Ethics-Rorty-Cultural Studies: Towards an Understanding of the Cultural Production of Solidarity

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Abstract

Is cultural studies on the verge of an ethical turn? What role could the work of Richard Rorty play in such an ethical turn? Rorty may be considered as a cultural theorist whose work enables a productive articulation of cultural studies and that area of experience known as "ethics" – one's sensitivity and sense of responsibility to others in pain. Through an extended "misreading" of the dispersed texts Rorty has written on and around the topic, it is possible to formulate a Rortian account of ethics as solidarity, including such concepts as the moral subject, the other, moral identification, moral community, as well as the ethical implications of Rorty's theoretical ethnocentrism. This account, by virtue of its antifoundationalist and discursive theoretical position, holds much interest for a cultural studies concerned to understand the normative dimension of discursive meaning.

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Contents

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are for the texts of Richard Rorty used in this thesis. Bibliographical information is provided in Works Cited and Consulted.

BK	The Barber of Kasbeam: Nabokov on Cruelty
BPPJ	The Banality of Pragmatism and the Poetry of Justice
CL	The Contingency of Language
CLC	The Contingency of a Liberal Community
CS	The Contingency of Selfhood
CTP	Comments on Taylor's "Paralectics"
CWE	Cosmopolitanism Without Emancipation: A Response to Jean François Lyotard
D	Diary
DMACL	De Man and the American Cultural Left
EL	The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope
FID	Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View
FMR	Freud and Moral Reflection
FP	Feminism and Pragmatism
HDFP	Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy
HKD	Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens
HLP	Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity
HRRS	Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality
Ia	Introduction [to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*]
Ib	Introduction [to *Truth and Progress*]
IAEL	Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, Ethnocentrism, and Liberalism
IDTP	Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?
INSNK	Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?
IPP	Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy

IPPNP	Introduction: Pragmatism and Post-Nietzshean Philosophy
IR	Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-Dualist Account of Inquiry
JOMS	Just One More Species Doing its Best
LIE	The Last Intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty
MIPA	Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault
MOTCS	Moral Obligation, Truth, and Common Sense
MSSSH	Method, Social Science, and Social Hope
NR	The Notion of Rationality
NRP	Non-Reductive Physicalism
OE	On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz
P	Posties
PBL	Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism
PDCW	Philosophy and the Dilemmas of the Contemporary World
PDP	The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy
PILH	Private Irony and Liberal Hope
PMN	*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*
PRI	Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism
PSMP	Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics
RCD	Rationality and Cultural Difference
RCPD	Response to Comments on Philosophy and the Dilemmas of the Contemporary World
RCRR	Response to Comments on Richard Rorty, "Relativism: Finding and Making"
RDP	Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism
RF	Response by Richard Rorty [to Farrell]
RSC	Response to Simon Critchley
S	Solidarity
SO	Solidarity or Objectivity
SS	Science as Solidarity
TL	Texts and Lumps
TLU	Towards a Liberal Utopia

TML	Two Meanings of "Logocentrism": A Reply to Norris
TT	Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Richard Bernstein
TWO	Trotsky and the Wild Orchids
UCRNF	Unger, Castoriadis, and the Romance of a National Future
WAW	Who Are We? Moral Universalism and Economic Triage

Introduction

I. Cultural Studies and Ethics

If there is one thing that people working within cultural studies agree on, it is that there is no universally agreed definition of cultural studies. In almost all accounts cultural studies appears as an amorphous array of ideas, practices, methodologies, theories, techniques, texts, institutions, values, politics and motives, rather than as a conventionally defined academic discipline. As Tony Bennett writes, cultural studies "comprises less a specific theoretical or political tradition or discipline than a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional *rendez-vous*": it is "an area of debate in which, certain things being taken for granted, the dialogue can be more focussed" (319, n.1).[1]

This unruly amorphousness granted, I think most practitioners in the field would agree that, whatever else it is, cultural studies is *political*. Two things can be meant by this. First, the object of inquiry in cultural studies – culture – is construed politically, as inseparable from relations of power, rather than, say, morally or economically or aesthetically or spiritually. While this does not mean all analyses performed under the name of cultural studies will focus only or mainly on the political dimension of cultural discourses, it does mean all such cultural discourses are agreed to be political. Second, not only is the object of inquiry political, so are the motives behind the inquiry. Simon During notes, for instance, that from the beginning cultural studies has been "an engaged form of analysis", one which "did not flinch from the fact that societies are structured unequally, that individuals are not all born with the same access to education, money, health-care, etc" (1-2). This is not to say that cultural studies possesses a single normative political programme, but it is just to say that its practitioners openly admit that what they are doing is inseparable from power relations. They are deliberate about

their nonchalance for putative academic "objectivity" and about their attempts to employ cultural studies in the service of their political aims.[2]

However, notwithstanding this highly developed political consciousness, cultural studies has not had much to say about ethics. Ethics and politics can be thought of as two distinct, yet compatible, ways of describing intersubjective relations. Foucault's model of relations of power could be seen to characterize politics, while Levinas's model of relations of responsibility could bee seen to characterize ethics. Put simply, politics asks, "What relations of power will best implement my responsibilities?", whereas ethics revolves around the question "For whom am I responsible?" Conceptually, considerations of responsibility are prior to considerations of power, although historically, it can often be the other way around. With ethics and politics thus configured, cultural studies can fairly be said not to have theorized the production of moral responsibilities. It has, indeed, been noticeably silent about ethics.[3]

Of course, ethical feelings are not absent. The ethical residue of responsibility is undoubtedly latent in the consciously political agendas of feminist, Marxist, postcolonialist and queer critics and theorists working within the field: their political aims conceptually presuppose a sense of moral responsibility to women, the working class, non-Europeans and gays. Otherwise, why work politically for these groups in the first place?[4] Moreover, as a contentious and contested non-discipline, cultural studies has for a long time been characterized by a genuine, if fractured, sense of professional solidarity.

These two points having been granted, however, solidarity has not been the object of explicit theoretical attention. This neglect is understandable. Cultural studies was, after all, partly constituted through the construction of theoretical vocabularies whose historicism and nominalism suspended all consideration of normality and rendered the non-discipline radically at odds with conventional moral theory and philosophy. The form of cultural studies emerging within English departments, especially, was often incidentally cut off from any talk of ethics by the way it deliberately positioned itself against pre-superstructuralist, liberal humanist kinds of literary criticism with their Leavisian proclivity to see literature as a moral force that can somehow "make you a better person" (Eagleton 1983, 207). Given that cultural

studies's theoretical positioning eschewed such notions as philosophically naïve, its neglect of ethics makes historical sense.

Things may be about to change, however – may already be beginning to change. For ethics is increasingly being distinguished from politics and addressed by theorists employing an antifoundationalist theoretical vocabulary similar to the one so vital to cultural studies, theorists working either within the non-discipline or at its edges in a range of contiguous disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. The work of Emmanuel Levinas (1969; 1981; 1989; 1996), for instance, is gaining a lot of attention. His unconventional understanding of "the ethical" as a fundamental openness to the Other as a "radical alterity" is currently being developed by theorists as diverse and prominent as Simon Critchley (1992; 1996; 1999), Christopher Norris (1994), Zygmunt Bauman (1989; 1993), Jacques Derrida (1978; 1991; 1999), Jean-François Lyotard (1989), John Llewelyn (1995; 1998) and Luce Irigaray (1991). The work of social theorist Jürgen Habermas is also apposite. Whereas Levinas construes ethics to be an animal-like, corporal, pre-linguistic affair, Habermas's "discourse ethics" (1990; 1992; 1993) locates it in what he deems to be the universal social processes of language. Literary critics such as J. Hillis Miller (1987; 1995) and Tobin Siebers (1988), too, are incorporating antifoundationalist ethics into their work, as are several American moral, social and political philosophers (May 1995; Caputo 1993; Sandel 1982; Baier 1991). Also, the work of feminist and postcolonialist theorists from a range of disciplines, from literature to political science, has increasingly begun to address the idea of ethics in a variety of ways consistent with theory (Spivak 1996; Chow 1993; Chow 1995; Dean 1996; Fraser 1986; Fraser 1990; Shildrick 1997; Benhabib 1992). The moral and political concerns underlying Michel Foucault's extensive work have recently been emphasized by the posthumous publication of *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (1997) and by Christopher Falzon's study of the ethical dimension of Foucault's work (1998). In addition, the publication of two anthologies of essays (Merrill 1988; Squires 1993) considering the possibility and nature of ethics in the age of postmodernism draws contributions from a wide range of figures, such as Kate Soper, Paul Hirst and Chantal Mouffe. Finally, the neo-pragmatist thinker Richard Rorty, whose work is the object of this study, has addressed ethics in terms consistent with the antifoundationalism of cultural studies. Although most people tend to associate Rorty with the themes of

pragmatic antifoundationalism, liberal aestheticism and reformist politics, his work on ethics, usually discussed under the term "solidarity", can in fact be traced as far back as 1979 to a few comments in Part Two of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (182-92). Since then a barrage of texts have produced a powerfully suggestive, if diffuse, picture of the nature of ethics as solidarity as well as a dedicated commitment to the particular form of ethics found in his version of "liberalism".[5]

Not all of these theorists would think of themselves as making contributions to cultural studies, let alone working *within* cultural studies. I do not believe we can validly claim that their work makes up a well-established, self-conscious debate about solidarity in cultural studies. My claim is that the emerging work of these solidarity theorists, by virtue of its antifoundationalist theoretical positioning, marks the opportunity of a *rapprochement* between that cultural studies and that area of experience and inquiry designated by the term "ethics". Cultural studies has the chance to incorporate ethics into its vocabulary both as an object of theory or analysis and as an issue of normative debate. The work of the above ethical theorists can be taken as the first sign that ethics is now in the process of attaining this status. The broad aim of my study is to facilitate this process, with particular regard to the way of theorizing ethics as solidarity that is found in the texts of Richard Rorty.

II. Richard Rorty and Ethics as Solidarity

As befits someone who praises the virtues of conversation, Rorty must be one of the most discussed academic figures of the late twentieth century. This lavish treatment, however, has not been bestowed on his work on solidarity. Out of 27 contributions to collections of essays on his work, only three (Burrows; Fraser 1990; Guignon and Hiley) could be said to address solidarity, and even then to a limited degree. The only book to attempt an examination of Rorty's complete oeuvre, David L. Hall's *Richard Rorty: Poet and Prophet of the New Pragmatism* (1994), though it purports to "wander here and there in Rorty's rather broadly conceived corpus" (7), hardly touches on ethics. What *has* been written on Rorty's solidarity work could accurately be described as wide but shallow. It is wide because from the beginning it has been multi-disciplinary, with contributions coming from philosophers, literary-

cultural critics, anthropologists, political scientists, jurists, theologians and historians. It is also wide because anyone who writes on any aspect of Rorty's work usually ends up including some comments somewhere on his notion of solidarity. This is especially true in discussions which take Rorty's "politics" as their ostensible subject; although some writers may never mention the words "solidarity" or "ethics", talking instead of Rorty's "political" position, their chief concern can be ethics.

Unfortunately, the considerable multi-disciplinary breadth of the discussion about Rorty's solidarity work is not currently matched by any comparable analytical depth. While there is a surfeit of work which offers superficial observations, there is a dearth of commentary that actually engages with Rorty's work through patient and detailed readings of his texts. Only three recent discussions of Rorty's solidarity work mount sustained book-length analyses: *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind: The Ungroundable Liberalism of Richard Rorty* (1995) by Norman Geras, Professor of Government at the University of Manchester; *Solidarity and the Stranger: Themes in the Social Philosophy of Richard Rorty* (1997) by Christian theologian Ronald Alexander Kuipers; and *The Work of Friendship: Rorty, His Critics, and the Project of Solidarity* (1999) by philosopher Dianne Rothleder.[6]

I would like to make five comments on the overall shape of the discussion of Rorty's solidarity work in order to contextualize my own contribution. First, there is little productive cross-pollination of ideas between the different commentators, with the majority showing a limited awareness of the other work on Rorty's ethics. Second, most of the commentary is critical insofar as it seeks only to point out alleged mistakes and dangers of Rorty's views rather than doing this *and* suggesting constructive developments or revisions. Third, many critics, even the most sophisticated ones such as Geras, Kuipers, Lentricchia, and Bernstein, are often mistaken in their understanding of important elements of in Rorty's ethical position. Geertz's essay (1986), for instance, contributed to the widespread myth that Rorty's work is necessarily ethnocentric in a pernicious way, while Fraser's celebrated essay (1990), perhaps the single most influential piece of commentary on Rorty's ethico-political work, has directed the attention of many commentators towards the putative tension between Rorty's pragmatism and romanticism.

Third, it is significant that Rorty's work on aestheticism and politics is often thrown into the analytical pot in discussions of his work on solidarity. In some cases (Bhaskar) preoccupation with criticizing Rorty's aestheticism or social democratic politics precludes serious engagement with what he has written on solidarity. In other cases (Fraser, Kuipers, Rothleder), aestheticism and politics are used as a means of undermining the theoretical validity of his account of solidarity. This seems to evince the mistaken assumption that if you accept what Rorty says about solidarity you must also accept what he says about aestheticism and politics. I would argue that some form of antifoundationalism, such as that outlined in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, is indeed a vital part of Rorty's work on ethics. However, this is not the case when it comes to his work on aestheticism, nor that on politics. In relation to his ethics, Rorty's politics and aestheticism are optional extras: we are not bound to consider his ethics with either his unique solution for the cohabitation of the public (ethical) and the private (aesthetic) spheres, the guiding issue of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), nor his praise of social democracy as the best form of political organisation, a major concern of *Achieving our Country* (1998).[7] Therefore, my study of Rortian ethics retains his antifoundationalism, but treats his views on politics and aesthetics as irrelevant to the present analysis.

Fifth, if the concerns of the discussion about Rorty's solidarity work can be divided into two broad strands – the *theoretical*, which focuses on "logical" problems with Rorty's account of solidarity (inconsistencies, incoherencies, tensions, contradictions, paradoxes, oversimplifications, exaggerations and inappropriate emphases), and the *normative*, which addresses the putative destructive effects of Rorty's account on the particular form of solidarity the given commentator supports (such as socialism, egalitarianism, liberalism, feminism) – then the vast majority of critical attention (with the exception of Geras's first two chapters) is concentrated in the normative strand, rather than the theoretical strand. Critics have been more concerned to highlight the supposedly useless or even dangerous effects of Rorty's work on this or that particular sense of solidarity than they have to consider its possible strengths as a theoretical account of solidarity in general, regardless of any supposed effects. This seems to me to be wrong-headed: how can we judge the normative effects of something before taking the time to understand it fully on a theoretical level? Partly as a

corrective to this tendency, my study deals almost exclusively with the theoretical aspect of Rorty's solidarity work.[8]

III. Argument and Methodology

It should be clear by now that this is not a philosophical study of Rorty's work on solidarity. Although I hope his philosophical critics may be forced to think again through my treatment of his work, such a hope is incidental to my primary aims. Rorty is very much at the centre of my study in terms of explicit content – although even then, he is cast as a cultural theorist – but he is at the margins in terms of conscious objectives. My intention is not to contribute to the philosophical debate about Rorty by defending him from his detractors, but to examine the potential I see in his work to add a significant new perspective to cultural studies. My thesis is (1) that Rorty's scattered texts can be read as a theoretical account of solidarity, and (2) that this account, viewed as a contribution to cultural theory, opens up productive possibilities for cultural studies. Thus, my title places "Rorty" between "Ethics" and "Cultural Studies" and hyphenates all three terms in order to suggest that Rorty is a conductor or link between the two.

Most of the thesis is concerned with examining Rorty's dispersed texts on solidarity in an attempt to systematize them into a theoretical account of the topic, one which can provide temporary answers to the following questions: What is solidarity? How can it be produced? How can it be prevented? How can it be modified? – all in terms consistent with an antifoundationalist theoretical vocabulary. Then in a final chapter I examine the terms of a possible *rapprochement* between ethics and cultural studies which the Rortian account of solidarity allows. My claim here is that the Rortian account can be viewed as making a contribution to cultural theory, one which may open up various productive possibilities for cultural studies, such as cleaving open the logical space needed to allow various forms of analysis of ethics within a cultural studies perspective. Through this articulation of Rortian solidarity with cultural studies, the Rortian account takes on a different shape, a suggestive potentiality which can in turn re-shape cultural studies, imbue it with a new potentiality vis-à-vis ethics.

It is crucial to realise that neither a systematic account of solidarity nor the utility of such an account to cultural studies are to be simply "found" in Rorty's work. Rorty's strategy in approaching the topic (or indeed any topic) has been to avoid any attempt to be systematic in favour of multiple assays, descriptions, re-descriptions, re-re-descriptions, not in the hope that he will eventually get things right, but in the hope that describing solidarity in different ways may persuade as many different people as possible. Such an approach yields creative and inconsistent results on the levels of signifiers and signifieds. He has, moreover, never offered his work on ethics as a contribution to cultural theory and would, I suspect, be aghast at the suggestion that what he has written could be of use for cultural studies. What Rorty writes of Donald Davidson applies equally as well to himself: "Since [his] work has been almost entirely in the form of essays, and since he eschews large programmatic statements, it falls to his admirers to attempt a synoptic view of his work" (NRP 113). Rorty's lack of interest in both explanatory (as opposed to persuasive) systematicity and cultural studies means my task has precisely been to "make" from out of his texts not only a systematic Rortian account of solidarity, but also an argument as to its utility for cultural studies.

In order to achieve this I have adopted as an interpretative methodology creative *misreadings* of his texts. The concept of misreading is associated with the work of Harold Bloom on poetic originality, and Rorty himself, following Bloom, argues that originality often proceeds by recontextualizing previous descriptions, rearranging them in new ways, placing them in untried relations to other descriptions. If this experimental strategy usefully highlights previously hidden features, similarities, differences, syntheses, antitheses, analogies and sequences, it can be said to have creatively misread the old descriptions and produced something original. Despite the fact my interpretive approach is more inferential than imaginative, this fairly describes my strategy in approaching Rorty's texts.

Importantly, I am acutely aware that, thanks to "the ethics of reading", as Miller puts it, my misreading of Rorty's work represents just one possibility, and that therefore the misreading could be different, with other emphases, other ellipses, other sequences. I do not pretend to have woven his texts together into a seamless account, but recognise the cutting and suturing I have necessarily employed. Nevertheless, I do not think my

use of his work for a purpose he did not intend is unfair to him. Rorty himself would agree. In response to Frank Farrell's charge that he makes significant exegetical errors concerning the work of Donald Davidson, Rorty has written, "If you borrow somebody's good idea and use it for a different purpose, is it really necessary to clear this novel use with the originator of the idea? . . . My account can, I should like to think, stand on its own feet, and be judged on its own" (RF 190). While I make no pretensions that what follows is a systematic and detailed treatment of ethics, I am aiming for a systematized account of Rorty's treatment of ethics. All the while I seek to remain both consistent with his theoretical premises and faithful to the implicit spirit of his work. So, even though the following account of solidarity cannot be said to be *Rorty's*, it can, I hope, be said to be *Rortian.*

My methodology of misreading proceeds in two moves: a long internal one and then a short external one. The internal misreading will involve culling words and extracts from throughout Rorty's corpus and pasting them together in new combinations, juxtaposing textual fragments to construct untried configurations, weaving together texts written years apart to create a temporarily homogeneous text. It is "internal" in the sense that it stays largely inside Rorty's texts. In order to foreground my methodology, I refer to Rorty's texts individually through abbreviations (CLC, FMR, WAW, etc), rather than referring monolithically to his collections of essays (see the list of Abbreviations). Through this process I aim to accentuate certain of his ideas about solidarity while downplaying other, less successful, ideas. The intended result is a more systematic theoretical account of solidarity than is currently provided by Rorty's own work.

The external misreading will involve recontextualizing the Rortian account of solidarity by interpolating it within cultural studies. This will engender an ability to view Rortian ethics as a cultural theoretical model. It is "external" in the sense that I move outside Rorty's texts in order to consider their relation to the texts that make up cultural studies. Thus I complete the misreading of Rorty's texts by suggesting their utility for the analysis of solidarity as discourse. While I claim no definitive conclusions, I do suggest the fruitful benefits for cultural studies of the Rortian way of looking at ethics.

In outline: Chapter One looks at Rorty's Freudian picture of "the moral subject" as a mechanical web of self-description. Chapter Two elaborates what Rorty has written on "the other" to whose pain the moral subject is sensitive and towards whom he or she feels responsible. Chapter Three explores "moral identification" as the mechanism by which solidarity, as embodied in a "moral community", is produced. Chapter Four describes the broader "ethnocentric" conditions of solidarity, thus rounding off my misreading of the Rortian account of ethics as solidarity. Chapter Five concludes my thesis by turning to the implications of the account for cultural studies.

Notes

[1] Simon During, for example, asserts that "cultural studies is not an academic discipline quite like others" (During 1), while Jonathan Culler asks wistfully "What is a professor of cultural studies supposed to know?" (in Nelson 273). The multiplicity of cultural studies has not stopped many from offering definitions. Of course, these definitions have usually been offered as manifesto-like attempts to achieve concrete political effects on the behaviour of others, rather than an attempt to capture cultural studies's essence. See Easthope, Eagleton (1983), Nelson, Johnson , Inglis and Bennett for interesting examples.

[2] For comments and qualifications on the political nature of cultural studies, see Bennett (307), Eagleton (1983, 210), Johnson (79), Nelson (278), Frow and Morris (354), Thwaites et al. (155-71) and Baldwin (17).

[3] I want to distance my empirical observation from Keith Tester's normative and evaluative view that cultural studies is a "morally cretinous" discipline (3) in which "meaningful questions about cultural and moral value have been at best ignored and at worst pushed quite beyond the asking" (6).

[4] Tobin Siebers's (1988) claim that all forms of literary criticism and theory are premised on an ethics, however latent, would not only overlap with the literary end of cultural studies, but could probably be argued in direct regards of cultural studies. As

James W. Carey writes, "cultural studies consists of a thinly disguised moral and political vocabulary" (67).

