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Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism

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I. Rorty on Vocabularies

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The concept of a *vocabulary* plays a pivotal role in the philosophical worldview—and the vocabulary articulating it—that Rorty developed over the last three decades of his career.

His use of this trope has its roots in Quine's critique of attempts by Carnap and other logical positivists to divide the explanatory labor addressed to linguistic practice between *meanings* and *beliefs.* At issue was the Kantian strategy of sharply distinguishing between the activity of *instituting* conceptual norms (fixing meanings) and the activity of *applying* those norms (forming and expressing beliefs). The idea was, first, that it is entirely up to us what we could and would mean by our words—here no 'should' gets a grip, beyond the subjective 'should' that reflects our convenience or arbitrary preference. But, second, once we have committed ourselves in this regard by free stipulation of meanings, the world imposes itself on us, constraining what we should believe, what meaningful sentences we should endorse. For in the context of a settled association of meanings with linguistic expressions, how it is with the things the meanings fix it that we are talking about determines which sentences are objectively *correct,* in the sense of *true.* Our talk is to be explained by factoring it as the product of our free meaning-creating activity and the world's brute, stubborn actuality—again following Kant, what we can know a priori because we have *made* it, and what we can know only a posteriori, because it can only be *found.*

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Quine pointed out that this model overdescribes actual linguistic practice. For we simply do not see sharp differences between changes of meaning and changes of belief of the sort that model predicts. Both on the side of what motivates such changes, and on the side of what follows from them, changes in linguistic practice seem rather to be arrayed along a continuous dimension accordingly as we are more or less sure how to go on, as the norms already in play seem to have a firmer or a looser grip on the case at hand, as we are more or less inclined to say that we are going on in the same way or changing how we do things. We can present this dimension, if we like, at most as having a change-of-belief pole at the less radical end and a change-of-meaning pole at the more radical end. (In much the same way, I want to say, Hegel responded to the Kantian precursor of this positivist explanatory structure by insisting that all our discursive activity can be construed *both* as the application of previously constituted conceptual norms—phenomenal activity—*and* as the institution of new ones—transcendental activity. There is no such thing either as the mere application of a previously determinate conceptual content nor as the institution of a wholly novel conceptual content. Every application of a concept develops its content. More on the significance of this thought later.)

If Quine is right, then we should not commit ourselves to a way of talking about our linguistic practices that distinguishes between languages, as structures of meanings, and theories, as structures of beliefs. 'Vocabulary' is Rorty's suggestion for a successor notion to do the work for which the positivists appealed to those concepts. Thus where before taking Quine's point on board we would have had to distinguish change of language or meaning from change of theory or

belief, in Rorty's recommended idiom we can just talk about change of vocabulary. Of course, to say this much is not yet to outline a view, it is only to point to a task: the task of articulating and teaching us how to use the idiom of vocabularies, of exploring its utility for organizing our thinking about our cognitive and practical activity as knowers and agents. A great deal of Rorty's philosophical work can usefully be seen as responding to this challenge. Indeed, I think that one of the major reasons underlying the deep affinity Rorty feels with Davidson's thought is that Davidson is the other major philosopher whose work is oriented in large part by this particular Quinean legacy.

II. Eliminative Materialism

Rorty originally came to public prominence as a philosopher (and not coincidentally, to Princeton as it was becoming the premiere department of its time) in the late 1960s, as the author of the first genuinely new response to the traditional mind-body problem that anyone had seen in a long time: eliminative materialism.[1] Just as Nietzsche had overleaped the classical alternatives of theism and atheism by suggesting that at one time God did exist, but that he had died—indeed, that we had killed him by coming to talk and think differently, without thereby ceasing to be us—Rorty transcended the classical alternatives of materialism and dualism by suggesting that although at one time we did (and still now do) genuinely have minds, we can make sense of changes in our vocabulary that would have the effect of destroying them, so that afterwards we would no longer count as having minds, also without thereby ceasing to be us. The argument, characteristically, grew out of a reading of the history of philosophy informed by a reading of

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contemporary work. Puzzling over the question of why the mind-body problem becomes urgent for modern philosophy in a way that it was not for ancient philosophy, Rorty came to a new way of thinking about one of Descartes' central innovations: his definition of the mind in *epistemic* terms. Descartes defined the mind in terms of its relation to our knowledge of it; it is what is best known to itself. Indeed, the mental is defined by its *perfect* epistemic accessibility; it is the realm where error and ignorance are impossible—what is happening in one's own mind is exactly whatever one *thinks* is going on. Rorty called this defining epistemic feature 'incorrigibility'.

Adapting some of Sellars's ideas, Rorty construed incorrigibility in *normative* terms as a structure of *authority,* as according some representations a distinctive sort of epistemic *privilege.* And he went on to understand this special sort of normative status in *social* terms: we treat sincere first-person claims about the contemporaneous contents of consciousness as incorrigible by agreeing to count nothing as overriding them, that is, as providing decisive evidence against them. So long as we deploy a vocabulary that accords some reports the status of having the right sort of incorrigibility, we *are* incorrigible and *do* have minds. If, as Rorty further argued, it is coherent to conceive of circumstances in which we alter our vocabulary to allow sincere first-person reports of mental happenings to be overruled, say by the deliverances of cerebroscopes, then by doing so we are conceiving of circumstances in which we would have come not to have minds in the specifically Cartesian sense. Since this process need not affect our capacity to deploy the vocabulary of psychological states about which no one these days takes us to be incorrigible—beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on—to envisage the loss of mind in this sense

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need have no impact on our sense of ourselves as intelligent or rational, that is, as sapient. Nor need it affect our capacity to understand ourselves as sentient: as sharing that characteristic sort of responsiveness to environing stimuli that we evidently share at least with other mammals—as even the Cartesians admitted, while they still withheld the attribution of genuine mentality to such nondiscursive creatures, on the grounds that they were incapable of knowledge, indeed, of the sort of conceptually articulated judgments of which incorrigible ones form an epistemically limiting case.

This rich and original line of thought is developed in the form of a single sustained argument, each of whose steps involves conceptual moves that are potentially controversial. It has set off significant reverberations in many different quarters, but I do not think we are yet in a position to see to the bottom and assess its significance and success once and for all. One aspect of the argument, which has not been much remarked upon, is, I think, particularly important for understanding the subsequent course of Rorty's intellectual development. For that argument purports to portray a particular case in which a change of vocabulary—from one that accords incorrigibility to some reports to one that does not—brings with it a change in the objects talked about. And the point of the eliminativist alternative is that this change should *not* be assimilated to more familiar cases in which what there is to talk about remains the same, but with a change in vocabulary, we stop talking about some bits of it and start talking about some other bits. The claim is not just that we could stop talking about our minds. The claim is that our having minds in the first place is a function of speaking a vocabulary that incorporates a certain sort of

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epistemic authority structure. That structure is optional, and speakers of a different sort of idiom simply would not have minds to talk about. If the idea of eliminative materialism is coherent, then we must reconceive the possible relations that vocabularies can stand in to what they enable us to talk about. That is just what Rorty sets out to do.

