingent products of time and chance.

What he has advocated instead is that for the most part, human beings are determined by genetic, social, economic, and psychological background. In a nutshell, contingency of selfhood, as explained by Topper, "represents the abundant possibilities inherent in the recognition of historicity: because our inherited practices and forms of life are not ontologically fixed but are culturally and historically constituted, they can (although never all at once) be questioned, transformed, and redescribed." Or as Buscemi puts it, "Depending on purposes and circumstances, we might see our own or other selves as John Doe, General Motors, or global eco-systems."

Thus Rorty asserts: "Our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids." Rorty recognizes that "the very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature—one which the physicist or the poet may have glimpsed—is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation..." He joins those who deny "that there is such a thing as 'human nature' or the 'deepest level of the self,' " and views discussions about "the nature of man" as "an unprofitable topic."
To begin with, Rorty credits Nietzsche with providing an alternate, more useful metaphor, namely, the self-creating self trying to overcome what is merely inherited from others. Next, he credits Freud with establishing the contingent nature of the moral self (in contrast with Kant) by showing how our moral sense develops via an attempt of dealing with the contingencies of one's upbringing as well as those blind impresses all our behavings bear rather than through rational thought.

1. The Self-Creating Self:

Rorty believes it was Nietzsche who first explicitly suggested that we drop the whole idea of "knowing the truth." His definition of truth as a "mobile army of metaphors" amounted to saying that the whole idea of representing reality by means of language, and thus the idea of finding a single context for all human lives, should be abandoned. In explaining Nietzsche's view Rorty says he viewed self-knowledge not as coming to know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time but rather that he saw self-knowledge as self-creation. Accordingly then, "this process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language – that is, of thinking up some new metaphors."66

Rorty supposes it was Nietzsche who has taught us that we need not become mere replicas or copies of someone else's story, poem, or model of the moral self. The triumph of a human life is in escaping from inherited descriptions of the contingencies of its existence and finding new descriptions. This is the difference between the will to truth and the will to self-overcoming. It is the difference between thinking of redemption as making contact with something larger and more enduring than oneself and redemption as Nietzsche describes it: "recreating all it was into a thus I willed it."67

That's why for Rorty, to fail as a human being is to accept someone else's description of oneself. Besides Nietzsche, he also mentions Bloom who describes such failure at self-description as the "horror of finding oneself to be only a copy or replica."68 In other words, the fear in Bloom's poets is the fear that one might end one's days in such a world, a world one never made, an inherited world from the past. Success however, in that enterprise - the enterprise of saying "Thus I willed it" to the past - is success in what Bloom calls "giving birth to oneself."69
2. Self and Blind Impresses:

Keeping in line with Freud, Rorty views the self and its particular actions and idiosyncrasies as nothing more than an array of responses to or reactions against different blind impresses. Unlike the Platonic and the Kantian narratives of universal morality which calls for particular actions to be brought under general principles if we are to be moral, Freudian moral psychology teaches us to think of our particular actions and idiosyncrasies in terms of our responses to or reactions against a constellation of past influences and present stresses. We may indeed suffer guilt and shame if we fail to live up to some standard considered universal or binding by our community of origin. But in this story of morality, the strong poet is one who has learned to condemn oneself for failure to break free of the past rather than for failure to live up to such standard.

According to Rorty, there is no way we can force Freud into a Platonic mold by treating him as a moral philosopher who supplies universal criteria for goodness or rightness or true happiness. On the contrary Freud has given us a moral psychology whereby we can turn away from the universal to the concrete, from the attempt to find necessary truths, ineliminable beliefs, to the idiosyncratic contingencies of our individual pasts, to blind impress all our becomings bear. In short, his moral psychology is more in sync with Nietzsche’s and Bloom’s attempt to see the strong poet as the archetypal human being.

Rorty however pointed out that while it has often seemed necessary to choose between Kant and Nietzsche about the point of being human, Freud has given us a way of looking at human beings which helps us evade the choice: “After reading Freud we shall see neither Bloom’s strong poet nor Kant’s dutiful fulfiller of universal obligations as paradigmatic. For Freud himself eschewed the very idea of a paradigm human being. He does not see humanity as a natural kind with an intrinsic nature, an intrinsic set of powers to be developed or left undeveloped. By breaking with both Kant’s residual Platonism and Nietzsche’s inverted Platonism, he lets us see both Nietzsche’s superman and Kant’s common moral consciousness as exemplifying two out of many forms of adaptation, two out of many strategies for coping with the contingencies of one’s upbringing of coming to terms with a blind impress. There is much to be said for both. Each has advantages and disadvantages… Freud stands in awe
before the poet, but describes him as infantile. He is bored by the merely moral man, but
describes him as mature. He does not enthuse over either, nor does he ask us to choose
between them.\textsuperscript{73}

To sum up, what Freud did was to bring about an end to the dispute between the
Kantian and Nietzschean views by making the development of our moral conscience a private,
contingent process. By revealing our private—and, often, unconscious—mechanisms of moral
deliberation, Freud helps us realize our own moral motives. As a result, the difference between
prudence and morality is dissolved for keeping in line with Freud’s point of view, a human
being is neither necessarily someone who fulfills a universal moral law nor someone who is
dedicated to his narcissistic self-creation. In short, Freud “leads us to drop the notion of a
paradigmatically human end—of an intrinsically human nature.”\textsuperscript{74}

Using Freudian Psychology, Rorty also believes that the commitment to self-creation
is not only confined to intellectual types. No matter how dull, unimaginative, or merely decent
we may appear outside, if we look inside the \textit{bien-pensant} conformist, if we get him on the
couch, we will find that he was only dull on the surface. For Freud’s account of unconscious
fantasy shows us how to see every human life as a poem—or, more exactly, every human life
not so racked by pain as to be unable to learn a language nor so immersed in toil as to have no
leisure in which to generate a self-description. Every such life is an attempt to clothe itself in its
own metaphors.\textsuperscript{75} Any activity therefore, whether poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific, or
political, are all, from a Freudian point of view, different ways of dealing with blind impresses:
“impresses which may be unique to an individual or common to the members of some historically
conditioned community.”\textsuperscript{76} Yet none of these strategies is privileged over others in the sense of
expressing human nature better. As Rorty puts it, “No such strategy is more or less human than
any other, anymore than the pen is more truly a tool than the butcher’s knife, or the hybridized
orchid less a flower than the wild rose.”\textsuperscript{77}

Indeed for Rorty it has now become possible “to juggle several descriptions of the
same event without asking which one was right—to see redescription as a tool rather than a
claim to have discovered essence.” It also became possible “to see a new vocabulary not as
something which was supposed to replace all other vocabularies, something which claimed to
VI. The Contingency of a Liberal Community:

Having established the contingent nature of the moral self Rorty goes on to deny even the existence of any moral community founded upon some rational, universal foundation. The reason is simply because, as Rorty believes, there is no morally privileged standpoint from which to make universal judgments.

Hence Rorty argues, the distinctions between absolutism and relativism, between rationality and irrationality, and between morality and expediency or practicality are obsolete and clumsy tools—remnants of a vocabulary we should try to replace. But as Rorty pointed out, there is no way he is going to recommend his point of view by arguing for it: “argument” is not the right word. For on my account of intellectual progress as the literalization of selected metaphors, rebutting objections to one’s redescriptions of some things will be largely a matter of redescribing other things, trying to outflank the objections by enlarging the scope of one’s favorite metaphors.” So then how does Rorty ever hope to make his views agreed by the majority? Rorty says his strategy will be what he calls “redescription”. As conceived by Rorty, redescription is an intellectual practice employed solely for the purpose of radically transforming or replacing a calcified but well-entrenched vocabulary. What Rorty will do is, using his own words, “try to make the vocabulary, in which these objections are phrased look bad, thereby changing the subject, rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on.”

Without doubt, the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism was essential in the beginnings of liberal democracy but today, Rorty reckons, it has become more of an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies. To meet this purpose therefore, it requires a new vocabulary, one that revolves around notions of metaphor and self-creation rather than around notions of truth, rationality, and moral obligation. Elsewhere, Rorty has explained this saying it really is “a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things.”
Rorty however is careful enough to add that he is not saying that the Davidson-Wittgensteinian account of language and the Nietzschean-Freudian account of conscience and selfhood provide "philosophical foundations of democracy: "For the notion of a "philosophical foundation" goes when the vocabulary of the Enlightenment rationalism goes." So what is Rorty actually saying is, these accounts while they do not ground democracy they do permit its practices and its goals to be redescribed. Such a redescriptions of our current institutions and practices is not to offer a defense of them against their enemies; it is, Rorty says, "more like refurnishing a house than like propping it up or placing barricades around it."

1. Foundation versus Redescription:

What distinguishes the search for foundation from an attempt at redescriptions? According to Rorty the difference between these is emblematic of the difference between the culture of liberalism and older forms of cultural life. "For," in the opinion of Rorty, "in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through."

Such a culture, Rorty insists, would be one in which there is essentially no standpoint outside the particular historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are presently using from which to judge the vocabulary of liberalism. That is to say, we should "give up on the idea that there can be reasons for using languages as well as reasons within languages for believing statements." And Rorty has given us a "reason" as to why this should be so: "For there will be no way to rise above the language, culture, institutions, and practices one has adopted and view all these as on a par with all the others."

Rorty thus affirms that the progress of the community as of the individual, is really a matter of using new words as well as of arguing from premises phrased in old words. Once we realize this we will come to regard a critical vocabulary that revolves around notions like "rational," "criteria," "argument," and "foundation," and "absolute" as badly suited to describe the relation between the old and the new. In fact, Rorty even claims that liberal societies in this century have produced more and more people who have been able to "recognize the contingency of the vocabulary in which they state their highest hopes -- the contingency of their
own consciences — and yet have remained faithful to those consciences.” He refers to figures like Nietzsche, William James, Freud, Proust, and Wittgenstein to illustrate what he calls “freedom as the recognition of contingency.” Such recognition says Rorty, is the chief virtue of the members of a liberal society.

So then, Rorty concludes, what a liberal culture needs is “an improved self-description rather than a set of foundations.” Of its method, it entails that we substitute dialectics for demonstration for it is no longer a discovery about the nature of a pre-existing entity called ‘philosophy’ or ‘truth.’ It is, as Rorty said, “changing the way we talk and thereby changing what we want to do and what we think we are.” Elsewhere Rorty says, “We need a redescription of a liberal society that is “poeticized” rather than “rationalized” or “scientized.” Such a culture, says Rorty, “would not assume that a form of cultural life is no stronger than its philosophical foundations. Instead, it would drop the idea of such foundations. It would regard the justification of liberal society simply as a matter of historical comparison with other attempts at social organization — those of the past and those envisaged by utopians.”

2. Morality as a Set of Contingent Practices:

With regard to morality, Rorty begins by saying that the distinction between morality and prudence, and the term ‘moral’ itself, are no longer very useful. Rorty takes much of his views on morality from Oakeshott. According to Oakeshott, “A morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language. General principles and even rules may be elicited from it, but (like other languages) it is not the creation of grammarians; it is made by speakers. What has to be learned in a moral education is not a theorem such as that good conduct is acting fairly or being charitable, nor is it a rule such as “always tell the truth,” but how to speak the language intelligently… It is not a device for formulating judgments about conduct or for solving so-called moral problems, but a practice in terms of which to think, to choose, to act, and to utter.”