[5] Rorty's most significant work on ethics can be found in the following texts (ordered by date of original publication): the essays "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope" (1980), "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism" (1983), "Freud and Moral Reflection", "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" and "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" (all 1984), "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Reply to Jean-François Lyotard", "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz" and "Solidarity or Objectivity" (all 1985), "Science as Solidarity" and "Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Richard Bernstein" (both 1987), "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault" and "Unger, Castoriadis, and the Romance of a National Future" (both 1988); much of the book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), particularly the chapters "The Contingency of Selfhood", "The Contingency of a Liberal Community", "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" and "Solidarity"; the essays "Feminism and Pragmatism", "Rationality and Cultural Difference" and "The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope" (all 1991); the autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" (1992); "Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View" and "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" (both 1993); and "Who Are We? Moral Universalism and Economic Triage" (1996).

[6] The following is a selection of commentary on Rortian ethics. For an example of a critic who points out the alleged exegetical mistakes in Rorty's work see Farrell (117-47). The smug and light-minded tone of Rorty's writings is criticised by Williams (175), Stout (45, 54), and Critchley (1996, 24). Commentary on the antifoundationalism crucial to Rorty's solidarity work is voiced, in progressive order of criticism, by Daly (175-89), Laclau (62), Baker (115), Veroli (121), Lentricchia (16-9), Haliburton (50-1), Critchley (1996, 25-6), Goodheart (231-5), Stout (256), Hollis (249), Guignon and Hiley (357), Bernstein (283) and Mounce (209, 228). Commentary on Rorty's use of the public/private distinction is expressed by Hall (134-6), Herdt (84-91), Laclau (64-5), Fraser (1990, 303-16), Williams (170-5), McCarthy (366-7), Guignon and Hiley (358), Critchley (1996, 24-5), Haber (59-70), Bernstein (280), Haliburton (51ff.), Goodheart (225-9) and Bhaskar (134-5). Rorty's ethnocentrism is

addressed by Bernstein (247), Dean (7), Veroli (123), Norton (27-45) and Geertz (109-13). Rorty's antiessentialist model of the moral subject is the target of work by Farrell (117-47), Critchley (1996, 26), Geras (47-69), Bernstein (275-7), Hollis (244-56), and Guigon and Hiley (356). Rorty's claims as to the efficiency of the mass media in facilitating solidarity is incisively discussed by Tester (90-109).

[7] Rorty's moral position (liberalism) should be carefully separated from his political position. The latter is outlined most clearly in TT, although the essay is now over a decade old. See also the more recent EL where Rorty urges leftists to stop using "capitalism" and "socialism" as the central terms of political analysis and to focus instead on "the struggle against human misery" (EL 229). I believe that Rorty may be serving a useful purpose in his insistence that a politico-economic theory derived from the nineteenth century should not be employed uncritically. However, to repeat, my study of Rorty's ethics stands independently of his politics.

[8] I am of the view that all that need be said of any putative normative implications is that there are none. Rorty's theoretical redescription of how ethics works is consistent with *all* normative ethical visions and *all* political programmes. This has been explained lucidly by Rorty himself: JOMS 6, DMACL 132, S 189.

1

The Moral Subject

Rorty believes that people can be described in as many different ways as there are uses for the description. He says that for the purposes of, say, ballistics a person is "a point-mass", while for the purposes of chemistry she is "a linkage of molecules" (PBL 199). Despite the apparent ontological conflict between these descriptions, they are actually equal in their ability to represent reality because language does not stand in a relationship of "representation" to non-linguistic items in the universe (IR 97). At the same time, this is not to say that the descriptions are equal in every way. Since language does stand in a relationship of "causation" to non-linguistic items in the universe, descriptions of people may be privileged over one another in terms of their efficacy at facilitating a particular aim. Certain people-descriptions will be better than others at helping us understand or control certain aspects of their behaviour.

One thing that Rorty wants to do is understand (and, for the purposes of his personal public liberalism, eventually control) how people come to possess a "moral identity" (MIPA 193; HRRS 171; WAW 5) or a "moral character" (D 21b), that is, a "sensitivity to the pain suffered by others" (S 198; Ia xvi) and "a sense of responsibility to others" (PBL 199; MIPA 194). This chapter begins the Rortian account of solidarity by exploring his description of people as "moral subjects".[1]

I. The Moral subject as Essential Humanity and as Machine

In order to better understand the Rortian model of moral subjectivity, it would be helpful to first establish the model of the Platonic-Kantian moral theoretical tradition

against which Rorty contrasts his own. According to Rorty's diagnosis, the Platonic-Kantian model posits a moral subject divided "fairly neatly" (CLC 47) into two parts: a "central and inviolable core surrounded by culturally conditioned beliefs and desires" (FP 225), that is, "an ahistorical natural centre, the locus of human dignity, surrounded by an adventitious and inessential periphery" (PDP 176). The privileged part of the moral subject is the former, which Rorty terms an "essential humanity" (S 189; IAEL 14).[2] It is privileged because it represents "the unconditioned character of the moral self, . . . that part of us which [is] not phenomenal, not a product of time and chance, not an effect of natural, spatiotemporal, causes" (CS 30). With its necessary origin outside the contingent language we speak and the culture into which we are socialised, the essential humanity gives us a sense of our responsibilities to others that is not simply the result of our contingent historical and cultural positioning, but is "built-in" (FMR 143) as an intrinsic part of our deep, fundamental self.

This model of moral subjectivity exerts a profound influence on contemporary thought and common sense. Discussions of the Holocaust, for instance, commonly begin by asking, "How could something this terrible have happened?" Such a question often assumes that the Holocaust marks an event that was ethically possible only because something resembling the essential humanity that is a natural part of all people was, in the case of the Nazis, repressed through clever and systematic propaganda. The Holocaust is not just a historical aberration but an ethical one too – a time when otherwise normal human beings lost sight of the moral law.[3] In such an explanation, the idea of an essential humanity embodies a desire to "want something which stands beyond history and institutions" when it comes to thinking about ethics, particularly at times "when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour are collapsing" (S 189). However, this model is simply unworkable within Rorty's antiessentialist theoretical vocabulary, for it contradicts his repudiation of the metaphysical search for necessary, essential and intrinsic natures that can be separated from merely contingent, accidental and extrinsic properties. Having rejected such distinctions, including that one "between an attribute of the self and a constituent of the self, between the self's accidents and its essence, as 'merely' metaphysical" (PDP 188), Rorty reconstructs his model of the moral subject as devoid of an essential humanity –

and yet as able to feel, reflect on, deliberate over, converse about, and act on, compelling feelings of solidarity.

Rorty theorizes the moral subject on the model of a "machine" or a "mechanism" (IR 93), because insofar as a machine's "formal and final causes may be distinct" (FMR 143) and its "purpose is not built in" (FMR 144), it exemplifies a lack of essence, a lack of an innate purpose. Like a machine, the Rortian moral subject does not have an intrinsic, necessary, central essence that can be differentiated from extrinsic, contingent, peripheral accidents. Consequently, it cannot be said to have a single sense of responsibility with others grounded in this essence, but many possible senses of responsibility to others, the causes of which are historico-cultural and spatiotemporal. Causality is the key issue here: any responsibilities that the moral subject has – and, to be sure, it can still have responsibilities – are going to be the result of different causal processes from those envisaged by the Platonic-Kantian tradition. Rather than emanating from deep within the essential humanity of the moral subject, these responsibilities will be produced and invented in the processes of one's subjective experiences, especially one's childhood, experiences situated in the historico-culturally conditioned final vocabularies of one's moral communities that one uses to narrate self-description. In the sense that moral subjectivity is the result of mechanical causal processes, Rorty also calls it a "network" (PBL 199), an "assemblage" (FMR 155), a "wired brain" (BK 153, n.15), "a concatenation" (PDP 185, n.24), a "tissue" (CS 32) and a "web" (IR 93; PILH 84).

II. Beliefs and Desires and Self-Description

So what are the mechanics of moral subjectivity? Rorty suggests we think of the moral subject as consisting of "mental states" (NRP 123).[4] Mental states include "beliefs" and "desires" (IR 93; PILH 84; FMR 147) as well as "emotions" (PBL 199), "moods" (NRP 123) and "self-images" (FMR 162). Such mental states will vary greatly, but in the case of moral subjectivity the particularly important ones will be the beliefs and desires concerning one's responsibilities towards others. They are, moreover, constantly "woven" and "rewoven" together (IR 93) for the purpose of telling a "story" or "narrative" about one's life (FMR 151, 152; CS 29; PILH 73). The

most important point about these beliefs and desires, however, is not just that "what the individual human being identifies as 'himself' or 'herself' is for the most part, his or her beliefs and desires" (NRP 121), but that "there is no self distinct from this self-weaving web. All there is to the human self is just that web" (IR 93). This idea that the moral subject is constituted through rather than in possession of beliefs and desires sharply contradicts the traditional model of the subject. Whereas Plato and Kant would have both agreed that the moral subject is centred on an essential humanity who *has* beliefs and desires, Rorty says the subject simply *is* that network of beliefs and desires (CL 10; NRP 123). Think of the moral subject, he writes "not as one of Rawls's original choosers, somebody who can distinguish her *self* from her talents and interests and views about the good, but as a network of beliefs, desires, and emotions with nothing behind it – no substrate behind the attributes" (PBL 199). To put it another way, "there is nothing deep down inside us except what we [individually and collectively] have put there ourselves" (IPP xlii).

The means by which mental states are "put there" as features of our moral subjectivity is "self-description" (FMR 153, 155; Ia xvi). Self-description assumes immense importance in Rorty's model of the moral subject, as it does in his models of all forms of human subjectivity, for it is the means through which one's "moral identity" – that part of one's identity concerning one's sensitivity and responsibility towards others in pain – is "constituted".[5] Moral subjectivity, he writes, can be thought of as something "created by the use of a vocabulary rather than . . . adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary" (CL 7). That is, "what a human being is, for moral purposes, is largely a matter of how he or she describes himself or herself . . . [W]hat you experience yourself to be is largely a function of what it makes sense to describe yourself as in the language you are able to use" (FP 220). This emphasis on the role of self-description in the formation of moral subjectivity not only chimes with the familiar poststructuralist idea of textual subjectivity – the idea that self-identity is managed through the use of language – but points to the analogy of literary characters. For characters in literature are a clear example of "persons" constituted through discourse. As fictitious "incarnated vocabularies" (PILH 80), they have no metaphysical soul, no biophysical body, no essence, no grounding at all. They exist as meaning purely through the descriptions of a culturally situated author and reader, just

as the moral subject exist as meaning by virtue of its self-description. Rorty himself describes the moral subject's self-descriptions variously as "case histories", "idiosyncratic narratives" (CS 33), "dramatic narratives" (CS 29), "stories" (FMR 151) and "poems" (CS 35). While Rorty's terms stress the temporal and structural requirements of narrative forms, it may be that the literary form upon which we may best model the moral subject's self-descriptions is some kind of dramatic monologue.[6]

III. The Nature of Self-Description

Given the vital role self-description assumes in the Rortian model of moral subjectivity, it is necessary to consider its characteristics and conditions in order to properly come to grips with Rorty's moral subject.

1. The first condition of self-description is *coherence* among beliefs and desires (FMR 162; FP 220-2). This is so because there must be some limit placed on the kind of beliefs and desires a single person can possess without falling apart: "the criterion for individuation of a person is a certain minimal coherence among its beliefs and desires" (FMR 147-8). Coherence, for Rorty, does not need to be understood in strictly logical terms, as the complete absence of ambiguities, ambivalence, tensions, inconsistencies and contradictions, but in pragmatic, functional terms, as an absence of these things when they make an activity "implausible" (FMR 147). In the case of moral subjectivity, something fraught with ambiguities, ambivalence and tension, perhaps the best we can hope for is that our beliefs and desires "hang together" in some workable way (FMR 151). This idea of coherence is captured by Rorty's metaphor of weaving. The subject "constantly" (PBL 199) "reweaves itself, in response to stimuli" (NRP 123; CS 33; FMR 149), by such techniques as "simply drop[ping] an old belief or desire", "creat[ing] a whole host of new beliefs and desires in order to encapsulate the disturbing intruder", and "just unstitch[ing], and thus eras[ing], a whole range of beliefs and desires" (IR 93). The moral subject's beliefs and desires will, moreover, need to cohere synchronically, at a given point in time, as well as diachronically, over a period of time: we "tell the story of our lives" both "prospectively" and "retrospectively" (PILH 73) in an attempt to make past events, especially from childhood, "cohere with later events" (FMR 151).

2. If self-description is an on-going process that aims at weaving together a narrative of one's life that is in the first place coherent, then one thing that makes this difficult is an abundance of *detail.* On this issue of detail, the Rortian position again contradicts the Platonic-Kantian way of thinking about moral subjectivity. Plato and Kant admit no role to the moral subject's experience of multiplex, idiosyncratic and contingent events in the formation of moral subjectivity. For them, "the particular contingencies of one's life are unimportant", since "mere spatiotemporal location, mere contingent circumstance" can only distract from and hinder the development of what really matters morally, our essential humanity, which is singular, universal, and necessary (CS 26). For Rorty, the concrete, multiplex, idiosyncratic and contingent play a pivotal role in the formation of moral subjectivity (CS 31). Indeed, it is the detail, particularly that detail taken from our childhood experiences (FMR 151,152), that makes us who we are as moral subjects. Every person, object, situation, place, event, sensation, and word we encounter becomes material with which we can compose our self-description. "Anything from the sound of a word through the colour of a leaf to the feel of a piece of skin can, as Freud showed us, serve to dramatize and crystallize a human being's sense of self-identity" (CS 37). In short, when it comes to ethics "Freud suggests that we need to return to the particular – to see particular present situations and options as similar to or different from particular past actions or events" (CS 33). For Rorty, moral subjectivity has nothing to do with locking onto the intrinsic nature of rational beings, as Kant had thought, but has much to do with the detailed parts of our self-descriptions.

3. Despite the fact it appears only in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, the third feature of self-description is one of the most important: *final vocabulary.*[7] Rorty defines it as follows:

> a set of words which [human beings] employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. . . .

> [They are] 'final' in the sense that if doubt is cast upon the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force.

He then adds:

> A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible, and ubiquitous terms such as 'true,' 'good,' 'right,' and 'beautiful.' The larger part contains thicker, more rigid and more parochial terms, for example, 'Christ,' 'England,' 'professional standards,' 'decency,' 'kindness,' the Revolution,' 'the Church,' 'progressive,' 'rigorous,' 'creative.' The more parochial terms do most of the work. (PILH 73)

The words that constitute the moral subject's final vocabulary – particularly the "thick" ones – are the most important beliefs and desires in the moral subject's self-description and hence they possess highly charged semantic fields. Rorty even speculates that each language-user may stand in relation to some "key sentence" and some "key thing" both of which stand at the centre of our final vocabulary (LIE 179). Such words and sentences are a crucial source of uniqueness: what gives people their "special flavours" and "distinctive neuroses" are "different associations" of key words with "particular situations" (BK 153, n.15).

4. Of course, while arguing that a moral subject's final vocabulary is the means of idiosyncrasy, Rorty avoids suggesting that it contains his or her essence. In fact, Rorty proposes that there is not just one self-description per moral subject but many: "the same human body can play host to two or more persons" (FMR 147). While the number of self-descriptions per subject is not set, most subjects are likely to contain competing, inconsistent, alternative self-descriptions. These descriptions may not cohere logically, but they do cohere causally, since they exist within the same "causal network", the same corporeal body (FMR 147-8). Armed with the distinction between logical and causal inconsistency, Rorty is able to assert that the reason the behaviour of a single body will not always be able to be explained by reference to one's conscious thoughts is that these conscious thoughts represent only one of the body's many self-descriptions (FMR 148).

5. The possibility of multiple self-descriptions raises the question: Can a moral subject know which of its self-descriptions is the correct one? The answer we give to this question, for Rorty, depends upon what we mean by "correct". If we mean "true", "actual" or "real", then we cannot know which self-description is correct. For the very import of an antiessentialist understanding of the moral subject as essenceless is that no description is more necessary and less contingent than others: because the moral subject cannot inspect a set of neutral facts, an objective autobiographical record, he or she cannot be split up, like an Aristotelian substance, into a centre and a periphery, a "true self" and a false self (FMR 152). To accept our various self-descriptions "as on a par, as alternative explanations of a confusing situation, is part of what [Philip] Rieff calls 'Freud's egalitarian revision of the traditional ideas of an hierarchical human nature'" (FMR 151). It is to view the moral subject, not as divided into an essential side and an accidental side, but as a "homogenous mechanism" divided into "regions that embody a plurality of persons (that is, incompatible systems of belief and desire)" (FMR 162).

To say that all self-descriptions are equal in terms of what is "true" is not to say that they are equal in all ways. If by "correct" we mean "best equips me for handling this situation or achieving a particular end", then we can know which of the moral subject's self-descriptions is correct (SS 36). After all, some self-descriptions will be more useful than others at helping do certain things. When I walk into a classroom to teach *Othello*, for instance, it would be more useful to describe myself as a knowledgeable, witty and charming teacher of English than as a cricket player or a drinking buddy. Equally, the nineteenth-century task of creating people who were more sensitive to the pain suffered by nonhuman animals was better served by the self-description implicit in *Black Beauty* than by that articulated in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. Instrumental utility is one measure of correct self-description.[8]

A second measure is the relationship with societal norms and conventions. Were I to describe myself as Napolean Bonaparte when I walked into my classroom, I would soon find out that a lack of instrumental utility would be the least of my worries, for not only is instrumental utility determined inside societal conventions, so too is descriptive appropriateness. Self-descriptions are not produced independently of moral communities: "the narratives of our own lives [are] episodes within . . . larger historical

narratives" (FMR 163). Indeed, not only do we "inherit" most of the terms for our self-description from our culture's final vocabulary (PRI 166), agent-membership of a given moral community is predicated on the fact that its members describe themselves in a particular way. If a moral subject's self-description is deemed unacceptable (for whatever reasons) for members of this community, then he or she will be described by adjectives such as "disgusting", "perverse", "bizarre" or "insane" (PDP 187-8).

For Rorty as liberal, a third measure of correct self-description is simply the moral subject's personal preference (FMR 154-61). Implicit in his view that identity is created not represented in language, and explicit in his account of poetic self-description, is the notion that people can choose to describe themselves in whatever ways they want, with the only normative qualification for Rorty being that they do not harm any one else while doing it (HDK 75; Ia xiv). Beautiful or interesting self-descriptions can be preferred simply because they enrich the life of the moral subject. Of course, this measure of correct self-description will also be limited: by the options available to the moral subject as a member of finite moral communities, by normative pressure from community forces, and by other moral subjects. A community or a moral subject (even liberal ones) may choose to ignore, modify or crush certain self-descriptions, such as those of British officers in colonial India as the superior race, those of non-Darwinians as different from nonhuman animals in kind rather than merely degree, and those of young aristocrats as somehow deserving the material wealth of their upbringing. I discuss in section 4 of Chapter Two Rorty's view of the violation of self-descriptive preference as "humiliation".

IV. Rational Unconscious and Conscious Self-Description

6. The constitution of the moral subject through several incompatible self-descriptions which cannot be privileged over each other on representational grounds is complicated further by Rorty's notion of the *unconscious*. Rorty radically revises traditional Anglophone notions of the unconscious that view it as a psychologized update of the brutish passions, "a seething mass of inarticulate instinctual energies, a 'reservoir of libido' to which consistency is irrelevant" (FMR 149).[9] By contrast, he defines the unconscious as: "one or more well-articulated systems of beliefs and

desires, systems that are just as complex, sophisticated, and internally consistent as the normal adult's conscious beliefs and desires" (FMR 149). While he preserves the idea that the unconscious is just that – not normally available to conscious inspection – Rorty also foregrounds the rational, that is, "internally consistent" (FMR 149) nature of the unconscious. It can, he writes, "no more tolerate inconsistency than can consciousness.

. . . [It] has a well-worked-out, internally consistent view of the world – though one which may be hopelessly wrong on certain crucial points" (FMR 149-50). The Rortian unconscious is capable of telling a coherent story or self-description. Thus he is able to claim not only that the unconscious can offer "alternative ways of making sense of the past," but that these stories "have as good a claim on our attention as do the familiar beliefs and desires that are available to introspection" (FMR 152).

If we remember that all self-descriptions within the same body are part of the same causal network, then with the idea of a *rational* unconscious Rorty is able to claim that self-descriptions offered by the unconscious cause us to act in ways that we would rather not, ways that cannot be explained by reference to our conscious self-descriptions (FMR 148). A particular person, word, situation or sensation may mysteriously evoke in us an emotion of pity or exhilaration or fondness or horror, for reasons we are unable to fathom, reasons related to the story of our life told by our unconscious. With the notion of a rational unconscious, Rorty can write, in a startling sentence, "It looks like a person using us rather than a thing we can use" (FMR 146).

7. This is not to say that the moral subject's self-descriptions, and hence the very fabric of moral subjectivity, are determined by the whim or fancy of an omnipotent unconscious. Rorty's reading of Freud does not deify the unconscious. It seeks only to clarify its causal role next to that of consciousness. For we can, Rorty has gone to great lengths to assert, consciously exert significant control over our moral subjectivity by telling our own stories of what happened to us. To explain *conscious self-description* Rorty borrows Harold Bloom's theory of the anxiety of influence felt by "strong poets". Bloom's basic idea is that "every poet begins (however 'unconsciously') by rebelling more strongly against the fear of death than all other men and women do" (Bloom, qtd. in CS 24, n.1). "Death" is not so much the failure of one's physiology as the failure to have created anew. What all poets want most of all, says Bloom, is to write poems that

are unlike any other poems that any poetic predecessors have ever written. Only achieving this originality would mean becoming a "strong poet" and successfully avoiding the "horror of finding [one]self to be only a copy or a replica" (Bloom, cited in CS 24).

