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Richard Rorty's Metaphilosophy and the Consequences for Edifying Theology

By

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presented to the University of Waterloo
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in

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Abstract

The intent of this dissertation is to set forth the philosophical and theological groundwork for appropriating Richard Rorty's metaphilosophical critique into theological terms. It is a work that bridges (or better, *blurs* the boundaries between) contemporary philosophy, the philosophy of religion, philosophical theology, and theology. It is a hermeneutical project situated within the death of God, at least as interpreted by the French theologian Gabriel Vahanian.

The first chapter outlines Vahanian's sense of the death of God, and how it finds parallel with Rorty's understanding of the "demise of the philosophical tradition." Of importance is how these trends within theological and philosophical thought render obsolete traditional issues in the philosophy of religion. That is once objectivity, rationality, and truth are redefined, the antithetical polarization between faith-reason, science-religion, and objectivity-subjectivity are severed. This, in turn, renders appellations such as "atheist" and "theist" vestiges of a bygone era. Other debates, such as traditional arguments over the existence of God, become uninteresting at best.

Chapter two is devoted to Rorty's analysis of traditional philosophy, traced from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to the third volume of his philosophical papers *Truth and Progress*. Of central importance is the language of traditional philosophy, with particular detail given to the nature of objectivity, rationality, the "scientific method," and truth. This traditional paradigm is in contrast to Rorty's sense of *philosophical* progress, described as the increase in solidarity. The third section of this chapter develops Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies as described in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. This distinction serves as the basis for a similar case made in theology.

The third chapter explores the ethical implications of Rorty's position as applied to the

philosophy of education. Here I compare a Rortyan, or pragmatic view of values education to that of a realist's account. I argue that the pragmatist's position serves better in the effort to develop the "rational and moral autonomy of children." The second part of this chapter examines Rorty's sense of ethics as the inculcation of sentimentality.

In chapter four I explore how Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies can be applied in the theological context, distinguishing between systematic and edifying theologies. With respect to systematic theology, I argue that similar philosophy, theological discourse (and hence the philosophy of religion) was infected by systematic philosophy, obscuring and redefining its theoretical and practical field of investigations. Edifying theology, similar to edifying philosophy, turns from robust metaphysical inquiry to the Deweyan *problems of society*. In the last part of this chapter I discuss how edifying theology, while sharing edifying philosophy's pragmatic concerns, remains uniquely theological.

The fifth and final chapter turns to an account of the philosophy of religion as developed in a recent unpublished manuscript by Rorty. I pay particular attention to how this account is compatible with edifying theology. The second half of this chapter deals with Alvin Plantinga's forthcoming book on warrant and Christian belief. My interest lies particularly with a section in Plantinga's book that takes to task Rorty's view of truth. In this section Plantinga seeks to show that whatever sense can be made of Rorty's position, it does not offer "defeaters" for Christian belief. I argue that Plantinga is right but for the wrong reason. That is, while Rorty's view of truth does not offer defeaters for Christian belief, the reason is not because Rorty's view is incoherent. Rather, read fairly and charitably, Rorty's view is not only coherent, but as well quite compatible with some interpretations of Christian belief.

In conclusion, this thesis is highly exploratory. Beyond applying metaphilosophical

distinctions into the theological context. If successful the implications for the philosophy of religion would be significant. In short, it would result in nothing short of a complete reconfiguration of its subject matter. And so while the death of God, philosophically, theologically, and culturally brings to an end a number of traditions, it marks the beginning of a new frontier of investigations. It is hoped that this thesis makes a small step in that direction.

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I learned early in my university days that department secretaries are the ones who are the most capable when it comes to resolving the most serious problems encountered by graduate students. I am indebted to Debbie Dietrich and Linda Daniel for masterfully dealing with those problems that arose in the course of my studies at the University of Waterloo.

Writing a doctoral dissertation has broken many men and women. I am grateful to Wendy Hicks who listened during those months when the battle was most fierce.

Of course I thank my parents who taught me to pursue my dreams.

Prologue

"And we should consider every day lost on which we have not danced at least once. And we should call every truth false which was no accompanied by at least one laugh."

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*

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Introduction

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Chapter two is devoted to Rorty's analysis of traditional philosophy, traced from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to the third volume of his philosophical papers *Truth and Progress*. Of central importance is the language of traditional philosophy, with particular detail given to the nature of objectivity, rationality, the "scientific method," and truth. This traditional paradigm is in contrast to Rorty's sense of *philosophical* progress, described as the increase in solidarity. The third section of this chapter develops Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies as described in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. This distinction serves as the basis for a similar case made in theology.

The third chapter explores the ethical implications of Rorty's position as applied to the philosophy of education. Here I compare a Rortyan, or pragmatic view of values education to that

of a realist's account. I argue that the pragmatist's position serves better in the effort to develop the "rational and moral autonomy of children." The second part of this chapter examines Rorty's sense of ethics as the inculcation of sentimentality.

In chapter four I explore how Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies can be applied in the theological context, distinguishing between systematic and edifying theologies. With respect to systematic theology, I argue that similar to philosophy, theological discourse (and hence the philosophy of religion) was distorted by systematic philosophy, obscuring and redefining its theoretical and practical field of investigations. Edifying theology, similar to edifying philosophy, turns from robust metaphysical inquiry to the Deweyan *problems of society*. In the last part of this chapter I discuss how edifying theology, while sharing edifying philosophy's pragmatic concerns, remains uniquely theological.

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In conclusion, this thesis is highly exploratory. If it is successful its implications for the philosophy of religion would be significant. In short, it would result in nothing short of a complete

reconfiguration of its subject matter. And so while the death of God, philosophically, theologically, and culturally brings to an end a number of traditions, it marks the beginning of a new frontier of investigations. It is hoped that this thesis makes a small step in that direction.

I. Contextualizing the Study

> "Theology is useless without the cultural tools to communicate it. So long as we do not meet the present crisis from this angle, our civilization will be able to build neither temple nor a tomb."
>
> - Gabriel Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*

A. Metaphilosophy and the Possibilities for Theology

Despite the fact that there is a wide range of judgment regarding the importance of Richard Rorty's[1] writings, there is little doubt over their provocative effect. This effect is not especially due to the fact that what Rorty says is novel since one can find detractors of the philosophical tradition with Plato's interlocutors. It is perhaps due more to where Rorty stands in relation to the history of philosophy. Whereas those arguing with Plato did not know any better than to try to answer his queries over definitions of justice and goodness, today's philosopher, informed by the three thousand year-old conversation, may be more hesitant. He or she may even go so far as to say that given the period of time that this conversation has been going on, with all its laborious arguments, it is time to change the topic of conversation. This is, in effect, the substance of Rorty's position.

Rorty has certainly convinced some intellectuals, philosophers and otherwise, that the issues and problems must change to a more pragmatic, concrete nature. Instead of highly

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[1] Richard Rorty is presently finishing his academic career at Stanford. Previous to this he had been Kenan Professor of Humanities at University of Virginia. He taught at Wellesley and, from 1961 to 1982, at Princeton University, where he was Stuart Professor of Philosophy. Kuipers has commented saying, "Richard Rorty is arguably one of the most important and influential thinkers of the late twentieth century. Despite this importance and influence, however, his work has tended to evoke a strong negative reaction from many philosophers. In fact, a common response from the philosophical community to his bold and often bluntly stated ideas has been a curious form of intellectual disdain." Ronald A. Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger: Themes in the social philosophy of Richard Rorty* (Boston: University Press of America, 1997), p. 1.

metaphysical inquiries (such as what really exists or what the real nature of things is), attention turns to pressing issues of contemporary society: racial and economic injustices, discrimination based on sex and gender, education, unemployment, and rights and duties. In short, the Deweyan "problems of society."

Irrespective of Rorty's highly critical analysis of the philosophical tradition (or Philosophy), and his unorthodox replacement, Rorty still sees a role for philosophy. Irrespective of whether or not one believes that Rorty's diagnosis and prognosis of philosophy is on the mark, there is little doubt that his position has tremendous implications. One can imagine, for example, the ramifications of Rorty's contention that truth as correspondence fails as a means of discriminating between large-scale beliefs. If truth as correspondence fails to match words to an object, claims that Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Materialism, or Atheism reflect the world "as it really is" would evoke only puzzlement on the part of the rest of the community. This can be phrased slightly different. In Nietzschean terms, even if the conservative Catholic or Protestant fundamentalist were correct (*viz.*, that their views actually represented the Truth), we would still ask ourselves what it would mean to assent to such Truth; who would we become by granting such assent?[2]

Rorty's attack on Philosophy is far reaching. Discarding correspondence theories of truth, Rorty has no use for epistemological realism and its concomitant terms objectivity, rationality, and the privileging of the "scientific method" over the humanities. Rorty's metaphilosophy has numerous, quite complex implications for all these subjects. But for the purposes of this study, I

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[2] "A question seems to lie heavily on our tongue and yet refuses to be uttered: whether one *could* consciously reside in untruth? or, if one were *obliged* to, whether death would not be preferable?" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All To Human: A book for free spirits*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 29; emphasis his.

wish to specifically focus on those implications for Christian theology. It is not difficult to understand why this is of interest.

Once Constantine transformed Christianity from a religion of martyrdom to the official state religion, theologians and philosophers, with their new-found leisure, began the debate over doctrine. And while some, such as Tertullian, questioned the rapport that Jerusalem was to have with Athens, the philosophical project, in its quest for Truth and certainty, was quickly assimilated into theological thought. As a result, theological investigation became embroiled with philosophical subjects of inquiry. And instead of theology being concerned with the existential condition of humankind, its attention was turned to the topic of conversation determined by the philosopher. As a result, theology had become as ineffectual for social concerns as philosophy. There nevertheless have been both philosophers and theologians who have kept one eye on their writings and the other eye on culture. Two contemporary examples are the philosopher Richard Rorty and the theologian Gabriel Vahanian[3].

Vahanian is best known as one of the principal "Death of God" theologians. He has argued that the death of God has been brought about by two factors. The first is that Christianity has become overly assimilated into the culture of the present. And while to be effective Christianity must always be modified, assimilated, and absorbed into its immediate culture, contemporary Christianity has undergone this process without keeping an eye on the "rear-view mirror"[4] – a looking back not only to see that one is headed in the right direction but to keep in mind, as well,

[3] Gabriel Vahanian taught at Princeton, Syracuse, and at l'Université de Metz and l'Université de Strasbourg where he is presently *Professeur Emeritus.*

[4] Using here Rorty's own appropriation of Kuhn's delightful metaphor.

the road traveled. By not keeping its forward progress in check, Christianity becomes merely self-fixated, gaunt, and desultory.[5]

The death of God was not brought about merely through detachment with its history. The second factor contributing to this death was from the other extreme; namely, the heaviness of history. The theological task, instead of being a project of responsibility to be renewed for each generation[6], codified and solidified its beliefs, values, and norms. Doctrine became immutable and irrevocable. As a consequence, religious belief became obscure, cryptic, and, because it no longer spoke to its immediate culture, irrelevant.

The death of God, then, is the consequence of two extremes: perfunctory performance and static, hoary dogma. These are the worst of what religion may bring. Here the insights of

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[5] This is not to say that the death of God should be interpreted as the end of interest in religion. In fact the continuation of interest in religion is indicative of this death. The rise of Christian Fundamentalism, for example, is Christianity *cum* hybrid – a cultural situatedness leading to an interpretation of Hebrew scripture and the New Testament, based on its own self-image. The result in this case are the "blue laws" of Fundamentalism – prohibition against gambling, drinking, dancing, all associated with the activities in the frontier town saloon (that was often the town brothel). Once the cultural phenomenon drops away the blue laws remain as a continuing index of one's spiritual condition. Proof-texts are sought within scripture, and obvious points of conflict, such as Christ turning water into wine or drinking wine, reinterpreted according to presuppositions. Authentic Christianity soon becomes synonymous with, for example, Southern Baptist values and norms. Without a stretch of imagination, so they believe, this is the way it has always been. This is understood not as debate between North American, late 20th century fundamentalists and secular society. It is rather the *Truth of the Gospel* standing in judgment over contemporary society. And so contemporary society, clearly understanding, at best the irrelevancy, at worst the boredom, of such a view of the world, continues along its way.

[6] "Such is the secret truth of faith as absolute responsibility and as absolute passion, the 'highest passion' as Kierkegaard will say; it is a passion that, sworn to secrecy, cannot be transmitted from generation to generation. In this sense it has no history . . . we must always start over . . . Each generation must begin again to involve itself in it without counting on the generation before. It thus describes the nonhistory of absolute beginnings which are repeated, and the very historicity that presupposes a tradition to be reinvented each step of the way, in this incessant repetition of the absolute beginning." Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, translated by David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 80.

Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud find their relevance. This is what makes *the religious experience* (for lack of a better phrase) capable of being most sublime and most terrible.

In another development, there are philosophers of religion and theologians who have sensed the shift in the "mindscape"[7] of Western society, often interpreting it as evidence of culture in rebellion.[8] *Secularization* became the hobgoblin of the religious Right. To be thwarted by intensified evangelism, the church dug in its theological heels. The struggle over cultural turf ensued, with political power (once the executrix of the martyr) becoming a tool for attaining spiritual ends. Cultural superiority[9] and political might usher in the Kingdom of God.

Vahanian, however, interprets the death of God in optimistic terms. For while the death of God calls for the end to certain forms of Christianity, the death of God releases *the other God* from cultural superfluity. Once released, liberty gives way to new possibilities. Once retraced, new possibilities find incipience in ancient responsibilities.[10] This view of the death of God is not far from Nietzsche's own:

> [Nietzsche's] "atheism" is not concerned with the simple possibility of God, but rather asserts a distinction between a heavily conceptualized and domesticated God and a divinity free from the conceptual weight of metaphysical theology.[11]

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[7] Gabriel Vahanian, "The Denatured Nature of Ethics: In Praise of the Secular," *Philosophie de la religion entre éthique et ontologie*, Biblioteca dell' Archivio di Filosofia, Cedam, textes réunis par Marco M. Olivetta, (1996), p. 503.

[8] "The term 'modern culture', has hardly any definable content beyond an almost universal aversion of traditional attitudes and values." Louis Dupré, *Metaphysics and Culture*, The Aquinas Lecture 1994 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), p. 36.

[9] This attitude is seen best with Evangelicals\Fundamentalists who continually bring forward their apologists with Ph.D.'s from some of the most eminent universities in the world, to debate the hoary questions of the philosophy of religion. The bugbear lurking is the old fundamentalist worry that "secular" scholars will somehow convince us that no self-respecting thinker could be an Evangelical\Fundamentalist. Again, the fight is over the cultural turf of North American society. The hope on the part of the Evangelical\Fundamentalist is that with enough Ph.D.'s on their side, they win the debate.

[10] "Religion is responsibility or it is nothing at all." Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 2.

[11] Michel Haar, "Nietzsche and the Metamorphosis of the Divine," translated by M. Gendre, *Post-*

With the death of God traditional theology is no longer an option.[12] This study attempts to provide one possible means by which theology may be recovered[13], and how as a consequence, the philosophy of religion will be reconfigured.[14]

Contemporary Christianity's cultural manifestations, and its corresponding irrelevancy, is mirrored in contemporary metaphilosophical debate by the call for the end of traditional philosophy. Because of the close and tumultuous historical relationship between theology and philosophy, this growing debate among philosophers should not escape the notice of philosophers of religion and theologians. History has repeatedly shown that what became troubling and problematic for one turned into concern for the other. Similar to identical twins (who, separated over time and distance, still invariably sense the presence of the other), philosophers and theologians cannot completely undo their once holy union.[15] And so, perhaps not surprisingly,

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Secular Philosophy: between philosophy and theology (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 157.

[12] When referring to "traditional theology" I mean those theological traditions that heavily depended upon systematic philosophy's definitions of essence, reason, and objectivity.

[13] It is to be admitted at the outset that the task of recovering theology will come only with great difficulty and risk. As Vahanian has put the problem, "To paraphrase St. Vincent of Lerins, the task is to say all things in a new way without proclaiming insidious novelties. The time has come to proclaim the gospel in a new, bold manner, yet without proclaiming a new gospel. Never easy, this kind of task is still more difficult today, and the future quite precarious, what with all the newfangled ideologies that compete with Christianity - and not always unsuccessfully - both at home and abroad." Gabriel Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols* (New York: George Braziller, 1964), p. 236.

[14] As Kerr puts the issue, "We do not have to choose between the leap in the dark of radical transcendence and hiding in the pure immanence of the familiar world. That is perhaps a theologian's dilemma that a philosopher of religion would hope to put aside." Fergus Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), p. 184.

[15] We should be mindful of Gilson's most helpful insight that "when religion tries to establish itself on the ruins of philosophy, there usually arises a philosopher to found philosophy on the ruins of religion." Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 35.

some of the most interesting implications of the death of God are to be found coming forth not from the pen of a theologian, but a philosopher; namely Rorty.

The radical shift from a "cultural tradition of the Christian era" to "our post-Christian age"[16] is evidenced through Rorty's critique of the philosophical tradition, as well as his views on religious belief. Abandoning all hope for establishing metaphysical truths and epistemological foundations, traditional philosophy faces its own fall from on high. Interpreted by Rorty, this is an event to be welcomed. He wishes to carry this to the very end by redefining those words most central to Philosophy's language - rationality, objectivity, and truth. He is an iconoclast who, once started, is difficult to restrain. In the end, Rorty's evaluation of traditional philosophy reduces *philosophy* to the task of "clarifying the ideas men and women have on those issues that divide them."[17] Philosophy, transformed, will redirect its efforts away from hoary metaphysical problems towards the *problems of society.*[18] So begins the progression toward the total secularization of philosophy.

The traditional conception of Philosophy[19], understood as the desire for a *God's eye view of reality* (i.e. the obsession "with the primal world of some final vocabulary, with truth or

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[16] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, pp. v-vi.

[17] Vahanian, "The Denatured Nature of Ethics," p. 508.

[18] Rorty's disdain for metaphysics has a close connection to his view of ethics. Rorty cites Sidney Hook here: "Traditional metaphysics has always been a violent and logically impossible attempt to impose some parochial scheme of values upon the cosmos in order to justify or undermine a set of existing social institutions by a pretended deduction from the nature of Reality . . . But once crack the shell of any metaphysical doctrine, what appears is not verifiable knowledge but a directing bias . . . the preeminent subject matter of philosophy has been the relation between things and values." Sidney Hook, *John Dewey* (New York: John Day, 1939), pp. 34-35; as quoted by Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 74. Dewey, moreover, "thinks that the moral of the story is that metaphysics, having exhausted its potentialities, leaves us with nothing except an increased appreciation for our concrete problems – for beings." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 49.

[19] Rorty distinguishes between "Philosophy" and "philosophy" in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of*

objectivity"[20]), must undergo transformation. And once philosophy loses its ontological footing, because of theology's dependence upon the same language, theological language as well falls from its metaphysical loftiness. Intent on completely doing away with traditional philosophy and, as a consequence, religious language, Rorty's thought is indicative of the profundity to which the death of God has reached into Western civilization.

Rorty's metaphilosophical account is one example of the theoretical barriers that resist attempts to reinvigorate forms of discourse that have become worn-out or uninteresting. But while his critique abolishes both philosophical and theological nostalgia, I believe it allows for their respective redescription. In this way, Rorty's critique assists in the task of recovering theological language, of creating new conversations in the philosophy of religion. The call for the end of Philosophy does not mean that philosophy, in all its forms, must end. This study, it is hoped, is one example of how at least the philosophy of religion may proceed after Philosophy. It is an *applied* philosophy of religion - appropriating the consequences of a metaphilosophical analysis into theological, and of necessity, ethical terms.

It is my contention that the death of God, coupled with "the demise of the philosophical tradition"[21], creates, among other things, an overture for theology. The death of God, as with the demise of Philosophy, puts an end to theological or philosophical metanarratives.[22] Once discarded reinterpretation becomes possible. And because of the close, tumultuous, relationship

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Nature (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[20] Vahanian, "The Denatured Nature of Ethics," p. 508.

[21] Borrowing this phrase from Kai Nielsen.

[22] It puts an end, as well, to what Wittgenstein described as a "presentiment that there must be a realm in which answers to questions are symmetrically combined - *a priori* - to form a self-contained system." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922), 5.4541.

between theology and philosophy, some of the most interesting implications of the death of God will be found here.

Seen from the metaphilosophical side, although Rorty's analysis of philosophy relieves theology of the task of responding to demands from that tradition, the price of doing so makes traditional theology ineffectual. Post-Christian man and woman have come of age. But instead of nullifying theology in its totality, theology becomes a possibility. It must, however be a theology *transformed*. With the death of traditional philosophy, theology must be conceived of in a radically new way. Theology no longer is bound to a traditional philosophical background that it must reflect; the philosophy of religion is no longer concerned with solving the traditional questions imbedded in its tradition. Here is an opening up to new possibilities that hitherto were impossible due to the perceived need to fulfill philosophical expectations.

My overall intent in this study is neither to baptize Rorty nor to argue that he is actually a disguised theologian. My aim is rather to show that his metaphilosophical position allows for at least two implications that should be of interest to the philosopher of religion and/or the philosophical theologian (depending on one's predilection). The first follows from Professor Rorty's assessment of traditional philosophy (or better, what he describes as *systematic philosophy*). Once systematic philosophy, with its desire for epistemological foundations and traditional definitions of Truth and Objectivity, is seen as *inutile*, the very tools used by the philosopher to vex the theologian crumble in the philosopher's hand. But if Rorty is on the mark, traditional theological investigation suffers a similar loss, at least insofar as theologian or philosopher of religion worked from the same philosophical tool-box[23]. As long as the philosopher

[23] "The Deweyan notion of language as tool rather than picture is right as far as it goes." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. xviii-xix.

was speaking of epistemological foundations, truth as correspondence, Objectivity, and Reason (all of which allowed for the possibility of metaphysics), the theologian had common ground with the philosopher. The philosopher may have disagreed with the theologian over the *truthfulness* or *objectivity* of religious belief, but at least they agreed on the conceptual importance of these concepts. This has dramatically changed since the consequences of the end-of-Philosophy debate have become clearer. Secondly, and perhaps more positively, since Rorty believes that philosophy (namely *edifying philosophy*) is possible after the demise of traditional philosophy, perhaps a comparable case can be made for theology. Instead of Rorty's metaphilosophical position eliminating religious language, theological inquiry may gain new prospect in the post-Philosophical scene as a viable form of discourse, a place that, in fact, has been provided by Rorty. And it is here where we need to look at Rorty's view of religious language in order to determine exactly what he thinks follows for religious belief in the post-Philosophical context. While he interprets the demise of philosophy as a further step in rendering religious language irrelevant, we will attempt to show that the opposite is the case. It is at this juncture that the death of God dovetails with Rorty's proposal for a post-Philosophical definition of philosophy. The result is the recommencement of theology. Just as only the end of systematic philosophy can save philosophy, only the death of God can save God-talk.[24]

This is most certainly a hermeneutical affair. In this study, the interpretations are from the point of view of theologian and philosopher - Gabriel Vahanian and Richard Rorty respectively. While the bulk of this study is devoted to Rorty's metaphilosophical writings, the sense of his work is placed against the background of Vahanian's diagnosis of Western society. The effort is to

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[24] "The death of God will ensure our salvation because the death of God alone can reawaken the Divine." Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London: Routledge

show how the death of God reaches across disciplinary boundaries - in this case into philosophy - but most importantly, how these disciplines may continue, albeit reinterpreted, after the death of God.

B. The Death of God and the Demise of the Philosophical Tradition

In the early 1960's, after examining the implications and consequences of the secularization of Western civilization, the French theologian Gabriel Vahanian announced the death of God[25]. It was a recognition that has since proved to be prophetic. Specifically, that in the latter part of the twentieth-century Western society has undergone a cultural shift rendering the traditional Christian world-view irrelevant.

Gabriel Vahanian defined the death of God as "a cultural phenomenon, expressive of the simplest fact that God is no longer necessary and that his reality cannot be taken for granted."[26] The death of God does not imply that God no longer *is*.[27] Unlike most theologians Vahanian has little interest in disputes over the existence of God. His point is rather that the Christian tradition, insofar as it has been described and inscribed, has become culturally irrelevant.[28]

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and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 184.

[25] Gabriel Vahanian, *The Death of God* (New York: George Braziller, 1961).

[26] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, pp. 36-37. Ramsey notes in the 'Preface' that "Ours is the first attempt in recorded history to build a culture upon the premise that God is dead. The period *post mortem Dei* divides into two distinct eras, roughly at some point between the World Wars. Until that time, the cultural death of God meant something *anti*-Christian; after it and until now, the death of God means something entirely *post*-Christian." Paul Ramsey, "Preface," *The Death of God*, by Gabriel Vahanian (New York: George Braziller, 1961), p. xiii; emphasis his.

[27] "In one situation the confession of God's death might be part of a Christian apologetics ('*God himself is dead*,' wrote Hegel), while in another it might be forthright atheism ('God is dead', say the Nietzscheans)." Kevin Hart, "Jacques Derrida: The God Effect," *Post-Secular Philosophy: between philosophy and theology*, edited by Phillip Blond (New York: Routledge), p. 261.

[28] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 32.

"Once a no man's land, the world has now become a no God's land."[29] Western culture has been severed from its metaphysical foundation, theological tradition, and sacramental meaning. Philosophers of religion and theologians who continue to employ the concepts, definitions, and terminology of this language speak only to those few within the confines of their discipline. The wider culture, continuing on its way, leaves this form of discourse behind as obscure and uninteresting.[30] Traditional theological talk has become a dead language. Philosophers of religion and theologians who are aware of the ever widening schism between culture and traditional Christianity can neither take their world-view for granted, nor take the culture as a given for evangelism. Western civilization has become post-Christian.

This transformation does not, in itself, render the culture atheist. Western culture, having become post-Christian, does not oblige man or woman to be either anti-Christian or non-Christian. Of importance is not especially what the post-Christian man or woman can become, but rather what he or she can no longer be. "Western culture and its Christian tradition as a whole today resembles a museum, exhibiting this piece or that to attract the post-Christian tourist."[31]

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[29] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 32.

[30] This is illustrated by the ongoing, and culturally uninteresting, fixation between "atheist" and "theist" over traditional arguments concerning the existence of God – for example, Patrick Glynn's book, *God: the Evidence: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World* (Rocklin, CA: Forum, 1997); Thomas V. Morris's, *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith & Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and George H. Smith's *Atheism: The Case Against God* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1989). Compare these with Philip Blond's edited work, *Post-Secular Philosophy. Between Philosophy and Theology* (Routledge, 1998), and, Graham Ward (ed.) *God: A Theological Reader* (Blackwell, 1997). As Frankenberry notes, "The fate of a new form of theism is still open. Having learned from the history of philosophy and of science to be wary of dichotomies between analytic and synthetic statements, between theories and observations, and between schemes and contents, we might now learn to be just as dubious about dualisms between nature and supernature or theism and atheism in contemporary religious inquiry." Nancy Frankenberry, *Religion and Radical Empiricism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 87.

[31] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 39.

Churches and religious ceremonies may remind us of our spiritual heritage. But like museum pieces they remain embedded in a history of a bygone era.

A change has come about that has transformed society. The result is a culture that no longer looks to Christianity for life's meaning or purpose. "The respective points of view of post-Christian man and Christian man are so radically different that the former, looking at the Christian religion, can neither accept it nor appropriate its values."[32] Vahanian has described the principal example of this change as a transition from a transcendental view of the world to an immanentist view. He poses the problem that results:

> It is easy to talk about God in a supernatural context, when human nature is understood in terms of a transcendental universe. But how can one speak of a transcendental God when only an immanentist frame of reference is available, and man construes both his situation in the world and the universe in immanentist concepts?[33]

Keeping in mind that the post-Christian individual will not necessarily characterize himself or herself as an atheist, the movement of culture towards radical immanentism nevertheless bears a strong resemblance to classical atheism. What is of importance is that radical immanentism no longer requires God to make sense of life. "Post-Christian man even claims atheism as the only guarantee of a free and responsible action, as his existential presupposition and the act of his emancipation."[34]

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[32] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 36.

[33] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 36. Vahanian and Harvey Cox cite Karl Barth here. See, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 230. The transcendentalist view can be contrasted with the immanentist view by understanding that the former is where man, woman and the world are God's creation, "therefore God is wholly other than what he creates and neither man nor the world is conceived as a self-sufficient and self-reliant entity." Vahanian, *The Death of God*, pp. 15-16.

[34] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, pp. 36-37.

Numerous attempts were made to resist this change.[35] Unfortunately the action taken was to solidify dogma so that it would remain safe from any transition from transcendence to immanentism. This merely exacerbated the inevitable:

> [Christianity] was neutralized long ago, as a whole screen of dogmas or religious attitudes testify; vainly it was hoped that these would arrest the decline either by reducing Christianity to the essence of religiosity, or by making religiosity the essence of Christianity. But neither Catholic dogmatism nor Protestant scholasticism on the one hand, nor on the other the religious romanticism of Schleiermacher or Chateaubriand could succeed in preventing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche from unmasking and proclaiming the fraud; the former in diagnosing the demise of Christianity, the latter in crying: God is dead.[36]

The efforts taken by philosophers of religion and theologians could not withstand radical immanentism from saturating the consciousness of Western civilization. With Western civilization well into the post-Christian age, the problem that faces the philosopher of religion is clear in Vahanian's question posed above: "how can one speak of a transcendental God when only an immanentist frame of reference is available, and man construes both his situation in the world and the universe in immanentist concepts?"[37]

The principal task for Vahanian has been to call the theologian's attention to the death of God and the drive toward radical immanentism. Unfortunately, but perhaps expectedly, philosophers of religion and theologians have continued their work irrespective of the need for internal reappraisal of their assumed method and its relation to the society which they inhabit.[38]

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[35] Perhaps not surprisingly, this event has been grasped by more *sensitive souls*: "poets and novelists, of artists and playwrights." Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 37.
[36] Gabriel Vahanian, *No Other God*, (New York: George Braziller, 1966), p. 16.
[37] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 36.
[38] This reaction is "expectant" because of the nature of the Church as an institution: "Admittedly, institutions too are born of the necessity of improvisation, but they freeze it, they codify it, just as dogmas and religion betray faith by codifying the acts of faith - through which they are improvised - forgetting that existence itself, as a spontaneous act of faith, is an impertinent improvisation on the theme of God's reality, of the presentness of God." Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 230.

This negligence retards necessary transformation of the Church. Without appropriate change the ecclesiastical community becomes increasingly obsolete.[39]

With the near extinction of the cultural relevancy of the Church, owing to the ever widening gulf between Christian men and women, and post-Christian men and women, secularism fills the void created by the inefficacy of Christianity. This is a consequence of the Christian's neglect of secularity. Vahanian remarks:

> By secularity is meant the sphere of man's action. This means temporality in contrast to the divine eternity; and it means finitude in contrast to God's infinitude. Secularity refers to the ensemble of man's activities as well as his creativity, all of which reflect the Biblical fact that man is created in the image of God, but is not divine *per se*. Secularity also refers to the cultural manifestations of man's self-apprehension as a creature of God. Cultural manifestations include not only what is obviously such, for example art forms, but also ecclesiastical, theological, creedal, or liturgical forms. There is no reason why the latter should not be considered in the same cultural category as the former. This is a reflection of the Biblical insistence to steer clear both of dualism and of monism – respectively, the separation and confusion of sacred and secular. For the Bible there is only one valid distinction: the holy and the not yet holy.[40]

Secularity rejects compartmentalization – dualism separating *sacred* life from *profane* life. Rather, all activity is for the glorification of God. "No cleavage subsists here between a sacred duty and a secular one, between private and public morality."[41] Secularity, however, is to be distinguished from secularism:

> Secularism is a form of religiosity, for which the present and the immanent are invested with the attributes of the eternal and the transcendent. It is an expropriation of religion, not for the sake of shaking of the tyranny of its supernaturalism as it is claimed, but really

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[39] In itself this need not be regarded as wholly negative. The Church's increasing obscurity may be to Christianity's advantage. "Indeed, it is historically verifiable that Christianity when it is organized is less apt than when it is not organized to inform and transform genuinely and creatively its secular cultural background. The evidence of sects as well as of early Christianity helps to corroborate this assertion. When Christianity became organized, it almost immediately arrogated to itself what rightly belonged to culture and to the sphere of the secular." Vahanian, *The Death of God*, p. 8.

[40] Vahanian, *The Death of God*, pp. 66-67.

[41] Vahanian, *The Death of God*, p. 66.

> for the sake of another mystique and another fundamentalism or fanaticism. Few attitudes are more "religious" than those of certain secularists, who have deified democracy or sex or the classless society.[42]

Secularity, in contrast to secularism, is affirmed by Christians through engagement in their society. They do not turn their backs on the world of everyday life because of a fixation on sacred matters or the afterlife. Secularity as well affirms the incarnation: "The incarnation means God's proximity to man, his presentness to all that is created. It means that God does not turn his back on this world, and that man must not either."[43]

Facing the death of God, radical immanentism, and the shift towards secularism, the question remaining is how philosophers of religion may respond to this problem. More specifically, at least for the purpose of this present study, is philosophy of religion and theology even possible given this radical shift in culture?

Pretending that traditional theological investigation and the philosophy of religion can carry on without taking into account the death of God would merely plunge theological investigation, and religious belief along with it, into further obscurity. As Harvey Cox understood this question some years back:

> The effort to force secular and political movements of our time to be "religious" so that we can feel justified in clinging to *our* religion is, in the end, a losing battle . . . We must learn, as Bonhoeffer said, to speak of God in a secular fashion and find a nonreligious interpretation of biblical concepts. It will do no good to cling to our religious and metaphysical versions of Christianity in the idle hope that one day religion or metaphysics will once again regain their centrality. They will become even more peripheral and that means we can now let go and immerse ourselves in the new world of the secular city.[44]

Despite the largely hostile reaction on the part of theologians, ministers, and the laity, this shift in culture should not seen as a threat. Undoubtedly the death of God has brought about a cleavage

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[42] Vahanian, *The Death of God*, p. 67.
[43] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 128.

between traditional Christianity and the society, but the consequences could be most liberating for Christianity:

> To speak of the death of God means, then, that finally at the end of the Christian phase of Western culture, the reality of the living God is freed from the cultural concepts and other institutions that attempt to objectify and domesticate it. The death of God marks the end of Christian culture and, especially, of its attempt to assimilate *the other God*, the living God of whom our religion as well as our diffuse religiosity is a desperate caricature. This means that, man being a religious animal, we are groping for a new concept of God and a new attitude, a mode of being congruous with it; that a new religiosity is dawning. And a new era begins when a new religiosity appears, rises from the empty tomb of the dead God.[45]

Whether it is described as postmodern[46] or post-Christian, this cultural shift has resulted in freeing theology from a conceptual scheme that has gradually prevented it from communicating with the society. With this newfound liberty theological investigation and the philosophy of religion have the opportunity to reinvent their procedures and roles. But while their reevaluation remains a possibility, the task is not to somehow reverse the death of God, *videlicet*, to assimilate God into a new form of religiosity. The challenge is not to begin a new ecclesiastical reformation. The death of God has rendered this issue uninteresting. But theology, understood as an interpretation of the God who *is* (an interpretation that cannot remain static), will nevertheless remain a possibility.

Since Vahanian wrote about the death of God in the 1960's the separation between Western culture and traditional expressions of Christianity has continued to dilate. The death of

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[44] Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), p. 3; emphasis his.
[45] Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, p. 231; emphasis his. Derrida adds that "God doesn't give his reasons, he acts as he intends, he doesn't have to give his reasons or share anything with us: neither his motivations, if he has any, nor his deliberations, nor his decisions. Otherwise he wouldn't be God, we wouldn't be dealing with the Other as God or with God as *wholly other* [*tout autre*]." Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 57; emphasis his.
[46] See, Tyron Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" *Theology Today* 51, 1995, pp. 524-525; Steven Conner, *Postmodern Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989); David Harvey, *The Condition of*

God is *fait accompli*. Facing this turn of events philosophers of religion and theologians either must grapple with the resulting issues or else begin to consider their profession a cultural vestige of a bygone era. Assuming for the moment that the latter may be premature, the attempt to recover the relevancy of the philosophy of religion and theological inquiry resides in knowing where to begin:

> The emergence of a post-Christian era makes it all the more imperative not only to rethink theology on the basis of a new model but also to recast the structures of the Church in terms of man's personal and social self-understanding today. A mobile and dynamic society has replaced the traditional stable structures in the light of which the nature of the Church was constructed. In a post-Christian age the Church cannot remain at the center of the village if it wants to be present in the midst of life. Nor can it resort to become an enclave, a modernistic ghetto. Much less can Christianity forfeit itself by becoming merely a private matter . . . it would seem that unless Christianity wants to be wiped off the face of the earth, the Church must begin to think of itself not as a place of retreat from the world, not as a society within a society, but as a community that has no reality other than *through* the society of men, as the avant-garde of society, as the axis of culture.[47]

The death of God renders traditional theological investigation ineffectual for dealing with issues relevant to contemporary culture. This study attempts to provide one possible means by which theology may be recovered – not as a theology of detachment but as "a nomad discipline wandering, wondering, and erring"[48] – as *edifying theology*. In order to arrive at this end, however, we must first set forth the philosophical terrain that must be traversed.

II. Rorty's Analysis of Traditional Philosophy

> "Many responsibilities begin in dreams, and many transfigurations of the tradition begin in private fantasies."
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> - Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*

Postmodernity (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989); and, Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling, "Reflexive Modernity and the Religious Body," *Religion*, 24, 1994, pp. 24-25.

[47] Vahanian, *No Other God*, p. 99; emphasis his.

[48] Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1995), pp. 133-134.

The death of God, at least in Vahanian's sense, finds a certain compatibility with Richard Rorty's metaphilosophy. The main intent of this study, in fact, is to show this compatibility, and how, as a result, the philosophy of religion and theological inquiry may proceed after the death of God, based on the theoretical underpinnings provided by Rorty.

The cultural death of God has come about, in part, through an ever increasing gap between religious language and the language of contemporary culture. Alternatively, we may speak of the inability of this particular form of discourse to maintain its relevancy within the volatile context of the present day social *Zeitgeist.*

In some respects, Rorty's critique of traditional philosophy is similar. Not only are the questions posed by the traditional philosopher *mal posé*, they are removed from public utility. As Rorty points out, the concerns of the philosopher should be focused, in the Deweyan sense, on addressing the problems of society[49]. But before this refocusing takes place, Rorty must first provide a clearing for this work by setting forth both his critique of traditional philosophy, and then, a reinterpretation of philosophical activity. Most importantly, at least for this study, is his examination of traditional philosophical discourse that holds to robust notions of truth, rationality, scientific inquiry, and objectivity.