III. Pragmatism and Representation

The way of thinking about the relations between vocabularies and the world in which they are deployed that has been standard since Descartes takes *representation* as its master concept. Beginning with *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty embarks on an extended investigation of the possibility and advisability of moving beyond that model.[2] The point is not to surrender the idea that vocabularies answer to things that are not vocabularies, but to reconstrue that idea in terms other than the representational. Rorty's development of this line of thought has both a critical and a constructive phase. I think it is useful to see the critique of representational models of vocabularies as centering on a particularly pregnant idea that is implicit already in the work on eliminative materialism: his pragmatism about norms, paradigmatically epistemic ones. By this I mean the thought that any normative matter of epistemic authority or privilege—even the sort of authority exercised on what we say by what we talk about—is ultimately intelligible only in terms of social practices that involve implicitly recognizing or acknowledging such authority. On the constructive side, Rorty began to explore the consequences of replacing the representational model by modeling the use of vocabularies on

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the use of *tools.* This idea, common to the classical American pragmatists and Wittgenstein, is what I have called "instrumental pragmatism."

The first move in the critique of representationalism about the semantic and epistemic functioning of vocabularies concerns the notion of epistemically *privileged* representations. This takes the form of a brilliant rational reconstruction of what was progressive in American philosophy in the late fifties and early sixties, epitomized by the work of Sellars and Quine. Rorty sees those thinkers as spearheading a pragmatist dissolution of neo-Kantian positivism. For he reads them as undermining the foundationalist picture of justificatory regresses as halted on the side of premises by the pure contribution of the constraining *world* in the form of what is *given* in perception, and as halted on the side of inferences by the pure contribution of the unconstrained *mind* in the form of its chosen *meanings.* The point of attributing special sorts of epistemic authority to the perceptual given and to inferences underwritten by meaning-analytic connections among concepts must, on the pragmatist line, be to explain features of the use of linguistic expressions—the deploying of a vocabulary—in which such authority is acknowledged in practice. But our linguistic practices turn out not to exhibit the sorts of features that would express such implicit acknowledgment: the perceptually given cannot coherently be understood as cognitively significant apart from its role in an inferentially articulated practice of applying empirical concepts, and inferences supposedly underwritten by connections among meanings alone are no more immune to revision in the face of recalcitrant experience than are those evidently underwritten by general matters of fact.

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Although Rorty did not put the point just this way, I take it that it is specifically pragmatism about epistemic norms that structures this diagnosis of the conceptual bankruptcy of epistemological foundationalism. The target is philosophical invocations of representations supposed to be epistemically privileged solely by their relations to certain kinds of *things*—perceptible facts and meanings—apart from the role those things play in practices of acknowledging them as authoritative. So regarded, the Sellarsian and Quinean critiques belong in a box with the later Wittgenstein's investigations of the kind of social practical background against which alone items such as sentences, mental images, and consciously framed intentions can be understood as normatively binding on our activity, in the sense of determining what according to them it would be *correct* to go on to do. The real issue concerns what sort of larger practical context we are presupposing when we think of something as (functioning as) a representation. For to treat something as a representation is to treat it as subject to a distinctive sort of normative evaluation as correct or incorrect. On this conception of representation, pragmatism about norms has immediate and important consequences. One lesson of the rational reconstruction of Sellarsian and Quinean critiques of the notion of intrinsic epistemic authority uncritically relied upon by foundationalist epistemologists is that the idea that the world *by itself,* or a mental act *by itself,* engendering norms determining the correct use of vocabulary is a radical mistake. This lesson is the opening salvo in an assault on the usefulness of the Kantian project of factoring the norms governing our deployments of our vocabularies into those due to the way the world is and those due to the activity of the mind.

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The role of this discussion in the larger project of reconceptualizing the constellation of freedom and constraint characteristic of vocabularies was obscured, I think, by its occasioning a series of casually incendiary metaphilosophical speculations about its significance for the shape and future of the discipline of philosophy: that without that Kantian project, philosophy would find itself with nothing to do. This line of thought was always at best tangential to the central philosophical thrust of the argument of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*—a dispensable peripheral frill one could take or leave according to taste without prejudice to the main point. Distracted by all the metaphilosophical dust and dazzle in the air, however, it was all too easy to dismiss the discussion of privileged representations with the observation that semantic representationalism does not, after all, entail epistemological foundationalism, and to console oneself accordingly with the thought that a critique of the latter falls far short of a critique of the former. Indeed it does, but this is the move that opens the argument, not the one with which it closes.

IV. Norms and Causes

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Rorty's master strategy in the book is to use a Kantian conceptual tool to undermine a (broadly) Kantian representationalist picture. That tool is the distinction between *causal* considerations and *justificatory* considerations. Kant accused his predecessors of running together causal and conceptual issues, largely through insufficient appreciation of the normative character of the "order and connection of ideas." It is one thing, he says to Locke, to exhibit the grounds for our ideas or beliefs by saying where they come from, that is, what matter-of-factual processes in fact

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give rise to them. It is quite another to exhibit grounds for those beliefs by saying what reasons justify them. Rorty appeals to this Kantian distinction to enforce a strict separation between the foreign and domestic affairs of vocabularies. Under the banner "Only a belief can justify another belief"—epitomizing a view he shares with Sellars and Davidson—Rorty insists that inferential or justificatory relations obtain only between items *within* a vocabulary (that is, between different applications of a vocabulary). The relations between applications of a vocabulary and the environing world of things that are not applications of a vocabulary must be understood exclusively in nonnormative causal terms. The application of any empirical vocabulary is indeed constrained by the world in which it occurs, but that constraint should be understood as a kind of causal constraint, not a kind of normative constraint. In a nutshell, this is how I think Rorty's critique of semantic representationalism goes: Normative relations are exclusively intravocabulary. Extravocabulary relations are exclusively causal. Representation purports to be *both* a normative relation, supporting assessments of correctness and incorrectness, *and* a relation between representings within a vocabulary and representeds outside of that vocabulary. Therefore, the representational model of the relation of vocabularies to their environment should be rejected.