From here Rorty explains as why he thinks that the distinction between morality and prudence, and the term “moral” itself, are no longer very useful. His argument turns on the
familiar anti-Kantian claim, which Oakeshott is here taking for granted, that "moral principles (the categorical imperative, the utilitarian principle, etc.) only have a point insofar as they incorporate tacit reference to a whole range of institutions, practices, and vocabularies of moral and political deliberation. They are reminders of abbreviations for, such practices, not justifications for such practices. At best, they are pedagogical aids to the acquisition of such practices." 97

According to Rorty, Oakeshott's suggestion is that, "we can keep the notion of "morality" just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speaker of a common language. We can keep the morality-prudence distinction if we think of it not as the difference between an appeal to the unconditioned and an appeal to the conditioned but as the difference between an appeal to the interests of our community and the appeal to our own, possibly conflicting, private interests." 98

Oakeshott's view, as Rorty explains, coincides with Wilfred Sellars' thesis that morality is a matter of what he calls 'we-intentions,' that the core meaning of "immoral action" is "the sort of thing we don't do." An immoral action is, on the other hand, "the sort of thing which, if done at all, is done only by animals, or by people of other families, tribes, cultures, or historical epochs. If done by one of us, or if done repeatedly by one of us, that person ceases to be one of us." 99

It is this Oakeshott-Sellers way of looking at morality as a set of practices, our practices, according to Rorty, that makes vivid "the difference between the conception of morality as the voice of a divinized portion of our soul, and as the voice of a contingent human artifact, a community which has grown up subject to the vicissitudes of time and chance, one more of nature's "experiments." 99 100

Any distinction therefore between morality and prudence exists only in the context of individuals having a nature over and above the various forms of life which history has thrown up so far. Because when we transfer this distinction to questions about whether the glue that holds our society is "moral" or "prudential" in nature, that distinction breaks down. This is because, according to Rorty, "the demands of a morality are (actually) the demands of a
language, and if languages are historical contingencies, rather than attempts to capture the true shape of the world or the self, then to “stand unflinchingly for one’s moral convictions” is a matter of identifying oneself with such a contingency,” and not with any moral principle as such.101

In conclusion Rorty says, “To see one’s language, one’s conscience, one’s morality, and one’s highest hopes as contingent produces, as literalizations of what once were accidentally produced metaphors, is to adopt a self-identity which suits one for citizenship in such an ideally liberal state.”102 To put it another way, Rorty’s notion of a liberal utopia would be one in which its citizens “would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their contingencies, and thus of their community.”103

3. Rorty’s Liberal Utopia:

This critical recognition that vocabularies, individuals and communities are contingent products of time and place does not mean that one must live without personal convictions or social commitments. On the contrary, Rorty dreams of a liberal utopia with an ethic which maximizes freedom and human solidarity and minimizes pain. Rorty wants to maximize freedom especially for ironist poets, who incarnate the highest ideals of his liberal utopia.

Who is a liberal ironist? Borrowing from Judith Shklar, Rorty defines a “liberal” as someone who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing we do. As for “ironist,” Rorty uses that term “to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires — someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.”104 According to Rorty, to be an ideal citizen of a liberal society one should be an ironist.

In terms of “final vocabularies,” an “ironist” is a person who fulfills three conditions. First, he or she “has radical and continuing doubts” about his or her own final vocabulary, because such persons have “been impressed by other vocabularies taken as final by people or books” they have encountered. Second, such people realize that arguments phrased in their present vocabulary “can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts.” Finally, insofar as such people philosophize about their situation, they don’t think their vocabulary “is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not [themselves].”105
In Rorty’s view then, ironists are the only individuals who can realize “that anything can be made good or bad by being redescribed”, and who deny that “any criteria of choice between final vocabularies exists.” What is a final vocabulary? According to Cleveland’s short and concise definition, “A final vocabulary is a set of terms used to justify the terms with which one ultimately evaluates actions and lives, one’s own and others.” With regard to their own philosophical positions Rorty says the ironists are what Sartre calls ‘meta-stable’: “never quite able to take themselves seriously because they are always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies and thus of their selves.” Ironists recognize the contingency and historicity of language and “our inability to step outside our language in order to compare it with something else.” Rorty says further, “For us ironists, nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary; there is no answer to a redescription save a re-re-description. Since there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them, criticism is a matter of looking on this picture and on that, not of comparing both pictures with the original. Nothing can serve as a criticism of a person save another person, or of a culture save an alternative culture – for persons and cultures are, for us, incarnated vocabularies.” In a word, the Rortyan ironist is a cognitive rolling stone which gathers no moral moss.

4. Private Obsessions – Public Hopes Distinction:

While this unending process of questioning, redescribing, and reweaving one’s inherited vocabularies and exploring and creating new ones is central to the ironist’s quest for an ever more autonomous, self-created final vocabulary, Rorty denies emphatically that this activity plays any positive role in public life. “Irony,” he states, “seems inherently a private matter,” something that “is of little public use”. On this view, the ironist’s desire for autonomy and self-creation, as well as the utopian vision of a culture characterized by an endless proliferation of alternative descriptions (what Rorty calls a “poeticized culture”), are all to be welcomed as legitimate and even exemplary private ideals. As long as they “do it on their own time-causing no harm to others and using no resources needed by those less advantaged,” ironists are free
to be “as privatistic, ‘irrational’ and aestheticist as they please”. Such freedom from coercion is not only tolerable but is, Rorty claims, “the aim of a just and free society”.

Moreover, as we have seen before, the commitment to self-creation is not, confined to intellectual types for no human life is so racked by pain as to be unable to learn a language by which to generate a self-description. Then again, no particular self-definition, no matter how private, fantastic, or idiosyncratic, has any special privilege. In a view that at times comes close to the sort of essentialism Rorty emphatically repudiates, he insists that all methods of self-creation are equally expressive of human nature, and all are part of the innate human desire to poeticize life anew and thus represent the “final victory of poetry in its ancient quarrel with philosophy—the final victory of metaphors of self-creation over metaphors of discovery.”

In the public realm, however, things are altogether different. This is the realm of Wilfred Sellars “we-intentions,” of shared practices and self-interpretations that define us not as individuals but as part of a larger moral community. Here our paramount concern is with public issues of social justice, and in public matters of this sort, discourse must begin necessarily from within a common vocabulary, one that permits both argument and rational consensus.

For Rorty, this shared and public vocabulary which should be for all citizens of the “the secular modern West,” is unavoidably that of liberal democracy, with its characteristic accent on averting cruelty and “the humiliation of human beings”. In short, Rorty’s private-public distinction gives one the freedom in private to “follow one’s bliss, enter one’s obsessions or tend to one’s personal ethic of self-creation.” This is the realm of idiosyncrasy and aesthetic invention. On the public side of the divide however, one is committed to the minimization of pain, cruelty, and humiliation through the expansion and refinement of “the institutions of bourgeois liberal society”. This is the realm of “solidarity” and “we-intentions” in which the highest virtues are those of the public citizen, the person engaged in common public discourse about ways to minimize cruelty, achieve social justice, and extend human solidarity.

What this solidarity comes down to is “the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of “us.” Indeed for Rorty, this is the obligation we have towards other human beings in that we keep “reminding ourselves to keep trying to
expand our sense of "us" as far as we can."\textsuperscript{124} This is a process, Rorty says, which we should try to keep going — a process which in Rorty's view, is mostly a matter of noticing our similarities with the "marginalized."\textsuperscript{125} Such an expansive view of "us" Rorty feels would be less likely to be accomplished by theory. Rather it is the narrative arts — reportage, novels, movies, TV and the like that can awaken us to detailed descriptions of particular varieties of pain and humiliation: "That is why the novel, the movie, and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress."\textsuperscript{126}

Many philosophers and theologians have charged that this is an unacceptable dualism or split. Rorty's predictable response is that this so-called split is really a common distinction between our private lives and our public lives as we actually experience them in the dynamics and dramas of living. Further, it is strategic way to reflect upon what we owe ourselves in our private passions and what we in fact owe to others in a compassionate and just social contract. One need not harmonize one's personal love of beautiful wild flowers with one's public commitment to progressive politics though both are important.\textsuperscript{127}

In his autobiographical essay entitled, "Trotsky and Wild Orchids,"\textsuperscript{128} Rorty narrates the story of his boyhood conviction, acquired from his parents and their circle of New York friends and colleagues, that all decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists. Even as a boy Rorty had a deep concern for social justice. Yet he was a precocious kid and loved many things, including wild orchids. This personal obsession with rare, beautiful flowers made him feel uneasy because he doubted that Trotsky would approve of such a passionate interest and involvement that did nothing to ease human suffering.

Thus at age fifteen he entered the so-called Hutchins College of the University of Chicago with a philosophical problem on his mind: how to reconcile Trotsky and wild orchids in some kind of metaphysical, theological or philosophical system. This problem occupied him personally and professionally for the next twenty years and displayed itself in various thought experiments and proposals. Finally, he reached the conclusion for which he is now famous in some circles, infamous in others. We need not harmonize, synthesize or integrate a private
Ethic of self-creation and a public ethic of mutual accountability. Elsewhere Rorty has said, we should stop trying to combine self-creation and politics, especially if we are liberals.

This is not to suggest that at times the personal and the public cannot and do not come together in satisfying ways. Nonetheless, Rorty suggests it is good to resist the temptation to systematically reconcile our private obsessions whatever they might be with our public responsibility to for in most cases aiming to reconcile these two would only be, says Rorty, like attempting to unify the positions of Nietzsche and John Stuart Mill.

In a nutshell, by abandoning what Rorty considers to be the now-outdated vocabularies of theology, metaphysics, and foundationalist philosophy, Rorty believes that we provide the conditions for a revitalized public and private life, one that consists of an “intricately textured collage of private narcissism and public pragmatism.” Indeed, what Rorty envisions is a liberal society that is thoroughly secular or, to use Rorty’s language, de-divinized. The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature, according to Rorty, is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation. And so he says, “to drop the idea of languages as representations, and to be thoroughly Wittgensteinian in our approach to language, would be “to de-divinize the world”, to get to the point where “we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as quasi-divinity, where we treat everything - our language, our conscience, our community - as a product of time and chance.” Only if we do that can we fully accept the argument I offered earlier – the argument that since truth is a property of sentences, since sentence are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths. Now Rorty is not really concerned that he cannot offer a ‘logical’ argument for his redescriptions. All he hopes to do is change the way we talk about truth, provide a new picture of truth. He wants to replace our old descriptions with a new, bolder redescriptions.

VII. Critical Evaluation and Conclusion:

In the following paragraphs I have tried to critically evaluate some of Rorty’s claims regarding contingency of language, self or human nature and community. Beginning with Rorty’s claim that truth is created, I will try to examine the various criticisms as expressed by various scholars.
1. Truth is Created:

Concerning Rorty’s claim that truth is a property of sentences and hence created, the whole debate, as per Cleveland, turns on whether sentences are the appropriate vehicles for truth. The suggestion is often made that an adequate account of truth requires a well-accepted or as Cleveland puts it, a countenancing proposition. Yet Rorty provides no reasons why truth is a property of sentences. This unquestioning acceptance by Rorty appears to beg the real question at issue. 135

Then again, there are two ways of seeing Rorty’s argument, which leads to two kinds of conclusions. One conclusion is the trivial conclusion according to which sentences which are true are created. If this is the case then Rorty’s distinction between the world not being created and truth being created by humans is misleading and would be better put by saying the world is not created, but sentences are.136 In other words, the world being “out there” certainly has some say even when sentences are human creations. And if this is all that truth’s being created amounts to, then it is obviously compatible with a correspondence theory of truth. (And) although this trivial sense of the conclusion helps Rorty distinguish his view from idealism it does so at the cost of deflating his idea that truth is created.”137

On the other hand, Rorty’s rhetoric indicates that what he has in mind is the more substantial conclusion, that human beings make sentences be true. For instance, he talks of truth in Nietzsche’s terms as ‘a mobile army of metaphors’. His picture of intellectual history is not to be understood in terms of progress towards the truth but simply as one set of new descriptions replacing an older set, where the new descriptions are simply redescriptions. Of course, the descriptions are not mind-independent, but what Rorty intends to suggest is that their being right or better has nothing to do with the way the world is. Rorty argues, “The ironist position seems to depend on embracing the robust sense of the claim that truth is created; the ironist realizes that ‘anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed’ and renounces ‘the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies’.138 It looks as if Rorty has abandoned any distinction between the world being out there and truth not. In other words, while these quotes suggest that Rorty believes truth is created in a significant sense, they also sound like linguistic idealism.139
It seems then that Rorty is unable to make up his mind thus indicating a serious instability when it comes to his idea of truth being created. Cleveland has summarized this by saying; “There is a reasonable, valid way of arguing that truth is created, but the conclusion of this argument is trivial. On the other hand, there is a significant sense in which truth is created, but this conclusion does not follow from anything like the plausible premises Rorty provides. So, either all Rorty’s talk about truth being created is overblown rhetoric, or else the reasons he gives for his conclusion are totally unconvincing.”

