

Richard Rorty

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Abstract

Richard Rorty (B. October 4, 1931 – D. June 8, 2007) is a highly influential American philosopher who is as divisive as he is popular. Rorty's many writings touch on major themes within both analytic and continental philosophy. Issues in epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science and naturalism featured centrally in his early work. His later writings placed increasing stress on questions of democracy and culture. However Rorty's "great theme" is philosophy itself and his relentless interrogation of philosophy's place and purpose both inside and outside the academy is unmatched in contemporary philosophy. The present article provides an overview of central features of his thought under the headings of "Anti-Representationalism", "Pragmatism" and "The Scope and Role of Philosophy". The examination is loosely chronological; however, since Rorty's thought demonstrates deep continuities, each heading presents an aspect of his thought rather than, exclusively, a period of his development.

Life

Richard Rorty was born in New York in 1931 to James Rorty and Winifried Rauschenbusch. Rorty was raised in New York City and Flatbrookville, New Jersey in a predominantly left wing but anti-Stalinist political environment. He entered University of Chicago in 1946, starting at the age of 15 where he studied with greatest of the logical positivists Rudolf Carnap and also Leo Strauss. After completing his MA in 1952, he moved to Yale where he received a PhD in philosophy in 1956 with a dissertation on the *Concept of Potentiality* under the supervision of the metaphysician Paul Weiss. After a brief stint in the army signal corps he taught at Wellesley College (1958-1960) and Princeton University (1961-1982). At Princeton Rorty was immersed in the problems, texts and method of analytic philosophy, which dominated the philosophical culture there. The fruit of that immersion was the groundbreaking *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) a work that was strongly critical of that tradition while attempting to supply impetus for its renewal. Rorty's next move, in 1982, was to University of Virginia where his primary teaching role shifted from "Professor of Philosophy" to "Professor of Humanities". The move to

University of Virginia both enabled and complemented his increasing interest in “continental” philosophers such as Derrida, Foucault and Habermas. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), a somewhat polemical work ranging across topics from epistemology to modernist literature, is an important product of Rorty’s broadened horizons. Rorty remained at University of Virginia until 1998 when he took up a chair in the department of “Comparative Literature” at Stanford University where he saw out his teaching career. He retired in 2005. Rorty’s fourth volume of philosophical papers, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* was published in 2007. He died in June of the same year from pancreatic cancer. In a short essay published posthumously in *Poetry* (November, 2007) Rorty wrote of his regret at not having spent more of his life with poetry:

Cultures with richer vocabularies are more fully human - farther removed from the beasts - than those with poorer ones, individual men and women are more fully human when their memories are amply stocked with verse (Rorty, 2010a, p. 521).

This is a signature Rorty remark, wide-ranging, polemical and yet precise, both heartfelt and ironic.

Work

The breadth of Rorty’s writing is remarkable. The content of his numerous books and essays span themes in epistemology and metaphysics, through a variety of literary forms, to ethics and politics. Rorty represents something of a puzzle for contemporary philosophy; he is an analytic philosopher by training as well as style of writing whose crucial interventions with respect to that tradition take the form of an attempt to close it down. His writings on pragmatism are central to a resurgence of interest in the Classical Pragmatists (William James and John Dewey) and the establishment of what has become known as Neo-pragmatism; however his interpretations are hotly disputed and criticized as selective and self-serving (e.g. Susan Haack 1993: 182-

202). Rorty's interest in philosophy itself has resulted in him being called a "philosopher's philosopher", a surprising title given his popularity outside of philosophy, and indeed outside the academy (Hall, 1994: 3; Kraugerud, 2010: 3); he has also been called an "anti-philosopher's philosopher" (Ramberg, 2009). It is tempting to regard Rorty as something of a contradiction, however, to do so, neglects the remarkable consistency and continuity of his thought. Rorty's writing, from his landmark introduction to the collection *The Linguistic Turn* (1967) to late essays such as "Philosophy as Transitional Genre" (2004) enacts a deep preoccupation with metaphilosophical questions concerning the methods, the value, and ultimately the fate of philosophy.