For those—evidently not readers of such canonical texts as "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism"[3]—who have been pleased to think of Rorty as a kind of linguistic idealist, burdening him with the worst excesses of some of the literary theorists he has the audacity to write about, it may come as a surprise that his critique of representationalism is

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founded not on denying or ignoring the causal context in which our talk takes place and to which it ultimately answers, but precisely on a hard-headed insistence and focus upon the significance of that context. What distinguishes his view is rather his claim that the sense in which the talk answers to its environment must be understood *solely* in causal terms, and his determination to follow out the consequences of that claim wherever they lead. Why should one think that? Rorty reads Sellars in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" as enforcing this point. Failure to observe the sharp distinction between epistemic, inferential, normative relations, on the one hand, and causal ones, on the other, leads to the Myth of the Given: the idea, most broadly, that some *thing,* a mere occurrence or process, could by itself, intrinsically, have normative (specifically, epistemic) significance, bind us, oblige us, or entitle us to do something. This is the idea I have called pragmatism about norms: only in the context of a set of social practices—within a vocabulary—can anything have authority, induce responsibility, or in general have a normative significance for us. More specifically, the key idea is that justification is an *inferential* affair. What justifies a claim or a belief must be another claim or belief, for only those have the right conceptual shape to serve as premises from which it could be inferred. The world consists of things and their causal relations, and they can only cause and not justify a claim or a belief—cannot make it correct or incorrect.

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It might seem that a crucial distinction is being ignored here. It might be acknowledged that a worldly fact could not, by itself anyway, *justify* a claim or belief, and so make it correct in the sense of justificatory entitlement. But it need not follow that the fact could not make a claim or

belief correct in the sense of *true.* The representational model, after all, does not purport to tell us about justification (at least, not directly); its claim is that the use of our empirical vocabularies stands in normative semantic relations to the world, in that how things are determines the correctness of our claims in the sense of their truth. This is indeed a point at which some misgivings are warranted, but the distinction in question is not simply being overlooked. Rorty strenuously resists the possibility of the radical decoupling of the concept of truth from practices of justification that is implicitly being put in play at this point.[4] His pragmatism about epistemic norms is not restricted to norms of justification, but extends to the norms invoked in appeals to truth and correctness of representation.

The question is why we should not think of our claims as standing in normative relations to facts, which make them correct or incorrect in the sense of true or false. Rorty rejects the idea of facts as worldly items that make our claims true or false. Once again, this is not because he ignores or denies the existence of everything other than vocabularies. Precisely not. It is rather a consequence of his anti-idealist commitments to the world of causally interacting things that causally constrains our applications of vocabulary not having a conceptual structure. It is because to talk of facts is to talk of something that is conceptually structured, propositionally contentful, something, that is, with the right shape to stand in inferential and hence justificatory relations. And that is a shape something can only be given by a vocabulary. Conceptual norms are creatures of vocabularies: no vocabularies, no conceptual norms. Rorty can explain our talk of facts: to treat a sentence as expressing a fact is just to treat it as true, and to treat a sentence as

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true is just to endorse it, to make the claim one would make by asserting the sentence. But he rejects the idea of facts as a kind of thing that *makes* claims true. This is why he endorses the argument he sums up in the following: "Since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths."[5] Before there were humans, there were no truths, so no true claims, so no facts.

IV. A Bridge Too Far?

Now I think that at this point something has gone wrong with the argument. But before saying what, I want to stress that Rorty ends up saying these odd things just because they seem to him to be required in order to secure his prosaic, never-questioned commitment to the existence of a world of causally interacting things that existed before there were vocabularies, that was not in any sense constituted by our vocabulary-mongering, and that goes its way in large part independently of our discursive activity (sometimes regrettably so). I think one can understand facts as true claims, acknowledge that claiming is not intelligible apart from vocabularies, and still insist that there were true claims, and hence facts, before there were vocabularies. For we should distinguish between two senses of 'claim': on the one hand, there is the act of claim*ing,* and on the other, there is what is claim*ed* or claim*able.* I want to say that facts are true claims in the sense of what is claimable rather than in the sense of true claimings. With this distinction on board, there is nothing wrong with also saying that facts *make* claims true—for they make claimings true. This sense of 'makes' should not be puzzling: it is inferential. "John's remark

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that *ép*ù is true because it is a fact that *p,*" just tells us that the first clause follows from the second (assuming that the singular term in the first has a referent).

There were no true claimings before there were vocabularies, because there were no claimings at all. But it does not follow that there were no true claimables. In fact, we can show that we ought not to say that. Here is an argument that turns on the grammatical transformations that "It is true that.º.º." takes.

Physics tells us that there were photons before there were humans (I read a lot about them in Stephen Weinberg's account of the early history of the universe, *The First Three Minutes,* for instance).[6] So if before time V there were no humans, so no vocabularies, we do not want to deny that

1. "There were (at time pre-V) photons."

   We can move the tense operator out front and paraphrase this as

2. "It was the case (at time pre-V) that [there are photons]."

   By the basic redundancy property of 'true', we can preface this with "It is true that.º.º.":

3. "It is true that [It was the case (at time pre-V) that [there are photons]]."

   Now we can move the tense operator out to modify the verb in "It is true that.º.º.":

4. Was[It is true (at time pre-V) that [there are photons]]

This is the key move. It is justified by the observation that *all* sentential operators can be treated this way, as a result of deep features of the redundancy of 'true'. Thus one can transform "It is true that Not[*p*]," into Not[It is true that *p*], "It is true that Possibly[*p*]," into "Possibly[It is true

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that *p*],” and “It is true that Will-be[*p*],” into “Will-be[It is true that *p*].” But now, given how the tense operators work, it is straightforward to derive

5. “It was true (at time pre-V) that [there are photons].”

And again invoking the features that make ‘true’ redundant, we get

6. “It was the case (at time pre-V) that [It is true that [there are photons]].”