2. Language – Reality Distinction:

   It is an accepted fact that while there are sentences that are figurative or metaphorical in nature, there are also those that can be said to be literal descriptions of the world. However, what Rorty has failed to recognize when he talks of truth in Nietzsche’s terms as ‘a mobile army of metaphors’ is that there are important differences between metaphorical language and literal language. Yezzi, for instance, feels that Rorty has given too broad an interpretation of metaphor. He argues, “There are important differences between metaphorical language and literal language in terms of intention, practice, and result. The broad interpretation of metaphor just mentioned ignores these differences.” He cites for instance, a poet who reveals facts about the human condition and a scientist who reveals the beauty of nature. Between these two he says, there is a basic difference between aesthetic intent and factual intent. Whereas the poet can take creative liberties, the scientist, though can be creative, can only be so within a more limited range than the poet. Similarly, when it comes to practice, there is a difference between writing poetry or fiction and writing biography or reporting on scientific investigation. Literal language, again, is more limiting and limited than metaphorical language. Here Yezzi refers to the satisfyingly exciting, rhythmic babble of a jazz singer which can be very poetic; but doesn’t count for much when we are seeking literal descriptions.

   Furthermore, even if we always express ourselves through language, it does not follow that language is all there is. To put it another way, while language can express truth it does not follow that truth is found only within language. Yezzi asks us to consider the question: “Do we
have sound reasons to believe that language can be related to, or affected by, something external beyond language itself?" Traditionally, he says, "the answer has been affirmative." In short, while Rorty has a restrictive view of truth as a "metaphor" that could be found only within language and hence created, the fact is, truth transcends language.

3. Can an Ironist Philosopher be a Serious Political Liberal?

The ironist view that truth is created was the first place where tensions seemed to appear. It is, however, argued that the ironist, when properly understood, is not really contending for a new conception on 'the nature' of truth. Instead, what the ironist is trying to do is "only attempting to change the way truth is talked about without suggesting that this way of speaking of truth is 'right'." Simply speaking, the ironist’s method is 'redescription rather than inference'. In the ironist picture therefore, there is no distinction between logic and rhetoric or between philosophy and literature, or between rational and nonrational methods of changing other people's minds.

Rorty however, has been severely criticized by Timothy Cleveland who feels there are particular tensions in Rorty’s picture of the liberal ironist which suggest either that the position is paradoxically or ironically self-defeating or that Rorty is only 'ironically' advocating the possibility of the liberal ironist stance. To begin with, Cleveland asks the question: How can such an ironist philosopher be a serious political liberal? Any liberal, even one who believes that cruelty is the worst thing we do, must concede that in a liberal society freedom of speech must be protected. But as Cleveland indicated, recognizing or granting this freedom also calls for a recognition of a certain distinction. Rorty himself admits of such a distinction as he says: "The only important political distinction in the area is that between the use of force and the use of persuasion." He is certainly right that the distinction is key to liberalism but can the ironist
take this claim seriously? Cleveland argues: "The ironist says that the distinction 'between rational and non-rational methods of changing other people's minds' is not justifiable in any deep sense, while the liberal demands a distinction between persuasion and force as causes of belief. But if there is no justifiable distinction between rational and non-rational methods of changing people's minds, then how can persuasion be distinguished from force?" In short, when there is no distinction between rational and non-rational method(s), how can force be distinguished from persuasion? The liberal ironist position thus, according to Cleveland, is self-defeating.

Now it may be argued that the ironist can actually make a distinction between rational and non-rational methods of changing people's minds which is consistent with a politically useful distinction between persuasion and force. As suggested by Rorty, the ironist can actually admit of a distinction between reasons as causes and other kinds of causes, but only "by sociologizing them—treating them as distinctions between contingently existing sets of practices, or strategies employed within such practices, rather than natural kinds." In other words, an ironist can, in ironist terms, make all the politically useful liberal distinctions. Cleveland however sees a problem with this response as it will either be a totalitarian, Fascist, or Machiavellian ironist. Cleveland explains: "The liberal ironist cannot help but play into the hands of the non-liberals because the ironist philosophy leaves no room for liberal distinctions that would separate the methods of the liberal ironist from those of the Fascist and other non-liberals."

Ari Cohen, in his article, *Sympathy, Solidarity, and Subjectivity in Richard Rorty's Final Vocabulary*, cites the example of Steven Kautz, who is appalled that 'there is no neutral, noncircular way to defend' liberal ways...against 'Nazi and Marxist enemies of liberalism' in Rorty's system. The only possible defense of liberalism for Rorty—and indeed of anything at all—is a revolving, contestable one. Kautz however sees a problem here in that it seems impossible for "this new species of liberalism...[to] sustain the practice of the humane liberal virtues." In addition, Cohen mentions Michael Perry, who made a very similar remark, that the Nietzschean assertion 'thus I willed it,' so dear to Rorty's process of individual self-creation, leaves open an avenue for "a nasty, illiberal rebellion...against gentle liberal virtues." Indeed,
for Perry and Kautz, this is the most dangerous feature of Rorty’s theory and also the most difficult to understand.

It is dangerous for two reasons; first, it leaves us without a reason for sustaining our own beliefs about the virtues of the contemporary human rights regime. To explain further, by relativizing the distinction between rational and non-rational methods of forming beliefs to a particular social context, what the ironist admits is nothing more than the contingent nature of the distinction—that it has no more ultimate justification than that people in that context agree to it. Second, it provides no defense against those who do not possess the same beliefs we do about the value of human life. As Cleveland has pointed out, it is possible that the liberal whose concern is human equality and the removal of human suffering may well find communities or other social contexts in which the contingently existing distinctions are more apt to hamper this liberal concern than help it.

It seems as of Rorty’s philosophy has found itself in a tight spot. If Rorty says he is seriously advocating the liberal ironist, then his view is self-defeating. On the other hand, if he does not intend that all his talk of the liberal ironist should be taken seriously as advancing a new philosophical position but only as a ‘poetic’ attempt to change our lives and our actions, then ironically this view will be realized only as long as his readers take him seriously. Cleveland concludes: “the ironist effect results only if one fails to understand that it is all irony.”

4. Denial of Human Nature or Essence:

Regarding Rorty’s denial of human nature or essence, Steve Lemke believes there is an internal inconsistency in Rorty’s philosophy. In denying the existence of a human nature or essence Rorty goes so far as to claim to recognize no essential difference between a person, a dog, and a robot.

Yet Lemke asks, “If there truly is no difference in essence between persons, dogs, and robots, then to what might these terms refer?” Obviously, there are clearly defined differences (at least in chemical makeup) between these three entities. Lemke further asks, “If persons have no essence, how can we know with whom to have solidarity or on whom to show
compassion? Or, for that matter, how can our self have solidarity with other selves if selves do not exist?” 165 In denying the self, Rorty, as perceived by Lemke, “has created an anthropological dilemma for himself similar to that in Buddhism, in which we are urged to feel compassion for those who suffer, while at the same time denying in the doctrine of anatta that any such suffering being exists.” 166

Besides, Rorty seems to have something essential clearly in mind when he refers to human life. Lemke puts this clearly when he says, “(Rorty) defines humanity as pain experiencers, so being sensate must be at the essence of personhood. He describes humans as capable of fantasy, so imagination must be an element of personhood. He speaks of preserving private freedom, so will must be included in the essence of personhood. He speaks of feelings of benevolence, so emotion and/or conscience must be essential to personhood. Although Rorty criticizes those who assert that rationality is essential to personhood, how and what he writes both uses reason and requires reason to comprehend—so rationality must indeed be an essential characteristic of at least some persons. He asserts that reading novels will curb those who fantasize in private from acting out their fantasies, thus he must have an incredibly optimistic view of human nature. So Rorty seems to be talking about humans as sensate, imaginative, free, emotional, rational beings with an optimistic view of human nature not unlike that of Rousseau. How much more essence would anyone want...” 167 Accordingly, there appears to be a logical inconsistency in that he presumes the very reality he repeatedly denies.

5. Public – Private Distinction:

What about the seemingly non-bridgeable divide between the private and the public? A few thinkers, such as Yezzi though, feel that there is a need for a more accommodating middle position rather than the two extreme ones. Yet, he says this becomes an “especially troubling problem” for Rorty for when he wants to assert as a liberal that “cruelty is the worst thing we do,” he would also say at the same time “(a) that there is no reason why we should care about cruelty and (b) that reduction of cruelty is no more important as an interest than private self-creation.” 168
Indeed, according to Gary Cutting, what led to an irreconcilable tension between the private and the public is Rorty's rejection of a human essence.\textsuperscript{169} As Gary Gutting puts it: “Traditional liberalism could at least hope for a resolution of the tension between [individual self-fulfillment and altruistic amelioration of the human condition] through the fundamental role of human nature. It could, for example, be argued that, given the social dimensions of human nature, a life of moral self-fulfillment would also have to be a life of altruistic service to others. Having rejected human nature as the basis of morality, Rorty has no such moves available to him and has to recognize that there may simply be irreducible conflict between the demands of public morality and the demands of personal self-fulfillment.”\textsuperscript{170}

Indeed, since the publication of \textit{Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity}, many flaws have been pointed out by various critics on Rorty's private-public distinction. An important reason for attacking Rorty's politics is that Rorty's distinction \textit{allows for an uncritical political commitment and an aesthetical private life}. Honi Fern Haber writes, “Making the private public, and hence amenable to political debate, is a necessary step in empowerment”\textsuperscript{171}. Hence, Haber sees the private/public distinction as a sort of terror for it “forces the notion that only one form of political discourse, the liberal democratic one, is valid.”\textsuperscript{172} For Rorty, as we have seen, the private is concerned with the self and autonomy, the public with welfare and solidarity. But for Haber this is untenable since, in Richard King's words, “our private concerns and judgments have social origins and implications”\textsuperscript{173}

In Eric Gander's view, a strict enforcement of Rorty's private/public distinction makes the (liberal) attempt to eradicate humiliation be at odds with his (also liberal) notion that people should be left alone.\textsuperscript{174} In other words, such a strict enforcement of the private/public split would not forbid anyone from publicly presenting the results of his private project of self-creation as there may be someone out there who might feel humiliated by the existence of such particular project. So how do we actually use the split? As Gander puts it: “Should we keep those who feel privately humiliated by a certain minority's private habit from publicly expressing their views, or should we alternatively keep that particular minority from publicly presenting their private habits?”\textsuperscript{175}
For Gander, what the split actually suggests is that both groups should be kept from publicly presenting their conflicting views on private matters, thus creating what he calls a "least-common-denominator" vocabulary. Such a vocabulary, he says, would require that everyone be enjoined to keep to himself or herself anything that would most likely humiliate or offend anyone else. However, such an approach would have the effect of constricting rather than expanding the range of "public" conversation.