These specific notions have importance for this study because of the relationship these words have expressed within the historical relationship between philosophy and theology (or the

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[49] Rorty believes Dewey echoes Hegel's definition of philosophy on this point. Quoting from Dewey, Rorty writes: "When it is acknowledged that under disguise of dealing with ultimate reality, philosophy has been occupied with the precious values embedded in social traditions, that it has sprung from a clash of social ends and from a conflict of inherited institutions with incompatible contemporary tendencies, it will be seen *that the task of future philosophy is to clarify men's ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day.*" Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 58; quoting from John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: The New American Library, 1948), p. 26; emphasis mine.

philosophy of religion). That is, even before the time Christianity became institutionalized at the hand of Constantine, the theologian had joined hands with the philosopher in what was to be a turbulent two-thousand year relationship. From the very beginning there was debate and disagreement over the compatibility of philosophical inquiry with theological investigation. In short, what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?[50] Depending on how theologian and philosopher defined rationality, objectivity, and truth, the result, more often than not, pitted reason against faith, truth against belief, science against religion.[51] These oppositions dissolve under Rorty's critique, and as a consequence, theological investigation takes on a new set of limits. Philosophers of religion, moreover, have a new set of issues to discuss.

Before we can flesh these results out in further terms we need to look at Rorty's metaphilosophical critique in order to see exactly how he argues for setting aside the philosophical tradition and redefining its terminology.

A. Truth, Objectivity, and Rationality

In a passage worth quoting at length Richard Rorty describes how philosophy has traditionally

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[50] We have to proceed cautiously here. As Gilson notes, "[w]hen theologians, whatever their particular creed may be, attempt to remodel philosophy to suit their own beliefs, they are prompted to do so by a sincere conviction that philosophy is in itself an excellent thing, so good indeed that it would be a shame to allow it to perish." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 36.

[51] These debates are well represented in the tensions between theologians and philosophers. And it certainly did not go unnoticed by Hume. Philo, in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, illustrates this view. As Popkin notes in the "Introduction": "Actually, Philo was repeating what had been asserted by Christian skeptics from Montaigne and Pascal to Bayle and Hume. This view, which is close to that of Demea in the first dialogue, contends that because human intellectual responses are incapable of any certain truths, one therefore should abandon reason and accept truths on faith. This view, called 'fideism,' employs skepticism to undermine human knowledge claims in order to prepare the way for the acceptance of revealed truth. Various religious writers have stated this view in a moving and convincing fashion." Richard H. Popkin, "Introduction," *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, by David Hume (Indianapolis: Hackett

defined its subject matter:

> Philosophers usually think of their discipline as one which discusses perennial, eternal problems - problems which arise as soon as one reflects. Some of these concern the difference between human beings and other beings, and are crystallized in questions concerning the relation between the mind and the body. Other problems concern the legitimization of claims to know, and are crystallized in questions concerning the "foundations" of knowledge.[52] To discover the foundations is to discover something about the mind, and conversely. Philosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion. It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims. It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge, and it finds these foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the "mental processes" or the "activity of representation" which make knowledge possible. To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations.[53]

Rorty contends that philosophy has come to be characterized in this manner chiefly because of the interdependent work of three philosophers: Locke (theory of knowledge based on mental processes[54]), Descartes ("the mind" as a separate entity in which "processes" occur), and Kant

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Publishing Company, 1985), p. xv.

[52] As Rorty sees it, the quest for philosophical foundations can be traced back to religious aspirations: "The idea that it [culture] ought to have foundations was a result of Enlightenment scientism, which was in turn a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a nonhuman authority." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 52.

[53] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 3. Rorty goes on to say that "[P]hilosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so)." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 3. And it is exactly this concern which drives the various debates within traditional philosophy of religion.

[54] And so on this account, belief is understood as a mental representation. As Gutting notes further: "Its truth is a matter of its accurately corresponding to an external (non-representational) object. Since, on the representationalist view, we are directly aware of only our representations, the great problem becomes justification: showing that our beliefs do in fact correspond to external objects. This project requires showing that some representations (a subset of our beliefs or perhaps some other, more basic representations – e.g., sensations) have a privileged status that makes the connection to the world." Gary Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, unpublished manuscript, "Rorty-24".

(philosophy as the tribunal of pure reason adjudicating the truthfulness of various claims brought forward by the culture).[55] And while other philosophers, namely Friedrich Nietzsche and William James, attempted to show that culture need not *ground* its beliefs in this manner, the philosophical fashion had become too prevalent.[56]

Rorty believes that this *trinitarian* view of philosophy came to be, at least for the intellectual community, a substitute for religion. "It was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity *as* an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance of one's life."[57]

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[55] In a helpful article Jaegwon Kim isolates three components of Rorty's critique of traditional philosophy: (1) The Platonic doctrine is a doctrine concerning *truth* and *knowledge*, according to which truth is *correspondence* with nature, and knowledge is a matter of *possessing accurate representations*. (2) The Cartesian doctrine is the doctrine of the mind as the *private inner* stage, "the Inner Mirror," in which cognitive action takes place. The Platonic doctrine of knowledge as representation was transformed into the idea of knowledge as *inner representation* of outer reality. The Cartesian contribution was to *mentalize* the Platonic doctrine. (3) The Kantian doctrine is a conception of philosophy according to which it is the business of philosophy to investigate the "foundations" of the sciences, the arts, culture and morality, and adjudicate the cognitive claims of these areas. Philosophy, as epistemology, must set *universal standards of rationality and objectivity* for all actual and possible claims to knowledge. See, Jaegwon Kim, "Rorty on the Possibility of Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 10, October 1980, pp. 589-590.

[56] In another place Rorty cites Brandon's division: "For the first, or representationalist, school (typified by Frege, Russell, Tarski and Carnap), Brandon says, 'the essential feature of language is its capacity to represent the way things are.' Representationalists, he continues, 'take truth to be the basic concept in terms of which a theory of meaning, and hence a theory of language, is to be developed.' The second school (typified by Dewey and Wittgenstein) starts off from a conception of language as a set of social practises. Members of this school start off from assertibility, and then squeeze the notion of truth in as best they can." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 151. Quotation from Robert Brandon, "Truth and Assertibility, *Journal of Philosophy* LXXIII (1976), p. 137.

[57] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 4; emphasis his. This comparison with religion is voiced by Rorty elsewhere: "For our notion of the world – it will be said – is not a lot of unquestioned beliefs, but rather of a hard, unyielding, rigid *être-en-soi* which stands aloof, sublimely indifferent to the attentions we lavish upon it. The true realistic believer will view idealisms and pragmatisms with the same suspicion with which the true believer in the God of our Fathers will view, for example, Tillich's talk of an 'object of ultimate concern'." Rorty,

Philosophy's task, construed thusly, carried over into the twentieth century. By this time, however, the philosopher's reverence for this discipline was beginning to wane. Rorty believes that philosophy's self-image was weakening primarily because of the diminishing need for the philosopher to be the guardian against superstition, especially with the increasing succession of the secular over the religious. Secondly, because of philosophy's growing interest in becoming scientific, philosophy was becoming increasingly removed from cultural relevancy.

In contrast to the intellectual who exemplified the rigidity of philosophical thought, another type of intellectual was gaining acceptance. This was "the culture of the man of letters, the intellectual who wrote poems and novels and political treatises, and criticisms of other people's poems and novels and treatises."[58] This intellectual, as novelist and poet, had come to displace both theologian and philosopher.[59]

Aggravating the philosophical scene in the twentieth century however, was a new breed of philosopher, namely Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. These three philosophers are similar in that while early in their philosophical work they occupied themselves with trying to make philosophy *foundational*, in their later years they came to see philosophy as "therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic, designed to make the reader question his own

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Consequences of Pragmatism, p. 13.

[58] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 4.

[59] Rorty actually speaks here of preachers and philosophers, but perhaps theologian may be better suited to the context. In any case, such a view is compatible with edifying theology. As Milbank notes, "Kierkegaard denies that those who existentially live the Christian life, or preachers who expound it from pulpits, present the truest *vision* of this life. This is done better by poets, who are aesthetically suspended from the continuum (i.e. subject to melancholia), and reinvent Christianity as though it were their own fiction." John Milbank, "The Sublime in Kierkegaard," *Post-Secular Philosophy: between philosophy and theology*, edited by Phillip Blond (New York: Routledge Press, 1998), p. 147.

motives for philosophizing rather than to supply him with a new philosophical program."[60] These three philosophers brought about a period of "revolutionary" philosophy[61] by abandoning epistemology and metaphysics[62] - knowledge conceived as accurate representation, foundations of knowledge, and problems that follow from the philosophy of mind.

Despite the attempt on the part of these latter philosophers to break free from the traditional conception of philosophy - to bring an end to its perennial problems and concerns - Rorty notes that over the past two decades there has been a gradual return to the former image of philosophy. Instead of viewing philosophy in the Wittgensteinian sense as *therapy*, the return to traditional philosophy endeavors to resurrect its perennial inquiry into epistemological foundations of knowledge and theory of meaning (as true or false). Rorty, however, sees no point to such inquiry:

> If we have a Deweyan conception of knowledge, as what we are justified in believing, then we will not imagine that there are enduring constraints on what can count as knowledge, since we will see "justification" as a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between "the knowing subject" and "reality." If we have a Wittgensteinian notion of language as tool rather than mirror, we will not look for necessary conditions of the possibility of linguistic representations. If we have a Heideggerian conception of philosophy, we will see the attempt to make the nature of the knowing subject a source of necessary truths as one

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[60] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 5. In the case of Wittgenstein, Kerr remarks: "In retrospect, that is to say, he regarded his own early work as deeply metaphysical - in the sense that certain words are allowed to call things 'of a higher order' into existence, like an enchanter's spell. 'The idea,' he says . . . 'is that one can beckon a lifeless object to come, just as one would beckon a person.' The principle at work, in metaphysics as in magic, is that of 'personification' . . . animism, as we might say." Fergus Kerr, "Metaphysics and Magic: Wittgenstein's Kink," *Post-Secular Philosophy: between philosophy and theology*, edited by Phillip Blond (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 248; quoted from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (Retford, Brymill, 1979), p. 4.

[61] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 5.

[62] Traditionally, metaphysics is the "science of being as such." But there are secondary and derivative meanings appropriate in this context as well: "(a) Anything concerned with the supra-physical . . . (b) Any scheme of explanation which transcends the inadequacies or inaccuracies of ordinary thought." William S. Weedon, "Metaphysics", *Dictionary of Philosophy*, edited by Dagobert Runes (Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1966), p. 196.

> more self-deceptive attempt to substitute a "technical" and determinate question for that openness to strangeness which initially tempted us to begin thinking.[63]

Rorty's criticisms, moreover, hold on both the analytic and Continental sides of the philosophical continuum. Whether it is Frege's philosophy of language or classical Husserlian phenomenology, both are attempts to place philosophy in a Kantian privileged position: "that of judging other areas of culture on the basis of its special knowledge of the 'foundations' of these areas."[64]

Situating himself within a Deweyan, Wittgensteinian, and Heideggerian view of philosophy, Rorty characterizes himself as an *antirepresentationalist.* As an antirepresentationalist Rorty does not view knowledge as a matter of showing a correspondence between belief and reality.[65] Instead he views knowledge in terms of "acquiring habits of action for coping with

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[63] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 9. Rorty states elsewhere that for the pragmatist "'knowledge' is, like 'truth,' simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 24. As for "thinking," Heidegger believes that it only begins when "we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought." Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Technology*, translated by William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), p. 112.

[64] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 8.

[65] Speaking of correspondence theories Susan Haack states that "[n]one of these attempts to generalize the Aristotelian Insight is unproblematically successful. The Logical Atomists' version of the correspondence theory is metaphysically demanding, requiring an ontology of logically ultimate objects. Austin's version of the correspondence theory is straightforwardly applicable only where there are indexicals for the demonstrative conventions to latch onto. Tarski's method relativizes 'true' to a language, and applies only to languages which are formally specifiable - which may, as Tarski thought, preclude its applicability where natural languages are concerned. Ramsey's approach - where the liberation felt with the resort to sentence letters achieves full generality only by means of sentential quantifiers - requires a new account of how such quantifiers work . . . And Peirce's definition faces the problem of Buried Secrets: that statements about the past which would not be settled however long inquiry were to continue must be deemed neither true nor false." Irrespective of these difficulties Haack maintains that our hopes should not be daunted: "Does this mean that my defense of the value of concern for truth [*as correspondence* I think we should add] places impossible demands on the concept? - of course not! That we have not yet devised a completely satisfactory and fully general statement of the Aristotelian Insight is no reason to conclude that it isn't an insight at all; to suppose otherwise is to succumb to the Arrogance of Theory, to that 'factitious despair' of which Bacon wrote - and 'all for the miserable

reality."[66]

But what about *reality*? Is there not a world outside of our minds[67], one to which we must compare our beliefs in order to decide if they are true? Rorty certainly is not a skeptic.[68] Neither is he an idealist (although he shares with the Idealist doubt over the belief that "truth is correspondence to reality"[69]). He believes that there is a real world.[70] He believes, however, that any attempt to try to show how our minds or language *corresponds to* or *represents* our environment, is misguided.[71] As one commentator on Rorty has remarked:

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vainglory of having it believed that whatever has not yet been invented or discovered will not be invented or discovered hereafter.'" Susan Haack, *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate: Unfashionable Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 22-23; quote from Francis Bacon, *The New Organon* (1620), Book I, Aphorism LXXXVIII.

[66] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 1. Rorty believes that Rawls is in agreement on this view of justification: "What justifies a conception of justice is not its being true to an order antecedent and given to us, but its congruence with our deeper understanding of ourselves and our aspirations, and our realization that, given our history and the traditions embedded in our public life, it is the most reasonable doctrine for us." John Rawls, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 1980, p. 519; as quoted by Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 58.

[67] On the question of the "mind-body" problem, see Rorty's, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

[68] Rorty, presumably, would not be adverse to what Hume described as "reasonable skepticism." As Cleanthes defines it in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: "The declared profession of every reasonable skeptic is only to reject abstruse, remote, and refined arguments; to adhere to common sense and the plain instincts of nature; and to assent, wherever any reasons strike him prevent it." Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 25.

[69] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 64.

[70] We "need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there . . .Truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there." Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 4-5. This goes for, so-called, laws of logic and other principles of this sort. Rorty states, "There are, of course, lots of criteria which cut across all divisions between parts of culture – e.g., the laws of logic, the principle that a notorious liar's reports do not count as evidence, and the like. But these do not possess some special authority by virtue of their universality, any more than the set consisting of the fulcrum, the screw, and the level is privileged by virtue of contributing to every other machine." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. xlvii, ft.nt. 51.

[71] Speaking of Wittgenstein's and Davidson's view of the relation of language to the world, Rorty states that they "both want us to see the relation as merely causal, rather than also

> Representationalist theories in epistemology think of Reality as a Something beyond all our epistemic practices. Notoriously, this Something cannot fall under any description. Any description offered itself becomes predicated of a Something of which it may or may not be true. In the analysis of "This physical object is a brown table," this is the *x* which is a physical object, brown, and a table. We have ways of determining whether an object in a room is a table; whether there are physical objects in a room; whether a table is brown. But when we ask whether these ways refer to Something called Reality, we are looking for a relation, independent of any context, which has no application and, hence, no meaning.[72]

Another commentator puts Rorty's position in a slightly different way:

> Rorty is suspicious of philosophy-as-epistemology because ultimately its message is that we cannot be certain we are in touch with reality unless we can show that our minds are mirroring an extramental reality. Yet for him, the sheer impossibility of our successfully performing this intellectual feat makes skepticism inevitable. Such a detached construal of human knowing makes us think of ourselves as separated from an unfamiliar and hostile world, and creates for us the problem of figuring out how we can bring ourselves back into familiar contact with it. This problem would not have occurred to us, Rorty argues, had the philosophical tradition not posited two disparate ontological realms: one containing our descriptions of the world and the other consisting of the world itself apart from any such description. Without these posits, he says, " . . . [we] will feel in touch with reality all the time," precisely because the epistemological issues of representation and correspondence do not arise in the first place.[73]

Instead of epistemological theory, Rorty holds to the *holistic* theory of meaning, a theory of meaning that has clear implications for relevance to theories of how language is learned.

The holistic view of meaning is the view that a theory of meaning for a language must do *no more than* give an account of how the meaning of sentences depend upon the meaning of words.[74] At the crux of this theory is the Davidsonian point that we need not think that "individual words must have meanings at all, in any sense that transcends the fact that they have a systematic

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representational. Both philosophers would like us to stop thinking that there is something called 'language' which is a 'scheme' which can organize, or fit, or stand in some other noncausal relation to, a 'content' called 'the world'." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 60.

[72] D. Z. Phillips, "Reclaiming the Conversations of Mankind," *Philosophy*, 69, 1994, p. 37.

[73] Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 23; quoting from Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 145.

[74] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 303; from Donald Davidson's "Truth and Meaning", *Synthese* 7 (1967), p. 304. The full reference is: Volume 7, No. 3, September 1967, pp.

effect on the meanings of the sentences in which they occur."[75] In another place Rorty states that this "Davidsonian way of looking at language . . . the activity of uttering sentences is one of the things people do in order to cope with their environment. The Deweyan notion of language as tool rather than picture is right as far as it goes."[76] This theory of meaning for language stands in contrast to the traditional view:

> The traditional view is that we anchor language to the world by giving meaning by *ostension* (or some other nonintentional mechanism - once which presupposes no "stage-setting in the language") to certain words, and then going on holistically from there. Davidson's neo-Wittgensteinian point is that even "red" and "mama" have uses - can help make possible the statements of truths - only in the context of sentences and thus of a whole language.[77]

This is a critical point because of the importance, in the philosophy of religion, for the oft repeated demand to show where the correspondence fits between *God-talk* and God himself.[78] Rorty contends, however, that meaning is not derived by corresponding language with *reality*, but rather by showing how various sentences work within the context of the language spoken.

The correspondence view, at least as far as the antirepresentationalist and pragmatist are concerned, is one that is *déplacé*:

> Pragmatists say that the traditional notion that "truth is correspondence to reality" is an uncashable and outworn metaphor. Some true statements - like "the cat is on the mat" - can be paired off with other chunks of reality so as to associate parts of the statement with

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[75] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 303; from Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 305.

[76] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. xiii-xix.

[77] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 303; see, Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 308; emphasis mine.

[78] This has been most vigorously argued by Kai Nielsen, although in his recent metaphilosophical writings he discusses how the attempt to pair off bits of language with their corresponding objects is no longer philosophically tenable. Compare, for example, his *Philosophy & Atheism: In Defense of Atheism* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1985) with his metaphilosophical views in *After the Demise of the Tradition: Rorty, Critical Theory, and the Fate of Philosophy* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991).

> parts of the chosen chunk. Most true statements - like " the cat is *not* on the mat" and "there are transfinite numbers" and "pleasure is better than pain"- cannot. Furthermore, we will be no better off even if we construct a metaphysical scheme which pairs off something in the world with each part of *every* true statement, and some first-order relation with every relevant metalinguistic relation. For we should still be faced with the question of whether the first-order language we use *itself* "corresponds to reality."[79] That is, we should still wonder whether talk of cats or numbers or goodness is the right way to break up the universe into chunks, whether our language cuts reality at the joints.[80] The pragmatists conclude that the intuition that truth is correspondence should be extirpated rather than explicated. On this view, the notion of reality as having a "nature" to which it is our duty to correspond is simply one more variant of the notion that the gods can be placated by chanting the right words. The notion that some one among the languages mankind has used to deal with the universe is the one the universe prefers - the one which cuts things at the joints - was a pretty [*sic*] conceit. But by now it has become too shopworn to serve any purpose.[81]

Rorty is adamant on this point of representation.[82] There is no sense to the demand that one must link language to something outside that language in order for sense to be made of what is being stated - the image of the mind as being a great mirror.[83] Instead of seeing our philosophical beliefs

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[79] Letson notes that "the correspondence theory of truth is taken to imply more than that there are facts in the world that we are trying to correspond to when we use language. The objectivity that is desired in holding this view is usually understood to be a consequence of the realism about truth that undergirds the correspondence relation. Thus the correspondence theory posits a world of objects that might forever remain aloof from all attempts to represent, or correspond to, them. But *if* our sentences correspond to these facts, then we have knowledge that is as objective as can be - there would be no residue of subjectivity, no problems of perspective, no mention of locutions such as 'true-for-us'." Ben H. Letson, *Davidson's Theory of Truth and Its Implications for Rorty's Pragmatism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), p. 9.

[80] As he states elsewhere, "[p]ragmatists agree with Wittgenstein that there is no way to come between language and its object. Philosophy cannot answer the question: can we perspicuously relate the various vocabularies we use to one another, and thereby dissolve the philosophical problems that seem to arise at the places where we switch over from one vocabulary to another?" Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 127.

[81] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, pp. 79-80.

[82] See as well, in this same text, pages 9; 12; 41; 81; 88; 97; 113; 116; 118; 153.

[83] Rorty does qualify this to some extent in other places: "Given a language and a view of what the world is like, one can, to be sure, pair off bits of the language with bits of what one takes the world to be in such a way that the sentences one believes true have internal structures isomorphic to relations between things in the world. When we rap out routine undeliberated reports like 'This is water,' 'That's red,' 'That's ugly,' 'That's immoral,' our short categorical sentences can easily be

arising through pictures and metaphor, traditional philosophy accounts for our convictions by means of propositions and statements.

But if Rorty discards the theory of truth as representation, how does one then distinguish true statements from false statements? Sense from nonsense? Can we even speak of objectivity? What account does Rorty offer in response to these concerns? As an antirepresentationalist, Rorty desires to reduce issues of representation and objectivity to *solidarity*. If one speaks of objectivity it should not be objectivity construed as the attempt to move outside one's society. Objectivity should be understood as the attempt to extend intersubjective agreement as far as possible. It is the desire "to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can."[84] Those who do this are *pragmatists*. "Within the philosophical community, they are best known as holists."[85]

Rejecting both metaphysics and epistemology, pragmatists view truth in William James'

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thought of as pictures, or as symbols which fit together to make a map. Such reports do indeed pair little bits of language with little bits of the world." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 162.

[84] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 23. For his part, Kai Nielsen understands objectivity in the following terms: "we say that a morality or a set of moral views is justified ('objectively justified' if that isn't pleonastic) when, at a given time in a cool hour, among reasonable people properly informed, these people achieve a reflective consensus on what is to be done and on what moral views to hold." The advantage of defining objectivity in this manner is that it is an "utterly nonmetaphysical conception of objectivity compatible with reflective common sense ('critical commonsensism,' to use Peirce's phrase) and with an appeal to our considered judgments." Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition*, pp. 242-243.

[85] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 64. Elsewhere he states that "[o]nce conversation replaces confrontation, the notion of the mind as Mirror of Nature can be discarded. The notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible. A thoroughgoing holism has no place for the notion of philosophy as 'conceptual,' as 'apodictic,' as picking out the 'foundations' of the rest of knowledge, as explaining which representations are 'purely given' or 'purely conceptual,' as presenting a 'canonical notation' rather than an empirical discovery, or as isolating 'trans-framework heuristic categories.' If we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature, we will not be likely to envisage a metapractice which will be the critique of all possible forms of social practice. So holism produces, as Quine has argued in detail and Sellars has said in passing, a conception of philosophy which has nothing to do with the quest

sense of "what is good for *us* to believe."[86] This view of truth stands in contrast to truth understood as the "accurate representation of reality."[87] Instead of being preoccupied with the traditional concepts of *objectivity* and *representation*, attention is turned towards the needs of a democratic society. The pragmatist's goal is to enhance solidarity. Here is Dewey's view of a society - one that is democratic, progressive, and pluralist. Society works toward establishing greater and greater intersubjective agreement and novelty:

> If one reinterprets objectivity as intersubjectivity, or as solidarity, in the ways I suggest below, then one will drop the question of how to get in touch with "mind-independent and language-independent reality." One will replace it with questions like "What are the limits of our community? Are the encounters sufficiently free and open? Has what we have recently gained in solidarity cost us our ability to listen to outsiders who are suffering? To outsiders who have new ideas?" These are political questions rather than metaphysical or epistemological questions. Dewey seems to me to have given us the right lead when he viewed pragmatism not as grounding, but as clearing the ground for, democratic politics.[88]

Lacking what appears to be philosophical and conceptual reinforcement to his position, can Rorty be so confident he will be successful in establishing solidarity without a strong philosophical procedure? How optimistic can Rorty be, desiring to increase social solidarity, without robust conceptual tools? Some have argued, for instance, that his definition of objectivity (which implicates a definition of truth) leads to relativism. If so, the chances for solidarity would be jeopardized if this charge of relativism were accurate.

Rorty rejects the charge that the pragmatist's view is equivalent to relativism. Distinguishing pragmatism from relativism, Rorty says that the meanings of rationality and truth

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for certainty." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 170-172.

[86] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 22. In another place, Rorty has a slight variant on this statement by James as stating, "what is *better* for us to believe." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 10; emphasis mine.

[87] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 10

[88] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 13.

should be understood as being bound to the familiar procedures of justification[89] that *our* society employs. This view is *ethnocentric*, not relativistic. For the pragmatist what is true is an expression of commendation.[90] This is very different from the relativist's view that something is relative to something else. The pragmatist is "making the purely *negative* point that we should drop the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion, construed as the distinction between truth as correspondence to reality and truth as a commendatory term for well-justified beliefs."[91] Linked to the desire for human solidarity the pragmatist's view of truth is not particularly sophisticated. The pragmatist, in fact, does not have a *theory* of truth. She sees no need to go beyond the description of truth as being those beliefs that we find good to believe. But given this view of truth what becomes of objectivity and method? Without these concepts how will Rorty procure solidarity?

B. Progress in philosophy as *solidarity*

Rorty contends that solidarity has better chances of being consummated if we set aside the "scientism" that posits that rationality is a matter of applying criteria.[92] In fact, if the notion of objectivity is set aside, society will have better chances for progress.

Although Rorty does have a view of progress with respect to society, he does not speak of progress in philosophy. Progress, defined by Rorty, is neither in the sense of philosophical

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[89] As Gutting notes, "Rorty's view – which he calls 'epistemological behaviorism' – is that we need nothing beyond this common-sense model as an account of epistemic justification. That is, justification, even in far more significant and complex cases, is just a matter of being able to give good reasons (put forward adequate supporting propositions) for the belief." Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, "Rorty–8".

[90] He states elsewhere that for the pragmatist, "'knowledge' is, like 'truth,' simply a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 24.

[91] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, pp. 23-24; emphasis his.

progress nor is it in the image of humanity moving towards an apex point of perfection. It is the belief that people have the capability for being occupied with more interesting things as well as having the capacity for being more interesting people. "For now the question is not about how to define words like 'truth' or 'rationality' or 'knowledge' or 'philosophy,' but about what self-image our society should have of itself."[93] Rorty sets up the difference between the realist[94] and the pragmatist quite nicely by stating that the former is interested in *finding* and the latter's interest is in *making*. There are no deep definitions to be found, uncovered, or established. The concern is what self-image of the society we need to create.

Consensus, even a Rawlsian search for consensus, will find a welcome place in Rorty's community. But Rorty sees no need to define in a highly philosophical and rigorous sense the values of tolerance, free inquiry, and open dialogue. And while Rorty sees no way of showing foundational justification for his use of these concepts, it would be a mistake to fault the pragmatist on this point. The problem of justification is not only a problem for the pragmatist but a general problem for all who make theoretical claims. Assertions by philosophers or others that justification has been satisfied, or should be satisfied, are misleading. The only justification needed

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[92] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 27.
[93] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 28.
[94] Kuipers cites House's definition of metaphysical realism, an obsession that is similar to that of the realist mentioned by Rorty above: "Genuine human knowledge has traditionally been understood in terms of the acquisition of an accurate mental reduplication of extramental reality. In contemporary idiom, knowledge consists in rationally justified, true beliefs or propositions; rational justification means primarily the provision of incorrigible foundations; and truth is largely understood as the correspondence of our concepts, beliefs, or statements to extramental reality." Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 35, footnote 5; from Vaden House, *Without God or His Doubles: Realism, Relativism and Rorty* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 12. According to the realist "*truth* is *radically non-epistemic* . . . the theory that is 'ideal' from the point of view of operational utility, inner beauty and elegance, 'plausibility,' simplicity, 'conservatism,' etc., *might be false*." Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), p. 125.

(or available) is that of comparison. Compare a society with these qualities named above against a society which does not have them. This would sufficiently show that "nobody who has experienced both would prefer the latter."[95]

The pragmatist does not take this turn because he has some dislike for well-established philosophical definitions of objectivity, scientific method, truth, and rational inquiry. He takes the pragmatist's position because the philosopher's task of establishing these concepts has failed. It is true that the pragmatist cannot justify, without circularity, his desire for toleration, free inquiry, and *undistorted communication*. This should not be seen as a problem that only the pragmatist faces because of his "anti-realist" position.[96] The realist faces the same hurdle. The realist has yet to provide a noncircular justification of these qualities. The pragmatist, sensing the dubious character of this demand, prefers to concentrate his effort in bringing about a tolerant, *solidaire* community. Subjects for discussion, Rorty believes, are quite clear:

> One will talk about the problem of evil, the stultifying effect of a religious culture upon intellectual life, the danger of theocracy, the potentiality for anarchy in a secularist culture, the *Brave New World* consequences of a utilitarian, secular morality. One will contrast the lives of one's secularist and of one's religious friends and acquaintances. One will do, in short, just what the "new fuzzies" in philosophy of science say scientists do when some relatively large-scale proposal to change the way nature (or part of nature) is pictured is up for discussion. One will muddle through, hoping that some reweaving will happen on both sides, and that some consensus may thus emerge.[97]

What is lacking in this dialogical process are methodological principles. Stripped of any such principles the dialogue in a very basic sense encapsulates a *duty*: "a duty to talk to each other, to

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[95] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 29.

[96] Rorty takes the charge of being an antirealist as a misnomer. See p. 2 of *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*. Even someone as sympathetic as Letson forgets himself and says, " . . . an anti-realist like Rorty . . ." What makes Letson's momentary lapse of memory worse is that on the same page he states that "Rorty must be careful to be accurately understood." Letson, *Davidson's Theory of Truth and Its Implications for Rorty's Pragmatism*, p. 20. Sometimes the onus of understanding is on the reader.

converse about our views of the world, to use persuasion rather than force, to be tolerant of diversity, to be contritely fallibilist."[98]

Needless to say this places Rorty's conception of philosophy and its task at odds with traditional philosophy's image of how to do philosophy. Neither rigorous philosophical thought, epistemological foundations, robust ethical theory, nor scientific methodology are required to attain Rorty's desired end. Rorty envisions an "intellectual life" in rather *blasé* terms:

> [The intellectual life] would be pursued without much reference to the traditional distinctions between the cognitive and the noncognitive, between "truth" and "comfort," or between the propositional and the nonpropositional. In particular, it would not make much of the line between "philosophy" and something else, nor try to allot distinctive cultural roles to art, religion, science, and philosophy. It would get rid of the idea that there was a special sort of expert - the philosopher - who dealt with a certain range of topics (e.g., Being, reasoning, language, knowledge, mind). It would no longer think that "philosophy" was the name of a sacred precinct that must be kept out of the hands of the enemy. People in other disciplines would no longer come around to philosophy professors to get their concepts "clarified".[99]

Rorty envisions society progressing in its admittedly *ethnocentric* attempt to establish solidarity in the society without Philosophy, the scientific method, or rigorous ethical theory.

Rorty has found support regarding his criticisms of the philosophical tradition and critical theory. But there has been hesitation on the part of many philosophers to subscribe to Rorty's critique of the scientific method. Given Rorty's pragmatist perspective, how does he respond to robust views of science and the scientific method? Rorty's addresses his view of science in a chapter entitled "Science as solidarity."[100]

In various places this chapter reads as if it had been authored by a theologian troubled because of the priority given to science over religion. The priest who once spoke of the truth has

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[97] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 67.
[98] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 67.
[99] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 76.

been replaced by the scientist. This is not meant to be a criticism of Rorty's tone or disposition. In fact it is quite refreshing to read a critique of science from someone with no religious beliefs or theological affiliations. He does religion a favor by analyzing the claims of science and setting forth the limits of the so-called scientific method.

Professor Rorty notes that our culture has placed science on a pedestal. "In our culture, the notions of 'science,' 'rationality,' 'objectivity,' and 'truth,' are bound up with one another. Science is thought of as offering 'hard,' 'objective' truth: truth as correspondence to reality, the only sort of truth worthy of the name."[101] The predominant example of this view was exemplified by the logical empiricists:

> For just as Plato was content to leave the world of appearances to the philodoxers, so many of the logical empiricists were, implicitly or explicitly, content to leave the rest of the culture to itself. On their view, once the job of demarcation had been accomplished, once the distinctive nature of science had been accurately described, there was no need to say much about the other activities of human beings.[102]

Logical empiricism was initially humbled through the critiques of Hempel and Neurath. This same high opinion of science's ability nevertheless remains largely intact.

Under the traditional view of scientific inquiry, if a particular discourse is worthy of consideration - if it is to be regarded as solid and objective - it must be measured against the *true picture of reality* offered by science. As a consequence, academics who labor outside the domain of the natural sciences must always show how their work embodies the scientific method. Only by proceeding throughout the inquiry in this way, so the story goes, can one be assured that the results are *true* and *objective.*

Rorty wishes to put forth a different view of science. He suggests that the *science* versus

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[100] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, pp. 35-45.
[101] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 35.

nonscience distinction was a search for metaphysical comfort. Just as the scientist has replaced the priest, the comfort provided once by religion is now replaced by this view of science. Rorty contends that this *sacralized* image of science is problematic, unduly prioritizing the sciences over other means of intellectual inquiry. "We need to stop thinking of science as the place where the human mind confronts the world, and of the scientist as exhibiting proper humility in the face of superhuman forces."[103] The best way of showing what is at stake in this debate is by distinguishing between two different meanings of the word *rational*; namely, rationality as methodology and rationality as reasonability.[104]

Concerning rationality as methodology, what characterizes this view is that the "criteria for success is laid down in advance."[105] Applying such methodology divides intellectual activity, clearly demarcating the work of poets and artists from the judges and lawyers. The former, as opposed to the latter, have no *a priori* means (or desire) for gauging their success before they accomplish their ends. There are no agreed upon standards that necessarily guide their work. Indeed the standards that arise are often of their own creation. "By contrast, we think of judges as knowing in advance what criteria a brief will have to satisfy in order to invoke a favorable decision, and of business people as setting well-defined goals and being judged by their success in

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[102] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 46.
[103] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 36.
[104] This has a certain resemblance to Nielsen's view: "'reasonable people' here can be plausibly taken to be people who are not *parti pris*, who are open to argument and the appeal to evidence, who attend to the causes of their coming to have the considered judgments they have and to the consequences of acting on them, who are willing to reconsider and are concerned with consistency and coherence." This coincides with his *Wide Reflective Equilibrium*: "rationalization involves a shuttling back and forth between theories, principles, and concrete moral judgments with a mutual correction between them until we have, considering them together, the best fit." Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition*, pp. 242, 225.
[105] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 36.

achieving them."[106] The archetypal example in this latter grouping is the scientist:

> [The scientist] knowing in advance what would count as disconfirming his hypothesis and prepared to abandon that hypothesis as a result of the unfavorable outcome of a single experiment, seems a truly heroic example. Further, we seem to have a clear criterion for the success of a scientific theory - namely, its ability to predict, and thereby to enable us to control some portion of the world. If to be rational means to be able to lay down criteria in advance, then it is plausible to take natural science as the paradigm of rationality.[107]

If this definition of what constitutes *rationality* is accepted, the humanities are, as a consequence, rendered nonrational and sub-par to the sciences.

Given the subject matter of the humanities, is this view of rationality appropriate? Probably not. This is because the goals of culture and society remain open-ended (at least in non-totalitarian societies). They cannot be determined in advance. And once determined, at least in democratic and pluralistic societies, these goals are susceptible to redefinition.[108] As such, if rationality was to be understood as "that which must satisfy pre-established criteria," the various subject matters of the humanities would be rendered nonrational. Rorty, seeing the problematic implications of this view, argues for a view of rationality which does not unjustly discriminate between the humanities and the natural sciences.

Rorty's alternative to the scientific view of rationality carries a sense of *saneness* or *reasonableness*. Rorty believes that this definition of rationality actually *names a set of moral virtues*:

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[106] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 36.

[107] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 36. Professor Horne has noted that Rorty's concept of rationality differs from Dewey's, in that Dewey posits reason on a scientific model, whereas Rorty seems to have gone beyond that view.

[108] Wittgenstein noted that "Wenn wir an die Zukunft der Welt denken, so meinen wir immer den Ort, wo sie sein wird, wenn sie so weiter läuft, wie wir sie jetzt laufen sehen, und denken nicht, daß sie nicht gerade läuft, sondern in einer Kurve, und ihre Richtung sich konstant ändert." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, from the English translation, *Culture and Value*, translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 3.

> . . . tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force. These are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if the society is to endure. In this sense of "rational," the word means something more like "civilized" than like "methodological." When so construed, the distinction between the rational and the irrational has nothing in particular to do with the difference between the arts and the sciences. On this construction, to be rational is simply to discuss any topic - religious, literary, or scientific - in a way which echews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation.[109]

Understood thusly, the activity that characterizes inquiry in the humanities can legitimately be understood as *rational*. This holds irrespective of the fact that these virtues will not always be exemplified by all those within the humanities. Humanly speaking this should be expected. Human failure should no more disqualify the humanities as being *rational* than it should the sciences.

Despite what Rorty believes to be a wholly adequate definition of rationality, he freely admits that this sense does not readily satisfy members of the academic community. For them, the stronger sense of rationality is to be preferred, one that continues to speak of objective truth, method, criteria, and correspondence to reality. Despite this opposition, Rorty holds firm to his contention that this traditional account of rationality should be placed aside.

Rorty's pragmatic disposition finds this *stronger* view of rationality to be misguided, especially with its bifurcation between the objective and the subjective, and the distinction between fact and value. Rationality, instead, should be the desire for "unforced agreement" - even if this agreement is derived within our admittedly, ethnocentric[110] society. As Rorty puts it, we must work by our own lights.

This does not mean that our society is impermeable to ideas from outside. On the contrary,

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[109] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 37.

[110] To be ethnocentric "is merely to say that beliefs suggested by another culture must be tested by trying to weave them together with beliefs we already have." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 26. Rorty is not interested in establishing a cross-cultural means of deriving agreement. With Davidson, Rorty believes that we already hold to mostly true beliefs. Secondly, our own

society openly encourages new ways of thinking. Ideas introduced will be compared to, and then possibly intertwined with, views already held. Rorty agrees that other viewpoints outside of our own culture are welcome - "we can always enlarge the scope of 'us' by regarding other people, or cultures, as members of the same community of inquiry as ourselves - by treating them as part of the group among whom unforced agreement is to be sought."[111] The demand for coherence will play a role in this process. Qualifying his own sense of coherence Rorty speaks of "mere coherence" and "mere agreement." He rejects attempts to establish an epistemological skyhook that would extract us from our distinctly finite situation.[112] This rejection is what is most striking about Rorty's position. It seems capable of moving the society towards greater tolerance and solidarity without the robust conceptual machinery of the philosophical tradition.