Despite this "inward" turn, Rorty's metaphilosophy rarely tended toward abstraction; his overriding metaphilosophical concern was the relevance of philosophy to our lives. It is, in fact, not possible to separate Rorty's metaphilosophical views from his substantive positions. Thus the following chronological survey of his key positions in philosophy is an account of both the substantive and the metaphilosophical points at stake.

Anti-Representationalism

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) Rorty opposes himself to a conception of philosophy which thought of the "discipline as one which discussed perennial, eternal problems - problems which arise as soon as one reflects" (Rorty, 1980: 3). By contrast *Mirror* is tasked with recounting the historical and social narratives both of how such problems were specified, and why they have come to demand philosophy's attention. Certain "ways of talking", he argues, have become remote from the purposes for which they were developed, they have become obsolete, in certain circumstances perniciously so. Most notably a specific "picture" has come to dominate the way philosophers think about our relation to reality, a picture that is neither obligatory nor useful.

The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, non-empirical methods” (Rorty, 1980, p.12).

This is how Rorty begins a career-long attack on what he characterized as the prevailing “representational paradigm” both illustrated and in part produced by the “ocular metaphor” of “mirroring”. The figure of the mirror articulates an understanding of knowledge as a relationship between a mind and the world in terms of representation. Philosophy builds on this understanding, claiming as its own a specialized domain of knowledge about representation, specifically about what counts as truly representing the world. Rorty’s response is to contextualize the view, to show that the view has a history and to reject the idea that it is compulsory or natural. In a language influenced by Michel Foucault, Rorty seeks to show “epistemology-centered philosophy as an episode in the history of European culture” (Rorty, 1980, p.390). In the account Rorty provides, “representationalism”, a paradigm rooted primarily in the Cartesian epistemic turn in philosophy, achieves its institutional apotheosis in the work of Kant. Kant combined the best insights of rationalist “mirror talk” – encapsulated by Cartesian clear and distinct ideas and empiricist “mirror talk” (Lockean and Humean conceptions of ideas and impressions) into “representations” which are actively synthesized through specialized conceptual capacities only describable at a “transcendental” level. In Rorty’s account, Kant’s putatively stable blend of empirical realism and transcendental idealism carved out a specific domain of reflective activity that supported the requirements of the empirical sciences while simultaneously positing a transcendental domain immune to the methods of those sciences and requiring specialized investigation with specialized tools. The mind (or in Rorty’s parlance the “Mind”) is a key invention of Kant’s revolution in philosophical approach, securing a place for the study of “mirroring” at a level inaccessible to empirical means. At the outset of his career, Rorty had advocated the disappearance theory of the mind (Rorty: 1965), a precursor of the influential “eliminative materialism”, where mind talk was to be eliminated from a naturalist description of the world to be replaced by a scientific vocabulary. This approach was subsequently

softened somewhat, however the “capital M” mind remained a key site of attack. Crucially, for Rorty the relationship between mind and world is not one of representing but “coping”: “[a]s long as we think of knowledge as representing reality rather than coping with it, mind or language will continue to seem numinous”(Rorty, 1982, p. 202) More recently he countered the traditional privileging of mind with the de-privileged social account: “the mind is not a representational apparatus, but rather a set of norm-governed social practices”(Rorty, 2007: 158).

Rorty’s criticisms are not merely leveled at the Kantian and post-Kantian traditions but also at contemporary analytic philosophy, particularly the “linguistic turn” which he sees as an “attempt to find ‘successor subjects’ to epistemology” (Rorty, 1980: 10). Whilst for many a gulf separates Kant’s “idealism” from Russell and Frege’s “descriptivism”, from Rorty’s perspective all these views are underwritten by unquestioned allegiance to the representational paradigm.

Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself. Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant - getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak - would not have made sense. Without this strategy in mind, recent claims that philosophy could consist of “conceptual analysis” or “explications of meanings” or examination of “the logic of our language” or of “the structure of the constituting activity of consciousness would not have made sense.” (Rorty, 1980: 12).

