

**RICHARD RORTY AS PEIRCEAN PRAGMATIST:
AN IRONIC PORTRAIT AND SINCERE EXPRESSION OF
PHILOSOPHICAL FRIENDSHIP**

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Introduction

What are the limits of redescription, the possibilities of renarration,¹ regarding the relationship between Charles Peirce and Richard Rorty? Is *rapprochement* between these two philosophers, however qualified and circumscribed, even a remote possibility? Is a narrative in which Rorty is advancing Peirce's impulses, rather than ridiculing or obstructing them, simply an even more distant prospect? Indeed, is such an exercise in storytelling anything more than a truly fantastic flight of a narrative imagination beyond anything Rorty himself would proffer or endorse? The value of such an undertaking is far from evident, the obstacles too numerous and obvious to discount, let alone to ignore. Even so, are we simply stuck at an impasse, where advocacy of Peirce entails a rejection of Rorty or sympathy to Rorty demands antipathy toward Peirce? Are the hermeneutic and narrative games in which we are engaged best envisioned as zero sum games (cf.

¹ In "American Pragmatism: The Conflict of Narratives," Richard J. Bernstein stresses: "We should be wary of anyone who claims that there are *fixed* criteria by which we can decide who is and who is not a pragmatist. Such boundary setting is not only unpragmatic, it is frequently used as a power play to legitimize unexamined prejudices" (1995, 67). In this essay, I have tried to heed Bernstein's advice. This practically means that my argumentative retelling of the pragmatic legacy – or, more precisely, the Peircean inheritance – will inevitably "be in conflict with other argumentative retellings" (ibid.) The ultimate justification for this is that it not only avoids blocking the road of inquiry but also opens new routes, ones leading (I hope) to more convivial settings and thereby civil exchanges. For an important renarration, though one not necessarily at odds with the main emphasis of my own playful retelling, see Bernstein's "The Resurgence of Pragmatism" (1992).

Smith 1983 [1981]) or might these activities be conceived in a more conciliatory, less polemical, spirit?

Indeed, I have always been charmed by William Ernest Hocking's confession regarding his stance toward John Dewey, made at the 1939 meeting of the APA²: "I seem to remember reading a paper [ten years ago] at that session [of the APA] at which I recounted the tragedy of thirty-two years occupied in refuting Dewey while Dewey remained unconscious of what had happened!" (LW 14, 411). But, then, Hocking rather playfully went on to reveal: "I have now a different and happier report to make. Not ... that Dewey has changed, but that I have largely ceased to read him *with polemical intent*: I read him to enjoy him. In this I succeed far better, in fact I am almost completely successful" (ibid; emphasis added). What seems to be implicit in Hocking's altered stance toward his philosophical rival is that such an engagement is not only enjoyable but also profitable: rather than teaching Dewey where he is in error, Hocking seems captivated by the prospect of learning from his interlocutor. Is it possible for at least some Peirceans to read Rorty without polemical intent, for the primary purpose of simply enjoying what he has to say, perhaps for the secondary one of learning where he is on to something? Such, at least, is the experiment undertaken in this essay. This essay is accordingly an essay (or *essai*) in the etymological sense – nothing more (but nothing less) than a trial, an attempt to approach Rorty in a different manner than is now the custom among Peirceans. Pragmatist ought, even more than other philosophers, to be experimentalists. Hence, they ought to be open to trying to comport themselves differently, otherwise than tradition (however recent) prompts them to proceed. Novel possibilities ought not to be dismissed prematurely; unconventional alignments

² The context was a symposium devoted to Dewey's concepts of experience and nature at which Morris R. Cohen presented a paper entitled "Some Difficulties in Dewey's Anthropocentric Naturalism" and Hocking one entitled simply "Dewey's Concepts of Experience and Nature" (see the Appendix of LW 14 for a reprint of these essays). Dewey's response bore the title "Nature in Experience" (LW 14, 141-54).

ought not to be rejected unreflectively. There is no more pragmatic adage than this: the proof of the pudding is in the eating – that is, it is *not* in the recipe. Abstract formulae can never take the place of concrete experience. So, too, formal definitions need ultimately to give way to pragmatic clarifications. And this Peircean point (indeed, what point could be more Peircean?) provides an important clue for how to redescribe and renarrate the relationship between Peirce and Rorty. But much needs to be said before we are in a position to explore (indeed, to exploit) this possibility. First of all, the implausibility of what I am proposing needs to be explicitly acknowledged.

On an August occasion, moreover one in which he announced to his analytic brethren³ his thoroughgoing adherence to American pragmatism, Rorty proclaimed that Peirce did little more than give this movement its name.⁴ In response to this and other dismissals or disparagements of Peirce, Peirceans and indeed other pragmatists have used a number of names to characterize Rorty's pragmatism and, more generally, his project. If all Peirce did was to give pragmatism its name, it sometimes seems that all Peirceans can do is call Rorty names, virtually all of them unflattering. The identification of him as a "vulgar pragmatist" and the characterization of his project as an unedifying one are among the best examples of this pronounced tendency.⁵ For the most part, however, defenders and interpreters of pragmatism (paleo-pragmatism?) have constructed detailed refutations of what they apparently take to be a hostile takeover of this philosophical movement by Rorty. For the most part, he has blithely gone his way,

³ I use this term deliberately, since at the time of his Presidential Address the APA was overwhelmingly not only a masculine but also masculinist association. In this regard, it still lags far behind such fields as history, English, French, Comparative Literature, and Religious Studies.

⁴ What more he did was inspire James (1982 [1980], 161).

⁵ The person who in the first instance used these labels has been engaged not in simply hurling derogatory labels, but in painstaking analyses and critiques of Rorty's arguments and positions. This is of course Susan Haack.

ignoring these critiques. When he did respond to such critics, he tended to do so in a tempered, conscientious, thoughtful, and respectful manner.⁶ If anything, however, his responses to them left these critics even more exasperated than the formulations or texts prompting their efforts in the first place. He became famous for shrugging off criticism, sometimes with a look of gentle bemusement, at other times with a deeply weary look of barely maintained forbearance.

Once again, then, it seems that professional philosophers have reached the impasse of mutual denunciation (when they take notice of each other) or (as is more often the case) assumed the stance of reciprocal disregard.⁷ Endless wrangling at the level of abstract definitions seemed to condemn philosophers to go round and round, to no effect. So we might puzzle interminably, Did the squirrel go round the man or the man 'round the squirrel?⁸ Is there any way of giving these creatures a rest or, even better, inviting them to take part in a more profitable chase, a more worthwhile

⁶ See, e.g., his response to Susan Haack in Saatkamp (1995) or to Cheryl Misak in Auxier and Hahn (2010)

⁷ *Who* can disregard *whom* is an index of relative power.

⁸ I am of course referring to the anecdote used by James to introduce his own account of pragmatism as a method. Returning to camp after rambling alone, James discovered his companions to be "engaged in a ferocious metaphysical dispute" (very quickly, it becomes impossible not to detect the irony in this description of the quarrel). The playfulness persists in his pun: "The *corpus* of the dispute was a squirrel – a live squirrel supposed to be clinging to one side of a tree-trunk; while over against the tree's opposite side a human being was imagined to stand." "Does the man go round the squirrel or not?" James in introducing the pragmatic method in this playful manner is quite explicit – indeed, emphatic: "The pragmatic method in such cases is to try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences" (28). Otherwise interminable verbal wrangling is brought to a halt by a substantive consideration of the practical entailed – or not – by verbally different accounts. "If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side of the other's being right" (ibid.). Or, as Peirce puts it in *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*, "there is no difference of meaning so fine as not to consist in anything but a *possible* difference of practice" (CP 5.400; emphasis added).

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endeavor? Might redescription and renarration move us beyond this impasse? This essay is accordingly an attempt to test those limits, to explore those possibilities. In this I am guided by John E. Smith's sage advice at the conclusion of *his* presidential address to the Eastern Division of the APA⁹:

[T]he task before us now is to initiate [or facilitate] a serious dialogue among the many different philosophical opinions represented in this Association. I believe that this can happen only if everyone is prepared to abandon two claims; first, that any single approach is the only legitimate one, and secondly, that those pursuing philosophical inquiry in any fashion other than one's own are *ipso facto* not engaged in philosophy at all. (1983 [1981], 241-42).

Smith goes on to note that the first claim (the one regarding pluralism) concerns respect for philosophy, whereas the second (the one regarding seeing representatives of different philosophical traditions as no less worthy of the title *philosopher* than adherents of our own intellectual approach) concerns respect for persons (242). Surely there is wisdom in Smith's insistence that "the baffling character of philosophical problems demands nothing less than a cooperative endeavor instead of partisan strife" (*ibid.*). This is as true regarding what happens *within* a philosophical tradition such as American pragmatism as what transpires between (or among) different traditions.