For John Horton also, Rorty's attempt to reconcile irony and commitment is deeply flawed since the inclusion of novels such as Orwell's 1984 or Rushdie's Satanic Verses in the public sphere does not leave much to be called private. For if private purposes are at most limited only to the thoughts one thinks, the private will definitely be overwhelmed by the public thereby providing little or no scope at all for what Horton calls "untrammeled irony" or the pursuit of private perfection which Rorty so obviously values. Also, if the sphere is so narrowed, it will most likely further undermine the ironist's commitment to liberalism.

The second main source of criticism of Rorty's politics is the view that "the private/public distinction is untenable since ironism is incompatible with democratic liberalism." An important criticism is that "the strong poet's desire for self-creation hides a secret contempt for all forms of social commitment, and therefore for democratic politics." We must make a choice if we want society to work for the strong poet—the Romantic view—or if we want the strong poet to work for society—the liberal democratic view. Given that for Rorty the purposes of the private are different from that of the public, he does not opt for any of the above. Instead, he introduces the private/public distinction, which enables him to get sublimity and decency working side by side. But, as Dianne Rothleder clearly states, "to conceive of the public/private split as Rorty does with the strong poet as hero to be emulated, is to occupy an untenable position. Either the private will collapse into the public or the public will collapse into the private." Rothleder therefore concludes that "this separation is unstable and untenable." Furthermore, according to Monteiro, there is a deep empirical problem with this option for he says, most groups simply do not want their private views kept private. Rorty also acknowledges this, for, in a passage quoted by Eric Gander, he writes: "What people cannot say in public becomes, eventually, what they cannot say even in private, and then, still later,
what they cannot even believe in their hearts. It seems then that the right not to be humiliated includes the right to be able to comfortably go public with one’s private vocabulary. Accordingly, Gander concludes, “Rorty’s vision of liberalism and his vision of irony are fundamentally incompatible.” This is so because Rorty’s vision of liberalism, with its focus on humiliation, obliterates any meaningful distinction between the public and the private. That one distinction, however, is all Rorty provides as a way of keeping the “privatistic, ‘irrationalistic,’ and aestheticist” impulses inherent in irony from turning around and destroying liberal solidarity.

6. Redescription and Cruelty:

What about redescription that Rorty says should take the place of a set of beliefs based upon certain foundations? It seems this is easier said than done for there are still many out there who would rather want to be taken at face value than having their final vocabularies redescribed by the ironist. Even Rorty acknowledges that there is a problem here as “most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms — taken seriously just as they are and just as they talk.” Rorty also recognizes that there is something potentially cruel about telling people that their final vocabularies are up for grabs, since one way of humiliating people is “by making the things that seemed most important to them look futile, obsolete and powerless.” “Redescription,” Rorty admits, “often humiliates.”

Moreover, as pointed out by Gander in the preceding section, not all groups would want to keep their private vocabularies private. Indeed, quite a few groups would argue that forcing them to keep their private vocabularies private is both humiliating and oppressive. Take the case of the metaphysician whose public life need not be distinguished from private life for he is convinced that he knows, and can share, the truth “about how things really are.” I doubt he would want to be redescribed and hence humiliated by the ironist.

What about the more complicated cases such as that of the Nazi? Would it be possible for a liberal ironist to effectively redescribe Nazism, for example, to persuade practitioners of extreme cruelty and of genocide to embrace liberalism? Or, on the other hand, might a particularly clever, eloquent, imaginative — in short, ironist — Nazi succeed at redescribing liberalism to
show that cruelty, as we have already stated, might be the best thing for some people to do to others? How would Rorty respond?

In Rorty’s words: “If I were assigned the task not of refuting or answering but of converting a Nazi... I could show him how nice things can be in free societies, how horrible things are in the Nazi camps,”... and so on. From Gardner’s point of view however, as soon as the conversation begins, Rorty excludes reason from his discussion with the Nazi. Reason, Gander insists, is capable of showing the Nazi that some of his most important beliefs contradict other important beliefs. Yet Rorty has always maintained that “there is no neutral, noncircular way for the liberal ironist to demonstrate that one position is right and the other wrong. On what basis then could Rorty ever convict human rights violators? In trying to proceed through this philosophical mess, Rorty might employ a clever maneuver that has worked for him before: He can point out that metaphysics is no more useful in this case than is liberal irony. The metaphysical hope at stopping Nazi atrocities would be based on some appeal to reason or our common humanity. If, for example, the Nazis could only be made to see the truth of the human condition, they would cease their brutality. Unfortunately, those intent on committing genocide are not much interested in listening to sermons about why cruelty against other human beings is wrong, and these types of appeal are easily silenced by a single gunshot. Force quickly wins out over persuasion – even when the truth is involved. This might be why Rorty refuses to use reason against the Nazi. In the end, Gander finds Rorty’s response unconvincing because he believes “we must maintain a minimalist foundationalist political rhetoric that centers on reason.”

Furthermore, we noted earlier, Rorty takes great care to avoid the particular type of cruelty (humiliation), which arises from the redescription of a person’s final vocabulary. Unless the redescription of Nazism is a metaphysical one and results in an empowering conversion, the liberal ironist engaging the Nazi runs the risk of humiliating him. While the liberal ironist is not required to reform her own final vocabulary in order to avoid humiliating others, she must understand what humiliates others and avoid those actions. Based on his own argument, then, Rorty ought not attempt to convert the Nazi at all.
If we continue to highlight the tension between liberalism and Nazism, the objectionable one of the two vocabularies will become outmoded and unacceptable publicly and, eventually, privately as well. But what guarantee do we have that the vocabulary we oppose will become passé and not our own? Here Rorty fails to convince us that he has established anything other than a situation wherein proponents of liberalism and Nazism butt heads for awhile before they simply part ways, each hopeful that the other will give up their policy of conversational engagement. Moreover, as Gander has pointed out, “If we leave it entirely up to redescriptive chance, we have no more reason for believing we will finally end up a liberal society than for believing we will finally end up a Nazi society.” In Gardner’s view, Rorty has—by allowing us to even engage in conversation with the Nazi—taken us to the very brink of the abyss and that the only way to bring us back is by relying on the foundationalist notion of objective truth. Indeed, Gardner goes so far as to suggest that “If Rorty is correct in what he says, then we liberals should act now to eliminate forcefully the possibility that anti-liberals could engage in conversation with us.” But since Rorty’s own conception of liberalism will never allow this type of behavior, Gander concludes that Rorty must, finally, “have some faith in the claim that ‘Truth is...the proper and sufficient antagonist to error’ and has nothing to fear in a free and open encounter.”

7. Solidarity

Finally, there’s the liberal commitment to solidarity. Much has already been said concerning Rorty’s preference of solidarity to objectivity. What I want to focus here concerns Rorty’s “liberal utopia” in which through the process of attaining solidarity one can bring about a lessening of cruelty in the world not by making an appeal to such notions as human essence or nature but by the narrative arts such as the reportage, novels, movies, TV and the like. The question is, how effective can these narratives be in creating solidarity? According to Douglass, “Rorty’s ideal narrative is one ‘which connect(s) the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other. It would be a narrative that captures the imagination of the people, one with powerful poetic language, one that has the ability to pervade the culture, or even different cultures, and bring them all together as one of us.’” Now in
Douglass' view, the one narrative that has brought together and integrated people from all continents is the Bible. So, can Rorty point to the Bible to show he is right? Douglass says “No.” This is because the Bible, in Rorty’s reading, was part of turning people away from each other to some higher Divine Truth, instead of turning them to themselves. Hence, according to Douglass “It can bear no witness to Rorty’s idea of solidarity through narratives, for its appeal likely lay in its transcendent and thus enchanting quality.”

Douglass then asks us to turn to what Rorty says created “sympathy” that’s needed for solidarity. He cites for instance, Uncle Tom’s Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin Luther King’s powerful speeches, the movie Malcolm X, daily TV reports such as those on human plight and injustice, indiscrimination, poverty, earthquake, bomb blasts, etc. Have these helped at all? According to Douglass, the impact of this “sentimental education” is remote.

TV reports, say those of an earthquake or bomb blast, would rivet our attention if it was happening, say, in our hometown but would evoke nominal interest from us if it was happening in another area of the world where we know no one.

Then there’s the problem of interpretation. As indicated by Douglass, “narratives are a matter for interpretation, and different people read narratives differently.” He gives the example of that great narrative of Nietzsche, his re-description of history that Rorty is so fascinated with. In Douglass’ view what Rorty ignores is the violent undertones of Nietzsche’s idea of self-creation, or “self-shaping”. In the words of Douglass, “How intellectually sweet a notion for Nietzsche’s idea of going ‘back to the innocent conscience of the beast of prey’, leaving behind ‘custom, respect, usage, gratitude’, and the ‘culture of the sick’, to become ‘something perfect, wholly achieved, happy, mighty triumphant, something still capable of arousing fear”.

All right, Nietzsche’s violence and the violence of the dark ages does not really fit Rorty’s reading. But it shows how all narratives are subject to interpretation. On proper scrutiny then, Rorty’s idea that reading narratives can sustain solidarity is found to be unsustainable. Now let’s say that maybe Rorty, for whatever reason, is right after all. Then Rorty still relies on the democratic structures and institutions that provide for the tranquility of reading and redescribing. But here again, Rorty is faced with another setback for how can these institutions be upheld when all the foundations are demasked as contingent, and truth dismissed as human construction?
In conclusion, one needs to ask the extent to which Rorty succeeds in making his vocabulary more attractive than the already existing ones. Though Rorty abjures philosophical argument for he says, "I am not to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace," yet he has, at key points, used what he elsewhere abjures. MacIntyre has given us a few examples of which two are given here. First, "He (i.e. Rorty) quotes and extends an argument of Davidson about what must be involved in any substantial change in our views or values." Second, he treats Freud's (as well as Nietzsche's) views as well-founded. In short, Rorty has argued a great deal about a "de-divinized" world. Yet the truth is, the old vocabulary of the metaphysician has not been replaced by the vocabulary of the liberal ironist. Perhaps one will agree with Terry Eagleton when he says that "No capitalist society is more secular than the United States, and (yet) none is more virulently metaphysical." Besides, one can disagree with his position on his own terms simply by presenting an alternative vocabulary that one hopes will be more attractive simply by redescribing Rorty's position to make it look bad, while making one's own look good. For Rorty, there is always the possibility of a "better vocabulary" that will help us cope better with our environment. In other words, a "final vocabulary" that can justify our own as well as others' lives and actions. At any rate, what matters to Rorty is not that we have discovered the truth of things but because we have been able to give, via the process of redescription, enough justification for one vocabulary to be replaced by another. Justification, says Rorty, should be our goal and not truth. How well Rorty can justify this claim is a matter that will be explored in detail in the next chapter.
Notes and References:

2 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p.3.
5 Ibid., p.5.
7 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p.5.
8 Ibid., p. 8.
11 Ibid., p. 67
12 Haidar Eid, “Rorty’s Complicit American Neo-Pragmatism” http://reconstruction.eserver.org, webpage,
14 Ibid., p. 78. Rorty defines “dialectic” as “the attempt to play off vocabularies against one another, rather than merely to infer propositions from one another, and thus as the partial substitution of redescription for inference.”
15 Ibid., p.20.
20 Rorty, “Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism” p. 34.
21 Ibid., p. 34.
22 Ibid., p. 34.
23 Ibid., p. 34.
24 Ibid., p. 35.
25 Ibid., p. 36. (see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 255)

28. Ibid., webpage.

29. Ibid., webpage.

30. Ibid., webpage.

31. Ibid., webpage. (see Rorty, “Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism” p. 49.)


33. Ibid., p. 49.

34. Ibid., p. 49.


36. Ibid., p. 958

37. Ibid., p. 959


40. Ibid.


42. Ibid., p. 11.

43. Ibid, p. 12.

44. Ibid., p. 12.


47. Ibid., p. 15.

48. Ibid., p. 9.

49. Ibid., p. 17.


52. Ibid., p. 17.

53. Ibid., p. 18.

54. Ibid., p. 18.
55 Ibid., p. 18.
56 Ibid., p. 19.
57 Ibid., p. 19.
58 Ibid., p. 20.
60 Ibid., p. 147.
61 Topper, "Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription," p. 958
63 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 16.
64 Ibid., p. 21.
65 Ibid., p. 8.
66 Ibid., p. 27.
67 Ibid., p. 29.
68 Ibid., p. 29.
69 Ibid., p. 29.
70 Ibid., p. 33.
71 Ibid., p. 34.
72 Ibid., p. 34.
73 Ibid., p. 35.
75 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 35-36.
76 Ibid., p. 38.
77 Ibid., p. 38.
78 Ibid., p. 39.
79 Ibid., p. 44.
81 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 44
82 Ibid., p. 44
83 Topper, "Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription," p. 954 (see Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 9.)
84 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 44.