These uniformities involving the interaction of ‘true’ with other sentential operators tell us we are committed by our use of those expressions to either deny that there were photons before there were people—which is to deny well-entrenched deliverances of physics—or to admit that there were truths about photons before there were people to formulate them. Taking the latter course is entirely compatible with acknowledging that the notion of a fact (true claimable) is only intelligible relative to a that of a vocabulary.[7]

That old semanticist and modal logician Abraham Lincoln asked “If we agreed to call the tail a ‘leg’, how many legs would horses have?” His answer was “Four, because you can’t change how many legs horses have by changing the way we use words.” This is surely the right response. One cannot change the nonlinguistic facts, in the unloaded sense, by changing linguistic ones. In the counterfactual situation envisaged, the words “Horses have five legs,” would be true, but only because it would not say that horses have five legs, and so would not conflict with the fact that horses would still have four legs. When we specify a counterfactual situation and go on to reason about it, our suppositions should not be thought of as altering the meaning of the words we use now to talk about it. The right thing to say using our concept of

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photon is that these things would have been there even if no language users had ever existed to undertake commitments regarding them. For facts are true claims in the sense of what is claim*ed,* not in the sense of claim*ings.* If we had never existed, there would not have been any true claimings, but there would have been facts (truths) going unexpressed, and in *our* situation, in which there *are* claimings, we can say a fair bit about what they would have been.

V. Social Pragmatism about Knowledge

If this is right, then we are not, as Rorty claims, precluded from talking about facts making our claimings true. We can only understand the notion of a fact by telling a story that makes reference to vocabularies—though notice, it is a consequence of the Quinean point with which we began that we can also only understand the notion of a vocabulary as part of a story that includes facts. But this does not entail that there were no facts before there were vocabularies. We can understand those true claimables as (when things go right) making our claimings true. But what about the original point that only beliefs can justify beliefs, and its generalization to the claim that we should only see causal, and not normative, relations between the causal order and our applications of vocabularies? This is a complex issue. Here I can only outline some of the considerations that bear on it. The crux of the matter, I think, is to enforce what Sellars calls the 'ing'/'ed' distinction that was invoked in the previous section, now as applied to 'belief'. Subjective idealism of the Berkeleyan sort resulted from failure to observe this distinction with the term 'experience', thereby underwriting a slide from the true, or at least not obviously false, "All we know is what is experienced ('experience')" to the false "All we know is experiencings

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('experience')." Believings can justify other believings, and believables can justify other believables. These two senses of 'justify' are different, but intimately related. (Just *how* they should be understood to be related, and which is more usefully regarded as prior in the order of explanation, are deep and interesting questions.) But can believables (which, if true, are facts) justify believings? To ask that question is to ask whether something that is not the application of a vocabulary can justify (and not merely cause) the application of a vocabulary. This Rorty and Davidson deny.

I want to suggest one way in which one might take issue with the claim that only causal relations, and not also normative relations of justification, ought to be admitted to obtain between items that are and items that are not applications of vocabularies[8]:

- There are facts, that is, conceptually structured truth-makers;
- applications of vocabulary must answer to those facts in a not strictly causal but also in an inferential-justificatory sense; and
- in a central range of favored cases of perceptual experience, the facts *are* the reasons that entitle perceivers to their empirical beliefs.

I indicated in the previous section how someone who shared Rorty's basic commitments might come to be committed and entitled to (a). (b) is just the denial of the general thesis in question, which distinguishes vocabularies' extramural and intramural relations as causal and normative respectively. (c) then specifies the sense in which justificatory relations are to be discerned in

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addition to causal ones. I claim that one can maintain all of these consistently with pragmatism about norms (and hence without falling into the Myth of the Given).

Consider what I am doing when I attribute knowledge to someone. I am, first of all, attributing a propositionally contentful *commitment*—a taking-true—to the candidate knower. One cannot be taken to know what one does not take to be true. This corresponds to the belief condition on the classical conception of knowledge as justified true belief (the JTB conception). Second, I am attributing some sort of epistemic *entitlement* to that commitment. Unwarranted or merely accidentally correct takings-true do not count as knowledge. This corresponds to the justification condition on the classical conception, though I am purposely using the somewhat broader notion of epistemic entitlement so as not to prejudge the issue (contentious between epistemological internalists and externalists) of whether one can *be* justified in holding a belief without being able to justify the belief. What about the truth condition on knowledge, the demand that the belief correspond to or express a *fact?* In taking the candidate knower's belief to amount to knowledge, I am taking it to be true. That is, I take it to be an expression of a fact: a true claim (in the sense of what is claimed or claimable). Doing that is not *attributing* anything to the knower above and beyond the propositionally contentful commitment and epistemic entitlement to it already mentioned. It is doing something else. It is *endorsing* the claim, *undertaking* the commitment myself. The standard of correctness I apply is just correspondence to (in the sense of expression of) the facts as I take them to be. Of course, I may be wrong, as the putative knower may. But the meaning of the truth condition on knowledge, the sense of

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'correct' in which the correctness of a belief is being assessed (by contrast to the sense of correctness assessed by attributions of epistemic entitlement), derives ultimately from this comparison between commitments *attributed* to another, and those *undertaken* oneself.[9]

Such a story underwrites assessments of normative relations obtaining between applications of vocabulary—claims that are candidate expressions of knowledge—and facts with respect to which they are true or false. But it does not violate the claims of pragmatism about norms. For the how things are is allowed to have normative significance for the correctness of someone's sayings and believings only in the context of someone else's *attitudes* toward how things are, that is, only as filtered through the takings-true of the one assessing the knowledge-claim. The facts are caught up in social practices by being endorsed by the one attributing knowledge. So there is in this picture no contact between naked, unconceptualized reality and someone's application of concepts. The sort of semantic correctness involved in truth assessments can be made intelligible as comparisons of one application of vocabulary (by the candidate knower) with another (by the one assessing the candidacy). Surely such an account satisfies the scruples that motivates Rorty's rejection of normative word-world relations, in spite of its invocation of facts and its underwriting of talk of 'making-true' and 'correspondence'.

VI. Social Pragmatism about Reliability

But it is one thing to produce a sanitized notion of the correctness of claims being settled by the facts where 'correct' is understood in the sense of *true.* It is a taller order to produce a corresponding notion of correctness of claims as being settled by the facts, where 'correct' is

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understood in the sense of *justified.* This is what is at issue in claims (b) and (c) in the foregoing; it is what Sellars's arguments against the Myth of the Given in terms of the confusion of nonnormative causal with normative inferential-justificatory relations apparently militates against; and it is what the principle that only a belief can justify a belief directly rules out. In fact, the same strategy applied previously to domesticate epistemic correctness as truth can be extended to domesticate epistemic correctness as justification or warrant. We can see the facts as standing in normative relations of justification to our claimings as well as in causal relations of triggering them. Indeed, we can see them as standing in the normative relations precisely *because* and insofar as they stand in the causal relations.