Peirce's "Canons of Enquiry"/Rorty's Immunity from Refutation

As much as Rorty and indeed any other contemporary philosopher, there is one who has unquestionably taken the irreducible plurality of philosophical traditions with the utmost seriousness.¹⁰ And, very recently, he has done so explicitly in reference to the two thinkers under consideration here. It is consequently instructive to turn

to this contemporary philosopher, one of the first rank, whose name is not ordinarily associated with either Charles Peirce or Richard Rorty. For he suggests one way we might describe, possibly redescribe,¹¹ the relationship between Peirce and Rorty. In a recent lecture, we learn of not only Peirce's influence on his early development but also Rorty's role in his ongoing maturation. This is likely to be surprising to even many who know his work well, since he hardly ever mentions Peirce and he almost always refers to Rorty for the purpose of criticism. His engagement with Peirce was mediated by a British philosopher, one whose name (let alone writings) too few are today likely to know¹²; that with Rorty involved face-to-face conversations when both were young men.¹³

In "On Not Knowing Where One Is Going," his John Dewey Lecture to the Central Division of the APA, Alasdair MacIntyre recalled:

In 1952 W. B. Gallie had introduced British readers to C. S. Peirce in his *Peirce and Pragmatism*. This led me to think about Peirce's canons of enquiry and to ask what analogy there might be between scientific enquiry, as characterized by Peirce, and philosophical

¹¹ It is unlikely that Peirceans who have been critical of Rorty would find much, if anything, novel in the substance of what Alasdair MacIntyre claims – that Rorty has refashioned his position to the point where virtually nothing counts as a refutation of it (2010, 72).

¹² W. B. Gallie's "Essentially Contested Concepts" is in my judgment one of the most important essays in Anglo-American philosophy appearing in the second half of the twentieth century. It was first published in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol.56, (1956), pp.167-198 (having been first presented as a paper to that Society). A slightly revised version then appeared in *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964). Rorty's metaphilosophical position might be seen as a strenuous defense of essentially contested concepts and, in light of this realization, a pragmatist response. Moreover, Gallie's book on Peirce is still worthy of consultation. In most important respects, it stands up even given advances in our understanding of Peirce.

¹³ "Before I finally emigrated to the United States," Alasdair MacIntyre recently recalled, "I had twice been a visiting Fellow of the Council of the Humanities at Princeton, where the young Rorty was engaged in redefining analytic philosophy by editing *The Linguistic Turn*" (2010, 71).

⁹ It is significant and, to some extent, ironic that Rorty's presidency made possible Smith's including a parliamentary decision regarding a technical question of voting.

¹⁰ See, e.g., his presidential address to the APA, "Relativism, Power, and Philosophy" (1985).

enquiry. I concluded that in philosophy as in natural science falsifiability is crucial, that imaginative conjectures – Popper’s terms, of course, not Peirce’s – have to be confronted with the widest and strongest range of objections from rival points of view, and in the light of those objections rejected or revised and reformulated. As reformulation and revision proceed through successive confrontations of conjectures with objections a philosophical tradition of enquiry is apt to emerge. And to do good work is generally to work within such a tradition. (2010, 63; cf. Maddelena)

The importance of working *within* a tradition, of self-consciously participating in the debates at the center of any intergenerational community of philosophical inquirers and, thus, taking seriously the responsibility to respond to the champions of rival positions, cannot be underestimated.¹⁴ This enjoins the additional responsibility to craft or formulate our positions in such a way that their weaknesses and limitations, perhaps even their fatal flaws, come to be identified in the back-and-forth so critical for such traditions. Even if philosophers cannot transform their discipline into a science in the same sense as physics or geology, chemistry or biology, they can address their questions in a manner akin, however remotely, to the communal work of experimental inquirers in these paradigmatic sciences.¹⁵

For responsible participants in a communal inquiry, scientific or otherwise, genuine doubt arises when competent persons actually disagree. This means that doubt is ineliminable. But there is a dilemma regarding this hardly ever acknowledged by interpreters of Peirce. He assists us in formulating this dilemma when he confesses:

Like irritations generally, doubt sets up a reaction which does not cease until the irritation

¹⁴ “The history of a tradition is ...,” as John E. Smith notes, “an indispensable resource for philosophical understanding” (1992, 86)

¹⁵ Dewey argues that, if philosophical inquirers more resolutely adopted an empirical approach to their subject matter, they would “procure for philosophic reflection something of that cooperative tendency toward consensus which marks inquiry in the natural sciences.” (*LW* 1, 389). See Colapietro 1998.

is removed. ... Doubt acts quite promptly to destroy belief. Its first effect is to destroy the state of satisfaction. Yet the belief-habit may still subsist. But imagination so readily affects this habit, that the former believer will soon begin to act in a half-hearted manner and before long the habit will be destroyed. The most important character of doubt is that no sooner does a believer learn that another man equally well-informed and equally competent doubts what he has believed, than he begins by doubting it himself. (*NEM*, IV, 41)

One way to counteract this doubt is, as Peirce suggests elsewhere, to doubt the competence of the person who holds a position other than one’s own. He is quite explicit about this tendency on the part of inquirers, including himself.

... in science a question is not regarded as settled or its solution as certain until all intelligent and informed doubt has ceased and all competent persons have come to a catholic agreement, whereas fifty metaphysicians, each holding opinions that no one of the other forty-nine can admit, will nevertheless generally regard their fifty opposite opinions as more certain than that the sun will rise tomorrow. This is to have what seems an absurd disregard for others’ opinions. The man of science attaches positive value to the opinion of every man as competent as himself, so that he cannot but have a doubt of a conclusion which he would adopt were it not that a man opposes it; but on the other hand, he will regard a sufficient divergence from the convictions of the great body of scientific men as tending of itself to argue incompetence, and he will generally attach little weight to the opinions of men who have long been dead and were ignorant of much that has been since discovered which bears upon the question in hand. (1.32)

The medieval schoolmen who far more than more metaphysicians exhibited a due respect for their intellectual rivals were faulted by Renaissance humanists for their lack of literary style (1.33). According to these critics, the schoolmen not only lacked such style but also the disposition to study matters “in a literary spirit” (*ibid.*). The culture of Renaissance humanism was that of litterateurs, whereas that of the medieval schoolmen was one of a “searching thoroughness” and selfless devotion. In these and other respects, then, Peirce judged the scholastic doctors to be closer in spirit to experimental inquirers than were the humanist writers. This was nowhere more apparent than in “their restless

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insatiable impulse to put their opinions to the *test*" (1.33). The elegant formulation of a position counted for almost nothing, while the most succinct proffering of evidence counted above all else.

One must accord one's predecessors and contemporaries the respect implicit in the act of hearing them out, of weighing the evidence for their positions (assessing the strength of their arguments), *especially* when one holds a rival position.¹⁶ The very presence of such rivals constitutes a basis for doubt. But the impulse to refute these opponents is strong, but in some instances that of doubting their own relevance or even expertise might even be stronger. This however generates a dilemma. On the one hand, the actual disagreement between (or among) competent inquirers is a basis for doubt. Such doubt is an impetus for honest inquiry, inquiry in which one's own position is treated as possibly mistaken or inadequate. On the other hand, such disagreement can prompt us to doubt not our own belief but the competence of our opponent(s). *Either* we accredit the competence of our opponents, in which case doubt is in most arenas (to all appearances) ubiquitous and ineliminable; *or* we discredit our opponents, judging them to be incompetent at least regarding the question under consideration, in which case the actual disagreements among "competent" inquirers might be defanged.

¹⁶ This claim needs to be qualified. One is not required to listen to anybody and everybody. Determining the justified limitations on who counts as a less than negligible interlocutor is, in practice, often a delicate and difficult task. For example, Simon Blackburn assumes only Continental philosophers are susceptible to the cultish elevation of obscurantist authors such as Heidegger. My suspicion is that such a view can be sustained by such a thoughtful, intelligent person only because he is operating in too narrow a circle of interlocutors (i.e., only because he has in effect launched preemptory strikes on strong representatives of the opposite viewpoint). See my "Tradition, Dialectic, and Ideology" (2006).

Many philosophers today would like to dismiss Rorty as a philosopher.¹⁷ In turn, Rorty himself had a tendency to disregard much of the criticism directed at him, often simply shrugging in response and then continuing to advance positions against which an escalating din of often quite nasty opposition was hurled. His notoriety was secured in no small measure by his skills as a provocateur: his ability to provoke responses and criticisms insured that any change in conversation would have him at or near the center of controversy.