85 Ibid., p. 45.

86 Ibid., p. 45.

87 Ibid., p. 48.

88 Ibid., p. 50.

89 Ibid., p. 49.

90 Ibid., p. 46.

91 Ibid., p. 52.


93 Ibid., p. 53.

94 Ibid., p. 53.

95 Ibid., p. 58.

96 Ibid., p. 58

97 Ibid., p. 59.

98 Ibid., p. 59.

99 Ibid., p. 59.

100 Ibid., p. 60.

101 Ibid., p. 60.

102 Ibid., p. 61.

103 Ibid., p. 61.

104 Ibid., p. xv.

105 Ibid., p. 73.

106 Ibid., p. 73.

107 Ibid. p. 74.


110 Ibid., p. 75.

111 Ibid., p. 80.

112 Manzoor, “Politics Without Truth, Metaphysics or Epistemology” webpage, http://pmanzoor.info

Ibid., p. 956. (see Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 120).


116 Ibid., p. xiv.

117 Ibid., p. 40.

118 Ibid., pp. 59-60.


120 Ibid., p. 957.


122 Topper, “Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription,” p. 958. (See also Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 84.)


124 Ibid., p. 196.

125 Ibid., p.196.

126 Ibid., p. xvi.


128 As narrated by Scott Holland in “The Coming Only Is Sacred: Self-Creation and Social Solidarity in Richard Rorty’s Secular Eschatology,” webpage. (see Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pp. 3-20.)

129 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p.34.

130 Ibid., pp. 120-121.

131 Ibid., p. 85.


135 Ibid., p. 220.

136 Ibid., p. 223.

137 Ibid., p. 224.

138 Ibid., p. 224. (See also Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 73)

139 Ibid., p. 225.

140 Ibid., p. 225.

141 Ron Yezzi, “Richard Rorty” (Based upon Rorty’s *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*). Minnesota State University, 2001 webpage, http://krypton.mnsu.edu

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.

144 Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p. 239.

145 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, p. 78.

146 Ibid., p. 78. (see also Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p. 227)

147 Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p. 228. (see also Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, p. 83) (Another philosopher who shares this view is Paul Feyerabend who as quoted by Cleveland from his book Against Method says, "The teaching of standards and their defense never consists merely in putting them before the mind of the student and making them as clear as possible. The standards are supposed to have maximal causal efficacy as well. This makes it very difficult indeed to distinguish between the logical force and the material effect of the argument. Just as a well-trained pet will obey his master no matter how great the confusion in which he finds himself, and no matter how urgent the need to adopt patterns of behaviour, so in the very same way a well-trained rationalist will obey the mental image of his master, he will conform to the standards of argumentation that he has learned, he will adhere to these standards no matter how great the confusion in which he finds himself, and he will be quite incapable of realizing that what he regards as the 'voice of reason' is but a causal aftereffect of the training he has received. He will be quite unable to discover that the appeal to reason to which he succumbs so readily is nothing but a political maneuver." (see Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p. 228)

148 Ibid., p. 227.

150 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, p. 84.

151 Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p 228.

152 Ibid., pp. 233-234.


156 Ibid., p. 6.

157 Ibid., p. 6.

158 Ibid., p. 6.

159 Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p.235.


161 Cleveland, "The Irony of Contingency and Solidarity," p. 234

162 Ibid., p. 241.

163 Ibid., p. 241.


165 Ibid., webpage.

166 Ibid., webpage.
163

167 Ibid., webpage.

168 Ibid., webpage.

169 Yezzi, "Richard Rorty," webpage.


171 Ibid., p. 8 (See Gary Gutting, Pragmatic Liberalism and the Critique of Modernity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 59.)

172 Ibid., p. 13.

173 Ibid., p. 13.


176 Ibid., p. 15.

177 Ibid., p. 15.

178 Ibid., p. 15.

179 Ibid., p. 15.

180 Ibid., pp. 15-16 (See Gander, The Last Conceptual Revolution, p. 89.)

181 Ibid., p. 16.


183 Ibid., p. 16. (see Rothleder, The Work of Friendship, p. 140.)


185 Ibid., p. 17. (See Gander, The Last Conceptual Revolution, p. 92.)

186 Ibid., p. 18. (See Gander, The Last Conceptual Revolution, p. 114.)

187 Ibid., p. 18. (See Gander, The Last Conceptual Revolution, p. 114.)

188 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, p. 89.

189 Ibid., p.89.

190 Ibid., p.90.


192 Ibid. p. 19.

194 Ibid., p. 20. (see Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 197.)

195 Ibid., p. 21.

196 Ibid., p. 22.

197 Ibid., p. 23.

198 Ibid., p. 23.


200 Ibid., p. 24.

201 Ibid., pp. 24-25.

202 Ibid., p. 25. (See Gander, *The Last Conceptual Revolution*, p. 168.)


205 Ibid., webpage 3.

206 Ibid., webpage 3.

207 Ibid., webpage 3.

208 Ibid., webpage 3.

209 Ibid., webpage 3.


I. Introduction:

In his “Introduction” to his book *Truth and Progress*, Rorty begins by saying, “There is no truth.” What could that mean? Why should anybody say it?1 Then he goes on to say, “Actually, almost nobody (except Wallace Stevens) does say it. But philosophers like me are often said to say it. One can see why.”2 And the reason he gives is: “For we have learned (from Nietzsche and James, among others) to be suspicious of the appearance-reality distinction. We think that there are many ways to talk about what is going on, and that none of them gets closer to the way things are in themselves than any other. We have no idea what “in itself” is supposed to mean in the phrase “reality as it is in itself.” So we suggest that the appearance-reality distinction be dropped in favor of a distinction between less useful and more useful ways of talking. But since most people think that truth is correspondence to the way reality “really is,” they think of us as denying the existence of truth.”3

From previous chapters we have seen how Rorty equates truth with usefulness. Hence, what is important to Rorty is that we keep talking about what is useful to us or “what is good for us to believe.” For this reason Rorty argues, the aim of philosophy is no longer to seek objective truth but to keep the conversation going with the sole purpose of reaching an agreement on what is best to believe with members of one’s society – in Rorty’s case, the secular liberal society of the West. Rorty identifies himself with the pragmatists who, he says, are the ones who feel they have no need and no desire for metaphysics or epistemology. Hence, according to Rorty, they have abandoned the quest for objectivity and taken instead the quest for solidarity. Now Rorty is very careful to say that what he is asserting is not that there is no truth but only that it is “an empty compliment”4 and that it is more useful to see it as a matter of solidarity or intersubjective agreement. Rorty thinks this is a much more feasible option since in his opinion, truth is not something that exists “out there” but in our vocabularies and hence contingent as they keep changing from time to time depending on our needs, interests, and purposes. Besides,
there is always the possibility of a "better vocabulary" that will help us cope better with our situation be it our contingent self or community. And yet, it is not because we have discovered the truth of things but because we have been able to give enough justification that for the time being we can discard our old vocabularies for the new ones. Regarding justification, Rorty thinks it is nothing more than a sociological matter, a matter of seeing whether something is acceptable to my peers. In view of this, truth becomes for Rorty simply "a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed. Rorty thus concludes that justification and not truth should be the goal of our inquiry. This has drawn in sharp criticisms from many philosophers and thinkers who feel that truth and justification are two independent conditions of our beliefs and one cannot be replaced by another.

In this chapter I will begin with an exploration into Rorty's claim that all we need is justification and not truth and see if this is really workable. At the same time I will also look at a number of critical arguments that have been offered by a number of thinkers concerning Rorty's views on truth and justification. Nonetheless, before we delve into Rorty's arguments on truth and justification, I will briefly sum up what has been the general or common understanding concerning truth and justification.

II. Truth and Justification from the Traditional Point of View:

Generally speaking, the assumption in any traditional epistemology is that truth is the condition for knowledge and if a belief is not true, it cannot be said to constitute knowledge. Accordingly, if there is no such thing as truth, then there can be no knowledge.

Furthermore, for a belief to be true and to constitute knowledge, it must be arrived at in the right way. What, then, is the right way of arriving at beliefs? In addition to truth, what other properties must a belief have in order to constitute knowledge? We might begin by noting that sound reasoning and solid evidence seem to be the way to acquire knowledge. In other words, for a belief to constitute knowledge, its truth must be justified by sound reasoning and concrete evidence. In contrast, a lucky guess cannot constitute knowledge. Likewise, misinformation and faulty reasoning do not seem like a recipe for knowledge, even if they happen to lead to a true belief.
Again, the requirement that knowledge involves justification does not necessarily mean that knowledge requires absolute certainty. Humans are fallible beings, and fallibilism is the view that it is possible to have knowledge even when one’s true belief might have turned out to be false. Between beliefs that are indubitably true and those which are true solely by luck lies a spectrum of beliefs with regard to which we have some feasible reason to believe that they would be true. For instance, if I heard the weatherman say that there is a 90% chance of rain, and as a result I formed the belief that it would rain, then my true belief that it would rain was not true purely by luck. Even though there was some chance that my belief might have been false, there was a sufficient basis for that belief to constitute knowledge. This basis is referred to as the justification for that belief. We can then say that, to constitute knowledge, a belief must be both true and justified. That is, “S knows P, if and only if, (1) he believes it, (2) it is true, and (3) his belief is justified.”

But just because justification and truth are connected, one does not entail the other. The reason is, a belief can be unjustified yet, because of luck, it can be true. Conversely, a belief can be justified yet, because of human fallibility, can be false. In other words, truth and justification are two independent conditions of beliefs and one cannot be replaced by another. Of course, a justified belief will presumably be more likely to be true than to be false and justified beliefs will presumably be more likely or more probable to be true than unjustified beliefs. But no matter how well a belief is justified, its truth is an altogether different matter. To be more precise, whatever the connection between truth and justification - be it through perceptual experience or memory or introspection, or good reasoning, or reliable testimony, or collection of data, or conducting of experiments - justification does not entail truth. As Audi has put it, “the former entails showing that one is in an epistemically successful state, and apparently does not entail that one’s getting there meets, or is, even indirectly, guided by, any normative standards; the latter entails showing that one is in an epistemically acceptable state, which one cannot be in without meeting normative standards.” He goes on to say, “Justification, we might say, is roughly a matter of a right to believe, and is anchored in a social practice; knowledge is roughly a matter of being right (in a suitable way), and is anchored to the world.”
Nonetheless, according to Rorty, all we need is justification and truth should simply be discarded. How did Rorty arrive at such a peculiar conclusion? It is to this question that we shall turn now.

