

RORTY, HEGEL AND RORTY'S HEGEL

Tom Rockmore

(Duquesne University, rockmore@duq.edu)

For a brief shining moment, Richard Rorty dominated the Western philosophical scene. He was apparently everywhere at once, more than a match for his famous contemporaries Derrida and Habermas, a presence whose every word seemed to resonate, someone who placed himself outside philosophy as ordinarily conceived, which did not diminish but only redoubled his influence on the philosophical debate.

Rorty left the conceptual stage at the height of his influence. It remains to see what will remain of his work in the future, and to determine whether he represents more than a passing phase in the ongoing debate or someone whose influence in the discussion will remain constant or even increase. One cannot say the same for Hegel, who, although this is controversial, is arguably one of the very few true philosophical giants. Though Hegel also departed the scene at the height of his fame, since his death from cholera in Berlin in 1831 his reputation and influence have not diminished but continued to grow. Hegel, who has always been a controversial but influential figure, is arguably the most influential post-Kantian German idealist, directly and indirectly, especially through his impact on Marx, one of the most influential modern philosophers.

Rorty, of course, had no pretensions to be a Hegel scholar. Yet a glance at Rorty's writings will show that Hegel is a constant point of reference in Rorty's texts over many years. Hegel thus functions as one of the numerous thinkers in reference to whom Rorty defines his own philosophical view. This is in itself surprising since Rorty came to philosophical attention within the broader Anglo-American analytic tradition, which, since analytic philosophy emerged at the beginning of the

twentieth century, has always been suspicious of Hegel and only rarely taken his position seriously.

Rorty was, at least originally, an analytic philosopher. Twentieth century Western philosophy includes four main tendencies: Marxism, which was invented by Engels; American pragmatism, which builds on Peirce; continental philosophy, which continues the form of phenomenology invented by Husserl and continued by his many followers, including Heidegger; and finally analytic philosophy. Analytic philosophy was invented by two philosophers at the University of Cambridge, Russell and Moore, who were later joined by Wittgenstein.

Russell, who came to philosophy from mathematics, and Moore, who studied classics, had very different backgrounds and not surprisingly very different conceptions of analytic philosophy. Russell distrusted intuition on which Moore often relied in favoring the view of the ordinary individual. One thing they had in common was an early interest in idealism, which they both later abandoned in turning against it. Both Moore and Russell wrote dissertations on Kant, Moore on Kantian ethics and Russell on Kant's theory of mathematics. Initially at least both seem to have considered themselves as idealists. This quickly changed. Their shared rejection of idealism was one of the founding acts of analytic philosophy. This was set out in a famous article, "Refutation of Idealism," written by Moore.¹ In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant, who thought he was misinterpreted, inserted a short section of a page and a half to indicate inner thoughts proved the existence of the external world. Moore, who found Kant's view unsatisfactory, argued that all idealists of whatever stripe, and presumably Kant as well, share a rejection of the reality of the external world. This led to an analytic anathema against idealism that has never been lifted. Rorty is one of the analytic instigators of an ongoing analytic (re)turn to Hegel by McDowell, Brandon and a few others. Yet

¹ See G. E. Moore, "The Refutation of Idealism," *Mind* 12 (1903) 433-53.

significantly none of the analytic thinkers now turning to Hegel has so far considered Hegel in respect to idealism.

Rorty was never simply a follower, concerned to observe convention, even in his earliest philosophical writings. He always had broad philosophical interests well outside the mainstream of analytic philosophy. He diverged from the vast majority of analytic thinkers in taking Hegel, a clearly non-analytic thinker, seriously. With such prominent exceptions W. Sellars, who taught Hegel over many years at the University of Pittsburgh, and who described his own most important contribution to analytic philosophy of mind as Hegelian meditations, and Charles Taylor who explicated Hegel, few analytic thinkers were willing to devote more than the most passing attention to Hegel.