Rorty sees in Bloom's work a useful model for the moral subject's attempts to describe herself consciously in a way that is to some degree free from the causal influence of her unconscious. If we view the poet's attempt to write new poems in terms of writing one's "life-as-poem" (CS 28), then

> We shall see the conscious need of the strong poet to *demonstrate* that he is not a copy or replica as merely a special form of an unconscious need everyone has: the need to come to terms with the blind impress which chance has given him, to make a self for himself by redescribing that impress in terms which are, if only marginally, his own. (CS 43)[10]

By making it possible for moral subjects to become "poets" in an extended sense – people able, through a mixture of contingency and ingenuity, to define themselves on their own, partially original terms (CS 24) – Rorty leaves open the possibility of radical changes in ethics. Indeed, taking a lead from Rorty's quotation of Dewey's comment that "The moral prophets of humanity have always been poets" (CLC 69), we could say that original self-descriptions are "social poems" (EL 243) that give birth to a new poetic sense of solidarity and that examples of "moral poets" may include the Buddha, Jesus of Nazareth, Nietzsche, Henry Salt, and Gandhi. Each of these figures can be thought of as inventing original ways of describing themselves, self-descriptions which affected their sense of their responsibilities to others. Each of them also hoped that the rising generations would adopt similar self-descriptions.[11]

In conclusion, Rorty's Freudian-derived model of the moral subject as a network of beliefs and desires constituted through coherent, detailed, multiple self-descriptions in response to contingent subjective experiences makes subjectivity a psychological, social and discursive issue rather than a metaphysical one. Moral subjectivity is not, as the Platonic-Kantian tradition held, to be identified with that portion of the human self that transcends the spatiotemporal processes of socialization and acculturation, but is to be thought of as entirely a product of these processes.

Notes

[1] For Rorty's principal discussions of moral subjectivity see HRRS, FP, FMR, CS, WAW, PDP, PBL, MIPA and S. It is worth pointing out that Rorty's initial talk of the "moral subject/self" in such essays as "Freud and Moral Reflection" (1984) and "The Contingency of Selfhood" (1986) was devoted almost exclusively to the private, intrasubjective side of ethics he terms autonomy, and that it was only later in "Feminism and Pragmatism" (1991) and "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" (1993), that he directly addressed the form of subjectivity characteristic of the public side to ethics he terms solidarity. Indeed, in FMR Rorty writes that "Freud, in particular, has no contribution to make to social theory", explaining that "[h]is domain is the portion of morality that cannot be identified with 'culture' . . . the private life, the search for a character, the attempt of individuals to be reconciled with themselves . . . " (FMR 154), a comment that seems to suggest that while his non-essentialist Freudian model of the subject is useful for helping us understand the quest for autonomy, it can do nothing similar for the quest for solidarity. Rorty's contention, however, should be interpreted as correctly pointing out that his Freudian moral subject should not be read as a blue-print for a revised normative morality in the public sphere (FMR 154, n.16; CS 34), a notion with which I concur, since the ideas of self-description and the unconscious have no necessary implications for revising our feelings of solidarity. Such an admission does not exclude usefully distinguishing autonomy and solidarity as two different aims of subjectivity while recognising that attempts at both operate through contiguous if not identical subjective mechanisms (a point noted by Richard King 44). Indeed, Rorty has explicitly stated (IDTP 121; HKD 72; CS 37) that the same structures and causal processes are continuous in both forms of subjectivity, something lost on commentators such as Haliburton, Goodheart, McCarthy, Fraser, Critchley and Williams who claim that Rorty does not allow for two-way causal osmotic movement between the public and private spheres.

[2] The term is a diagnostic one employed by Rorty to describe the features of what Plato meant by "soul", what Kant termed "practical reason", what most Western

intellectuals call "rationality", and what most non-intellectuals would simply name "humanity" (see S 194, n.6 for more on this). Ever inventing new ways of advancing his cause, Rorty also calls "essential humanity" by the following terms: "deep true self" (HRRS 129), "human nature" (HRRS 171-2), "claims to knowledge about the nature of human beings" (HRRS 171), "conscience" (PDP 176), "core self" (S 189), and "central self" (CS 33).

[3] As an epigraph to his sociological study of the Holocaust, Zygmunt Bauman quotes Gersholm Scholem affirming that "It is to our interest that the great historical and social question . . . how could this happen? . . . should retain all its weight, all its stark nakedness, all its horror" (1989, ii).

[4] Rorty's emphasis on "mental states" suggests that moral subjectivity is separate from the biophysical body. This is not an accurate representation of his view, as is evidenced by his remark, in the same essay, that "moral obligation is . . . a matter of . . . traces of encounters between particular people and our bodily organs" (FMR 157). It is assumed by him that moral subjectivity is corporeal.

[5] But not "caused". For explanations of Rorty's distinction between "constitution" and "causation" see CL 4-8, IR 96-7, MSSSH 199, TL 80-84 and JOMS 3. With particular regard to the moral subject, the gist of the distinction is that it allows us to retain the common-sensical "physicalism" of natural science, if in a "non-reductive" form, while believing that moral subjectivity possesses no intrinsic meaning and can only be given meaning through self-description (NRP). That is, the Rortian position does not preclude the causal influence of non-discursive factors, such as genetics, technology, natural environment and so on, in the formation of moral subjectivity. It does, however, emphasise the unique and crucial constitutive role played by self-description.

[6] Recent work by E. Warwick Slinn has employed poststructuralist models of subjectivity to analyse dramatic monologues as particularly rich examples of textual self-identity. See Slinn, *The Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry* (1991). Such an approach recognises the constituted-through-description nature of subjectivity.

[7] The term "final vocabulary" first appeared in the introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* (IPP xlii). But here Rorty intended the term to mean what he later

described as "the platitudes which contextually define the terms of a final vocabulary in use" (PILH 74), something quite different from his later usage of the term.

[8] See FP for Rorty's discussion of the instrumental utility of self-description with particular reference to feminism's ethical and political aims.

[9] Richard Harland points out that traditional Anglo-Saxon interpretations of Freud's unconscious as closely associated with the human subject's biological instincts are coloured by the assumption that what is "underlying and basic" must be biological (33-4). It is fair to say that Rorty stands more with Lacan and poststructuralists, than with most traditional readers of Freud, in his understanding of the unconscious, particularly on the role of language. Compare Lacan's "the unconscious is structured like a language" with Rorty's "a witty unconscious is necessarily a linguistic unconscious" (FMR 149).

[10] Since developing his Bloomian notion of poetic self-description, Rorty has written what appears to be a significant modification of this view: "Individuals – even individuals of great courage and imagination – cannot achieve semantic authority, *even semantic authority over themselves*, on their own" (FP 223). I think this sentence needs to be read within the context of the surrounding passage. The next sentences are: "To get such authority you have to hear your own statements as part of a shared practice. Otherwise you yourself will never know whether they are more than ravings, never know whether you are a heroine or a maniac". I take Rorty's point to be that even strong poets who are successful at autonomy have to face up to the fact that their self-descriptions can only be articulated within a social and political context, one in which their self-descriptions may be ignored, laughed at, and even crushed. Even strong poets have to wait to see how the next generation respond to their self-description to find out whether they will be viewed as geniuses or maniacs. See CS 41 for further clarification of this interpretation.

[11] Rorty describes the feminist attempts to free women from androcentric norms of behaviour as mostly a matter of poetic self-description (FP).

2

The Other

Rorty does not use the term "the other" with much frequency generally and not at all in his explicit discussions of solidarity. He even says that he finds the topic of otherness "a bit baffling" (Balslev 86) and would probably question the effort cultural studies spends on the topic. His most detailed discussions of the other – "Comments on Taylor's 'Paralectics'" (1991) and the letters he wrote to Anindita Niyogi Balslev which are collected in the booklet *Cultural Otherness: Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (Balslev 1991) – express a deep scepticism towards traditional uses of the term which I try to explain below in relation to the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Despite this seeming incongruence, however, the term is useful to signify "an individual being to whom the moral subject may have a sense of responsibility". This is the meaning it has in the following discussion in which I elaborate Rorty's view of the other as other-description, a view advanced on the same antiessentialist and antirepresentationalist grounds by which the moral subject is identified as self-description. Having established this basic proposition, attention will focus on the nature of other-description, particularly its causal production. It will be argued that the other may contribute causal input to this production, so much so that the moral subject's other-description matches up closely with the other's own self-description. However, such an occurrence will require some degree of free and open conversation between the two and/or a considerable amount of imagination on the part of the moral subject. While Rorty's account of other-description makes this possible, it is by no means guaranteed. Hence, I will consider the possibility that the other may also be humiliated, may have his or her self-description ignored by the moral subject and denied any causal input into the

production of the moral subject's other-description. In the end, other-description is a political matter in which causal forces vie for power, though there are means of privileging one description over another.

I. The Other as Other-Description

The first point I want to make about Rorty's model of the other can be made quite quickly, since it is much the same point made with regard to the moral subject in the second section of Chapter One. It is that *the other is other-description.* This claim must be seen in relation to the Platonic-Kantian moral theoretical tradition, which, as Rorty summarizes, construes the other as possessing an essential humanity identical to the one possessed by the moral subject (S 189), and which thus measures the moral subject's relation to the other in terms of his or her ability to accurately "recognize" the other's essential humanity (PMN 191; S 189, 192, 194), "something that exists antecedently to [its] recognition" (S 196). Rorty's view is, inevitably, that, just like the moral subject, the other lacks the essential humanity ascribed to it by the Platonic-Kantian moral theoretical tradition; hence, it cannot possibly be "recognized" (or mis-recognized) by the moral subject. Rather it must be "constructed" through the moral subject's description of it, in the same way in which the moral subject is constructed through self-description. The only difference between the discursive construction of the moral subject and the other is that in the latter case the other does not describe himself or herself, but is described by another – namely, the moral subject. This has important implications that will be discussed in this chapter, but for the moment I would like to register the Rortian view that if "[*a*]*nything* is, for purposes of being inquired into, 'constituted' by a web of meanings" (MSSSH 199), then this not only includes the moral subject but also the other. Just as the moral subject is constituted through description – self-description – so the other is constituted through description – other-description. Although not a term employed by Rorty, "other-description" is conveniently symmetrical to his term "self-description" and can be thought of as shorthand for "description of the other as an other by another".[1]

II. Causes of Other-Description

I would like to spend the rest of the chapter teasing out the implications of Rorty's idea that the other is other-description. This idea is open to the significant criticism that by equating the other with other-description, it reduces the other to a mere projection of the moral subject and so does not take adequate account of the other's otherness. Most conceptions of the other deem its independence from the subject as constitutive of its very otherness – not just causal independence, which Rorty's general physicalism (CL 5) accords the other, but semantic independence, which Rorty does not accord it. In the increasingly popular account of ethics derived from the work of Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, "the Other" names that which cannot be reduced to, or subsumed by, the moral subject. The Other is not merely "the image I myself make of the other man" (Levinas, qtd. in Bauman 1989, 182), but is to be thought of as "exceeding the *idea of the other in me*" (Critchley 1991, 5). Indeed, it is the Other's "radical alterity" that puts into question or challenges what Critchley summarises for Levinas as "the liberty, spontaneity, and cognitive emprise of the ego that seeks to reduce all otherness to itself" (Critchley 1991, 5). Consequently, Rorty's view of the other as constituted through descriptions by the moral subject would qualify as an example of what Levinasians call "ontological" thinking, insofar as it participates in that urge in philosophy, supremely exemplified by Heidegger's notion of *Daesin*, to violate the intrinsic meaning of the Other by "comprehending", "acquisitioning", "grasping" and "digesting" it (Critchley 1991, 6). Philosopher Mark C. Taylor aptly sums up the Levinasian criticism: "The striving [Rortian] subject enters into conversation in order to build *itself* up through the search for truth. Thus the person who converses relates to *himself/herself* even when s/he seems to be relating to others . . . The 'other' is not really other but is actually a *moment* in *my* own self-becoming" (17). Rorty may have made the moral subject give up the specular metaphor of representation, but only in exchange for that of narcissism.

This criticism potentially undermines the idea that one can be sensitive to the other. As such, it deserves a considered response. Although Rorty has not yet formulated such a response, at least directly, we can trace the outline of a response by inference from his broad theoretical position and by his indirect comments in a variety

of texts. The vital move in the Rortian response would be to clarify that though the other is constituted *through* the moral subject, she is not created *by* the moral subject. The preposition is crucial. It pinpoints the exact role played by the moral subject in the causal construction of other-description, and thus clarifies the moral subject's relationship with the other.[2] To say that the other is constituted through rather than by the moral subject is to attribute crucial significance to the moral subject *only* insofar as his or her description of the other will, at the moment solidarity is produced through moral identification, be the only one of any import. This is so because he or she is, after all, the one doing the identifying and because it is what he or she and not anyone else thinks about the other that matters – even if he or she is hopelessly "wrong" and others are "right".

To say that the other-description with which the moral subject operates is the only relevant one when it comes to identification is not, however, to claim that the moral subject is the only causal factor in the process by which other-description is constructed. Certainly, we can admit some role in this process to the idiosyncratic psychological profile of the moral subject. But this is merely to acknowledge that the unique way in which he or she weaves together the elements of his or her final vocabulary in response to contingent past experiences will inevitably have some effect on the composition of any other-description, if only because we cannot avoid describing others in terms of "resemblances and differences between ourselves and very particular people (our parents, for example) and between the present situation and very particular situations of the past" (CS 32).

Idiosyncrasy aside, Rorty would never propose the moral subject as a solipsistic monad, completely cut off from the other and Author of its descriptions of the other. There is always room for forces outside the moral subject to causally influence and contribute to her description of the other. One of the moral subjects

> more central, difficult-to-imagine-revising beliefs is that lots of objects she does not control are continually causing her to have new and suprising beliefs which often require hasty and dramatic reweaving [of her self-description] on her part. She is no more free from pressure from outside, no more tempted to be 'arbitrary', than anyone else. (IR 101)

Rorty's final diagram of the human self in the essay "Non-Reductive Physicalism" even has a line with arrows at either end going from "The human body" to "The body's environment" and a note explaining that the arrowed line "indicates causal influence" (NRP 122). Inside the human body, causal influences on the moral subject's other-description may include "hormones, positrons, neural synapses, beliefs, desires, moods, diseases, and multiple personalities" (NRP 121). Outside the human body, causal influences could include advertisements, documentaries, graffiti and even "cosmic rays scrambling the fine structures of some crucial neurons in [our] brains" (CL 17). Rorty's only qualification to this is to say that "outside" cannot be thought of as "outside of time and space, outside of the contingent workings of nature" (CTP 76), the place where Otherness with a capital O is usually located. In Rorty's naturalistic view, "there is nothing more to Otherness than the random events which produce random effects on our language" (CTP 75-6).

This qualification granted, Rorty's position allows that the other-descriptions employed by the moral subject are not necessarily Authored by the moral subject. Just as other-description does not arise as an essence-to-be-represented from the other as Other, neither does it arise as a creation of the moral subject as Author. In some situations it is possible that the moral subject may have little input to his or her other-description, acting as a largely passive and not very idiosyncratic fulcrum through whom multiple causal forces on his or her description of the other are channelled. Far from being reduced to a projection of the moral subject, then, the Rortian other might depend on the moral subject *only* insofar as the latter is the unavoidable but malleable channel through which other-description is formulated.

III. The Other as a Cause of Other-Description

If in describing the other the moral subject can be influenced by external forces, one such force would be the other himself or herself. Through a variety of techniques – conversation, bribery, blackmail, trickery, logical argument, facial expressions, physical contest and so on – the other may contribute to the moral subject's other-description. This will be done, not to ensure the moral subject's description accurately represents the other's essential humanity, but in order to make sure it accurately represents the

other's preferred self-description, the way he "wants to be . . . represented" (CS 40). Unlike an elusive essential humanity, a preferred self-description can be laid out in front of the moral subject. Hence, it can be an object of respect. The other may urge the moral subject to add this and delete that from his description of her, to highlight this part and play down these parts. "You seem to be misinformed", he may point out. "I am not, as you put it, 'Jewish scum'. I am an educated and emotionally sensitive physics teacher. I have two daughters, Abby and Moana. And I have a partner called Carol who I love very much. I am a great fan of Oasis and I am currently reading Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. And yes I have been a practising Jew for several years. Please alter your description of me accordingly". Here the other is influencing the way the moral subject describes her, but not as an irreducible radical alterity, only as a language-user, possibly one speaking an alternative final vocabulary, one who can communicate to the moral subject details she thinks are important about herself. It is always possible, therefore, for the moral subject to be sensitive to the ways in which the other prefers to be described. If the moral subject's other-description is significantly similar to the other's own self-description, then he or she can say to the other what Elizabeth Spelman says it is necessary to say in order to treat persons as persons: "I treat you as the person you are just insofar as I recognize and respond to those features of you which, in your view, are necessary to who you are" (Spelman 151). For Rorty as liberal, moral subjects may hope that they will not be "limited by [their] own final vocabulary when faced with the possibility of humiliating someone with a quite different final vocabulary" (PILH 93).

The degree to which the moral subject's other-description and the other's self-description match up depends partly on the vociferousness and eloquence of the other and partly on the moral subject's openness towards the other, his or her desire to understand who the other thinks he or she is. Rorty notes that perception, inference (PSMP 12) and conversation (CLC 52) are all methods for such an exchange of information, but the method he privileges above all is *imagination*. Without producing a systematic explanation of what he means by this kind of imagination, Rorty has said that in its application to other-description, imagination allows the moral subject to "get inside" the other (OE 212), to hypothetically "[travel] down the road he ha[s] traveled" (OE 205), to "imagine [himself or herself] in the shoes of the despised and oppressed"

(HRRS 179), and to "think about what things might be like for people with whom [he or she] do[es] not immediately identify" (HRRS 180). Put these varied descriptions together with Rorty's offhand references to "imaginative projection" (CS 34) and "people you can imagine being" (MOTCS 49), and we can get the sense that Rorty is talking about a form of imagination that produces a kind of identification by which the moral subject's "I" – its sense of self-identity as captured in its self-descriptions – is set aside or suspended so that the subject can introject or internalize the imagined characteristics of the other's "I". The subject, whether or not it is aware of it, never alters its corporeal location, of course, but does alter its subjective location – in literary terms, its narrative point of view – because it actually thinks, however briefly, and to varying degrees of verisimilitude, that it *is* the other.[3] The subject identifies not as *its* self, but as the *other's* self. So configured, Rorty's version of imaginative projection can be seen as a contribution to a long tradition, one which includes Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) and Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), and which has been revived in more recent work on "empathy" and "moral imagination" by philosophers such as Richard Wollheim (1974) , Mark Johnson (1993), David L. Norton (1996), and John Kekes (1995).[4] All writers champion the virtues of empathy and moral imagination and would agree with Rorty that they allow the moral subject to be sensitive to the self-descriptive preferences of the other.

The possibility that the moral subject's other-description and the other's self-description may be extremely similar raises fundamental questions about the needs for such terms as "the other" and "other-description". For if other-description may, for practical purposes of identification, be the same as self-description, then why not just talk about "other moral subjects" and "other moral subjects' self-descriptions"? Can the other not just be thought of as a moral subject with a self-description?

Firstly, the terms "moral subject" and "other" are indeed always interchangeable in reference to individuals, so much so that further analysis may construe the original other as a moral subject capable of feeling solidarity with the original moral subject who is now the other. And admittedly, the ideal version of solidarity involves two moral subjects reciprocating feelings of responsibility based on an intimate acquaintance with each other's self-descriptions: I identify with you as you see yourself and you identify with me as I see myself. But these qualifications do not erase the fact

that moral identification, the production mechanism of solidarity, employs the moral subject's other-description, not the other's self-description, simply because identification is, in causal terms, always one-directional, *from* the moral subject *to* the other, even when it is reciprocated.

Moral identification's inevitable reliance on other-description and not self-description is seen most clearly when solidarity manifests itself in the non-ideal version where one moral subject feels responsible for an other who, for the purposes of identification, and for whatever practical reason, does not have a self-description that can be communicated to the moral subject, an other such as an infant, a severely intellectually impaired person, a nonhuman animal, a speaker of another language, someone of whom the moral subject is only fleetingly aware, people who are "suffering too much" to describe themselves and who hence need "the job of putting their situation into language . . . done for them by somebody else" (PILH 94). Here, when the moral subject has no access to the other's self-description, and whether or not the other reciprocates some sort of equivalent responsibility, solidarity can exist without an intimate acquaintance with the other's self-description. Whatever you do back to me, says the moral subject, I identify with, and thus feel responsible for, you *as I see you*.

And neither is this non-ideal version of solidarity a simple anomaly. It actually demonstrates what is the case in all versions of solidarity. Even when the moral subject's other-description matches up with the other's self-description, it is still the other-description that does the work in the process of moral identification. The two descriptions are the products of separate causal processes: whereas other-description is always channelled through *the moral subject*, self-description is always channelled through *the other*. The moral subject's other-description and the other's self-description can never be causally equated. Thus, in the ideal, reciprocal version of solidarity, it is more accurate to say: I identify with you as I think you see yourself and you identify with me as you think I see myself. That is why the other as other-description is vital to a Rortian account of solidarity.[5]

IV. Humiliation, Politics, and Privilege

Sometimes the moral subject's other-description is very different from the other's self-description – such as when the other's own narrative of his or her life is not listened to, not taken seriously, or is deliberately crushed. This will usually be because his or her self-description is not the one the moral subject thinks the other should have. Perhaps the other is a greedy aristocrat who maintains that his material privilege is God-given and the moral subject is an atheistic revolutionary peasant. Perhaps the other is a homosexual Catholic who regularly contemplates suicide and the moral subject is a gay pride activist. Perhaps the other is a 37-year-old builder who also happens to be Jewish and the moral subject is a neo-Nazi. In each of these cases the moral subject may brush aside as delusional the self-description in which the other "[finds] his moral identity" (FP 219) on the grounds that it is not true that

> somebody's *own* vocabulary is always the best vocabulary for understanding what he is doing . . . . There are, after all, cases in which the other person's, or culture's, explanation of what it's up to is so primitive, or so nutty, that we brush it aside. The only general hermeneutical rule is that it's always wise to ask what the subject *thinks* it's up to before formulating our own hypotheses. (MSSSH 200)

Rorty calls the strong version of this brushing aside of self-description *humiliation*. He borrows the concept from Judith Shklar's *Ordinary Vices* (1984) and, more especially, Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) and sums it up as "the forcible tearing down of the particular structures of language and belief in which [people] were socialized (or which they pride themselves on having formed for themselves)" (LIE 177). Humiliation can involve the use of violent trauma, such as physical torture, but the physical suffering is not the point. The point is to dismantle a person's self-description, particularly his or her final vocabulary, to the extent that he or she is no longer able to "reconstitute" himself or herself (LIE 177), to make her "irrational" in the "precise sense" that "she can no longer rationalize – no longer justify herself to herself" (LIE 178), to "tear a mind apart" so much so that the old self-description no longer makes sense (LIE 179). The important point to remember is that,

if moral identity is constituted through self-description, then to take apart her self-description is to take *her* apart.