III. Justification Instead of Truth:

In a chapter that he has entitled "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Davidson versus Wright," Rorty launches an attack on truth with this argument: “Pragmatists think that if something makes no difference to practice, it should make no difference to philosophy. This conviction makes them suspicious of the philosophers’ emphasis on the difference between justification and truth. For that difference makes no difference to my decisions about what to do. If I have concrete, specific, doubts about whether one of my beliefs is true, I can only resolve those doubts by asking if it is adequately justified – by finding and assessing additional reasons pro and con. I cannot bypass justification and confine my attention to truth. Assessment of truth and assessment of justification are, when the question is about what I should believe now (rather than about why I, or someone else, acted as we did), the same activity. If, on the other hand, my doubts are as unspecific and abstract as Descartes’ - if they are such that I can do nothing to resolve them – they should be dismissed, as they were by Peirce, as ‘make-believe’. Philosophy should ignore them.”

Rorty believes that although there are obviously a lot of regional things to be said about the justification of beliefs in various particular areas (though nothing global to be said about justification in general) there may be little to be said about truth. Actually, whatever has been said about truth that it is some sort of correspondence to, or accurate representation of, reality seemed, according to Rorty, empty and pointless. As a matter of fact, says Rorty, “doubts about correspondence to reality can only be settled by assessing the coherence of the dubious belief with other beliefs” and here, he says, he agrees with his idealist opponents. For the pragmatists, he says, “the difference between true beliefs considered as useful nonrepresentational mental states, and as accurate (and therefore useful) representations of reality, seemed a difference that could make no difference to practice. No one profits from insisting on the distinction, both concluded, except for those who enjoy entertaining make-believe doubts.”
This is not the only time where Rorty has suggested that we dismiss the notion of truth and look instead for justification. In another article entitled “Universality and Truth” he says very clearly that what philosophers have described as the universal desire for truth is better described as the universal desire for justification. He then argues, “The grounding premise of my argument is that you cannot aim at something, cannot work to get it, unless you can recognize it once you have got it. One difference between truth and justification is that between the unrecognizable and the recognizable. We shall never know for sure whether a given belief is true, but we can be sure that nobody is presently able to summon up any residual objections to it, that everybody agrees that it ought to be held.”

Rorty further says that truth “is too sublime, so to speak, to be either recognized or aimed at. Justification is merely beautiful, but it is recognizable, and therefore capable of being systematically worked for. Sometimes, with luck, justification is even achieved. But that achievement is usually only temporary, since sooner or later some new objections to the temporarily justified belief will be developed.” To put it simply, the difference between truth and justification is really that between the unrecognizable and the recognizable and hence we can only work towards attaining the latter. But here again, we need to be reminded that whatever justification we have worked for is only temporary for sooner or later there may arise objections to our so called justified beliefs.

In his “Introduction” to Truth and Progress Rorty emphatically says, that it would have been better for James to say that phrases like “the good in the way of belief” and “what is better for us to believe” are interchangeable with “justified” rather than with “true.” In fact, according to Rorty, he (i.e., James) could have gone on to say that we have no criterion of truth other than justification, and that justification and betterness-to-believe will always be as relative to audiences (and to ranges of truth candidates) as is goodness to purposes and rightness to situations. In Rorty’s view “there is no such thing as belief being justified sans phrase – justified once and for all – for the same reason that there is no such thing as a belief that can be known, once and for all and that is certain and indubitable.” There are a load of beliefs such as “Two and two are four”; “The Holocaust took place,” about which nobody has any doubt. But there are no beliefs that can be said to be immune to all possible doubt.
Now what makes philosophers look for truth rather than justification is, according to Rorty, their yearning for unconditionality. He says, "As I see it, the yearning for unconditionality—the yearning which leads philosophers to insist that we need to avoid "contextualism" and "relativism"—is, indeed, satisfied by the notion of truth." According to Rorty however, this yearning for unconditionality is unhealthy for in the ultimate analysis, the price of unconditionality is actually of no great concern when it comes to practice. Rorty admits there is the yearning for unconditionality in order to avoid "contextualism" and "relativism" but without really going for an explanation he says this yearning is unhealthy and hence truth should be abandoned and we should stick to justification.

IV. The Cautionary use of Truth:

Although Rorty has called for an abandonment of truth yet he sees a certain aspect to truth which cannot be eliminated and that is its cautionary use. He says, "There are many uses for the word 'true,' but the only one which could not be eliminated from our linguistic practice with relative ease is the cautionary use. That is the use we make of the word when we contrast justification and truth, and say that a belief may be justified but not true." This is an idea he has borrowed from Davidson whom he interpreted as saying that the word 'true' has no explanatory use, but merely a disquotational use, a commending use, or what he himself calls, a 'cautionary' use. This is its use in such expressions as 'fully justified, but perhaps not true.'

Now what makes Rorty speak of the cautionary use of truth even though he had mentioned earlier that we should dismiss it as something irrelevant? Rorty himself answers this by saying that his underlying idea in advocating the cautionary use of truth is, as he himself has admitted, "to point out that justification is relative to an audience, and that we can never exclude the possibility that some better audience might exist, or come to exist, to which a belief which is justifiable to us would not be justifiable." In "Universality and Truth" we find Rorty reiterating this same line of reasoning when he says, "Outside of philosophy, this cautionary use is used to contrast less-informed with better-informed audiences, past audiences with future audiences. That is, we can never tell when some audience in future might come up with..."
a better justification for changing our vocabularies, i.e. our habits and practices, that will help us better cope with our environment.\textsuperscript{23}

In fact Rorty sees no difference between the use of the word "danger" and "true" in terms of their cautionary aspect. As he explains it, "it is no more necessary to have a philosophical theory about the nature of truth, or the meaning of the word ‘true,’ than it is to have one about the nature of danger, or the meaning of the word ‘danger.’ The principal reason we have a word like ‘danger’ in the language is to caution people: to warn them that they may not have envisaged all the consequences of their proposed action."\textsuperscript{24} In the same way, Rorty sees the cautionary use of truth as nothing more than flagging a special sort danger. To quote him at length, "We use it to remind ourselves that people in different circumstance – people facing future audiences – may not be able to justify the belief which we have triumphantly justified to all the audiences we have encountered."\textsuperscript{25}

V. Truth, not a Goal of Inquiry:

According to Rorty, "A goal is something you can know that you are getting closer to, or farther away from.\textsuperscript{26} But there is no way to know our distance from truth. Indeed, truth is not even something to which we might get closer, much less something we might realize we had finally reached. Rorty therefore concludes, "To try to make truth approachable and reachable is to do what Davidson deplores, to humanize truth."\textsuperscript{27}

The only criterion we have for applying the word "true; is justification, and justification is always relative to an audience.\textsuperscript{28} It is relative for such justification might only serve the purpose of that audience and the situation in which it finds itself. For Rorty therefore, the question of whether our practices of justification lead to truth is as unanswerable as it is unpragmatic. And the reason he gives is, "It is unanswerable because there is no way to privilege our current purposes and interests. It is unpragmatic because the answer to it would make no difference whatever to our practice."\textsuperscript{29}

Rorty attributes the view that truth is not the goal of inquiry to Davidson whose views he has contrasted with those of Wright in his article "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Donald Davidson versus Crispin Wright." While Wright, who is termed by Rorty as a metaphysical activist, thinks that truth and justification are two distinct norms that regulate the process of
inquiry and that one should successfully aim at both. Davidson, on the other hand, is a
metaphysical quietist, who, according to Rorty, does not recognize truth as a distinct norm.
“For Davidsonians,” Rorty insists, “the most consistent position is to hold that… there is nothing
which can plausibly be described as a goal of enquiry, although the desire for further justification
of course serves as motive of enquiry.” He goes on to explain, “If Dewey and Davidson
were asked ‘What is the goal of enquiry?’, the best either could do would be to say that it has
many different goals, none of which has any metaphysical presuppositions: for example, getting
what we want, the improvement of man’s estate, convincing as many audiences as possible,
solving as many problems as possible, and so on. Only if we concede to Wright that ‘truth’ is
the name of a distinct norm will metaphysical activism seem desirable. For Dewey and Davidson,
that is an excellent reason not to view it as such a norm.”

Rorty therefore looks forward to a time when we shall no longer be asking questions
about whether we are getting nearer to truth but become “more sensitive to the marvelous
diversity of human languages, and of the social practices associated with those languages…”
A time and a culture in which, according to Rorty, “instead of asking, “Are there truths out
there that we shall never discover?” we would ask, “Are there ways of talking and acting that
we have not yet explored?” Instead of asking whether the intrinsic nature of reality is yet in
sight (the secular counterpart of asking whether things are dis aliter visum”, i.e. it seemed
otherwise to the gods. Put another way, “man proposes; God disposes.”), we would ask
whether each of the various descriptions of reality employed in our various cultural activities is
the best we can imagine—the best means to the ends served by those activities.”

In asking the above questions, which Rorty sees as a change in our intellectual habits,
there will be, according to Rorty, at least two advantages: “First, it would help us stop assigning
one of these activities (religion, for example, or natural science) priority over others. Second,
it would help us stop worrying about objectivity by letting us be satisfied with intersubjectivity.
In previous papers, in particular in a paper called Science as Solidarity, Rorty has argued
that “the romance, and the idealistic hopes, which traditionally have been elaborated in a rhetoric
of ‘the pursuit of objective truth’ can be equally well elaborated in a rhetoric of social solidarity,
a rhetoric which romanticizes the pursuit of inter-subjective, unforced agreement among larger
and larger groups of interlocutors.”
Because of his views, Rorty has been labeled a relativist by many philosophers. And it is not so surprising considering his views on truth and justification. First, he says, we need to no longer view truth as the goal of inquiry suggesting therefore that it is not really necessary or relevant to talk about truth anymore. Then he recommends that instead of looking for truth we should look for justification. But even justification is relative to an audience. This is because, as Rorty said, there may come up a better audience in future who would come up with objections regarding our present beliefs and practices thus invoking a change in our vocabularies. So then, there is no enduring vocabulary or in other words, truth, for according to Rorty, truth is really embedded within our vocabularies. Moreover, Rorty gives a great deal of importance to the audience or in other words, certain people belonging to a certain culture – in this case, the “wet liberals” – and this has brought him the charge of being a cultural relativist. Rorty however claims that he is an ethnocentrist and not a relativist. This, however, is an issue that we shall take up in the next chapter when we come to the question of whether or not Rorty is a relativist.

VI. Critical Evaluation and Conclusion:

In the following paragraphs, we will look at some of the critical arguments that have been offered by a number of scholars and philosophers concerning Rorty’s views on truth and justification. Does the difference between truth and justification really make no difference? What about the notion of “unconditional validity,” which according to Habermas differentiates truth and justification? Can truth really be reduced to or replaced by justification? To put it another way, can justification do without the notion of truth? For justification, says Putnam, is more than just a sociological notion. It is to these arguments that we shall now turn.

1. Does the difference between Truth and Justification make no difference to Practice?

We have seen that for Rorty there is nothing to truth beyond justified belief and henceforth what has always been seen as the “desire for truth” should be substituted with a “desire for justification. And the reason he gives is that the difference between the two does not make any difference to practice. Yet according to Steinhoff there is a difference and the difference between the two does make a different to practice. To prove his point, Steinhoff cites an example of a situation – let’s say, situation A – in which there are some facts which would
usually indicate that the water in the pool in front of me is mixed with an absolutely lethal poison. However, there is considerable counter-evidence which outweighs these indications and my belief that the water is not poisoned is justified. I decide to scoop up some water and drink it - and at this instant my companion says “Well, your belief that the water is not poisoned may be justified, but perhaps it is not true.”

Before continuing with story A, let us turn to story B. There is again a pool in front of me. This time there are no indications that the water is poisoned though there are indications that it tastes bad. Nevertheless the counter-evidence outweighs these indications and once again, my belief that the water does not taste bad is justified. I am about to drink it when my companion once again tells me “Well, your belief that the water does not taste bad may be justified, but perhaps it is not true.”