Rorty divides the history of philosophy into two distinct camps of systematic vs. edifying philosophers. The divide cuts across the more conventional division between analytic and continental philosophy. Hegel and Husserl are system builders as are a great majority of the empiricists, rationalist and analytic philosophers. While the later Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey are concerned with “edification”, with creating a space within philosophy which enables us to grow and develop in direct opposition to the approach where philosophy seeks to provide “‘grounding’ for the intuitions and

customs of the present”(Rorty, 1980: 12). Wittgenstein’s therapeutic mode shows how philosophical problems forced themselves on us through captivating pictures, but his approach “needs to be supplemented by historical awareness”; Heidegger’s historical approach enables us to “‘distance’ ourselves from the tradition” to tell a historical story about how the “captivating” picture emerges. However neither Wittgenstein nor Heidegger pay enough attention to the “social perspective” of the picture’s emergence (ibid.:12). Dewey provides that crucial “social perspective” but also, as part of that perspective the idea of an aesthetic mode of being that fills out the idea of “coping”. In Rorty’s words Dewey seeks a “culture no longer dominated by the idea of objective cognition but by that of aesthetic enhancement” (ibid: 13). All three contribute to Rorty’s call for a change in our overall understanding of philosophy.

The cultural-political themes and motivations that dominate Rorty’s later writings are already a feature of *Mirror*. Rorty claims: “If we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a meta-practice which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practice.” (ibid:171). The edifying philosophers help us to recast our relation with reality in terms of “coping” rather than “representations””. Coping is this practical activity that releases us from the constraining chimera of “mirroring”: “[w]e should not look for skyhooks, but only for toeholds” (Rorty, 1991b, pp. 13-14).

Pragmatism

Rorty, more than any other contemporary American philosopher, is responsible for the resurgence of what has become known as Neo-Pragmatism in contemporary American philosophy. Pragmatism, for Rorty, first and foremost, is a kind of anti-essentialism with respect to philosophical categories such as truth, knowledge and morality (Rorty, 1982: 162) and a counter-force to the foundationalist traditions of modern philosophy since Descartes. A second hallmark of pragmatism is its resistance to unhelpful dichotomies such as the

epistemological difference between truth about what ought to be and truth about what is, nor any metaphysical difference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science (Rorty, 1982: 163)

In this Rorty shares common grounds with his long time philosophical interlocutor Hilary Putnam. A third feature of pragmatism is one which we now most closely associate with Rorty and is at the heart of Rorty's disagreement with not only many of the philosophers in the analytic tradition but also with Hilary Putnam:

[Pragmatism is] the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones - no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow inquirers... The pragmatist tells us that it is useless to hope that objects will constrain us to believe the truth about them, if only they are approached with an unclouded mental eye, or a rigorous method, or a perspicuous language... The only sense in which we are constrained to truth is that, as Peirce suggested, we can make no sense of the notion that the view which can survive all objections might be false. But objections - conversational constraints - cannot be anticipated. There is no method for knowing when one has reached the truth, or when one is closer to it than before (Rorty, 1982: 165-6).

In parallel to the picture of "the mirror" pursued in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* Rorty's pragmatism attempts to release us from the grip of the picture of "the world". In a recent essay Rorty writes:

Despite my veneration for Wilfrid Sellars, who originated this talk of manifest and scientific images, I would like to jettison these visual metaphors. We should not be held captive by the world-picture picture. We do not need a synoptic view of something called "the world." At most, we need a synoptic

narrative of how we came to talk as we do. We should stop trying for a unified picture, and for a master vocabulary. We should confine ourselves to making sure that we are not burdened with obsolete ways of speaking, and then ensuring that those vocabularies that are still useful stay out of each other's way (Rorty, 2010b: 58).

Pragmatism, as Rorty's presents it, helps to free us from yet another pernicious dichotomy, that of a division between the world and the conceptual schemes that supposedly categorise it and render it intelligible. Following Donald Davidson (Davidson 1974), Rorty finds the very division between a scheme and the world, as something unfitted falling under it, not only incoherent but also pernicious both for those who accord them metaphysical status and those who locate them in history (and any position in between).

The notion of "the world" as used in a phrase like 'different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently' must be the notion of something completely unspecified and unspecifiable-the thing-in-itself, in fact. As soon as we start thinking of "the world" as atoms and the void, or sense data and awareness of them, or "stimuli" of a certain sort brought to bear upon organs of a certain sort, we have changed the name of the game. For we are now well within some particular theory about how the world is. (Rorty, 1982, pp. 14-15).