The pragmatist's view of philosophy, along with its post-Philosophically nuanced concepts of objectivity, rationality, and truth, has interesting consequences for science. Is *scientific investigation* able to carry through with its optimistic description of what it is capable of doing?

There is little doubt that science has had success in describing the world. What Rorty finds contentious is *why* this success has been achieved. He maintains that success is *not* due to the scientist being able to show, for example, the correspondence or reference between an atom and the world. He goes on to explain that:

> The antirepresentationalist is quite willing to grant that our language, like our bodies, has been shaped by the environment we live in. Indeed, he or she insists on this point - the point that our minds or our language could not (as the representationalist skeptic fears) be "out of touch with the reality" any more than our bodies could. What he or she denies is that it is explanatorily useful to pick and choose among the contents of our minds or our language and say that this or that item "corresponds to" or "represents" the environment in

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society's beliefs are what are of importance, especially in light of his ethnocentrism.

[111] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 38.

[112] An interesting discussion of such attempts can be found in Fergus Kerr's *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997)

a way that some other item does not.[113]

The reason for this is that there is no "*independent* test of accuracy of representation - of reference or correspondence to an 'antecedently determinate' reality - no test distinct from the success which is supposedly explained by this accuracy."[114] Quoting Kuhn, Rorty writes "there is no theory-independent way to reconstruct phrases like 'really there'."[115]

Rorty argues that if one speaks of science's success, the success granted is because of the method, or criteria, laid down in advance. This follows from scientists' endeavor to predict and control the behavior of phenomena. Science is *not* successful because of an ability to show how our language or the contents of our minds refer or correspond to the environment. As Rorty states

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[113] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 5. As Phillips explains further, we "can ask whether Tom is in pain, but what does it mean to ask whether the language in which we talk of pain itself accurately represents what is Real or what is True? We can ask whether it is true or false that there are chairs in the next room, but what would it mean to ask whether the language in which we speak of physical objects is itself true or false? We can ask whether the curtains are blue, but what would it mean to ask whether the language of colours refers to anything real? Our various uses of language show us what 'contact with reality' comes in these contexts: what it means to speak of real pain, real chairs and real colours. What does it mean to ask whether these uses of language adequately represent what is Real or True? It may be said that we need only distinguish between sentences and vocabularies to appreciate the point being made." Phillips, "Reclaiming the Conversations of Mankind," p. 36.

[114] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 6.

[115] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 38. From Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 206. Rorty states further that we "should avoid the idea that there is some special virtue in knowing in advance what criteria you are going to satisfy, in having standards by which to measure progress." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 37. As Letson comments, "Correspondence is thus made trivial from the standpoint of epistemology, for given a language-game or vocabulary, it is a simple matter to state the conditions of correspondence. For these theories, questions that would arise in an epistemological inquiry are already settled. A theory will come with an ontology assumed or postulated by the theory, and that ontology may be superseded by some other theory's ontology; but if the theory is not being questioned at the time, the ontology will be in place for the correspondence theorist to employ. The issue of correspondence under these circumstances is easily settled, for that part of the world that our sentences correspond to will simply be the objects that are used in the putatively true sentences of the theory." Letson, *Davidson's Theory of Truth and Its Implications for Rorty's Pragmatism*, p. 16.

elsewhere:

> . . . great scientists invent descriptions of the world which are useful for purposes of predicting and controlling what happens, just as poets and political thinkers invent other descriptions of it for other purposes. But there is no sense in which *any* of these descriptions is an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself. These philosophers regard the very idea of such a representation as pointless.[116]

Scientific inquiry certainly plays an important role in the society. But the importance does not rest in the mistaken belief that science somehow represents the true nature of reality, a representation that all other disciplines must somehow imitate or match. The humanities operate differently. Because of the different subject matter we should expect difference. Prediction and control, as Rorty puts it, should not be the humanities' primary (or even secondary) concern.[117] In fact, seen from Rorty's *softer* version of rationality the sciences and the humanities operate in the same measure. Neither group is more objective. Neither group better represents the real world.

What Rorty does find particularly praiseworthy among the sciences are the institutions that it has created and the virtues it sustains. The sense of solidarity within the sciences could be an example for the rest of society to mirror. These institutions attempt to exemplify the attributes of "relying on persuasion rather than force, of respect for the opinions of colleagues, [and] of curiosity and eagerness for new data and ideas . . . "[118] Out of this milieu arises a "free and open encounter," one that Rorty even characterizes as "an encounter in which *truth* cannot fail to win."[119]

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[116] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 4; emphasis his.

[117] As he states elsewhere, " . . . what is so special about prediction and control? Why should we think that explanations offered for this purpose are the 'best' explanations? Why should we think that the tools which make possible the attainment of these particular human purposes are less 'merely' human that those which make possible the attainment of beauty or justice?" Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 59.

[118] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 39.

[119] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 39; emphasis mine. In another place, speaking of

Professor Rorty's position is especially striking for mainly two reasons. Firstly, given the conceptual machinery that must be in place for traditional ethical theory to work, Rorty's view is relatively unencumbered. The second reason owes itself to Rorty's use of the word *truth*. In contrast to the view of truth as a correspondence, Rorty sees truth as the capacity to understand others: "the best way to find out what to believe is to listen to as many suggestions and arguments as you can."[120] If one does speak of "inquiry" its goal would be "an appropriate mixture of unforced agreement with tolerant disagreement (where what counts as appropriate is determined, within that sphere, by trial and error)."[121] There is no method for deriving more rational, objective, or truthful considered judgements from other considered judgements. *Mere coherence* and *mere agreement* are all that should be expected.

Does this account of objectivity, truth, rationality, and science, pave the way to relativism? By removing truth and objectivity from our language, is totalitarianism around the corner? Without a robust definition of truth how does one ultimately refute, for example, the Nazi? To argue thusly, Rorty contends, only begs all theoretical questions. Having abandoned the language of the realist, the pragmatist cannot be forced to answer questions presupposed from within the realist's framework. In fact, Rorty puts a twist on this inquiry by saying that pragmatists do not try to argue against the realist's answers but against their questions. "Unless one were worried about the really real, unless one had already bought in on Plato's claim that degrees of certainty, or of

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"domination free communication," Rorty states that "[s]uch a narrative would clarify the conditions in which the idea of truth as correspondence to reality might gradually be replace by the idea of truth as what comes to be believed in the course of free and open encounters." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 68.

[120] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 39.

[121] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 41.

centrality to our belief systems, were correlated with different relations to reality"[122] one would be hard pressed to make sense of these questions. Moreover, while the pragmatist will not speak of refuting Nazi's or fascists with the truth, it is deceptive to think that people of this sort need only be convinced of *the truth* to change their ways or that somehow *the truth* is needed to protect the society from their ideas.

Rorty contends that notions like "unforced agreement" and "free and open encounter" should not only replace disputes as the above, but as well the more convoluted and controversial notions such as "the will of God," "the moral law," "what our beliefs are trying to represent accurately," and "what makes our beliefs true."[123] Once this replacement is accomplished the difference between a society that praises tolerance, open dialogue, and the free-exchange of ideas obtains its own justification. Admittedly, neither religious nor political fundamentalists may be easily convinced of the errors of their ways. But this is the case both on the pragmatist's and the realist's account of *truth*.

In Rorty's view of society, science would not have a privileged position adjudicating between what is objective, rational, or true. Given Rorty's *weak* sense of rationality the sciences would not be juxtapositioned against the humanities. "The people now called 'scientists' would no

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[122] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 52.

[123] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 42. It is easy to see Hume's influence here. As Philo argues, "[B]ut when we look beyond human affairs and the properties of the surrounding bodies; when we carry our speculations into the two eternities, before and after the present state of things; into the creation and formation of the universe; the existence and properties of spirits; the powers and operations of one universal Spirit existing without beginning and without end, omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, infinite, and incomprehensible. We must be far removed from the smallest tendency to skepticism not to be apprehensive that we have here got quite beyond the reach of our faculties. So long as we confine our speculations to trade, or morals, or politics, or criticism, we make appeals, every moment, to common sense and experience, which strengthen our philosophical conclusions and remove (at least in part) the suspicion, which we so justly entertain with regard to every reasoning, that is very subtile and refined." Hume, *Dialogues*

longer think of themselves as a member of a quasi-priestly order, nor would the public think of themselves as in the care of such an order."[124] The outcome of this reorganization of definitions and conceptions would soon have dramatic consequences for the members of our society:

> For one's ultimate loyalty would be to the larger community which permitted and encouraged this kind of freedom and insouciance. This community would serve no higher end than its own preservation and self-improvement, the preservation and enhancement of civilization. It would identify rationality with that effort, rather than with the desire for objectivity. So it would feel no need for a foundation more solid than reciprocal loyalty.[125]

In the end, Rorty's account of rationality, objectivity, truth, and science gives no guarantee that society will emerge tolerant, open to dialogue, free, and *solidaire*. This is something that only time will tell.

There remains a certain attractiveness to Rorty's position. Lacking the conceptual machinery normally attached to theories that attempt to render the society more hospitable, Rorty's view may have more practical chances for implementation. The straight-forward emphasis of Rorty's position on tolerance, for example, may prove more successful in granting emancipation for the society than a more robust view of deriving social consensus. There is, in addition, an intuitive appeal to a view of knowledge that does not privilege one domain of research and study over another discipline. Certainly the dispute over the priority of science has wrought much damage. Giving priority to beliefs that were *scientifically grounded* has resulted in abdicating other beliefs that failed in this respect. Many of these abandoned beliefs are important to the well-being of the individual and society.

"On a pragmatist view, rationality is not the exercise of a faculty called 'reason' - a faculty which stands in some determinate relation to reality. Nor is the use of a method. It is *simply* a

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Concerning Natural Religion, p. 7.

[124] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 44.

matter of being open and curious, and of relying on persuasion rather than force."[126] Eschewing the belief that social solidarity needs strong philosophical or scientific theory, Rorty attempts to accomplish a goal without undue conceptual and theoretical sweat and labor. Rationality (in the *soft* sense) and objectivity (construed as tolerance and willingness for dialogue) should be sufficient for bringing solidarity to the society.

It is evident that Rorty's analysis of truth as representation, objectivity, and his examination of science, has significant implications for the philosophy of religion and theological investigation. This is the case not only with traditional conceptions of religious language but as well with his thoughts on the status of contemporary philosophy. Before we look into these implications, we need to describe Rorty's distinction between what he describes as *systematic* and *edifying* philosophies. As we will see below, this distinction provides a conceptual framework for implementing Rorty's redescription of key philosophical terms into the theological context.

C. Concerning "Systematic Philosophy" and "Edifying Philosophy"

In his text *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* one of the most useful distinctions Rorty has developed in his philosophical writings is between "systematic philosophy" and "edifying philosophy."[127]

Beginning with systematic philosophy, what characterizes this approach to philosophy is its interest in epistemology. The popularity and strength of systematic philosophy has largely come about by applying the success achieved in the sciences to philosophical problems:

> Successive philosophical revolutions within this mainstream have been produced by philosophers excited by new cognitive feats - e.g., the rediscovery of Aristotle, Galilean

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[125] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 45.
[126] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 62; emphasis his.
[127] See pages 365-372.

> mechanics, the development of self-conscious historiography in the nineteenth century, Darwinian biology, mathematical logic. Thomas's use of Aristotle to conciliate the Fathers, Descartes's and Hobbes's criticisms of scholasticism, the Enlightenment's notion that reading Newton leads naturally to the downfall of tyrants, Spencer's evolutionism, Carnap's attempt to overcome metaphysics through logic, are so many attempts to refashion the rest of culture on the model of the last cognitive achievements.[128]

The systematic philosopher typically takes the success gained in one area of inquiry and attempts to apply this success as a sort of methodological template across all other areas of culture. With proper epistemological understanding, so the story goes, where there was once superstition and convention there will be *objectivity*, *rationality*, insight into human knowledge, and progress:

> A "mainstream" Western philosopher typically says: Now that such-and-such a line of inquiry has had such a stunning success, let us reshape all inquiry, and all of culture, on its model, thereby permitting objectivity and rationality to prevail in areas previously obscured by convention, superstition, and the lack of a proper epistemological understanding of man's ability accurately to represent nature.[129]

Systematic philosophers who establish reputations, a *greatness*, do so because of their admittedly astonishing, scientific like ability to erect conceptual edifices. "Great systematic philosophers, like great scientists, build for eternity."[130] And the edifice, once built, must be defended by argument and proof - to show that the edifice represents nature, how things really are if they could describe themselves. Offered are accurate representations, between the world and our sentences, our thoughts - a final vocabulary that successfully achieves universal commensuration.[131]

In contrast to this mainstream view of philosophy, described by Rorty as *systematic philosophy*, there is a *peripheral* view of philosophy described by Rorty as "edifying" philosophy. The most exemplary figures within this peripheral view are philosophers such as Kierkegaard,

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[128] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 366-367.
[129] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 367.
[130] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 369.
[131] "By 'commensurable' I mean able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point of where

Santayana, William James, John Dewey, the later Wittgenstein, and the later Heidegger.

While this assemblage of philosophers is quite diverse, their resemblance can be noted on a number of points. First is their shared suspicion of the idea that the task of human investigation is to know "essences." There is, secondly, a general distrust for taking a successful methodology from one discipline and applying it, *holus bolus*, onto another discipline, in the hopes that it will grant similar success. Thirdly, against the constructive impulse of the systematic philosopher, the edifying philosopher is suspicious of overly optimistic visions of vocabulary. Once one becomes enamored with a particular vocabulary, what may follow is the desire to show how this way of speaking *mirrors* nature, the way the world truly is if it could express itself.

In contrast Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger, emblematic of the edifying philosopher of the twentieth century, see the philosophical project differently. They "hammer away at the holistic point that words take their meanings from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character, and the corollary that vocabularies acquire their privileges from the men who use them rather than from their transparency to the real."[132] Rorty goes on to state that:

> They have kept alive the historicist sense that this century's "superstition" was the last century's triumph of reason as well as the relativist sense that the latest vocabulary, borrowed from the latest scientific achievement, may not express privileged representations of essences, but be just another of the potential infinity of vocabularies in which the world can be described.[133]

Instead of attempting to show the representative character of words, edifying philosophers wish to show how the meaning of words are derived from other words. The *great* edifying philosophers are therefore "reactive and offer satires, parodies, aphorisms."[134] In contrast to the systematic

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statements seem to conflict." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 316.

[132] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 368.

[133] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 367.

[134] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 369.

philosophers who wish to build eternal conceptual systems or schemes, the edifying philosopher wishes to pull apart, to sound out the idols, to "destroy for the sake of their own generation."[135] Rorty even speaks of the similarity between the edifying philosopher and the poet. Edifying philosophers, like poets, wish to leave open the possibility of a "sense of wonder," "something which is *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described."[136] By characterizing philosophy in this manner they indeed go against a *particular* view of what it is to do philosophy. But this is exactly the point.[137]

A comparison between these two types of philosophers, and especially the comparison between philosopher and poet[138], naturally brings up the question of what constitutes a philosopher. And quite naturally, as well, this takes the discussion back to Plato as he was most notable in his contrast between poet and philosopher.

Those who take this opposition from Plato to heart, become caught up in the "who really is the philosopher" debate. The most typical charge in this respect is between the Continental and

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[135] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370.

[136] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370; emphasis his.

[137] Although Rorty has been accused of trying to jettison philosophy in its entirety, his position is quite different: "To say that philosophy might end is not to say that holding large views might become unfashionable, or that philosophy departments might be plowed under, but rather to say that a certain cultural tradition might die out." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 32. And, "[t]here is a difference between hoping for the end of 'Philosophy 101' and hoping for the end of philosophy . . . I hope that we never stop reading, e.g. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Dewey, and Heidegger, but also that we may, sooner or later, stop trying to sucker the freshmen into taking an interest in 'the problem of the external world' and 'the problem of other minds'." Richard Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 90, 9, September 1993, pp. 446-447.

[138] But having the poet on hand gives the systematic philosopher a handy foil: "Normal philosophers need to think, for example, that in forging the powerful tools of modern analytic philosophy, they are developing weapons to ensure victory in the coming final struggle with the

the Analytic philosophers. For Continental types, Analytic philosophy falls under the scope of science or mathematics, but because it does not deal with humanity's existential condition it most certainly is not philosophy. For Analytic types, Continental philosophy is perhaps good literature or even an interesting sort of contemplation, but because it lacks intellectual rigour and scientific-like precision, it most certainly is not philosophy. And it is the Continental side that appears weakest when contrasted with Plato's view of the poets. But only on this reading of Plato. The Continental side has Socrates' as brother in arms with his dictum of the "unexamined life" being indicative of the wise philosopher.

Rorty takes this debate over "who is the real philosopher" to be little more than "a rhetorical gambit" between incommensurable discourses.[139] Be that as it may, when philosophers turn their attention to the edifying philosopher, Rorty notes, the force of the accusation takes a particularly forceful turn. The edifying philosopher, because of her suspicion of language, argument, and attempts to represent the *Real* in a final vocabulary, goes against normal philosophy. Instead of offering arguments, for example, the task for the edifying philosopher is to "simply offer another set of terms, *without* saying that these terms are the new-found accurate representations of essences."[140]

Describing the edifying philosopher in this way, judging from its own history, is at worst *anathema*. The edifying philosopher, we should remember, does not engage in the classical image of philosophizing. For Plato the extreme case of such a person, the poet, was as well not interested in such activity. And so he clearly demarcated himself from the inquiring *philosophical*

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decadent dialecticians. Everybody needs everybody else." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 108.

[139] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370.

[140] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370; emphasis his.

activity of the systematic philosopher.

For the edifying philosopher, to philosophize is to be engaged in a task that differs significantly from that of offering accurate representations. Compared to the goals of the systematic philosopher, the edifying philosopher sees herself as "participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry."[141] The latter view of philosophy drops the idea of representation. And so while the edifying philosopher has something to say in a conversation, the contribution made is predicated on the belief that the sentences uttered are connected to other sentences, not to the world. As a result of this view of philosophy and language, edifying philosophers, like Wittgenstein and Heidegger[142], do not wish to be thought of as philosophers having views about how things are.[143] Their philosophical task is not seen as having to represent the world accurately or as it is if it could speak for itself.[144]

And this brings the conversation back to Plato, or better, Socrates. Namely on the issue on the *philosopher's love of wisdom*:

> One way of thinking of wisdom as something of which the love is not the same as that of argument, and of which the achievement does not consist in finding the correct vocabulary for representing essence, is to think of it as the practical wisdom necessary to participate in a conversation. One way to see edifying philosophy *as* the love of wisdom is to see it as

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[141] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 371.

[142] Rorty notes that "Heidegger is not the first to have invented a vocabulary whose purpose is to dissolve the problems considered by his predecessors, rather than to propose new solutions to them. Consider Hobbes and Locke on the problems of the scholastics, and Carnap and Ayer on 'pseudo-problems.' He is not the first to have said that the whole mode of argument used in philosophy up until his day was misguided." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 40.

[143] Rorty contends that "edifying philosophers have to decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views." On this point he notes that Heidegger's *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* (translated as "The Age of the World-View" by Marjorie Grene in *Boundary II* [1976]) is the best discussion of this difficulty that he has seen. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 371.

[144] "They do not accept the Cartesian-Kantian picture presupposed by the idea of 'our minds' or 'our language' as an 'inside' which can be contrasted to something (perhaps something very different) 'outside.'" Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 12.

> the attempt to prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into a research program. Edifying philosophers can never end philosophy, but they can prevent it from attaining the secure path of a science.[145]

If the philosophical enterprise is to be understood as participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry, what kind of contribution can such a philosopher make to society, or more specifically, to ethics? With Rorty's analysis of traditional philosophy, and his distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies, is it even possible to say anything about ethics? Once one does away with robust notions of truth, objectivity, and rationality are we left in a quagmire of relativism?

With this non-traditional conception of philosophy, the immediate implications fall upon ethics. The strongest objections to Rorty's antiessentialism comes from the moral realist. Charging Rorty with anti-realism, the moral realist believes that without a robust conception of the way the world is, we will be left with no means of adjudicating or teaching moral values.

No better place can this debate be illustrated than in the philosophy of education. The question to be faced is whether values education is possible outside of moral realism. Tapio Puolimatka has argued precisely that this is not truly possible – that inculcating children with values (such as rational and moral autonomy) is contingent on the validity of realism.

What makes Puolimatka's study important, is that he not only states clearly the moral realist's account of values education, but as well critiques the pragmatist's (or Rortyan) position. Puolimatka's article therefore merits a close reading and response.

III. Edifying Philosophy and the Task of *Doing Ethics*

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[145] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 372.

Richard Rorty's metaphilosophical position, with its strong critique of traditional notions of truth as correspondence, objectivity, and rationality, has direct implications for doing ethics. His antiessentialist position opens itself to charges of relativism or bringing society to the brink of anarchy and nihilism. These accusations, usually from the realist, are made repeatedly. Referring to two philosophers that Rorty makes use of, one Catholic philosopher has stated: "let me state baldly that both Nietzsche and Heidegger fail – and cannot help but fail – as moral thinkers because, whatever their other accomplishments, they have no place for absolute moral truths or universal principles of justice."[146]

In order to have a clear sense of ethics the traditional philosopher has claimed that we must be *rational* and *objective.* To be rational, one eye must be kept on *reality* and the other on one's given *beliefs.* Beliefs about right and wrong are to be compared with "moral reality." This view implicates a strong theory of truth as correspondence[147] coupled to an objective means of firm justification. The philosopher, moreover, in order to show that real results in ethics are

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[146] Robert Royal, "The Forgetfulness of Beings," *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy.* Edited by Roman T. Ciapalo (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), p. 209. See my review, Roman T. Ciapalo (ed.), *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, Baltimore: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996, pp. 1 – 294. *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, forthcoming. At a recent conference sponsored by the University of Notre Dame Law School, Joseph Boyle, President of St. Michael's in Toronto, began his lecture on religion and society with the language of philosophical orthodoxy, using phrases such as: "principles of reality"; "fundamentally good and the true"; "objectively good"; "objectively, rational, religious demand"; and "the Transcendent perspective." During the question period my query (written beforehand) was this: "I can offer motivation for action, reasons for behavior, without reference to 'principles of reality' and the 'objectively good'. I am dubious that we must categorize issues of alienation, sin, and failure [his stated issues] under these principles because of the realization that the 'objective, rational, religious demand' is often used as a substitute for conversation and more often than not rhetoric to sustain religious conservativism. The rational appeal has been used historically for the justification of slavery, subjugation of women, and capital punishment. So my question is how much consideration have you given to the problematization of these terms as undergirding your sense of moral obligation?" In his reply Boyle could only say that the alternative is relativism or some sort of "postmodernism."

forthcoming, must subscribe to methodology that is in accordance with the, so-called, *scientific method*. This is the means by which we are certain ethical decisions are *rational*, *objective*, and most importantly, *true*.

The debate over the source of values, morality, and ethics has practical implications. Whether in our private or public activities how do we decide between right and wrong? How do we decide the right course of action when facing decisions of a moral or ethical nature? What is the basis or source of our distinctions between right and wrong?

One way of exploring these issues is through discussion of values education. That is, when it comes to teaching values, especially to children, how are we to go about effectively inculcating and nurturing a moral and ethical attitude? The section below addresses this debate, pitting moral realism against a pragmatist's account of values education. We hope to show that irrespective of the realist's claim that without objective moral standards we would not be able to inculcate values, such a task is possible on a nonrealist, pragmatist account. In short, this is an example of how edifying philosophy may be applied, in this case, to the philosophy of education.

A. Inculcating Values: Moral Realism or Pragmatism?

In an article discussing the means by which democratic values education is to be effected, Tapio Puolimatka argued that "it is possible to educate in [sic]democratic values in ways that foster the development of the rational and moral autonomy of children only within the moral realist context."[148] Examining in detail Puolimatka's defense of moral realism, we will offer a Rortyan response to moral realism as well as a pragmatist account of democratic values education.

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[147] That is, the way things are apart from how we describe them.

[148] Tapio Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 31, 3, November 1997, pp. 461-476.

Seeking to express the flaw of what he terms "the problem of values education, Tapio Puolimatka argues that "democracy presupposes citizens who are capable of forming authentic convictions about the life they regard as most worth living and of bringing their contribution to the guidance of society on the basis of their deliberation."[149] What counts as "authentic convictions" are those "the person can identify while being conscious of the processes which led her to identify with them."[150] Education will certainly play a role in this process even though Puolimatka readily admits that the inculcation of values will be a tenuous affair.

The real danger, he warns, comes from those who wish to replace democratic values with values contrary to liberty, equality, justice, solidarity, and truth. How can we maintain these values and at the same time allow for dissent? Puolimatka contends that "[i]t is crucial for democratic society to agree on a set of procedural values for adjudicating conflicts over substantive value-orientation."[151]

For Puolimatka, deriving agreement is fraught with obstacles owing to the inherent definition of democracy – allowing for the possibility of dissent over the very values it upholds. This leads to the paradox of trying to sustain democratic freedom while allowing for radical remonstration. The problem is exacerbated, he believes, by those who contend that moral decisions are a matter of personal responsibility. As such, individual moral decisions may conflict with public values currently in place. "This indicates a basic discrepancy between the individualistic nature of morality and the socialising nature of education."[152] When it comes to teaching values to students this issue becomes more delicate. How is it possible "to teach a

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[149] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 461
[150] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 461.
[151] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 462.
[152] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 462.

commitment to moral values in a way that respects individuality"? The problem of democratic education, as it turns out, can only be seriously resolved in the moral realist context. Moral realism is

> the view that the realm of moral values and norms is wider than our knowledge of it and that their validity is not dependent on individual attitudes or social contracts. The conditions for moral experience cannot be reduced to the views, desires and valuations of moral agents. The real (as opposed to the imaginary or routinely projected) structure of human interaction has an irreducible moral aspect which sets requirements for human behaviour.[153]

And while there are different versions of moral realism (which should immediately put up a red flag to the cautious) ranging from Kant[154], to Scheler[155], to the classical intuitionists[156],

> The crucial point is . . . that moral knowledge is not essentially relative to culturally transmitted vocabularies, conceptual systems and justificatory conventions. The ultimate source of authority is moral reality rather than democratic consensus or the individual teacher. The development of moral consciousness is dependent on the unfolding of the capacity for moral discernment.[157]

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[153] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 463.

[154] By attempting to derive moral knowledge from the principle of universalisability.

[155] By assuming that feelings communicate objective value-essences.

[156] Classical intuitionists employ the notion of self-evident intuitions. Some modern versions relax the requirement of self-evidence. See: Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464. An example of this is from Waluchow and Thomas who state: "To say that a principle is self-evident and known through intuition is to say that its truth is evident to an attentive mind, that it neither needs supporting evidence nor needs to be deduced from other propositions. It stands alone as something whose truth is known directly through *moral* intuition." John E. Thomas and Wilfred J. Waluchow, *Well and Good: A Case Study Approach to Biomedical Ethics* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1998), p. 36; authors' emphasis.

[157] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464. The Catholic theologian Joseph Owens reflects this position although he is careful to nuance it somewhat differently than Puolimatka. He states that "appeal may be made to philosophy – sometimes even in discussions in the popular press – when moral norms are challenged or ridiculed. Rational grounds are thereby sought for steadfast adherence to moral standards that have been handed down from generation to generation. This is the case today in regard to the nature and stability of marriage and family, or about the motives for respecting human life. In those areas traditionally accepted tenets have come to be regarded by many people as running counter to the progressive thrusts of a new age. The viewpoint for the opposition to the older standards may be either modern or postmodern. But in either case, it would indicate that the moral norms are being looked upon as open to philosophical discussion." Joseph Owens, *Some Philosophical Issues in Moral Matters: The Collected Ethical*

The result, Puolimatka concludes, is that human actions "are always subject to evaluation by moral standards *whether one acknowledges the reality of the moral order or not.*"[158] And just for good measure Puolimatka notes that the moral realist's paradigm, due to its "explanatory power", gives added preference over anti-realism.

Provisionally we might remark that this way of setting up the problem begs the question from the very beginning.[159] Why believe, in the first place, that moral standards are somehow beyond the decision making process of the moral agent? Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, what does it really mean to assert that there is a moral reality that somehow is distinct from human agency? That the *ethically true* could exist without anyone knowing it?[160] And if such a *realm*

Writings of Joseph Owens, edited by Dennis J. Billy and Terence Kennedy (Roma: Editiones Academiae Alphonsianae, 1996), p. 14.

[158] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464; emphasis mine.

[159] Mackintosh, speaking about Troeltsch's rigid principles of historical investigation, put the problem in a way comparable to the moral realist view of ethical theory: "The possibilities have been fixed in advance; the facts are compelled to fit the method by which they are to be treated; just as, though an automatic machine when opened may disgorge nothing but unbent pennies, this is not because the outer world is made up of unbent pennies and nothing else, but because the selective mechanism at work will accept no other sort." H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1937), p. 203.

[160] For example, Puolimatka cites Stout who says "I deny that the wrongness of torturing innocents is simply a belief we have that is justified by some expedient social convention. Knowingly and willingly torturing innocents is wrong, impermissible, unjust. It always has been. It would still be unjust if, after the general collapse of civilization, everybody was justified in believing it permissible, given the expedient conventions of the day . . . That is the moral truth of the matter, whether we recognize it or not – a truth I deem more certain than any explanation I could give of it or any argument I could make on its behalf." Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 463; from Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel. The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), p. 245. Stout is right here. The wrongness of torturing children is *not* simply a belief we have that is justified by social convention. It is more than that, even on Rorty's position. Rorty can say, like Stout, that this is "wrong, impermissible, unjust" – but it is something more to say that it would be unjust even if everybody believed otherwise. Rorty would undoubtedly say that this claim makes no sense because truthfulness can only be assigned to beliefs possessed by an agent. On Stout's account, moral truths have a life of their own.

(this way of speaking naturally conjures up Platonism) is something we are to somehow come in contact with to be moral, why does moral realism give way to different versions and different norms?[161] My hunch at this point is that in the end the moral realist will ultimately fall back on *ad hominem* – accusations that one's opponent in the discussion over ethics cannot agree because he or she has some sort of cognitive, psychological, or spiritual (or a little of each) malfunction which impedes seeing *moral truth.*[162]

Puolimatka offers the following premises to his argument which he then elaborates in closer detail:

1. The essence of democracy is in moral values expressed in societal procedures and human relationships, and in critical citizens who are committed to these values.
2. The continuity of democratic society presupposes that citizens are both critical and committed to democratic values.
3. Without moral truth there is no adequate reason for critical persons to come to definite conclusions about values.
4. Since each person has the right to make her own value choices, education should provide her with the capacity to make them in a rational framework on the basis of the best available information.

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[161] As Owens has further noted, "But no overall agreement is to be found among philosophers, whether ancient or modern or contemporary, in their own explanations of the detailed ways in which philosophy influences human conduct. The views differ radically with each individual thinker. Also, the fact remains that people can be good citizens and good soldiers and good rulers without having had formal philosophical training. The track record of philosophy's conscious influence on the major events of human history does not glow with any notable brilliance." Owens, *Some Philosophical Issues in Moral Matters: The Collected Ethical Writings of Joseph Owens*, p. 15.

[162] An example of this is Schall who argues that "the denial of God is not primarily an intellectual problem about proving God's existence but a spiritual problem, a murder in fact. There are basic questions that we refuse to ask so that our problem is not really intellectual but spiritual, a problem of will and not of intellect." James V. Schall, S.J., "Our Postmodernism and the 'Silence' of St. Thomas," *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*. Edited by Roman T. Ciapalo (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), p. 209. Rorty's response is appurtenant: "We are quite justified in thinking as we do, but we cannot check our view of the matter against the intrinsic nature of moral reality . . . Nor will we get anywhere by telling those who think differently that they are out of touch with reality or that they are behaving irrationally." Rorty, *Truth & Progress*, p. 7.

5. Genuine moral convictions can develop only in a rational framework where ideas are accepted on the basis of their validity and justifiability. Convictions formed in a context closed to reason are prejudices.
6. Critical individuals adopt democratic convictions only if democratic values prove to be more valid than competing value-systems. If these values have no rational appeal, it is not sensible to teach them since there are better moral choices.
7. An indoctrinatory teaching approach cannot foster the development of democratic convictions. Educational authority should not be used for ideological purposes. Rational convictions presuppose a learning process which discloses the human potential for being critical, and the formation of convictions which stand critical scrutiny. Democratic convictions should be taught without indoctrination. If they cannot, it is hard to justify their teaching at all.[163]

How would the pragmatist evaluate the premises of this argument enumerated by Puolimatka?

To be admitted at the outset, the goal for the pragmatist or Rortyan theorizer is *not* to do what the moral realist does – except better. It is to rather show that the former can teach values to students in a *rational framework*, but without the cumbersome assumptions presupposed by the moral realist.

From a pragmatist standpoint premises (1) and (2) are rather uncontroversial. In terms of enhancing solidarity and human flourishing the pragmatist would argue similarly. For the time being we will leave them as they stand.

Premise (3) would be the most troubling for the pragmatist, although most of Puolimatka's criticisms here are directed against the antirealist. And while the pragmatist sees this, as Rorty would put it, as "the flabby old controversy between realism and antirealism"[164], some comments should be offered about this premise.[165]

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[163] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," pp. 463-464.
[164] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 61, footnote 49.
[165] We will not examine this debate between the realist and antirealist although Rorty does spend some time discussing it in his writings. See "Solidarity or Subjectivity," in Rorty's *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, pp. 21-34. As he states elsewhere "[t]he difference between the moral realist and the moral antirealist seems to pragmatists a difference that makes no practical difference. Further, such metaethical questions presuppose the Platonic distinction between inquiry that aims

Puolimatka argues that developing moral authenticity in students can best be achieved through moral realism – the contention that "moral truth is not reducible to prevalent social conventions."[166] Neither is it reducible to mere individual preferences, nor practical effectiveness. Instead, "[t]he teacher is expected to foster students' capacity to relate to moral reality and focus on its relevant features, rather than to use persuasive methods to communicate her convictions."[167] Puolimatka then goes on to offer three different examples of moral realism – Kant, Scheler, and the classical intuitionist. Admitting that there is difference among them as to what constitutes the nature of moral cognition, Puolimatka believes that the crucial point is "that moral knowledge is not essentially relative to culturally transmitted vocabularies, conceptual systems and justificatory conventions."[168]

The principal difficulty is that Puolimatka does not explain what exactly it is that the moral educator is supposed to come into touch with before being adequately equipped to teach values to students. How exactly does one "relate to moral reality" and "focus on its relevant features" - to transcend the human point of view, reaching out to objects that are wholly external to our descriptions?[169] Perhaps this goes unexplained for good reason. As it turns out, much preparatory conceptual busy work is necessitated:

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at efficient problem solving and inquiry that aims at a goal called 'truth for its own sake.' That distinction collapses if one follows Dewey in thinking of all inquiry – in physics as well as ethics – as practical problem solving or if one follows Peirce in seeing *every* belief as action-guiding." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 173; emphasis his.

[166] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464.

[167] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education,", p. 464.

[168] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464.

[169] Referring to Murdoch's account of transcending our human condition, Kerr states, "we live in a world that makes claims on us, morally, ethically - claims we can ignore, claims to which we may be blind, but we are not the ones who invent them or project them - *we find them, discover them.*" Kerr, *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity*, p. 87; emphasis mine.

> A life spent representing objects accurately would be spent recording the results of calculations, reasoning through sorites, calling off the observable properties of things, construing cases according to unambiguous criteria, getting things right . . . He wants to be constrained not merely by the disciplines of the day, but by the ahistorical and nonhuman nature of reality itself.[170]

Rorty notes that this impulse takes two forms:

> [T]he original Platonic strategy of postulating novel *objects* for treasured propositions to correspond to, and the Kantian strategy of finding *principles* which are definatory of the essence of knowledge, or representation, or morality, or rationality. But this difference is unimportant compared to the common urge to escape the vocabulary and practices of one's own time and find something ahistorical and necessary to cling to.[171]

It would take some time for Puolimatka to both explain what the moral realist means by all of this, and to then show the educator how she must carry out the task of teaching this information to students in a meaningful way. In short, to find "the a priori structure of any possible inquiry, or language, or form of social life."[172] This will be a challenging undertaking. Yet this is what being moral means on the moral realist's account – to give substantive content to how "the student's capacity to relate to moral reality"[173] can be fostered. *Reality* is distinct from *social reality*. If not explained, these ideals are platitudes which merely give the impression some high level activity is being carried out.

Pragmatists, on the other hand, urge us to think differently about rationality, and as a consequence, what one must do to be considered moral. They contend "that rationality is what history and society make it – that there is no overarching ahistorical structure (the Nature of Man,

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[170] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. 164-165.
[171] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 165; emphasis his.
[172] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 166.
[173] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464.

the laws of human behavior, the Moral Law, the Nature of Society) to be discovered."[174] But far from plunging humanity and society into an abyss of relativism, anarchy, and meaninglessness (a fear that the moral realist enjoys poking a stick at), the dismissal of realism pushes the individual towards responsibility. "Dewey emphasizes that this move 'beyond method' gives mankind an opportunity to grow up, to be free to make itself, rather than seeking direction from some imagined outside source (one of the ahistorical structures mentioned above)."[175] In response to the query "How real is that?" the pragmatist can only say that nobody would ask this question "unless he had some invidious contrast in mind between things that are *really* real and things that are (as Royce put it) 'not so damned real.'"[176]

Premise (4) seems, at first glance, unproblematic and conducive to the pragmatist's position. But it becomes increasingly clear that what constitutes being rational in this premise carries with it the Kantian idea of rationality – that "it is rational to be moral"[177], and the Kantian model of philosophy – a model where epistemological questions are foremost areas of concern. Understood thusly, philosophy, as epistemology, "must set *universal standards of rationality and objectivity* for all actual and possible claims to knowledge."[178] Once these universal standards are

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[174] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 204. Moreover for the pragmatist, "there is no overarching, ahistorical, context-free criterion to which one can appeal when asked to shift from one paradigm of explanation to another." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 104.
[175] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 204. As Kwiek puts the issue,"[m]an, freed from an ethical smoke-screen, from a meta-narrative haze that covers ethical choices, receives the burden of his own moral dilemmas." Marek Kwiek, *Rorty's Elective Affinities: The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought* (Poznan', 1996), p. 35.
[176] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, pp. 116-117; emphasis his.
[177] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 181.
[178] Kim, "Rorty on the Possibility of Philosophy," p. 590; emphasis his.

established the knowledge derived gives the philosopher a privileged perspective whereby she may adjudicate cultural quarrels over values and truth claims.[179]

Puolimatka does not exactly mention Kant in his discussion of the "rational framework." But it is interesting to note that in his elucidation on this point he quotes Kant's view of moral education. And given the context of Puolimatka's article there is good reason to believe that Kant's notion of rationality is being presupposed. If so, this view, compared to the pragmatist's view of rationality, is epistemologically loaded, creating more problems than it attempts to solve.