When philosophers such as MacIntyre, Robert Brandom, and Richard Bernstein take Rorty so seriously, is it responsible to dismiss him out of hand? In *critical* deference to them but also in direct appreciation of Rorty's considerable gifts as a philosophical thinker, at least I cannot simply dismiss him. Rorty's conclusions and positions are however more often than not directly opposed to those defended by Peirce, a philosopher for whom I have the highest regard and greatest admiration. More than anyone else, Susan Haack has identified the main points of disagreement and, then, criticized Rortyeian positions from a Peircean perspective. There is no necessity for me to try doing again what she has done so well, even if at times in too harsh or uncharitable a

¹⁷ Despite fundamental differences, John E. Smith is not one such philosopher. In *America's Philosophical Vision*, he readily admits: "Richard Rorty has written perceptively about the impact of Pragmatism on philosophy in America, and his contribution must certainly be taken into account" (1992, 5). But he quickly points out that doing so is made difficult by the fact (or "inconvenience") of there being "at least two Rortys – perhaps there are even more. There is first the Rorty – I shall use 'rorty' for this persona following his own device with the use of 'philosophy' and 'Philosophy' – who acutely captures the central drift of Pragmatism and brings it to bear on recent discussions in an illuminating way" (6). But there is in addition "a second Rorty – I shall use 'Rorty' for this persona"; he is doing something different in latching onto Dewey and onto the idea of 'overcoming tradition in order to get rid of Platonism and metaphysics or what he sometimes calls 'Philosophy'" (ibid.). There is no doubt something sly and indeed mischievous in Smith's use of *rorty* (lower case) to designate the person with whom he is in deepest sympathy. An even more sympathetic interpreter and critic – Jeffrey Stout – also feels the need to distinguish between two persona – the prophetic and the therapeutic Rorty (2007, 9ff.)

tone. If one wants a Peircean critique of Rorty's creative appropriation of the pragmatic tradition, and if one wants this presented in a straightforward, candid, and indeed uncompromising manner, one cannot do better than consult Haack's work.

But I admire MacIntyre's philosophical acumen no less than Haack's, his erudition as much (if not more) than any other living philosopher.¹⁸ So, from a Peircean perspective, I am given pause. I have no reason to doubt MacIntyre's veracity when he claims that his conversations with the young Rorty "were as philosophically exciting as any I have ever had" (2010, 71). (Indeed, I have no reason to doubt his veracity in reference to any of his other assertions.) MacIntyre's reflections here bear directly on Peirce *and* Rorty. For he goes on to divulge not only his admiration for Rorty but also "the combination of admiration and exasperation that I felt and feel toward his project" (72). MacIntyre feels no *ressentiment* for his at least equally famous contemporary (MacIntyre was born in 1929, Rorty in 1931): "Unlike some analytic philosophers I did not resent his change of professional identification [from philosopher to professor of humanities]. Unlike quite a number of others I did not think that I had a knock-down argument with which to refute him, except perhaps on this or that point of detail." In MacIntyre's judgment, however, the indefeasible character of Rorty's philosophical position speaks not in favor but against his position.

... just that was my central problem with Rorty's new claims. His ability to respond to his critics' arguments seemed to me more than a matter of his splendid dialectical skills. It was also the case that he had in the end succeeded in formulating his positions so that they were in effect immune from refutation. And this is, as I had learned much earlier from Peirce, the worst fate that can befall any theorist. We need, if we are rational, to be able to say what would show us to be mistaken. But in the end this is what Rorty could not do. (72)

¹⁸ This is so even though I am not sympathetic with many aspects of his critique of liberalism or, more generally, modernity. In this regard, I concur with Jeffrey Stout's critique of MacIntyre's critique of modernity.

I recall here MacIntyre's own recollections because they help me inaugurate my own attempt to consider Rorty *and* Peirce – and to do so as a Peircean, but also (as it turns out) as a Rortyeen of a rather extreme stripe (cf. Peirce). I am disposed to agree with Rorty when he claims, "human beings are at their best when they play" (2004, 25). So I intend to be playful rather than polemical, to join him in being ironic, rather than succumbing to what Nietzsche castigated as the spirit of seriousness. Of course, Peirce came to philosophy via Schiller and Rorty makes this suggestion about humans at their best in reference to Schiller (along with Oscar Wilde). Moreover, Peirce is quick to divulge: "... I seriously believe that a bit of fun helps thought and tends to keep it pragmatic" (*EP* 2, 161).¹⁹ So, in being playful, I take myself to be Peircean no less than Rortyeen

Playful Experiments: A Strong Misreading and an Ironic Portrait

There is nothing necessarily wrong with polemics or, at least, a forthright exchange of divergent ideas, including the mutual accountability resulting from claim and counterclaim, argument and counterargument, argument and refutation, alleged refutation and critical response. Forthright acknowledgment of fundamental disagreement unquestionably has its proper place in philosophical discourse. It is not too difficult, however, to imagine how a predominantly agonistic conception of philosophical exchange tends not so much to deepen our understanding as it provides an outlet for our baser impulses.²⁰ When this happens, such discourse is

¹⁹ "There is," he notes elsewhere, "an attitude of spirit that is separated only by a swordblade from fun, and yet is in fully harmony with all that is spiritual and even hungers for that which is devotional" (*MS* 280, 23).

²⁰ Such a culture is one in which nonsense, errors, and fallacies are exposed for what they are. It is one in which justice tends to eclipse charity. All of this seems unqualifiedly appropriate, until we consider seriously Peirce's claim: "Suppose, for instance, that I have an idea that interests me. It is my creation. It is my creature; for ... it is [in a sense] a little person. I love it; and I will sink

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reduced to little (if anything) more than a *polemos*, a war in which the defense of truth warrants the destruction of one's adversary (cf. Foucault 112). This has become such a central feature of philosophical discourse that Michel Foucault (none other than Foucault!) draws a very sharp distinction between discussion and polemic. On the one hand, he is quick to note: "I like discussions, and when I am asked questions, I try to answer them." On the other, he stresses his distaste for polemics. If he opens a book and sees the author calling an adversary a name (e.g., accusing an individual of being an advocate of "infantile leftism"), "I shut it again right away" (111). That is, he emphasizes, his way of doing things: he simply does not want to belong to "the world of people who do things that way." He goes so far as to suggest, "a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for truth and the relation to the other" (ibid.)

Discussion in the sense intended by Foucault is nothing less than "the serious play of questions and answers," the overarching objective of which is "mutual elucidation." In contrast, the polemicist "proceeds encased in privileges that he possesses in advance and will never agree to question. On principle, he possesses rights authorizing him to wage war and making that

myself in perfecting it. It is not by dealing our cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending to them as I would the flowers in my garden" (CP 6.289). Might it not also be the case that it is only by acting likewise toward the ideas presented by others that I can assist in their growth? Think here of James's stance toward Freud's approach to psychology, an approach about which James had deep suspicions and (in some respects, most of all the reductive treatment of religious experience entailed by the Freudian approach) a fundamental antipathy. "After meeting Freud at Clark University, James wrote to a friend: "I hope that Freud and his pupils will push their ideas to their utmost limit, so that we may learn what they are. They can't fail to throw light on human nature ..." He expressed this hope despite in the very same sentence confessing: "he made on me personally the impression of a man obsessed with fixed ideas" (Perry, II, 122). To another friend he wrote around the same time: "I strongly suspect Freud, with his dream-theory, of being a regular *halocline*" (II, 123). Despite these severe misgivings, he hoped Freud and his followers would cultivate their ideas with the deep cherishing concern necessary to facilitate the growth of any human idea.

struggle a just undertaking." This practically means that "the person he confronts is not a partner in the search for truth but an adversary, an enemy who is wrong, who is harmful, and whose very existence constitutes a threat" (112). And *this* practically means that the removal of such a threat entails, justifiably, the annihilation of this adversary.

Rorty certainly does not eliminate entirely the agonistic dimension of philosophical discourse. Part of what he does however is, following suggestions made by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence* and elsewhere, to locate this dimension in the relationship the younger generation of creative philosophers and their intellectual ancestors. "Strong philosophers" might be modeled on Bloom's image of "strong poets," an emancipatory form of philosophical discourse moreover might be modeled on what he calls "strong misreading." In any event, Rorty was an uncompromising advocate of strong misreading. This is nowhere more evident than in his suggestion that the theorist or critic

asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions but simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose. He does this by imposing a vocabulary – a 'grid,' in Foucault's terminology – on the text which may have nothing to do with any vocabulary used in the text or by its author, and seeing what happens. The model here is not the curious collector of clever gadgets taking them apart to see what makes them work and carefully ignoring any extrinsic end they may have [or serve], but the psychoanalyst blithely interpreting a dream or a joke as a symptom of homicidal mania. (1982 [1981], 151)

Later, in "The Pragmatist's Progress," he observes: "Interpretation itself needs no defense; it is with us always ..." (1992, 110).²¹

²¹ This is part of an exchange with Umberto Eco. There is, for the purpose of understanding Rorty's relationship to Peirce, arguably no more important later text by Rorty, since Eco is in both his own mind and that of Rorty, so closely associated with Peirce's efforts to circumscribe the irrepressibly wild impulses of our hermeneutic imagination.