Rorty regards the torture episode from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) as a paradigm for humiliation and discusses it in detail (LIE 177-82). This scene is typically explained through Kantian eyes as a gruesome example of a human subject having his essential humanity violated by a torturer who similarly represses his own essential humanity. In this view, the "dehumanizing" moral falsification at work is analogous to the obvious mathematical falsification of getting Winston to believe that "two and two equals five". Rorty, however, reads this scene not in terms of Winston having his essential humanity violated, and thus a plain moral fact being falsified, but in terms of him having the key terms of his self-description messed with. By getting Winston to genuinely want Julia to have her face eaten by rats instead of his own, O'Brien changes a crucial part of Winston's final vocabulary and thus his self (LIE 178). After saying "Do it to Julia!" Winston can no longer describe himself in the same way, for this was one of the terms integral to his moral-identity. Now his autobiographical narrative of standing up with Julia against Big Brother can no longer cohere. O'Brien humiliates Winston not by violating something deeply and essentially human inside his breast, but by dismantling and actually re-arranging how Winston wants to describe himself. Now he can never be who he was. Winston is no longer him-self (LIE 179).[6]

His discussion of humiliation shows that Rorty is acutely aware that the other's causal input on the moral subject's other-description is theoretically indeterminate. It just depends. It depends because other-description "is as much up for political grabs as anything else" (UCRNF 186) and because the other is just one causal force amongst an indefinite number all exerting causal influence, all vying for "semantic authority" over the moral subject's other-description (FP 223). Who wins, who makes their other-description the one to be used by the moral subject when she does her identification, is a matter of who has the power to make their description "stick". It is not a matter of who has Power on their side, in the form of an eternal, ahistorical, transcultural Truth (CL 22). With epistemological concerns about correspondence to a necessary essence shelved, it makes sense that politics becomes what is important in other-description (JOMS 6). If the moral subject is a liberal he may let his other-description match the

self-description of the other and conscientiously change his other-description when he gets it wrong. If he is a boot-licking neo-Nazi he may insist that these details do not disguise the overwhelming fact that the other is a dirty Jew. While the Rortian position does not ensure that the moral subject's other-description will be or should be sensitive to the preferences of the other – no theoretical account of solidarity can do that – it does make it clear that there is no reason to think that other-description is *necessarily* going to humiliate the other.

Amidst all this political warring, the three means of descriptive privilege as discussed in Chapter One with regard to the moral subject's self-description may be applied to the moral subject's other-description to privilege one over another. The first is its efficiency at facilitating a particular, explicit end. If the end is to get these moral subjects to feel solidarity with these others, and other-description *x* achieves this more efficiently than other-description *y*, then *x* can be privileged over *y*. The second is how comfortably the other-description matches up with the descriptions of the other (and similar others) conventional to certain moral communities, most usually either that of which the moral subject is a member or that of which the other is a member. The more comfortable this match, the more objective the other-description is. The third means by which other-description can be privileged is simply the preferences of the other on the make-up of her self-description, preferences which as I have just argued can be laid out in front of the moral subject.

All three means of privilege open up the space for disagreement about what constitutes a "correct" other-description. The Jew from our previous example would certainly regard the neo-Nazi's simplistic description of her as false by the terms of her personal preference. For the neo-Nazi, it would be the Jew's more nuanced self-description which attempts to gloss over blatantly obvious moral distinctions between himself and the other by containing a lot of details which the neo-Nazi's moral community deemed morally irrelevant. When it comes to efficiency, the two other-descriptions would be privileged according to the end which they are expected to facilitate. The neo-Nazi's other-description may be successful at facilitating hatred of Jews, while the Jew's description of himself may be successful at facilitating sensitivity towards and responsibility for Jews. All three means of privilege avoid any notion of mimetic correspondence to the way the other "really" is, outside all description, but

they do provide a way by which it may be argued that one other-description is better than another.

Notes

[1] Purely a space-saving device, the term "other-description" denotes what Rorty has called "description of what unfamiliar people are like" (Ia xvi), "descriptions under which [people] could fall" (S 191), and "tell[ing] stories about them [people]" (MOTCS 48).

[2] The issue of the causes of other-description should not be confused with the issue of the constituted-through-language nature of the other. This former issue concerning the relationship between the moral subject and other-description proceeds only on the completion of the latter one concerning the relationship between the other and other-description.

[3] I have described the strong version of imaginative projection in which the moral subject not only adopts the other's corporeal situation, but also suspends his or her sense of self and adopts that of the other. Rorty's texts, however, also seem to include the weaker version where the moral subject adopts the corporeal situation of the other, but retains his or her own sense of self. The difference is that between me, Alastair Hunt, imagining what it would feel like to *be* an East Timorese orphan and me, Alastair Hunt, imagining what *I* would do if *I* were in the position of an East Timorese orphan.

[4] Smith writes: "By imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (qtd. in M. Smith 95). For Shelley, "The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, person, not our own. A man to be greatly good, must

imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his own species must become his own" (Shelley 118).

[5] The necessity of concepts of the other and other-description in Rortian ethics can be seen as a miniature version of Rorty's general ethnocentrism (discussed in Chapter Four).

[6] Rorty seems to conceive of humiliation only as a weapon of cruelty employed by sadists for the purposes of domination and torture. As the first two of my opening examples suggest, humiliation can also be a tool of kindness employed by liberals for the purposes of relieving unnecessary suffering and misery. In convincing the homosexual Catholic that his "unnatural sins" are neither unnatural nor sins, for instance, we are trying to persuade him to adopt a new self-description, one more in line with our other-description, but this is humiliation in a benevolent sense. The distinction between this kind of humiliation and that employed by O'Brien on Winston would turn on distinctions between the motivations of the humiliator – malevolent or benevolent – and between "the use of persuasion and the use of force" (PILH 84; CLC 47-8), though these would be fuzzy distinctions at the best of times and open to quite different applications from different ethical-political perspectives. See CWE 214-5 for more on this.

3

Solidarity

The Platonic-Kantian moral theoretical tradition, writes Rorty, explains the production of solidarity by recourse to the moral subject's essential humanity. Put simply, solidarity is produced when the moral subject's essential humanity "resonates to the presence of this same thing in other human beings" (S 189). Such an explanation assumes that the essential humanity, first, can transcend the merely phenomenal differences of language, custom, appearance and belief, and mark out those deserving of moral consideration, and, second, can illuminate the path past parochial, conditional prejudice to the recognition of the "moral law" that we have an "unconditional moral obligation" to those who share this essential humanity (HRRS 182). If the moral subject's and the other's essential humanity is, thus, "the source of human solidarity" (CLC 68), then in the Platonic-Kantian explanation the "springs of cruelty" (PILH 95) can be equated with our "lacking some component which is essential to a fully-fledged human being" (S 189). This explanation of the production of solidarity "coheres with our habit of saying that the audiences in the Coliseum, Humbert, Kinbote, O'Brien, the guards at Auschwitz, and the Belgians who watched the Gestapo drag their Jewish neighbours away were 'inhuman'" (S 189). It coheres, too, with our talk of "crimes against humanity" and "man's inhumanity to man" and our condemnation of, for example, the Nazi scientific experimenter Dr Mengele for treating his non-Aryan subjects as "less than human" and becoming himself "inhuman".

Because Rorty's models of the moral subject and the other do not possess anything resembling an essential humanity, he is unable to accept the Platonic-Kantian explanation of solidarity as plausible. Instead he suggests the following: that *solidarity*,

as embodied as a *moral community*, may simply be a result of the more banal, mechanical process of *moral identification*. This chapter explores the Rortian explanation of solidarity production.

I. Solidarity

What *is* solidarity for Rorty? Up until this point I have treated it as synonymous with "responsibility" (TWO 147; PBL 197; TLU 14) and "sensitivity" (Ia xvi; D 21; PILH 94; S 198) to others. However, the matter is not quite that clean-cut. At various times Rorty has also described solidarity as "sympathy" (TWO 148; HRRS 180), "noticing" (S 193; 196; HDK 78, 80; OE 206), "pity" (LIE 184; CS 31; S 193), "loyalty" (MOTCS 48; PBL 197, 200; S 190; JOMS 6b), "sentiment" (HRRS *passim*), "compassion" (CS 31; RSC 42), "support" (JOMS 6), "fellowship" (HRRS 167; S 192; PMN 38; Ia xvi; Ib 12), "caring about" (TLU 14d; RSC 42), and even "love" (HRRS 176; OE 207). We cannot dismiss this list as merely the use of different words for the same idea, because the different words have more or less significantly different meanings due to the specific context in which they are used. By the very nature of Rorty's guerrilla-like and rhetorical intellectual *modus operandi*, one which his friend, champion and critic, philosopher Richard Bernstein has described as "kibitzing" (233), solidarity appears in his texts as a nebulous web of significance.

Rorty's ambiguity on the matter, however, should not put *us* off from attempting some measure of analytical precision. We may begin by noting that all of the above terms concern intersubjective relations. Another common denominator lies in the fact that the words "pain" and/or "suffering" appear frequently in the contextual sentences. In these sentences, moreover, pain and suffering – best thought of as "unnecessary" or "man-made" pain (MIPA 194; RSC 42; TLU 14; RCD 197; BK 147), what Rorty calls "cruelty" (Ia xv; BK 146) – are, moreover, either implicitly or explicitly opposed to the synonyms for solidarity. Putting these clues together, perhaps we can understand solidarity as a matter of wanting and facilitating a decrease in the pain suffered by others. This seems to me to strike the right note. Not only has Rorty talked about the aim to "increase equality and decrease suffering" (TWO 150), about the "hope that that suffering will be diminished" (Ia xv) and about the "willingness to come to fellow-

members' assistance when they need it" (WAW 5), he also says of the liberal ironist that "[h]er sense of human solidarity is based on a sense of a common danger [namely, humiliation], not on a common possession or shared power" (PILH 91). Solidarity is, under a Rortian interpretation, the intersubjective practice of thinking others should not have to suffer unnecessary pain and helping them to avoid it as much as possible.[1]

II. Moral Community

Thus defined, solidarity, for Rorty, is inevitably lived and embodied as a *moral community*.[2] One can distinguish solidarity from moral community, but the distinction must be grasped in the right way. Moral community is neither a container into which solidarity is poured ready-made, nor a causal effect of the sense of solidarity. Rather, moral community is constitutive of solidarity, just as solidarity is constitutive of moral community. Changes in the number of members of a moral community, for instance, will be paralleled with quantitative changes in the sense of solidarity embodied by that community. Further, changes in the specifications for membership in the moral community will be paralleled by qualitative changes in that community's sense of solidarity. We experience solidarity, it could be said, by virtue of our membership in a moral community, and we are members of a moral community by virtue of our shared sense of solidarity. Reversed and reworded: just as a moral community exists through the expression of the sense of solidarity shared by its members, so a sense of solidarity exists through its embodiment as a moral community.

So what does a moral community, this embodiment of solidarity, look like for Rorty? Rorty is sceptical, on the grounds of feasibility, but not desirability, of the possibility of realizing a moral community that limes the limits of our biological species (IPP xxx; WAW 15; FMR 163; PBL 197; S 191ff.). Instead, he says, you will be able to get moral communities "large or small" (S 195), ones "consisting perhaps of a dozen heroes and heroines selected from history or fiction or both" (SO 21), and ones "smaller and more local than the human race" (S 191). A moral community does not have to be the statistical majority of a country or historical era (several politically cooperative or competitive moral communities can coexist within a single nation or historical era), though Rorty has said that nations, along with churches, are shining examples of moral

communities (PBL 200). Neither does a moral community have to comprise people who live in close, daily, physical proximity to one another: they may be far-flung, both geographically and historically (PBL 197), to the extent that one could, for example, consider oneself a member of the moral community of Balzac lovers or Amazons or Wildean aesthetes. A moral community does not even have to be or have been "actual" as opposed to "possible" (WAW 7). It may even be "imaginary" (FP 214; SO 21). I am a hobbit; you are the forewoman of a seventeenth-century Chinese motorized junk-building team; he is the secretary of the Rummidge University English Department; they are members of Wordsworth's unrealised Virginian pantisocracy.

In the face of such loose conditions, what prevents Rorty's concept of a moral community from disintegrating into an anarchic rabble is the group's possession of a "we" (WAW 11; S 196, 198; OE 207). Following Wilfred Sellars (S 190, n.1) Rorty identifies a human community as any collection of individuals who share a sense that they are "members" of the same group (MOTCS 48; IAEL 13; PMN 70), a sense that they are each "one of us" rather than "one of them" (Ia xvi; S 190-1). Rorty calls this sense "we-consciousness" (CLC 68; S 190, n.1). In the case of a moral community, this we-consciousness revolves around the members' possession of certain morally "relevant" or "salient" features (HRRS 179; S 192). Such features may, depending on the kind of identification employed (see Section 3 below), include their "shared moral identity" or agreement when it comes to their perception of their responsibilities to each other and others (HRRS 171), or may simply involve shared physical features. Again following Sellars, Rorty suggests we think of such expressions of common ethical features as "we-intentions": sentences in the form of "*We* all want . . ." (S 195), "WE [sic] do not do this sort of thing" (PBL 200) and "We all believe . . ." (PMN 70).[3] For example, members of a moral community may express their solidarity through, in the case of shared features which are not beliefs or desires, such we-intentions as "we graduates of Oxford", "we marijuana-users" or "we medical doctors". In the case of shared features which are beliefs or desires, we-intentions may be "we who believe that animals have a right not be harmed unnecessarily", "we who are repulsed by the notion that blacks are the moral equals of whites", or, to use Rorty's favourite example, "we liberals who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do".[4] By serving as an "over-riding purpose" (WAW 7) or a "unifying ideal", the we-consciousness articulated by such we-

intentions makes people "less like a mob and more like an army, less like people thrown together by accident and more like people who have united to accomplish a task" (WAW 5).

If a moral community is based on we-consciousness, then it would seem inevitable that something like "they-consciousness" is also important. In fact, Rorty does not shirk from the notion that a moral community exists through semantic and, possibly, physical exclusion. This is so, he reasons, because the morally relevant features that unite a moral community must, in order to do their job, be "distinctive" (PBL 200). Such distinctiveness is diacritical. Just as "the force of 'us' is, typically, contrastive in the sense that it contrasts with a 'they'" (S 190) and "the *identity* of . . . people . . . is bound up with their sense of who they are *not*" (HRRS 178), so

> The naturalized Hegelian analogue of 'intrinsic human dignity' is the comparative dignity of a group with which a person identifies herself. Nations or churches or movements are, on this view, shining historical examples not because they reflect rays emanating from a higher source, but because of contrast-effects – comparisons with other, worse communities. Persons have dignity not as an interior luminescence, but because they share in such contrast-effects. (PBL 200)[5]

The *in*clusion of certain beings within a moral community depends on the parallel and inverse *ex*clusion of other beings. For example, while *we* feminists are united by our practice of championing the rights of women, we contrast ourselves against a *them*, those anti-feminists who think women's pain is somehow less significant that that of men. This is not to say that we feminists will not try to educate anti-feminists and thus persuade them to join our moral community, but it is to admit that we will never stop defining ourselves, even tacitly, against our immoral others. Those who fall inside the limits of a moral community will be welcomed as "persons" or "true humans", while those who fall outside a community's limits will be shunned as "non-persons" (PMN 38) or "pseudo-humans" (HRRS 167, 178-9) – "the wrong sort of human beings" (S 190), those "disturbingly different" (MOTCS 48). "Personhood", writes Rorty, is not "an all-or-nothing affair, something evenly distributed around the species" (FP 219); it is a matter of "acceptance of another being into fellowship rather than a recognition of a common essence" (PMN 38).

Interestingly, Rorty talks about "nice, tolerant, well-off, secure, other-respecting students" who are "eager to define their identity in non-exclusionary terms", seeming to suggest that such a wish is possible. He is, however, only teasing. Though the students may want to define themselves as a "we" without recourse to an oppositional "they", they cannot avoid doing so. For "[t]he only people they have trouble being nice to are the ones they consider irrational – the religious fundamentalist, the smirking rapist, or the swaggering skinhead" (HRRS 179). The point about the inevitability of defining moral community in exclusionary terms, however, should be distinguished from the contingency and plasticity of the limits of moral community. The students do not define their moral community in the *same* exclusionary terms as the racist, the homophobe or the anti-Semite. Their intolerance is not the intolerance of those who would knowingly cause others unnecessary suffering. While the students' terms are no less exclusionary, no less reliant on contrast, from a liberal point of view they are much "more expansive" (S 196) and much "more inclusive than ha[s] previously been thought possible" (Ib 12). As Rorty says, tongue-in-cheek, "You may even get [the students] to stop eating animals" (HRRS 179).

The similarities and differences that unite the moral community and that differentiate its members from non-members are collectively known as a *moral vocabulary*. Rorty first introduced the term moral vocabulary in the essay "Freud and Moral Reflection" (1984), defining it as "a set of terms in which one compares oneself to other human beings". He continued:

> Such vocabularies contain terms like magnanimous, a true Christian, decent, cowardly, God-fearing, hypocritical, self-deceptive, epicene, self-destructive, cold, an antique Roman, a saint, a Julien Sorel, a Becky Sharpe, a red-blooded American, a shy gazelle, a hyena, depressive, a Bloomsbury type, a man of respect, a grande dame. Such terms are possible answers to the question 'What is he or she like?' and thus possible answers to the question 'What am *I* like?' By summing up patterns of behaviour, they are tools for criticising the character of others and for creating one's own. They are the terms one uses when one tries to resolve moral dilemmas by asking 'What sort of person would I be if I did this?'. (FMR 154-5)

While the above passage, like most of "Freud and Moral Reflection", pursues the idea of a moral vocabulary with particular application to private ethics, that part of our lives relevant to our responsibilities to ourselves, Rorty has more lately developed the notion of a moral vocabulary that may be more than a "private vocabulary of moral deliberation" (CS 32), and may be equally well applied to public ethics, that part of our lives relevant to our responsibilities to others.[6] Such a moral vocabulary comprises we-intentions, ones which buttress and complement each other in a coherently workable manner. It consists of the signifiers through which moral subjects articulate the salient qualities that unite them together as well as the salient qualities that differentiate them from others. It is the language game through which invidious contrasts are drawn between those whom the moral vocabulary does cover (those possessing the salient similarities) and those whom it does not (those bereft of the salient similarities and in possession of salient dissimilarities). A moral vocabulary constitutes the lexicon in which we justify and prescribe certain ethical practices as well as deplore and proscribe others. It is also the discourse through which we describe the achievements and the failures, the aspirations and the regrets, the extent and the limits, the history and the future of our moral community. Containing the side of our self-descriptions, other-descriptions and final vocabularies relevant for intersubjective ethics, it "serves to develop and modify a group's self-image by, for example, apotheosizing its heroes, diabolizing its enemies, mounting dialogues among its members, and refocusing its attention" (PBL 200). In short, a moral vocabulary is the set of words that answers the question "Who are we?" (WAW 5), the words constitutive of everything that makes up our "we-consciousness".

One cannot overstress how crucial a moral vocabulary is to a moral community. We should not think that a moral community can exist *and* have a moral vocabulary which it uses. A moral community exists through the use of a moral vocabulary. As Rorty puts it: "we think of our sense of community as having no foundation except shared hope and the trust created by such sharing" (SO 33); the "loyalties and convictions" of a moral community "consist wholly in this fact [of our moral vocabulary] . . . nothing else has any moral force" (PBL 200); and "we need to say . . . 'there is only the dialogue', only *us*" (SO 32). A moral vocabulary is not so much the semantic emblem or container of a moral community as its discursive incarnation.

If a moral community is discursively constituted, then it is bound by the same limits by which discourse is bound. I will say more about this famous "ethnocentric" position of Rorty's in the next chapter, but for now I will note that a moral community is ethnocentric because a moral vocabulary is, after all, only equivalent with intersubjective conversation or interlocutory agreement. As such, a moral community is not the product of anything outside history and culture, or more generally space and time. "Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity", writes Rorty, "she does not ask about the relation between the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community" (SO 21). Therefore, "The only 'we' we need is a local and temporary one" (CWE 214); "[we should] give 'we' as concrete and historically specific a sense as possible" (S 196); and we should view it as "a larger machine" similar, in this respect, to the moral subject (FMR 163). This view of moral community as bound by discursive limits contrasts strongly with the Kantian view that there is an "ultimate community" (SO 22) or a "supercommunity" (PBL 197) made true by a power outside discourse such as the Kantian moral law or the Platonic world of Forms, a community to which it is our unconditional duty to be responsible, in the face of parochial prejudices. Rorty is incredulous at such notions and says that while he cannot believe in the practical possibility of a universally specific sense of solidarity, he can countenance a "a sense of human solidarity that . . . restricts itself to such particular communal movements as modern science, bourgeois liberalism, or the European novel" (FMR 163).[7]

III. Moral Identification

Proceeding on the premises of the previous sections, this section discusses *moral identification* as the means by which feelings of solidarity, as embodied in a moral community's moral vocabulary, are produced (WAW 14). Unfortunately, moral identification is potentially the most confusing concept in the Rortian account of solidarity and so will first require some ground clearing. It is potentially confusing due to the ambiguous manner in which Rorty associates the concept with imagination, and to the fact that his distinction between two kinds of identification is implicit rather than explicit.

To take the first of these, Rorty uses the phrase "imaginative identification" three times with little, if any, contextualizing explanation about exactly how imagination and identification fit together (MOTCS 48; PILH 93; S 190, 191). The phrase may most obviously be read as construing imagination as the means by which the end of identification is achieved, something akin to what Rorty elsewhere calls "imaginative projection" (CS 34), and this reading is corroborated by his emphasis on the role of imagination in the creation of solidarity: "it is imagination, rather than a clearer grasp of our moral obligations, that does most for the creation and stability of such communities" (Ib 12).[8] A problem arises, however, when other comments by Rorty on the nature of identification seem to admit no role to imagination. Moreover, they talk of identifying with a community's "we", suggesting a very different kind of identification: "The Kantian identification with a central transcultural and ahistorical self thus replaced by a quasi-Hegelian identification with our own community, thought of as a historical product" (PDP 177).[9] This muddle needs sorting out.