In contrast to the moral realist's position, the pragmatist contends that rationality *names a set of moral virtues*:

> [T]olerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force. These are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if the society is to endure. In this sense of "rational," the word means something more like "civilized" than like "methodological." When so construed, the distinction between the rational and the irrational has nothing in particular to do with the difference between the arts and the sciences. On this construction, to be rational is simply to discuss any topic - religious, literary, or scientific - in a way which echews dogmatism, defensiveness, and righteous indignation.[180]

The pragmatist insists that this metaphysically unencumbered view of rationality makes good sense. Instead of trying to isolate the shared human attribute which grounds morality in *rationality*, rationality is understood by the Rortyan as the attempt to "make one's web of

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[179] "Kant's example encouraged the idea that the philosopher, as an expert on the nature and limits of knowledge, can serve as a supreme cultural arbiter." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 174) As he says elsewhere, "[t]o drop the notion of the philosopher as knowing something about knowing which nobody else knows so well would be to drop the notion that [the voice of the philosopher] always has an overriding claim on the attention of the other participants in the conversation." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 392.

[180] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 37.

belief"[181] as coherent as possible.[182] Dropped is Kant's attempt to square a dying rationalist tradition with "a vision of a new, democratic world":

> Kant's balancing act has become outmoded and irrelevant. We are now in a good position to put aside the last vestiges of the idea that human beings are distinguished by the capacity to know rather than by the capacities for friendship and intermarriage, distinguished by rigorous rationality rather than by flexible sentimentality. If we do so, we shall have dropped the idea that assured knowledge of a truth about what we have in common is a prerequisite for moral education, as well as the idea of a specifically moral motivation.[183]

Avoiding otherworldly denotation the pragmatist's account exhibits a human point of view coupled with the explanatory power sought after by values education. It is clear that educators know how to inculcate these values into the moral life-world of students. It is something that skillful, sensitive, and judicious teachers have always done.

Similar to the other premises the force of premise (5) turns on the use of the word "rational." The pragmatist, while not rejecting out of hand this premise, once again is suspicious of the moral realist's use of this word. She is, moreover, skeptical about the necessity and efficacy of the rational framework that provides "genuine moral convictions."

The first suspicion, provoked by Dewey and Foucault, is that what counts for rationality is often motivated by politics and power exhibited through nurture and culture, not nature and reality.[184] What is rational in one era (or generation) may be considered irrational a few years

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[181] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 171.

[182] And as we shall see below, it is one that admits the utter contingency of our beliefs. Instead of accepting the realist's model that argues that beliefs must represent moral reality, "[t]o accept the contingency of starting points is to accept our inheritance from, and our conversation with, our fellow-humans as our only source of guidance." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 166.

[183] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 166.

[184] "[R]ationality is what history and society make it." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 204.

down the road.[185] When we look back in our own century to certain beliefs that were once counted as truths according to nature, the moral realm, in short *rational* – we now think as unjust, bigoted, racist, sexist, or xenophobic. And to our credit.

The second suspicion is that the interests of those with political, ecclesiastical, and monetary power, cloaked in the guise of being "rational," more often than not lead to breaches in human rights, environmental disasters, intolerance, and unjustified discrimination. Instead of being the foundation of democracy – instead of strengthening democratic values – these constructed views of rationality give way to conduct that threatens democracy. As Ricoeur has warned, once the unquestionable is established violence is not far off:

> Rien ne prête plus à l'imposture que l'idée de totalité. On a trop vite dit: elle est ici, elle est là; elle est Esprit, elle est Nature, elle est Histoire; la violence n'est pas loin; d'abord la violence sur les faits et bientôt la violence sur les hommes, si par surcroît le philosophe de la totalité a pouvoir sur les hommes.[186]

The moral realist fears that without objectivity and rationality, morality slips into anarchy.[187] Pragmatists, on the other hand, see universalism and realism "as committed to the idea of a reality-tracking faculty called 'reason' and an unchanging moral reality to be tracked, and thus unable to make sense of the claim that a new voice is needed."[188] Moral progress, for the latter, must make

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[185] Speaking of Goethe, Kierkegaard, Santayana, James, and Dewey, Rorty states that "[t]hey have kept alive the historicist sense that this century's 'superstition' was the last century's triumph of reason as well as the relativist sense that the latest vocabulary, borrowed from the latest scientific achievement, may not express privileged representations of essences, but be just another of the potential infinity of vocabularies in which the world can be described." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 367.

[186] Paul Ricoeur, *L'homme fallible, Finitude et Culpabilité I* (Paris: Aubier, éditions montaigne), 1960, p. 66.

[187] Here is what Richard Bernstein describes as "Cartesian anxiety" – "the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface." Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), p. 18.

[188] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 208.

way for new voices and new ways of seeing things. The questions asked are "What are the limits of our community? Are the encounters sufficiently free and open? Has what we have recently gained in solidarity cost us our ability to listen to outsiders who are suffering? To outsiders who have new ideas?"[189] As Rorty rightly notes these are political questions rather than metaphysical or epistemological questions. It "consists in an increasing ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us as outweighing the differences."[190]

What must the teacher do, under the realist's account, in order to show that the moral beliefs accepted have "validity" and "justifiability"?[191] Again, if by rationality we mean the non-metaphysical, pragmatist sense given above, the pragmatist would agree that one should certainly be able to give students reasons for certain behavior. Validity and justifiability are the descriptions we apply when reasons for actions are successfully explained and accepted by a particular audience[192]:

> If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. If they succeed in their office, they are reliable, sound, valid, good, true. If they fail to clear up confusion to eliminate defects, if they increase confusion, uncertainty, and evil when they are acted upon, then they are false.[193]

B. Sentimentality and Being Ethical

The pragmatist would fully agree with Puolimatka's contention that when teaching "morality" to

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[189] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 13.
[190] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 181.
[191] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464.
[192] "On James's view, 'true' resembles 'good' or 'rational' in being a normative notion, a compliment paid to sentences that seem to be paying their way and that fit in with other sentences which are doing so." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xxv.
[193] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York, The New American Library, 1950), p. 156.

children "the child should be provided with reasons as early as he is able to understand them."[194] Children easily understand (usually better than adults[195]) norms such as, "treat everyone with kindness, because this is what we like best for ourselves." If the child (or adult) asks for more – e.g. "why should I care about Sally or Johnny" – no unarguable, irrefutable response can be given. Yet because no final and ultimate response or justification is available it does not follow from this that *no* response is possible:

> A better sort of answer is the sort of long, sad, sentimental story that begins, 'Because this is what it is like to be in her situation – to be far from home, among strangers' . . . or 'Because her mother would grieve for her.' Such stories, repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, safe, powerful people, to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people – people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation.[196]

But in Puolimatka's working paradigm providing reasons is more than providing justification – this is the point of moral realism. *Reason-giving* is one thing, establishing objective moral truth is another. The moral realist needs to do more than *merely* give children reasons for doing certain things and refraining from other things. Required is a crash course in Kant's *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, along with standard readings in the history of metaphysics and epistemology. It will be no mean task for the average school teacher to provide this foundation of morality for the student – getting in touch with objective reality and moral truth takes time, plenty of energy, and most certainly much homework.

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[194] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 466.

[195] Similar questions can be asked of adults. For us "[t]his is to set aside Kant's question 'What is man?' and to substitute the question 'What sort of world can we prepare for our great-grandchildren?'" Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 175.

[196] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 185. The ability to respond to those who suffer, the pragmatist believes, means that "people merely need to turn their eyes toward people who are getting hurt, notice the *details* of the pain being suffered, rather than needing to have their cognitive apparatus restructured." Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 80; emphasis his.

In contrast to the attempt to come into contact with moral reality, Rorty emphasizes the importance of conversation. As Rorty describes it, this is close to Habermas's philosophy of intersubjectivity which "centers around a practice characteristic of liberal societies – treating as true whatever can be agreed upon in the course of free discussion and waving aside the question of whether there is some metaphysical object to which the result of such discussion might or might not correspond."[197] Language is treated in this account as a game rather than a picture.[198] Language and the world are not seen as two separate realms "separated by an abyss that has to be crossed."[199] It is the rather banal assertion that we will never escape our language. Which is another way of saying that we will never "see God or the Intrinsic Nature of Reality face to

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[197] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 309. Speaking of his differences with Habermas, Rorty states: "Our differences concern *only* the self-image which a democratic society should have, the rhetoric which it should use to express its hopes . . . Habermas thinks it is essential to a democratic society that its self-image embody the universalism, and some form of the rationalism, of the Enlightenment. He thinks of his account of 'communicative reason' for 'subject-centered reason' as just a misleading way of making the same point I have been urging: A liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' (or 'right' or 'just') whatever the outcome of undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view wins in a free and open encounter. This substitution amounts to dropping the image of a preestablished harmony between the human subject and the object of knowledge, and thus to dropping the traditional epistemological-metaphysical problematic." "I want to replace [Habermasian universalism] with a story of increasing willingness to live with plurality and to stop asking for universal validity. I want to see freely arrived at agreement as agreement on how to accomplish common purposes (e.g., prediction and control of the behavior of atoms or people, equalizing life – chances, decreasing cruelty), but I want to see these common purposes against the background of an increasing sense of the radical diversity of private purposes, of the radically poetic character of individual lives, and of the merely poetic foundations of the 'we-consciousness' which lies behind our social institutions." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 67.

[198] See Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 110. And, "[t]here is a difference between vocabulary that just happens to work, and vocabulary working *because* that is the way things really are." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 192; emphasis his.

[199] Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, by G. Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 103; as quoted by Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 331.

face."[200] But this does not mean that humanity is left in a quagmire of meaninglessness. The intersubjectivity that we pursue ("unforced agreement among larger and larger groups of interlocutors"[201]), is a sense of social solidarity that rivals the realist's "pursuit of objective truth."[202]

In premise (6) the first sentence appears to be straightforward. At least if we interpret the notion "more valid" as "good reasons." The values that are part of democratic convictions remain fallible. But contrary to the realist, the pragmatist believes that the vocabulary of democracy is to be preferred over the alternatives because it encourages the capacity for human flourishing, not because it represents reality more adequately[203]:

> I take the point of Rawls and Habermas, as of Dewey and Peirce, to be that the epistemology suitable for such a democracy is one in which the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human, about the path to private perfection.[204]

If there is to be an appeal made to a standard outside of our community, pragmatists contend it can only be to "the practice of a real or imagined alternative community."[205] Rather than appeals to standards, rules, and laws in other worldly reality, appeal is made to human reality. Rorty calls Dewey into the picture here:

> [Dewey] insisted that the only point of society is to construct subjects capable of evermore novel, ever richer, forms of human happiness. The vocabulary in which Dewey suggested

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[200] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 80.
[201] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 41.
[202] "I argue . . . that it is imagination rather than a clearer grasp of our moral obligations, that does most for the creation and stability of such communities." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 12.
[203] This is the distinction between "finding out whether a proposition is true and finding out whether a vocabulary is good." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 142.
[204] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 5.
[205] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 214.

> we discuss our social problems and our political initiatives was part of his attempt to develop a discursive practice suitable for that project of social construction.[206]

This will be a creative process, "the creation of a greater diversity of individuals – larger, fuller, more imaginative and daring individuals."[207]

Puolimatka, as a moral realist, must mean more than this account offered by Dewey and Rorty. But it is not exactly stated in this premise how his position is different. In fact, as Puolimatka describes it, his view of rationality is arguably more pragmatic than Kantian.

For instance, in his elucidation of premise (6) Puolimatka states that the "democratic way of life" as "rationally preferable," means that it "is more valuable than the totalitarian way of life, just as freedom, equality, solidarity, justice and truth are preferred to their opposites."[208] The pragmatist would be in hearty agreement. Here the question of values turns on accessing ways of life based on inquiry and preference. "For the pragmatists, the pattern of all inquiry – scientific as well as moral – is deliberation concerning the relative attraction or various concrete alternatives."[209] Here is agreement with William James's definition of truth as being "what is good for *us* to believe."[210] The better approach to those ways of life mentioned by Puolimatka above, Dewey tells us, "is not 'Do they get it right?', but more like 'What would it be like to believe that?

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[206] Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 31.
[207] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, p. 30.
[208] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 466. Puolimatka's objection to Rorty's account is most interesting within the context of this point: "Without a sense of objective value, human motivation is impoverished, since an objective moral vacuum does not motivate." Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 475. Certainly one does not need to be in touch with *moral reality* or *objective truth* to give reasons for why living in a peaceful, tolerant, and open society is preferable to living in one that is totalitarian and war-torn. While Rorty would agree that we do not have objective moral values in the realist's sense, we are nevertheless *not* left with a moral vacuum or lack of motivation for our behavior.
[209] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 164.
[210] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 22; emphasis his.

What would happen if I did? What would I be committing myself to?'"[211] If this constitutes "critical scrutiny" then children, reflecting on these questions, are certainly capable of "sharpening their critical capacities."[212]

The second sentence of premise (6) captures an important point of contention between the moral realist and a Rortyan account of democratic[213] moral education. For the latter, appeal is not so much a matter of being rational. It is a matter of sentiments. This distinction is clearly demarcated within a historical, intellectual context.

Again, it is to be kept in mind that when Puolimatka speaks of rational appeal for moral beliefs the appeal is made from the context of moral realism. Presupposed is a set of moral truths of "which we are immediately aware."[214] Puolimatka quotes approvingly from Stout on this point: "That is the moral truth of the matter, *whether we recognize it or not* – a truth I deem more certain than any explanation I could give of it or any argument I could make on its behalf."[215]

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[211] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 163. This, Rorty believes, coincides with Sellar's thesis "that morality is a matter of what he calls 'we-intentions,' that the core meaning of 'immoral actions' is 'the sort of thing *we* don't do.'" Such a description seems quite close to the ethics of virtue. As Rorty goes on to say, "[o]n Sellar's account, as on Hegel's, moral philosophy takes the form of an answer to the question 'Who are "we", how did we come to be what we are, and what might we become?' rather than an answer to the question 'What rules should dictate my actions?' In other words, moral philosophy takes the form of historical narration and utopian speculations rather than of a search for general principles." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, pp. 59-60; emphasis his. On Wilfrid Sellars see *Science and Metaphysics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), chapters 6 and 7.

[212] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 467.

[213] Rorty's view of establishing values in democracy is quite different from the moral realist's view: "I take the point of Rawls and Habermas, as of Dewey and Peirce, to be that the epistemology suitable for such a democracy is one in which the only test of a political proposal is its ability to gain assent from people who retain radically diverse ideas about the point and meaning of human, about the path to private perfection." Richard Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation Stopper," *Commonwealth* 3, 1994, p. 5.

[214] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 463.

[215] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 463; from Stout, *Ethics After Babel. The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents*, p. 245; emphasis mine.

Instead of appeals to a rational justification of democratic values, Rorty situates the issue of moral progress within the human rights project.[216] Changing the conversation thusly, Hume replaces Kant. Of especial interest is Hume's contention that "corrected (sometimes rule-corrected) sympathy, not law-discerning reason, is the fundamental moral capacity."[217] Agreeing with Baier, Rorty believes that "trust" rather than "obligation" should be our fundamental moral notion. Advancement in concerns over human rights or extending the principles of democracy is not a matter of more people becoming rational or coming in touch with moral reality. It is rather "a progress of sentiments." "These two centuries are most easily understood not as a period of deepening understanding of the nature of rationality or of morality, but rather as one in which there occurred an astonishingly rapid progress of sentiments, in which it has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories."[218]

Of course someone might ask, "Why should I be motivated by these stories if I am under no objective, rational moral obligation?" For people like Hume, Rorty remarks, this response is a sure mark of intellectual immaturity.[219] It is a clear separation from the contention of the moral

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[216] See "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," Rorty's *Truth and Progress*, pp. 167-185.

[217] Annette Baier, "Hume, the Women's Moral Theorist," *Women and Moral Theory*, edited by Eva Kitay and Diana Meyers (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987), p. 40; as quoted by Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 180-181.

[218] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, pp. 181, 185. Stories, "repeated and varied over the centuries, have induced us, the rich, safe, powerful people, to tolerate and even to cherish powerless people – people whose appearance or habits or beliefs at first seemed an insult to our own moral identity, our sense of the limits of permissible human variation." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 185.

[219] He adds that for those "who want a demonstration that less suffering and greater diversity should be the overriding aims of political endeavor, Dewey and Whitman have nothing to say. They know of no more certain premises from which such a belief must be deduced." Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, p. 30.

realist that democratic values must have "rational appeal" in order to be considered "better moral choices."[220]

The *progress in sentiments* view maintains that moral failure is not due to irrationality. For example, that those who are intolerant are somehow "irrational" – "that with only a little more effort, the good and rational part of these other people's souls could have triumphed over the bad and irrational part."[221] This Platonic-Kantian view implies that we (the good people) know something that they (the bad people) do not know. With a little more intellectual effort, a little more inculcation of what it means to be rational, they could be like us.

Instead of explaining bad people's beliefs as the consequence of a deficiency of rationality, or failure to be objective and cognizant of the categorical imperative, it would be better (*viz.*, of more explanatory power because it is "more concrete, more specific, more suggestive of possible remedies"[222] to teach students that their moral failure is due to some other condition. "The bad people's problem is, rather, that they were not as lucky in the circumstances of their upbringing as we were."[223] Most probably they were deprived not of truth or moral knowledge, but security and sympathy:

> By 'security' I mean conditions of life sufficiently risk-free as to make one's difference from others inessential to one's self-respect, one's sense of worth . . . By 'sympathy' I mean the sort of reactions Athenians had more of after seeing Aeschylus's *The Persians* than before, the sort that whites in the United States had more of after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* than

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[220] Puolimatka is somewhat ambiguous here with the wording of this statement. The exact wording he uses is "If these values have *no* rational appeal, it is not sensible to teach them since there are better moral choices." Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," p. 464; emphasis mine. It would be obvious, even on a pragmatist's account, that there must be some sort of "rational appeal" for a moral choice. Even a little justification (a couple of half-baked reasons) would be more than "no rational appeal." It seems unlikely then, that he is speaking about a problem likely to be encountered.

[221] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 179.

[222] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 179.

[223] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 179.

> before, the sort we have more of after watching television programs about the genocide in Bosnia.[224]

Security and sympathy must both be part of an individual or community's environment, just as peace and economic prosperity go together. "The tougher things are, the more you have to be afraid of, the more dangerous your situation, the less you can afford the time or effort to think about what things might be like for people with whom you do not immediately identify. Sentimental education works only on people who can relax long enough to listen."[225]

This account of moral education is captured in Puolimatka's elucidation of his final premise. After all the debate and appeals to rationality and truth are finished he concludes: "the distinction between a critical and an uncritical citizen has more to do with personal depth than with intellectual skills."[226] The pragmatist could not be more in agreement.

Contrary to what the moral realist argues, "pragmatists feel they can have moral seriousness without 'realist' seriousness."[227] In the attempt to show how the pragmatist has good reasons for this contention, we have evaluated Puolimatka's sevenfold argument, amending it with the pragmatist response.

The initial difficulty faced in this evaluation came down to two details. Firstly, Puolimatka takes as unproblematic the language of the moral realist, while secondly assuming that the realist has attained something of substantive content that will be the only hope for sustaining democratic values. The first follows from not defining the terms close to the moral realist's position. The most relevant are words such as "objectivity," "rationality," "reality," and "truth." It then turns out, as in any other discussion, that much of Puolimatka's defense of moral realism and his critique of Rorty

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[224] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 179.
[225] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 179.
[226] Puolimatka, "The Problem of Democratic Values Education," pp. 467-468.

depend on the implicit assumptions in the use of words. Without offering a clear account of these terms from the outset, arguing that other approaches cannot reflect moral objective truth or relate to moral reality is mere question begging.

Pragmatists are suspicious of the moral realist's account of values education. For the pragmatist, the realist's attempt to represent the nature of moral reality is "the search for a way in which one can avoid the need for conversation and deliberation and simply tick off the way things are."[228] Pragmatists, on the other hand, believe that Kuhn, Derrida, Putnam, and Davidson, would all agree that

> it is futile either to reject or to accept the idea that the real and the true are "independent of our beliefs." The only evident positive sense we can make of this phrase, the only use that derives from the intentions of those who prize it, derives from the idea of correspondence, and this is an idea without content.[229]

This follows from the recognition that distinguishing between language and reality is ultimately an impossible endeavor. Quoting Putnam, Rorty writes:

> [E]lements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent' is fatally compromised from the start. Like Relativism, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere.[230]

The pragmatist, because she can give all sorts of reasons for her preference for democracy, is quite justified in thinking as she does. But in contrast to the moral realist, "we cannot check our view of the matter against the intrinsic nature of moral reality . . . Nor will we get anywhere by

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[227] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 83.
[228] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 164.
[229] Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," *Journal of Philosophy*, 87, no. 6, 1990, p. 305; as quoted by Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 67.
[230] Hilary Putnam, *Reality with a Human Face* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 28; as quoted by Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 67-68.

telling those who think differently that they are out of touch with reality or that they are behaving irrationally."[231]

While the realist believes that values education can only be completed by holding to a robust view of truth and objectivity, the pragmatist maintains that inculcating values will be most effective through appeal to "sentiments." Stripped of highly metaphysical language, this *application* of edifying philosophy seeks to show how it can successfully guide our beliefs and norms. It is one example of how this sense of philosophy addresses the concrete problems of society. The task now is to describe how Rorty's views, especially the distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies, may be appropriated into theology.

IV. Transforming Theology

> "The theologian who is not a realist (and who could never become a realist) . . . uses realism and becomes a positivist to the positivists, a pragmatist to the pragmatists, and a tragic interpreter of life to the tragic interpreters of life."
>
> - Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations*

Philosophy, after the demise of traditional philosophy, is no longer construed as the attempt to establish epistemological foundations or metaphysical vantage-points that offer a God's-eye view of *reality*. Traditional philosophy's failure to provide robust definitions of truth and objectivity, along with the conflict over what it means to be rational and scientific, prompts the necessity for a redefinition of philosophy's task. An important consequence of this metaphilosophical shift is that once this redefinition occurs on an epistemological level, our understanding of how we approach ethics will be affected. Just as the epistemological project of matching sentences to objects in the world is seen as *mal posé*, so the project of matching sentences to moral objects will fare no better.

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[231] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 7.

Another important consequence of the demise of the philosophical tradition is the removal of all pretense from philosophy, particularly in the attempt to provide a vantage point from where the rest of culture comes under scrutiny. Literature, poetry, and theology no longer sit underneath the critical and watchful eye of the philosopher. This is an important consideration because theological investigation, in particular, has historically been predicated on the assumption that concepts of truth, rationality, and objectivity were necessary components of meaningful discourse. This *demise* of the philosophical tradition serves to bring us back to our preliminary considerations in the first chapter regarding the status of theological thought in post-Christian, Western culture.

Traditional theological thought has become ineffectual because of its archaic language, and, as a result, its inability to address concerns of contemporary society. To be sure, much of this is because of Western culture's highly fragmented, pluralistic, secularist state. And while this may be described as *the death of God*, this need not imply that all theological thought is irremediable. It means, rather, that theology must be described in language consistent with its desire to be culturally and socially engaged.

Evaluating the status of contemporary theology must take into account the implications of contemporary metaphilosophy. That is, once the essentialist view of truth, objectivity, and goodness is rejected, along with robust definitions of objectivity and rationality, how is theological inquiry affected?

A distinction similar to that between systematic philosophy and edifying philosophy may serve as a conceptual aid in theology. By appropriating this distinction my assumption is that there is a certain parallel between the aims of edifying philosophy and post-Philosophical theological investigation. If so, this appropriation could serve to set forward the conceptual scheme by which

theology may be reconstructed.

A. Edifying Theology

With the demise of the philosophical tradition there are diverse implications for theology. With some reservations (as we will see below), Rorty is quite candid in his contention that religious belief has little use in the post-Philosophical society. The language used to express this belief, in particular, has drifted away from a sense of relevance for the culture. We simply do not talk like this anymore - at least not seriously.

Yet it is not evident that the demise of philosophy *necessarily* excludes religious belief in general, or theology in particular. Recalling Rorty's description of post-Philosophical society, there is no necessary basis for barring religious belief and theological reflection. In fact Rorty's description allows for this possibility, a possibility highly problematized by systematic philosophy's critique. Rorty's vision of society, while certainly optimistic and ambitious, is quite *atheological* - even with the disdain for epistemological foundations, metaphysics, and grand narratives.[232]

Perhaps Kai Nielsen says it best where he notes that the "perspicuity (perhaps the genius) and sanity of Rorty is to show something of what it should be like for us unalienated pragmatists, if you will, to live without shallowness, evasion, or inauthenticity in a world that no longer concerns itself with metaphysical questions and the other traditional questions of philosophy."[233] But if theologians and philosophers of religion admit to this conception of the post-Philosophical

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[232] For example, Rorty states that "I should like to replace both religious and philosophical account of a *suprahistorical ground* or an *end-of-history* convergence with a historical narrative about the rise of liberal institutions and customs - the institutions and customs which were designed to diminish cruelty, make possible government by the consent of the governed, and permit as much domination-free communication as possible to take place." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 68.

world, must they seek new professions? Is the philosophy of religion or theology possible in this vision of the world?

Philosophy has been transformed. Similarly, theology must likewise be transformed. Both should accord with our contemporary understanding of who we are, who we desire to be, and the most appropriate means of attaining this desire. For theology to contribute to this process it must be capable of speaking to contemporary culture in language it can understand. It must provide a meaningful description of our condition, and by doing so, offering a means of increasing liberties and tolerance.

This is an ongoing, discriminating process. But knowing what should be retained, transformed, and displaced is a formidable task awaiting the philosopher of religion and theologian. I can only hope in this study to give certain broad proposals. This in itself will prove to be a delicate task.

One means of broaching these issues is by appropriating Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies into the theological context. As noted above, Rorty, by outlining their respective parameters and limits, distinguishes between these two very different accounts of philosophy. Of importance in his critique is the recognition that even with the demise of traditional philosophy, philosophy can still be done. Indeed it could be argued that philosophy, now *liberated*, has better chances for resolving social and political problems.

In the appropriation of the adjectives *systematic* and *edifying* into the theological context, certain parallels can be seen to exist between philosophy and theology. Beginning with what I describe as systematic theology, there is a certain parallel to be seen here with Rorty's description of systematic philosophy.

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[233] Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition*, p. 122.

Throughout their own tradition, theologians have continually debated with philosophers over the importance and role of philosophy in theological investigation. And while the debate was, and continues to be unsettled, there were many theologians who were convinced that theology and philosophy shared important goals. These theologians attempted to construct theological systems which they believed were representative of how things are - in heaven and on earth. The tasks for these theologians were akin to their philosophical counterparts: to determine to what extent knowledge could be wrought and to establish the foundation for this knowledge.[234]

Similar to the systematic philosopher the *systematic theologian* is a truth seeker - the correspondence between beliefs and the objective reality of God's truth. "Truth, therefore, was also conceived as having a kind of objectivity, or overagainstness; it was a quality or attribute or possession of (the objectively existing) God. The human mind had to conform itself to this objective reality of God's truth if it was to avoid falling into error."[235] The systematic theologian, similar to the systematic philosopher, attempts to reproduce a true picture of reality. While the

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[234] As Gilson notes, there were two more questions that concerned philosopher and theologian: the eternity of the world and the immortality of the soul. Gilson goes on to state that "Averroës had proved that the world is eternal and that there is no personal immortality. All the Christian theologians protested against his conclusions and attacked his demonstrations, but not all in the same way. St. Bonaventura attempted to prove by philosophical arguments that the world is not eternal and that the soul of each man is immortal. St. Thomas Aquinas was of the opinion that Averroës had failed to prove the eternity of the world, but that St. Bonaventura had also failed to prove that the world is not eternal; in short, philosophy cannot prove anything on that point, but it can prove the immortality of the soul. Duns Scotus' position was that neither the creation of the world in time, nor the immortality of the soul could be proved by theologians. As to Ockham himself, he was willing to hold such conclusions as philosophical probabilities, but not as conclusively proved truths; to which he added that what cannot be proved by philosophy can still less be proved by theology, where certitude is not grounded on reason, but on faith." Gilson adds a further important point worth noting: "The result of that state of things was a widespread feeling that theology could not afford to ignore philosophy, but should not trust it." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 96.

[235] Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1995), p. 27.

domains of representation are quite different, representation is their common objective.

The traditional understanding of reason plays an important part in this quest for representation by the systematic theologian. Reason, at least as guided by the light of scripture, will yield insight into the earthly and heavenly realms. Unlike the edifying theologian, whose task is pragmatically constructive, the systematic theologian holds to a view of the world (and the heavens) – that he maintains is *true* and representative of how things actually are. Whether holding to a theory of theological foundationalism or a metaphysical view of reality (the two not necessarily mutually exclusive) the systematic theologian's work will be an assembled, concise, detailed, and methodical set of assertions concerning the physical world and the spiritual realm. Kaufman explains this view concisely:

> This whole scheme was consistent in itself; and it was the basis for a coherent conception of the theological task, one that has in fact been operative through most of Western history. The theologian's task consisted, on the one hand, of setting out clearly and fully this schema itself, so it would be possible to see just how God, humankind and the world are interrelated and interconnected. On the other hand, the theologian was concerned to show how and why this schema is *true*, i.e., is an accurate reflection of God's Truth, either as God has himself revealed that truth to men and women (e.g., in the Bible) or as we have come to know that truth in some other way (through intuition or experience). There were, of course, great disagreements about details of all these matters, and splits between Augustinians and Pelagians, Catholics and Protestants, high churchmen, low churchmen, mystics and biblicists, and others, proliferated. But nearly all accepted the basic schema which elaborated a conception of God, and of God's Truth, as having independence and objectivity over against humanity.[236]

On this account, while theological investigation can be a highly speculative and metaphysical activity, the systematic theologian tries to buttress his claims by being highly attentive to scientific investigation and the scientific method.[237] Similar to systematic philosophy, systematic theology

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[236] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 28.

[237] As Peacocke notes, "[t]he linking of the projects of metaphysics, theology and philosophy is meant to show that they are appropriated to the rational. In the rationality of their rational pronouncements they are firmly wedded to the sciences." John Peacocke, "Heidegger and the

has at various times appropriated the success granted in the sciences and attempted direct application to the theological domain. For systematic theology, science and theology may serve intersecting interests. What is known in science, theology confirms. What is known in theology, science confirms. There is no real contradiction between the two, as properly interpreted.[238]

Science serves in the interest of systematic theology. In fact both understand similarly their domains of study and investigation: "each of these sciences [psychology or biology] has its own object, a reality existing over against and independently of the investigator, a reality to be perceived, studied, analyzed, theorized about, understood." Kaufman states further that:

> The student of life has many examples - trees, dogs, birds, human beings - which can be examined; the student of the psyche has not only his or her own experience as object for reflection but also observations of the other persons round about. Likewise the theologian: though the object of inquiry here is not so directly evident and available, it too may be thought of as in some sense *there*, over against the theologian as an object of knowledge; as real as - actually, much more real than - any of the objects open to direct perception.[239]

Reason (defined according to the systematic philosopher) has often been seen by systematic theologians as forming the third component in the theological and scientific trinity of investigation.[240] Here common ground is shared between the systematic philosopher and the systematic theologian. To be sure the relationship between theology and philosophy has been tenuous throughout the centuries, but as long as theology is conceived as a highly rational

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Problem of Onto-Theology," edited by Phillip Blond (New York: Routledge, 1998), p.190.

[238] Of course this clause, "as properly interpreted," can be employed to deflect or delay apparent contradictions indefinitely.

[239] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 25; emphasis his.

[240] This criticism of rationality is nuanced by Tillich in the following way: "Reason emerged within us out of mystical experience, namely, the experience of the divine presence within us . . . I said that the principles of reason develop out of an originally ecstatic experience which produces insight. This insight can become rationalized. As the principles of reason emerge within us, the original underlying ecstasy can disappear or recede, with the result that the Spirit becomes Reason in the largest sense of the concept." Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, translated by James Luther Adams (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 19,21.

enterprise the relationship endures.

The investigations in these domains are rationally based. Reason, in the hands of theologian, philosopher, or scientist, has been perceived as a common tool for uncovering the *Truth*. Because acquiring knowledge of *reality* is their common goal, their respective means of accomplishing this goal are important to recognize. But how did this view of philosophy begin and how did it come to infiltrate theology?

This view of philosophy that so heavily influenced theological investigation can be traced through Hegel, Spinoza, Aquinas, Marcus Aurelius, Plotinus, and Aristotle - reaching at least as far back to Plato.[241] All taught that "Ultimate Reality is either perfectly Ideal and Rational in nature, or else has absolute ideality and rationality as its necessary attribute."[242] From this were developed the great "systematic philosophies."[243] Contrary to the poets and the moralists who demurred over the transitory nature of human existence - including its values and goods[244],

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[241] Put slightly differently Gilbert Murray states that "[t]he religious side of Plato's thought was not revealed in its full power till the time of Plotinos in the third century A.D.: that of Aristotle, one might say without undue paradox, not till its exposition by Aquinas in the thirteenth." Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), p. 17; as quoted by Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (Massachusetts: Yale University Press, 1941), p. 62.

[242] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 96.

[243] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 96. In an important article on Heidegger, Peacocke discusses this transition in a passage worth quoting at length: "When philosophy donned its garb of respectability - the argument, this gave rise to the spectacle of the contest; 'thinking' became 'philosophy' and philosophy was about battle and war, winners and losers. The 'lovers of wisdom' were those who joyfully did battle with irrationalism and ignorance to proclaim the 'truth' of reason. 'Thinking' which did not cover the nakedness of its insight with the proffered cloak of respectability was consigned to the depths of irrationalism and exiled from the respectable precincts of philosophy. The 'thinking' which was exiled from philosophy was to be encountered only in poetry, literature, art and, we might venture, mysticism and the religious. The whispered insights gained in such diverse fields, were never to be deemed worthy of the name 'philosophy'; and never were the figures from these realms to be hallowed with the name 'philosopher'." Peacocke, "Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology," p. 180.

[244] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 96.

systematic philosophers "defined perfect Ideality in conceptions that express the opposite of those things which make life unsatisfactory and troublesome."[245] Elucidating this position Dewey states:

> Wherever there is change, there is instability, and instability is proof of something the matter, of absence, deficiency, incompleteness. These are the ideas common to the connection between change, becoming and perishing, and Non-Being, finitude and imperfection. Hence complete and true Reality must be changeless, unalterable, so full of Being that it always and forever maintains itself in fixed rest and repose. As Bradley, the most dialectically ingenious Absolutist of our own day, expresses the doctrine "Nothing that is perfectly real moves." And while Plato took, comparatively speaking, a pessimistic view of change as mere lapse and Aristotle a complacent view of it as tendency to realization, yet Aristotle doubted no more than Plato that the fully realized reality, the divine and ultimate, is changeless. Though it is called Activity or Energy, the Activity knew no change, the Energy did nothing.[246]

Under this view to *know* the world takes on a particular sense. "To know it means to neglect its flux and alteration and discover some permanent form which limits processes that alter in time."[247]

Speaking of how Aristotle conceived of this view of philosophy, Dewey states:

> The highest degree is attained in knowing ultimate Ideal Being, pure Mind. This is Ideal, the Form of Forms, because it has no lacks, no needs, and experiences no change or variety. It has no desires because in it all desires are consummated. Since it is perfect Being, it is perfect Mind and perfect Bliss; - the acme of rationality and ideality. One point more and the argument is completed. The kind of knowing that concerns itself with this ultimate reality (which is also ultimate ideality) is philosophy.[248]

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[245] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 96.

[246] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, pp. 96-97. Another question that vexed minds such as Ockham's was "how is it possible for things which are material to cause impressions in a soul, which is immaterial?" Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 75.

[247] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 97.

[248] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 99. Irrespective of the fact that we might argue this view of theological investigation is misguided, the *desire* is easy enough to understand. As Bradley put it: "All of us, I presume, more or less, are led beyond the region of ordinary facts. Some in one way and some in others, we seem to touch and have communion with what is beyond the visible world. In various manners we find something higher, which both supports and humbles, both chastens and transports us. And, with certain persons, the intellectual effort to understand the universe is a principal way of thus experiencing the Deity. No one, probably, who has not felt this, however differently he might describe it, has ever cared much for metaphysics. And, wherever it has been strongly felt, it has been its own justification." F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford, 1902), pp. 5-6; as quoted by W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), p. 353.

The similarity between Rorty's and Dewey's image of systematic philosophy is clear on this point. Dewey states:

> Philosophy is therefore the last and highest term in pure contemplation. Whatever may be said for any other kind of knowledge, philosophy is self-enclosed. It has nothing to do beyond itself; it has no aim or purpose or function - except to be philosophy - that is, pure, self-sufficing beholding of ultimate reality.[249]

Philosophical study falls short of *Being* because implicit in the definition of the word *learning* is an imperfection that must be overcome. Learning must occur but the need to learn exists because of a defect. As learning transpires there is change and becoming. This stands in contrast to perfection, Being, and the eternal. Despite this state of affairs for the learner, learning is still to be valued:

> But the function of study and learning of philosophy is, as Plato put it, to convert the eye of the soul from dwelling contentedly upon the images of things, upon the inferior realities that are born and that decay, and to lead it to the intuition of supernatural and eternal Being. Thus the mind of the knower is transformed. It becomes assimilated to what it knows.[250]

This view of philosophy was quickly assimilated into Christian thought by systematic theologians.[251] Dewey further explicates how this occurred:

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[249] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 99.

[250] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 99. As Dupré noted with the Greek philosophers, the beginnings of methodic thought "consisted in the marvelous capacity to be interested in the world *as it is in itself* rather than as it fleetingly impresses itself upon the perceiver's momentary condition." Louis Dupré, *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life* (New York: Seabury, 1976), p. 3. Speaking of St. Bonaventura's *On Reducing the Arts to Theology*, Gilson states that "[man's] essential function is to lend his own voice to an otherwise speechless creation, to help each thing in publicly confessing its deepest and most secret meaning, or rather its essence . . . the ultimate meaning of our arts and techniques, of our various sciences and of philosophy itself, is to symbolize on a lower plane the perfection of the divine art and of the divine knowledge." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 50.

[251] Heidegger believed that "Western metaphysics . . . since its beginning with the Greeks has eminently been both ontology and theology." Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 54.