He would repeatedly call Davidson a pragmatist while Davidson himself would vehemently reject this characterization. Despite Davidson's protestation, Rorty took himself to be justified in applying this appellation to this thinker.²² Moreover, despite Peirce's prominence in the history of pragmatism, Rorty virtually denied the title of pragmatist to the figure who is generally recognized as the father of this movement. In his Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the APA, he said (as I have already noted, though not yet quoted): Peirce's "contribution to pragmatism was merely to have given it a name, and to have stimulated James" (1982, 161). Is not turnaround here fair play? In granting, however provisionally, Rorty his hermeneutic right to strip Peirce of the title of pragmatist, I accord myself the right to dub Rorty a Peircean. Despite appearances, I am not playing a game of "Anything Goes." Rather I am engaging in that of "Hermeneutic Turnabout." Rather than calling him a vulgar pragmatist (see, e.g., Haack), calling Rorty a Peircean pragmatist would have likely caused him consternation. But my motive is not to provoke the provocateur or (as it turns out, since he is no longer alive) his disciples and defenders; it is to illuminate otherwise undetected affinities between the most important figure in the inaugural phase of the pragmatic movement and the most influential one in its contemporary resurgence. This does not reduce to name calling. My aim is to help readers of Rorty see a different Peirce than the one Rorty portrayed, also devotees of Peirce to glimpse a different Rorty than they are disposed to discern. Peirce was not nearly the Kantian whom Rorty saw staring back at him from Peirce's writings, just as Rorty is not the literary

charlatan or irresponsible litterateur whom all too many Peirceans apparently see staring back at them when they read his texts. As unfortunate as this term likely is, Peirce was a *historicist* no less than Dewey, perhaps even more than James. That is, he was not a formalist in the sense derided by Rorty (see Colapietro 2004). Peirce was not engaged in the task of providing human inquirers with an "ahistoric framework." He was committed rather to methodological improvisations made in the exacting context of some actual inquiry.

If Rorty was mistaken about Peirce in this regard, then Peirceans might consider the possibility of their own role in contributing to this misunderstanding – at least, their failure (if only by omission) of presenting Peirce as a historically self-conscious actor who took his task to be facilitating the *growth* (not the justification) of knowledge. No anachronism has served Peirce more poorly than reading him as a contemporary epistemologist (i.e., an analytic philosopher fixated on the skeptical problem). He was a pragmaticist methodologist, preoccupied with opening fields of inquiry, removing obstacles from the road of inquiry, and forging novel paths (crafting new methods). He was self-consciously a historical actor engaged in an unfolding drama, primarily concerned with questions of how *to go on* (cf. Wittgenstein), how to carry on the work of inquiry. This did not require securing indubitable foundations for the edifice of human knowledge. There is, of course, the text place by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss as the Preface to the *Collected Papers*: "To erect a philosophical edifice that shall outlast the vicissitudes of time, my care must be not so much to set each brick with nicest accuracy, as to lay the foundation deep and massive" (1.1). Peirce in fact wrote these words and there is no need to deny their existence. But do they convey Peirce's defining aspirations in all of their complex character? In particular is Peirce's own *anti-foundationalism* at all evident in this pronouncement of his aspiration? What happens when we juxtapose this text with ones like the following? Science

²² In the essay on which I have been drawing, MacIntyre notes that he is indebted to Rorty for not only their conversations but also introducing him to Davidson, "both the man and the work": "But the Davidson to whom Rorty introduced me turned out to have a *Doppelgänger*, that subtle and imaginative fiction, Rorty's Davidson. And Rorty's Davidson became one of major *dramatis personae* in a story that Rorty developed of how 'analytic philosophy culminates in Quine, the later Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Davidson – which is to say that it transcends and cancels itself'" (2010, 71). MacIntyre is here quoting Rorty himself (*London Review of Books*, January 20, 2005).

... is driven in desperation to call upon its inward sympathy with nature, its instinct for aid, just as we find Galileo at the dawn of modern science making his appeal to *il lume naturale*. But in so far as it does this, the solid ground of fact fails it. It feels from that moment that its position is only provisional. It must then find confirmations or else shift its footing. Even if it does find confirmations, they are only partial. It still is not standing upon the bedrock of fact. It is walking upon a bog and can only say, this ground seems to hold for the present. Here I will stay till it begins to give way. (5.589)

Peirce no less than Thomas Kuhn or Richard Rorty was convinced that in the actual course of human inquiry the ground will eventually give way. Was Peirce's impulse to jump outside of time and history or was it rather to participate in our ongoing practices of experimental inquiry in a truly deliberate and intelligent manner? Did he strive to construct an ahistoric framework or rather to respond to historical crises in a practical fashion (contributing as a practitioner, thus a historically situated agent, to the immanent crises of various historical undertakings)? Theory is itself a form of practice and, as such, it is an affair of history.

The tendency to see Peirce as first and foremost a philosopher committed to furthering a project akin to Kant's is, in my judgment, one of the main reasons for our distorted understanding of the Peircean project in its historical uniqueness. This also results in the occlusion of Peircean pragmatism in its full force.²³ For a Kantian to abjure from the bottom of his heart his conception of things-in-themselves²⁴ is much like a Marxist jettisoning

²³ Of course, Kant can be – and ought to be read – as preparing the way for Peirce. See however Mora 1955.

²⁴ The Kantian, Peirce suggests, “has only to abjure from the bottom of his heart the proposition that a thing-in-itself can, however indirectly, be conceived; and then correct the details of Kant's doctrine accordingly, and he will find himself to have become a Critical Common-sensist” (CP 5.452). Elsewhere, he insists: “we have *direct experience of things in themselves* Nothing can be more completely false than that we can experience only our own ideas. That is indeed without exaggeration the very epitome of all falsity. Our knowledge of things in themselves is entirely *relative*, it is true; but all experience and all knowledge is knowledge of that which is, independently of being

the conception of revolution or a Freudian abandoning the notion of the unconscious. If one begins at the very end of Kant's first *Critique* and focuses on “The Architectonic of Pure Reason” and “The History of Pure Reason,” rather than being misled mostly by the trappings of Peirce's “New List of Categories” into supposing he was engaged in a transcendental deduction of his categorial scheme (cf. Zach), then one is likely to understand Peirce's undertaking in a manner much closer to the way he understood his own project. If one then substitutes experimental reason for pure reason, one will not only have an even clearer comprehensive of Peirce's project but also a more accurate measure of the great distance between him and the philosopher by whom his youthful self was so deeply enthralled. Peirce was not Kant with a dash of Darwin and the logic of relations. He was, in his mature thought, far, far distant from Kant. The failure of Peirceans to make this clear is, in part, a reason why Rorty and others are so easily misled regarding Peirce's architectonic aspirations and (of the utmost importance) historicist commitments. The insistence on reading Peirce as a variant of Kant renders him vulnerable to the trenchant critiques of the transcendental project offered by Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and elsewhere.

Even granting this, a vast chasm exists between Peirce's efforts to transform philosophy into a science and Rorty's rejection of scientism.²⁵ There are differences and there are differences. Some are negligible, too slight to matter much, if at all, in many contexts. Some differences however truly make a difference – widely, deeply, and significantly make a difference. The differences between Peirce and Rorty are almost too obvious to merit much serious attention. They are fundamental, numerous, and (for me at least) mostly uninteresting. These thinkers were for the most part at cross-purposes. Philosophy conceived as an instance of

represented (CP 6.95). Rorty no less than Peirce was committed to jettisoning the notion of the *Ding-an-sich*.

²⁵ As odd as it might sound, Peirce was not a champion of scientism. See, e.g., Bergman and also Short.

inquiry leaves inadequate room for it envisioned as redescription, renarration, and recontextualization. Peircean inquirers however need not take issue with the Rortyeen “poets.” They are animated by different purposes, engaged in largely incommensurable undertakings. Neither the one nor the other, given the depth of their historicism, has an unquestionable right to legislate exclusively the scope of what *philosophy* includes. Despite this, Peirce can be read as preparing the way for Rorty in certain fundamental respects; in addition, Rorty can be read as carrying forward some impulses clearly integral to Peirce’s project.