My own diagnosis is that the core of Rorty's concept of solidarity-producing identification does not at all require imagination, though imagination can be linked with identification as an agent of moral change and as a method for collecting information to be used in other-descriptions. For instance, it makes sense to call new forms of moral identification "imaginative" precisely because they are original, novel and fresh. In this line, Rorty talks of "imaginative experimentation" (FP 217) when lobbying for new forms of solidarity, and writes that "The formulation of general moral principles has been less useful to the development of liberal institutions than has the gradual expansion of the imagination in those in power, their gradual willingness to use the word 'we' to include more and more different sorts of people" (OE 207). Viewed thus, the phrase "imaginative identification" means "imaginative forms of identification", forms which in time will become "the fossilized product of some past act of imagination" (UCRNF 186). The second way in which imagination can come into play with identification has to do with the composition of other-descriptions. As discussed in section 3 of the previous chapter, imagination is one method for collecting information to be used in other-descriptions. By suspending his or her own subjectivity, the moral subject can "imaginatively" inhabit the other's subjective situation, "get inside" him or her and "imagine [himself or herself] in the shoes of the

despised and oppressed". Such identification through "imaginative projection" produces a more detailed description of the other, a more nuanced and finely-textured understanding of what the other wants, fears, loathes, loves, desires, and believes is important.

So, while imaginative identification and imaginative projection can contribute to the transformation of current patterns of moral identification, they cannot, in themselves, produce solidarity, leaving the Rortian concept of moral identification as basically imagination-free.[10]

The second reason for the potentially confusing nature of Rorty's moral identification could be placed later in the discussion, but I would like to address it now in order to preempt any confusion. The point is the important distinction between two kinds of identification through which solidarity between the moral subject and the other may be produced. Rorty's work implicitly acknowledges that solidarity can result both when the moral subject identifies with the other (HRRS *passim*, LIE 177; S 191, 198; PBL 202) and when the other identifies with a moral community (PBL 200; IAEL 13; UCRNF 184; PDP 177). In the former case, it is the moral subject who does the identifying, while the other remains the more or less passive and possibly unknowing recipient of the identification. In the latter case, it is the other who does the identifying while the moral subjects who form the moral community that is the object of the other's identification are more or less passive and unknowing. These two forms of identification result in distinct forms of membership in a moral community. The former kind of identification results in an other who is a *patient* of solidarity, whereas the latter kind results in an other who is an *agent* of solidarity. Of course, it is possible that the other may turn out to be both a patient and an agent of solidarity if the moral community identifies with him or her and if she, in return, identifies with the community. However, there is nothing guaranteed about this reciprocal possibility. The relation between the other as patient and as agent, between patient-identification and agent-identification, is a contingent rather than a necessary one. For instance, the same other may be a patient but not an agent of the sense of solidarity embodied by a moral community, perhaps because she or he refuses to acknowledge the authority of the community (as with German Aryans during World War Two who were apathetic or even slightly antipathetic towards the aims of the Nazi party), or because he or she is

incapable of actively participating in the moral community (as with infants, the mentally disabled, nonhuman animals and the senile). Similarly, the same other may be an agent but not a patient of the sense of solidarity embodied by a moral community, perhaps because his or her recognition of the authority of the community is not matched by the community's acceptance of him or her into their sphere of solidarity. This was often the case with moral relations between Westernized Indians and colonial British society during the Raj. In short, agent-identification and patient-identification are the result of two separate causal processes. This is not only something testified to by empirical examples of non-reciprocal solidarity, it also explains why solidarity can be non-reciprocal: even when solidarity is reciprocal it is only because both of the two separate causal processes of agent-identification and patient-identification are at work.

I will focus the following discussion on the patient version of the process, partly for reasons of economy and partly because patient-identification can, through several simple adjustments, be easily converted to agent-identification. Summarizing the basic elements of the Rortian conception of moral identification, it could be said to occur when detailed similarities between the moral subject's self-description and other-description outweigh any dissimilarities in terms of their relative salience.

1. Similarity and Dissimilarity. As mentioned above, the kind of identification dependent on imaginative projection thinks of identification as a matter of intersubjective "identity". By contrast, moral identification is more a matter of "similarity" between the moral subject and the other. Hence, Rorty consistently explains solidarity as "the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation" (S 192) and "an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences" (HRRS 181).[11] If identity can be thought of as the condition of *total* sameness, where two discrete things share *all* properties, then by contrast, similarity can be thought of as the condition of *partial* sameness, where two discrete things share *some* properties.

The similarity at the heart of moral identification is, of course, that between the moral subject and the other. And since both are discursively constituted, the similarity is between self-description and other-description. One consequence of thinking of

identification as a matter of similarity, rather than identity, between the moral subject and the other is that difference and discreteness between the two can be allowed for. "The other need not", as Kuipers notes, "throw off all her difference in order for 'one of us' to welcome her" (81). While they are both known collectively as "we" their subjective discreteness may be preserved as "I" and "you". That is the significance of the fact that the pronoun is of the plural form rather than the singular form: the moral subject is not asked to give up or set aside his or her "I" in order to inhabit the "I" he or she imagines the other to be. Rorty makes it clear that the sameness is limited and that difference is acceptable for successful identification to occur by writing that "For public purposes, it does not matter if everybody's final vocabulary is different, as long as there is enough overlap so that everybody has some words with which to express the desirability of entering into other people's fantasies" (PILH 192-3).[12] Perhaps it is in recognition that differences can be allowed for when considering membership in the group signified by "we" that Rorty writes that the moral subject can be said to identify *with* the other, as opposed to identifying *as* the other (WAW 11; MOTCS 48; IAEL 13; PBL 197; S 191, 193, 198). In any case, complaints that Rorty's account of solidarity "fail[s] to consider the gaps and contradictions that rupture any identity" (Dean 7) are mistaken.[13]

I actually suspect that Rorty is too restrictive in emphasizing similarities and differences as the basis for moral identification. After all, are there not empirical cases of solidarity between people who share no identifiable similarities? While it could be argued that the important word here is "identifiable", such a manoeuvre is unnecessary. Rorty's Freudianism with regards to moral subjectivity means he can conceive of anything about the other, and not just his or her similarities with the moral subject, as inducing identification. Perhaps Rorty's talk of similarities and dissimilarities is beside the point and the relevant distinction is between those descriptions of the other that induce the moral subject's sympathy and those that do not. For now, I suggest that we preserve the Rortian terminology of "similarity" and "dissimilarity" and gloss them as shorthand for "any aspect of description about the moral subject and the other that induces in the moral subject a sympathetic or antipathetic response, respectively".

Rorty's only restriction on the similarities and dissimilarities that play a role in moral identification is that they will be *details*. Although he never defines what

constitutes detail, clues are given in the assortment of modifiers which he slaps onto the word detail: "particular" (S 192; Ia xvi), "empirical" (S 192), "superficial" and "little" (HRRS 181). All of these words, when contrasted with their opposites ("general", "theoretical", "deep" and "big"), either gravitate away from essence and towards accidents or play down magnitude of mass. They seem to suggest that detail is by definition historico-cultural as well as diminutive and local. In this regard he also models identification on the "sewing together [of] a very large, elaborate, polychrome quilt", explaining that it is possible to sew people together "with a thousand little stitches – to invoke a thousand little commonalities rather than by specifying one great big one, their common humanity" (qtd. in Kuipers 73).

Rorty supports an understanding of details as historical and diminutive chunks of information by his very inconsistency when talking about types of detailed similarities between the moral subject and the other. He has at various times talked about details as: "the actual and possible humiliation of others" (PILH 93); "the pain being suffered" (HKD 81); "the private and idiosyncratic" (PILH 94); and "cherishing our parents and our children – similarities that do not interestingly distinguish us from many nonhuman animals" (HRRS 181). He has also given the examples of "this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home, among strangers", "she might become your daughter-in-law", and "her mother would grieve for her" (HRRS 185). Faced with such inconsistency, we may well ask, which kind of detailed similarity is it – our shared pains (defined by Rorty as nonlinguistic), our shared humiliations (defined as linguistic), our shared filial bonds, our shared private pursuits, our group idiosyncrasies or our cultural isolation and loneliness? I suspect the answer to this question, however, will depend on its efficiency within a given context. The first and more important issue is that talk of detailed similarities is a neat way of encapsulating Rorty's main point: that far from being "a matter of sharing a deep true self which instantiates true humanity" (HRRS 181), "[s]olidarity has to be made out of little pieces" (PILH 94). As small, historical chunks of information, detailed similarities in our descriptions of self and others exemplify these "little pieces" and contradict the Platonic-Kantian idea of the causal role of our essential humanity – the ahistorical, universal, transcultural continuity that connects all people.

Rorty elaborates this anti-Platonic-Kantian point when he writes that the kind of texts most efficient at helping us see detailed similarities between ourselves and others are the ones written by "the specialists in particularity – historians, novelists, ethnographers, and muckraking journalists, for example – [rather] than [by] such specialists in universality as theologians and philosophers" (OE 207). Whereas "philosophical or religious treatises" (S 192; Ib 12) deal in grand overarching commonalities and abstractions, "ethnography, the journalist's report, the comic book, the docudrama, and, especially, the novel" (Ia xvi) "specialize in thick description" (PILH 94).

When Rorty picks out the novel as the genre most adept at encouraging us to see detailed similarities, and urges us to "see Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* as a placeholder for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" for the purpose of facilitating moral identification (HRRS 132), we can see that he has in mind a particular kind of novel, more akin to the tradition of nineteenth-century sentimentalism and realism than that of late-twentieth-century postmodernism. In this respect he has referred to Jane Tompkins's study, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (1985), as treating the sentimental novel in a way that "chimes" with his point about detailed similarities (HRRS 132, n.13). The novelist whose work Rorty singles out as paradigmatic is Charles Dickens. "'The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing'", he approvingly quotes from Orwell, "'is the *unnecessary detail*'; 'He is all fragments; all details – rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyles – and never better than when he is building up some character who will later on be forced to act inconsistently'" (HKD 81). Highlighted here is Dickens's treatment of character. As fine examples of "the novel of character", his novels not only include an abundance of characters, they often revolve around characters: lengthy descriptions of characters, characters in settings, characters thinking, feeling, speaking, scheming, regretting, fearing, acting and interacting, characters with motivations, and so on. If "the concreteness of a character in a novel is a matter of being embedded in situations to which the reader can, out of his own life, imagine analogues" (BK 167, n.34), it is by constructing such concrete characters, Rorty argues, that Dickensian texts will "thereby" have a good chance of "making a suggestion about how your reader should act" (BK 167). In other words, by the simple fact that they include lots of details about

others – their lived experiences, such as their hopes, their ideals, their humiliations and their idiosyncrasies, as well as their physical characteristics, such as their asthma, their uneven gait, their brown eyes, their wispy beard and their embarrassingly loud laugh – texts such as sentimental and realistic novels carry with them the weight of statistical probability that they will offer details which the moral subject also shares with the other. Thus, they have a good chance of facilitating moral identification.

2. *Salience*. But solidarity is not just a matter of stumbling across any old detailed similarities shared by the moral subject and the other. They must be "salient" details (S 192). Rorty implicitly defines salient details as ones that have a bearing on the moral subject's response to the other, ones that are imbued with moral significance or "relevance" (HRRS 179). What is crucial to understand is that detailed similarities and dissimilarities between the moral subject and the other are in themselves empty of salience; they only gain salience upon coming into contact with the moral subject's final vocabulary (S 192). This, remember, is a record of the moral subject's most important experiences, or at least a version of them held together through narrative. The final vocabulary associates things, people and events with certain words, emotions, attitudes and principles. It characterizes some people as villains and others as heroes. It describes some situations as regrettable, to be avoided in the future, and others as wonderful, to be craved. Hence, we are always going to engage with and gauge the other for salience in terms of our final vocabulary, in terms, that is, of "some very specific chain of associations with some highly idiosyncratic memories" (BK 153; CS 32).

Some detailed similarities that form the basis for identification may seem trifling and petty to us, hardly significant enough to prevent or produce identification and, as a result, solidarity. The other's goatee beard or the smell of alderberries permeating her jacket, for instance, may evoke fond romantic or filial feelings for you, while for me it may bring back feelings of fear and loathing. The sexual habits or skin colour of the other may not bother me, but they may make you shudder with powerful feelings of revulsion. While we can rarely predict such variation in salience, however, Rorty allows us to explain it *post factum*: the salience one person or culture attaches to the details may well differ from the salience another attaches to them because the salience of details about the other will be relative to one's final vocabulary, and because final

vocabularies are idiosyncratic for individuals and cultures.[14] This is why our sympathies are

> channeled [sic] in very specific ways toward very specific sorts of people and very particular vicissitudes. . . . why we deplore cruelty in some cases and relish it in others. . . . why our ability to love is restricted to some very particular shapes and sizes and colours of people, things, or ideas. . . . why our sense of guilt is aroused by certain very specific, and in theory quite minor, events, and not by others which, on any familiar moral theory, would loom much larger. (CS 32)

There is no "'natural' cut in the spectrum of similarities and differences which spans the difference between you and a dog, or you and one of Asimov's robots – a cut which marks the end of the rational beings and the beginning of the nonrational ones, the end of moral obligation and the beginning of benevolence" (S 192). Such a cut is made by our past contingent experiences and the language we use to describe these experiences – on both individual and cultural levels. This is what Rorty means when he writes that Freud enabled us to track "conscience home to its origin in the contingencies of our upbringing" (CS 30), that "your sense of moral responsibility is . . . a result of how you were brought up" (TWO 152), and that "a person's moral character – his or her selective sensitivity to the pain suffered by others – is shaped by chance events in his or her life" (D 21b).[15]

Of course, as "an empirical claim", the assumption that "people merely need to turn their eyes towards the people who are getting hurt, notice the *details* of the pain being suffered" is "often falsified" (HKD 81). It is falsified because the similarities noticed are not, in terms of their relative salience, weighty enough when seen next to the dissimilarities. Rorty notes that the dissimilarities between the moral subject and the other that often preclude identification, and therefore, solidarity, include the "traditional differences" (S 192) "between people's religions, nations, genders, races, economic status" (Ib 11), "custom" (S 192), "colour . . . intelligence" (TWO 148), "sex . . . tribe, and final vocabulary" (PILH 93). He also notes that the moral significance attached to these differences is, for many, "not just a rhetorical device . . . It is heartfelt" (HRRS 178). For instance, "most white Americans before the American Civil War" would have insisted that "those creatures are *black* and that that is a good enough

reason to treat them very differently" (MOTCS 49). Consequently, for such "blatantly obvious moral distinctions" (HRRS 178) to be deemed "morally irrelevant" (HRRS 179, 171) – "irrelevant to the possibility of cooperating with them for mutual benefit and irrelevant to the need to alleviate their suffering" (Ib 11) – they need to be "outweighed" by more significant similarities (HRRS 181; S 192). Rorty suggests that this was what did not happen in Belgium during World War Two where Jews were rescued from the Nazis less frequently than they were in Italy and Denmark: descriptions such as "'She is a Jewess' so often outweighed 'She is, like me, a mother of small children'" (S 191).

In the dependence of salience on the moral subject's final vocabulary and in the weighing up of different similarities and dissimilarities, the Rortian view of moral identification is noticeably influenced by Freud. Indeed Rorty nominates "Freud's account of the narcissistic origin of compassion" as "an appropriate object of my concern" (CS 31; RSC 42). What Freud and psychoanalysis have done, he writes, is "blurred the distinction between conscience and the emotions of love, hate, and fear" (PDP 176) to the extent that it is easy to see "the connection between conscience and cleanliness, between sexual repression and moral consciousness" (NR 87) and easy to "identify the bite of conscience with the renewal of guilt over repressed infantile sexual impulses", easy to describe "conscience as an ego ideal set up by those who are 'not willing to forgo the narcissistic perfection of . . . childhood'" (CS 31). Importantly, for Rorty, had Freud made

> only the large, abstract, quasi-philosophical claim that the voice of conscience is the internalized voice of parents and society, he would not have startled. That claim was suggested by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, and later developed by reductionist writers like Hobbes. What is new in Freud is the *details* he gives us about the sort of thing which goes into the formation of conscience, his explanations of why certain very concrete situations and persons excite unbearable guilt, intense anxiety, or smoldering rage. (CS 31)

What Rorty adds to the Freudian account of solidarity is the idea that the moral subject's psychology is constituted through self-description and stored as a final

vocabulary. By doing this, Rorty psychologizes ethics at the same time as he discursifies psychology.

I would like to conclude this chapter with an example to flesh out the Rortian concepts of solidarity, moral community and moral identification as I have rather abstractly outlined them. Some months ago, while on holiday, my partner and I were picked up from the Alice Springs airport and then driven along the isolated highway to Uluru (Ayers Rock) by our friend, Ben. Several hours into the journey, with the air conditioning on full and with other cars few and far between, we came upon two men standing on the side of the road. What was obviously their car was parked about 20 metres off the road, slightly into the dry desert scrub. As we approached them, the men rushed out from the side of the road, waving their hands and yelling. Ben slowed the car down and we discussed what the men might want. When we were almost level with them, Ben accelerated again, leaving the men behind. He would not stop when we asked him to.

What happened here was undoubtedly an act of non-solidarity, an instance of insensitivity towards the needs of others and irresponsibility for those who were asking for help. But how would the Rortian account of solidarity allow us to explain this event? I posit that in the few seconds in which we saw the men, Ben formed an other-description of them. I think I could safely venture to suggest that the most prominent details in this other-description were that the men were not only complete strangers and males, but also Australian Aborigines. Ben had made several stereotypically derogatory comments about Aborigines as we walked around the Alice Springs city centre. I think I could also bet that for Ben – genetically, a New Zealand Maori, but one who does not consider being a member of an ethnic minority as an important part of his self-description – the racial-ethnic dissimilarity between himself and the men possessed considerable salience for him, a salience not outweighed by any comparable similarities. Because no recollection of similar situations, people, events, places stored in Ben's final vocabulary could be filled with a salience that could outweigh the dissimilarities and make the men morally significant, he did not identify with them. He saw the men as "them" rather than "us", as people for whom he is not responsible, people who are not included in his moral vocabulary and people who are not members

of his moral community. Ben is most certainly not a racist in any conscious manner. Nor is he essentially inhuman. In fact, he is just like the rest of us "whose treatment of a rather narrow range of featherless bipeds is morally impeccable, but who [remain] indifferent to the suffering of those outside this range, the ones he thinks of as pseudo-humans" (HRRS 177).

Notes

[1] In grasping the negative, anti-cruelty nature of solidarity it may be useful to use Rorty's non-hierarchical opposition between the public and the private: whereas the private sphere is where we *maximize* pleasure, the public sphere is where we "merely" *minimize* suffering. Also, see note seven below where I point out Rorty's recognition of the distinction between feelings of solidarity and actions of solidarity.

[2] Rorty's main discussions of moral community are in CLC, FP, HRRS, WAW, OE, PDP and PBL.

[3] If, as noted above, the salient similarity between the moral subject and the other is a physical characteristic, such as paraplegia or skin colour, it qualifies as a we-intention by being something about which "we" have beliefs or desires. For example, "Our paraplegia angers both of us" and "Walking along Venice Beach, California, we are both self-conscious about our pasty white skin".

[4] The eight-point political credo Rorty articulates in TT provides a neat example of such we-intentions. Each point constitutes a we-intention and together the we-intentions constitute a moral vocabulary.

[5] See also OE 210 and PBL 200.

[6] See BK 143, LIE 177, FP, WAW and HRRS for Rorty's discussion of the concept of a public moral vocabulary.

[7] In "Who Are We?" Rorty raises the issue of whether a genuine moral community can rely simply on the willingness to help others, or whether it also requires the ability to do so. He concludes that "[m]oral identification is empty when it is no

longer tied to habits of action" and that it is "either hypocritical or self-deceptive" for us to think of those whom we do not practically help as included in the range of "us". As an example of such hypocrisy or self-deception, he cites those who, while feeling the "hopelessness of attempting to rescue the black American underclass from its pathological situation", continue to use the phrase "We, the people of the United States" (WAW 14). While Rorty admits that there can often be a productive tension between the actual, realistic "we" of here and now and the imagined, utopian "we" of the future, the "we" towards which we are building, as was the case at the founding of the United States, he asks what the usefulness of the latter "we" is if no one can think of a way to make it feasible (WAW 14-5).

[8] For more on Rorty's emphasis on imagination in relation to ethics, see the phrase "moral imagination" (OE 207; TOTP 30), his insistence that we should "agree with Dewey that 'imagination is the chief instrument of the good . . . art is more moral than moralities'" (CLC 69), and his assertion that "human solidarity . . . is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers" (Ia xvi). See also MOTCS 48-9.

[9] See also WAW 11, 12, PBL 200, IAEL 13, UCRNF 184, PRI 166 and S 198.

[10] Given that he does not separate out the various ways in which identification can be linked to imagination in the way I have, I am unsure about the extent of Rorty's awareness on this issue. However, further textual confirmation of this understanding of Rorty's view of the relationship between imagination and identification can be found when he writes: "think about what things might be like for people with whom you do not immediately identify" (HRRS 128) and "We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of 'they' rather than 'us'" (S 196). Rorty's advice to "think about" and "look out for" the other can be taken as suggestions to make our other-description more detailed, perhaps through imaginative projection; the result of this improved other-description may be a new, fresh, more imaginative form of moral identification. In neither case, does solidarity-producing identification require imagination as a vehicle.

[11] See also PILH 93, Ia xvi, OE 207, S 192, 196, Ib 12, MOTCS 48 and CS 32.

[12] See also SO 30, PILH 83, n.4, SO 31, n.13 and PBL 200.

[13] I do want to register my agreement with Dean's important claim that solidarity should be thought of as incorporating difference into its fabric. Such an idea is present in Rorty's position and emphasized in his liberal utopian vision of a democratic and cosmopolitan public ethico-political sphere that accommodates a diverse range of final vocabularies. The only qualification here is that, contrary to what Dean seems to think, not all forms of solidarity will incorporate difference (IAEL 13-4). The only other significant difference between Rorty's and Dean's understanding of solidarity is that the latter still finds something useful in Habermas's idea of "solidary universality". In response to this Habermasian point Rorty has replied: "it is one thing to go intersubjective and another thing to go universalist. One can do the former without doing the latter" (P 12).