Hegel, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids"

Rorty emerged as a promising analytic philosopher who quickly reacted against mainstream analytic philosophy in criticizing its epistemological aspirations. Hegel was simply absent in *The Linguistic Turn* (1967), which initially brought Rorty to prominence. In this collection, Rorty was concerned with the nature and viability of analytic philosophy. His focus here was, as his subtitle indicated, on "Recent Essays in Analytic Philosophy." In the important Introduction, Rorty argued in detail that analytic attention to language identified analytic philosophy as one of the great periods in the entire tradition but that efforts to turn it into a science would fail. The extensive bibliography accompanying the volume pointed to many analytic as well as some non-analytic writers, such as Dewey and Heidegger, but Hegel was wholly absent.

Rorty later developed his attention to figures outside any normal understanding of analytic philosophy even as he widened his effort to work out a viable position. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), Rorty turned away from the relation of language to the world while focusing on Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey. At this

point, Hegel emerged in Rorty's texts as a minor but ongoing philosophical point of reference that remains throughout all his later writing. In fact, Hegel was apparently an early, even a decisive early interest in Rorty's intellectual development. In an autobiographical piece called "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" (1992), Rorty wrote the following retrospective passage, which, since it indicates Rorty's own understanding of the role Hegel played in his intellectual development, deserves to be cited at length²:

"I have spent 40 years looking for a coherent and convincing way of formulating my worries about what, if anything, philosophy is good for. My starting point was the discovery of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book which I read as saying: granted that philosophy is just a matter of out-re-describing the last philosopher, the cunning of reason can make use even of this sort of competition. It can use it to weave the conceptual fabric of a freer, better, more just society. If philosophy can be, at best, only what Hegel called 'its time held in thought', still, that might be enough. For by thus holding one's time, one might do what Marx wanted done - change the world. So even if there were no such thing as 'understanding the world' in the Platonic sense - an understanding from a position outside of time and history - perhaps there was still a social use for my talents, and for the study of philosophy.

For quite a while after I read Hegel, I thought that the two greatest achievements of the species to which I belonged were *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Remembrance of Things Past* (the book which took the place of the wild orchids once I left Flatbrookville for Chicago). Proust's ability to weave intellectual and social snobbery together with the hawthorns around Combray, his grandmother's selfless love, Odette's orchidaceous embraces of Swann and Jupien's [sic] of Charlus, and with everything else he encountered - to give each of these its due without feeling the need to bundle them together with the help of a religious faith or a philosophical theory - seemed to me as astonishing as Hegel's ability to throw himself successively into empiricism, Greek tragedy, Stoicism, Christianity and Newtonian physics, and to emerge from each, ready and eager for something completely different. It was the cheerful commitment to irreducible temporality which Hegel and Proust shared - the specifically anti-Platonic element in their work - that seemed so wonderful. They both seemed able to weave

² "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Penguin, 1999, p. 11.

everything they encountered into a narrative without asking that that narrative have a moral, and without asking how that narrative would appear under the aspect of eternity.

About 20 years or so after I decided that the young Hegel's willingness to stop trying for eternity, and just be the child of his time, was [12] the appropriate response to disillusionment with Plato, I found myself being led back to Dewey. Dewey now seemed to me a philosopher who had learned all that Hegel had to teach about how to eschew certainty and eternity, while immunizing himself against pantheism by taking Darwin seriously. This rediscovery of Dewey coincided with my first encounter with Derrida (which I owe to Jonathan Arac, my colleague at Princeton). Derrida led me back to Heidegger, and I was struck by the resemblances between Dewey's, Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms of Cartesianism. Suddenly things began to come together. I thought I saw a way to blend a criticism of the Cartesian tradition with the quasi-Hegelian historicism of Michel Foucault, Ian Hacking and Alasdair MacIntyre. I thought that I could fit all these into a quasi-Heideggerian story about the tensions within Platonism."

This passage is extremely interesting and in some ways at odds with the picture of Rorty's philosophical motivations that results merely from reading *The Linguistic Turn*. Rorty, like many others, famously like Marx, announces that early on he was concerned not merely to do philosophy but with what philosophy amounts to. He did not want merely to be another philosopher whose main contribution lies in either ignoring or even in reinforcing the status quo but rather someone who had a hand in changing things for the better. Philosophy here takes on a clear social role wholly unrelated to transforming philosophy into a science unless scientific philosophy is, as Kant thinks, intrinsically useful to all human beings. But that argument remains to be made and Rorty clearly is not making it here.