This is not likely to make either Peirceans or Rortyeans happy. This is understandable. At first blush, the similarities between Peirce and Rorty seem, nonetheless, superficial, scant, and insignificant. Upon closer consideration, this turns out to be more or less true. Our initial impression is largely confirmed by further reflection. Even so, there are similarities and there are differences. Not only do some differences make a difference; some similarities also do so, especially when fundamental oppositions obtrude at virtually every turn. They intimate ways of looking at familiar figures in an unfamiliar manner. But, to Freud’s expression “the narcissism of small differences,” we might add the resolute refusal to acknowledge even the slightest degree of kinship. This might be a species of such narcissism.

So, I persist in what can only appear to most readers as a perverse strategy. (Doth he protest too much? Are not my repeated disclaimers indications of my genuine – not merely rhetorical or heuristic – perversity? That is of course something for my readers to decide.). Despite his denunciations of Peirce, Rorty can be portrayed as a Peircean. But a stronger claim can be made here. In the first instance, he actually was something of a Peircean. This contention is not derived from a strong misreading, but discoverable from a straightforward reading (what the later Rorty would disparagingly call a *weak*

misreading) of Rorty’s first major publication.²⁶ The actual development of Rorty’s philosophical career does not trace the trajectory from an analytic philosopher to a deconstructive pragmatist. Rorty was not trained primarily as an analyst. Rather he was trained for the most part by such systematic philosophers as Richard McKeown, Charles Hartshorne, and Paul Weiss, but also by John E. Smith, a (if not *the*) major interpreter of the pragmatic tradition (see Gross 2003). There is another figure (Rulon Wells) with whom Rorty as a graduate student studied closely at Yale, moreover, a thinker whose relationship to Peirce was at once informed, nuanced, and (in no small measure) ambivalent. His eventual turn toward pragmatism, so dramatically evident in his Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the APA in 1979 was to some extent a return (see Gross 2003, 96), a return to a position he had been discussing with Richard Bernstein since their undergraduate days at the University of Chicago (Rorty 2004, 3). So, as a matter of historical record, the young Rorty (roughly the age of Peirce when he wrote the “cognition-series” for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*) actually *was* as emphatic a champion of Peirce as of the later Wittgenstein. Any unbiased reading of “Categories, Pragmatism, and Language” (1961) incontestably reveals this. This essay appears to be an attempt to work out some of the details of the pragmatist conclusion of his doctoral dissertation: “our description of logical empiricism’s difficulties ... suggest that we need to strive for the sort of *rapprochement* between [*sic.*] formal logic, semiotics, and traditional epistemology which is found in the work of Peirce”(1956, 573; cf. Gross 2003, 96-97). But, very quickly he will have serious reservations about Peircean semiotics no less than traditional epistemology (apparently, reservations about Peirce’s theories of signs and of categories even before any about the theory of

²⁶ In 1955, he published a very short piece in *The Review of Metaphysics*. Besides this and several also very short book reviews, “Categories, Pragmatism, and Language” is Rorty’s first publication (unqualifiedly, it is first published article).

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knowledge). Looking back more than thirty years later, hence, he will in “The Pragmatist’s Progress” confess to having been a code-cracker (someone devoted to discovering the hidden structures or forms underlying not only everyday language but also even the more rigorous forms of human discourse). “This ambition,” he goes on to note, “led me to waste my twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth years trying to discover the secret of Charles Sanders Peirce’s esoteric doctrine of the ‘reality of Thirdness’ and thus of his fantastically elaborate semiotico-metaphysical ‘System’” (1992, 93).

So let us now fast forward to the mature Rorty. If anything, the mature Rorty might be read as saying: Let’s get on with the business of painstaking, honest inquiry and, in those disciplines where such inquiry seems mostly (if not entirely) beside the point, let’s turn to the business of imaginative redescription, recontextualization, and renarration. Let’s be forthright about the purposes animating our endeavors. And let’s not allow our antipathies, blindnesses, and misgivings to block the paths of those pursuing their inquiries differently than we are. In these respects, Peirce was as critical of his contemporaries as Rorty was of *his*. Spilling tons of ink on the possibility of knowledge does little or nothing to contribute to the *growth* of knowledge. Virtually everyone actually engaged in some substantive inquiry finds the often technical debates among professional philosophers on epistemological topics of no relevance to what they are doing.

Peirce almost certainly would have taken Rorty to be a litterateur into whose wretched clutches had fallen any number of critical terms (e.g., objectivity, rationality, and truth). Susan Haack and others have ably defended Peirce against the way in which these terms have been abused by this litterateur. But the voice of philosophy is not so unequivocally and incontestably that of science as Peirce and some of his defenders insist. Literary philosophy can be a healthy corrective to unbridled efforts to transform philosophical reflection into a strictly scientific enterprise. There is more than one way

to address, say, the question of meaning or that or truth. The relative merits of rival approaches, including literary or rhetorical ones, need to be assessed first and foremost in light of consequences.

As I have already stressed too many times, reading Rorty as a Peircean will likely strike, both Peirceans and Rortyans (and, no doubt, various others), as perverse. I would be less than candid if I refused to acknowledge this facet of my portrayal. But I insist: it is not simply perverse. Indeed, I am disposed to believe it is both Peircean and Rortyean. A Wittgensteinian (or therapeutic) pragmatist who never tires of warning us against the distortions resulting from our craving for generality is one who might be warmly welcomed by a Peircean pragmatist.²⁷ In his “Minute Logic” (1902), Peirce after all insisted: “Broad generalization is glorious when it is the inevitable outpressed juice of painfully matured little details of knowledge; but when it is not that, it a crude spirit inciting only broils between [or among] a hundred little dogmas, each most justly condemning all the others” (CP 2,14). He pointedly adds: “It is the usual fruit of sloth.” So, too, a Peircean pragmatist who takes texts no less than lumps to be objects of interpretation.

Everything is, as Peirce suggests, similar to everything else in some respect(s). So I have done very little, if anything at all, in insisting upon resemblances between Peirce and Rorty. “After all, any analogy, however fanciful, which serves to focus attention upon matters which might otherwise escape observation is valuable” (CP 3, 470). Is my analogy fanciful? Without question. Is it nonetheless illuminating? This is, at least, an open question – a question opened by my strong misreading of a multifaceted philosopher. If I have picked Rorty up more gently than has been the wont of most Peirceans,

²⁷ Here I am indebted to Jeffrey Stout who distinguishes between the *prophetic* and the *therapeutic* Rorty (see 2007, 10ff). Although I am somewhat more sympathetic to the prophetic side of Rorty’s philosophic persona than is Stout, I agree with him that the therapeutic Rorty makes the most unproblematic contribution to contemporary thought.

and if I have turned him around in my hand so a facet rarely seen catches an unaccustomed ray of light, then the polemical spirit might give way to humane interpretation.

Richard Rorty spoke more persuasively to a contemporary audience than any other pragmatist of his generation. Confronted with this fact, the impulse of many Peirceans is to decry the state of philosophy and indeed culture: Rorty's stature is, from their perspective, a function of our culture's decadence and our discipline's backwardness. Another response however might be to try to understand why his texts resonate with intelligent, imaginative, and passionate readers, especially youthful ones. That is, it might be to begin with a question – to begin truly with a question, not the facile pretense of a question and the secure presumption of an answer. Even those who were close to Rorty, in some cases very close (e.g., Richard Bernstein, Robert Brandom, Jeffrey Stout, and Cornel West) found him exasperating as well as exhilarating, frustrating in his insouciant dismissals as well as stunning in his dialectical finesse. But they found him exhilarating, talented, sincere, and insightful. Are we to say to those who knew him far better than most of us, "You are too indulgent and uncritical, allowing your personal affection to color your philosophical judgment, even to blind you from your intellectual responsibility"? This seems all too slighting of them as well as Rorty.