[14] Rorty's explanation as to the cause of salience is replicated in his account of why "the discourse of philosophy" has a strong grasp over some of us but not others: "Having myself cathected the discourse of philosophy when young, I find Heidegger and Derrida among the most powerful and fascinating writers of my time. They speak to my condition. But I doubt very much that they speak to a universal human, or even a universal Western, condition. My own imagination is filled with the same images as theirs . . . . These are powerful, but not universally compelling, images. Their power over me, I take it, comes from the way I happened to acquire them, the way they happened to interlock with, and eventually symbolize, my own idiosyncratic hopes and fears" (TML 108).

[15] Rorty persuasively presses home this causal link between the moral subject and the salience she attaches to details about the other in a remarkable sketch of the life of Martin Heidegger in an alternative possible world (D 21). It is a world in which Heidegger "happened to have his nose rubbed in the torment of the Jews until he finally noticed what was going on, until his sense of pity and shame were finally awakened" – a far cry from our actual world where "Heidegger was a Nazi, a cowardly hypocrite, and the greatest European thinker of our time" (D 21). In this different possible world, different personal experiences and a different final vocabulary would have given Heidegger a different moral character, no less selective, but more laudable from Rorty's liberal point of view.

4

Ethnocentrism

This fourth chapter examines the broader features of the Rortian account of ethics as solidarity under the heading *ethnocentrism*. Rorty has been widely criticized for using this term,[1] but criticisms invariably target the first of the two related but separable strands in his ethnocentrism: the normative belief that the rich North Atlantic democracies, especially the United States, are the best the socio-politico-economic cultures ever envisaged and that realization of a truly liberal or cruelty-free sense of solidarity is consistent with their piecemeal modification rather than wholesale replacement. This chapter addresses the second strand of ethnocentrism: Rorty's suspicion that human beliefs and practices can rely on no support from anything outside historico-cultural processes and will inevitably be situated at a particular historico-cultural location. The aim will be to explore the historicist and nominalist applications of this theoretical ethnocentrism for solidarity.

I. Anti-Anti-Ethnocentrism

Although Rorty's commentators rarely acknowledge it, the full term is actually *anti-anti-ethnocentrism* (OE 203). The awkward double negative is significant for it suggests that Rorty's ethnocentrism is not just brought into existence *sui generis*, but is rather a response to specific intellectual pressures. In the first place, the Platonic-Kantian moral theoretical tradition opposes itself to ethnocentrism, not the kind espoused by Rorty, but that practiced by Columbus and Cortez. The latter kind amounts to judging, and usually criticizing and changing, the attitudes, customs and

behaviour of an *ethnos* regarded as inferior by the superior standards of one's own – and doing so smugly and un-self-consciously. The production of Platonic-Kantian solidarity, by contrast, is a matter of *anti*-ethnocentrism, or recognizing the processes which produced one's *ethnos* at a particular point in history and in a particular geographical part of the world and transcending them in favour of that which is universal: our essential humanity. The problem with historical particularities is that they clog up our essential humanity and thus threaten to reduce moral subjectivity to "a mere sector of space-time" (HKD 79) – reduce it, that is, to the provincial, superficial, contingent and parochial norms of merely our historically finite *ethnos*. But it is only by being "free . . . from the contingency of having been acculturated as we [are]" (IAEL 13) that we can let our essential humanity lead us to a more rational and universal perspective on the world. With the ethnic debris cluttering our moral subjectivity removed from around our essential humanity, we will be able to realise a true sense of solidarity.

The Rortian response to this anti-ethnocentrism admits that historically it may have been a useful way to combat the unnecessary suffering caused by Western imperialism and colonialism: encouraged by anthropologists and historians, we have developed a curiosity to look outside our often limited historico-cultural perspective and see how others describe the world. Theoretically, however, Rorty cannot see how feelings of solidarity – or indeed any meaningful occurrences – could be produced if the moral subject escapes or exits the particularities of *ethnic* location. If "[o]ur acculturation is what makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced" (IAEL 13), and our sensitivity towards others' pain is inseparable from the processes of historicity and acculturation, then surely an escape from historico-cultural processes would leave one in a semantic, including moral, vacuum, stripped of all meaningful subjectivity. Rorty's anti-anti-ethnocentrism is, thus, ethnocentrism by default. It arises not as an essentialist description of the semantic nature of human beings, but only because he cannot see any *practical* way that human beings can escape the processes of historicity and acculturation (SO 31, n.30), whether in favour of a "supercultural platform" (CWE 213), a "God's-eye point of view" (IAEL 13), a "sky hook" (SS 38), or a "standpoint outside the particular historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are using" (CLC 48). This point is well understood by Geertz, Hall and Norton who respectively

describe Rortian ethnocentrism as "relax-and-enjoy-it ethnocentrism" (Geertz 109), "sincere ethnocentrism" (Hall 174), and "inescapable-received-ethnocentrism" (Norton 28).

With the metaphysical option of historical transcendence looking doubtful, the "inescapable" (IAEL 15), "inevitable" (SO 31) and, therefore, "unobjectionable" (CWE 212) conclusion is that, as Rorty variously puts it, "human beings [are] children of their place and time" (TWO 148-9), "we must work by our own lights" (SS 38) and "we are just the historical moment that we are" (SO 30). The implication for ethics of this default acknowledgement of the "situated"[2] nature of human activity is that "loyalty no longer needs an ahistorical backup" (PBL 199). This breaks down into the acknowledgement that "there are no objects of loyalty or sources of comfort other than actual and possible human communities" (JOMS 6b; PBL 198) and moral communities "do not embody anything, and cannot be reassured by anything, larger than themselves" (P 12d). Moral communities, and the sense of solidarity which they embody, are all we have when it comes to ethics. Moreover, moral communities have nothing behind them: "there [is] nothing bigger, more permanent and more reliable, behind our sense of moral obligation to those in pain than a certain historical phenomenon" (TWO 148). Feelings of solidarity, it could be said, are always already situated at a particular historico-cultural location.

II. Moral Historicism

Rorty is well aware that his critics often think that anti-anti-ethnocentrism, like high structuralist theory, does not allow moral subjects to escape or alter the historico-cultural point at which they find themselves and thus condemns them to an ethically and politically conservative form of ethnocentrism. In relation to the nominalistic element of his ethnocentrism, he writes, "if you say, with Putnam, that 'truth does not transcend use,' you may easily be taken as referring to actual, present use . . . you may be taken as holding that a true belief is one that coheres with what most people currently believe . . . you may easily conclude that a pragmatist cannot help the cause of emancipation" (FP 256). This very point is argued by Culler, who writes that for Rorty,

> there is no standard or reference point outside the system of one's beliefs to appeal to, critical arguments and theoretical reflections can have no purchase on these beliefs or the practices that inform them. . . . [W]hat one does must be based on one's beliefs, but since there are no foundations outside the system of one's beliefs, the only thing that could logically make one change a belief is something which one already believes. (Culler 55)

In this view, because the limits of one's current moral vocabulary are the limits of all of one's possible worlds, then ethnocentrism is, in ethical terms, no more than a closed-minded apologia for "the powers that be". Moral history moves on a closed circuit.

This is not how Rorty understands his ethnocentrism. When he says you cannot escape historico-cultural processes he does not mean you are unable to escape your present, particular historico-cultural location, only the on-going, general processes of historicity and acculturation. Spatiotemporality is inevitable, it could be said, but no particular spatiotemporal location is inevitable. To say "we have to work out from the networks we are, from the communities with which we presently identify" (PBL 202) is not to say "we are forever stuck in the network we are, stuck in the communities with which we presently identify". To say "*we* have to start from where *we* are" (S 198) is not to say "where we are is where we always have to be." Where we are is just a "starting point" for further conversation (PRI 166). Our children's starting points will, with luck and hard work, be better, more sophisticated, more beautiful, more useful, more sensitive to the pains of a much greater variety of beings – but no less ethnocentric. This predicament should, moreover, not be thought of as limiting: "bemoaning this fact is like bemoaning the fact that we are, for the time being, stuck in our own solar system. Human finitude is not an objection to a philosophical view" (IR 101-2). To put it another way, while we will never escape the finality of our final vocabularies, we can renovate them, make them roomier, make them different from how we found them. Transformations in moral subjectivity, moral identity, moral vocabulary, moral community, other-description, final vocabulary, moral truth, and moral identification are, on the Rortian view, very possible. The only condition on moral change is that we will see ourselves as moving from one ethnocentric location to another, rather than escaping ethnocentricity for universality (IAEL 14). Feminists, for

instance, should not think we are "trying to do away with social constructs in order to find something that is not a social construct. We are just trying to help women get out of the traps men have constructed for them" (FP 210). In this line Rorty writes of "find[ing] new descriptions whose adoption will enable one to alter one's behaviour" (FMR 153) and says that "One way to change instinctive emotional reactions is to provide new language that will facilitate new reactions" (FP 204).[3]

Rorty has nominated numerous mechanisms for change in moral history: "perception", "inference" (PSMP 12), "disruptions from outside", "internal revolt" (IAEL 13), "economic success" (WAW 9), "cosmic rays scrambling the fine structure of some crucial neurons in [the] brains [of moral poets]" (CL 17), "some odd episodes in infancy – some obsessional kinks left in these brains by idiosyncratic traumata" (CL 17), "redescription of what we ourselves are like" (Ia xvi), or "conversation with fellow mortals" (CTP 77). The mechanism he discusses the most, however, is *metaphor*. "The principal means" (IAEL 14) by which "moral and intellectual progress is achieved" (FP 213, n.23),[4] metaphors are the kind of things that "let us see everything from a new angle, that induce a Gestalt-switch" (Ib 10). On Rorty's Davidsonian view, metaphors can be defined as "unfamiliar uses of old words" (CS 41). Insofar as they originate from inside a moral subject's "poetic imagination" (CS 36) and outside the logical space of one's moral vocabulary, like "a voice from far off . . . a word spoken out of the darkness" (PSMP 14), these uses are "non-'logical'" (FP 213, n.23).[5] Such non-logicality can itself be explicated in terms of meaning: since to "have a meaning is to have a place in a language game" and since "[m]etaphors, by definition, do not [have a place]" (CL 18), then "metaphors do not have meanings" (CL 19). Without an established meaning, metaphors cannot be thought to convey a message within the terms of the moral vocabulary shared by speakers. Their effect is like not speaking at all: "tossing a metaphor into a conversation is like suddenly breaking off the conversation long enough to make a face, or pulling a photograph out of your pocket and displaying it, or pointing at a feature of the surroundings, or slapping your interlocutor's face, or kissing him" (CL 18). Although each of these things produce "effects" on the interlocutor, they do not communicate a "message" (CL 18). Your interlocutor is quite unlikely to ask you what you mean by doing such things, precisely because they are not things that have meaning. If he or she does ask what you mean,

you would not be able to say, because to paraphrase your metaphor would be to give it a place within the logical space of the established moral vocabulary, to give it a familiar, literal meaning, to make it, therefore, not a metaphor (CL 18). As Rorty summarizes, "meaninglessness is exactly what you have to flirt with when you are in between social, and in particular linguistic, practices – unwilling to take part in an old one but not yet having succeeded in creating a new one" (FP 217).

The idea of metaphor as a means for moral change that is so radical that it is unintelligible raises the issue of intentionality. Jennifer A. Herdt asserts that Rorty's concept of metaphor overzealously eschews any role played by intentionality in moral change, and thus threatens "the intelligibility of any transformative endeavour". She claims that Rorty needs "some recognition of the place of intentionality in the creation and deployment of metaphor" (Herdt 88). I see no reason why this demand cannot be incorporated into the Rortian position. The only caution I would make is that this kind of intentionality – which stretches across two vocabularies, one before metaphor and the other the result of metaphor – is neither lucid nor continuous. It is not intentionality as something that beams down its meaning from the heavens with Apollonian serenity. It is a much more dimly lit, shadowy, fragile, hit-and-miss, temporal, experimental affair – now you have it, now you don't, now you have it – something Rorty calls "imaginative experimentation" (FP 217). The guidance of moral poets may be intermittent, as they work through their metaphorical "social poetry" (EL 243) and we may not easily be able to identify their "causes of" our new beliefs as "reasons for" our new beliefs (UN 171).[6] However, they can deliberately guide us from one moral vocabulary to another. Radical moral transformation can, in this revised sense, be intentional.

Of course, while metaphors remain metaphors they are useless as mechanisms for moral change. "The proper honour to pay to new, vibrantly alive metaphors, is to help them become dead metaphors as quickly as possible, to rapidly reduce them to the status of tools of social progress" (PSMP 17). It is only by being *literalized* within an established moral vocabulary, first as hypotheses, then as conclusions to a debate, as premises of new debates, and finally as our deepest intuitions (CL 21), that metaphors are able to transform a sense of solidarity. There is inevitably going to be a fair bit of give and take in the move from metaphorical meaninglessness to literal meaningfulness.

The original, alterior force of the metaphor may have to be compromised to some degree in order to take up a place within the moral vocabulary, in order to be understood by its speakers. What is crucial, however, is that the literalized metaphor is not simply swallowed up by the vocabulary, but retains enough of its original force to effect change, whether in our self-descriptions or other-descriptions, and consequently our ability to notice surprising similarities between ourselves and others (UN 290). Whatever occurs, in the end the metaphor will have metamorphosed into a platitude, an intuition, a common-sensical obviousness, a "dead metaphor" (CL 18). If it attains this status, the metaphor will have effected a transformation in our patterns of moral identification and thus in our sense of responsibilities to others.

As an example of a time when the course of moral history was influenced by an imaginative use of language rather than a rational use of language, Rorty points to "a famous court case in Canada":

> The women of Canada noticed in 1927 that the Constitution of Canada says 'any person may be elected to the Senate who ...' without mentioning sex. So they said 'Okay, so we can be elected to the Senate.' The Supreme Court of Canada was asked whether 'person' meant 'man or woman' or 'man.' The argument of the feminist lawyers was that, in every other statute and constitutional provision, 'person' had always been construed to mean 'man or woman.' The Supreme Court of Canada decided that that was true but that it would be so ridiculous to let a woman be a senator that in *this* case the word 'person' just *had* to mean 'man.'
>
> The feminist lawyers had an absolutely airtight argument, and it did not do them the slightest bit of good. Reason and argument were certainly valued in the Canadian judicial system, but the imagination of the judges was insufficient to let them change the practices of the society. I think it was a shift in imagination rather than an increased susceptibility to argument which eventually gave us female Canadian senators. (PDCW 123)

The kind of circular reason and logical argument that exists *within* a single moral vocabulary (see section three below) are unable to convincingly account for this

example of moral change, for it requires a *post factum* explanation of how the Canadian legal system moved from a state of lunacy to a state of rationality. What does account for this example of moral change is the idea of a movement *between* two different moral vocabularies, a movement from a pre-feminist moral vocabulary to a feminist moral vocabulary. Such movements are engineered by metaphor. At first the idea that women could be senators was understood as non-logical, as non-sensical, as a metaphorical rather than literal suggestion. Over as period of time, however, the idea was literalized to the extent that it has become a platitudinous part of common sense. Indeed, the idea that women *cannot* be senators is now understood as non-logical, as non-sensical, as a metaphorical rather than literal suggestion. This is not to suggest that all new initiatives in moral history are metaphorical, for reason and argument still play an important role. However, it does stand as a neat example of how transformation in a sense of solidarity can have more to do with imagination than reason.

In conclusion, the Rortian picture of moral history does not view it in terms of an increase in our moral vocabulary's ability to represent something such as a moral law which lies beyond the constitutive processes of human vocabularies. "To see the history of . . . the moral sense . . . as the history of metaphor is to drop the picture of the mind, or human languages, as becoming better and better suited to the purposes for which God or Nature designed them" (CL 16). Moreover, moral history is not determined by "something outside of time or more basic than chance" (LIE 175, 185) or a "power larger than that embodied in a concrete historical situation" (PILH 93). The causes are "nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (S 189).[7] "The triumph of Oligarchical Collectivism", for instance, "if it comes, will not come because people are basically bad, or really are not brothers, or really have no natural rights, any more than Christianity and political liberalism have triumphed (to the extent they have) because people are basically good, or really are brothers, or really do have natural rights" (LIE 185). The course of moral history has nothing to do with "any large necessary truths about human nature and its relation to truth and justice", but everything to do with "a lot of small contingent facts" (LIE 188).

Rortian moral historicism integrates ethics into "a world of blind, contingent, mechanical forces" (CL 17), a world where no feelings of solidarity can have the status of an archaeological or teleological inevitability inscribed in the movement of history.

The genocides of Germany, Cambodia, Bosnia and East Timor, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the trials of Nazi war criminals at Nuremburg and Jerusalem, the exhausting and humiliating expectations of women's beauty in contemporary Western society, the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States, the Roman fondness of using Christians as living torches, the practice of clitoroidectomy, the environmental movement, the burning of witches at the stake – none of the feelings of solidarity and non-solidarity integral to these moral practices "had to happen". This awareness of the contingency of moral history, Rorty says, was well-grasped by Orwell in *1984*: "He was priding himself on having the imagination to see that history very well might not go the way he wanted it to go, the way [H. G.] Wells thought it was *bound* to go. But this does not mean that Orwell at any time, even when creating O'Brien, believed that it was *bound* to go that way" (LIE 184). The fact is that

> it *just happened* that rule in Europe passed into the hands of people who pitied the humiliated and dreamed of human equality, and . . . it may *just happen* that the world will wind up being ruled by people who lack any such sentiments or ideas. Socialization, to repeat, goes all the way down, and who gets to do the socializing is often a matter of who manages to kill whom first. (LIE 184-5)[8]

III. Moral Nominalism

It could be responded to Rorty's moral historicism that, while he has historicized the occurrence of solidarity, he has not undermined its *truth*.[9] Such a response would acknowledge that solidarity is indeed subject to the fragile fluctuations of history, and that therefore our moral vocabulary will not necessarily be the one that prevails. However, it would still cling to the insistence that our moral vocabulary is true. Kuipers, for example, writes: "Nor do I believe that human moral progress is guaranteed in any way. I am, however, unsatisfied with Rorty's claim that the liberal cultural values of human dignity, equality, freedom, and the diminution of suffering are simply the result of historical happenstance" (94, n. 37). This attitude would allow us to maintain, as many Jew rescuers surely maintained during the Holocaust, that the moral beliefs *we* hold, though statistically idiosyncratic and politically effete, are the

true ones. It would also allow us to gloss Rorty's comment that "what counts as being a decent human being is relative to historical circumstance, a matter of transient consensus about what attitudes are normal and what practices are just or unjust" (S 189) as meaning that other cultures may honestly believe that their sense of solidarity is true, but their merely "contingent" truth (PMN 157) is the result of a "corruption" (CLC 47) of the universal human ability to recognize fundamental, "necessary" truths (PMN 157) – truths as universal, obvious and unchangeable as "two plus two equals four".[10]

The only way this response may be plausibly defended would be through recourse to some form of realism. Realism casts the universe (the world and the self) as "something personlike in that it has a preferred description of itself" (CL 21) and is able to "split itself up, on its *own initiative*, into sentence-shaped chunks called 'facts'" (CL 5 my italics). Alternatively, realism thinks of the universe as "a creation of a being who had a language of his own" (CL 5, 21), a creation which "somehow *demands* a certain description" (WAW 7 my italics).[11] In whatever way the universe is modelled, the import of its capacity for intrinsic self-description is that it allows us to believe that it "tell[s] us what language games to play" (CL 6) and "decides which descriptions are true" (CL 5). In the sense that truth is an intrinsic part of the universe's self-description, "truth is out there" (CL 6). With truth configured in this way, it could be said that while our ability to recognize ethical truth is prey to the same volatile historical fluctuations as ethical practice, ethical truth itself is as permanent and ahistorical as mathematical truths.

From Rorty's point of view, this response to moral historicism is right insofar as it appreciates the juridical ahistoricity of particular ethical truths, their ability to be applied across the boundaries between moral communities. "[T]rue sentences", he writes, "are always true" (FP 225, n.42), no matter which moral vocabulary one speaks. Our truth does not have its jurisdiction limited by temporal or spatial distance. We do not say, for instance, that the Nazis were not wrong to attempt genocide simply because that event happened over half a century ago; nor do we not say that the result of the American Civil War for blacks was, ethically speaking, an improvement since that occurred centuries ago. "It was, of course, *true* in earlier times that women should not have been oppressed, just as it was *true* before Newton said so that gravitational attraction accounted for the movements of the planets" (FP 225).

Where the realist conception of moral truth goes wrong, however, is in its conflation of the *conceptual* ahistoricity of such truth with its *causal* ahistoricity (RF 205). Applying our truth about the ethical significance of homosexuals, for instance, to all moral communities from all historical eras is not the same as thinking that our truth is caused by something linking all communities. Any given truth is caused by processes limited to a finite historico-cultural sector. "Truth is ahistorical", as Rorty writes, "but that is not because truths are made true by ahistorical entities" (FP 226): "'Truth' is not the name of a power that eventually wins through" (FP 226).

Indeed, "truth is made rather than found" (CL 7). The German idealists and the Romantics, of course, were saying similar things two hundred years ago concerning truth about matter as opposed to mind and the world as opposed to the self. What they were unable to conceive of, however, was "a repudiation of the very idea of anything – mind or matter, self or world – having an intrinsic nature to be expressed or represented" (CL 4). Rorty's nominalistic view that truth is made is based on such a repudiation. While it still allows us to acknowledge the validity of the physicalist notion that "the world is out there" in the sense that "most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states" (CL 5), and still lets us accept that "[t]he world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs" (CL 6) – while it still allows these common-sensical ideas, it insists that the universe "cannot propose a language for us to speak" (CL 6). That is something which only other language-users can do.

Another way of putting this is to say that language stands in relations of causation to the world, but not in relations of representation: "there is no sense in which any of these descriptions is an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself. . . . [T]he very idea of such a representation [is] pointless" (CL 4). Truth is not out there, and neither is it "in here", in our deep selves. In fact, "truth is a property of sentences" and "since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so is truth" (CL 21). This is the sense in which moral truth is created.