Epistemological externalists claim that it can be appropriate to attribute the sort of epistemic entitlement required to distinguish mere true beliefs from true beliefs that amount to knowledge even in cases where the candidate knower cannot offer reasons justifying her belief. A paradigm case is where the belief is in fact, whether the believer knows it or not, the output of a reliable belief-forming mechanism. Thus someone who is being trained to distinguish Toltec from Mayan potsherds by eye may in fact acquire the reliable differential responsive dispositions required for her noninferential reports of Toltec fragments to count as perceptual knowledge before she realizes that she is reliable. She may at that point be inclined to call something Toltec, without being able to give any reason for that inclination. If she is in fact sufficiently reliable in distinguishing Toltec from Mayan bits, reliabilist epistemologists argue that when she is right, she genuinely knows she is looking at a Toltec bit, even though she cannot justify that claim,

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even by an appeal to her own reliability as a noninferential reporter. After all, beliefs acquired in this way are not merely accidentally true.

This sort of epistemological reliabilism, it seems, is a paradigm case of what Rorty is committed to treat as the mistaking of a causal relation for a justificatory one. For what counts as justifying the reporter's belief (and so qualifying it as knowledge, if it is true) is the merely causal relation of reliable noninferential triggering of response (classification as Toltec) by stimulus (Toltec potsherds). But if we look at things from the point of view of the one *attributing* knowledge (as we did before), this appearance vanishes. For what I am doing in *taking* the reporter to be reliable, *attributing* reliable differential responsive dispositions to produce noninferential reports, is precisely *endorsing an inference* myself. I am taking it that the inference from "S is disposed noninferentially to report that the pottery is Toltec" to "The pottery is (probably) Toltec" is a good one. This is an inference *from* a commitment *attributed* to the reporter *to* a commitment *undertaken* by the attributor. I can treat the report as expressing knowledge even though the reporter cannot offer reasons for it because *I* can offer reasons for it. Although she cannot invoke her reliability, I can—and if I could not, I could not, even by the reliabilist externalist's lights, attribute knowledge. The causal relation can underwrite a justification just because and insofar as those assessing knowledge claims *take* it as making good a kind of *inference.* Nonnormative causal relations between worldly facts and someone's claims do not exclude normative epistemic justificatory relations between them, since others can *take* the causal relations *as* reasons for belief, by endorsing reliability inferences. This story about

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assessments of epistemic entitlement, like the one about truth assessments, is couched entirely in terms of discursive commitments and entitlements. It shows how the difference in social perspective between assessor and assessed can bring relations between the vocabulary and the causal environment in which it is applied within the scope of the vocabulary itself.

I said previously that basing the sharp separation of the foreign and domestic relations of vocabularies by distinguishing exclusively causal external relations normative justificatory internal relations, on the principle that only a belief could justify a belief, runs the risk of seeming to ignore the distinction between two sorts of correctness-assessments of beliefs for which the facts might be invoked. To say that a worldly fact could not *justify* a claim or belief, and so make it correct in the sense of justificatory entitlement, is not to say that the fact could not make a claim or belief correct in the sense of *true.* I pointed out that Rorty would not accept a radical decoupling of justification and truth—to justify a claim is, after all, to give reasons to think it is *true.* I have now sketched a story about assessments of truth and assessments of reliability (and hence epistemic entitlement) that respects the pragmatism about norms that I see as underlying Rorty's scruples, that does not decouple truth radically from giving and asking for reasons, and that shows how causal relations between applications of vocabulary and the facts to which those applications answer (in both the sense of 'answer' given by assessments of truth and that given by assessments of entitlement or justification) can support conceptually structured inferential relations between facts and claims. This story denies that we must understand the relations between vocabularies and the world they address in exclusively causal terms, restricting

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normative talk of semantic and epistemic assessment to relations within the vocabulary. At the same time, it accepts a version of the principle that only beliefs can justify (or make true, in the sense of giving inferential grounds for) beliefs. It does so by distinguishing what is believ*ed* (or believ*able*) from believ*ings,* and appealing to the distinction of social perspective between *attributing* commitments and inferences, on the one hand, and *endorsing* commitments and inferences, on the other. Together, these moves let us talk about facts, as true believables, in favored cases both justifying believings and making them true.

I have been urging, in the spirit of friendly amendment, that Rorty's scruples (which lead him properly to insist that semantic and epistemic, as opposed to causal, relations are intelligible only when thought of as obtaining between *relata* that all have conceptual shape) can be satisfied without our having to deny that our claims answer normatively to the facts—both for their truth and for their justification—as well as being causally conditioned by them. The key is to look more closely at the *social* articulation of our linguistic practices of making and assessing claims, of giving and asking for reasons. However, even if this reconstruction is successful, Rorty may well still think that attempting to tame such dangerous idioms as "truth as correspondence to the facts" and "reliable causal connections providing reasons" is a foolish task to take on: no matter how docile training may seem to have made them, they are always liable to reassert their wild nature and turn on their supposed master. At any rate, the remainder of this discussion will not presuppose the acceptability of these suggestions.

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VII. The Vocabulary Vocabulary

A dualism is a distinction drawn in such a way as to make unintelligible the relation between the two sorts of thing one has distinguished. Rorty distinguishes vocabularies, within which various distinctive sorts of normative assessment are in order, from things like photons and butterflies, which interact with each other only causally. Things of this kind do not *normatively* constrain each other's activities; they are not in the business of obliging and entitling themselves or each other to do things one way rather than another. A distinction of this sort is recognizably central in the thought of figures otherwise as diverse as Kant, Frege, Wittgenstein, and Sellars. Does Rorty's use of 'vocabulary' commit that great foe of dualisms to a dualism of norm and cause? I do not think so. But pursuing the issue opens up some interesting avenues through his thought.

If we take a step back, we can say that there is the *vocabulary* of causes, and there is the *vocabulary* of vocabularies (that is, of implicitly normative discursive practices). What can we say about the relations between them? First of all, they are *different* vocabularies. It may be that all Rorty needs of the Kantian distinction between the order of causation and the order of justification is this fact: these 'orders' are specified in different vocabularies.[10] It would be a mistake to confuse, conflate, or run them together. But they are not just different. For one thing, the vocabulary of causes is a vocabulary. It is something we can discuss in the metavocabulary of vocabularies. We can ask such questions as how the vocabulary of Newtonian causes arose, and how it differs from the vocabulary of Aristotelian causes in the questions it prompts us to ask about ourselves and our activities. Rorty himself often pursues such questions and thereby

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affirms his practical commitment to historicism. But developing and applying vocabularies is something that we, natural creatures, do. Our doing of it consists in the production of causally conditioned, causally efficacious performances. That is to say that using vocabularies is one among many other things that is describable in the vocabulary of causes. Rorty never loses sight of this fact. In his insistence on reminding us of the causal relations between our applications of vocabulary and the world in which we apply it, he affirms his practical commitment to naturalism.[11]

The fact that we can use the vocabulary metavocabulary to discuss the causal vocabulary (its emergence, peculiarities, practical virtues and vices, and so on), and the causal metavocabulary to discuss vocabularies (the role of reliable differential responsive dispositions in empirical vocabularies, the practical capacities they enable, and so on) shows that the distinction between the vocabulary of causes and the vocabulary of vocabularies is not drawn in terms that make relations between them unintelligible. So it is not playing the functional expressive role of a dualism. From the point of view of this question, when we have remarked on the complementary perspectives these metavocabularies provide on each other, we have said everything there is to say—at any rate, everything we need to say—about the relations between the two.