In his highly influential book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) and a number of papers to follow Rorty is at pains to distinguish between the goal of giving meaning to our lives and thoughts with reference to a 'nonhuman reality' vs. the alternative of envisaging their role in terms of contributions to a community. Realist philosophers, since Plato, have followed the first route and relying on the correspondence theory of truth, a key component of the metaphor of the mind as a mirror, to achieve the ideal of objectivity with no reference to our historical situatedness. The alternative route is to seek solidarity with a community of

enquirers, to reject the dualism of objective and subjective, knowledge vs. mere opinion and to eschew the talk of truth in other than in the sense of complimenting or commending the best beliefs and practices available to us at any given time (Rorty 1985/1991) where the 'us' is a community of, thoughtful, well-informed and reasonable, but historically located thinkers. The approach is best captured in the writings of the pragmatist philosophers' attempt to "reduce objectivity to solidarity" (Rorty, 1991b, p. 21).

Rorty calls this approach "ethnocentrism" and resists the charge, leveled at him by Hilary Putnam among many, that the abandonment of the ideal of mind-independent objectivity amounts to a form of relativism (Baghramian 2004: 144-151). He thinks relativism to no more than the claim that all beliefs are equally good and he finds the idea incoherent. Ethnocentrism, on the other hand is the "purely negative point that we should drop the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion, construed as the distinction between truth as correspondence to reality and truth as a commendatory term for well-justified beliefs" (Rorty, 1991b, pp. 23-24).

From the perspective of his pragmatism dispensing with talk of "Truth", "Knowledge" and even "The World" as metaphysically inflated categories provides release from a series of endless and fruitless debates that are only pertinent if on one's thinking is constrained by the metaphor of mirroring. Knowledge is belief justified within a social context while truth is a compliment paid to the best-justified beliefs we have at any given moment, beliefs that "we can defend against all comers". We do not need to refer to a mind-independent world or objective accuracy of representations in our understanding of these and other cognate epistemic concepts. For Rorty the very idea of "The World" produces the illusion of a vantage from which distinctions between true by our lights and True simpliciter, but such World is "well lost" (Rorty, 1982, p. 3) as we cannot make sense of the very idea of its existence outside of our linguistic and social practices. The pragmatist alternative, allows us to construct a narrative of how we created and lost the world. The mode is ironic since from the pragmatist vantage, the world was always a story and the story is told for the purpose of edification. "Solidarity", however, is not a purely abstract philosophical notion, but

plays a major role in Rorty's political outlook. As an unapologetic liberal, Rorty sees solidarity as the basis for obtaining incremental improvements in the scope of our freedoms and rights, and to help, by Rorty's lights, in the core liberal aims of preventing and reducing cruelty and decreasing intolerance. In politics as in philosophy the task is to be carried out through replacing confrontation by conversation within an ever-growing circle of peers. Philosophy, in its pragmatist form, is an aid to democratic politics, in so far as it encourages such conversation.

The approach results in one of the important intellectual advances of our century a "steady decline in interest in this quarrel between Plato and Nietzsche about what we are really like" (Rorty, 1998, p. 169); there is now, Rorty thinks,

a growing willingness to neglect the questions "What is our nature" and to substitute the question "What can we make of ourselves". We are much less inclined than our ancestors to take "theories of human nature" seriously, much less inclined to take ontology or history or ethology as a guide to life. We are much less inclined to pose the ontological question "What are we?" because we have come to see the main lesson of both history and anthropology is our extraordinarily malleability. We are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal (ibid., pp.169-170).

Here too Rorty remains the eliminativist philosopher *par excellence*. We not only should eliminate the reified mind talk, and Truth talk from philosophy but we should also stop thinking of ourselves in essentialist terms, as creatures endowed with a specific nature.

Rorty's version and interpretation of pragmatism has come under sustained attack. Susan Haack for instance, an unflinching critic, thinks Rortyism is no more than vulgar pragmatism and accuses him in have misrepresented the work of classical pragmatists, James, Dewey and Peirce (Haack, 1993, pp. 182-202). Defenders, on the other hand, have hailed him as crucial revivalist, a philosopher who has delivered

previously unfashionable pragmatist thinking to new audiences, re-invigorating the pragmatist ideas in the process.