> Through a variety of channels, especially Neo-Platonism and St. Augustine, these ideas found their way into Christian theology; and great scholastic thinkers taught that the end of man is to know True Being, that knowledge is completive, that True Being is pure Immaterial Mind, and to know it is Bliss and Salvation. While this knowledge cannot be achieved in this stage of life nor without supernatural aid, yet so far it is accomplished it assimilates the human mind to the divine essence and so constitutes salvation. Through this taking over of the conception of knowledge as Contemplative into the dominant religion of Europe, multitudes were affected who were totally innocent of theoretical philosophy.[252]

Theology, infected by systematic philosophy's pursuit of Being and the Absolute, was transformed into the theological version of systematic philosophy:

> Bacon's conviction of the quarrelsome, self-displaying character of the scholarship which had come down from antiquity was of course not so much due to Greek science itself as to the degenerate heritage of scholasticism in the fourteenth century, when philosophy had fallen into the hands of disputatious theologians, full of hair-splitting argumentativeness and quirks and tricks by which to win victory over somebody else.[253]

Systematic theology's view of the world, developed out of this philosophical position, had dramatic consequences for the development of Christian theology, especially with its conception of God. Altizer goes on to explain the consequences of this philosophical assimilation by theology:

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[252] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, pp. 99-100. As Gilson notes with Augustine, "the perfect type of rational knowledge was the philosophy of Plato, as revised and brought up to date by Plotinus. Consequently, given his own idea of what rational knowledge is, the whole philosophical activity of Saint Augustine had to be a rational interpretation of the Christian Revelation, in terms of platonic philosophy . . . when all is said, it still must be maintained that the net result of Augustine's philosophical speculation was to achieve a platonic understanding of Christian revelation." Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 22-23. It is important, however, to nuance this description of Augustine's metaphysical bent. As Jones points out: "Paul was a missionary who taught a religious mystery, while Augustine had a philosophical bent, with a real metaphysical interest. In any such mind the primary interest is always the nature of the real. Thus Augustine belongs, in this respect at least, to the same tradition as Plato and Aristotle and Democritus, but with the important difference that, while their interest in the nature of reality was mainly secular, his was primarily religious . . . What he found, therefore, was naturally *a different kind of reality from theirs*." W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), p. 353; emphasis mine.

[253] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* p. 47. This tension between philosophy and theology was probably not helped by that fact that during the Middle Ages, as Gilson notes, "practically all the philosophers were monks, priests, or at least simple clerics." Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p.

> Once having absorbed a Greek metaphysical idea of God as an eternal and unmoving Being, and having refused Paul's proclamation of faith as freedom from a moral law and a priestly cultus, Christian theology found its ground in the God who alone is God, the awesome Creator and the distant Lord. No way lay from this transcendent and wholly other God to the Incarnation, the act of the Word's becoming flesh, apart from a transformation of the Incarnate Word into an eternal Logos and a mysterious Lord.[254]

Five examples of how this relationship between theology and philosophy has been understood are Anselm, Aquinas, Luther, Kierkegaard, and Pascal.

Known best for the Ontological Argument of the existence of God, Anselm had been able to show by logic alone, that a rational understanding of the Christian faith could be established (or at least so he believed). As Gilson goes on to argue, such methodology had dire consequences for Christian theology:

> Once a Christian thinker gets to this point, nothing could prevent him from applying the same method to each of the Christian dogmas. And indeed Anselm of Canterbury, as well as his immediate disciples, remain famous in the history of theology for their recklessness in giving rational demonstrations to all revealed truths. To limit ourselves to Anselm himself, we find him proving, by conclusive dialectical arguments, not only the Trinity of the Divine Persons, as he did in both his *Monologium* and his *Proslogium*, but even the very Incarnation of Christ, including all its essential modalities, as he did in his *Cur Deus homo*.[255]

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[254] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 42. Altizer goes on to state that "[T[hroughout its history Christian theology has been thwarted from reaching its intrinsic goal by its bondage to a transcendent, a sovereign, and an impassive God." Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 42. As Gilson further notes, "Christian philosophy arose at the juncture of Greek philosophy and of the Jewish-Christian religious revelation, Greek philosophy providing the technique for a rational explanation of the world, and the Jewish-Christian revelation providing religious beliefs of incalculable philosophical import. *What is perhaps the key to the whole history of Christian philosophy and, in so far as modern philosophy bears the mark of Christian thought, to the history of modern philosophy itself, is precisely the fact that, from the second century A.D. on, men have had to use a Greek philosophical technique in order to express ideas that had never entered the head of any Greek philosopher.*" Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p. 43; emphasis mine.

[255] Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, p. 26. It should be noted, at this point, that for all of Susan Haack's admonitions (mostly against Rorty) for avoiding "the main obstacles to honest inquiry" as described by Roger Bacon (*Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, p.192), she fails to mention the extent to which Bacon thought this inquiry could go. As it turns out, Bacon is

Aquinas[256] and the Scholastics[257], to some extent, had a more balanced view of theology and philosophy. Philosophy was understood as being a handmaiden to theology.[258]

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an excellent counter example of Haack's position. For while Bacon believed that mathematics had certainty, "in other sciences, the assistance of mathematics being excluded, there are so many doubts, so many opinions on the part of man, that these sciences cannot be unfolded . . . ; for in these sciences there are from nature no processes of drawing figures and of reckonings, by which all things must be proved true." (Roger Bacon's, *Opus majus*, Pt. IV, Dist. 1, Ch. 1; in R. B. Burke's translation, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928, Vol. 1, pp. 123-124) It should, as well, be pointed out that Bacon was quite ambitious in using mathematics as a means of deriving knowledge. This was particularly the case with Christian doctrine: "Hence, in the *Opus majus* of Roger Bacon, his curious attempts at representing and expressing, by means of numbers and of geometrical figures, the mysteries of grace and predestination, the relationship between the unity of God and the Trinity of the Divine Persons, the necessarily low proportion of the just ones as compared with the number of the sinner and many other religious teachings of unequal importance." Gilson goes on to describe Bacon's rather curious use of mysticism as an experimental knowledge of all claims to truth: "for it is a clear thing that he who has had diligent training in the use of the spiritual senses will be able 'to assure himself and others not only in regard to things spiritual, but also in regard to all human sciences.' To Bacon all knowledge is but a particular case of universal revelation." Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, pp. 29-30.

[256] As Gilson puts it, "As a philosopher, Thomas Aquinas was not a pupil of Moses, but of Aristotle, to whom he owed his method, his principles, up to even his all-important notion of the fundamental actuality of being." Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, p. 67. It is interesting to see, as well, Gilson's comparison between Aquinas and Augustine on the notion of truth: "Shall we say, as St. Thomas Aquinas was to answer, that since God has made man a rational animal, the natural light of reason must be able naturally to perform its proper function, which is to know things as they are, and thereby to know truth? Or shall we say with St. Augustine, that truth being necessary, unchangeable, mutable and impermanent human mind interpreting unnecessary, changeful and fleeting things? Even in our minds truth is a sharing of some of the highest attributes of God; consequently, even in our minds, truth is an immediate effect of the light of God." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 54.

[257] Altizer notes that when "Christian Scholasticism followed Aristotle in defining God as pure actuality or *actus purus*, it wholly isolated God from the world, knowing him as inactive and impassive, the God who is aseitic, or self-derived, the *causa sui* who is the sole cause of himself." Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 62.

[258] We must be careful with Aquinas on this point. Again, as Gilson notes, "[h]imself a theologian, St. Thomas had asked the professors of theology never to prove an article of faith by rational demonstration, for faith is not based on reason, but on the word of God, and if you try to prove it, you destroy it. He had likewise asked the professors of philosophy never to prove an article of faith by rational demonstration, for faith is not based on reason, but on the word of God, and if you try to prove it, you destroy it. In other words, theology is the science of those things which

Perhaps the most dramatic reaction to this view was Luther's position. Accusing some of the Scholastics of trying to peek into God's bedroom, he described reason as "the devil's whore." Søren Kierkegaard, while more of a philosopher than a theologian, may nevertheless be situated in this context as being on the other side of Luther, moving even further away from theologians like Aquinas (who ironically, comparable to Kierkegaard, had much to say about theology and philosophy). Suspicious of system builders (primarily Hegel[259]) and the relationship between faith and reason, he was a formidable opponent of the systematic theologian. His dictum, *it is absurd, therefore I believe*, was (and continues to be) vexing for the theological and philosophical communities.

One intellectual who tried to soothe the hostilities between theology, philosophy, faith, and reason was Blaise Pascal. For him, there was no hostility between faith and reason. But if doubt lingered, the famous *leap of faith* could resolve the doubt that reason provoked. If the skeptic, however, "asks if he can have a peep and see how the game will turn out"[260] before the leap, the final answer, says Pascal, is not a final proof for the existence of God. Rather, what the skeptic requires is a change in those passions that prevent belief:

> You would fain reach faith, but you know not the way? You would cure yourself of unbelief, and you ask for a remedy? Take a lesson from those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all they possess. These are they who know the road you would follow, who are cured of a disease of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which

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are received by faith from divine revelation, and philosophy is the knowledge of those things which flow from the principles of natural reason. Since their common source is God, the creator of both reason and revelation, these two sciences are bound ultimately to agree; but if you really want them to agree, you must first be careful not to forget their essential difference." Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, p. 62.

[259] On the relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard there is Altizer's observation that "few theologians have taken account of the fact that Kierkegaard adapted almost the whole movement and method of his thought from Hegel." Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 24.

[260] Terence Penelhum, *Religion and Rationality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 213.

> they began, that is by making believe that they believed, by taking holy water, by hearing mass, etc. This will quite naturally bring you to believe, and will calm you . . . will stupify you. "But this is what I fear." Pray why? What have you to lose?[261]

As if the relationship between philosophy and theology, and hence reason and faith, did not bring enough debate, the increasing autonomy of modern science exacerbated their respective concerns.

In the triangular dynamic between theology, philosophy, and science, science in the twentieth-century has chiefly been regarded as a discipline most averse to religious belief. Dewey, describing the "Conflict of Science and Religion" (a conflict dating from the sixteenth century), states that:

> In that earlier warfare, attacks upon science hinged upon certain general conclusions reached by the sciences, first in astronomical and finally in biological science. The attacks centered upon the destructive doctrinal effect of the new conclusions upon beliefs that had been established in a primitive stage of human history, and that, in the course of intervening millennia, had become invested with all kinds of intellectual, institutional and emotional sanctions.[262]

Kai Nielsen, for example, has argued that good philosophical and scientific training eliminates religious belief, thus reflecting this perceived contradiction between objective knowledge and religious belief.[263]

As a cautionary note however, while much ignorance exists on religious matters insofar as they supposedly touch upon scientific concerns, one must be careful not to paint broad strokes of characterization. As Dewey noted from Bertrand Russell:

> The threat to intellectual freedom is greater in our day than at any time since 1660; but it

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[261] Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensées*, edited by H. F. Stewart (New York: The Modern Library, College Edition, n. d.), p.121; as quoted by Terence Penelhum, *Religion and Rationality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 212-213. My thanks to Professor Horne for pointing out this passage by Pascal.

[262] John Dewey, *Problems of Men* (1946), p. 161.

[263] This view does have its detractors. P. C. W. Davies's writings concerning theistic belief and physics should not escape notice. See *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

> does not now come from the Christian churches. It comes from governments, which, owing to the modern danger of chaos and anarchy, have succeeded to the sacrosanct character formerly belonging to the ecclesiastical authorities.[264]

Although this does not weaken criticism against the Church when it has attempted to wage a religious battle with science, it should not be forgotten that the abuse of authority and threats to intellectual freedom are not confined to ecclesiastical bodies.

Systematic theology has fallen out of favor among theologians. The strain upon systematic theology, partly from the outside and partly from within, began at least two centuries prior to the twentieth century. Criticism from outside was due to discoveries in science and the increasing popularity of critical philosophical schools of thought. Suspicions over metaphysical or religion-based interpretations of the world and the heavens were escalating within the scientific community. Philosophers, whether as empiricists or rationalists, became increasingly suspicious about the intelligibility and coherence of traditional religious language. From within systematic theology, strain was increased because of an overly optimistic acceptance of rationalism generated by the Enlightenment:

> During more optimistic epochs of enlightenment rationalism, humanism, and romanticism, the self-exclusion of religion by its own theological formulations might have seemed a gratuitous development further isolating the repressive aspects of religious life from the fulfillment of the human promise. In the twentieth century, this promise in all of its many expressions seems false and capable of fulfillment on its own terms. The self confidence in rationality and individual fulfillment has lost its mooring, especially for those who were highly conscious of rational and individual goals. What seemed deep was another surface that when rationalized was disappointing and sometimes dangerous. Utopian expectations

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[264] Bertrand Russell, *Religion and Science*, cited by Dewey, *Problems of Men*, p. 171. As Buber noted, this abuse of power comes not from one source. It is a phenomenon that may arise from any social context: "Once a few respected men have fortified a brazen claim with their prestige, it becomes a cliché that gets repeated endlessly as if it were self-evident. Any protest is regarded as a heresy that shows how those who utter it do not belong: arguments are not met on their merits; instead one rehearses a few illustrious names and possibly deigns to contrast them with some horrible examples." Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) p. 41.

were not salvific when experienced over against the many epiphanies of darkness that have characterized the modern experience of history.[265]

The breaking away from rationalism (and hence systematic philosophy) allowed for the beginning of a reconstruction of theology. When systematic philosophy was beginning to feel the pressure of its conceptual weight, with the breaking away from systematic philosophy by philosophers such as Heidegger, theologians saw the opportunity to work out their theological thought in philosophical terms. A prominent example here is the work of Rudolf Bultmann. The revolutionary transformation of philosophy was providing conceptual tools for theology to reconstruct itself. This reconstruction is notably radical, especially when compared to past views of theology's task.

The appropriation of philosophical categories into theological thought on the part of theologians has continued. Some of the more radical exponents of the philosophical shift, namely Jacques Derrida, have been appropriated into the theological domain. The work of Mark Taylor is perhaps the best example of this application.[266] Ironically, the appropriation of philosophical

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[265] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 6. There is another way of understanding the Enlightenment. Here the emphasis is on the struggle for personal autonomy. Tillich, discussing Kant's view of the Enlightenment notes: "Kant defined enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) as man's conquering the state of immaturity so far as he is responsible for it. Immaturity he said, is the inability to use one's own reason without the guidance of somebody else. Immaturity of this kind is caused by ourselves. It is rooted in the lack of resoluteness and courage to use reason without the guidance of another person. The free use of reason is the essence of enlightenment . . . Kant pointed out how much more comfortably one lives if one has guardians, of whatever kind they may be, whether religious, political, philosophical, or educational ones. But it was his intention to drive men out of their security under the guidance of other people. For him this security contradicts the true nature of man." Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, pp. 24-25. This view is in agreement with Gutting's description of "modernity": "The idea that there is something distinctive about this period is still best formulated in Kant's terms. The modern age is one of 'enlightenment', where enlightenment means a rejection of the 'self-incurred tutelage' of humankind. Previously, Kant said, we accepted outside authorities as the guide to what we should think or do." Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, "Introduction–2".

[266] See, Mark C. Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also, Thomas J. J. Altizer, et al. *Deconstruction and Theology*, (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

trends into the theological domain is the means by which theology became *infected* in the first place. Perhaps it is fitting that this is the medium by which theology becomes detached from systematic theology.

In contrast to systematic theology, what I describe as edifying theology approaches theological inquiry in a wholly different manner. Just as systematic philosophy could not satisfactorily answer perennial philosophical questions, so systematic theology raised particular problems hopelessly enigmatic and without foreseeable solution. This provoked a different view of theology.

Just as there are peripheral philosophers, philosophers who stand outside the prevalent view of the philosophical task, so there are theologians who are on the periphery of the theological discipline. They can be described as *edifying theologians*. They have recognized that the failure of systematic philosophy brings about a failure of systematic theology. But the failure is not only here. Systematic theology fails as well because it is rooted in a history that is no longer relevant:

> We can sense the estrangement of the contemporary Christian from his own theological heritage by simply noting the inability of all traditional forms of theology to speak in the presence of our history. As the historical world of Christendom sinks ever more deeply into the darkness of an irrecoverable past, theology is faced with the choice either of relapsing into a dead and archaic language or of evolving a whole new form of speech.[267]

Altizer believed this "evolving" was to be carried out by theology conceived as *radical theology*. For my purposes, this evolution of theology is better described as *edifying theology*.

Similar to edifying philosophers, edifying theologians do not assert that the *truthfulness* of their beliefs is established through showing how they correspond to *reality*. They are interested neither in establishing epistemological foundations for theological beliefs, nor in establishing

metaphysical truths. The edifying theologian shares Wittgenstein's scepticism over these matters:

> The medium in which the traditional metaphysician works seems to be propositions about the world, theses about reality, the truth of which he seeks to establish by analysis or insight. But in fact, according to Wittgenstein, he manipulates language, or is manipulated by language, to generate myths which answer to deep and ancient needs, at least in our culture.[268]

In a theological context, establishing the truthfulness of a proposition is not a matter of showing how scripture represents (or *mirrors*) nature. Comparable to the edifying philosopher, the emphasis is on *language*.[269] The edifying theologian sees language in holistic terms. Recognizing the significance of Wittgenstein's discussion of language games, edifying theologians see beliefs as part of a complex form of discourse. Here is the theological application of Davidson's neo-Wittgensteinian point that our concepts and words will have meaning only in the context of sentences and thus of a whole language.[270] Moreover:

> If Wittgenstein is correct in stating that the meaning of a word is its use in language, it also needs to be stated that *use* is not fixed.[271] Certainly there are ordinary uses of a word, but there can also be extraordinary uses that are important in thinking about thinking. This is

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[267] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 76.

[268] Kerr, "Metaphysics and Magic: Wittgenstein's Kink," p. 253. For example, "philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by the means of language." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), § 109.

[269] For the edifying theologian, it is the interest in metaphysical issues that diverted the theological task in the first place. A Wittgensteinian appropriation into the philosophy of religion is *apropos*: "Wittgenstein clears away persistent encrustations and allows us to see familiar things as if for the first time. It becomes possible to see how 'wild conjectures and explanations' might be replaced by 'quiet weighing of linguistic facts.'" Kerr, "Metaphysics and Magic: Wittgenstein's Kink," p. 253; from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Zettel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §447.

[270] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 303; see, Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", p. 308; emphasis mine. As Rorty notes, justification is a matter of historical comparison. "To think such a justification sufficient would be to draw the consequences from Wittgenstein's insistence that vocabularies - all vocabularies . . . are human creations, tools for the creation of such other human artifacts as poems, utopian societies, scientific theories, and future generations." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 53.

[271] Here Winquist cites Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967).

> especially important when singularities mark the recording surface of thinking. It is the singularity that needs to be thought. Singularities include the knots and intensities in our lives. They remain "other" unless they can be thought.[272]

Language is seen in the Wittgensteinian sense as being a tool and not as a mirror. This view of theology bears significant importance for the issue of God-talk. Kaufman notes:

> Theology *(theos-logos)* is "words" or "speech" about God - "God-talk." All the other terms of the theological vocabulary in one way or another qualify, explain or interpret what is meant by "God," or indicate ways in which God is related to or involved in human experience and the human world. In this sense they are all derivative from or secondary to "God." It should not be supposed, however, that this means they can be logically deduced from the concept of God and that the only real theological problem, therefore, is to get that concept straight. That would be an overly simple and too undialectical way of understanding the matter. For words and concepts are not self-enclosed things which simply are what they are: they interpenetrate each other in many complex ways, qualifying and conditioning each other reciprocally . . . The theological vocabulary is an organic whole and must be studied as such . . . [God, far] from being an independent given from which all other concepts can be deduced, is the most complex and difficult of all concepts, in some ways dependent and conditioned by all others.[273]

God is the predominate locution in God-talk. But this is exactly the reason why this *word* cannot be merely extracted and examined as an object of science. It is interlaced and bound to integral points of human experience. "However central and fundamental to the theological enterprise is the concept (or image) of God, therefore, it cannot be dealt with independently or in isolation from

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[272] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 53; emphasis his.

[273] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 12. It is on this account where Kaufman sees theology being aided by the philosophical discipline (admittedly more so on Nielsen's conception of post-Philosophical philosophy rather than Rorty's account): "And to the extent that the theologian claims to *know* something about God, he or she must attend carefully to the epistemologists' studies about what can properly count as knowledge, how various knowledges are gained, what their possibilities are and what their limits, how they can be distinguished from mere subjective opinions or beliefs. Further, inasmuch as theologies are, after all, *talk* – talk about God (as well as other subjects) – theologians do well to listen carefully to what linguistic philosophers have to say about the 'grammars' of our languages. There is a great deal to be learned from philosophy about what theology is or can be, and thus about the proper tasks of theology and the methods that theologians employ. And this will certainly bear on the sort of vocation that theology can be and how that vocation can best be carried out." Kaufman, *God – Mystery – Diversity*, p. 3; emphasis his.

the rest of the theological vocabulary. It gains its meaning precisely through its connections with other terms and ultimately thus with the whole of human experience."[274] Kerr goes on to describe how Wittgenstein himself recontextualized various words and concepts in the theological language game:

> It is not difficult to find other instances of how Wittgenstein, without ever revealing his own religious commitment, offered illuminating descriptions of how key words in theological discourse are actually used . . . He invited us to regard 'the face as the soul of the body' (1980:23). Christianity, he reminded us, is not 'a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life' (1980:28). He invited us to consider predestination as 'less a theory than a sigh, or a cry' (1980: 30). He drew attention, in a very remarkable passage composed in 1937, to the conceptual connections between belief in the resurrection of Christ and love (1980: 33), a passage headed by a pretty clear declaration of his personal lack of faith.[275]

This is not to say, however, that faith is synonymous with language. Although faith uses language as an instrument, faith cannot ultimately be reduced to language:

> . . . il n'y a pas de langage propre à la foi. La foi ne fait pas l'object d'un langage qui, parce qu'il en serait l'instrument, lui serait à la limite superflu. Dans ce cas, le langage ne servirait qu'à *dé-signer* la foi tout en l'*as-assignant* à tel ou tel domaine de la vie, à telle ou telle dimension de l'exercice personnel ou social de la réalité humaine. Il serait l'instrument de la foi, une foi qu'on pourrait alors prendre comme ceci ou comme cela et qu'en dernière analyse on pourrait se dispenser de comprendre. Au contraire, c'est la foi qui est l'instrument du langage, un langage qui, par conséquent, prend et, du même coup, se comprend.[276]

Theology, as performed by the edifying theologian, will undergo a certain transformation.

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[274] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 13. As J. J. C. Smart remarked, "The question 'Does God exist?' has no clear meaning for the unconverted. But for the converted the question no longer arises. The word 'God' gets its meaning from the part it plays in religious speech and literature, and in religious speech and literature the question of existence does not arise." J. J. C. Smart, "The Existence of God," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 41. Or, as Heidegger puts it, "God is in no way the object of investigation in theology, as, for example, animals are the theme of zoology." Martin Heidegger, *The Piety of Thinking*, translated by James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 15.

[275] Kerr, "Metaphysics and Magic: Wittgenstein's Kink," p. 252; quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Culture and Value* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), pp. 28, 30, 33.

Particular issues, perhaps important for systematic theology, will lose their significance. There will be, for instance, no desire to show whether atheism or theism better represents the world. Similar to the edifying philosopher, the edifying theologian and philosopher of religion sees the task as how one can better *cope* with the world.[277] Abandoning metaphysical and epistemological problems these theologians endeavor to transform theology.

The edifying theologian aspires to speak so that contemporary culture can understand. Over the past two centuries religion, because of its ecclesiastical form and language, has slowly become separated from ordinary life. The *religious* has become distinguishable. And by becoming so it can be discarded. No longer are the state and church in cohabitation, either in the American view of the separation of church and state or France's conception of society as *laïc*. In the last decade of the twentieth-century, while Arab countries are experimenting in Islamic theocracies, the political sphere of the Western world has been attempting to expunge itself of all hints of religious connotation. Christianity fails to captivate the interest of the society.[278] "Christianity, while it has contributed much to Western culture, is now unable to speak to it, nor can it profit from the crises of conscience through which modern man gropes for his soul."[279]

Laboring to sustain this incessant status of relevance and comprehension, theology is coerced into a continual process of transformation. Theology must be capable of speaking to the

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[276] Gabriel Vahanian, *Dieu anonyme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1989), p. 45.
[277] See, Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 1.
[278] Culturally speaking there is quite a difference on this point between Canada and the United States. One can still make the point that interest in the United States over Christianity is hardly the Christianity described in its original sources, or practiced historically. As discussed at the beginning of this study, this is Christianity as hybrid, a reflection of recent historical and cultural determinants.
[279] Vahanian, *The Death of God*, p, 73.

people, and the society. This is the task of the "new theologian"[280]:

> From the perspective of the theology of our century, the strangest thing about this new theologian is his conviction that faith should be meaningful and meaningful in the context of our world. Indeed, the very conviction that faith is eternally given or wholly autonomous is forcefully being challenged. Having come to the realization that Christian theology cannot survive apart from a dialogue with the world, it is increasingly being recognized that dialogue is a mutual encounter: faith cannot speak to the world unless it is prepared to be affected by that world with which it speaks.[281]

Paul Tillich is one of the most notable examples of a theologian who has endeavored to communicate in this way. Tillich continually argued that the theologian must endeavor to be lucid in his theological task:

> . . . theology must apply the phenomenological approach to all its basic concepts, forcing its critics first of all to see what the criticized concepts mean, and also forcing itself to make careful descriptions of its concepts and to use them with logical consistency, thus avoiding the danger of trying to fill the logical gaps with devotional material. The test of a phenomenological description is that the picture given by it is convincing, that it can be seen by anyone who is willing to look in the same direction, that the description illuminates other related ideas, and that it makes the reality which these ideas are supposed to reflect understandable.[282]

While Tillich would not be understood as being, in my sense, an edifying theologian, his emphasis on avoiding obscure and cryptic descriptions is something both hold in common. Understanding the potential for the abuse of religious language, the edifying theologian will guard against the

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[280] The description "new theologian" carries a somewhat elitist sense as if being a new theologian is to be preferred to being an "old theologian"; as if a linen shirt is to be preferred over a polyester suit. This is not intended here.

[281] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 17.

[282] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 118. Speaking of the role of seduction in this "conversation" Baudrillard describes this process as similar to a move in a kind of game: "a game of appearances (as between potential lovers) in which each player seeks to lure the other into the mirror of their own desire, and, in so doing, challenges the other to defer that expression through a counter-challenge of their own. The practice of seduction, so conceived, is neither unilateral nor, despite its libidinous alibi, motivated by desire at all. It is not even, in religious context, motivated by such a desire as underlies Pascal's existentially driven *foi*." Andrew Wernick, "Jean Baudrillard: Seducing God," *Post-Secular Philosophy: between philosophy and theology*, edited by Phillip Blond (New York: Routledge,

bewitchment of religious language into forms of discourse that are manipulative and destructive.

Here is a Wittgensteinian application into the philosophy of religion:

> Thus, rather than a systematic exposition of metaphysical principles, work in philosophy becomes "a battle", as Wittgenstein will say . . . "against the bewitchment of our intelligence (*Verstand*) by the devices of our language (*durch die Mittel unserer Sprache*)".[283]

The edifying theologian will likewise seek to maintain a sense of relevancy with her contemporaries. Theology is never done in isolation. As Tillich states elsewhere:

> If religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, this state cannot be restricted to a special realm. The unconditional character of this concern implies that it refers to every moment of our life to every space and every realm. The universe is God's sanctuary. Every workday is a day of the Lord, every supper a Lord's supper, every work the fulfillment of a divine task, every joy a joy in God. In all preliminary concerns, ultimate concern is present, consecrating them. Essentially the religious and the secular are not separated items. Rather they are within each other.[284]

Edifying theology, moreover, faces squarely the death of God, and without the bifurcation between the sacred and the secular, so moves down from any presumed privileged vantage point. As Winquist has stated:

> Since theologians do not have a proper place in the dominant culture they, like other marginalized consumers, must rent their space. They must insinuate their differences into the dominant text. Theological strategies are efficacious to the extent that they can be tactically insinuated into existing textual practices. Tactics exploit the discursive and nondiscursive spacing in the dominant discourse . . . It is because theology does not have a proper place of its own in the dominant secular culture that it must value and affirm its

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1998), p. 354.

[283] Kerr, "Metaphysics and Magic: Wittgenstein's Kink," p. 241; quote from Ludwig Wittgenstein's, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §109. Elsewhere, Wittgenstein says that "[p]hilosophy, as *we* use the word, is a fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us." Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 27; emphasis his.

[284] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, edited by Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 27. Tillich goes on to remark that in actual practice, separation is made between these two elements: "In actuality, the secular element tends to make itself independent and to establish a realm of its own. And in opposition to this, the religious element tends to establish itself also as a special realm." Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, pp. 41-42.

> identity as a marginal and interstitial reality. That is, theology inhabits the edges and cracks of the dominant culture. It is a nomad discipline wandering, wondering, and erring.[285]

Karl Barth, as well not an edifying theologian, nevertheless articulates clearly this view of theology. As one commentator has noted:

> No one did more than he to overthrow the dominant theologies of the nineteenth century, yet in this very connection he tells us that the theologian of today must keep his ear open to the voices of that period for "there is always the possibility that in some sense or other we may be in particular need of wholly unexpected voices, and that among them there may be voices which are at first wholly unwelcome."[286]

In order to prevent theological investigation from becoming obscure – for edifying theology or the philosophy of religion to be able to raise issues pertinent for social concern – these disciplines must be cognizant of issues outside of the parameters of their own discourse. Investigation and inquiry should be done *in conversation* with other disciplines, a process that extols eclecticism.[287]

As already mentioned, a striking example of this interdisciplinary dialogue is Rudolf Bultmann's appropriation of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. The resulting profundity of Bultmann's theological approach, which at some but not all points is compatible with edifying theology, is demonstrative of the importance of viewing the theological task in a holistic manner.

My understanding of edifying theology, sympathetic to the methodological approaches of theologians such as Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Vahanian, and Winquist, likewise seeks to communicate to contemporary society in a meaningful manner. Edifying theologians, similar to

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[285] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, pp. 134-133.

[286] John Macquarrie, *The Scope of Demythologizing: Bultmann and his Critics* (London: SCM Press, Ltd.),1963, p. 52; cited from Karl Barth's, *Die protestantische Theologie im neunzehnten Fahrhundert* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947), p. 3.

[287] As Vahanian sees it, "Among other things, theology will have to enter the fields of, e.g., literature, politics, and economics, if it wants to tackle the chief problem of our age, namely, the problem of God. Otherwise, it will merely engage in the business of updating the Church. And that is not the position to take, especially if being the Church means also being the avant-garde of society; the axis of culture." Vahanian, *No Other God*, pp. 99-100.

edifying philosophers, see their work as therapy. But this therapy is not passive; it is both dynamic and iconoclastic. This is the only means by which therapy gives way to actual change. Their task is not to provide security within a system of beliefs. It is rather to question the very justification and usage of the terms embedded in its discourse. Theological therapy, then, does not seek to offer simple answers. As Wittgenstein recognized with nontheological therapy (but as well applicable for theological therapy), its danger lies in the fact that it often raises more problems than it solves: "Sich psychoanalysieren lassen ist irgendwie ähnlich vom Baum der Erkenntnis essen. Die Erkenntnis, die man dabie erhält, stellt uns (neue) ethische Probleme; trägt aber nichts zu ihrer Lösung bei."[288] Or, as one commentator has put the issue, "[t]he purpose of religious knowledge is . . . therapeutic. All construction of religious theories ought to be controlled by the desire to heal."[289]

Edifying theology has aims that are radically different from systematic theology. Edifying theology loses interest in correspondence theories of representation, robust theories of truth and descriptions of reality. It moreover loses any privileged epistemological vantage point over culture. Theology becomes transformed quite unlike previous formulations. Similar to each period of transition some will regard this as unforgivable heresy. The church, deprived of "a little religiosity"[290], will surely find this loss to be too much. Others will regard it as unrelenting theological renewal. And it is here that edifying theology integrates the ethical.

Just as philosophy, once transformed, remains a viable discipline of research and inquiry, post-Philosophical theology, likewise transformed, becomes a legitimate field of discourse and

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[288] Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, p. 34. "In a way having oneself psychoanalysed is like eating from the tree of knowledge. The knowledge acquired sets us (new) ethical problems; but contributes nothing to their solution." Translation from German by Peter Winch.
[289] Peter Munz, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1959), p. 140.

investigation. By circumscribing theology in this manner a new overture for theology is made possible. This marking will provide a point of departure for the development of theology in a post-Philosophical context.

Similar to philosophy taking upon itself a new set of objectives after the failure of systematic philosophy, so the theological discipline is free (if not obligated) to do the same. The task is to deal anew with how theology is to be envisioned and the issues with which it must grapple. Altizer, in a statement compatible with edifying theology, puts the issue well:

> Today the Christian theologian is faced with the primary problem of the identity of the Word that is present in our history. Insofar as the theologian recognizes the truth that ours is not simply a distinct moment of history but, rather, a moment or an era which is being born at the inevitable cost of the loss of its roots in a previous history, he can no longer search for the presence of the Word by means of a theology whose form and language was evolved in a now long distant past.[291]

While many theologians are in agreement that traditional theological language no longer speaks to the contemporary community, the difficulty is deciding how theology is to be reconstructed. Rorty, in his distinction between systematic philosophy and edifying philosophy, has perhaps offered theology the conceptual groundwork necessary for its reinvention.

The parallel that I have attempted to develop between systematic and edifying philosophies, and systematic and edifying theologies helps us to conceptualize the development, clarification, and qualification of a contemporary post-Philosophical approach to theology. By appropriating to theology the distinctions made by Rorty in his description of philosophy, the working assumption is that a certain parallel holds between the aims of edifying philosophy and post-Philosophical theological investigation. The similarities and differences between these various philosophies and theologies are particularly acute in their respective views of *truth*, *science*, and

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[290] Ramsey, "Preface," *The Death of God*, p. xxviii.

reason. But while there are important parallels between philosophy and theology on this account, theologians may have initial reservations about appropriating into theology distinctions made in philosophy. This procedure, nevertheless, has precedent. Aquinas, as Balthasar notes, made full use of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Therefore

> . . . why should it be forbidden to the present and the future to enrich the kingdom of thought in a genuine and completely original manner. [I]f he [Aquinas] had known Buddha and Lao-Tse, there is no doubt that he would have given them the place appropriate to them.[292]

With the Catholic church in mind, Balthasar states further that:

> Indeed, it would be evidence of the worst kind of backwoods mentality if Catholic philosophers were to wish to pass by the evident progress and enrichments of the modern period to hold rigidly fast to a medieval *status quo* . . . This would mean handing on the letter of the great scholastic theologians while abandoning their inner spirit, which was a spirit of astonishing openness to their own age and of the most audacious progressiveness.[293]

Yet edifying theology's "openness" to change, reconceived in light of philosophical developments, is decisively different from previous transformations in theology. While in the past theology was transformed because of philosophical success, edifying theology's impetus for reconstruction follows because of philosophy's failure. And with that failure, theology is set free from a tradition that determined much of its labor.

The grid that determined the agenda for systematic philosophy and traditional theology is the Enlightenment's emphasis on a particular view of reason, objectivity, and truth. Undercutting the overly optimistic views of the Enlightenment project removes the ground on which much of the systematic philosophers' approach was built. Tyron Inbody's description of how certain

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[291] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 76.
[292] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, "On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," *Communio : International Catholic Review*, 20, 1993, pp. 158-159.
[293] Von Balthasar, "On the Tasks of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," p. 172.

assumptions of the Enlightenment structured society is helpful here. Beginning with the Enlightenment's view of knowledge he states:

> Most fundamentally, modernity, embodied foremost in the disciples of the Enlightenment, is a worldview, a body of attitudes and ideas. Its key feature was its reconception of knowledge. Knowledge is achieved through critical reason, conceived by rationalists as a deductive and by empiricists as an inductive or experimental power of the mind. This concept of knowledge underwrote the Enlightenment quest for certainty, for literal and objectifying thought, for direct representation of reality in language, for comprehensiveness, and for certain imperatives for practical action, most notably the quest for individual human freedom and the demand to create history.[294]

Speaking of the social consequences of Enlightenment modernity he then notes:

> Socially, Enlightenment modernity involved individualism, dualism, anthropocentrism, substantialism, Eurocentrism, unilinear progress, centralization, and the domination of nature. Meaning, value, and confidence finally were located in human subjectivity, the autonomous, self-consciously knowing and acting human "subject." In addition to the hard sciences, modernity developed new historical methods that led to an historical consciousness that tried to recognize change, novelty, and the differences between periods and cultures.[295]

Inbody finally describes the Enlightenment's view of nature:

> Enlightenment thinkers held a mechanistic view of nature, and they sought the rational control of data, single meanings, universal claims for truth, objective interpretation, and a sensationalist doctrine of perception. They were devoted to the development of science and technology, to secularization, and to the belief that individuals and society should move toward such goals. Human nature is not fixed but is malleable.[296]

Inbody's explanation of Enlightenment modernity admittedly may vary according to various thinkers. It does serve, however, as a general denotation.

Perhaps the most provocative contemporary challenge to Enlightenment modernity is the postmodernist view of the world[297]:

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[294] Tyron Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" *Theology Today*, 51, January 1995, p. 526.
[295] Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" p. 526.
[296] Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" p. 526.
[297] Inbody distinguishes three types of postmodernism: 1) Destructive postmodernism; 2) Cultural

> [It] refers to a vision of the world that refines and enriches the positive contributions of the modern view of the world but is more in accord with emerging paradigms, which sees the world as rich, open, subtle, complex, complementary, and interrelated than the truncated views of modernity. Their "constructive postmodernism" is a communalist, nondualist, biocentric, theocentric, processive, and global way of thinking that gives up the quest for certainty and modifies the literal objectifying styles of thought that usually accompany it.[298]

The movement away from the Enlightenment toward the postmodern does not mean that all Enlightenment values are jettisoned. One method of selection has been provided by Caputo's description of the *New Enlightenment à la* Derrida:

> If the old Enlightenment makes everything turn on "Reason," the New Enlightenment wants to know the reason for reason, wants to take responsibility *for* what at a specific point in history calls itself reason and the age of reason, and to consider carefully what is being declared "irrational" in the name of reason, instead of simply marching to its tune . . . Nor does Derrida desire to break with the old Enlightenment's desire for "emancipation" . . . [r]ather, deconstruction[299] means to continue the struggle for emancipation but by another means and in another key, by taking a second look at the very things the old Enlightenment tended to devalue – literature, faith, and the messianic, for example – just in order to look for the sorts of things that tend to drop though the grinds of the old Enlightenment.[300]

An important result of this shift from a modernist Enlightenment view of the world to a postmodern view is the manner by which theology has been reinterpreted according to the postmodern *Weltaunschauung*. Inbody lists five main versions: (1) Deconstructive postmodernism – Mark Taylor, Charles Winquist; (2) Constructive postmodernism – Griffin, Neville; (3) Mystical postmodernism – Huston Smith; (5) Eschatological postmodernism – Peters; and (6) Reactionary

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and liberationist postmodernism; and 3) Revisionary postmodernism. See "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" pp. 535-536.

[298] Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" p. 536.

[299] Concerning the relationship between deconstruction, postmodernism, and philosophy, Derrida has said that what is called "'deconstruction' . . . has never, never opposed institutions as such, philosophy as such, discipline as such." Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 5.