Rorty's positive suggestion is that we can make sense of normative evaluations of vocabularies on the model of assessing tools as more or less useful in pursuit of certain *goals* or *purposes.* One of the cardinal benefits he sees stemming from the adoption of the vocabulary of

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instrumental pragmatism is the *discursive pluralism* that idiom encourages. It makes sense to make normative comparisons of tools once a task is specified. Hammers are better than wrenches for driving nails. But it makes no sense to ask whether hammers or wrenches are better, simply *as tools.* Assessment of tools is always relative to a purpose; to describe something as a tool is only to say that it has a purpose, not to specify some particular purpose. Similarly, Rorty wants to teach us not to ask whether one vocabulary is better than another simply *as a vocabulary.* We can say that the causal vocabulary is the better one to apply if one's purpose is to predict which way one billiard ball will move when struck by another, or to get someone to say "Ouch." And we can say that the vocabulary vocabulary is probably better if we want instead to discuss the relations between Blake's poetry and Wordsworth's.[12]

One of the main indictments of the metavocabulary of representation is that it tempts us to think that we can make sense of the question "Which vocabulary is better as a *representation?*" without having to specify a further purpose.[13] "Mirroring the world" is intelligible as such a purpose only as an element of some larger practical context. The root commitment of the representational metavocabulary as a metavocabulary is the idea that "representing the world" specifies a purpose that all vocabularies share—or at least a purpose to which they could all be turned, a dimension along which they could all be compared. But insofar as this is true, the purpose in question is devoid of any content common to the motley of vocabularies with which we are familiar. It is an empty formal compliment that can be paid to any set of practices that deserve to be called 'linguistic', in virtue simply of some performances counting within them as

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having the significance of assertions. The compliment is empty because promiscuous. It affords no grounds for comparison, for assessments of better and worse.[14] For assertions just are claims about how things are. That is, we derive our practical grip on the notion of "representing how things are" from our practical mastery of assertion: representing how things are is what we are doing when we make claims.

So Rorty's purpose in introducing the vocabulary vocabulary is not to recommend it as a replacement for or competitor of the causal vocabulary. It is introduced as useful for some purposes, and not for others. It *is* intended to replace the metavocabulary of representations. For that one turns out, Rorty argues, to have outlived its usefulness for the purposes for which philosophers introduced it: understanding how vocabularies work in general (and in particular the relationship between the causal vocabulary of modern physics and the intentional vocabulary of everyday life). My purpose in the remainder of the essay is not further to examine that critical argument, but rather further to explore the instrumental pragmatism Rorty recommends to replace the representationalism of our philosophical fathers.

VIII. Vocabularies as Tools

If we should think of vocabularies instrumentally, as tools, what should we think of them as tools for doing? The purposes with respect to which we assess vocabularies as better and worse, more and less successful, come in two flavors. For we can think of purposes either as they come into view from the perspective of the *naturalist* or as they come into view from the perspective of the *historicist.* Vocabularies can be viewed as evolutionary coping strategies. As determinately

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embodied organisms, we come with interests in survival, adaptation, and reproduction. Vocabularies can be useful tools for pursuing those inbuilt ends—particularly the causal vocabularies that enable prediction and secure control over the natural environment. Broadening the focus somewhat, *whatever* it is that we find ourselves wanting or pursuing—whether rooted in our biology, in the determinate historical circumstances under which we reproduce our social life, or in idiosyncrasies of our individual trajectories through the world—deploying vocabularies can be a useful means for getting what we want. This thought is the lever with which classical American pragmatism sought to move the conceptual world. To think of vocabularies this way is really to think of them in the terms of the metavocabulary of causes (of already describable effects).

But vocabularies can do more than just help us get what we already want. They also make it possible to frame and formulate new ends.[15] Rorty says:

> The Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools has one obvious drawback. The craftsman typically knows what job he needs to do before picking or inventing tools with which to do it. By contrast, someone like Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel (a "poet" in my wide sense of the term—the sense of "one who makes things new") is typically unable to make clear exactly what he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose.[16]

No nineteenth-century physicist could have the goal of determining whether neutrinos have mass. No ancient Roman governor, however well intentioned, could resolve to respect the human

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rights of the individuals over whom he held sway. No medieval poet could set out to show the damage wrought on an individual life by the rigidity of gender roles inscribed by an archetypal family romance. In fact, pragmatism itself is a prime example: Raymond Williams points out that the words 'problem' and 'solution' had only such rare and specialized uses (in mathematics) at the time that they do not even occur in the King James version of the Bible. (Nor, indeed, does 'happiness'.) Can we post-Deweyans so much as understand the way of being in the world natural to ones whose personal, professional, and political activities are not structured by the seeing of problems and the seeking of solutions to them?

And as purposes wax, so they wane. No physician can any longer so much as try to isolate the choleric humor in a feverish patient. No statesman can aim, like Metternich, to reestablish recognition of the divine right of kings. And it would be a rare contemporary poet who could adopt Milton's goal and write so as "to justifye the wayes of God to man." A distinctive feature of Rorty's discursive pragmatism is how seriously he takes this historicist point about the role of alterations of vocabulary in altering the purposes accessible to us—both by engendering novel ones and by rendering familiar ones obsolete or irrelevant. To think of vocabularies this way is to think of them in terms of the metavocabulary of vocabularies, rather than the metavocabulary of causes. For to do so is to focus on bringing about new descriptions, rather than new effects.