Let us assume that the belief in situation A is as well justified as the one in situation B. And both beliefs are equally convincing. How do the stories continue? Any reasonable person will think that I drink the water in situation B but not in A. This then is the difference which results from the difference between truth and justification. Taking into account the cautionary use my companion makes of the difference between truth and justification, I begin to consider the utility/risk ratio of drinking the water. Now in both cases, the potential utility of drinking the water will be the same - my thirst will be quenched. But the risk is different in each case. While the water may taste bad in both situations, yet the risk that I shall die is higher in situation A than in situation B. In other words, the utility/risk ratio is better in case B than in case A and for this reason, I drink to drink the water in B but not in A.

The point that Steinhoff wants to make here is that “no sense can be made of such a utility/risk calculation without the concept of truth and without emphasizing the difference between truth and justification.” Now someone may argue that the belief that I shall not die is better justified in B than in A. Nevertheless, Steinhoff contended, “the difference between good and better justifications can only matter in so far as the better justification raises the probability of a belief’s being true. If it did not - if, let us say, ‘better’ here just meant ‘rhetorically more appealing’ or ‘more appealing to a bourgeois liberal taste’ - there would be no effect on the utility/risk ratio.” According to Steinhoff, “the significance of the difference between good
and better justifications already presupposes the difference between justification and truth.  

As if this is not enough, he then asks as to why should anyone who thinks that this difference does not practically matter take it into consideration? Why should not one just say in case A ‘Well, my belief is justified. Nothing else matters. Cheers!’? Then he drinks it and dies.  

Furthermore, Rorty admits that there is what he calls a ‘cautionary’ use of ‘true’. As mentioned before, this is its use in such expressions as ‘fully justified, but perhaps not true’. However, Steinhoff feels there is a dilemma here which he pointed out by saying, “If the difference between truth and justification, which the cautionary use does in fact emphasize, is understood as making a difference to decisions about what to do, then Rorty simply contradicts himself. And if it is understood as not making the mentioned difference, it has nothing to do with the general rule which is intended to induce the utility/risk calculation.”  

By playing down the significance of the cautionary use, Rorty seems to opt for the second horn, which is, that the entire force of the cautionary use of ‘true’ is to point out that justification is relative to an audience, and that we can never exclude the possibility that some better audience might exist, or come to exist, to which a belief which is justifiable to us would not be justifiable.” But this cannot explain why the decision in story A is not the same as in story B. Moreover, it cannot explain the different results of the utility/risk calculation. For if the ‘cautionary’ use of ‘true’ just pointed out the risk - which was not so much a risk as an unchangeable fact - that my belief might not be justifiable to some better audience, this ‘risk’ would be the same in both cases A and B. What Steinhoff infers from here is that “whether the belief is about poison or taste, it does not matter at all for its justifiability to some audience. It only matters for its consequences for me.”  

Truth does make a difference to practice. For no matter how well-justified a belief is, what matters is its truth as seen in the example above. Indeed, this is just what Rorty’s cautionary use of “true” is all about when it reminds us that a statement maybe justified but not true –not in the sense that “this may be true for me but not for some future audience” but in the sense that if it is overlooked or ignored then it may even cost us our lives. For our beliefs to be useful or workable, they should not only be justifiable but unconditionally true. This takes us to the next
section where it will be argued that truth, no matter how often the standards of justification may change, itself remains the same due to one fundamental aspect of it, which is its notion of unconditional validity.

2. Truth and Unconditional Validity:

Habermas, in his article, “Richard Rorty’s Pragmatic Turn” says he agrees with Rorty in proclaiming that “nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept.” Nonetheless, he feels there is one fundamental aspect of the meaning of truth found in the correspondence idea of truth that we cannot just write off, which is that of the notion of “unconditional validity”. Indeed Habermas feels that this aspect–the notion of unconditional validity–is “swept under the carpet if the truth of a proposition is conceived (only) as coherence with other propositions or as justified assertability within an interconnected system of assertions.”

And the reason he has given as to why we cannot conceive of truth this way is, as illustrated in the above example, that even our well-justified beliefs can turn out to be false. Truth, on the other hand, as Habermas understands it, is a property of propositions “that cannot be lost.” Besides, coherence depends on practices of justification that let themselves be guided by standards that change from time to time. This accounts for the question: “Why does the fact that our beliefs hang together, supposing they do, give the least indication that they are true?”

Regardless of the fact that truth cannot be reduced to justified assertability, Habermas admits there has to be an internal relation between truth and justification. He contends, “How, otherwise, would it be possible to explain that a justification of “p,” successful according to our standards, points in favor of the truth of “p,” although truth is not an achievement term and does not depend on how well a proposition can be justified.”

In Habermas’ view, the question as to the internal connection between justification and truth–a connection that explains why we may, in light of the evidence available to us, raise an unconditional truth claim that aims beyond what is justified–is not an epistemological question but rather a practical one. As Habermas puts it, “What is at stake is not the correct interpretation of reality but everyday practices that must not fall apart.” For Habermas it is simply a fact that a justification successful in our justificatory context points in favor of the context-independent truth of the justified proposition.
To explicate this further, because Habermas believes that individuals or what he calls “acting subjects” have to “cope” with “the” world, they cannot, in the context of their lifeworld - this is the dimension of interactions and traditions shared intersubjectively by the language users” - avoid being realists. That is to say, having to cope with a world presumed to be objective, actors in the lifeworld can no more than operate with the distinction between believing and knowing. This and the fact that we can err even in the case of well-justified beliefs or what Habermas termed as “the fallibilist consciousness,” leads to what is termed by Habermas as an “orientation towards unconditional truth,” compelling participants in argumentation to presuppose that there are ideal justificatory conditions. It is through such idealized conditions a proposition justified according to “our” standards is distinguished from a true proposition in the same way that a proposition justified in a given context is distinguished from a proposition that could be justified in any context. Indeed Habermas says, “There is practical necessity to rely intuitively on what is unconditionally held-to-be-true.” Also, that “the process of justification can (only) be guided by a notion of truth that transcends justification although it is always already operatively effective in the realm of action.

Regardless of what Habermas has argued regarding the notion of unconditionality, Rorty, in his Response to Habermas, says he still finds this notion of “unconditional validity” to be of no use. Rorty explains: “There is nothing to be understood about the concept of X except the various uses of the term “X.” This goes for the concept of truth as well. ‘True’ is a term we can, if we like, apply to all the assertions we feel justified in making, or feel others are justified in making.” One question however keeps lurking, “Are all assertions of truth that have been made true only because we have “felt” justified in making them or is it because they are certainly and unconditionally true and hence cannot be changed?” To cite a few examples, “The solid world exists; its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall towards the earth’s centre.” Such beliefs, according to Hynes, “set limits to men’s power; (and) testify to the fact that some things cannot be changed.” In other words, they are unconditionally true and regardless of what one “feels” about them, will continue to remain so as long as the world exists.
According to John McDowell, such statements as these form part of what can be called “our theory of the world” or “our worldview” and this sets a standard for what is and is not to be counted as true. This takes us to the next section where it will be argued that somewhere among all our beliefs, there are those that we do not have to be in the dark about but which we can know to be true. Justification then is not always relative as a large number of our beliefs that form part of our worldview such as the earth is round are absolutely and indubitably “true,” and need not be justified again. Truth then is different from justification and one cannot be substituted or replaced by another. As a matter of fact, as Bilgrami argues in the next section, why keep justifying something that is not being doubted?

3. Why Justify Beliefs that are Doubt-free and form part of our Worldview?

In an article entitled “Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Rorty and Davidson on Truth”, Bilgrami refers to John McDowell’s view that just because it is wrong to think that words such as “true” signify a mode of “conformity” to “something more independent of us than the world as it figures in our world view,” they also fail to signify a mode of conformity to the world as it does figure in our world view.63

The key idea according to Bilgrami is that we can speak of the “truth” of our beliefs and sentences as conformity to the world as it figures in our worldview such as the earth is round. Such a worldview though has not been formed in isolation but from a generally accepted body of theory that have been verified and proved true beyond doubt. This idea thus has no place for the Davidsonian claim that we could never tell which of our beliefs is true. As Bilgrami emphasizes, “For conformity (of our beliefs) to things as they figure in our world view, is surely a conformity that we do not have to be in the dark about.”64 Somewhere among all our beliefs there are some (or other) beliefs which must be true not just for a brief period of time but for all time.

In a similar manner, Quine has made a statement, though it is very underdescribed, has many of the elements that McDowell aspires to. To quote it at length, Quine says, “It is rather when we turn back into the midst of actually present theory…that we can and do speak of this
or that sentence as true. To say that the statement ‘Brutus killed Caesar’ is true or ‘The atomic weight of sodium is 23’ is true, is in effect simply to say that Brutus killed Caesar, or that the atomic weight of sodium is 23.” What Quine means is that “the truth attributions for such beliefs as cited above are made from the point of view of the same surrounding body of theory.”

Quine then asks, “Have we now so lowered our sights as to settle for a relativistic doctrine of truth, rating the statements of each theory as true for that theory and brooking no higher criticism?” Answering the question himself he says, “Not so. The saving consideration is that we continue to take seriously our own particular aggregate science, our own particular world theory, or loose total fabric of quasi-theories, whatever it may be. Unlike Descartes, we own and use our beliefs of the moment, even in the midst of philosophizing, until by what is vaguely called scientific method we change them here and there for the better. Within our own totally evolving doctrine, we can judge truth...subject to correction, but that goes without saying.”

What Quine means here, according to Bilgrami, is that we can judge truth within our current ongoing theory of the world. That is to say, from the point of view of those who judge truth, or rather, from the point of view of the inquirer, our current theory of the world is put to “use” in inquiry in the following way: it sets the standard for what is and is not to be counted as true. From McDowell’s point of view, it is to say that “the expression ‘true’ signifies a kind of conformity our beliefs or sentences have ‘to things as they figure in our world view,” and to “nothing more independent of our world view.” It is to be noted that this is different from solipsism since according to McDowell, whatever forms our worldview have already been proven and verified.

From this Bilgrami concludes that since we (inquirers) use our own theory of the world (McDowell’s “world view”) as the standard for what is true, there is nothing from the point of view of the inquirer that can be cautionary about our conception of truth. The picture is this: The inquirer has various states of mind, some of which are cognitive. Among these latter are some which are the beliefs that count, as Quine puts it, the inquirer’s current theory of the world. These set the standard by which truth is judged and evaluated. Of course there may be
various other cognitive propositional attitudes which the inquirer entertains, which are not beliefs in this sense, and about which inquiry is undertaken and then determined as to whether they should become part of our theory of the world. Such an inquiry about those beliefs which are not (or in some cases not yet) beliefs in the sense of constituting one’s world view, all sorts of caution may be advisable. But about beliefs in the sense that do constitute one’s world view, Bilgrami feels that there is nothing that counts as cautionary from the inquirer’s point of view. Of course, it is logically possible that beliefs in this sense be false, but the point is that the acknowledgment that there is that logically possibility, need not lead to the kind of epistemological blindness that Rorty’s and Davidson’s cautionary idea suggests. In other words, “it does not lead to the conclusion that we can never tell which of our beliefs are true, and it does not lead us to doubt these beliefs.”

To put it more succinctly, “There is an alternative picture to Davidson’s idea of objective truth, and on this reading the idea of truth gets to be something no more independent of us than the world as it figures in our world view. This notion of truth, says Bilgrami, does not have the cautionary aspect claimed by Rorty and Davidson.” The question is, “Why is it that this “cautionary aspect” cannot have a place in inquiry? According to Bilgrami, once we introduce the idea of inquiry, we introduce the crucial distinction between an inquirer’s or first-person point of view and a third-person point of view. As has already been suggested by Bilgrami, it is simply not possible for there to be any caution from an inquirer’s or first person point of view. And from the third person point of view, successful cautioning of an inquirer may of course take place but not in the way Rorty and Davidson thinks, that we can never tell which of our beliefs are true. According to Bilgrami then, “It can only be caution prompted by the injection of serious and specific doubt by the citing of particular reasons to the inquirer by the third person.”