What are the implications of this view of moral truth? Eugene Goodheart objects that Rorty's nominalism amounts to a "proscription against pursuing the so-called metaphysical questions about justice and right action that would enable us to

determine *what constitutes cruelty*" (231-2 my italics). Goodheart hits the matter on the head, though not, I think, in the way he intends to. He is right to say that without a metaphysical conception of truth, cruelty is unidentifiable by traditional means, since the Rortian position is that there is no intrinsic nature to cruelty that allows it to be identified in advance of descriptions of it. Goodheart's mistake is to assume that "[q]uestions about the nature of cruelty are metaphysical" (231). For Rorty, the identification of a practice as cruel has little to do with intrinsic natures; it is a function of one's language. If "anything can be made to look good or bad, important or unimportant, useful or useless, by being redescribed" (CL 7; PILH 73), then in moral terms this means that the identification of a moral practice as cruel will depend on manipulating our self-descriptions and other-descriptions so that salient details likely to stimulate us to think of the other as "one of us" are eradicated. Thus Rorty says, "moral abominableness [is] something we can produce or erase by changing the language taught to the young" (FP 224, n.40).

It is vital that we acknowledge that the discursive nature of moral judgements applies to kindness as well as to cruelty, truth as well as falsehood. It is not just the Nazis who make people morally visible and invisible by describing themselves and these others in a certain way. Members of the post-Holocaust "human rights culture" that Rorty champions (HRRS 170) also manipulate their descriptions in a similar way. Thus Rorty writes:

> I hope that feminists will continue to consider the possibility of dropping realism and universalism, dropping the notion that the subordination of women is *intrinsically* abominable, dropping the claim that there is something called 'right' or 'justice' or 'humanity' that has always been on their sides, making their claims true. (FP 210)

Just as torture, genocide and the Holocaust are not intrinsically evil, so kindness, altruism and even charity are not intrinsically good, for things do not have meaning in and of themselves (FP 208, n.13). Hence Rorty writes: "I do not think there are plain moral facts out there in the world, nor any truths independent of language, nor any neutral ground on which to stand and argue that either torture or kindness are preferable to the other" (LIE 173). Such an understanding of moral truth extends even to our deepest intuitions, which, says Rorty, "we shall not think of . . . as more than platitudes,

more than the habitual use of a certain repertoire of terms, more than old tools which have as yet no replacements" (CL 22; PILH 77). Our deepest intuitions about our responsibilities to others have only "poetic foundations" (CLC 68), for they are nothing more than "the corpses of [our predecessors'] metaphors" (CL 21). Moral truths and falsehoods, virtues and abominations, kindness and cruelty are all functions of our moral vocabulary.

Does the discursifying of our moral compasses mean that Rorty is a relativist who holds that "anything goes" where ethical truth is concerned? Will he allow us no grounds on which to deny that Hitler was a kind man, that the lives of black people "participate more of sensation than reflection", and that Terry Eagleton owns a kinky B'n'D retail shop in Soho? While it is possible to imagine communities where such statements are true, such communities would have to speak very different vocabularies from ours. In a liberal community such statements are not even credited as plausible candidates for truth (MOTCS 50). None of them could be taken at all seriously. This is because within a single moral vocabulary truth is only limited to a quite select number of possible statements: it is just not possible for a single vocabulary to accept every statement as true without falling apart. The same criterion of coherence that applies to moral subjectivity means that there are very clear specifications about what statements get to be called true and which ones do not. Candidates for moral truth must conform to the set of justificatory rules, precepts and codes of the vocabulary in which they are going to be articulated. "[W]hat counts as a possible truth is a function of the vocabulary you use", remarks Rorty, "and what counts as a truth is a function of the rest of your beliefs" (LIE 172). The idea of rational justification is, therefore, preserved in Rorty's account of moral truth, although "rational" means something like "coherent with our other true beliefs".

If there is a tautology here, it is intended and inescapable. The procedures of rational justification are going to be circular in that they are ethnocentrically situated within a particular historically contingent vocabulary. Rorty likens this idea of circular justification to our choice of friends or heroes: "Such choices are not made by reference to criteria. They cannot be preceded by presuppositionless critical reflection, conducted in no particular language and outside of any particular historical context" (CLC 54). Likewise, we are unable to justify moral habits without circularity:

> justification is not by reference to a criterion, but by reference to various detailed practical advantages. It is circular only in that the terms of praise used to describe [for example] liberal societies will be drawn from the vocabulary of the liberal societies themselves. Such praise has to be in *some* vocabulary, after all. (SO 29)

For this reason Rorty urges us to "give up on the idea that there can be reasons for using language as well as reasons within language for believing statements" (CLC 48): "There is nothing which validates a person's or culture's final vocabulary" (S 197) – except another final vocabulary. Such is the very finality of final vocabularies.

Thinking of moral truth this way explains why many moral issues remain unresolved and why one culture's reason is another culture's bias. Once we have admitted that we must work (at least minimally) by our own lights, "[i]t would seem natural to go on from this to say that we cannot get outside the range of those lights, that we cannot stand on neutral ground illuminated only by the natural light of reason" (SO 25). There is nothing embarrassing about this, because such ethnocentrism is, to repeat, inevitable:

> we cannot justify our beliefs (in physics, ethics, or any other area) to everybody, but only to those whose beliefs overlap with ours to some appropriate extent. (This is not a theoretical problem about 'untranslatability,' but simply a practical problem about the limitations of argument; it is not that we live in different worlds than the Nazis or the Amazonians, but that conversion from or to their point of view, though possible, will not be a matter of inference from previously shared premises.). (SO 31, n.30)

Whereas "[t]he Enlightenment has hoped that philosophy would justify liberal ideals and specify limits to liberal tolerance by an appeal to transcultural criteria of rationality" (OE 208), it would be best, suggests Rorty, to "simply drop the distinction between rational judgement and cultural bias" (OE 207). This amounts to admitting that because not all communities start from the same set of assumptions, conversations between different moral communities are, at some point, going to break down. The liberal and the Nazi, for instance, will always see each other as begging all the most vital questions, questions such as whether "membership in our biological species carries

with it certain 'rights'" (SO 31). They will see each other as irrational or insane, not "because they have mistaken the ahistorical nature of human beings", but "because the limits of sanity are set by what [*they*] can take seriously. This in turn is determined by our upbringing, our historical situation" (PDP 187-8).[12] The same sort of irresolvable tension that can exist between moral communities can also exist within a single moral subject because "the same human being can contain different coherent sets of belief and desire – different roles, different personalities, etc. – correlated with the different groups to which she belongs or whose power she must acknowledge" (FP 211, n.22). Hence, our moral dilemmas can result from the fact that we belong to more than one moral community at once, communities which expect incommensurate loyalties from its members (PBL 201; S 197).

In conclusion, perhaps the best way to understand the Rortian view of moral truth is to come to grips with Rorty's suggestion that truth is a topic that "has caused more trouble than it is worth" and does not "repay 'analysis'" (CL 8). What Rorty means by this is that having argued against "the theory that true beliefs or statements correspond to the intrinsic nature of reality" we do not "now need a new theory of truth to replace this correspondence theory" (Ib 11). The very idea that one ought to have a "theory of truth" marks a crucial assumption that truth is the type of thing one can have a theory about, something with a nature independent of our descriptions of it (Ib xiii). In a series of flippant phrases, Rorty "trivializes" truth (INSNK 50) by calling it "an ethnocentric claim from the point of view of a given cluster of genes or memes" (FP 201), "a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed" (SO 24), "the nominalization of an approbative adjective" (FP 226), "an expression of commendation" (SO 23), and "just an empty compliment" (CL 8). Perhaps the last word on the matter should be left to Nietzsche who describes truth as "[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms . . . 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" (qtd. in UCRNF 186; SO 32).

IV. Conclusion

If the Rortian account of ethics as solidarity could be said to advance a central proposition, it would be that there is no extra-historico-cultural force – truth, the moral law, our essential humanity, the way the world is in itself – that makes us sensitive towards others in pain and makes us feel responsible for them. This idea is part of Rorty's general antifoundationalist recognition that there is no "order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities" (Ia xv). In Darwinian terms, such antifoundationalism means "we are as friendless, as much on our own, as the panda, the honeybee or the octopus – just one more species doing its best, with no hope of outside assistance, and consequently no use for humility" (JOMS 6). All we language-users have is each other and our ordinary, finite, banal, mechanical, historico-cultural processes.

Despite a lack of foundations, solidarity is still possible. Indeed, according to the Rortian account of ethics, solidarity is made through our self-descriptions, other-descriptions, final vocabularies, moral identifications and moral vocabularies. It has probably always been made this way, even when our moral vocabularies included the idea that we have a foundation for our ethics. "For even if we agree that languages are not media of representation or expression, they will remain media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings" (CS 41, PRI 166). Having convinced ourselves that language stands in only relations of causation to the universe, we can still use language to bind ourselves together in moral communities. The only difference now is that this sort of "solidarity [i]s made rather than found" (S 195, 196; PILH 94; Ia xvi). And neither does the fact that language is cut off from the universe mean we are set adrift in a hostile sea or that we face an abyss: "a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (S 189). There *is* nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance: "we pick Freud up by the wrong handle if we try to find an account of 'moral motivation' that is more than a reference to the historical contingencies that shaped the processes of acculturation in our region and epoch" (FMR 163). The Rortian account stresses that historico-cultural processes are all we need to explicate

ethics as relations of intersubjective solidarity and that questions about the relation of solidarity to something behind it, something making and guaranteeing it, drop out.

In the way it "stops asking a timeless question" – "What are we?" – and "asks a question about future time" – "What sort of world can we prepare for our grandchildren?" (WAW 7; HRRS 175) – the Rortian account of ethics could be said to embody a profound humanism – of the "causal" kind. It replaces our traditional God-centred ethical vision with a future-oriented ethical vision: it thereby "humanizes what the [Platonic-Kantian] tradition thought of as divine inspiration" (FMR 151; CS 30). The effects of this are at once liberating and sobering: ethical practice is infinitely plastic, but plastic in the wrong ways as well as the right ways; hence it is up to *us*, and nothing else, to create the sense of solidarity *we* want. In this spirit, Rorty urges us to "put our faith in ourselves" (JOMS 7), to learn "self-reliance" as opposed to "reliance on something antecedently present" (IAEL 17), "something bigger than ourselves" (CTP 75), and to complete the process of "de-divinization" whereby we are "no longer . . . able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings (CLC 45).[13]

Rorty has achieved a massive theoretical redescription of ethics as solidarity in terms consistent with an antifoundationalist theoretical vocabulary. He has done so by uniquely synthesizing the views of a number of diverse thinkers: Davidson on truth and metaphor, Freud on the causal formation of subjectivity, Bloom on poetic originality, Darwin on naturalism, Sellars on community, Nietzsche on history, contingency and truth, and Dewey on antifoundationalism and instrumentalism.[14] The Rortian account of ethics, however, should not be thought of as a "theory of morality" in the conventional sense in that it represents the truth about the topic (PRI 160). It is a premise of the Rortian intellectual method that there are no pretensions to discover definitively the production process of anything, including solidarity. As Rorty himself says of Freud: "He is not interested in invoking a reality-appearance distinction, in saying that anything is 'merely' or 'really' something quite different. He just wants to give us one more redescription of things to be filed alongside all the others" (CS 39).[15] What I have explored above is not a definitive account of the production process of

solidarity, but an ethnocentric account of a production process of solidarity – and a *cultural* one at that. The uses of this account are the topic of Chapter Five.

Notes

[1] See Introduction, note six, for examples of such criticism.

[2] "I don't destroy the subject," Derrida once said. "I situate it" (Macksey and Donato 271). Rorty and Derrida have much the same thing in mind when it comes to the historico-cultural status of the subject.

[3] I should point out that for Rorty a pre-condition of moral change is that our "culture contains (or, thanks to disruptions from outside or internal revolt, comes to contain) splits which supply toeholds for new initiatives. Without such splits – without tensions which make people listen to unfamiliar ideas in the hope of finding means of overcoming those tensions – there is no such hope. The systematic elimination of such tensions, or awareness of them, is what is so frightening about *Brave New World* and *1984*" (IAEL 13-4).

[4] See also UCRNF 186 and CL 7, 16 for further statements of this claim. I am unsure about the empirical validity of this proposition, since Rorty has talked about the efficacy in certain situations of banal, incremental mechanism for moral change (HDK 79; PILH 77), and since radical moral changes seem few and far between. Perhaps Rorty is pointing to the dramatic, extreme nature of metaphorical change and suggesting that, although few and far between, such changes tend to do more than all the incremental changes put together: "what matters in the end are changes in the vocabulary rather than changes in belief, changes in truth-value rather than assignments of truth-value" (CLC 47-8). Inevitably the distinction between radical and incremental change is a matter of degree: Rorty himself has talked of "the gradual enlargement of our imagination through metaphorical use of old marks and noises" (IAEL 14).

[5] Which is not to say metaphors always originate outside one's moral community. See note three above.

[6] The reason/cause distinction Rorty uses in his discussion of metaphor should not be confused with another of his Davidsonian claims in his discussion of non-reductive physicalism, namely that "reasons can be causes". For this latter claim see NRP 113-6.

[7] Rorty's emphasis on "contingency" should be understood in the context of the philosophical opposition between "contingency" and "necessity" (PMN 157). It is not, as Kuipers asserts (75), a facile assertion that human beings have no intentional control over their actions or the results of those actions.

[8] For further statements of Rorty's moral historicism, see LIE , PILH 93, CS 30, CLC 68, EL *passim*, especially 228-32, 240-3, HRRS 181-2 and S 189, 190, 195.

[9] Rorty has written on truth at length, both as detailed contributions to philosophical debates and as more general attempts to use his philosophical acumen and lucid writing style to benefit non-philosophers. Because the details of Rorty's view of truth are negotiable for my purposes, I will draw on the more general writings. The cleverest, most sophisticated and most lucid of these which address truth with application to ethics are CL, FP, HRRS, IPP, PRI, TL and NRP. The best commentators on Rorty's conception of truth are Hall (89-101) and Jenkins (99-106).

[10] In his discussion of Orwell's *1984*, Rorty quotes Samuel Hynes as an example of a critic whose reading of the novel supports the view of Orwell as "a realist philosopher, a defender of common sense against its cultured, ironist despisers". Hynes writes, "Winston Smith's beliefs are as simple as two plus two equals four: the past is fixed, love is private, and the truth is beyond change . . . . The point is beyond politics – it is a point of essential humanity" (LIE 173).

[11] The other model is religious: truth is the name of a "power" (HRRS 176; PMN 157-8; FP 226), inquiry is a form of "power worship" (FP 211, n.21), and experts in inquiry (such as moral philosophers and scientists) are "priests" (CL 21; HDK 70) insofar as they are capable of recognising the truth as a power imposed on us. If Rorty's model appears to be a simplistic caricature, it is because it is a diagnosis. No version of realism is presented this way, but Rorty is identifying the structure common to various forms of realism, a structure of which realism's proponents may even be unaware.

[12] For more on this ethnocentric explanation of ethical conflicts, see HRRS 177, 180, PBL 199, S 195, PDP 177.

[13] For more on de-divinization, see RCD 196, CL 22, HRRS 181-2, CS 30 and CLC 67-8.

[14] To this extent, as Rorty would acknowledge, the account is "syncretic" rather than "original" (Ib 10).

[15] Why would we even assume there was only one means by which solidarity is produced? As Rorty writes of "the difference between people who care about others suffering and those who don't": "For all I know, the difference is all acculturation, or all a matter of the environment of the first few days of infancy, or all in the genes" (RSC 42). Rorty also suspects that solidarity will have a lot to do with economics (NR 84; TLU 14; WAW 9; RSC 42; HRRS 180).

5

An Ethical Turn in Cultural Studies: Rorty vs. Levinas

The above chapters articulate an account of ethics as solidarity based on an examination of the various texts Richard Rorty has written on and around the topic. In this final chapter, it remains to suggest that Rorty's approach to ethics contains much that may interest cultural studies. I will first offer a deliberately non-polemical sketch of cultural studies as the analysis of discursive practices. Second I will suggest that, though Rorty and cultural studies have their political differences, their shared antifoundationalist and discursive theoretical ground opens up exciting possibilities for cultural studies, including the analysis of solidarity as discourse. Third after locating Rorty's work on solidarity as part of a general turning towards ethics amongst certain theorists whose work is influential on the direction and practice of cultural studies, I will argue that, because of limitations in the major competing theory – that of Emmanuel Levinas – the Rortian approach is the one best suited to the needs of cultural studies.

I. Cultural Studies

As my opening remarks in the Introduction hinted, I am ambivalent about the possibility and usefulness of defining cultural studies. On the one hand attempts to master the topic with an exhaustive, comprehensive and definitive description are not just doomed to fail but also unenlightening. On the other hand one can get a practical handle on cultural studies for certain concrete purposes, such as introducing newcomers to the topic, writing a manifesto to influence the future direction of the non-discipline,

establishing an agreed premise to enable further debate, and applying for funding to do research in cultural studies. My definition is of the latter, non-definitive type, and simply aims to establish some degree of consensus between myself and my readers as to what cultural studies is, so as to enable further discussion. For the most part, I am happy to leave this definition implicit rather than explicit on the grounds that establishing the negotiable details of cultural studies is irrelevant to my claim. What is relevant, and what I do want to explicate briefly, though, is the notion of cultural studies as the analysis of *discourse*, or the normative dimensions of meaning conceived of in antifoundationalist terms.

I take discourse or discursive processes to be as uncontroversially central a concept as any in cultural studies.[1] Thanks to the influential conceptions of discourse articulated by theorists such as Volosinov (1973), Pecheux (1982), Hindess and Hirst (1977), Foucault (1972; 1977; 1981; 1980), and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), discourse can be said to name the general object of analysis for cultural studies. To be sure, some practitioners in the field may prefer to use other terms, such as textual, cultural, representational, signifying and semiotic processes. But I believe we can all agree that, nuances – often significant ones – aside, each of these terms mean much the same thing.

The useful thing about discourse, for cultural studies, is that it summarizes a host of important advances made by post-humanist theory. The first such advance is the idea that discursive processes, or whatever one wants to call them, are those that produce meaning. Not just any old meaning, but a particular conception of meaning. We all know that meaning is found most obviously in linguistic and other semiotic texts such as novels, advertisements, films, and shopping catalogues. But it is also found in less obvious places such as Heineken bars, one's sexuality, shopping malls, teenage parties, rest homes for the elderly, millennium celebrations, television chat shows, national parks, Stephen Hawking and sports events. Meaning is not just a quality of our representations of reality, but also our experience of reality itself. And neither can our experience of reality be neatly set aside when we want to examine reality as it really is, independent of all discursive meaning. As Eagleton writes, "It is not that I can have a pure, unblemished meaning, intention or experience which then gets distorted and refracted by the flawed medium of language: because language is the very air I breathe, I can never have a pure, unblemished meaning or experience at all" (1983, 130). In this

antifoundationalist sense, meaning constitutes the dimensions of experience for language-using beings, even the obvious, present, hard parts such as our own bodies, other beings, rocks and trees. Discursive meaning is not grounded in any reality other than the one it plays a part in creating.

If the world is not something that can place any representational constraints on meaning, what can? Cultural studies is not concerned with discursive meaning as a free-floating aesthetic phenomenon, but as a social and, most importantly, political one. Thus it conceives of meaning as something not only produced but also consumed, circulated, employed, privileged, attached to texts, objects, events and experiences. Because meaning is not just an object of power, but also a mechanism through which power is exercised and relations of social power are managed, discourse is thoroughly sociologized and politicized. Consequently, one is able to speak of "specific discourses", such as the discourse of colonialism, the discourse of the "free" market, and, as I suggest below, the discourse of solidarity. The social and political nature of discourse is one significant point of difference from the Saussurean notion of "langue" or the more traditional idea of "language". It would not be an overstatement to suggest that, while the motivations of practitioners are extremely diverse, most forms of cultural studies address the normative dimensions of discursive meaning.

II. Rorty and Cultural Studies

However selective and brief the above sketch, it does enough to characterize cultural studies as the field about which I will make the general claim that, thus defined, cultural studies may take an interest in the Rortian account of ethics. This proposition is, for many, an unconvincing one, since the differences between the Rorty and cultural studies, when it comes to ethical-political visions, are too great. Just what are these differences, and do they preclude productive cross-pollination?

In the first place, Rorty and cultural studies do share the common ground of certain anti-cruelty moral values, by virtue of which both could, as Rorty notes, be classed as "progressivists" ranked against the "orthodox" (TWO 150): both think that because contemporary Western society does not live up to their moral values, it needs to be changed (MOTCS 51; IAEL 15, n.29; TWO 141, 151; TLU 14d). But that is

about where the common ground stops. Rorty and cultural studies disagree first on what political-social-economic arrangements will best put these moral values into practice. On Rorty's side, he thinks that "Marxism no longer looks plausible even in Paris" (DMACL 137) and that therefore "welfare-state capitalism is the best we can hope for" (TWO 151), something embodied more or less in the United States, which he calls "the best little culture anybody ever thought of" (TLU 14d). By contrast, Terry Eagleton could be seen to represent typical cultural studies criticisms when he explicitly separates Rorty from "the political left" (1991, 68) and casts him as an "elitist": "in Rorty's ideal society the intellectuals will be 'ironists', practising a suitably cavalier, laid-back attitude to their own beliefs, while the masses, for whom such self-ironizing might prove too subversive a weapon, will continue to salute the flag and take life seriously" (1991, 11).

The second bone of contention between Rorty and cultural studies is over the kind of agitative activity that will best facilitate political change in Western societies. Rorty is adamant that "the culture of liberal democracies . . . still [provides] a lot of opportunities for self-criticism and reform" (IAEL 15), and so argues that the most efficient method for political change is conducted in as "banal", "untheoretical" (EL 229; BPPL 89), "plain, blunt, public, easy-to-handle language" as possible (RSC 45) and aims at "pragmatic, short-term reforms and compromises" (RDP 17; EL 231), rather than hopelessly inefficient attempts at "total revolution" (TWO 151; IAEL 15, n.29).[2] For cultural studies, however, Rorty's "banal" approach to political agitation "seems altogether appropriate for the age of Reagan" (Culler 55); is "little more than an ideological *apologia* for an old-fashioned version of cold war liberalism dressed up in fashionable 'postmodern' discourse" (Bernstein 249); and is a fine example of "Awful Patriotism" (Palumbo-Liu 1999).