So we might turn (or perhaps return) to the question, What *use* may I (and I precisely as a Peircean) make of Rorty? Was Rorty rejecting the possibility of painstaking, honest inquiry of the kind championed by Peirce or rather was he (precisely in his role as ironist) questioning the actuality of philosophy being an instance of such inquiry? (Was Peirce any more charitable in his judgment of his contemporaries than Rorty was of *his* – in particular, was he more charitable in judging the philosophers of his day to be genuine inquirers than Rorty?). I have no question that Rorty knew that it was, in countless contexts (e.g., the number of civilians killed as "collateral damage" or the percentage of the

population who have ceased even looking for work), important to get things right but he was deeply skeptical of philosophical defenses of objective truth. What are we to *make* of this? In large part, the threat of skepticism both is and is not important. It is important insofar as so many contemporary philosophers devote themselves to traditional epistemology and, hence, divert, philosophical attention away from more interesting questions, more genuine concerns. But this obsession should be treated therapeutically, not addressed directly. A metaphilosophical move,²⁸ rather direct engagement in this particular game, should be encouraged. As the example of Peirce himself shows, however, this threat is not serious, at least to those who are engaged in the business of inquiry. For some purposes, in some settings, the Rortyeen manner of deconstructing the dualisms between thought and thing, language and reality, fact and value, might prove as effective (or even more effective) than other strategies. The point is (Is it not?) to turn philosophical attention away from the sterile questions of traditional debates, helping to direct such attention to more fruitful ways of framing philosophical questions. Indeed, the very point of pragmatism is to expose endless verbal wrangling for what it is. The task of breaking the stranglehold of verbalism – the compulsive tendency to become completely absorbed in ferocious debates regarding little more than abstract definitions – is not only salutary but also truly pragmatic. Moreover, I take Rorty to have licensed me and others to turn aside in good conscience from certain technical debates in professional philosophy and to do so for the purpose of indulging

²⁸ From the beginning of his career, Rorty was more or less preoccupied with metaphilosophy. See, e.g., "The Limits of Reductionism," "Recent Metaphilosophy," and even his comparison of Peirce and the later Wittgenstein ("Pragmatism, Categories, and Language,"). All three articles published in 1961 (i.e., at the outset of his career). One might even say that before he commenced his graduate studies at Yale University, while still a student of Richard McKeown, he was preoccupied with this topic. The extent to which Rorty is carrying on the project of McKeown is still an unasked, but (in my judgment) salient question. McKeon's pluralism might have secured an afterlife in his most famous student's work.

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more humanly worthwhile impulses and interests, aims and obsessions.

Of course, the efficacy of any therapy is dependent on a host of factors. What proves effective for this person might actually be harmful for some other person. The difficulties are compounded when the philosophical therapy question is almost always group therapy. Different reactions are inevitable, variable outcomes predictable. For some of us there is often something too dispirited and despairing in Rorty's denunciations and dismissals. For others of us, however, there is something exhilarating and liberating. I tend to be among the former. There are, however, various occasions when I have experienced, if somewhat fleetingly, what other readers have experienced far more often – the power of Rorty's redescriptions to transfigure the field of possibilities. My exasperation with him tends to eclipse my exhilaration. But, more than a decade ago, I made a deliberate decision not to write about Rorty in a dismissive or denunciatory manner, if only because these tendencies were what I liked least about him. I resolutely refused then – and in this essay I renew that resolution – to respond directly to his provocations. My hope is (among other tasks) to have engaged in a more or less random series of therapeutic interventions, ones wherein the link between rationality and persuasion is strengthened, also the tie between the irrepressible impulses of the imagination and the typically exacting demands of intelligence are made into a working harmony, an effective union.

For many, then, Rorty is the social philosopher who makes the distinction between the public and private spheres of our lives into a regrettable and even dangerous dualism. For many, he is the analytic philosopher who used his unrivalled rhetorical skills to build a Trojan horse to gain access into the walled city of professional philosophy, only to have a horde of pluralists stream from his construction. The result was, from the perspective of those enamored of the safety

and sanctity of life before these pluralists came to force themselves on the rightful inhabitants of that walled city, destructive, real if only partial of the city itself. For many who identify as pragmatists or simply students of pragmatism, Rorty is the "pragmatist" who has distorted this position beyond anything James and Dewey (let alone Peirce) would recognize. For me, however, Rorty will be, as much as anything else, the author of "Pragmatism, Categories, and Language."²⁹ He accordingly will be the one who led me from Wittgenstein to Peirce (or, more accurately, from my youthful captivation with the later Wittgenstein to a deeper understanding of one of the most elusive figures in Western philosophy). In my own philosophical meandering, this essay invited me to abandon reservations and to explore more boldly possibilities of forging a disciplinary identity rooted in American pragmatism, indeed, in Peirce's distinctive articulation of that philosophical framework. Though it was published fifty years ago, I discovered it over a decade later while just beginning my graduate studies. It is an essay I always assign when I teach Peirce, sometimes when I teach Wittgenstein. In the concluding paragraph Rorty readily acknowledged: "... I have been emphasizing similarities between Peirce and Wittgenstein, and I have played down the differences between them. These differences are real and important" (1961, 223). If anything, the differences between Peirce and Rorty are, at least, equally real and important. But they are very hard to miss. In contrast, similarities or affinities have proven almost impossible to detect. This has seemed to be more a matter of impassioned refusal, than one of intellectual discernment (i.e., more a matter of will than intelligence).

As Whitehead (the teacher of several of Rorty's own teachers, also the subject of his MA thesis) insisted,

²⁹ Just as Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* helped me to appreciate the force of Peirce's critique of foundationalism, Rorty assisted me in discerning possible links between the later Wittgenstein and the American pragmatist whose thought (to my own amazement) began to draw me as a graduate student more strongly to it than did the thought of James or even Dewey.

philosophy “is not – or at least, should not be – a ferocious debate between [or among] irritable professors” (1937, 125).³⁰ Truth is not a club with which to beat our opponents. It is rather a largely elusive ideal. The inhumanity of all too many human inquirers toward those with whom they disagree is all too prominent feature of our intellectual history. The truth about truth is one thing, that about our advocacy of truth quite another. However ennobling is the ideal in the abstract, the history of the crimes committed in the name of this ideal is sobering, indeed chastening. Of course, one might readily object that Rorty rejects the very notion of truth, so such an appeal is out of place in reference to him. But am I not entitled to redescribe the Rortyan notion of coping in such a way that, in certain contexts, getting it right is crucial for whatever we might mean by effective coping (cf. Stout 2007)? I do not think that the notion of truth in its modest, experimental sense carries in its wake all or even most of the bad things which Rorty supposed would inevitably trail it, if once allowed into our discourse. If I am wrong and it does threaten to embroil me in the endless verbal wrangling of a purely professional game, I will simply demure – and turn my attention elsewhere. I have seen how effective such a move can be.

Is raising the question of truth inevitably that of raising the question of Truth and, in turn, is that move inescapably a case of reintroducing a surrogate for God? Perhaps. The question to which we are ultimately driven by Rorty’s project might just be one pertaining to religion (cf. Stout). Is Truth in the sense advocated by Peirce and others from (at least) his generation accurately interpreted as the surrogate of God?³¹ Can

³⁰ Smith quotes this at the outset of his Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the APA “The New Need for the Recovery of Philosophy”), a position made possible by Rorty’s parliamentary decision as President of that association (see Gross 2008, 220-22).

³¹ “Through the nineteenth century, men like Huxley and Clifford and Peirce still saw,” Rorty argues, “respect for scientific truth as the highest human virtue, the moral equivalent of the Christian’s love and fear of God. These nineteenth century figures were [Hans] Reichenbach’s heroes. But the nineteenth century also saw the rise of a

we submit to any authority other than that of our own devising and refashioning without effacing ourselves, without abandoning our freedom and betraying our humanity? Is this most anti-Cartesian of philosophers unwittingly committed to a central tenet of the Cartesian framework, for does he not apparently espouse a self whose locus in nature is fundamentally antagonistic and ruptured? What if the critique of Cartesianism requires a fuller recovery of human agency, in particular, a recovery in which authority, authorship, and agency itself demand the prefix *co*?³² And what if nature herself is in some manner and measure one of the voices to whom humans ought to accord a hearing? On Rorty’s account, an extra-human authority is by definition self-annihilating (*humanly* self-annihilating). To speak of nature speaking is, from his perspective, to deceive ourselves about our own acts of ventriloquism.³³

In light of what we know, also what we desire, a fuller recovery of nature, experience and indeed language, also practice, inquiry, and science, is needed. Reading Wordsworth and Emerson, Goethe and Schiller might aid us in this task as much as reading Descartes and Locke, Leibniz and Hume, Kant and Hegel. *If* a choice must be made between rigor and range – the rigor of

new sort of secular intellectual, one who had lost faith in science with the same thoroughness as the Enlightenment had lost faith in God, [Thomas] Carlyle and Henry Adams are examples of this new kind of intellectual, the kind whose consciousness is dominated by a sense of the contingency of history, the contingency of the vocabulary which he himself is using, the sense that nature and scientific truth are largely beside the point and that history is up for grabs. This sort of intellectual is secular with a vengeance, for he sees the religion of ‘science’ or ‘of humanity’ as just as self-deceptive as the old-time religion” (1982, 228-29).

³² In “The Essence of Humanism,” James argues humanism is “a religion susceptible of reasoned defense.” It is, so read, “essentially a *social* philosophy, a philosophy of ‘*co*,’ in which conjunctions do the work” (238). To conjoin humanity and nature, humans and other animals, mortal animals with their irrepressible longings and a sense of the sacred, is central to humanism so understood.

³³ Rorty’s love of wild orchids might be taken as a sign of a more inclusive love of the natural world. His father’s poetry, some of the best of which involves a celebration of nature, is pertinent here.