Marxism typically suggests that in virtue of their idealism, which seems to amount to the fact that they, like everyone else, depend on modern industrial capitalism, philosophers succumb to ideology that prevents them from grasping the world, which, on the contrary, Marx correctly comprehends. Rorty here

implicitly defends an anti or at least a non-Marxist perspective in implying Marx's goal could be reached on Hegelian grounds. The implication is that despite what Engels and other Marxists thought, one does not have to leave philosophy to realize it since philosophy can reach its goals within philosophy. Rorty, who here characterizes philosophy as consisting in a series of alternative descriptions of the world, suggests Marx's stated goal of changing the world can perhaps be achieved, not by grasping the world in itself, which no one can do and which amounts to Platonism, hence not through defending a form of metaphysical realism, but by grasping it philosophically within time and history. I take Rorty to be pointing to a historicist approach to knowledge clearly incompatible with the examination of the so-called linguistic turn in the collection of that name, hence incompatible with a centrally linguistic conception of philosophy. The problem is assuredly not the semantic problem of how words hook onto things, but rather how to comprehend the world when like all human beings one is situated within the historical flux.

Yet there is an obvious tension here between temporality and history or historicity, which surfaces in Rorty's reference to Hegel and Proust in the same breath. Rorty seems very oddly to regard them as doing about the same thing. Yet a reading of Proust and Hegel as sharing similar concerns apparently conflates time and history. Proust's aim is to recover what he calls lost time (*du temps perdu*), which is preserved in memory that can, through an appropriate stimulus, such as the famous incident of the madeleine, be made conscious. There is an analogy between Proust's concern to revive our memories of what has taken place, but been forgotten, and Freud's stress on the cathartic recovery of the repressed events of early childhood. Hegel's interest, on the contrary, lies in calling attention to the historical element in conceptual claims, which depend on the historical moment in which they occur. If Hegel is right, we cannot go beyond the historical moment in which we are always situated.

Rorty, who apparently overlooks this crucial distinction, draws attention to the anti-Platonic character of Hegel's suggestion that we necessarily think out of our historical moment. This claim requires some discussion. We do not know and cannot now determine Plato's view, if he had one. According to the theory of forms, which is routinely ascribed to him, Plato can be understood to believe, like Parmenides, that if there is knowledge, it must consist in a grasp of what, according to the theory of forms, can be described as mind-independent reality. In other words, and once again if and only if there is knowledge, there is a mind-independent reality that, under appropriate conditions, on grounds of nature and nurture, at least some talented individuals called philosophers can be said to grasp.

This general view of philosophy as social relevant is broadly Hegelian. Rorty shares with Hegel and many others a concern with what philosophy amounts to from a social perspective. This concern, with the exception of Schelling, runs throughout all the great German idealists from Kant through Hegel and, if Marx is an idealist, continues in Marx as well. Yet Rorty's view of philosophical social relevance seems thoroughly un-Hegelian. Thus, although he thinks of Hegel as indicating how philosophy can be socially relevant, he does not seem aware of Hegel's understanding of the philosophical mechanism through which philosophy makes its social contribution. Marx, of course, was skeptical of Hegel's view of philosophy as contributing to society. Early on, he argued that we should turn from philosophy to revolution. Later on, he thought that modern liberal capitalism will through its inner dialectic transform itself into something he called communism, but which has only the name in common with twentieth century political systems that feature that name.

Hegel's argument for the social utility of philosophy does not rely on leaving philosophy behind, or on the related idea of philosophy as pointing beyond itself to an extra-philosophical solution. It rather relies on a claim for the relation between philosophy, which he understands as a

historical form of cognition, and the historical moment. According to Hegel, philosophy, which arises only post facto, is a centrally important way of understanding what occurs, in Hegel's language its moment captured in thought. For Hegel, the retrospective capacity to understand what has happened is a key ingredient in making possible a future based on that understanding. In other words, philosophy is socially useful in promoting the realization of ideas through the self-understanding arrived at in comprehending the historical moment.