If political disagreements about goals and strategies were all that characterized the relationship between Rorty and cultural studies, there would be little hope of finding common ground between them, other than shared moral values. Fortunately the political disagreements can be contrasted with a harmony when it comes to theoretical positioning. This harmony began with the publication of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), a book I believe Anglo-American literary-cultural critics appreciated as an articulation in an American philosophical idiom of the kind of things

they were learning in the 1970s and 1980s from French theorists such as Derrida and Foucault. That Rorty in turn valued this appreciation by a non-philosophical audience, in the face of a largely hostile reaction from his philosophical colleagues, is hinted at in his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" (147). Since 1979 Rorty and cultural studies have pretty much agreed when it comes to their theoretical views on language, truth, meaning, discourse, culture, selfhood, history, metaphysics, philosophy and science. They have both championed, with varying emphases, the texts of continental thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Heidegger and Wittgenstein. They are both thoroughgoing nominalists, historicists, secularists, antiessentialists, antirepresentationalists and antifoundationalists. In short, and to borrow Rorty's phrases, while cultural studies and Rorty may think each other "politically silly", they do think each other "philosophically right" (TWO 151).

This theoretical agreement – in particular their shared antifoundationalism and their understanding of the nature of discourse – constitutes the common ground upon which lies the possibility that cultural studies may find something of interest in the Rortian account of ethics as solidarity. For just as cultural studies specializes in the analysis of discursive processes, understood in the antifoundationalist sense that obsolesces any epistemological subject-object relationship, so Rorty, with his talk of self-description, other-description, moral vocabulary, final vocabulary and metaphor, conceives of how a sense of intersubjective responsibility can arise through discourse without an epistemological subject-object responsibility. By virtue of its theoretical positioning, Rorty's account of solidarity could have been written by a cultural theorist.[3] Consequently, we *should*, I suggest, think of him as a cultural theorist, one whose work offers a detailed theoretical description of an area of experience for which cultural studies has had at most only a tacit, intuitive understanding. Rorty is a cultural theorist whose work opens up new and exciting possibilities for cultural studies.[4]

What these possibilities are is indeterminate since, as Rorty has pointed out more than once, there is just no way of predicting the future uses of a novel set of descriptions (IPPNP 6). Even so, we can guess. A reasonably obvious one would be the employment of Rorty's account of solidarity in analytical enterprises. For by conceiving of ethics in discursive terms, the Rortian account cleaves open the theoretical space to allow the analysis of solidarity as discourse. In the same way in

which Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1990) validated sexuality as an object of cultural studies analysis by offering a massive theoretical redescription of the topic in discursive terms, so I would argue – if the comparison does not seem too extravagant – Rorty validates ethics as an object of cultural studies analysis by offering a massive theoretical redescription of the topic in discursive terms. Rorty's account of solidarity brings ethics into the ken of cultural studies. For if our sensitivity and responsibility, or lack thereof, towards others in pain is something manufactured through discourse, rather than simply an effect of our genes or our essential human nature, then this sensitivity and responsibility is something to which we cultural scholars, specialists in the study of discourse, can apply our analytical skills. "The cultural production of sensitivity towards the pain of *x*" or "the discourse of solidarity among *y*", it is envisaged, may name plausible topics of cultural analysis. Perhaps a psychoanalytical approach could trace the idiosyncratic sensitivity of a moral subject back to certain crucial experiences of childhood and the resultant formation of a unique final vocabulary. Or perhaps a more sociological procedure could examine the moral vocabulary and the patterns of moral identification of a given moral community. An analysis could even be carried out on the processes by which moral poets are able, through metaphorical redescription of self and/or others to effect a change in the patterns of moral identification and thus a sense of solidarity.

All this, of course, is just speculation rather than legislation. Rorty does not provide us with an analytical model or a tool-kit of things to do when studying solidarity as discourse, but merely validates it as a legitimate object of inquiry and highlights multiple sites of interest for analysis. Which sites we target and how we do it are up to us as cultural analysts. It is not my place, nor Rorty's, to place limits on how his account of solidarity should and should not be used in this way. Neither is Rortian ethics sacred, the revered last word on ethics that should be left untouched down to the last detail. By the means-end efficiency criterion that Rorty himself espouses, it can and should be changed and improved – perhaps by synthesis with a heavily revised Levinasian ethics – if this will help cultural studies most efficiently achieve whatever ends it sets itself.

III. Rorty vs. Levinas

Within the context of present critical debate, I think that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that cultural studies will most likely soon undergo something of an "ethical turn". As noted in the introduction, a number of theorists whose work is connected to the thematic concerns of cultural studies and which is influential upon the field's direction are, or have been, addressing ethics: besides Rorty, there is Derrida, Foucault, Habermas and Levinas. Although there is no intentional collaboration or coordination between the different theorists, their collective attention to ethics suggests the possibility of a new scholarly initiative for cultural studies. This would make historical sense. There would appear to be historical evidence in the nineteenth century, for instance, for an emergent attention to political and ethical issues following the destabilizing of established belief systems or disciplines. Insofar as cultural studies has been formed through attempts to apply post-humanist theorizing to political analysis and practice, it could reasonably expect to extend this analysis to ethics.

If cultural studies were to turn to ethics, as I am suggesting it might, then it is by no means certain that the Rortian account will feature prominently. Indeed, given the scant and largely hostile attention garnered by Rorty's work from influential figures in cultural studies when compared with the enormous amount of sympathetic attention given to the work of French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, it is very likely that Rortian ethics will be overshadowed by Levinasian ethics. As mentioned in the introduction, theorists who have responded sympathetically to Levinas's texts include Jacques Derrida, Simon Critchley, Zygmunt Bauman, Christopher Norris, Jean-François Lyotard, John Llewelyn and Luce Irigaray. The collective work of these prominent theorists – particularly Critchley, who has probably done, and may yet do, more than anyone to bring Levinas to the attention of cultural studies – means that we can speak of "a Levinasian account of ethics", one composed of the texts authored by Levinas and also those texts written by theorists of note for cultural studies that interpret, expand, explore and explain Levinas's texts – one existing if not firmly *in* cultural studies (in the sense of being a well-known feature of the field) then at least *for* cultural studies (in the sense of being ready, available for employment). It is this

Levinasian account of ethics that, I predict, is better placed than that of Rorty or anyone else to become the most prominent account of ethics in cultural studies.[5]

It would be unfortunate, I contend, if this were to happen, for the simple reason that the Levinasian account of ethics contains regressive elements inconsistent with the theoretical vocabulary of cultural studies. There are several such elements: moral obligation as a pre-societal, corporeal disposition to the Other's pain (Bauman 1989, 178-84; Critchley 1996, 33; 1992, 177-82), justice as an unconditional and undeconstructible "infinite responsibility" (Bauman 1989, 182; Critchley 1999, 107-9, 113; 1996, 34; Derrida 1996, 86-7), ethics as "first philosophy" (Critchley 1992, 9, 70-2) and the other as Other (see the discussion above in the second section of Chapter Two). The element I wish to focus on here is the moral subject. Because the moral subject is, as Rorty suggests generally (PBL 199; PDP 176), and as Critchley acknowledges with regard to the particular case of Levinas (1999, 194), the key concept in any account of ethics – ethics being all about inter-subjective responsibility – then a discussion of this single element is sufficient to indicate whether or not Levinasian ethics contains theoretical elements which make it unsuitable for cultural studies.

What is so wrong with the Levinasian model of the moral subject and, by extension, the Levinasian account of ethics? The Levinasian moral subject is conceptualized against the background of a model that casts human subjectivity in terms of "the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness" (Critchley 1992, 4), a model exemplified by "Husserlian intentional consciousness" (Critchley 1999, 188). The problem with this model is that it has the subject relating to others only through acts of conscious "comprehension" in which it tends to "subsume" the "alterity" or "exteriority" of the Other (Critchley 1992, 5-6), something that Levinasians believe hardly provides an appropriate basis for ethical intersubjectivity. The Levinasian response is to replace "the conscious subject of representation and intentionality" with "the sentient subject of sensibility" (Critchley 1996, 33). This moral subject is "sentient", "sensible", "pre-rational", "pre-reflective" (Critchley 1996, 26, 33), "pre-conscious" (Critchley 1999, 188), "corporeal", and "tactile" rather than "verbal" (Critchley 1992, 180-1). As Critchley writes, quoting Levinas, "*The subject is subject*, and the form this subjection takes is sensibility. Sensibility is my subjection,

vulnerability, or passivity towards the Other, a sensibility that takes places [*sic*] 'on the surface of the skin, at the edge of the nerves'" (1992, 179).

As it stands so far, there is nothing about the Levinasian model of the moral subject that makes it inconsistent with the theoretical vocabulary of cultural studies. The notion of corporal, bodily subjectivity is a plausible and increasingly popular one within contemporary cultural theoretical work, for example, that of Margrit Shildrick (1997). The problem with the Levinasian model only arises when it comes to describing the status or nature of this corporality or sensibility. Critchley hints at what this may be when he remarks that sensibility is "a more fundamental stratum" than intentionality (1992, 98). But such a remark only raises the question, In what way is sensibility more fundamental? He gives his answer in a telling passage worth quoting at length from the essay "Post-Deconstructive Subjectivity?":

> . . . although it may be true that the human being is conditioned in the manner argued by psychoanalysis, sociology and political theory, *we do not need this knowledge when we enter into relation with the other.* Although the human being is undoubtedly and massively determined by the contexts – sociohistorical, psychobiographical, linguistic, biological – into which he or she is inserted, this in no way negates the unconditional priority of the ethical moment which rends those contexts. Thus, the insights of anti-humanism and post-structuralism might well be necessary conditions for the determination of subjectivity, but they are not sufficient to explain the extraordinary event of my responsibility for another, what Levinas calls, in a key word of his later work, the holiness or saintliness (*la saintete*) of the human being. For Levinas, . . . it is precisely this saintliness . . . that cannot be placed in question. (1999, 59-60)

It appears that while the Levinasians are willing to grant the complex determination of subjectivity with one hand, they want to insist with the other hand that such determination does not apply when it comes to ethical subjectivity. It is as though they are willing to theorize subjectivity without foundations in all areas of experience, *except for ethics*. When it comes to ethics, they suggest, there is something at work which transcends "merely" banal, contingent, mechanical, spatiotemporal processes,

something deep, necessary, essential and foundational. Of course, they cannot have it both ways. The only conclusion to be drawn from the above passage is that the Levinasian account of ethics suffers from a contaminating case of essentialism and foundationalism.

Further evidence to support this reading comes in Bauman's quotation and explanation of a passage from Levinas concerning the moral subject's perception of the Other as "face":

> I analyse the inter-human relationship as if, in proximity with the Other – beyond the image I myself make of the other man – his face, the expressive of the Other (and the whole human body is in this sense more or less face) were what *ordains* me to serve him . . . The face orders and ordains me. Its signification is an order signified. To be precise, if the face signifies an order in my regard, this is not in the manner in which an ordinary sign signifies its signified; this order is the very signifying of the face.

Bauman's immediate comment is "Indeed, according to Levinas, *responsibility is the essential, primary and fundamental structure of subjectivity*" (1989, 1982-3). I do not see how to read Levinas's or Bauman's words without avoiding the diagnosis that in this version of moral subjectivity the meaning of the Other's face is something intrinsic or inherent in its existential structure, and thus grounded outside discursive processes. Levinasian ethics is foundationalist ethics.

For many readers, this will be a hard proposition to swallow. How can Levinasians, particularly Critchley, author of some of the most sophisticated recent writing on deconstruction, be guilty of foundationalism? Perhaps his above passage is anomalous, a hurried piece of writing. More evidence, however, comes in Critchley's own words when at a symposium on the ethical and political similarities and differences between pragmatism and deconstruction during 1993 he replied to Rorty's scepticism about Levinasian ethics by cunningly proposing that Rorty's liberal abhorrence of cruelty does "essentially the same work" as Levinasian ethics: namely it attempts to "locate a source for moral and political obligation in a sentient disposition towards the other's suffering" (1996, 33). "[W]hat is the status of the implied appeal to minimize cruelty?" asks Critchley. "Is this a universal principle or foundation for

moral obligation? If it is, then how would this be consistent with Rorty's anti-foundationalism?" (1996, 26). Drawing attention to the conception of pain as nonlinguistic which underlies Rorty's notion of liberal anti-cruelty, Critchley continues: "To my mind this would seem to ground Rorty's definition of the liberal in a universal fact about human nature . . . is not this recognition of cruelty or suffering as the ethical basis for Rorty's liberalism an appeal to an essentialist, foundationalist fact about human nature . . ?" (1996, 26). Critchley thinks he has spotted an inability of Rorty's to apply antifoundationalism when it comes to the issue of how we respond to others in pain. He is wrong, as was Norman Geras when he made the point somewhat more persuasively in his dissection of Rorty's model of the liberal moral subject (Geras 47-70). But that issue is inconsequential for the present argument. What is consequential is Critchley's explicit acceptance of the notion of the moral subject as having foundations. He accuses Rorty of foundationalism, not for the purpose of berating this theoretical flaw by someone who should know better, but for the purpose of demonstrating that Rorty employs an essentialist and foundationalist model of the moral subject *just like Levinasians*. Just as "there is a foundationalist claim in deconstruction [which, for Critchley, embodies Levinasian ethics] which cannot be pragmatized" (1996, 20) – "a non-pragmatist (or at least non-Rortian) foundational commitment to justice as something that cannot be relativized" (1996, 37) – so Critchley argues, it is in doubt "whether Rorty's pragmatism is in fact pragmatist *all the way down*" (1996, 37). To be sure this evidence as to the latently foundationalist nature of Levinasian ethics is oblique insofar as it appears in a criticism of Rorty's counter position rather than an exposition of the Levinasian position. Added to the previous evidence, however, it contributes to well-rounded case.

Critchley reasonably squarely confronted the possibility that Levinasian ethics is metaphysical, soon after the above symposium where Rorty accused him of committing the ultimate theoretical crime. "I hate to lug out the ultimate weapon so soon", announced Rorty with characteristic near-flippancy, "but Critchley's attitudes strike me as – you guessed it – *metaphysical*" (RSC 43). Critchley's response to this accusation came, not at that debate, but in a later essay ominously titled "Metaphysics in the Dark". "Well, am I a metaphysician?" he asks. "In a word, as Laurence Sterne would say, 'Yes and No'". He goes on to explain that he means "No" in the sense that he is

not simply working "within the metaphysical tradition by postulating some new thesis on Being" (1999, 117) and means "Yes" in the sense that he is acutely aware that our language and history are "shot through . . . with metaphysical categories and the ghosts of the metaphysical tradition" (1999, 118). I take this to be a familiar, well-known point made by Derrida in his early writings, as Critchley notes. So what I do not understand is how this suffices to explain the use of blatantly foundationalist and essentialist assumptions in work supposedly informed by deconstructive premises. Reminding us of the double bind in which we are all meant to be caught, however critical our dealings with metaphysics (and I will accept this thesis for the sake of the present argument[6]), is one thing; it is quite another to explicitly use metaphysical notions as an important part of an account of ethics. As Rorty writes of Heidegger's complex relationship with metaphysics: "to be intensely aware of a danger is not necessarily to escape it" (HDK 70). Critchley's ambivalence rather suggests a semi-conscious realization that his Levinasian account of ethics is built on a latent foundationalism. This is certainly not to say that Critchley and other Levinasians are dupes in this regard. Critchley at least is acutely aware of the metaphysical charges to which Levinasian ethics is open (1999, 73-7). In constructing their version of ethics as a counter position to the ontological form of philosophy, Levinasians successfully avoid the most obvious form of metaphysical thinking about ethics – the strictly rationalist, intentionalist, phenomenological, ego-as-consciousness epistemological form. However, the murky, tactile, corporal form they replace it with, as exemplified in its model of moral subjectivity, is just as metaphysical. Levinasian ethics is metaphysical insofar as it purports to be founded on "a centred structure . . . a fundamental ground, . . . a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which is in itself beyond the reach of play" (1978, 279).[7]

The metaphysical nature of Levinasian ethics is exemplified further in the way in which it severely limits the range of ethical phenomena that can be considered as valid objects of analysis. By presuming that solidarity is, as Bauman puts it, the "object", and not the "product", of socialization (1989, 178), Levinasian ethics removes solidarity, responsibility and sensitivity to pain from out of the ken of economic, social, and cultural analysis, leaving only instances of non-solidarity, irresponsibility and insensitivity. As Bauman remarks, "It is . . . the incidence of immoral, rather than

moral, behaviour which calls for the investigation of the social administration of intersubjectivity" (1989, 183). That this is indeed the result of applying Levinasian ethics in analytical practice is testified to in Bauman's own analysis of the Holocaust, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989). Beginning with the Levinasian premise of "the universality of human revulsion to murder, inhibition against inflicting suffering on another human being, and urge to help those who suffer", he sees his job as a matter of detailing the methods by which "the Nazi regime . . . neutraliz[ed] the moral impact of the specifically human existential mode" (185). In the particular case of cultural studies, the acceptance of Levinasian ethics would mean the removal of half of the topic – the construction of solidarity – from out of the range of the discursive processes which are the life-blood of cultural studies. Rather than analysing the role discursive processes play in both producing and destroying a sense of solidarity, cultural studies would only be able to do the latter.

To answer my original question, then, what is wrong with the Levinasian model of the moral subject, and by extension, Levinasian ethics, is that it contains a corporal, sensible form of foundationalism, the effect of which is to contradict the theoretical vocabulary upon which cultural studies is premised. I want to make it clear that I am not simply claiming that the Levinasian account of ethics is unattractive because it is foundationalist. Foundationalism, in itself, is not necessarily a bad thing. As Rorty notes, it has and still can, in certain situations, even be a useful rhetorical ploy in agitating for reforms in public ethical practice (RCPD 123-4; RCRR 113; HRRS 173; S 195). Whether it is good or bad depends on how useful it will be in facilitating what you want. What cultural studies wants, if I understand it correctly, is to analyse discursive meaning within an antifoundationalist framework. Such an objective will not be served well by the foundationalism to be found in Levinasian ethics. Indeed, if cultural studies were to adopt Levinasian ethics, it would necessitate compromising the hard-won antifoundationalist theoretical ground upon which the field prides itself, the theoretical vocabulary that makes the analysis of discursive meaning possible in the first place. Because I cannot see how one cannot take away this antifoundationalism and still claim to practise cultural studies, I cannot see how it is possible to be both a Levinasian in ethics and a practitioner of cultural studies.

This isn't to say that the Levinasian account of ethics has no place in or for cultural studies. There is the good possibility that by discursifying or "sociologizing" (PILH 83, n.4) Levinasian ethics – or by having its *non*-foundationalist nature demonstrated (something to which I would look forward) – we may redeem it into a serviceable account of ethics for cultural studies, one to complement the Rortian one. In its current form, however, the account may stand as no more than a provocative counter conception of ethics which may challenge Rortian ethics.

The Rortian account of ethics, of course, has no trouble conceiving of the productive nature of discourses when it comes to ethics. Its notion of intersubjective solidarity, with no hints of epistemological objectivity, utterly immerses ethics in the discursive processes which are the domain of cultural studies. Thorough-going in its antifoundationalism, antirepresentationalism, antiessentialism, antiuniversalism, nominalism and historicism, the Rortian account of ethics is entirely consistent with the theoretical vocabulary of cultural studies. For this reason, it is well-suited to being considered as a contribution to the field. Indeed, so far as I am aware, it is the only account of ethics that shares cultural studies's theoretical position, and hence it is the only genuine contender for an account of ethics to guide cultural studies through the ethical turn.

Notes

[1] Which is not the same as saying that discourse appears in all varieties of cultural studies. I readily admit that my description of cultural studies as concerned with discourse tends towards the literary-semiotic end of the spectrum rather than the sociological end.

[2] Rorty is severe in his criticisms of cultural studies' favourite methods for political agitation: "I think a lot of the energy of leftist intellectuals is being wasted, just insofar as they hope that work within such disciplines as philosophy and literary criticism can be geared in with political action in some direct way" (IAEL 16) and "we

leftists in the U.S. academy now spend more of our time on postmodernist philosophy, and on what we like to think of as 'transgressive' and 'subversive' cultural studies . . . [because we] persuade ourselves that cultural, and especially academic, politics are continuous with real politics . . . . that the gifts that got us our cushy jobs in universities are being used on behalf of human solidarity" (EL 238). See also DMACL 135 and RSC 144. However critical of certain aspects of cultural studies Rorty is, he should not be cast in the same category as someone like Alan Bloom. On the positive side, Rorty does admit that the work of cultural studies can result in political benefits in a "long-term, atmospheric, indirect political way" (IAEL 16; RSC 46, n.4), and that "any leftist political movement – any movement which tries to call our attention to what the strong are currently doing to the weak – is a lot better than no left" (DMACL 137). The pointed question Rorty asks – and it is a good one, rarely considered by us cultural scholars – is this: even though cultural studies is undoubtedly implicated in politics and conscious of this implication, how efficacious is it as a method for political agitation?

[3] We should note that in the Introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* Rorty encouraged the idea of "culture criticism" as a replacement activity for neatly parcelled disciplines (IPP xl). While the culture criticism Rorty describes here is not an accurate description of contemporary cultural studies, the two share several significant features.

[4] A similar version of this notion was prefigured, though not suggested to me, by Keith Tester's brief discussion of Rorty's work on solidarity: "undoubtedly his work contains the potential to open up new directions for media research" (91).

[5] The only other possible contender for this title, in my opinion, is Jürgen Habermas. However, while Habermas's "discourse ethics" at first glance appears to chime with a cultural studies that specialises in the analysis of discursive processes, it actually suffers from an inability to go antifoundationalist all the way in its retention of a "universal" standpoint which serves as a foundation for moral intersubjectivity. For Rorty's comment on this see CLC 65-9. For more of Rorty's ethically and politically sympathetic but ultimately theoretically frustrated view of Habermas, see HLP, HDFP and P.

[6] I do, however, share Rorty's scepticism with regard to the Derridean-Heideggerean claim that everyone, everywhere, at all times, is under the burden of

metaphysics. Rorty's Freudianism with regard to formation of subjectivity allows him to suggest that such a claim could only be made by people "trying to excuse their own idiosyncratic difficulties by taking them to be universal: imagining that their own tiresome and embarrassing parents are also the parents of everyone else" (TML 108).

[7] For those who think that Critchley's interpretation of Levinasian ethics exaggerates its foundationalist features, note that Critchley claims to "read [Levinas] through a deconstructive looking glass, that is to say, through Derrida's decisive dismantling of his pretension to ethical metaphysics" (1999, 118; 1996, 26).

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