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philosophical discourse and the range of its legitimate topics – I would choose range. But no such choice is necessary. What rigor, clarity, and responsibility *practically mean* in diverse contexts is, however, a matter to be worked out by the social actors trying to cope with the complex demands defining these variable contexts. That is, they must be worked out on the ground (the ground of our practices themselves), not on high. Indeed, for this task “poets” no less than scientists,³⁴ the mystically inclined no less than the politically committed are themselves needed. In executing this task, Rorty will be both an ally and an impediment. His therapeutic and pluralist proclivities will assist and (at the same time) thwart our efforts. Yet, in turning once again to his writings, I on this occasion feel neither unqualified antipathy nor unalloyed admiration. More than an exercise in perversity, this undertaking has been for me an attempt, yet again, to achieve something approximate to ambivalence (Segal; cf. Rorty). In response to such a strong “poet,” also such a strong misreading of a philosophical author to whom I have devoted my philosophical life, the achievement of ambivalence should not be counted as a mean or insignificant accomplishment. Rather than bemused condescension³⁵ I feel the need to work toward a finely

nuanced ambivalence toward my philosophical ancestors, proximate as well as remote.

Accordingly, Rorty himself is for me not an object of condescension, let alone one of scorn. Like those much closer to him, I find him exasperating and admirable, frustratingly insouciant and delightfully sane about the problems of men and women in our time and place. Quite apart from the most prominent features of my personal attitude toward this philosophical elder, I am appreciate that Rorty so greatly contributed to not only the resurgence of pragmatism but also the recovery of history (not least of all the history of his own discipline as relevant to the *doing* of philosophy).³⁶ Whatever else our histories are, they are inclusive of countless ironies. Ruptures are hardly as ever as dramatic and deep as their advocates contend, critiques very rarely as thoroughgoing and conclusive as their fashioners suppose. Aristotle was almost certainly far more of a Platonist than he realized, Descartes far more of a scholastic than he appreciated (see, e.g., Etienne Gilson on this score), and Peirce himself arguably more of a Cartesian than this critique of Cartesianism was inclined to suspect. Might not Richard Rorty, late as well as early,

³⁴ A. N. Whitehead, the philosopher on whom Rorty wrote his MA thesis (“Whitehead’s Use of the Concept of Potentiality” [1952]), underscores the relevance of the voice of poetry to our appreciation of nature (see, e.g., 1967, 15, also 77). He wrote this thesis under the supervision of Charles Hartshorne, one of the editors of the first six volumes of *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. He wrote his PhD dissertation also on potentiality, under the supervision of Paul Weiss, the other editor of these volumes. Of relevance here, is Weiss’s “The Essence of Peirce’s System” (1940). Hartshorne, Weiss, and Richard McKeown were strenuous champions of systematic philosophy. See Justus Buchler’s “The Accidents of Peirce’s System” (1940).

³⁵ The pragmatist ... thinks,” Rorty contends, “that the quest for a universal human community will be self-defeating if it tries to preserve the elements of every intellectual tradition, all the ‘deep’ intuitions everybody has ever had. It is not to be achieved by an attempt at commensuration, at a common vocabulary which isolates the common essence of Achilles and the Buddha, Lavoisier and Derrida. Rather, it is to be reached, if at all, by acts of making rather than of finding

– by poetic rather than Philosophical achievement. The culture which will transcend, and thus unite, East and West ... is not likely to be one which does equal justice to each, but one which looks back with the *amused condescension* typical of later generations looking back at their ancestors” (1982, xxx; emphasis added).

³⁶ “Pragmatism is,” Rorty announced in 1961 in “Pragmatism, Categories, and Language,” “becoming respectable again. Some philosophers are still content to think of it as a sort of muddle-head first approximation to logical positivism. ... But those who have taken a closer look have realized that the movement of thought here is more link a pendulum than like an arrow” (197). So the young Rorty set out to show “how Peirce was in advance of the positivism of his day and how close his views are to the present trends in philosophy which have arisen in reaction to the more sophisticated positivism of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* and of the Vienna Circle.” Rorty in this essay goes so far as to claim, “Peirce’s thought envisaged, and repudiated in advance, the stages in the development of empiricism which logical empiricism represented” (197-98). To say in 1961 that pragmatism was becoming respectable again seems less an established fact than a Jamesian bid, an instance of courage and hope wherein faith in the fact may help to create the fact!

be more of a Peircean pragmatist than *he* would be disposed to admit? But what's the use of calling Rorty a Peircean? *Of course*, there is something misleading about this characterization. There is, as I have already acknowledged, also something perverse about portraying Rorty as a Peircean. So, *then*, what is the use of calling him a Peircean? We are thereby thrust into a position to hear a strand in his voice otherwise inaudible to his contemporary admirers and Peircean critics. But do we not run the risk of losing either Peirce's voice or Rorty's – or indeed both in their singularity? Hardly. The differences are too numerous, important, and crucial for anyone to miss – so numerous, significant, and fundamental that they almost render completely implausible any suggestion of kinship. But irony might serve to facilitate solidarity, suggesting moreover a dash of contingency: Peirce is not necessarily opposed to Rorty in all fundamental respects. Animated by the spirit of playfulness, we might yet be able to see the relationship between Peirce and Rorty as being otherwise than one of invincible opposition or absolute divergence. The fruits of doing so might be far from plentiful and hence far from sufficient to nourish us for any length of time. They may however be as sweet as they are scarce, as subtly delicious as they are widely overlooked.

It is often missed that Peirce was no less than Dewey repulsed by epistemology (including the word itself). He tended to identify his project (or, at least, the heart of his project) as logic and, in turn, logic as a theory of inquiry (not an account of knowledge allegedly already in our possession or possibly never anything we could possibly attain). Willy-nilly we are thrust into processes of inquiry. In its most rudimentary and pervasive forms, this has nothing or little to do with our love of truth or of anything else; it has everything to do with impasses of our agency. The point of logic, as conceived by Peirce, was not to answer the skeptic, but to advance inquiry.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty writes: “we should not try to have a successor subject to

epistemology, but rather try to free ourselves from the notion that philosophy must center around the discovery of a permanent framework of inquiry” (1979, 380).³⁷ It decidedly makes a difference whether we take hermeneutics or methodology to be the successor to epistemology (Rorty 1979, 380). This however might deflect attention from a point of agreement. Rather than attempt to offer from on high a method or strategies of inquiry, it would be better (for those of us who have the training, temperament, and inclination) to engage, on the ground, in substantive inquiries unfolding in some more or less recognizable philosophical tradition (cf. MacIntyre 2010). This is, for the most part, precisely what Peirce did. It would at the same time be instructive for those of a different intellectual temperament to reflect upon our practices of inquiry vis-à-vis other undertakings (including imaginative literature and religious rituals) (see, however, Haack). This is for the most part what Rorty did. To open the space for a wide-ranging and deep-cutting inquiry into not only inquiry but also the full spectrum of human discourses seems to be either recognizably philosophy or (at the very least, to recall the words of Wittgenstein in *The Blue Book*) “one of the heirs to the subject which used to be called ‘philosophy’” (28). There is no compelling reason to deny the right of those engaged in this undertaking to call themselves philosophers (cf. Smith 1983, 242; quoted above).

³⁷ This is arguably the main reason for what he takes to be Peirce's philosophical project: “Peirce himself remained the most Kantian of thinkers – the most convinced that philosophy gave us an all-embracing ahistoric context in which every other species of discourse could be assigned its proper place and rank. It was just this Kantian assumption that there was such a context, and that epistemology or semantics could discover it, against which James and Dewey reacted. We need to focus on this reaction if we are to recapture a proper sense of their importance” (1982, 161). Thus, James and Dewey emerge as the heroes of Rorty's renarration of the history of pragmatism, while Peirce is cast as the villain (cf. Bernstein in Saatkamp [ed.]).