[300] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 55.

postmodernism – Thomas Oden.[301]

The intent here is not to explore these various postmodern theologies. Neither is it is imperative to the discussion to establish whether edifying theology is another postmodern theology, or whether it merely picks and chooses among those aspects of the postmodern project suitable to its own purposes. Because of the death of God, postmodernism may certainly be understood as a post-Christian paradigm of thought. In this sense edifying theology certainly is compatible with many of the precepts of postmodernism. We may even agree with Taylor's claim that "it would not be too much to suggest that *deconstruction is the 'hermeneutic' of the death of God.*"[302] At least for Winquist, "if this is a credible claim, we might want to further suggest and then interrogate the claim that the theology of the death of God is fully implicated in a postmodern sensibility and that the postmodern sensibility is fully implicated in the theology of the death of God."[303]

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[301] Inbody, "Postmodernism: Intellectual Velcro Dragged Across Culture?" p. 537. Inbody refers the reader to Huston Smith, *Beyond the Postmodern Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

[302] See Mark Taylor's *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1984), p. 6; emphasis mine. For further reading on the relationship between deconstruction and theology Caputo refers the reader to his own *Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) and "The Good News About Alterity: Derrida and Theology", *Faith and Philosophy*, 10, 1993, pp. 453-470; "Mysticism and Transgression: Derrida and Meister Eckhart", *Continental Philosophy*, 2, 1989, pp. 24-39. See also Rodolphe Gasché, "God, For Example" in *Inventions of Difference* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 150-170; Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, pp. 92-93ff.

[303] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 112. Caputo puts this matter in an interesting way by stating that "[i]f there is any sense to speaking of deconstruction as 'post-modern' (which diminishes with each passing day) or as engaged in the production of a 'new' Enlightenment . . . which I hope is increasing day by day, then deconstruction must likewise be seen as a form of 'post-secularization.' For deconstruction moves beyond all Enlightenment debunking of religion and chastises the Enlightenment – as Derrida chastises Marx – for having chased away one ghost too many . . . For without the messianic spirit, which likewise haunted Marx in his most prophetic moments and is indeed part of his legacy . . . deconstruction (which expects justice, which *is* justice) does not have

While this claim by Winquist is deserving of its own study, the importance of how edifying theology can participate within the task of *doing ethics* deserves elaboration. On this point a certain reliance on Rorty's description of edifying philosophy will be necessary.

B. Edifying Theology and the Task of *Doing Ethics*

Just as philosophy must give up its pretense for believing that it must represent *reality*, so must theology. Just as philosophy must give up all pretense in maintaining that it has a privileged point over culture so must theology. The consequence is that theology becomes one voice among others. This need not, however, be regarded as undesirable. No longer will people be lured or coerced into religion because of enticing claims to *truth*. No longer will people be tempted through will to power because of claims of metaphysical vantage points over one's culture, one's society, or one's neighbor. Understood in this way a certain degree of liberty for society ensues; a sense of liberty that will, in part, be ethical. And on this point Rorty's perceived task for the society is appropriate for the edifying theologian:

> One will talk about the problem of evil, the stultifying effect of a religious culture upon intellectual life, the danger of theocracy, the potentiality for anarchy in a secularist culture, the *Brave New World* consequences of a utilitarian, secular morality. One will contrast the lives of one's secularist and of one's religious friends and acquaintances.[304]

This statement by Rorty is as fitting for the theological context as it is for the philosophical context. Edifying theology provokes the believer to question his own motives for being a Christian and to enter into a dialogue with the rest of society concerning pertinent and vexing questions. The edifying theologian is not interested in constructing a new vision of reality.[305]

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a ghost of a chance." Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 159.

[304] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 67.

[305] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 5.

But what about reality? Should not the edifying theologian, as the edifying philosopher, be concerned about the world? Indeed he should be, and he is. Just as the edifying philosopher reduces issues of representation and objectivity to solidarity, so does the edifying theologian. The difference is that the edifying theologian has theological impetus for this action, but this should not count against him.

Notwithstanding the importance that scripture has for the edifying theologian, his task spans that of the pragmatist. The edifying theologian also asks the questions posed by Rorty: "What are the limits of our community? Are the encounters sufficiently free and open? Has what we have recently gained in solidarity cost us our ability to listen to outsiders who are suffering? To outsiders who have new ideas?"[306] As Rorty rightly notes these are political questions rather than metaphysical or epistemological questions. One should also add that they are ethical issues, and as a consequence, of concern in the theological context. They have been the object of study for theologians and philosophers of religion throughout the centuries and continue to be so.

The edifying theologian is entrenched in the attempt to respond to the *problems of society* for her generation. It is an effort that demands eclecticism – a selection from whatever tools will aid in the resolution. Kaufman, for example, describes the theologian as an "artist": "In painting his or her picture of the whole, the theological artist must draw on wide ranges and types of experience, showing how each is grasped in the integrating vision and what each means, for the 'whole' is nothing, an empty abstraction, apart from the parts that make it up."[307] Anticipating edifying theology in its ethical concern, Kaufman notes, as Rorty, the more human concerns of its activity:

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[306] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 13.
[307] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 40.

> [This picture] which results dare not be highly idiosyncratic or "subjective"; it must be recognizably of our world, our life, our experience. It will have to find place for the terrors and joys, the triumphs and failures, the striving and the repose, the loves and hatreds of actual human life. It will have to do justice to the complexity of political and economic institutional structures in an industrial society, as well as to the intimacy of personal communion; it will have to deal with and be relevant to problems of conservation of the environment on this planet as well as personal crises of despair and meaninglessness.[308]

In fine, "No important dimension of experience can be omitted from the theologian's concern and interest and interpretation, and he or she must exert every effort to root out one-sidedness, prejudice and bias."[309]

By having a vested interest in the *problems of society* edifying theology finds reinclusion into the task of doing ethics. Faith, as understood by the edifying theologian (though not only limited to the edifying theologian), actively engages in the problems that confront society either on an individual level or on a global level. It must or it fails to remain faith:

> . . . the Christian can only participate in the suffering and broken body of the humanity of our time by freely sharing the depths of its anguish and despair, not with the self-conscious realization that his participation is vicarious, but rather the certainty that there is no true suffering which is foreign to faith.[310]

The problems of society become an important area of concern for both edifying philosopher and the edifying theologian.

It is an important consideration that Rorty's interest over the problems of society is not something that only he initiated in the post-Christian society. The concern for the problems of society carries over into post-Christian society because of the weight of importance these problems were given before the society was de-Christianized. "Today's world, by contrast with that of the apostles, is the beneficiary of the impact of the Christian faith on its human as well as

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[308] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 40.
[309] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 40.
[310] Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism*, p. 28.

cultural and social structures . . . It also includes the vast number of functions and responsibilities which once were ecclesiastical and have become public or governmental, or even private."[311]

The problems of society, after the death of God, have been transplanted into a secularized context. The consequences are twofold. "Exactly this is what in fact makes our job at once easier and more difficult. Easier, because we should at least in theory be able to speak the same language as our contemporaries. But also more difficult, because today's paganism is 'Christian.' As the index of the erosion of the spirituality of Christian culture, this new mentality gives no hold to the Christian faith, much less when it is proclaimed through its traditional channels."[312] Facing the secularization of the problems of society, edifying theology need not recoil believing that these problems are reserved only for theologians or the church. As Vahanian has well pointed out:

> In other words, one should not lament the fact that others, such as the state or private foundations have today assumed the great cultural, political, and social tasks that the Church in the past initiated and accomplished, and from which our civilization benefited before turning its back on Christianity. The essential thing today is that Christianity should not miss its vocation by not assuming even the humblest tasks to which its adherents may be brought in spite of their faithfulness to the Church. As in the parable of the last judgment, could it not be that these were the most urgent and decisive tasks? And could it not be that their style is the one that behooves the Church's involvement in the world?[313]

The edifying theologian will be engaged within the society by rendering the shared society more humane. The edifying theologian, moreover, may take pride in knowing that she is continuing the process of humanization that was largely brought about in Western society by the church. The edifying theologian, in any case, will not work in isolation.

Similar to the edifying philosopher, the edifying theologian recognizes the need for dialogue. In fact, it is a dialogue in process: firstly with one's community and then extending this

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[311] Vahanian, *No Other God*, p. 92.
[312] Vahanian, *No Other God*, pp. 92-93.
[313] Vahanian, *No Other God*, p. 95.

intersubjective agreement as far as possible - "to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can."[314] Those who do this in the philosophical discipline are pragmatists. Or, with "the philosophical community, they are best known as holists."[315] This sense is perfectly applicable in theology.

Edifying theologians, rejecting both grand metaphysical narratives and attempts at providing epistemological foundations, have hopes similar to pragmatists. They agree with William James's definition of truth as being "what is good for *us* to believe."[316] In the case of religious belief some proposed questions could be: "What forms of human life do these conceptions facilitate? Which forms inhibit? What possibilities do they open up for men and women? Which do they close off?"[317]

As already indicated, the edifying theologian is not *merely* a pragmatist or an antirepresentationalist. She is not only concerned with promoting dialogue, tolerance, and solidarity in society. Operating within her own language game, within her own history, incorporated within her view of the world is a particular set of beliefs *qua* theologian. And although this language game will differ in some respects to Rorty's understanding of a secularized language game, both language users will share a great deal in common:

> Theology, thus, works largely with public, not private or parochial, materials. It is not restricted either to the language and traditions of a particular esoteric community (the church) or to the peculiar experience of unusual individuals. Everyone speaks the common language; everyone knows, understands and uses (to some degree) the words with which theology begins and which it analyzes. Hence, there is no problem of how one can get into some charmed "circle of faith" or "theological circle" in order to do theology or to

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[314] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 23. Davidson, putting the matter somewhat differently states that "we improve the clarity and bite of declarations of difference . . . by enlarging the basis of shared (translatable) language." Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Post-analytic Philosophy*, ed. John Rajchman and Cornel West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 142.
[315] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 64.
[316] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 22; emphasis his.
[317] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 39.

> understand what is going on in theology. We are already there simply by virtue of speaking and understanding English [French or Chinese]. Theology need be no more parochial or exclusive than any other discipline.[318]

The similarity between edifying theology and edifying philosophy is important to see. It is as well imperative that edifying theology is not understood as being limited to the same subject matter as the edifying philosopher.[319] Certainly the edifying theologian is very interested in promoting

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[318] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 11.

[319] Jeanrond argues for eleven criteria for new biblical theologies which are applicable to edifying theology. "1) Biblical theology is a multidisciplinary theological exercise that aims at retrieving the theological dimensions of the biblical texts as part of the larger project of interpreting the communicative potential of these texts. 2) Biblical theology is not necessarily an ecclesial exercise controlled by any particular church or religious community/institution or inspired by any particular doctrine or faith. Rather, in the first instance, it is provoked by aspects of the communicative potential of the biblical texts themselves in the act of reading. 3) Biblical theology is interested in discovering the diversity of theologies operative within the biblical texts. Hence it includes intertextual investigations. 4) Biblical theology is a challenge to all systematic theologies insofar as it calls for an always new test of any preconceived or traditionally assumed concept of the God to whose revelation the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament witness in various ways. 5) Biblical theology operates on the basis of a hermeneutical consciousness. That means biblical theology respects the textuality of the biblical texts and the requirements and implications of text interpretation. 6) Biblical theology as one among many theological activities is fully accountable according to the usual academic standards, that is, it yields results that are subject to intersubjective perception and critique. 7) Biblical theology encourages all nondogmatic models and paradigms of describing continuities and discontinuities in the complex development and religious challenge of biblical monotheism. It calls for an ongoing ideology critique of any systematizing attempt. 8) By definition, biblical theology begins its work by interpreting the canonical texts of the Bible, but its concern is not limited to these texts (against Childs). Rather the continuities and discontinuities of the monotheistic movement may be grasped more sharply through additional intertextual comparisons with texts documenting other religious movements of experience of and reflection on the divine. 9) Biblical theology encourages not only the critique of hidden or open ideologies in the act of interpretation, but also the critique of ideologies in the biblical texts themselves. It welcomes especially the feminist critique of ideologies in the composition and reception of biblical texts. 10) Biblical theology wishes to serve all readers interested in the diverse theological potential of the biblical texts. It seeks the mutually critical dialogue with all users of the Bible, including those Jews and Christians who use the Bible as Scripture within their respective religious communities and faith traditions. 11) As a cooperative project biblical theology seeks the contributions and critical challenges of all critical theories within the academy, for example, literary criticism, historical criticism, cultural criticism, and social criticism." Werner Jeanrond, "Criteria for New Biblical Theologies," *The Journal of Religion*, 76, April 1996, pp. 246-247.

dialogue, solidarity, and tolerance within the society. But if this were the extent to which the edifying theologian was engaged, this activity would be *merely* edifying philosophy. The edifying theologian is engaged in something quite different from edifying philosophy. But how is it different from edifying philosophy, especially in a post-Christian society? What does edifying theology have to offer society?

Pace Rorty, the theologian Winquist believes that theology still has something to say to post-Christian society. Winquist (in agreement with Vahanian) contends that we must not assume that theology has nothing to contribute to the post-Christian society:

> It would appear that in the shallowness of secular culture there are singularities that this culture has not been able to think – that is why we have raised the question of whether we need to think theologically even in a secular culture. Is there anything special on the surfaces or in the mechanics of theological text production that are differential possibilities for thickening the meaning of secular lives? Has the silencing of theology diminished the capacity for living? This is not a meaningless question for those who are restless with their sense of boredom or emptiness.[320]

Maintaining that theology still speaks to post-Christian society, the edifying theologian (as opposed to the edifying philosopher) is interested in the nuances of language that are *religious*. He "attends to certain key terms or complexes of terms, such words as 'holy,' 'divine,' 'sacred,' 'transcendent' and the like, and focused particularly, or 'presided over' (I. T. Ramsey), by 'God'."[321] This language is present; it permeates culture. The death of God does not change this. As a consequence "[t]he theologian's task of constructing a meaningful and humane world is in part the task of articulating and explicating a world already in certain respects defined in and by the culture in its religious traditions, its (conscious and unconscious) myths, its rituals and taboos, its linguistic classifications; that is, it is always based on the prior human constructive activity which

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[320] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 53.
[321] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 11.

produced and shaped the culture."[322]

The edifying theologian *uncovers* these terms and concepts in order to provide greater understanding through reflection, criticism, and interpretation. This will, it is believed, give way to "refinement or reconstruction of their meaning and use."[323] Kaufman explicates further what the edifying theologian could also take as integral to her investigation:

> Theology is the disciplined effort to see what we are trying to do and say with these complexes of meaning so as to enable us to say and do them better - more accurately, more precisely, more effectively. In this sense, as Ludwig Wittgenstein has put it, "Theology [is] grammar." As with all grammar, it involves the attempt to determine not only how the language is actually used by its speakers and writers, but also the rules governing that use, so that it will become possible to distinguish proper from improper use, clear and adequate from misleading and confusing forms of expression. This prescriptive dimension of grammar - always founded upon and emergent out of a sense for, and descriptive studies of, usage - enables it to help shape language into a vehicle which expresses our intentions with greater precision, thus facilitating a fuller and clearer consciousness of those intentions. Theology also, as grammar, not only attempts to describe how men and women in fact talk about God; it searches out the rules governing the use of such talk so that it will be possible to see more clearly just what that talk is intending to express. Thus, theological analysis aims to distinguish better from worse forms of expression and seeks to define adequate or proper speech about God.[324]

This multifaceted task of the edifying theologian endeavors to better understand the language particular to this discipline. The edifying theologian has a particular scope of interest that includes words, terms, concepts, and language that the edifying philosopher need not necessarily be interested in. But the concern over how language works and the particularities that govern it is shared between the two disciplines. This is the philosophical side to edifying theology. It is an approach that is decidedly eclectic. It appropriates procedures that accord with its assumptions.

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[322] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 40. In this matter Kaufman comments in a footnote that, "For discussion of the way in which social and cultural conventions and institutions define a world that is only dimly perceived in consciousness, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), and Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974)." [p. 49, footnote #9]

[323] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 11.

By being eclectic and ethical, edifying theology has a unique relationship to postmodernism.

While edifying theology is *post-Christian*, and not necessarily *postmodern*, its eclectic approach to theological investigation stands in close proximity to certain postmodern theologies. Especially those theologies interested in ethics.

Contemporary theology, compared to traditional theology, is no longer able to assume a privileged epistemological position in Western culture. As Winquist has argued in his explication of postmodern theology, it "cannot begin in sanctuaries where there is, as a presupposition, a witness of faith, although these sanctuaries can be visited. Theology can look for or try to construct a depth dimension to culture, but it cannot assume with any credibility that there is in any natural reality such a depth."[325] And while theologians such as Schleiermacher and Tillich argued for a notion of religious depth from a valuation of a religious experience (*Absolute dependence* and *Ultimate concern*), some have argued that a "secular postmodern theology begins with an acknowledgment of a lack of such experiences in many of our lives and asks if any experience can be had or so transformed such that it can be valued as real and important."[326] This is not to say that postmodern theology or edifying theology will not take into account religious experience. Indeed it will. As Winquist explains at length:

> There are witnesses in our collective historical memory that claim that they have had this experience of the profoundest depths and if we are to hear their voices we will need to intersect their discourses in ways that are both meaningful and credible for us. Their discourses will have to become valenced with our discourse if they are to provide access to religious experience. This means that we will first have to locate in our own experiences those places or moments which can connect with their witness. Otherwise, their witness will be no more than a curiousity for us. The trust in pious teachers has been sufficiently diminished that exhortations to piety are not enough. It is not a question of whether we should have or want to have religious experiences but whether we can have such

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[324] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 11.
[325] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 4.
[326] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 5.

experiences.[327]

While religious experience remains, the death of God disallows the possibility for epistemologically securing one's faith. More than ever faith is vulnerable:

> We have experienced a progressive series of losses that has left us in a world of contingency and relativity. We are never able to say of any value or experience, "it must be," because we are aware that it could just as well be otherwise. The death of God and the disappearance of a unified and single subject as legacies of the nineteenth century are perhaps the most vivid of our losses, although they entail other losses, such as the end of the meaning of history and the closure of the book as a source of wisdom.[328]

In postmodernist or post-Enlightenment developments of theology, rationality, truth, and science have become transformed. With the removal of systematic philosophy's pretense of being overseer of culture, the reaction should not be to seek for another replacement - another means of viewing the world from a God's eye-view:

> Once we have given up our epistemic concern to found culture on an incorrigible and immutable foundation . . . there will no longer be a need for a distinct "priesthood" of intellectuals to tell us when, in our various activities, we are in touch with such a permanent, ahistorical foundation (reality), and when we are not.[329]

Whether described as post-Christian or postmodern, contemporary culture has no metanarratives, religious, political, or philosophical. Faith has become vulnerable. This does not mean, however, that descriptions of the world are to be avoided. To be avoided are metaphysical vantage points. As Rorty has noted, *toeholds* that attempt to capture and describe part of our experience are acceptable. This follows for edifying theology. One approach to theology that is postmodern, ethical, and compatible with edifying theology has been presented by David Tracy.[330]

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[327] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 5.
[328] Winquist, *Desiring Theology*, p. 6. On this point Winquist cites Mark Taylor's *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), part one.
[329] Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 13.
[330] David Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," *Theology Today*, 51, April 1994, pp. 104-114.

Tracy serves postmodern and post-Christian theologies well by attempting to establish what must remain essential to theological investigation after the collapse of modernity.

As we have showed with the development of edifying theology, theological investigation will continue. And by doing so it must retain certain characteristics, one of which, as we saw above, is ethical. In a statement applicable to edifying theology Tracy states:

> Genuine postmodernity begins not in ennui but in ethical resistance. Postmodernity begins by trying to think the unthought of modernity. Beyond the early modern turn to the purely autonomous, self-grounding subject, beyond even the more recent turn to language (the first great contemporary challenge to modern subjectivism) lies the quintessential turn of post-modernity itself – the turn to the other. It is that turn, above all, that defines the intellectual as well as the ethical meaning of postmodernity. The other and the different come forward now as central intellectual categories across all the major disciplines, including theology. The others and the different - both those from other cultures and those others not accounted for by the grand narrative of the dominant culture – return with full force to unmask the social evolutionary narrative of modernity as ultimately an alibi-story, not a plausible reading of our human history together.[331]

After presenting how postmodern theology remains decidedly ethical, Tracy then elaborates how these *prophetic* and the *meditative* (wisdom) biblical forms are to be understood.

Beginning with the prophetic form, Tracy contends that this form is intrinsically bound to the demand of the *Other*. The prophet is to speak on behalf of those who have been marginalized – economically, politically, or socially. In speaking of the other, Tracy cites Levinas's[332] well-known description: "the face that commands 'do not kill me,' the face that insists, beyond Levinas, do not reduce me or anyone else to your grand narrative."[333] Caputo, in his own treatment of

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[331] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 108.

[332] As Kuipers notes, "Levinas's influence on contemporary scholarship exemplifies an increased willingness in general among contemporary thinkers momentarily to turn their ears away from the powerful Greek chorus of Western philosophy and instead listen for the specifically Judeo-Christian tones that resonate within the often-dissonant chords that constitute the polyphony of Western culture." Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 8.

[333] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 108. Tracy refers the reader to Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne

Derrida, explains:

> For Levinas, the face of the other who commands me infinitely and places me in a position of "absolute dissymmetry," is itself comparable to the Hebrew notion of *kadosh*, of "sanctity" (*sainteté*) as the separate and apart, the transcendent, that whose sacrosanct holiness sets it apart and demands our respect. While this characterization is reserved for God in Jewish theology, Levinas extends it to the other (*autrui*), both the neighbor and the stranger, whom he says we must "make welcome."[334]

Establishing the meaning of the prophetic form in Christian theology can proceed in two directions.

The first is what Tracy describes as the "generalizing" direction. Here the "religious/revelatory core is seen as, at its heart, also an ethic."[335] Tracy agrees with Levinas that on this account ethics is first philosophy - "true ethics is grounded in the face of the other."[336] Ethics on this reading requires no ontological justification, because the other "is what no ontological totality can ever control."[337] A different direction that the prophetic core can take is through the embodiment of an ethic that does not necessarily depend on the postmodern ethic of the Other. Tracy is thinking here of ethical positions that have been developed in modern liberal theological circles which still give importance to the "modern autonomous self and its rational

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University Press, 1981). Kuipers notes that for Levinas "the question of ethics has less to do with constructing rational normative frameworks than it has to do with opening ourselves, especially when our moral deliberating becomes dominated by such rationalist ethics, to that which eludes our moral concepts: the singular others whose potential pain our moral deliberating is meant to address." Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 7.

[334] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 136. Derrida states that the "structure of my relation to the other is of a 'relation without relation.' It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent. I cannot reach the other. I cannot know the other from the inside and so on. That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war, too, a condition of the relation to the other." Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 14.

[335] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 112.

[336] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 112.

[337] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 112.

obligations."[338] Tracy is not convinced that this approach is as close to the prophetic core as the former account. "Postmodern positions (like Levinas) seem to me far more hermeneutically faithful to the prophetic self-understanding than the more familiar modern deontological and teleological Christian ethical options."[339]

The other basic religious form in the Bible is meditative (or the wisdom form). The meditative form, like the prophetic form, also moves in two directions. On the first account instead of focusing on the Bible's historical or ethical core, attention is given to the more existential concerns that confront humanity (the standard list is given here by Tracy: death, guilt, anxiety, despair, joy, peace, and hope[340]). In a passage worth quoting at length Tracy explains how particular biblical texts address these "limit situations":

> Job and Lamentations will always speak their meditative, penetrating truth to anyone capable of facing the tragedy that is human existence. The Gospel of John – that meditative rendering of the common Christian narrative – will always describe the beauty and glory of the whole of reality (even the cross as the lifting up and disclosure of glory) to all those capable of genuine meditation on the limit experiences of peace, joy, beauty, and love. Meditative humans, then as now, will turn to intelligence and love, to nature and to cosmos, to mind and to body, to aid their reflections on the vision of life, the wisdom, disclosed by the biblical narratives for our common human limit-experiences.[341]

The second move that the meditative form may take is a more generalizing turn. This form may attempt to develop "participatory metaphysics" (Plato being the best example here). If the wisdom form takes a turn towards ethics, a wisdom ethic similar to Whitehead and Hartshorne may follow (that is, "an aesthetic ethics of appreciation of the good and of beauty").[342] On this form's historically conscious side is a "hermeneutical philosophy disclosing the dialogical character of all

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[338] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 112.
[339] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 112.
[340] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 113.
[341] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 113.
[342] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 113.

reality."[343]

The more generalizing form of meditative theology is too heady for edifying theology (despite Tracy's attempt to qualify metaphysics by saying that it will never be "totalizing"[344]). Nevertheless, both the prophetic form and the meditative form (that has limit-situations at its center) are compatible with edifying theology's aims. The prophetic form, with its importance given to Levinas's view of the ethical and its *prophetic self-understanding*, provides a view of ethics appropriate for edifying theology. This seems especially important when coupled to the meditative form, the focus of which are the existential questions of life. It should be clear, however, that because edifying theology's methodology is eclectic, choosing and avoiding what is compatible with its assumptions, it is not assimilated within postmodern theologies.

Edifying theology remains autonomous. And so despite the similarities and differences that edifying theology shares with other disciplines, the main factor that distinguishes its activity is its dialogical interaction with its culture. "Theology must now be conceived not simply as the imaginative constructive work of individual minds addressing the theological problems they confront: it becomes, rather, a wide-ranging *conversation* among many voices, all involved in imaginative construction but representing significantly diverse standpoints in our thoroughly pluralistic world."[345] This temperament is shared among many postmodern theologies, in particular, the post-Christian view of ethics as presented by Charles Winquist.

Winquist's elaboration of *paraethics* is an example of how ethics, on the one hand, resists totalizing accounts of behavior and, on the other hand, includes as much as the community as possible. Winquist "uses the term 'paraethics' to distinguish his project from one that would seek

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[343] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 113.
[344] Tracy, "Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity," p. 113.

to ground itself in first principles. Paraethics, he says, is based in strategies that resist totalization and the reduction of others to the self. It involves a belief that life is less beautiful when diversities are not recognized and explored."[346] Another example is Edith Wyschogrod.[347] Sanders states:

> In her attempt to develop a postmodern ethics, Wyschogrod, surprisingly, turns to the lives of saints. Modern ethical systems, she says, have been unable to bridge the gap between theory and life. Emerging from disparate philosophical backgrounds and privileging varying questions, they have stood paralyzed in the face of this century's horrors. By turning to hagiography, Wyschogrod hopes to discover a postmodern thinking that can respond adequately to the challenges of our time.[348]

Sanders explains exactly how Wyschogrod understands, in this context, a "saint" and why this is ethically relevant:

> [Wyschogrod] defines a "saint" as "one whose adult life in its entirety is devoted to the alleviation of sorrow (the psychological suffering) and pain (the physical suffering) that afflicts other persons without distinction of rank or group or, alternatively, that afflicts sentient beings, whatever the cost to the saint in pain or sorrow."[349] Drawing on a wide variety of sources and traditions, including Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and modern fiction, Wyschogrod argues that saints' lives point beyond the aporias of theory and open up sites for moral action.[350]

The postmodern theologian is thoroughly engaged in ethics. These different attempts at grappling with the problems that our culture is faced with are compatible with edifying theology's aims. More examples could be cited.[351]

The edifying theologian's work is not significantly different from Rorty's description of the

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[345] Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. xiv; emphasis his.
[346] Theresa Sanders, "The Otherness of God and the Bodies of Others," *The Journal of Religion*, 76, October 1996, pp. 581-582. See Winquist's *Desiring Theology*, pp. 143, 146-147.
[347] Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[348] Sanders, "The Otherness of God and the Bodies of Others," p. 582.
[349] Sanders cites here Wyschogrod's *Saints and Postmodernism*, p. 257.
[350] Sanders, "The Otherness of God and the Bodies of Others," p. 582.
[351] See for example *Reconstructing Christian Theology* where various postmodern theologians deal with a number of diverse ethical issues: "God, Sexism, and Transformation," "Creation, Environmental Crisis, and Ecological Justice," and, "The Church, Classism, and Ecclesial Community." Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark Taylor, eds. *Reconstructing Christian Theology*

work of the post-Philosophical philosopher. Edifying theology, while understanding itself primarily as post-Christian rather than post-Philosophical, is as well compatible with, and parasitical on, the recognition that traditional philosophy has reached its end. Construed in this manner edifying theology is compatible with Rorty's view of the post-Philosophical society.

This appropriation of Rorty's metaphilosophy into theological terms is a project that most probably has not been considered by Rorty. He has, nevertheless, spoken of religious belief in a number of places throughout his writings.

In some places, he has rejected out of hand any place for religious belief in contemporary, liberal society. In other places, room is made, yet with certain conditions. The most important being that religious belief is to be confined to the private side of the private/public split.

Of course not all theorists, philosophical or theological, are comfortable with the implications Rorty's position holds for religious belief. There are some, such as Alvin Plantinga, who believe that Rorty's view may even be hostile to religious belief; even more precisely, Christian belief.

After reviewing how Rorty's position is compatible with Christian theology, a contrast to this view will be provided by Plantinga, primarily through a chapter he has included in a forthcoming book. In short, this chapter examines the debate between an open application of Rorty into a theological context, and a complete rejection of any such application.

V. Religious Language and Defeaters

> "The god that can be pointed out is an idol, and the religiosity that makes an outward show is an imperfect form of religiosity."
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> - Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*

(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

While our description of the society as post-Christian is compatible in many respects with Rorty's post-Philosophical aims, the question that arises is whether or not Rorty would be sympathetic to an appropriation of his distinction between systematic and edifying philosophies in theological terms? Most probably he would not. But this may be simply because the subject does not interest him, not because there is some sort of logical incompatibility with the appropriation. And there is quite a difference between the two.

While the appropriation of his philosophical distinction into theological terms may not interest him, Rorty does have much to say about religious language and belief in general. Throughout his prolific writings, particularly in his metaphilosophical period where he has set forth his critique of traditional philosophy and, in turn, set out his pragmatist account, he has spoken much of religion, religious belief, theism, and Christianity. Reference to these items, in fact appear regularly throughout his work. If they were indexed in the glossary of his texts they most certainly would show themselves to appear as frequently as terms such as truth as correspondence, rationality, and objectivity. The impression imparted is that these themes have been given some thought on Rorty's part. The points made are often insightful, details that a philosopher of religion might as well take note of. This deserves closer examination and so the following will be taken up in two parts – a positive and then negative view of Rorty's philosophy of religion.

The other question that we face in the appropriation of edifying philosophy into theological terms, however, is from quite another direction. Specifically, is this appropriation bound to fail from the outset because of Rorty's views of such concepts as truth? Is Rorty's position, in fact, one that impinges upon the integrity of the Christian faith? And if so, would not

any attempt to transfer such a destructive view into theological terms be doubly doomed to failure?

These questions are raised by Alvin Plantinga in a chapter in his forthcoming book on warrant and Christian belief. Here Plantinga raises the question of whether Rorty's view of truth offers, what Plantinga describes as, a "defeater" for Christian belief. In the final analysis, Plantinga contends, Rorty's position borders on incoherence, and as such, offers nothing in the way of defeaters for Christian belief.

If Plantinga is correct on Rorty's view of truth, then the attempt to appropriate Rorty's description of edifying philosophy into theological terms fails from the outset. But Plantinga's position raises another important problem, because on Plantinga's reading, Rorty's metaphilosophical position is quite incompatible with Christian belief. And so even if Rorty's metaphilosophical position is shown to be coherent, would it not then offer serious defeaters for Christian belief? As Plantinga sees it, whether Rorty's view is coherent or not, there is a high degree of incompatibility between these two accounts. Accordingly, Plantinga's analysis of Rorty's view of truth, and whether it offers defeaters for Christian belief, merits review in the second part of this chapter.

A. Rorty's Account of the Philosophy of Religion

Throughout his examination of traditional philosophy, *vis-à-vis* the pragmatist's alternative, Rorty has had much to say about religion, religious belief, and Christianity. In fact references to these items appear regularly throughout his work, imparting the impression that they are of some consequence in his metaphilosophical critique. This is not to say that he is entirely consistent with

his remarks concerning religious belief. While certainly not a theist[352], in other places he makes room in his language for "spirituality."[353]

Some of his most recent writings on this subject could be described as a pragmatist's philosophy of religion. Taken in their various contexts these statements are not merely provocative. I venture to argue that his comments and views are rather insightful, observations that a theologian, sensitive to issues in contemporary philosophy, would as well share.[354] In the attempt to better situate our comparison of philosophy and theology we will review the main theses of Rorty's philosophy of religion as developed in his writings.

Rorty has no philosophically rigorous argument against religious belief, or what is usually described under the general idiom as *God-talk*. He rather believes that various forms of religious

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[352] Rorty states that "I use 'secularism' in the sense of 'anticlericalism' rather than 'atheism.'" Speaking of Dewey, Rorty notes further that "Dewey's dislike of 'aggressive atheism' is made clear in *A Common Faith*. I have argued elsewhere that Dewey, like James, wanted pragmatism to be compatible with religious belief - not only with a privatized religious belief, not with the sort of religious belief that produces churches, especially churches which take on political positions." Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), footnote 8, p. 142. Elsewhere he states that "Once God and his view goes, there is just us and our views. What Sartre calls 'a consistent atheism' would prevent us from inventing God surrogates like Reason, Nature, CSP, or a Matter of Fact about Warrant." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 54.

[353] Rorty has stated that "the question at hand is ultimately spiritual, and . . . the adoption of my view would be a real change in people's self-image. For when people step outside of their expert cultures – when they stop acting as carpenters or physicists and start getting reflective in religious or philosophical ways – they do, alas, start wondering about whether we are shadowing, displaying, mirroring, and representing something. I wish they did not. I think that if we could get rid of *both* Farrell's sense that we are meaningless unless we are getting something not ourselves right, *and* the Nietzschean sense that we are meaningless unless we create a world in our image (the Romanticism that Farrell attributes to me), then our spiritual state would be better than it is now." Richard Rorty, "Response to Farrell," *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, edited by Herman Saatkamph (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), p. 195; emphasis his. As quoted by Ronald A. Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger: Themes in the social philosophy of Richard Rorty* (Boston: University Press of America, 1997), p. 35, footnote #6.

[354] The comparison here with Nietzsche is clear. Although many have understood Nietzsche's highly acerbic criticisms of Christianity to be indicative of rabid atheism, others have better seen

language, as expressed in our western culture, will eventually pass out of use. This accords with his general view of how we adjudicate between new and old beliefs and desires, or *sentential attitudes.*[355]

Professor Rorty rightly believes that the process by which beliefs, religious or otherwise, change within a given society is a highly complicated affair. Using the Copernican Revolution as an example, Rorty notes that cultural change "of this magnitude does not result from applying criteria . . . any more than individuals become theists or atheists, or shift from one spouse or circle of friends to another, as a result either of applying criteria or of *actes gratuits.*"[356] Consistent with his philosophical position, Rorty likewise contends that change of beliefs does *not* occur because of a failure in relations of representation:

> . . . the pragmatist recognizes relations of *justification* holding between beliefs and desires, and relations of *causation* holding between these beliefs and desires and other items in the universe, but no relations of *representation.*[357] Beliefs do not represent nonbeliefs. There are, to be sure,

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these criticisms leveled against a form of Christianity rightly deserving of our chagrin.

[355] See Richard Rorty's "Inquiry as recontextualization: An anti-dualist account of interpretation," *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, pp. 93-110. Some of the discussion here overlaps with "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism."

[356] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 6. This has a certain resemblance to Kuhn's account of how scientific paradigms shift. Gutting further explains how Kuhn's position is helpful for Rorty: "First, it rejects the idea that there is any necessarily shared epistemic ground (e.g., a neutral observation language or a priori methodological rules) that we can use to resolve scientific disagreements. This is Kuhn's doctrine of incommensurability, which corresponds to Rorty's rejection of privileged representations. Second, Kuhn locates the ultimate source of science's cognitive authority in the consensus of the scientific community, a view that corresponds to Rorty's insistence on the primacy of conversation (reason-giving as a social practise). Rorty's idea is to extend what Kuhn says about natural science to the entire domain of human knowledge." Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, "Rorty-12".

[357] "One can reply that *of course* language can usefully, for many purposes, be viewed as a system of representations . . . All that one has to do to make *any* of these approaches useful and productive is to take the vocabulary of the present historical period (or class or society or academy) for granted and to work within it. Once one is safely ensconced within this language-game, questions about what correctly represents what, how we know that it does, and how it manages to do so will make admirable sense and will get useful answers." Rorty argues, however, that the problems begin "when the Kantian tradition cosmologizes and eternalizes its current view

> relations to *aboutness* . . . [T]here is no problem about how a belief can be about the unreal or the impossible. For aboutness is not a matter of pointing outside the web. Rather, we use the term "about" as a way of directing attention to the beliefs which are relevant to the justification of other beliefs, not as a way of directing attention to nonbeliefs.[358]

Rorty goes on to comment that:

> [Beliefs] all come with contexts attached, just as Riemannian space comes with axioms attached. So there is no question of taking an object out of its old context and examining it, all by itself, to see what new context might suit it. There is only a question about which other regions of the web we might look to find ways of eliminating the residual tensions in the region currently under strain. Nor is there an answer to the question of what it is that is being put in context except, boringly and trivially, "beliefs." All talk about doing things to objects must, in a pragmatic account of inquiry "into" objects, be paraphrasable as talk about reweaving beliefs.[359]

But how is the "reweaving" of beliefs (religious or otherwise) carried out? Does Rorty's description imply that there is no way of evaluating or legitimately changing our beliefs?

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of physics, or right and wrong, or philosophy, or language." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 104; emphasis his.

[358] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 97; emphasis his. Concerning *reality* Rorty says: "Reality is one, but descriptions of it are many. They *ought* to be many, for human beings have, and ought to have many different purposes." Richard Rorty, "Against Unity," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1998, p. 31; emphasis his. Moreover, "we should view inquiry as a way of using reality. So the relation between our truth-claims and the rest of the world is causal rather than representational. It causes us to hold beliefs, and we continue to hold the beliefs which prove to be reliable guides to getting what we want." Richard Rorty, "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality," unpublished manuscript, p. 7. Here the influence of Nietzsche is apparent: "Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less, but has been *given* value at some time, as a present – and it was we who gave and bestowed it." Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 301; emphasis his.

[359] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 98. This description of objects should not be interpreted as meaning that the "antiessentialist" is an idealist. Rorty goes on to state that the "antiessentialist specializes in creating this hall-of-mirrors effect - in getting us to stop asking which is the real thing and which the image, and to settle for an ever-expanding choice of images, of Goodmanian 'worlds.'" [100] But the antiessentialist believes, like the realist, that "there are objects which are *causally* independent of human beliefs and desires." [101] The inquiry is not based on a confrontation between beliefs and objects, but rather in the search for a coherent set of beliefs. "We do in fact describe most objects as causally independent of us, and that is *all* that is required to satisfy our realistic intuitions. We are not also required to say that our descriptions *represent objects*." [101; emphasis his.