The Scope and Role of Philosophy

Much of Rorty's work, as indicated above, has a metaphilosophical tone. This was clear even in his very early publications, but it is not always an easy task to distill a unified account of philosophy from Rorty's writings on the topic. A few strands of thinking, however, are prominent. The *Linguistic Turn* (1992) signaled Rorty's nascent interest in a historic and contextualized understanding of philosophy.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature where Rorty puts the current "predicament of philosophy" (Rorty, 1980), as he sees it, in the historic context of a turn to epistemology, expresses this "genealogical" understanding of philosophy even more completely.

In this book I have offered a sort of prolegomenon to a history of epistemology-centred philosophy as an episode in the history of European culture...A proper historical treatment would require both learning and skills I do not possess. But I would hope the prolegomenon has been sufficient to let one see the contemporary issues in philosophy as events in a certain stage or a conversation – a conversation which once knew nothing of these issues and may know nothing of them again(Rorty, 1980, pp. 390-391).

He also notes that, "[a]lmost as soon as I began to study philosophy, I was impressed by the way in which philosophical problems appeared, disappeared, or changed shape as a result of new assumptions or vocabularies" (Rorty, 1980, p. xiii). The historical perspective makes us sensitive to a lack of fundamentals and the apparent mutability of philosophical problems themselves, themes that permeate Rorty's work.

A second prominent tendency is an invitation to modesty and even quietism in philosophy. Rorty had questioned the "cash value" of philosophy even in his earliest writings. In an early essay "The Philosopher as Expert" (1958-61/2009), unpublished

in his life time but recently included in the 30th anniversary edition of *Mirror* Rorty already demonstrates both the deep metaphilosophical tendencies that will inhabit his mature thought combined with a discomfort with the idea of philosophy as distinct set of jobs for which only the philosopher need apply. Thus Rorty resists the assumption that: “there is a body of special "philosophical" truths, or the assumption that there is a special "philosophical" technique that somehow works equally well on all problems, and is distinct from the ordinary, vulgar methods used to solve them” (Rorty, 2009: 421). In a new introduction written for the reissue of *The Linguistic Turn* (1992), Rorty remarked that in direct contrast to other types of inquiry such as science: “what counts as philosophical knowledge seems itself to be a matter of opinion” (Rorty, 1992, p. 2). It is for Rorty an important irony that this lack of consensus has not prevented philosophers from believing that their discipline should critique and regulate what counts as knowledge within specific empirical domains. Philosophy, Rorty tells us, is not in a position to sort out its own affairs, never mind the affairs of other activities. There was, Rorty argues, a particular historical juncture at which Philosophy (with a capital P) served a “useful purpose”, for example “by suggesting ways of dealing with the triumph of mechanistic materialism” (Rorty, 2010b: 56) without recoil into some form of supernaturalism. That purpose is now achieved and the attendant self-image of the discipline only possessed meaning within that task; that self-image should no longer be honored. Instead Rorty encourages us to replace the vocabulary of discovery with that of creation; our task (or more precisely our tasks) qua philosophers is to create, innovate, to work for the better of the human conversation (and the humans who contribute to it) through inventiveness, playfulness and brio. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty named this “activity” irony. In its broader, institutional practiced form it is “cultural politics”; “Philosophy as Cultural Politics” is the title and theme of his last collection of papers.

Thirdly, Rorty’s conception of traditional philosophy crucially exceeds institutional boundaries. Even in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* the term ‘philosophy’ is not restricted to analytic philosophy. “[T]he difference between “analytic” and other sorts of philosophy is relatively unimportant - a matter of style and tradition rather

than a difference of “method” or of first principles”(Rorty, 1980: 8). However almost from the beginning Rorty seems to express a preference for “continental philosophy” specifically those types of continental philosophy that combine social and cultural critique with a deep suspicion vis-à-vis the prior western philosophical tradition. A feature of the kind of continental philosophy Rorty likes is its embrace (at least in his reading) of contingency as well as the edifying form of philosophizing. But his writing as well as his academic career also cross the boundaries between philosophy and literature. He also wishes to transgress the “purity of academic disciplines” by inviting philosophers to become participants in debates on moral and political topics that shape our lives and our times. As Rorty remarks in the introduction to his fourth volume of papers

The more philosophy interacts with other human activities – not just natural science, but art, literature, religion and politics as well – the more relevant to cultural politics it becomes, and thus the more useful. The more it strives for autonomy, the less attention it deserves(Rorty, 2007: x).