Conclusion

Peirce's theory of signs was designed not simply to offer a normative account of objective inquiry (though it was fashioned primarily to provide just such an account). In crafting his semeiotic, he was animated by the hope of offering resources for nothing less than the full range of human articulation, discursive and otherwise. The field of philosophy might be even more encompassing than the one envisioned by Peirce, whereas the capacity of this discipline to transform itself into a humanly useful discourse about the full spectrum of human articulation might be far greater than Rorty was disposed to acknowledge. Peirce's theory of signs invites explorations of fields quite removed from the main focus of his philosophical project (objective inquiry as paradigmatically illustrated in such experimental sciences as physics, chemistry, geology, and to some extent biology), while Rorty's manner of *doing* philosophy suggests a relevance and power beyond what he was disposed to grant at the meta-level (i.e., grant when he was philosophizing about philosophy itself). Philosophers should be inquirers who have devoted themselves to some undertaking other than philosophy and, as maturity, experience, and possibly even wisdom are acquired in the course of having done so, should only then feel entitled to join Aristotle or Kant, Scotus³⁸ or Hegel, Leibniz or Schröder, as a historically self-conscious participant in an intergenerational community of resolutely experimental inquirers. Discoursing about the practices of inquiry apart from extended participation in some historically evolved and evolved practice (or, even better, set of such practices) is a suspect undertaking. Peircean inquirers are not – or should not be – preoccupied with offering a justification of knowledge in the abstract (i.e., in abstraction from the history of our practices); rather they are – or should be – concerned

with facilitating the *growth* of knowledge. In order to conduct any inquiry, we assume that we know countless things. We cannot take the first step without doing so. Some of the things we assume we know turn out in the course of inquiry to be not instances of knowledge at all. The actual course of this or that passionate pursuit tends to expose some of them, often quite pivotal ones, as erroneous assumptions, unreliable beliefs. To attempt to go on those beliefs is to condemn ourselves to frustration (the failure to attain our purposes, to achieve or even simply approximate our aims). The point is not to provide an abstract, formal definition of knowledge, but a pragmatic, hence contextual clarification. This would be a pragmatic clarification of (above all else) the dispositional properties of epistemic agents no less than investigated objects. It should always be a clarification directly relevant to the task at hand. Hermeneutics is a site wherein questions of method and virtue might be posed by practitioners for the sake of the growth of their practices.

Philosophers pontificating from on high about the meaning of truth and meaning in, say, religious, scientific, or literary discourse tend to be as convincing as celibate pontiffs speaking *ex cathedra* about sexual morality. Cannot Rorty's therapeutic interventions in contemporary philosophy be read as more or less effective efforts to drive home this basically Peircean point? (One cannot determine their efficacy *überhaupt*.) Regarding established fields of experimental inquiry, the lot of practitioners on the inevitably shifting ground of their own practices reflecting upon how *to go on*, especially in the face of disciplinary crises, (the lot of practitioners in this regard) is one thing.³⁹ The position of deracinated intellectuals presuming the unquestionable right to legislate the terms of responsible debate is, however, quite another.

³⁸ In his response to Susan Haack, Rorty makes a very important point, moreover a distinctively Peircean one: "it is hard to see Duns Scotus as more or less open to questions of justification than Darwin, even though his views about what beliefs were relevant to what other beliefs were quite different" (152-53).

³⁹ See MacIntyre's "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narratives, and the Philosophy of Science." This piece originally appear in *The Monist*, 60 (1977), 453-71, was thereafter reprinted in *Paradigms and Revolutions* (1980), a volume edited by Gary Gutting, and more recently has been included in *The Tasks of Philosophy* (MacIntyre 2006).

If I have disregarded at least half of Rorty in sketching this ironic portrait, he has provided me with the example and, thereby, the license to do just this.⁴⁰ If I in what can only strike some as an excessively conciliatory spirit have betrayed Peirce's more pugnacious tendencies, I can invoke his own words as central to my inspiration. Did not the youthful Peirce himself castigate "the inhumanity of the polemic spirit" (*W* 1, 5)?⁴¹ In any event, the love of truth demands us to be more truthful about how mixed, often how violent, is our love of truth or anything else. Here as elsewhere we are likely to be "blind to our own blindness" (*CP* 6.560). We might profit from refusing to treat each other as knaves, or fools, or dupes, or charlatans, or sophists.⁴² The treatment which a shy, brilliant, stubborn, witty, and imaginative thinker received at the hands of other philosophers seems to me too often to have been a disgrace to our discipline.⁴³

⁴⁰ Again, I encourage readers to consult John E. Smith's playful distinction between *rorty* and *Rorty* cleverly modeled on Rorty's own distinction between *philosophy* and *Philosophy*. The ability to have deep misgivings about *Rorty* while having pragmatic sympathy with *rorty* seems clearly to signal (to use once again Segal's expression) the achievement of ambivalence.

⁴¹ "These reflections [on *Errare est hominis*]," writes Peirce when he was not yet twenty-one, "should teach us the inhumanity of the polemical spirit and should teach us still to revere a great man notwithstanding his mistakes." But they also argue for the identification of intellectual error with moral perversion: "The fact is, essential error can only arise from perversion, from wickedness, or from passion. Sincere and philosophic production have no other falsity than that which is inseparable from every human proposition" (*W* 1, 5). The conviction that this is so prompts us to question the motives of those whom we regard as essentially wrong, not just challenge the strength of their arguments or the reasonableness of their positions. Aye, here's the rub.

⁴² Here, once again, it is instructive to recall Kuhn's remark to his friend and colleague regarding the conduct of philosophers:

⁴³ Rorty hated bullies. (This of course does not preclude the possibility of this individual playing, in some respects and situations, precisely this role. My own take, however, is that he mostly avoids unwittingly replicating the role he most despised.) He appears to have been at a young age the target of their malevolence, a situation made especially complex for a boy who has not small for his age. He was also a child who loved to explore nature on his own. One of his professors at Yale worried that the bashful graduate student might actually bolt from the room when first assigned the task of teaching. Rorty's father rather cruelly told his son, as a late

Our often warranted exasperation might have taken various forms, not simply shrill ridicule or especially caustic ripostes. It might have taken the form of playful irony, specifically in offering an ironic portrait of this somewhat Protean figure, but a portrait offered as a sincere expression of philosophical friendship.⁴⁴

Is the fun to be had in refuting Richard Rorty truly greater than that of redescribing him as a Peircean? Is it greater in narrating a straightforward, serious – all too serious – account of pragmatism than in renarrating the complex history of Rorty's therapeutic interventions in this evolving tradition? These therapeutic interventions are, after all, more often than not helpful reminders⁴⁵ of what might without too much distortion be read as Peircean points or warnings. In general, a bit of fun does indeed help thought and also tends to keep it pragmatic (*CP* 5.71).⁴⁶ Might not Peircean playfulness encompass a

adolescent, that he had no talent for literary fiction. Nothing reductive is intended by assembling these biographical fragments. But, in some small measure, they might illuminate certain marked tendencies in Rorty's philosophical persona.

⁴⁴ Though I did not know Rorty well, I did know him. Moreover, I liked him a great deal. A colleague and I had lunch with him the last time he visited my university, not long before he died. On this occasion, I was reminded, once again, why I found him so likable and exasperating.

⁴⁵ "The work of the philosopher consists," Wittgenstein remarks in the *Investigation*, "in assembling reminders for a particular purpose" (I, #127). The extent to which philosophers, including most self-avowed pragmatists, need to be reminded of their implicit satisfaction with abstract, formal definitions – hence, their failure to feel the need for pragmatic, contextual clarifications (framed explicitly in terms of dispositional properties of objects and deliberately cultivated dispositions of agents) – is a measure of the extent to which the spirit (indeed, simply the letter) of Peirce has not been internalized by them.

⁴⁶ In "Thinking Cheerfully," James Ryerson observed: Rorty's gambit "placed him under pressure to project a certain attitude: unfazed, affable, confident." Perhaps the deepest spilt in Rorty's intellectual persona is evident right here. "With his heartfelt expressions of and his gift of blithely shrugging off criticism, on the printed page Rorty could be quite convincing at this. So it was striking to discover that he did not convey this lightness of tone in person. Few persons who heard him speak failed to remark on the contrast between the buoyancy of his written persona and his slightly depressive and weary mien. His friend and fellow philosopher Daniel Dennett once told me that Rorty reminded him of Eeyore, the gloom stuffed donkey from

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measure of Rortyeen irony, might not also the ironic portraitist be himself a subject for ironic portrayal, the uncompromising champion of strong misreading an occasion for a strong misreading? In turn, might not Peirce's periodic failures to move beyond abstract definitions and advance toward truly pragmatic clarifications be candidly acknowledged, might also not the endless wrangling at the level of formal definition fostered by avowed Peirceans be seen for what it is – a betrayal of Peirce's pragmatism, not an appropriate defense of a pragmatic orientation too often honored in word and disregarded in practice?

So let us translate our all too verbal quarrels into practical terms having directly to do with what at this historical juncture the defining exigencies of our evolving practices. In so doing, we would be following the sage advice of a Peircean pragmatist who ironically failed to see himself as such.

“Winnie-the-Pooh.” Ryerson seems to me insightful when he concludes by suggesting, Rorty “carried some unspoken burden or sorrow, as if, however liberating it might be to live without the idea of The Way Things Are, it could be hard to let it go.” Whether or not this was truly the source of Rorty's burden or sorrow, it was difficult in his presence not to sense at least something akin to sorrow.

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