Furthermore, having introduced the context of inquiry, and therefore the point of view (first-person) of the inquirer, it would now seem that Rorty’s own view that the only goal that inquirers can have is justification is made unnecessary. From the inquirer’s point of view, what she seeks is truth. Simply speaking, she seeks to know which among the propositional states of mind which are not truths, but merely hypotheses, supposals, etc., should be judged as truths, which she can then put into “use” as part of the standard by which we judge truth.
To sum up, justification applies to those hypotheses, supposals, etc. which the inquirer entertains but which are yet to be counted as truth. As for those beliefs which are already part of our “theory of the world” they no longer need any justification. Justification then is not always relative. A large number of our beliefs that form part of our worldview such as the earth is round are absolutely and indubitably “true,” and need not be justified again. The reason as Bilgrami explains, “Why justify anything that is not being doubted?” Certainly, there have been those so-called beliefs that have been “justified” to be true but in the end turn out to be false. But this need not lead us into skepticism for surely amongst our beliefs a lot of them can be said to be the truth, which can then be used as part of the standard for “justifying” which of our other propositional states can also form a part of our doubt-free beliefs. Truth then is different from justification. As said before, there is definitely an internal relation between them in that justification can lead us to truth but one need not and should not substitute it for truth. In fact, as someone has pointed out, in discarding truth, Rorty certainly is throwing the baby (justification) out with the bath water (truth).

Rorty however is adamant and wonders why justification should be thought to lead us to truth. One fundamental reason as to why Rorty thinks this way is that for him, truth and hence justification, is really a matter of how people in a community have come to agree on “what is good or better for them to believe” thereby reducing both of them to sociological notions. But as we shall see in the next section, Rorty’s claim that justification is purely a sociological notion is totally unrelated to Rorty’s own practices.

4. Is Justification a Purely Sociological Notion?

According to Putnam, Rorty’s view of justification has two aspects, a contextualist aspect and a reformist aspect. Referring to the contextualist aspect, Putnam pointed out that for Rorty to be a justification is just to be counted as a justification by some bunch of people. What is and what is not a justification is no more than a sociological question. Thus in Realism with a Human Face, Putnam asked Rorty if he accepts certain principles (he has listed five of them) concerning justification or warranted assertability, which includes the following:
In ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not.\textsuperscript{76}

And Rorty's response was, "I view warrant as a sociological matter, to be ascertained by observing the reception of S's statement by her peers."\textsuperscript{77} What is puzzling to Putnam however, is Rorty's response to another of his five principles, namely:

\textit{Whether a statement is warranted or not is independent of whether the majority of one's cultural peers would say it is warranted or unwarranted.}\textsuperscript{78}

Rorty's response to this is, "Well maybe a majority can be wrong. But suppose everyone in the community, except one or two dubious characters notorious for making assertions even stranger than $p$, thinks S must be a bit crazy... Might S still be warranted in asserting $p$? Only if there were some way of determining warrant \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}."\textsuperscript{79}

As regards Rorty's statement that S might be warranted in asserting $p$ only if there were some way of determining \textit{sub specie aeternitatis}, it was pointed out by Gary Cutting that what Rorty ignores is the fact that "S might have good reasons to believe that everyone else in the community is wrong on the basis of ignorance, or misinterpretation, or simply, not being able to understand the relevant community norms for evaluating $p$. In such a case, S will be justified against everybody else - not necessarily \textit{sub specie aeternitatis} but in light of his superior understanding of norms implicit in his community."\textsuperscript{80}

What puzzles Putnam however, is Rorty's admittance that even a majority of S's cultural peers could be wrong. Now how does Rorty reconcile his own recognition that a majority could be wrong with his claim that justification for asserting or not asserting something is a sociological question? Moreover, Putnam asks, "How the sociologist, qua sociologist, could determine that S is warranted in asserting $p$ when a majority of S's cultural peers disagree?"\textsuperscript{81} Being left with no explanation to account for Rorty's "maybe a majority can be wrong" Putnam feels that this remark can only be an expression of what he referred to as the "reformist" aspect of Rorty's view of justification, and to which we will now turn.
In *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty asserted, "...in the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off against one another, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting—not better by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense that they come to seem clearly better than their predecessors." In *Realism with a Human Face*, Putnam responded to this by drawing our attention to the fact that when it comes to our conception of reform, whether the outcome of a change is good (a reform) or bad (the opposite), is logically independent of what the majority of people take it to be a reform:

*Our norms and standards of anything — including warranted assertability— are capable of reform. There are better and worse norms and standards.*

As an example to try and show that Rorty's criterion cannot distinguish a genuine reform from its opposite, Putnam used the following: "Let us imagine that a neo-Nazi tendency wins out, and people cope better in the (Rortian) sense that "it comes to seem to them that they are coping better" by dealing savagely with "those terrible Jews, foreigners and communists," and also imagine that if the forces of good win out it will equally be the case that people cope better in the sense that it comes to seem to them that they are."  

In "*Putnam and the Relativist Menace,*" Rorty has made clear how he would defend himself against such counterexamples: "I want to gloss ‘come to seem clearly better than their predecessors’ as ‘come to seem to us clearly better than their predecessors’. ‘But ‘us’ here does not mean ‘us humans – Nazis or not,’ or ‘whatever nonhuman dominant species evolution next throws up to rule the Earth.’ Rather it means ‘language users whom we can recognize as better versions of ourselves’."  

All the same, Putnam says he finds this rather strange for the simple fact that none of us who live today would actually be alive to "recognize" our successors as better versions of ourselves or to refuse to so "recognize" them. Putnam then imagines a time when, say, a hundred or two hundred years from now, we all decide to become either Rortian or staunch metaphysical realists. At that time, the question as to whether the arguments that have been
developed those two centuries and that have won people over are ones that our ghosts or spirits can recognize as “better,” or whether those people are the ones that “we can recognize as better versions of ourselves,” is, in Putnam’s view, simply meaningless. 87

Above all, Putnam thinks that even if Rorty’s proposals win out in the future such as the proposal that we give up the idea that there is any such thing as representing individual “hunks of reality,” such as Rorty himself, or that we give up the idea that there is any such thing as “objectivity” and talk about “solidarity” instead, or that we think of “warranted belief” as a purely sociological notion, it is not clear, on Rorty’s own criterion of reform, in what sense that victory will imply a reform of our standards and ways of thinking. At best, saying that it does will only be what Rorty calls a “compliment” that our successors will be paying to themselves. 88 Putnam therefore concludes, “Not only does Rorty (his protests to the contrary) lack any meaningful notion of reforming norms and standards; his claim that justification is a “sociological” notion is totally unrelated to Rorty’s own practice.” 89

It seems then that we need to arrive at a more meaningful concept of reform in terms of our norms and standards including that of justification. And Levisohn in Probing Pragmatism: Rorty, Reforms, and Responsibility, has shown us how to do this. Taking from Hanks he has argued that there is no way but to fall back on the concept of truth.

For as Hank has argued, “(I)f we were really to imagine a standard which will come to seem better to our grandchildren because of a process that we, now, deem legitimate – that we can envision, presently, as a process of rational persuasion – then why wouldn’t we hold this standard ourselves? How is it possible to imagine an admittedly persuasive – not just reasonable, but persuasive – argument for a position differing from one’s own and not be persuaded?” 90 In view of this argument, it seems to Hanks that Rorty’s solution “only works at the level of abstraction where it’s a theoretical possibility that people might end up in a situation where, retrospectively, they call something a reform of norms and standards. But when we talk about the potential for reform, we mean something more than that.” 91
This is why according to Hanks, it is only the retention of a meaningful sense of truth that can give substance to the hope offered by pragmatism.92 Or as Levisohn puts it, "a meaningful sense of reform" where meaningful means, "a sense of these concepts that respects and is responsible to the work that they do in our language and in our lives, the roles that they play—a role that extends further and deeper than simply affirming that the future might differ from the past, in a purely hypothetical way..."93

Levisohn continues, "We hope for real reforms, not just reforms that will seem real to us or to language users whom we can recognize as better versions of ourselves. We aspire to real truth in our inquiries, not just something that will come to seem true."94 Furthermore, according to Levisohn, to see this is to achieve self-understanding and here once again Levisohn quotes Hanks: "to see oneself as working in the context of a robust engagement with truth as a meaningful concept."95

Levisohn ended his essay by quoting from Putnam’s recent book The Threefold Cord, where Putnam offered the following justification of his project: "If, as I believe, there is a way to do justice to our sense that knowledge claims are responsible to reality ... then it is important that we find that way. For there is, God knows, irresponsibility enough in the world ... and it belongs to the vocation of the thinker, now as always, to try to teach the difference between the two."96

Because of his views on truth and in particular, justification, Rorty has been labeled a relativist by many scholars and philosophers. Rorty though on more than one occasion has denied this charge by insisting that he is an ethnocentrist rather than a relativist. Rorty makes a difference between these two by saying in Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, "...there is no truth in relativism, but this much truth in ethnocentrism: we cannot justify our beliefs (in physics, ethics, or any other area) to everybody, but only to those whose beliefs overlap ours to some appropriate extent."97 This takes us to the next chapter where we will examine some of the key (anti-relativistic) arguments leveled at Rorty and find out whether or not Rorty escapes the charge of relativism.
Notes and References:


2 Ibid., p. 1.

3 Ibid., p. 1.


7 David A. Truncellito, “Epistemology” (George Washington University, 2007), *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: http://www.iep.utm.edu/e/epistemo.htm (webpage)

8 Ibid.


11 Ibid., p. 323


13 Ibid., p. 281.

14 Ibid., p. 282.


16 Ibid., p. 2.


18 Ibid., p. 2.

19 Rorty, “Universality and Truth,” p. 2

20 Ibid. p. 4 (See also Rorty, “Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Davidson vs. Wright,” p. 283.)


22 Ibid., p. 283.


24 Ibid., 4.

25 Ibid., 4.

26 Rorty, “Introduction,” to *Truth and Progress*, p. 3.


29 Ibid., p. 4.


31 Ibid., p. 297.

32 Ibid., pp. 297-298.


34 Ibid., p. 6.


39 Ibid., p. 359.

40 Ibid., p. 359.

41 Ibid., p. 359.

42 Ibid., p. 359.


45 Ibid., p. 360. (See also Rorty, “Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry, Davidson vs. Wright,” p. 283.)

46 Ibid., p. 360.

47 Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, p. 78.

60 Ibid., p. 57.


64 Ibid., p. 250.

65 Ibid., p. 250.

66 Ibid., p. 250.

67 Ibid., p. 250.

68 Ibid., p. 250.

69 Ibid., p. 251.

70 Ibid., p. 251.

71 Ibid., p. 252.

72 Ibid., p. 253.

73 Ibid., p. 253.

74 Ibid., p. 256.


76 Ibid., p. 84.

77 Ibid., p. 84.

78 Ibid., p. 84.

79 Ibid., p. 84.


81 Putnam, "Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification," p. 84.

82 Ibid., p. 84. (See also Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Essays: 1972-1980 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. xxxvii.)

83 Ibid., p. 85.

84 Ibid., p. 85.


97 Ibid., p. 85.

98 Ibid., p. 86.

99 Ibid., p. 86.


101 Ibid., p. 4.

102 Ibid., p. 4.

103 Ibid.; pp. 4-5.

104 Ibid., p. 5.

105 Ibid., p. 5.

106 Ibid., p. 5.

107 Rorty, Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, p. 30, n. 13. (see also Rorty, Truth and Progress, p. 51 n. 26)