Intellectuals, Rorty thinks, have a duty "to function as citizens of a democracy," "to use the mechanisms of democratic government to help prevent the rich from ripping off the poor, the strong from trampling on the weak," (Rorty, 1991a: 490) and philosophy should not turn its back on these tasks, and yet he points out that in “political deliberation, philosophy is a good servant but a bad master. If one knows what one wants and has some hope of getting it, philosophy can be useful in formulating redescriptions of social phenomena”(Rorty, 1999: 232).

Legacy

The impact of Rorty’s work can be felt far beyond the boundaries of what is typically considered academic philosophy, however, any appreciation of this influence must begin with an assessment of his philosophical legacy. Rorty’s legacy can be divided with respect to what commentators take to be his most significant work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* or *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Those philosophers

who take themselves to inherit from the Rorty of *Mirror*, broadly speaking analytic philosophers, are at once critical and admiring. In many instances, their aims are to rehabilitate a Rorty who in numerous ways and on a host of issues simply went too far; their task is to retain the best of his insights while calming or abandoning his rhetoric. For example John McDowell shares Rorty's belief that the philosophical problems posed within the Cartesian and British Empiricist traditions are to be addressed therapeutically rather than to be straightforwardly answered or solved, but he thinks Rorty goes too far in denying the idea of an answerability to the way things are that goes beyond our communal say so (McDowell, 2000: 110). Other contemporary analytic philosophers who inherit from Rorty include Robert Brandon, Michael Williams and Huw Price. Those who read *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* as Rorty's most important work, broadly speaking continental philosophers, tend to be more focused on the possibilities his work supplies for the pursuit of a post-philosophical mode of philosophy. They include Nancy Fraser who has further developed Rorty's concept of "private irony" (Fraser, 1988, 1991) as part of her brand of feminist critical theory. Equally Rorty's impact on the social sciences both extends from that work and is at its strongest where the social science and philosophy are at their most enmeshed; those social scientists who take Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Alain Badiou seriously are likely to be interested in what Rorty has to say concerning the active creation of vocabularies, the resistance to systematization and the embrace of contingency in a mode of critical historicism. In an early essay "Method, Social Science and Hope" (1981/1982) Rorty argued that the social sciences should not occupy themselves with scientific description at the expense of the normative, nor should they attempt to artificially separate these strands. Rather they should concern themselves with being useful. Rorty recommends a "Deweyan approach to both social science and morality, one which emphasizes the utility of narratives and vocabularies rather than the objectivity of laws and theories" (Rorty, 1982, p. 195). The social scientist, thinks Rorty, should be in the business of telling good stories that make our lives better.

Appropriately for a polemical philosopher such as Rorty his relation to key thinkers from the continental tradition is both complex and contested. For example his reading of Derrida as a poet rather than a philosopher is, by some lights, typical of Rorty's shallow "way" with philosophical texts (e.g. (Bouveresse, 2000, pp. 133-134)). Also, despite his leftward leaning, Rorty's ethnocentrism sits uncomfortably with those who aim to undo what they see as Enlightenment inspired structures of domination masked behind a rhetoric of emancipation (e.g. (Haber, 1994, pp. 43-72)). For such critics Rorty is the effective steward of old-Europe enlightenment wolves in "theory" laden sheep's clothing.

Finally we might say that Rorty himself has, appropriately, attracted attention as an intellectual phenomenon that requires a socio-historical account. In an innovative work, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (2008), Neil Gross, a sociologist, has attempted to turn Rorty's ceaseless demand for context back on Rorty himself. In many ways Gross's engagement with Rorty is exemplar of Rorty's influence on the social sciences and his lessons for the social sciences that there is no such thing as a value-free, a-historical mode of inquiry, that the question of context must always be addressed, and that the story of how we reached our "present" must be told.

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