Coherence, in Rorty's view, plays an integral part in the process of acquiring and disposing of beliefs. But what exactly he means by coherence should be kept in mind:

> . . . I think the test of philosophical truth consists neither in "correct analyses" of individual concepts (for example, "meaning," "intentionally") nor in the internal coherence among hundreds of such analyses linked together in a philosophical system, but only in the coherence of such a system with the rest of culture, a culture which one hopes will continue to be as *ondoyant et divers* as is that of the Western democracies at the present time.[360]

On this account, the coherence of belief will be judged by how well it fits with the rest of culture, situated at least for us, within the description of the Western democratic world. It is important to keep the preceding distinctions in mind as we now look specifically at Rorty's narrower discussion of religious language in contemporary Western society.

Rorty has argued, in the context of how our beliefs come and go, that webs of beliefs and desires are continually rewoven in order to account for new sentential attitudes. Questions of how and from where these new attitudes arise are not of particular interest for Rorty. The important point is that some new beliefs "popping up" will put older beliefs under strain.[361] "Strains" will be of two sorts: "contradictions" and others, "tensions." The means by which we alleviate these strains are numerous, but as described by Rorty, there are three options which are especially noteworthy.

The first option is to simply abandon an old belief. In the context of religious convictions, this could apply to a global belief such as belief in the existence of God. But as we will note further, this option would most likely apply to a less consequential, or secondary belief, such as a particular theological doctrine.

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[360] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 90.

[361] The similarity to Kuhn's description of a paradigm shift in not accidental in this description.

Secondly, and more perhaps more dramatically, we may attempt to account for the new belief by constructing an entire set of new beliefs to account for "the disturbing intruder," "reducing the strain which the old beliefs and desires put on it and which it puts on them."[362] Here, I take it, is a reconfiguration of our old beliefs together with new beliefs in order to account for the so-called intruder. An example of this sort could be the Christian fundamentalist taking a seminar in evolutionary biology, and in the course of her studies, attempting to retain her theistic beliefs but dispensing with a literal "Creationist" reading of Genesis. The extent to which this change causes a rippling effect on other religious beliefs held will depend on a number of factors. Suffice here to note, at least from this example, that while the student retains belief in God, a significant shift in her religious thinking has occurred.[363]

The third option, Rorty suggests, is to "just unstitch, and thus erase, a whole range of beliefs and desires - we may stop *having* attitudes toward sentences which use a certain word (the word 'God,' or 'phlogiston,' for example)."[364] This option is more radical than the first. And so using the example of option two, once certain principles of evolutionary biology are accepted, one could imagine the student completely abandoning theism.

It is important to note that options one and three are different because of the importance of the belief originally held. Option one, for example, seems to apply best with trivial beliefs. It would hardly be expected that having the belief that I packed my sandwich to work, when in fact I left it on the refrigerator, would necessitate erasing my beliefs about democracy or the existence

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[362] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 93.
[363] As Rorty notes further, "in special situations, the acquisition of that belief will provoke the sort of large-scale, conscious, deliberate reweaving which does deserve the name of inquiry . . . a revelation which leads one to rethink one's long-term plans and, ultimately, the meaning of one's life." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 94.
[364] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 93; emphasis his.

of other sentient creatures. Changes in belief of this category are distinguished by Rorty as habits rather than inquiry.[365] Options two and three apply to those cases in which the beliefs are of consequential importance, and hence fall under the distinction of inquiry:

> As one moves along the spectrum from habit to inquiry - from instinctive revision of intentions through routine calculations toward revolutionary science or politics - the number of beliefs added to or subtracted from the web increases. At a certain point in this process it becomes useful to speak of "recontextualization." The more widespread the changes, the more use we have for the notion of "a new context."[366]

One either "creates" and "encapsulates," or "unstiches" and "erases." In the case of *God-talk*, Rorty favors the latter, while I wish to make room for the former. Or, put otherwise, while Rorty sees "contradiction," I see "tension."

Rorty's description of how our language changes and/or drops out of use, with the distinction between habit and inquiry, is consistent with his post-Philosophical view of society. And at first glance this general view appears theologically neutral. But describing culture in its ideal form elsewhere, Rorty states that:

> The difference between a search for foundations and an attempt at redescription is emblematic of the difference between the culture of liberalism and older forms of cultural life. For in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible. It would drop, or drastically reinterpret, not only the idea of holiness but those of "devotion to truth" and of "fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit."[367]

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[365] "This is, like all of Dewey's distinctions, one of degree. At one end of a spectrum are situations where minimal reweaving is required . . . The reweaving involved in assimilating the novel belief 'The fork is on the wrong side' is usually too minimal to deserve the name of 'inquiry.'" Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 94.

[366] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 94.

[367] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 45. As far as Rorty's own view of religious belief is concerned, some have commented on his particularly vehement anti-religious tone. Vahanian notes that when Rorty speaks of the secular "he means secular, even with a vengeance." He goes on to say that "in Rorty's use, it acquires an even more radical meaning than, especially in the wake of the Reformation, is normally associated with it. Originally serving to distinguish the so-

Irrespective of Rorty's exhortations, it is nevertheless debatable if this described "secular" culture is the "ideal form." To suppose that is, is perhaps a precipitant assumption.

Elsewhere Rorty does not presume to say what sort of language will drop out of usage. He states that "X-talk just fades away, not because someone has made a philosophical or scientific discovery that there are no X's, but because nobody any longer has a use for this sort of talk."[368] In another place "he freely admits that his post-philosophical liberal culture will retain many of the ethical elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition from which it has emerged."[369] Most would agree that these are balanced claims. Here there is no pre-judgment as to which sort of *talk* (religious, political, scientific, etc.) *will* pass into obscurity.

For some members of the society certain forms of religious discourse will most probably fade away. It is just as likely, however, that such forms of discourse will continue as integral parts of self-expression. Rorty's view of how we acquire and forfeit beliefs is important, but it is not clear on his account that all forms of religious language need to dissipate in order to obtain a truly cultured and liberal society. Religious language, like philosophical language, can take different forms.

The preceding is important for our present discussion, especially in the context of Rorty's metaphilosophical writings. The question at hand is, "If one accepts Rorty's critique of the

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called secular from the regular clergy, it attenuates or even extenuates all rigid opposition between the world - *secular* - and faith. Though it has no meaning except through the religious, it enjoys its own franchise." Gabriel Vahanian, "The Denatured Nature of Ethics: In Praise of the Secular," *Philosophie de la religion entre éthique et ontologie* (Biblioteca dell' Archivio di Filosofia, Cedam, textes réunis par Marco M. Olivetta, 1996), p. 507. For Rorty, the disappearance of the sacred and the success of the secular appear to be part of the process of liberation.

[368] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 115.

[369] Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, p. 9. On this point Kuipers refers the reader to Rorty's *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 202.

philosophical tradition, what becomes of religious belief?" And while Rorty does not explicitly reject religious belief in the post-Philosophical context, we need to explore how religious belief can survive in this context.

I wish to argue that religious belief can survive because it is compatible with the demise of the philosophical tradition. Space is created for belief because the replacement of systematic theology by edifying theology has effects similar to the replacement of systematic philosophy by edifying philosophy. Rejecting theology's interest in metaphysics, epistemological foundations, or essentialist views of Truth does not necessarily erase religious belief in its entirety. At most, it erases a way of expressing belief. Just as a post-Philosophical view of philosophy can survive systematic philosophy, theology can survive the demise of systematic theology.

Like edifying philosophy, edifying theology abandons effervescent metaphysical investigation, the desire for establishing epistemological foundations and robust definitions of truth. As in edifying philosophy, the theologian focuses attention on the Deweyan "problems of society." And if the edifying theologian has more to her task than this (in order to distinguish her as theologian), the "more" that is involved will not violate her basic commitment to *this world.*

As yet, the character that religious language could have in the post-Philosophical culture has not been fleshed out, but I think that we can find preliminary clues to it by focusing on a recent manuscript by Rorty, where, among other things, he sketches a pragmatist philosophy of religion.[370] After listing his five staccato theses, we will discuss how these might give edifying theology its initial form.

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[370] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," unpublished manuscript, p. 12. I would like to thank Professor Gary Gutting for passing this document on to me.

First, true to his pragmatist views, Rorty notes "an advantage of the anti-representationalist view of belief which James took over from Bain and Peirce - the view that beliefs are habits of action - that it frees us from the responsibility to unify our beliefs into a single world-view."[371] Instead of attempting to have our beliefs as tightly unified, representing a single world, we look to habits of action. Here the purposes vary, as do the habits inculcated and nurtured that serve the purposes desired.

"The pragmatists' romantic utilitarianism," secondly, drops the idea that "some parts of culture fulfill our need to know the truth and others fulfill lesser aims."[372] Gone are privileged vantage points, religious and scientific, over culture. Leaning on Nietzsche, this "is an attempt to make more room for individuality than can be provided either by orthodox monotheism, or by the Enlightenment's attempt to put science in the place of religion as a source of truth."[373] Regarding the place of religion under this rubric, we "treat religion as poetic and poetry as religious."[374]

As his third thesis Rorty wishes to make a further distinction - between "projects of social cooperation and projects of individual self-development."[375] With respect to the former,

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[371] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 12. This follows from Rorty's holistic, coherentist position. Letson notes that we "need at this point to combine the coherentist's claim that truth is a matter of consistency with the comprehensive set of beliefs of a knower with the claim that this view of the matter does not commit the coherentist to the view that there is no way to pick out any particular consistent set from all of the possible sets available for belief. The coherentist does not face this alarming possible proliferation of sets of beliefs for a very simple reason: we already have a comprehensive set of beliefs, and any candidates for belief must pass the test of these beliefs. It is never the case that any actual knower can be in the position of having to choose between competing sets. Rather, there will be small adjustments to the set that he already has - coherence then entails that new beliefs conform to the vast body of unquestioned and unquestionable beliefs now held." Letson, *Davidson's Theory of Truth and Its Implications for Rorty's Pragmatism*, pp. 26-27.

[372] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.

[373] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.

[374] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.

[375] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.

intersubjective agreement is required. As he has argued elsewhere, Rorty believes that natural science "is a paradigmatic project of social cooperation."[376] Romantic art, on the other hand, is an example of a paradigmatic project of individual self-development. Rorty includes religion here too, but only if it is disconnected from both "science and morals."[377] This disconnection, Rorty believes, circumvents the attempt "to predict the consequences of our actions and the attempt to rank human needs."[378]

Fourthly is Rorty's well-known critique of the essentialist view of Truth. Applied to the theological context, "[t]he Idea that we should love Truth is largely responsible for the idea that religious belief is 'intellectually irresponsible.'"[379] As he argues further:

> But there is no such thing as the love of Truth. What has been called by that name is a mixture of the love of reaching intersubjective agreement, the love of gaining mastery over a recalcitrant set of data, the love of winning arguments, and the love of synthesizing little theories into big theories.

The attractiveness of Rorty's view of truth is obvious in the theological context. By dropping the robust notion of truth as correspondence historical dialectics become unhinged: "truth - belief,"[380] "faith - reason," "religion - science," "subjective -objective," "belief - fact," "otherworldly -

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[376] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14. Institutions of science, he says elsewhere, exemplify the attributes of "relying on persuasion rather than force, of respect for the opinions of colleagues, [and] of curiosity and eagerness for new data and ideas . . . " Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 39.

[377] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.

[378] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.

[379] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.

[380] Dupré believes that Johann Georg Hamman (1730-1788), of whom Kierkegaard was his most famous disciple, to be the first philosopher to regard the odd nature of God-talk. "He identifies divine truth as appearing only through the 'inner lies or contradictions of reason.'" Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 216. See Johann Georg Hamann, *Konoxompax*, in Sämtliche Werke, vol. 3, *Sprache, Mysterien, Vernunft 1772-1788*, ed. Josef Nadler (Vienna: Herder, 1950), p. 227.

worldly," "spiritual - material," and "soul - flesh."[381] No longer is *faith* in opposition to *reason*, *religion* in opposition to *science*. Each is a matter of being a different project, suited for reaching different ends. They are not to be juxtaposed, as polar opposites, to be paired off in diametrical contrast with each other.

What about the objection that a certain amount of evidence is necessary for legitimately holding to a particular religious belief? On the side of the theologians, Rorty states that it is "never an objection to a religious belief that there is no evidence for it."[382] Instead, the "only possible objection to it can be that it intrudes an individual project into a social and cooperative project, and thereby offends against the teaching of *On Liberty*."[383] An intrusion of this sort is "a betrayal of one's responsibilities to cooperate with other human beings, not of one's responsibility to Truth or to Reason."[384]

His last thesis follows from his critique of the essentialist view of Truth - "The attempt to love Truth, and to think of it as One."[385] Rorty compares the philosophical hubris of commensurating and ranking human needs with the religious desire to align oneself with "something big, powerful, and non-human."[386] In the latter case, the hope is that a "powerful being" will side with the believer in the struggle with other people.[387] Pragmatists are as opposed to the attempt to establish an epistemological vantage point over society as they are to the desire

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[381] This unhinging is paralleled in the philosophical tradition. Rorty states that "I need to argue that the distinctions between absolutism and relativism, between rationality and irrationality, and between morality and expediency are obsolete and clumsy tools - remnants of a vocabulary we should try to replace." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 44.
[382] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.
[383] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.
[384] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.
[385] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.
[386] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 15.
[387] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 15.

"to circumvent the process of achieving democratic consensus about how to maximize happiness."[388] Admitting that the ideal of human fraternity was inherited by democracy from the Judeo-Christian tradition, it would be a betrayal of this inheritance to ignore that "every human need should be satisfied unless doing so causes too many other human needs to go unsatisfied."[389]

With these five theses in mind, how is the philosopher of religion and theologian to respond? Especially in light of Rorty's metaphilosophical position, are some of these views compatible with a post-Philosophical view of religious belief?

Rorty, in agreement with James, speaks of beliefs as habits of action. By accepting this anti-representationalist view of belief, the philosopher of religion and theologian are released from a barrage of weighty historical debates. Of notable concern are the debates carried on in traditional philosophy of religion over the existence of God - controversies that often juxtapose faith to reason, belief to knowledge, and science to religion.[390]

In an antiessentialist recontextualization, dropped for philosopher and theologian alike is the requirement to represent "a single world," the facts of which must "all hang together fairly tightly."[391] As the Harvard theologian Kaufman explains:

> But where it is the *world-self* we are trying to conceive, the whole within which everything else falls - including not only all facts but also all our symbols - there is nothing outside our conception against which we can place it to see whether it "corresponds": just as every thing is within the world, so also everything must be conceived as included within the conception of the world. With this conception, then, criteria of correspondence cannot be applied: only criteria of *coherence* and *pragmatic* usefulness to human life are relevant and

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[388] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 15.
[389] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 15. Elsewhere he connects "the trickle-down effects of the Christian doctrine that love is the only law"; "the trickle-down effects of liberal philosophy"; and "the Enlightenment suggestion that we privatize religion without trivializing it." Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation Stopper," p. 6.
[390] Concerning the traditional debate over the existence of God, Rorty says "I doubt that we'll get anywhere arguing theism vs. atheism . . . " Rorty, "Religion as a Conversation Stopper," p. 4.
[391] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 12.

> applicable. If these considerations hold for the concept of world, how much more must they apply to the concept of God, built up as it is through even more elaborate imaginative constructive moves.[392]

So-called "habits of action" is not a theme foreign to religious language. This is illustrated by Dewey's general account of language:

> If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. If they succeed in their office, they are reliable, sound, valid, good, true. If they fail to clear up confusion to eliminate defects, if they increase confusion, uncertainty, and evil when they are acted upon, then they are false. Confirmation, corroboration, verification lie in works, consequences. Handsome is that handsome does. By their fruit shall ye *know* them.[393]

The web of belief is not dormant, inert, *without fruit*; rather, it "produces movements in the organism's muscles - movements which kick the organism into action."[394] The allusion here to the New Testament (and certainly with Old Testament precedents) is not accidental. Throughout the centuries, care for the poor, the orphaned and the widow, concern for justice and equality, and deeds in accordance with them were performed by Christians because of their convictions.[395]

> Edifying theologians are in agreement with edifying philosophers on thesis two:
>
> Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause – wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described.[396]

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[392] Gordon Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, p. 87; emphasis mine. He states elsewhere that "the concepts of God and world must be assessed and reconstructed in consideration of the kinds of activity and forms of experience they make possible, rather than with reference to some objects to which they are supposed to 'correspond.'" Kaufman, p. 39.

[393] Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, p. 156; emphasis his.

[394] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 93.

[395] I do not intend to use this as some sort of apologetic for the Christian faith. It was often the case that these concerns were willfully ignored by the Church and those who professed to be Christian. It is only to point out that the Old and New Testaments speak clearly about putting belief into action.

[396] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370.

Given the tension between modern scientific investigation and religious thought - its bifurcation between matters of fact and matters of faith, and especially the view that the standard of knowledge must be scientific - this recalibration by Rorty sets new parameters between these two dispositions. This is not to say that "some parts of culture fulfill our need to know the truth and others fulfill lesser aims."[397] It is *only* to say that questions of religion are different from questions of science. It is *not* a comparison of "the serious with the non-serious."[398] The beliefs implicated call for different habits of action.

On the relationship between projects of social cooperation and projects of individual self-development, the issues become somewhat more complex. On the one hand, edifying theologians would agree that the religious paradigm is a project of individual self-development in which intersubjective agreement is not of primary concern. But it is not evident that this paradigm has no concern for intersubjective agreement. For example, although Rorty wishes to separate religion from morals, the religious dynamic (at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition) must be socially engaged. Of course *how* it is to be engaged is an ongoing debate. Here I can only mention that *moral* concerns address issues of social injustice and discrimination, and *not* issues typically voiced from fundamentalist groups and the religious right.

On thesis four, as we noted above, dropping the essentialist view of Truth is as important for the edifying theologian as it is for the edifying philosopher. But once dropped, how does one speak about the coherency of religious belief?

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[397] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.
[398] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 13.

Rorty is quite helpful in this regard, arguing that with the lack of "privileged representations," gone as well are demands that one must somehow correspond beliefs to how the world "really is":

> If there are no privileged representations in this mirror, then it will no longer answer to the need for a touchstone for choice between justified and unjustified claims upon our belief. Unless some other such framework can be found, the abandonment of the image of the Mirror leads us to abandon the notion of philosophy as a discipline which adjudicates the claims of science and religion, mathematics and poetry, reason and sentiment, allocating an appropriate place to each.[399]

Discarding the view that somehow philosophy gives some privileged epistemological vantage-point over the rest of culture - that philosophy can make final adjudication between beliefs and knowledge - carries with it a sense of liberation. Following from thesis three, this permits the edifying theologian and the edifying philosopher to affirm "one's responsibility to cooperate with other human beings, not of one's responsibility to Truth or to Reason."[400] The problems of society once again take central focus in the social context of edifying theology and edifying philosophy.

Thesis five is somewhat difficult to reconcile with edifying theology partly because of the emphasis, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, that Yahweh is on the side of the poor and oppressed. In the American context an example of this theme is vividly illustrated by the Afro-Americans during slavery. The "Negro Spirituals" were a reminder that injustice was present, yet there was hope that oppression would someday end. This is a far cry from the more popular image of a vengeful deity punishing infidels for crimes such as drinking alcohol or playing sports on

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[399] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 212. Elsewhere he states that "if Sellars is right that we cannot check our language against our nonlinguistic awareness, then philosophy can never be anything more than a discussion of the utility and compatibility of beliefs - and, more particularly, of the various vocabularies in which those beliefs are formulated. There is no authority outside of convenience for human purposes that can be appealed to in order to legitimize the use of a vocabulary. We have no duties to anything nonhuman." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 127.

Sunday. Rorty's encouragement to remember Mill's reflections on liberty are exactly apropos: "that every human need should be satisfied unless doing so causes too many other human needs to go unsatisfied."[401] Understood in this context, one differentiates between morals which directly affect individual self-fulfillment, and morals that permit basic human needs to be satisfied. For the latter, the edifying theologian (as anyone else in our society) may need to be socially engaged - but always for the fight for liberty, not against it.

Faced with the demise of the philosophical tradition, Rorty's "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism" gives an interesting starting point to the edifying theologian who wishes to recontextualize *God-talk* with contemporary concerns. Undoubtedly, however, the choice for many on the issue of theism may lie in erasure. And perhaps Rorty is correct concerning the future of religious language. He muses that after "five hundred years of experience with the language of a secular culture we may find ourselves no longer bothering to use religious terminology."[402]

This prediction may come to be. But there are dangers in thinking that the language of secular culture can easily be distinguished from religious terminology. Separating the *secular* from the *religious* is not as clear as it may at first appear. The theologian Gabriel Vahanian has noted that we "may indeed have abandoned a certain religious conception of the world but surely not for a non-religious one. Insofar as the present crisis is cultural, we are only exchanging one religious mentality for another."[403] With Eliot as a case in point Vahanian goes on to state that:

> In his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, published in 1949, Eliot observes that culture is the incarnation of a people's religion. Does this mean that only one type of culture can incarnate a given religion? Or does it mean simply that culture is a more or less accurate expression of certain fundamental religious assumptions, regardless of whether

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[400] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 14.
[401] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 15.
[402] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 115.
[403] Gabriel Vahanian, *God and Utopia* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1977)

> these are organized into dogmas and institutions or diffusely scattered across some collective unconscious?[404]

Keeping this in mind, the edifying philosopher may find accord with the edifying theologian as they attempt to move society towards the Deweyan goal of creating a greater diversity of individuals - "larger, fuller, more imaginative and daring individuals."[405] And with this shared goal, Rorty reminds us: "Different poets will perfect different sides of human nature, by projecting different ideals."[406]

With respect to religious belief, Rorty is consistent with his overall view of how our language changes and how we acquire new beliefs. He has no rigorous philosophical argument against religious language or, what is commonly referred to as, *God-talk.* He believes instead that this way of speaking will merely pass out of use. Rorty states:

> Think of human minds as webs of beliefs and desires, of sentential attitudes - webs which continually reweave themselves so as to accommodate new sentential attitudes. Do not ask where the new beliefs and desires come from. Forget, for the moment, about the external world, as well as about that dubious interface between self and world called "perceptual experience." Just assume that new ones keep popping up, and that some of them put strains on old beliefs and desires. We call some of these strains "contradictions" and others "tensions." We alleviate both by various techniques. For example, we may simply drop an old belief or desire. Or we may create a whole host of new beliefs and desires in order to encapsulate the disturbing intruder, reducing the strain which the old beliefs and desires put on it and which it puts on them. Or we may just unstitch, and thus erase, a whole range of beliefs and desires - we may stop *having* attitudes toward sentences which use a certain word (the word "God," or "phlogiston," for example).[407]

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[404] Gabriel Vahanian, *Wait Without Idols*, pp. 136-137; from George Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (New York, 1949), p. 32.
[405] Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, p. 30.
[406] Rorty, "Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism," p. 4.
[407] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 93; emphasis his. An example of this process is given by Rorty where he notes that, "Intellectual historians commonly treat 'the nature of the human subject' as the topic that gradually replaced 'God' as European culture secularized itself." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 183.

This description of how our language changes as well accords with Rorty's view of the ideal culture. For Rorty, the disappearance of the sacred and the success of the secular are a process of liberation:

> The difference between a search for foundations and an attempt at redescription is emblematic of the difference between the culture of liberalism and older forms of cultural life. For in its ideal form, the culture of liberalism would be one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self. Such a culture would have no room for the notion that there are nonhuman forces to which human beings should be responsible. It would drop, or drastically reinterpret, not only the idea of holiness but those of "devotion to truth" and of "fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit."[408]

Although Rorty has in mind some sort of religious language, this position is applicable to all beliefs or language-games. "X-talk just fades away, not because someone has made a philosophical or scientific discovery that there are no X's, but because nobody any longer has a use for this sort of talk."[409] According to Rorty religious language will *not* become obscure owing to some profound philosophical argument against its coherency. Its utility as a language-game will merely dissipate. Irrespective of Rorty's exhortations, he does not adequately explain why our use of *God* or other instances of religious language necessarily *should* drop out of our vocabulary. To merely suppose that it will is a precipitant assumption.

Professor Rorty's view of how we acquire and forfeit beliefs is important, but he offers little in the way of argument for believing that religious language need fade away in order to have a truly cultured and liberal society.[410] Admittedly there are members of the society for whom

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[408] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 45.
[409] Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 115.
[410] In another place he poses the issues thusly: "It isn't that we believe in God, or don't believe in God, or have suspended judgment about God, or consider that the God of theism is an inadequate symbol of our ultimate concern; it is just that we wish we didn't have to have a view about God. It isn't that we know that 'God' is a cognitively meaningless expression, or that it has its role in a language-game other than the fact-stating, or whatever. We just regret the fact that the word is

particular forms of religious talk will lose their use. It is just as likely, however, that for other members of the society it will remain an integral part of expressing who they are. It should be added that Rorty's desire for a dedivinized society, in which all trace of *the religious* is removed, is strangely out of keeping with what he has said elsewhere:

> Edifying philosophers want to keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause – wonder that there is something new under the sun, something which is *not* an accurate representation of what was already there, something which (at least for the moment) cannot be explained and can barely be described.[411]

The edifying philosopher must retain an "openness to strangeness which initially tempted us to begin thinking."[412] And a disposition of this description is compatible with various expressions of religious belief. Stated this way the historic debate between religion and philosophy, faith and reason, and theologian and philosopher are recast into a different light.

Rorty's description of religious language is, as well, at odds with his repeated encouragement for contemporary philosophers to take into account the importance of Wittgenstein's *language-games.* An appreciation for the complexity of language-games is perhaps nowhere as critical as it is in the context of religious language. *Holiness*, for example, granting various possible definitions, is normally an integral part of the religious believer's language-game.

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used so much." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 98. It is interesting to compare this with Buber's view: "Some would deny any legitimate use of the word God because it has been misused so much. Certainly it is the most burdened of all human words. Precisely for that reason it is the most imperishable and unavoidable. [*das unvergänglichste und unumgänglichste*] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, pp. 9-10), p. 123.

[411] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 370. He states, as well, that "[i]f there are no privileged representations in this mirror, then it will no longer answer to the need for a touchstone for choice between justified and unjustified claims upon our belief. Unless some other such framework can be found, the abandonment of the image of the Mirror lead us to abandon the notion of philosophy as a discipline which adjudicates the claims of science and religion, mathematics and poetry, reason and sentiment, allocating an appropriate place to each." Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 163..

It cannot be severed from its pivotal position in the matrix of meaning as if one were merely lifting a piece from a puzzle.[413] This has been a point, borrowed from Wittgenstein, often repeated by Rorty. Unfortunately, on the issue of *religious* language-games Rorty does not retain the importance of Wittgenstein's claim.

Theology, like philosophy, is carried out in many different forms. This is, of course, compatible with pragmatism: "As we pragmatists see it, there can and should be thousands of ways of describing things and people – as many as there are things we want to do with things and people – but this plurality is unproblematic."[414] Moreover, it need not be supposed that one has done away with theology by rejecting metaphysics, epistemological foundations, or truth as correspondence.[415] Just as a post-traditional view of philosophy can survive the demise of systematic philosophy, so theology can survive the demise of systematic theology. Theological discourse, and hence, religious language, remain after the demise of systematic theology.

While Rorty's writings on philosophy, post-Philosophical culture, and the role of religious belief can at least be provisionally accepted, this acceptance is not without detractors. There are

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[412] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 9.

[413] This is in accord with the Ricoeur's understanding of the *hermeneutical circle*. As he has argued, "[le cercle de l'herméneutique] 'Il faut comprendre pour croire, mais il faut croire pour comprendre.' Le cercle n'est pas un cercle vicieux, encore moins mortel; c'est un cercle bien vivant et stimulant. Il faut croire pour comprendre: jamais en effet l'interprète ne s'approchera de ce que dit son texte s'il ne vit dans l'aura du sens interrogé. Et pourtant ce n'est qu'en comprenant que nous pouvons croire." Paul Ricoeur, "Herméneutique des symboles et réflexion philosophique (I)," *Les conflit des interprétations: essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), p. 294. Regarding *truth*, it is as well interesting to note that Ricoeur states: "La vérité est bien un chemin, un advenir; elle a à voir et à faire avec la possibilité de continuer d'exister, de persévérer dans l'existence, d'être engendré et perpétué dans l'existence; elle est la possibilité d'un itinéraire." Paul Ricoeur, "Esquisse de Conclusion," *Exégèse et herméneutique* (Paris: 1971), p. 295.

[414] Rorty, "Against Unity," p. 30.

[415] In the theological context the edifying theologian may agree with Rorty's version of pragmatism that "delights in throwing out as much of the philosophical tradition as possible and urges that philosophers perform their principal social function only when they change intuitions as

numerous philosophers of religion who resist accepting the coherency of Rorty's views, as well as any appropriation into theological terms. The problem, it appears, is two-fold.

Some take Rorty's position as too extreme. As they see it, Rorty misrepresents the philosophers he discusses. Describing what he calls the *Rorty Factor*, Dennett has quipped: "Take whatever Rorty says about anyone's views and multiply it by .742' to derive what they actually said."[416] But if Rorty is taken seriously, his position, it is feared, opens up a Pandora's box of consequential implications. As we have seen, one of the most important results falls directly on the ethicists' ability to effectively do ethics. Without keeping robust notions of truth, rationality, and objectivity, it is argued that there will be no basis for normative claims. In short, if realism is rejected, we will be thrown into a morass of relativism and nihilism.

Another implication of Rorty's view concerns religious belief. As can be expected, just as there are many who are opposed to Rorty's metaphilosophical account, there are others who, in addition to this opposition, are troubled by the implications for theology.

Historically, there is an interdependency between philosophy and theology that, at certain points, is extremely difficult to separate. Where their differences are clear however, the contentions revolve around issues secondary to definitions of truth and reason. The main objective was always to get the opponent to line up his beliefs with the way the world, or the heavens, are. Whether mystics, fidiests, or scholastics, all believed that their particular view was the clearer description of reality.

Rorty's position radically alters this traditional dynamic between philosophy and theology, as well as their respective means of carrying out inquiry. As noted above, once epistemological

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opposed to reconciling them." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 130.

[416] Michael David Rohr, "Rorty, Richard McKay (1931-)," *Routledge Encyclopedia of*

and moral realism are put aside, the various points of contention between philosophy and theology dissipate. Each discipline, moreover, takes upon new tasks.

Alvin Plantinga is one example of a philosopher who is troubled by such a result. He wonders whether Rorty's discussion of truth can be taken seriously. Secondly, as a philosopher of religion, he wonders whether anything that Rorty argues for may be taken as a "defeater" for Christian belief. In short, Plantinga believes that if Rorty is right, Christian belief will suffer. It is important, then, to review Plantinga's understanding of Rorty to determine the consequences for philosophical analysis, and as well, for religious belief.

B. Plantinga's View of Truth: What to Make of Rorty's View?

In a chapter entitled "Postmodernism and Pluralism," from his third volume on warrant and Christian belief[417], Alvin Plantinga takes aim at the postmodernists' view of truth. As Plantinga sees it, postmodernism teeters on the brink of incoherence due to its conceptual ambiguities and exaggerated claims.

Plantinga is not only on the offensive. He takes a defensive position as well, assuring the reader that contrary to what some might maintain, postmodernism does not offer "defeaters" for Christian belief. Plantinga explains:

> . . . to provide me with a defeater for my belief B, you have to do or say something such that (given that I am aware of it and have heard and understood it) I can no longer rationally continue to believe B, or continue to believe it as firmly as before. In the typical case you will do this either by putting me into a position where I can see that my belief is to be rejected (e.g., by arranging for me to have the right sorts of experience) or by giving me an argument of some kind.[418]

Philosophy, Version 1.0 (London and New York: Routledge, 1998)

[417] Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Christian Belief*, forthcoming. I would like to thank Professor Plantinga for giving me a copy of this chapter before it went to print.

[418] Plantinga, p. 5.

Plantinga's article raises a number of concerns worthy of further discussion. Two notable issues are, firstly, his definition of who constitute the Christian community and, secondly, this community's compatibility with postmodernism. Of special interest, however, in the context of defeaters, is Plantinga's analysis of Richard Rorty's account of truth and how this position, if taken seriously, is incompatible with "Christian belief."

I hope to show that Plantinga is correct, albeit for the wrong reasons. Plantinga is quite right to maintain that neither Rorty's view of truth nor most definitions of postmodernism offer serious defeaters for Christianity. But this is *not* because Rorty's metaphilosophical position or postmodernism are incoherent and muddled. Rather, on *a particular reading*, there are a number of places of compatibility with *some interpretations* of Christianity. In fact, read carefully and charitably, their critical concerns may illumine the *kerygma* of this great faith.

Professor Plantinga is quite certain that postmodernism offers little in the way of providing defeaters for Christian belief. The possible candidates representing this camp range from a diversity of thinkers: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Lacan, Derrida, and Rorty.[419]

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[419] Kuipers notes that "Rorty has become increasingly unhappy with the label 'postmodern,' as a description of his thought as well as a description of a general intellectual trend. See *EHO* 1: 'I have sometimes used "postmodern" myself, in the rather narrow sense defined by Lyotard as "distrust of metanarratives." But I now wish that I had not. The term has been so over-used that it is causing more trouble than it is worth. I have given up on the attempt to find something common to Michael Graves' buildings, Pynchon's and Rushdie's novels, Ashberry's poems, various sorts of popular music, and the writings of Heidegger and Derrida. I have become more hesitant about attempts to periodize culture – to describe every part of a culture as suddenly swerving off in the same new direction at approximately the same time.'" Despite this consideration on Rorty's part, Kuipers maintains the value of using this term. He states that Rorty's criticism "provides an important caveat; nonetheless, I wish to continue using the word, however unadvisedly, for its heuristic value. As a loose term describing a suspicious reaction to the authoritative metaphysical claims of various canons and traditions, it still helps reflect a growing mood in Western culture." Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger*, pp. 16-17, footnote 2.

This is not to say, however, that no common ground exists between some of their claims and Christian belief. There is compatibility, for example, with their rejection of classical foundationalism. Another important point of compatibility is the shared views of social justice between Christians and proponents of postmodernism: "one thinks of sympathy and compassion for the poor and oppressed, the strong sense of outrage at some of the injustices our world displays, celebration of diversity, and the 'unmasking' of prejudice, oppression and power seeking masquerading as nothing but self-evident moral principles and the dictates of sweet reason."[420]

But some postmodernist claims stand in clear opposition to Plantinga's understanding of Christianity. Three of the most notable are: 1) God is dead; 2) There are no "objective" moral standards; and, 3) "there isn't any such thing as *truth*, at least as commonsensically thought of."[421] In the remaining section of his article, Plantinga takes aim at the third claim.

There are at least a couple of different ways this third assertion may be understood. The first interpretation, Plantinga suggests, is to think that "what is true depends upon what we human beings say or think."[422] On the face of it this would be an odd way of understanding one's relationship to the rest of the world; that somehow a certain object's existence depended upon our cognitive relation to that object. For example, with the claim "God exists," it would seemingly follow that the truthfulness of this proposition would depend upon whether or not we thought he existed. Plantinga concludes: "But of course from a Christian perspective that is wholly absurd."[423]

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[420] Plantinga, p. 3.
[421] Plantinga, p. 3.
[422] Plantinga, p. 4.
[423] Plantinga, p. 4.

Another way of understanding this claim is to argue that there is "no such thing as the way the world is."[424] A strong reading of this view, Plantinga believes, would lead to the abandonment of the very important place we and other objects have in the world. And yet commonsense seems to indicate that the world certainly *is* a certain way - that horses exist while unicorns do not. Plantinga concludes: "the *existence of truth* is intimately connected with there being a way things really are, a way the world is."[425]

There is, however, a less controversial way of understanding the postmodernist's rejection of truth. She may *merely* be rejecting truth understood as correspondence. If so, the postmodernist's scepticism is well placed. But the stronger claim that "there really is no such thing as the way the world is, and hence no such thing as truth" is much more problematic. "For it is certainly crucial to Christian belief to suppose that there *is* a way things are, and that it includes the great things of the gospel; it is crucial to Christian belief to suppose that such propositions as *God created the world* and *Christ's suffering and death are an atonement for human sin* are true."[426]

After this initial introduction, Plantinga considers two arguments a little more closely, albeit he adds that their relevance for Christian belief is not entirely obvious.[427] As far as our present study is concerned, we will pay particular attention to the second argument that Plantinga has entitled, "Do Human Beings Construct the Truth?"[428] Here Plantinga takes to task Richard Rorty's view of truth. In this section Plantinga hopes to show that Rorty's position cannot be taken seriously. And as such, it cannot be considered a defeater for Christian belief.

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[424] Plantinga, p. 5.
[425] Plantinga, p. 4.
[426] Plantinga, p. 5.
[427] Plantinga, p. 7.

Referring to what Rorty "is widely credited (some might say 'debited')" as saying, Plantinga describes Rorty's view of truth as "what our peers will let us get away with saying."[429] Such a definition, Plantinga goes on to say, "is a bit vague."[430] But *if* taken seriously, he points out, its incompatibility with Christian belief should be apparent:

> That is, if a proposition is true (true "for me", I suppose) if and only if my peers will let me get away with saying it, then . . . God is dependent ("for me", if that makes sense) for his very existence on my peers. For if they were to let me get away with saying that there is no such person as God, then it would be *true* that there is no such person, in which case there would be no such person. So whether there is such a person as God depends upon the behavior of my peers. Not easy to believe.[431]

It comes as no surprise then, that how one understands "truth" will affect how one confronts and interacts with the world. The ethical implications, for instance, are obvious. Plantinga explains:

> For example, it promises an auspicious way of dealing with war, poverty, disease, and other ills our flesh is heir to. Take AIDS; if we all let each other get away with saying that there just isn't any such thing as AIDS, then on this Rortyesque view it would be *true* that there isn't any such thing as AIDS; and if it were *true* that there is no such thing as AIDS, then there would *be* no such thing.[432]

Plantinga, with tongue in cheek, reaches the logical conclusion of Rorty's definition:

> So all we have to do to get rid of AIDS, or cancer, or poverty is let each other get away with saying there is no such thing. That seems much easier than the more conventional methods, which involve all that time, energy and money.[433]

The same argument could be given for the events of Tiananmen Square and the Holocaust. What happens if everybody is convinced that these events, or others, did not occur? Would this mean that, in truth, they did not occur?

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[428] See page 9.
[429] Plantinga, p. 9.
[430] Plantinga, p. 9.
[431] Plantinga, p. 10; emphasis his.
[432] Plantinga, p. 10; emphasis his.
[433] Plantinga, p. 10.