This insight provides another reason to reject the monolithic representationalist answer to the question: What are vocabularies *for*—that is, what purpose do they serve *as* vocabularies? For the representationalist response is that vocabularies are tools for representing how things

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always already in any case are. It entails that vocabularies can be partially ordered depending upon whether they do that job better or worse. Such a response is at least intelligible so long as we restrict our attention to the role of vocabularies in pursuing the sort of goals that come into view from the broadly naturalistic perspective. Insofar as the point of vocabularies is conceived as helping us to survive, adapt, reproduce, and secure antecedently specifiable wants and needs, limning the true vocabulary-independent structure of the environment in which we pursue those ends would evidently be helpful. It is much less clear what the representationalist picture has to offer if we broaden our attention to include the role of vocabularies in *changing* what we want, and even what we need. From the historicist perspective, insofar as it makes sense to talk about what all vocabularies are for, simply as such, the answer must give prominent place to the observation that they are for engendering new purposes. This function of vocabularies is simply not addressed by representationalist totalitarianism.[17]

These two sorts of purposes—those that loom largest from the perspective provided by the commitments implicit in the naturalist's preferred vocabulary, and those that loom largest from the perspective provided by the commitments implicit in the historicist's preferred vocabulary—fund structurally different sorts of assessments of more and less successful vocabularies, and consequently structurally different notions of conceptual or discursive *progress.* Assessments of the relative success of various vocabularies at achieving purposes of the first kind are at least in principle available *prospectively.* Assessments of the relative success of vocabularies at achieving purposes of the second kind are in principle only available *retrospectively.*

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Interests rooted in fundamental features of our embodiment and activities as social creatures transcend more parochial features of our vocabularies. They put even practitioners of discarded vocabularies in a position to assess with some authority the relative success of different attempts at pursuing them. Thus Aristotle would not, without complete reeducation, be able to appreciate much of the conceptual progress we have made in physics since his time. But he would immediately be able to appreciate our greater facility at making large explosions, constructing tall buildings, traveling and transporting cargo by air, and so on. For our techniques are simply and evidently better at doing things he could already perfectly well understand wanting to do—in a way that more accurately measuring the charge on an electron is not something he could already understand wanting to do. We owe the preservation of the bulk of classical Greek philosophy and literature—the repository of their vocabularies—to the admiration of the early Arabs for the practical achievements of Greek medicine. Greek doctors could save warriors from the effects of battlefield wounds and diseases the Arabs knew would otherwise be fatal. That gave them a reason to treasure and translate works of Greek theory that would otherwise have left them unmoved. For the medical practice answered to interests the Arabs shared, while the theory—which the Greeks insisted was inseparable from the practice—answered to interests formulable only in an alien vocabulary. In cases like these, progress in achieving ends can be visible even from the point of view of those speaking a *less* successful vocabulary.

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By contrast, the sophisticated interests that are intelligible only as products of particular vocabularies give rise to assessments of success and progress that are essentially available only

retrospectively. From the privileged vantage point of (what we take to be) a mature atomic theory of the nature of matter, we can retrospectively discern (indeed, in an important sense, constitute) a progressive path trodden by Democritus, Lucretius, Dalton, and Rutherford, and contrast it with the mistakes of the fans of infinitely divisible cosmic goo. Nineteenth-century realist painters, having won their way clear to the purpose of conveying in a picture exactly the visual information available to an observer from a point of view fixed in space and time could then rewrite the history of art Whiggishly, seeing it as structured by such epoch-making events as the discovery of the laws of perspective; medieval painters would not and could not have seen the later productions as doing better what they were trying to do. Assessments of progress in realism of portrayal are essentially retrospective.[18]

Assessments of technological and theoretical progress are evaluations of the relative success of different vocabularies at achieving a fixed constellation of goals. Such evaluation requires that the goals be specified in some vocabulary. The structural difference I am pointing to reflects the difference between goals that are specifiable in all the vocabularies being evaluated and those that are specifiable only in a privileged subset—in the limit, in one of them. Naturalistic pragmatism allows vocabularies to be evaluated only with respect to their utility for accomplishing the first sort of end. Historicist pragmatism allows vocabularies to be evaluated also with respect to their utility for accomplishing the second sort of end. Naturalistic pragmatism courts the dangers of reductionism and philistinism—as though we could safely dismiss romantic poetry by asking what contribution it has made to the adaptability and long-

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term survivability of human beings. Historicist pragmatism courts the dangers of smugness and

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empty self-satisfaction. For it is far too easy to tell Whiggish retrospective stories, rationally reconstructing one's tradition as a monotonic approach to the pinnacle of one's current vocabulary. We can all too easily imagine our scientific institutions falling into the hands of theological fanatics who can describe in excruciating detail just how the revolutionary change from present-day science to their loopy theories represent decisive progress along the essential

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dimension of pleasingness to God—a purpose unfortunately and pitiably no more available from within the impoverished vocabulary of twentieth-century natural science than that of measuring the charge of electrons was from within Aristotle's vocabulary.

Once these two sorts of purposes have been distinguished, it is obviously important to try to say something about how they ought to be understood to be related. It is a central and essential feature of Rorty's developing philosophical vocabulary that it strives to keep both the perspective of the naturalist and the perspective of the historicist fully in view at all times. The reductive naturalist must be reminded that she is leaving out of her story an absolutely crucial *practical* capacity that vocabularies give us: the capacity to frame genuinely novel purposes, and so in a real sense to remake ourselves. The uncritical historicist must be sprung from the dilemma of flabby relativism, on the one hand, and self-satisfied parochialism, on the other, by the reminder that there *are* purposes that transcend vocabularies and permit us to make comparative assessments. The theological fanatics should not be permitted to claim theoretical progress over traditional natural science until and unless that progress can be certified

technologically as well. The question is, can they on the basis of their theories both keep the machines running and continue to make the sort of progress at securing common practical ends that would have convinced Aristotle of our greater prowess, and ought to convince contemporary scientists that their successors had indeed made corresponding progress? Pragmatism ought to be seen as comprising complementary vocabularies generated by the perspectives of naturalism and historicism, of common purposes and novel purposes, rather than as restricting itself to one or the other.

IX. Vocabularies and the Public/Private Split

One arena in which Rorty explicitly confronts this challenge may seem initially surprising: political theory. A distinctive feature of Rorty's thought is his conviction that adopting a philosophical vocabulary that treats people as incarnated vocabularies has specifically political implications.[19] This shared conviction is one of the deep underpinnings of his identification with Dewey and a warrant for the assertion of kinship implicit in adopting and transforming the tag 'pragmatism', even in the face of the many important differences between the two thinkers' use of it. Again, this commitment marks a significant point of contact with Habermas. Though both philosophers are quick to insist on the magnitude and import of the issues that divide them, they are each concerned to extract substantive political conclusions from a philosophical investigation of language. It is easy to see how an intellectual whose research as a philosopher has led him to view philosophy as one form of writing among others—distinguished by the vocabularies it has inherited and the texts to which it owes allegiance rather than by a distinctive task or timeless

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essence—should address himself to its relations to other sorts of literature and criticism. Seeking to situate one's research area in and to develop its significance for the culture more generally is, after all, the distinctive calling of the intellectual as such. It is perhaps more difficult to see how the vocabulary vocabulary could be thought to teach us lessons concerning our relations to institutions that articulate *power,* traditionally distinguished from mere talk. But for Rorty, it is vocabularies all the way down.