Rorty, who is an epistemological skeptic, has to resolve the problem of how to attribute a social role to philosophy, a role that cannot be based on its cognitive function, since it has none. His rejection of a historical form of cognition, which follows from his rejection of epistemology in general, leads him toward a novel conception of pragmatism. Pragmatism in all its forms is a-historical. This is a major difference between classical pragmatism, which reacts to Kant, and post-Kantian German idealism, which also reacts to Kant in moving toward a historical reinterpretation of the critical philosophy. Pragmatism, which is anti-foundationalist, can be understood as an effort to continue the epistemological debate after the turn away from Cartesian foundationalism. Peirce, for instance, famously favors an understanding of reality as what science arrives at in the long run. Rorty, who is opposed to knowledge claims in general, turns away from Peirce, arguably the central figure on any of the usual approaches to pragmatism. The result is an idiosyncratic reading of pragmatism beginning in James and continuing in Dewey, whom Rorty presents as the truth of both German idealism and Hegel in particular, as well as the high point of pragmatism. Thus he ends his autobiographical sketch, in which he calls attention to the significance for his own philosophical approach of Hegel and Proust in indicating that both pale before the importance of Dewey. Dewey, who famously declines an interest in the problem of knowledge in general, favors a process of inquiry, whose appeal to Rorty lies in the fact that, instead of fruitless epistemological claims, Dewey

offers a dream of a democratic community based not on knowledge but rather on solidarity. According to Rorty, "The democratic community of Dewey's dreams ... is a community in which nobody everybody thinks that it is human solidarity, rather than knowledge of something not merely human, that really matters."³ Rorty goes on to claim that Dewey's approximation to "a fully democratic, fully secular community" is "the greatest achievements of our species" (sic), and that in comparison "Hegel's and Proust's book seem optional, orchidaceous extras."⁴ His preference for democracy, which accords well with the direction of Dewey's thought, does not, however, solve the problem of how to justify the social utility of philosophy, which, in virtue of Rorty's epistemological skepticism, remains unresolved.

In his later writings, Rorty continued to feature Hegel, but, perhaps in virtue of his own anti-epistemological stance, only as a minor strand in a position that turns on the rejection of claims to know. Even in the autobiographical context, Rorty seems to imply Hegel is more important to him personally than he is finally willing to admit. Here the difference between idealism and pragmatism comes into play. An important difference between Kant and Hegel lies in the a-historical form of idealism Kant features that, by the time it gets to Hegel, has become thoroughly historical. Pragmatism of all kinds is not unfriendly toward but also not interested in history as such. None of the classical American pragmatists features a historical conception of philosophy. Rorty, who is an epistemological skeptic, is, unlike Hegel defending a historical view of knowledge. He is rather interested in defending the paradoxical view, familiar in the debate at least since Socrates, that we know there is no knowledge. This explains the fact that even in the autobiographical sketch, where he seems close, or closest to Hegel, or at least close to a form of Hegelianism that seems to promise the realization of social change through philosophy, he is

closer still to a pragmatist like Dewey whom Rorty reads as reticent to engage in theory of knowledge.

In giving up Hegel and Proust for Dewey, Rorty turns away from the social function of philosophy, or at least demotes it to a secondary theme. His central concern now becomes the ability of philosophy to carry out its epistemological program, which was central in *The Linguistic Turn*, and which is further developed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Already in the former book, Rorty indicates toward the end of the Introduction, that the Cartesian spectator view leads to a series of difficulties that disappear in rejecting the view of knowledge as "the presentation of something "immediately given" to the mind, where the mind is conceived of as a sort of immaterial eye," and where "immediately" means, at a minimum, "without the mediation of language."⁵

Hegel and *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

Rorty develops his critique of epistemology in detail in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, his most important book. The title of this book points beyond the familiar Cartesian spectator view to a particular epistemological thesis associated more narrowly with F. Bacon, Engels, Lenin, the early Wittgenstein and others, and which in Marxism is known as the reflection theory of knowledge. There is a difference between the spectator view and the reflection theory of knowledge. The spectator view, which precedes Descartes, is at least as old as the Platonic conception that on grounds of nature and nurture some among us known as philosophers can intuit invisible mind-independent reality. The spectator view attributed to Descartes, and adopted by many others, takes many forms. One form is the thesis that in knowing the mind must, as the title of Rorty's book suggests, reflect the way the world is, or act as the mirror of nature. In the famous account of the divided

³ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 20.

⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 20.

⁵ Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 39n.

line in the *Republic*, Plato asserts that if the line is divided into visible and invisible parts, the visible consists of images, including reflections situated in the imagination, which are images of animals, plants and other things.⁶ In the spectator theory of knowledge, invisible reality gives way to visible nature that, in the reflection theory of knowledge, one knows by reflecting it.

Rorty's aim in this book seems to be to refute the Cartesian spectator view in the form of the reflection theory of knowledge and, hence, epistemology in all its forms. In the Introduction to *The Linguistic Turn*, Rorty presents attention to language as centrally important, but less so than the critique of the spectator view. The refutation of the spectator view is the central task of the *Mirror* book. The main point, which is continuous with but different from the view adumbrated in the autobiographical essay, is that philosophy has no distinctive role to play since theory of knowledge fails.⁷ Rorty signals this inference in the last sentence of the book where he recommends continuing the conversation of the West without insisting on a specific place within it for the traditional problems of modern philosophy. Yet this conclusion seems hasty, more than the argument can bear. If I am correct that the reflection theory of knowledge is no more than a variation on the theme of the spectator theory, it follows that a refutation of the former does not necessarily count as a refutation of the latter. It follows that despite the evident interest of what Rorty says in this book, he fails to clinch the case he builds against the Cartesian spectator view.

The other problem is the modified role he now accords to Hegel in this book. In the *Mirror* book, he supplements his earlier remarks Dewey with equally appreciative comments about Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey. As in the autobiographical piece, he again

credits the latter with offering a naturalized version of Hegel's vision of history.⁸ In the *Mirror* book, the main reference to Hegel is as a counterweight to Kant and the return to Kantian theory of knowledge after Hegel. In this regard, Rorty makes two points: first, it was only after Hegelianism receded that epistemology as we now know it emerged; and, second, it became apparent after Hegel that we cannot ground claims to know in anything like world-spirit but must justify claims for objectivity.⁹ Both these points are controversial. Although Rorty takes a softer line on the linguistic turn in this volume, he seems still to overestimate the importance of words in linking the rise of epistemology to the use of "epistemology" and related terms (e. g. Epistemologie, Erkenntnistheorie, Vernunftkritik, etc.) by Zeller and other neo-Kantians. If Kant invented theory of knowledge worthy of the name, then it originated around the time of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If not, then, as many think, it arguably goes back to early Greek philosophy and merely receives an important make over in at the time of Kant. Second, in suggesting that Hegel wants to ground all the disciplines on world-spirit Rorty, who never discusses Hegel's position, apparently relies on philosophical gossip about it in attributing a view to Hegel that is arguably in what one says about Hegel's writings but not in his texts.

"Dewey between Hegel and Darwin"

In the *Mirror* book, Rorty contends that with Wittgenstein and Dewey that we should not think of knowledge as a problem for which we have a theory. If the epistemological approach to philosophy is optional, then so is philosophy that focuses on it. In "Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin," Rorty returns to the interpretation of Dewey broached in the autobiographical sketch. In the sketch, Rorty depicted Dewey as offering a naturalized version of Hegelian historicism. He now enriches that basic claim in focusing on the role

⁶ See Plato, *Republic*, 510A, translated by G. M. A. Grube, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992, p. 183.

⁷ See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 394.

⁸ See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 5.

⁹ See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 233-235.

of Darwin in the formulation of Dewey's thought. Rorty now stresses Hegel's historicism in downplaying his idealism.¹⁰ Rorty takes it as a given that there are different Hegels, or at least different ways of reading his position accordingly as we emphasize one strand or another. It never seems to occur to him, since there is no direct interpretation of Hegel's texts, that perhaps Hegel's idealism and his historicism are interrelated through his constructivist approach to knowledge. If this is true, then it is not possible to hold onto the historicism without adopting the idealism as well.