Perhaps, Plantinga suggests, the preceding is merely a *straw man.* A stronger account of Rorty's view of truth would understand his position in light of his broader analysis of analytic philosophy - philosophy as a "panoply of definitions, principles, necessary and sufficient conditions, attempts at rigor, and all the rest."[434] And yet Plantinga is after something a bit different here. He poses the problem:

> My aim is to ask whether Rortian thought offers a defeater for Christian belief; one of the most prominent strands in Rorty's thought is what he has to say about truth; but then I need to know whether what he means to say about truth is or isn't incompatible with Christian belief. For that, it would be nice to have a relatively serious way of stating what this strand of thought might be. What could he mean?[435]

For Plantinga, determining whether Rorty's view of truth is compatible with Christian belief is no trivial matter. For possible clarification Plantinga turns to Gary Gutting's exposition of Rorty's view of truth.

On Gutting's reading it is *not* the case that Rorty says truth is dependent upon certain properties of society. The key point, says Gutting, "'is that our 'discourse on truth' should be limited to an assertion, without philosophical commentary or elaboration, of the baseline commonplaces about truth; and a review of the arbitrariness and/or incoherence of efforts to criticize (i.e. analyze, modify, or justify) the baseline truths.'"[436] As Plantinga rightly notes from Gutting's discussion, Rorty's primary point of contention is with realism, and the view of truth most often associated with it - truth as representation. "This is the idea that we (or our minds) possess and think by way of representations, which are true just if they 'correspond to reality'."[437]

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[434] Plantinga, p. 11.
[435] Plantinga, p. 11.
[436] Plantinga, p. 12; from Gary Gutting's "Richard Rorty: the Rudiments of Pragmatic Liberalism," unpublished manuscript.
[437] Plantinga, p. 13.

From this criticism, however, it does not follow, as Gutting rightly points out, that Rorty rejects "all the commonsense, baseline platitudes about truth and our relation to it."[438]

But Plantinga thinks that this explanation disguises what it has otherwise attempted to expose - that even this basic version of representationalism is platitudinous.[439] What Plantinga here seems to stress, is that even a loose grip on "baseline," mundane, versions of representationalism carry a certain robustness that cannot easily be differentiated from the more "platitudinous" versions of representationalism. Rorty seems, then, to be in a delicate situation: "[He] really can't both reject representationalism and accept all those baseline platitudes."[440]

Irrespective of Gutting's attempt to clarify Rorty's sense of truth, Plantinga believes that if Gutting is accurate in his description, Rorty's views become somewhat "pedestrian."[441] As such they would not constitute a serious threat to Christian belief. But Plantinga is not really convinced of Gutting's interpretation, and he suggests another variation of the original construal of Rorty's view of truth: "that truth is a human construction and that a belief or other candidate for truth is true ('for us') just if it stands in a certain relationship to (our) society."[442] Here Plantinga bases this claim on a direct quote from Rorty:

> About two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe . . . To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there.[443]

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[438] Plantinga, p. 13
[439] Plantinga, p. 13.
[440] Plantinga, p. 14.
[441] Plantinga, p. 14.
[442] Plantinga, p. 14.
[443] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, pp. 3, 5.

Putting aside the consideration that it would have perhaps been better to begin with this direct quotation, Plantinga raises two objections to this view - one "serious," the other "fatal."

As for the serious objection, Plantinga believes that after a little reflection, Rorty's understanding of truth leads to rather odd conclusions. To begin with, Rorty seems to include beliefs, assertions, claims, and suggestions in the range of sentences that are either true or false. The difficulty arises when the *proposition* 2 + 1 = 3 (a proposition that is necessarily true[444]) is compared with the *sentence* "2 + 1 = 3." As a sentence, at least insofar as Plantinga understands Rorty, it could have failed to be true. "This is because it is a sentence, and is true, on Rorty's view, because of something *we* do with it."[445] Plantinga continues: "The *proposition* 2 + 1 = 3, therefore, has a property that the *sentence* '2 + 1 = 3', does not have: being necessarily true, i.e., being such that it could not have failed to be true. The proposition (truth) that 2 + 1 = 3, therefore, is not the sentence '2 + 1 = 3'."[446] There is something peculiar, to say the least, about a view of truth that would somehow see this sentence as failing to be true.[447] But this is what seems to follow, at least on Plantinga's reading of Rorty.

As for the, so-called, "fatal" objection, Plantinga remarks that *if* we assume that sentences, in the primary sense, were the only things that are true or false, then one could say that humans make truths. "[F]or we make it the case that a given sequence of sounds or marks is indeed a *sentence* . . . that string of shapes or sounds owes its being a sentence to what we, the users of

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[444] As Plantinga notes, "that means among other things that it couldn't have failed to be true; there are no possible circumstances in which it is not true." Plantinga, p. 16.
[445] Plantinga, p. 16; emphasis his.
[446] Plantinga, p. 16; emphasis his.
[447] Unless, of course, as professor Horne notes, it is an empirical sentence about 2 volumes of alcohol and 1 of water!

language do with it. And perhaps we could express this by saying that truths are made."[448] But he is quick to add that it does not follow from this sense of sentence making "that we make a given sentence *true*, or that it is by virtue of something we do that a given sentence is in fact true."[449]

If we write, for example, "Dinosaurs existed," it does not then follow that dinosaurs existed because of our sentence. "For the sentence to be true, there must once have been dinosaurs; and that, presumably, is not something we have made to be the case, but our language making activities or in any other way."[450] And so with the first sense of sentences, the claim made would appear to be unobjectionable if not trivial. But if understood in the second sense, the claim is rather contentious, and for Plantinga, quite incompatible with Christian belief. He states:

> Taken the other way, as the nonplatitudinous claim that we human beings are responsible, not just (for example) for the sentencehood of 'God created the world', but for God's having created the world, the conclusion of the argument is indeed incompatible with Christian belief; but taken that way there is not the slightest reason (beyond a certain confusion) for thinking that conclusion true. It certainly doesn't follow from the premises. Either way, therefore, there is no defeater here.[451]

So while it seems that Rorty's view of truth kicks up a lot of dust, after it settles there is little reason to suppose that any serious defeaters remain for Christian belief.

And perhaps surprisingly, we need not suppose otherwise. As I noted at the beginning, Plantinga is indeed correct in his belief that Rorty offers little in the way of defeaters for Christian beliefs. But he is right for the wrong reasons.

In assessing Plantinga's own position, and his critique of Rorty's view of truth, a number of points need to be raised. The first is that Plantinga's disagreement with Rorty and the postmodernist follows largely because of his particular understanding of who the Christian

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[448] Plantinga, p. 17; emphasis his.
[449] Plantinga, p. 17; emphasis his.
[450] Plantinga, p. 17.

community is, and, secondly, what should constitute their beliefs. Leaving these concerns for later, we need to examine in closer detail Plantinga's account of Rorty's view of truth.

Given all of Rorty's writings, not only on the issue of truth, but as well on the related issues of realism, objectivity, and rationality, it is rather surprising that Professor Plantinga bases a five page discussion on a view of truth that has been credited to Rorty, leaving the original quotation in a footnote. Only near the end of his treatment Plantinga quotes directly from Rorty's *Contingency, irony, and solidarity.*

The quotation Plantinga leaves in a footnote states: "What he [Rorty] actually says is 'For philosophers like Chisholm and Bergmann, such explanations *must* be attempted if the realism of common sense is to be preserved. The aim of all such explanations is to make truth something more than what Dewey called 'Warranted assertability': more than what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying.'"[452] *Ceteris paribus* - "all things being equal" - is the operative phrase in this claim.

On a charitable reading of Rorty, one of the "things" bearing consideration on the equality (or balance) of the definition would involve taking into account other statements he has made concerning truth.[453] Of course one cannot expect to cover all of Rorty's thoughts on this subject and related issues (e.g. traditional philosophy, problems of representation, and the realist\anti-realist debate). And, admittedly, while some things he has said over the years have at times been unduly strong, his overall position is both quite clear, concise, and extensive. Ample discussion,

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[451] Plantinga, p. 17.
[452] Plantinga, p. 9, emphasis Rorty's; Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 175-76.
[453] As one philosopher has noted, "It is a fundamental methodological principle of the art of interpretation that one attribute to the writer one is reading the best intentions and a few errors as the text will allow . . ." Denis McManus, "Sympathy for the Devil: Edwards and Heidegger," *Philosophy*, 70, 1995, p. 265 (pp. 263-272).

nuance, distinction, and amplification can be found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: "Truth Without Mirrors", "Truth, Goodness, and Relativism", "Objectivity as Correspondence and as Agreement", and "Edification, Relativism, and Objective Truth"; *Consequences of Pragmatism*: "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy", "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey", "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism", and "Philosophy in America Today"; *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*: "Introduction: Antirepresentationalism, ethnocentrism, and liberalism", "Solidarity or objectivity?", "Pragmatism without method", "Pragmatism, Davidson and truth", "Representation, social practise, and truth"; *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*: "The contingency of language"; and most certainly his most recent volume *Truth and Progress.* Two of the three major divisions of this latest volume are directly relevant to Rorty's view of truth and the implications for morality - "Truth and Some Philosophers" (pp. 19-165), and "Moral Progress: Toward More Inclusive Communities" (pp. 167- 246).

Throughout his writings Rorty has made it quite clear he rejects any essentialist view of truth - that truth is some sort of reified object that existence over and above that of the natural world. Plantinga's own description belies this quasi-Platonic, hypostatization of truth when he makes claims such as "truth has its own existence."[454] Or where he criticizes claims to the contrary - that "there isn't any such thing as *truth*, at least as commonsensically thought of."[455]

But what does Rorty mean to say by the claim that "there is no truth"? In what could be taken as a direct reply to Plantinga, Rorty states:

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[454] Plantinga, p. 3

[455] Plantinga, p. 3; emphasis his. That this view of truth is one that is "commonsensically thought of" has its own problems. It is not clear whether Plantinga is speaking about philosophers or the average person in the street. Either way, while the point does not really demonstrate much, for the latter I doubt the first thing to come to mind would be truth "existing" in the realist's sense.

> Actually, almost nobody (except Wallace Stevens) does say it. But philosophers like me are often said to say it. One can see why. For we have learned (from Nietzsche and James, among others) to be suspicious of the appearance-reality distinction.[456]

Putting aside for the moment the "appearance-reality" distinction, one may question further what Rorty's view of truth actually is.

To try to answer this question one immediately encounters a conceptual barrier; namely, to define a concept for which, Rorty believes, no definition is possible. Siding with Davidson, Rorty believes that the attempt to delineate the nature of truth should be put aside:

> The greatest of my many intellectual debts to Donald Davidson is my realization that nobody should even try to specify the nature of truth . . . Davidson has helped us realize that *the very absoluteness of truth is a good reason for thinking "true" indefinable and for thinking that no theory of the nature of truth is possible.* It is only the relative about which there is anything to say.[457]

If we abandon the attempt to define truth, will not the hoary question of relativism rear its ugly head? Without a robust definition of truth are we left in a relativistic quagmire where everyone does what is right in his own eyes? Moreover, is Rorty's description of the "absoluteness of truth" some sort of metaphysic brought in through the back door?

Answering the second question paves the way to a response to the first. By saying that no theory of truth is possible, that truth is an absolute notion, he *merely* means to make the distinction between justification and truth:

> Truth is, to be sure, an absolute notion, in the following sense: "true for me but not for you" and "true in my culture but not in yours" are weird, pointless locutions. So is "true then, but not now." Whereas we often say "good for this purpose, but not for that" and "right in this situation, but not in that," it seems pointlessly paradoxical to relativize truth to purposes or situations. On the other hand, "justified for me but not for you" (or "justified in my culture but not in yours") makes perfect sense.[458]

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[456] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 1.
[457] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 3; emphasis his.
[458] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 2. "Pragmatists think that if something makes no difference to practice, it should make no difference to philosophy. This conviction makes them suspicious of the

And so while we cannot compare our beliefs with the true nature of reality, we are still able (and required) to justify our beliefs to our audience. Admittedly there is not a sense of justification that will apply in all cases to all audiences. Acceptance by an audience is dependent on the purposes of each audience. And yet, on this account, we may say that intellectual and moral progress has been made, and will continue:

> Certainly we have been making progress, by our own lights. That is to say, we are much better able to serve the purposes we wish to serve, and to cope with the situations we believe we face, than our ancestors would have been. But when we hypostatize the adjective "true" into "Truth" and ask about our relation to it, we have absolutely nothing to say.[459]

Specific examples of progress offered by Rorty are "increased health, security, equality of opportunity, longevity, [and] freedom from humiliation."[460]

If Rorty does not think of truth as a noun, a reified object with some sort of independent existence, then truth as correspondence is also left behind. With this in mind, as well as Plantinga's description of truth's "existence" - as a "thing" - it is clear why Rorty rejects this way of describing truth. Unless one holds to an essentialist view of truth (and perhaps as well the *Good* and the *Beautiful*), this manner of speaking about truth is markedly odd. The distinction Rorty decidely

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distinction between justification and truth, for that difference makes no difference to my decisions about what to do. If I have concrete, specific doubts about whether one of my beliefs is true, I can resolve those doubts only by asking whether it is adequately justified - by finding and assessing additional reasons pro and con. I cannot bypass justification and confine my attention to truth: assessment of truth and assessment of justification are, when the question is about what I should believe now, the same activity." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 19.

[459] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 4.

[460] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 4. "These two centuries are most easily understood not as a period of deepening understanding of the nature of rationality or of morality, but rather as one in which there occurred an astonishingly rapid progress of sentiments, in which it has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories. Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 185. In another place Rorty has said, "To say that we think we're heading in the right direction is just to say, with Kuhn, that we can, by hindsight, tell the story of the past as a story of progress."

makes is "between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there . . . Truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there."[461] In short, Rorty maintains, philosophy will get along better "without the notions of 'intrinsic nature of reality' and 'correspondence to reality' than with them."[462]

How would Rorty address Plantinga's claim that "the *existence of truth* is intimately connected with there being a way things really are, a way the world is"[463], and that this is a necessary part of how we adjudicate between beliefs - that there are elephants but no unicorns, or that dinosaurs would have existed even if there were no humans today who thought so.

Rorty is very clear on this point. This is the difference between corresponding, or representing, small scale beliefs with "the world," and doing likewise with large scale beliefs.[464] With the former, we are quite successful corresponding our ideas with a visual image - such as a designer with her clothes, an architect with his buildings, or an artist with her paintings. But the "mapping"[465], or representation, with the latter beliefs are quite different. How do we begin to make sense of the claim that one's religion or politics corresponds, or represents, the way the world is? What about Plantinga's suggested propositions that "*God created the world*" and

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Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 27.

[461] Rorty, pp. 4-5.

[462] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 2.

[463] Plantinga, p. 4; emphasis mine.

[464] Letson notes elsewhere that "[A]ccording to Rorty, the trouble with correspondence is that such mundane [small-scale] demonstrations of correspondence yield nothing very interesting in the way of helping us to be better knowers . . . Rorty rejects any sense of large-scale correspondence for theories and with it any hope for a piece-by-piece justification of the sentences of theories. What this leaves us with is an account of justification that is coherentist and holistic in nature." Letson, *Davidson's Theory of Truth and Its Implications for Rorty's Pragmatism*, pp. 13, 17. See, as well, page 31 of this same text.

[465] Or, "the 'tie' between words and the world . . . '[to be] held captive by a picture'." Rorty,

"*Christ's suffering and death are an atonement for human sin*"? By what manner do we show that these propositions correspond to the way the world is?[466] Can we correspond the proposition "God created the world" to the world in the same way we correspond a map to the coastline of Newfoundland? Rorty states:

> Sometimes, of course, they [sic] are pictures or representations, as when we use an illustrated dictionary or field guides to identify birds or wanted posters to identify criminals. Then we have representations in the proper sense - items some of whose parts can be correlated one-to-one with parts of the thing being represented (a condition that obviously does not hold for most sentences or beliefs).[467]

Consequences of Pragmatism, p. 114.

[466] This is a Humean point. These propositions offered by Plantinga are quite different than resolving issues of "common sense." Compared to issues which arise in "trade, or morals, or politics, or criticism," "in theological reasonings, we have not this advantage." But Hume is here thinking of a particular sort of theological reasonings: "[W]hile at the same time we are employed upon objects which, we must be sensible, are too large for our grasp, and of all others, require most to be familiarized to our apprehension. We are like foreigners in a strange country to whom everything must seem suspicious, and who are in danger every moment of transgressing against the laws and customs of the people with whom they live and converse." Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 7.

[467] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 96. "Given a language and a view of what the world is like, one can, to be sure, pair off bits of the language with bits of what one takes the world to be in such a way that the sentences one believes true have internal structures isomorphic to relations between things in the world. When we rap out routine undeliberated reports like 'This is water,' 'That's red,' 'That's ugly,' 'That's immoral,' our short categorical sentences can easily be thought of as pictures, or as symbols which fit together to make a map. Such reports do indeed pair little bits of language with little bits of the world . . . The great fallacy of the tradition, the pragmatists tell us, is to think that the metaphors of vision, correspondence, mapping, picturing, and representation which apply to small, routine assertions, will apply to large and debatable ones. This basic error begets the notion that where there are no objects to correspond to we have no hope of rationality, but only taste, passion, and will." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, pp. 162;164. Elsewhere Rorty states that "we cannot go back and forth between our statements about electrons and electrons, or our ascriptions of belief and beliefs, and pair them off as we pair off bits of the chart and bits of Maine. This would be, as Wittgenstein said, like checking what is said in the newspaper against another copy of the same paper." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 115. These claims by Rorty accord with Gutting's understanding of Rorty: "I think Rorty should have no difficulty accepting Michael Devitt's point that Rorty's critique of correspondence as an epistemological theory does not, in principle, exclude it as an element in a causal explanation of knowledge." Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, "Rorty-9".

But what about the charge that it follows from Rorty's position that the world is somehow dependent upon our beliefs? That there were no objects before language? That dinosaurs existed only when our language found room to include talk about them? Or that God suddenly pops into existence because we are successful convincing colleagues he exists?

Rorty (in agreement with Taylor, Goodman, and Putnam[468]) indeed maintains that there is no description-independent way the world is. Having admitted this much there is the temptation to say "no objects before language shaped the raw material (a lot of ding-an-sichy, all content-no-scheme stuff)."[469] This sort of talk, Rorty admits, quickly evokes charges such as Plantinga's - that the existence (or non-existence) of objects in the world are dependent on our language and beliefs. "[A]s soon as we say anything like this we find ourselves accused (plausibly) of making the false causal claim that the invention of 'dinosaur' caused dinosaurs to come into existence - of being what our opponents call 'linguistic idealists.'"[470] Rorty addresses this charge at length:

> But none of us antirepresentationalists have ever doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us. What we question is whether they are representationally independent of us. For *X* to be representationally independent of us is for *X* to have an intrinsic feature (a feature that it has under any and every description) such that it is better described by some of our terms rather than others. Because we can see no way to decide which descriptions of an object get at what is "intrinsic" to it, as opposed to its merely "relational," extrinsic features (e.g., its description-relative features), we are prepared to

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[468] Rorty notes that "[w]hen we go, so do our norms and standards of rational assertability. Does truth go too? Truth neither comes nor goes. This is not because it enjoys an atemporal existence, but because 'truth,' in this context, is just the reification of an approbative adjective, and adjective whose use is mastered once we grasp, as Putnam puts it, that 'a statement is true of a situation just in case it would be correct to use the words of which the statement consists in that way in describing the situation.'" Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, pp. 53-54; from Hilary Putnam, *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), p. 115.

[469] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 90.

[470] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 90. As Gutting notes, "The issue is not, Did the Big Bang occur before there were any human beings to experience it? It obviously did. The issue is rather whether the Big Bang, as we know it, has any features that are *representationally* independent of us. That is, do the categories we use to characterize it somehow mirror features it has entirely apart from our characterizations?" Gutting, *Modernity and Analytic Philosophy*, "Rorty-19".

> discard the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction, the claim that beliefs represent, and the whole question of representational independence or dependence. This means discarding the idea of (as Bernard Williams has put it) "how things are *anyway*," apart from whether or how they are described.[471]

In place of trying to answer questions of reference, Rorty suggests that the burden of the argument rests on his detractors. The two questions he asks of them are:

> (1) Can you find some way of getting between language and its objects (as Wittgenstein sardonically put it) in order to suggest some way of telling which joints are nature's (part of the content) and which merely "ours" (just part of the scheme?)[472] (2) If not, can you see any point in the claim that some descriptions correspond to reality better than others?[473]

As for the first question, Plantinga has not shown how we might exactly go about this procedure. In fact, as we will see below, he admits that one can only go so far with the certainty of one's belief.

In the last section of his treatment of Rorty, "Postmodernism a Failure of Nerve", Plantinga argues that the rejection of classical foundationalism should not lead the postmodernist to conclude "that there is no such thing as truth at all, no way things really are."[474] But by agreeing

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[471] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 86. "Davidson," Rorty says, "has shown us how to make our point without saying anything susceptible to that misinterpretation. He suggests that we stop trying to say *anything* general about the relation between language and reality, that we stop falling into our opponents' trap by taking seriously problems that owe their existence to the scheme-content distinction. We should just refuse to discuss such topics as 'the nature of reference.'" Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 90; emphasis his] Elsewhere Rorty says that "Kuhn, Putnam, Derrida, and I would, I think, agree with Donald Davidson that 'it is futile either to reject or to accept the idea that the real and the true are "independent of our beliefs." The only evident positive sense we can make of this phrase, the only use that derives from the intentions of those who prize it, derives from the idea of correspondence, and this is an idea without content.'" Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 68; from Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth," *Journal of Philosophy*, 87, no. 6 (1990), p. 305.

[472] Elsewhere Rorty states that "[t]his is the sixty-four dollar question: whether we can (as Dewey and Davidson insist we cannot) separate out 'the world's' contribution to the judgment-forming process from our own." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 35.

[473] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 91.

[474] Plantinga, p. 18. In a footnote Plantinga notes, "Thus they uncritically accept another tenet of

that classical foundationalism is no longer an option, what is Plantinga's response to a life "without sure and secure foundations"?[475]

Plantinga believes that our present epistemic condition is not recent. Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Kuyper all recognized the lack of certainty due to the absence of a Cartesian foundation. Plantinga concludes:

> [The nonfoundational stance] is a stance that requires a certain epistemic hardihood: *there is indeed such a thing as truth*; the stakes are indeed high (it matters greatly whether you believe the truth); but there is no way in which you can be guaranteed that you have the truth; there is no sure and certain method of attaining truth by starting from beliefs about which you can't be mistaken and moving infallibly to the rest of one's beliefs; and many others reject what seems to you to be most important. This is life under uncertainty, life under epistemic risk and fallibility. I believe a thousand things and many of them are things others - others of great acuity and seriousness - do not believe. Indeed, many of the beliefs that mean the most to me are of that sort. I realize I can be seriously, dreadfully, fatally wrong, and wrong about what it is enormously important to be right. But that is the human condition: my response must be finally, "Here I stand; this is the way the world looks to me."[476]

There is something decidedly peculiar about Plantinga's description of our epistemic condition. Namely, how exactly does *the existence of truth* help one's beliefs if one cannot have epistemic certainty? What exactly constitutes this life under "epistemic risk and fallibility"?

In light of this passage from Plantinga above, both he and Rorty (and indeed the rest of us) are in the same boat. In the end, there seems to be a gap between mapping our beliefs and the way the world truly is. And if there remains this gap, does talk of truth being somehow "out there," a reified object to be sought after, truth as a noun, only evoke and give life to charges of scepticism and relativism? The stakes are high, but there is no way we can make a safe bet? Or even *know* the outcome of our wager? Quoting Bennington, Rorty notes that:

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classical foundationalism, namely that if there are no certain foundations, then there is no truth." footnote #15, page 18.

[475] Plantinga, p. 18.

> . . . any philosophy which gives itself world and language two separate realms separated by an abyss that has to be crossed remains caught, at the very point of the supposed crossing, in the circle of dogmatism and relativism that it is unable to break.[477]

And so the claim that we must submit our beliefs, because of this lack of certainty, to review and debate with our peers, is *merely* to say that "we hope to justify our belief to as many and as large audiences as possible" - a romanticizing of the "pursuit of intersubjective, unforced agreement among larger and larger groups of interlocutors."[478] We may wish for something stronger. But it is not even clear that such certainty is even desirable.

The differences between Rorty and Plantinga come down to the practical consequences of how one understands her world, and as a consequence, her place in the world. Rorty's response to these question leans on Dewey. The question is *not* how our beliefs correspond to the real world. Rather, one must ask about the consequences of holding a particular belief. The pragmatist asks: "What would it be like to believe that? What would happen if I did? What would I be committing myself to?"[479]

For Plantinga, however, any position that attempts to address these questions before addressing how the world actually is, is somehow epistemologically irresponsible. Such people, on his reading, seem to have aversion to living in a world they have not "constituted or structured."[480]

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[476] Plantinga, pp. 18-19; emphasis mine.
[477] Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, by G. Bennington and Jacques Derrida (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 103. From Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 331. Elsewhere Rorty states: "I follow Davidson in thinking that 'it is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking that there are representations which engenders thoughts about relativism.'" Richard Rorty, "Religion as Conversation Stopper," *Commonwealth* 3, 1994, p. 4; from Donald Davidson, "The Myth of the Subjective," in *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, Michael Krause ed., (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 165-6.
[478] Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, pp. 39, 41.
[479] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 163.
[480] Plantinga, p. 18.

And so Plantinga's response (to what may be described as *perspectivism*) is quite unsympathetic: "Now some of this may be a bit hard to take seriously (it may seem less Promethean defiance than foolish posturing)."[481]

But if truth as correspondence is placed aside, at least with large scale beliefs, then the task of understanding our beliefs *vis-à-vis* the world is decidedly hermeneutical.[482] Contrary to what Plantinga believes, this view does not deny "reality" - that the world is actually *out there*. "Reality," for the anti-essentialist, remains. As Rorty puts it, "Reality is one, but descriptions of it are many."[483] And the plurality of descriptions that arise because of this condition is unproblematic. In fact, it is to be encouraged. "They *ought* to be many, for human beings have, and ought to have, many different purposes."[484] Just how we come to change our views about the world, is at the heart of the matter in this discussion.

But for Plantinga the plurality of descriptions is problematic. The world is one way and therefore no other way. And so the real question to be asked, Plantinga argues, is whether these various descriptions by others may constitute defeaters for Christian belief. Offered is the following scenario which illustrates whether an impassioned, confident "bare assertion"[485] can be considered as a defeater:

> We saw . . . that you can give me a non argumentative defeater for certain kinds of beliefs; but could she give me a defeater *for an element of Christian belief* without giving me an argument? Here is a possibility: perhaps she can give me a defeater by citing the trajectory of her own intellectual and spiritual life. Perhaps she is raised as a traditional believer; in her sophomore year in college she is introduced to Freud, Marx, and

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[481] Plantinga, p. 18.
[482] Rorty is helpful here: "on my view, 'interpretive' or 'hermeneutical' is not having a special method but simply casting about for a vocabulary which might help." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 199.
[483] Richard Rorty, "Against Unity," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1998, p. 32.
[484] Rorty, "Against Unity," p. 31.
[485] Plantinga, p. 6.

> Nietzsche; the next year she advances to Heidegger, Derrida and Rorty. She is captivated by Nietzsche's brilliant, sparkling style, by Heidegger's air of Teutonic profundity, by Derrida's mischievous and playful spirit, and by the brave 'making-the-best-of-a-really-lousy-situation' attitude of Rorty.[486]

For Plantinga, a change *in disposition* does not automatically give a defeater for Christian belief. "Nor do I automatically get a defeater by retracing her steps and reading these authors myself: where she finds profound insight, I may find posturing obscurantism . . . one can sensibly read these authors and - despite verbal pyrotechnics and airs of profundity - remain unmoved, rationally continuing to accept Christian belief."[487]

Plantinga is right, at least in one sense, on this matter. This student's account of her new disposition need not be considered as a defeater for Christian belief. Depending on her particular understanding of Christianity, however, her disposition towards certain Christian affiliations may change.[488] One could imagine, for instance, that she now finds herself very uncomfortable attending her present church, and either finds a church which expresses her newly assumed disposition more adequately, or perhaps discontinues attending church altogether.[489]

If she were asked which defeaters her professors offered that resulted in this state of affairs, quite possibly she would not know how to respond. It is not so much that she heard an

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[486] Plantinga, p. 6; emphasis his.

[487] Plantinga, pp. 6-7.

[488] Of course there is nothing to preclude the possibility that the change of certain beliefs could evoke a chain reaction - a paradigm shift of beliefs - the result of which is a non-theistic disposition. But again, the subject may not *know* exactly which belief initiated this shift. Nor is it epistemically irresponsible not to be able to say if this belief, if known, served as a defeater. As Rorty notes, "in special situations, the acquisition of that belief will provoke the sort of large-scale, conscious, deliberate reweaving which does deserve the name of inquiry . . . a revelation which leads one to rethink one's long-term plans and, ultimately, the meaning of one's life." Rorty, *Objectivity, relativism, and truth*, p. 94

[489] As Rorty notes, "if you want to work out who you are - put together a moral identity - which describes the importance of your relationships to one set of people and increases the importance of your relationships to another set, the physical absence of the first set of people may be just what

argument against "Christian belief," as she acquired a particular disposition. And this acquisition somehow made "distasteful" or "undesirable" the holding of certain beliefs, or the attending of a particular church (the holding and attending of such which exemplifies its own disposition).[490]

What troubles those people who talk about the "rationality" of beliefs is that despite what they may suspect, from the student's point of view, there is nothing about this account that is *irrational*. Now this turns on how one defines rational and irrational. But the point in this context is that the student has undergone a particular (educational?) experience that results in a particular disposition. She most likely is not concerned about offering it as a defeater for Christian belief, although what she has acquired gives her a particular disposition against a particular interpretation of the "Christian life" or what constitutes "Christian belief." But this is different from becoming an "atheist."[491] And the Christian, moreover, need not take the changed disposition as an offered defeater for his or her own disposition.

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you need." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 223.

[490] This issue brings us to the question of whether this student can only change her beliefs, at least in an epistemically responsible manner, through the way Plantinga suggests, *viz.*, by offering "defeaters." But this begs the entire problem of how and why beliefs do change. For her beliefs to change she need not show where Plantinga goes wrong in his view of language and the world. As Rorty notes on the "philosophy of life": "It is just not the case that one need adopt one's opponents' vocabulary or method or style in order to defeat him. Hobbes did not have theological arguments against Dante's world-picture; Kant had only a very bad scientific argument for he phenomenal character of science; Nietzsche and James did not have epistemological arguments for pragmatism. *Each of these thinkers presented us with a new form of intellectual life, and asked us to compare its advantages with the old.*" Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 156; emphasis mine. In another place he states: "Getting out from under one's parents or one's predecessors - setting aside the assumptions of the preceding century or the preceding few millennia - is never a matter of simple repudiation, any more than it is a clean cutoff." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 338.

[491] Although she may have become an "ironist." If so she has fulfilled three conditions: "(1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve those doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she

The reasons for why and how we change our beliefs about major issues is a complex affair. Plantinga does not give due consideration to how beliefs actually do change - how people come to believe, adopt, or inculcate a new set of beliefs or disposition.[492] A change or shift in views has more to do with a particular confrontation with the world, rather than confrontation with *the truth*. And I would venture to argue that in most cases beliefs seldom change because of *defeaters* or lack thereof. The fact of the matter is beliefs change because of experiences, sentiments, and empathy. In fact, beliefs often change without our notice - at least until we are reminded by something, sometimes a flash of thought, about what we once believed.

This debate between Plantinga and Rorty becomes a difficult discussion because of certain presuppositions floating just below the surface in Plantinga's article. The first is Plantinga's image of who he means as being a "Christian." It evidently leaves out more people than it includes. The second assumption, following from the first, is that Christians should be ill-disposed to such figures as Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Lacan, and Rorty - that their claims are offensive, that somehow they are enemies of the faith, and should, as a consequence, be read as hostile writers. But of course this depends on the first assumption of who should be considered a Christian.

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does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply by playing the new off against the old." Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 73.

[492] The way our views change about a given issue often is better explained as a change in disposition rather than beliefs. That is, we come to be disposed toward a given issue *not* because of evidence, argument, or defeaters, but rather because of experiences in our personal or public lives; instead of rationality, sentimentality. Our past two centuries "are most easily understood not as a period of deepening understanding of the nature of rationality or of morality, but rather as one in which there occurred an astonishing rapid progress of sentiments, in which it has become much easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories." Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, p. 185.

Certainly for some Christians these authors are a scandal to the faith. Their remarks may appear as blasphemous and insulting. But for other Christians, these authors bring to the faith a deeper critique, a more insightful understanding than what its' own theologians and ministers have been able to produce. Nietzsche's scathing rebuke of Christian hypocrisy, Marx's castigation of the rich, Freud's analysis of unadmitted desires, all find an important place in an understanding of Christianity that is open to analysis and critique.

The third assumption follows from the above considerations: that "Christianity" must be defended against the unbelievers. Who the unbelievers are is determined in light of the primary definition. The more narrow the primary definition, the wider the scope of opponents. And the separation between the two can be bridged by no mean task; one must recognize these authors as empty of all relevance and leap towards a form of Christianity - a disposition - which is more of a narrow expression of how some Christians are, rather than who they may be.

The difficulties raised in Plantinga's chapter on postmodernism can quickly be resolved. We first understand the Christian community in broad terms. In other words, we should err on opening the gates of the Kingdom too wide rather than too narrow. Secondly, we see that while there are many extreme and even ridiculous claims made by some postmodernists, this hardly invalidates all research made from the postmodernist perspective. If this does not follow, given Christianity's own abuses in this matter, it would suffer a worse fate than postmodernism.

Finally, Plantinga seems to be closer to Rorty than he realizes. As we noted from Plantinga above, the human condition is such that there is no final or ultimate way of seeing if our beliefs fit

with reality - to somehow escape our language, stand outside our language, our history and finitude.[493]

And so Professor Plantinga is correct in his analysis, but for the wrong reasons. Rorty's view of truth has little to offer by way of "defeaters" for Christian belief. But this is because his position recognizes our epistemic limitations. And within this limitation, Christian or not, we should be attempting to change the conversation; to divert the subject away from whether our beliefs represent the Truth, to whether our beliefs are doing anything to "construct subjects capable of evermore novel, ever richer, forms of human happiness."[494]

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[493] Cavell warns us of the attempt to avoid our finitude, "that we are mortals, who think and talk as we do because we have read, talked with the people we have talked with. They [foundationalism and the 'Cartesian quest'] encourage us to think that philosophy will do for us what we once thought religion might do - take us right outside language, history, and finitude and put us in the presence of the atemporal. They lead the philosopher to think himself so little dependent upon his community that what he says will 'work on people at random, like a ray." Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 186; from Stanley Cavell's *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality and Tragedy* (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1979), p. 326.

[494] Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 31.

Conclusion

The death of God finds its philosophical counterpart with the current metaphilosophical scene. Just as the *Death of God* theologian, Gabriel Vahanian, has been describing the death of God and the demise of traditional theology, Richard Rorty has been describing the demise of Philosophy - the death of traditional philosophy. It is not so much a question of who came first, as much as the importance of the interrelationship of their respective analyses.

The assumption of this study has been that the theological sense of the death of God is paralleled by its philosophical counterpart. The aftermath, or results of this phenomenon, however, allow for their respective reinvention - or perhaps better, redescription. The task of tracing and elaborating this process falls under the purview of the philosophy of religion.

According to Richard Rorty the language of systematic philosophy, with its concern for metaphysics and establishing epistemological foundations, has "outlived its usefulness."[495] The problems traditional philosophy has set about trying to resolve are *mal posé*. The same holds, I maintain, for *systematic theology*. But I have tried to show that as philosophy may continue, albeit transformed, so may theology. In this manner, religious language need not be seen as a dissipating form of discourse.

The diagnosis of contemporary North American *Zeitgeist* is one which sees the death of God, as a cultural phenomenon, dovetailing with the death of the philosophical tradition:

> What we do know, however, is that with the death of God we have become godless, that is, the God of philosophy is no longer with us. That the God of philosophy is dead still has not been recognized: as Nietzsche says, "I have come too early."[496]

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[495] Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xiv.

[496] Peacocke, "Heidegger and the Problem of Onto-Theology," p. 185; quote from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vantage Books, 1974), p. 182.

While the death of God has been interpreted primarily as a religious event, as this quote above indicates, a much wider scope of interpretation is possible. Most importantly, this death need not be interpreted as marking a finality to all religious and philosophical thinking. It rather marks an end to a *particular* religious and philosophical manner of thinking. As Heidegger noted:

> The godless thinking which must abandon the god of philosophy, god as *causa sui*, is thus perhaps closer to the divine God. Here this means only: godless-thinking is more open to Him than onto-theology-Logic would like to admit.[497]

In the case of religious belief, although some would argue that the death of God must give way to atheism, this interpretation does not see the significance of this death in its completeness.

Insofar as traditional theology was concerned, the death of God was predicated, at least in part, upon the theological language and life-world it was responsible for having created. To this end, atheism put to rest a version of religious life that was inevitable. And so the death of God, on this level, was a cultural succession over a form of belated discourse, rather than proving religious belief to be unintelligible, or illogical.

The other part to this death was predicated on this cultural shift, which saw, among other things, the demise of the philosophical tradition. Those critical tools used by the systematic philosopher - rational analysis, objectivity, science - began to appear as exactly that, tools for pulling apart the conceptual problems they were designed to fix. In the case of the philosophy of religion, the long, historical debate over conceptual issues such as the existence of God, the rationality of religious belief, religious experience, were predicated upon a robust view of philosophy and its preferred terms of discourse. But with the challenge to this discourse comes the loosening of the various couplets imbedded in the traditional study of the philosophy of religion -

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[497] Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, p. 72.

faith vs. reason; religion vs. science; and, truth vs. belief. The results are as important to the philosophy of religion and theology as they are for philosophical investigation. In short, inaugurated is a complete reconfiguration of both disciplines, the effects of which will change how we see ourselves and our role within society.

One example of this change is illustrated through how dialogue between the representatives of these two disciplines may be carried out. Resolving such questions as whether God exists, or whether there can be ethics without God, are questions predicated on the assumption that in some way, some how, truth is *out there*. It is our epistemic duty, not only to mirror in our own minds this truth, but, as well, to bring our interlocutor to this juncture.

Because the philosophical and theological terrain has been reconfigured, the vocabulary these debates employ requires replacement. Discussion between interlocutors over differences, the pursuit of intellectual progress is the "literalization of selected metaphors." As Rorty goes on to explain, "rebutting objections to one's resdescriptions of some things will be largely a matter of redescribing other things, trying to outflank the objections by enlarging the scope of one's favorite metaphors."[498] This is not so much a matter of "argument" as it is the attempt to change the subject. To make the vocabulary of this language look bad, "rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on."[499] My attempt to begin a sense of edifying theology in this thesis is, I hope, a small step toward changing the conversation in the philosophy of religion. Whether it is successful or not will depend on how many more believe that it is a discussion worth joining.

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[498] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 44.

[499] Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p. 44. Whether in a religious, philosophical, or cultural sense, the continuation of religious belief and philosophical inquiry remain a possibility, insofar as these disciplines are transformed.

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