Rorty is interested in finding out what can be defended and what must be rejected in Dewey, whose pragmatism he depicts as the positive outcome of the German idealist tradition. With this in mind, Rorty proposes an interpretation of Dewey's relation to Hegel in which Dewey is neither a panpsychist nor a radical empiricist. Rorty follows Manfred Franks' point that after Hegel philosophers must give up the idea of a transhistorical frame of reference lying beyond language, which in turn allows a distinction between historicism, which denies we can match up language to the world, and scientism, or the claim that natural science is closer to the world than other activities.¹¹ Dewey's contribution lies in formulating a view of truth that does not rely on getting it right about the world based on a turn to Darwin in merging the vocabulary of epistemology with that of evolutionary biology.¹² In this respect, Rorty makes three key claims. First, Darwin finished the job begun by Galileo in eliminating purpose from nature; Second, Darwin shows us how to naturalize Hegel in retaining a Hegelian account of progress while dispensing with the claim that the real is the rational¹³; and, third, Dewey's position is "a genuine marriage of Darwin with a de-absolutized Hegel."¹⁴

All three claims are controversial. Rorty is right that there is a close, but probably still not well-comprehended link between pragmatism and German idealism, and further between Dewey and Hegel. American pragmatism is in part the product of a complex reaction to nineteenth century German idealism. Peirce famously claimed to know Kant's first *Critique* almost by heart. He was initially unfavorable to Hegel, whom he later regarded as mainly differing from his own position through a different vocabulary.¹⁵ James never knew much about Peirce or the German idealists. Dewey was influenced by the St. Louis Hegelians as well as by Hegel in ways that we still do not completely understand. Through recent publications, we now know more than Rorty did about Dewey's reading of Hegel.¹⁶

Rorty's first claim refers to the relation of physics and biology, Galileo and Darwin. Galileo's successful application of mathematics to nature does not eliminate purpose from physics, which is still featured by Newton. In the third *Critique*, it is known that Kant, who focuses on a teleological approach to nature, still dreams of a Newton of a blade of grass. It is further tendentious to claim that Darwin shows us how to naturalize Hegel. It needs to be shown that Hegel, a pre-Darwinian figure, is committed to a form of teleology that after Darwin is attributable to natural selection. It further needs to be shown that after Darwin a recognizable version of Hegel's position can still be maintained. From an epistemological perspective, Hegel's view of progress consists in arriving at a better theory about what is given in experience. This might be paraphrased as a theory that does everything the preceding theory does plus at least one thing it should do but fails to do.

Rorty's second claim implies that Darwinism is incompatible with Hegelianism, which it supposedly

¹⁰ See "Dewey between Hegel and Darwin," in Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers 3: Truth and Progress*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 292.

¹¹ See Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, pp. 293-294.

¹² See Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 299.

¹³ See Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 300.

¹⁴ Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 304.

¹⁵ See, for this argument, Tom Rockmore, "Hegel, Peirce and Knowledge," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1999, pp. 166-184.

¹⁶ See *John Dewey's Philosophy of Spirit, with the 1897 Lecture on Hegel*, edited by John R. Shook and James A. Good, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.

corrects by advancing a theory of biological evolution in place of the development of spirit. Yet this is incorrect. Since the Hegelian conception of spirit cannot simply be reduced to nature, Hegel's problems cannot be solved on the level of modern biology. Rorty seems to believe that Darwinian evolution is incompatible with Hegel's position, and in particular with the view that the real is the rational. This inference is based on the relation between science and philosophy. After Darwin Hegel's thesis that the real is the rational remains unaffected. Hegel's thesis points to a minimal condition for the intelligibility of our surroundings. The alternative is to give up the idea that we can know our surroundings and ourselves if they cannot be grasped through human reason. In this respect, Hegel and Darwin are not incompatible but compatible. Darwinian evolutionary theory, which can be depicted as a way of grasping the intrinsic rationality of experience, is committed to a form of the thesis that the real is the rational.

Finally the third claim that Dewey's position is a genuine marriage of Darwin with a supposedly de-absolutized Hegel depends on interpretations of both Dewey and Hegel that Rorty never proposes. This has been Rorty's claim all along. The main difference between the way Rorty depicts the relation of Dewey to Hegel in the autobiographical sketch and in the *Mirror* book, and the way he depicts it here, is that Rorty now suggests that in turning to Darwin Dewey discovers the non-metaphysical historicist Hegel. In replacing the Hegelian absolute by Darwinism, historicism by scientism, Rorty substitutes pragmatism for idealism. Yet this is problematic since historicism cannot be understood simply as a claim that we cannot match up a trans-historical frame of reference with mind-independent reality. Kant, an a-historical thinker, denies precisely this point in the famous Copernican revolution. According to Kant, we cannot claim to represent mind-independent reality, which we uncover, discover, or reveal, since we can only claim to know what we in some sense construct, product, or make. Hegel and other post-Kantian German idealists follow this Kantian insight in

rethinking the problem of knowledge in historical terms. Yet if as I believe none of the American pragmatists can be described as a historical thinker, in other words as committed to some version of the view that cognitive claims depend on the historical context, then it is incorrect to depict Dewey as naturalizing Hegelian historicism. To put the point simply but not inaccurately: a turn toward Darwin or science in general is not the same thing as, nor a substitute for, a post-Kantian historical account of knowledge.

Conclusion: Rorty, Hegel and Rorty's Hegel

The conclusion is obvious. Rorty, who does not seem to know much about Hegel, uses the latter mainly as a foil, as a promissory note for what is left over after we deny theory of knowledge understood as matching words up to things, our claims about the world to the mind-independent world, or an approach that simply cannot justify its claims to objectivity. Rorty's original objective as described in the autobiographical sketch lies in finding a reason to carry on philosophy, which seemed to be justified through Hegel and Proust, but could finally only be tied to Dewey's form of pragmatism. Yet his identification of Dewey's theory as a naturalized form of Hegelian historicism is undermined by a basic unclarity about the nature of historicism, hence Dewey's relation to historicism and to Hegel.

There is a lack of seriousness in Rorty's claim that "The problem with Hegel and Darwin has always been that Hegel seems to say that human civilization just couldn't casually be wiped out by a plague or a comet"¹⁷ Yet the difficulty runs deeper than that, deeper than Rorty's deliberately playful tone. Rorty's Hegel is a distant relative of the left-wing Hegelian interpretation, which arose after his death in 1831. The right Hegelians thought Hegel was a kind of theologian, who privileged the religious element, something the left Hegelians accepted as a correct reading of Hegel and criticized. But what if Hegel were not offering a theologically-centered

¹⁷ See Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 300.

theory at all, but rather a form of post-Kantian constructivism consisting in formulating, trying out and then reformulating successive theories, each attempting to go further than preceding theories about experience? In that case Hegel's historicism and his idealism would be two sides of the same position, and, since they could not be simply severed, that is, since one could not have Hegelian historicism without Hegelian idealism, it could not be the case that like Marx Dewey gave up Hegel's idealism in adopting his historicism.¹⁸

Rorty fails to see, perhaps because he is an epistemological skeptic opposed to any theory of knowledge, that the interest of Hegel does not lie only in rejecting metaphysical realism. It also lies in an interesting form of epistemological constructivism without making any claim for a cognitive grasp of mind-independent reality as it is. If Dewey had been a historical thinker, and if he had taken the German idealist turn towards constructivism seriously, then Rorty could correctly have claimed that Dewey provides a naturalized form of Hegelian historicism. But since Dewey's theory differs from Hegel's, and since it cannot merely be understood as a further development of German idealism, I conclude that Rorty's contention that Dewey provides a naturalized form of Hegelian historicism is wide of the mark.

¹⁸ See Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 30: "If all this sounds vaguely reminiscent of Marx, that is because Marx and Dewey were steeped in Hegel, especially his idealism and because both rejected everything nonhistorical in Hegel, especially his idealism.. Both kept only those parts of Hegel which could easily be reconciled with Darwin."