Many of the lessons he extracts are critical, by way of ground-clearing: for example, do not think that the propriety and the utility of the vocabulary of rights, or of obligations, must be grounded in the existence of a distinctive kind of *thing* (rights, obligations), which another vocabulary must be getting wrong, or at least ignoring, insofar as it leads us to speak otherwise. After all, for Rorty mindedness turned out to consist in an authority structure instituted by an optional vocabulary, rather than in an antecedent structure of facts specifiable in a causal vocabulary. But the most basic positive suggestion that Rorty makes in this area is that political wisdom begins with a sharp distinction between the *public* and *private* use of vocabularies.[20] The vocabularies in which we conduct our public business with each other must be shared. They answer to the goals of minimizing cruelty, humiliation, and injustice, and of creating a space in which individuals can pursue their private ends with as little interference from others as is compatible with minimizing cruelty, humiliation, and injustice. Our private vocabularies need not be shared. They answer to the goals of recreating ourselves individually by redescribing ourselves—transforming our inherited vocabularies in novel and unpredictable ways and

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pursuing idiosyncratic personal goals that come into view through the medium of those new vocabularies. Aristotle, Locke, Marx, Mill, Dewey, Rawls, and Habermas are theorists, practitioners, and admirers of the kinds of public vocabularies whose job it is to sustain and perfect communities, making possible the formulation and pursuit of shared goals and projects. Thoreau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Heidegger, Proust, and Nabokov are theorists, practitioners, and admirers of the kinds of private vocabularies whose job it is to transform and perfect individual selves, making possible the formulation and pursuit of novel personal goals and projects. Public vocabularies articulate the norms that govern our answering to each other; private vocabularies articulate the norms that govern our each answering to ourselves.

Rorty sees the distinction between public and private discourse as a special case of the distinction between thought and talk that takes place *within* a stable, shared vocabulary, on the one hand, and thought and talk that transcends such a vocabulary by creating a new, individualized vocabulary, on the other. Community-constitutive acts of forming 'we' intentions, and the giving and asking for reasons that such acts are embedded in, are made possible by the shared norms and commitments implicit in our use of a public vocabulary. Poets and revolutionary scientists break out of their inherited vocabularies to create new ones, as yet undreamed of by their fellows. The creation of novel vocabularies is an activity we can all partake in to one degree or another, but we should recognize the incommensurability of the vocabulary in which we publicly enact our concern for the development of the 'we' and that in which we privately enact our concern for the 'I'. Rorty says:

> There is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory. The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange .º.º.

He recommends that we

> begin to think of the relation between writers on autonomy and writers on justice as being like the relation between two kinds of tools—as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars. One sort of writer lets us realize that the social virtues are not the only virtues, that some people have actually succeeded in re-creating themselves. We thereby become aware of our own half-articulate need to become a new person, one whom we as yet lack words to describe. The other sort reminds us of the failure of our institutions and practices to live up to the convictions to which we are already committed by the public, shared vocabulary we use in daily life. The one tells us that we need not speak only the language of the tribe, that we may find our own words, that we may have a responsibility to ourselves to find them. The other tells us that that responsibility is not the only one we have. Both are right, but there is no way to make both speak a single language.º.º.
>
> The demands of self-creation and human solidarity [are] equally valid, yet forever incommensurable.[21]

Here the tool metaphor is brought in to make intelligible the practical compatibility of both undertaking the shared commitments implicit in deploying the vocabulary of liberal community and adopting the attitudes of ironic detachment and playful creativity expressed in deploying idiosyncratic vocabularies that bring novel possibilities and purposes into view. These two forms

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of life are equally near and dear to Rorty's heart and central to his wider vision of our situation as incarnated vocabularies. We can lead these two lives if we keep a strict separation between the vocabularies of public and private life. The vocabulary that construes vocabularies as tools is Rorty's primary tool for construing that split coherently and nondualistically. For if there is no one thing that vocabularies as vocabularies are *for*—for instance, mirroring nature, representing how the *things,* from which we should read off our responsibilities, really are—then we can simply see tradition-sustaining and tradition-transforming vocabularies as serving different purposes, and hence as not competing.

What more can we say about the relationship between these two discursive aspects of our lives, beyond the observation that they are distinct and do not compete with one another? I think they can be understood as expressions of the two dimensions of pragmatism noted in the previous section: public discourse corresponding to common purposes, and private discourse to novel purposes. The novel vocabularies forged by artists for private consumption make it possible to frame new purposes and plans that can be appreciated only by those initiated into those vocabularies. The recreation of the individual they enable makes possible a distinctive sort of assessment of success that is essentially retrospective—because prospectively, in the terms of the vocabulary that has been transformed and transcended, one cannot in general so much as understand the ends toward which one's efforts are now bent. By contrast, the overarching goals that structure and orient the public vocabulary Rorty envisages are common to, or at least intelligible in the terms of, a wide variety of vocabularies. Minimizing cruelty is an aim rooted

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ultimately in our biological encoding of pain as the mark of harm for creatures like us. A baseline or default abhorrence of the infliction of pain on one of *us* (though possibly not on one of those *others*) is accordingly one of the most basic attitudes instituting and sustaining an *us.* And just as pain is the paradigm of felt harm to an essentially biological creature, so is humiliation the paradigm of felt harm to an essentially social one. These are just the sort of vocabulary-transcendent common purpose highlighted by the pragmatist-as-naturalist.

Can the same be said of the other common civic aims that Rorty, as liberal theorist, insists should be basic to our public discourse? On the face of it, the aspiration to *justice,* in the sense that those affected by plans for communal action should have a voice in the deliberation that leads to the adoption of those plans, and the aspiration to *freedom,* in the sense of ensuring to each individual appropriate behavioral and discursive space in which to pursue purely private ends (where that pursuit does not infringe on the corresponding space of others) have a different status. These aims evidently are not shared by inhabitants of all political vocabularies—either historically or on the contemporary scene. And Rorty is constitutionally suspicious of the heroic efforts of thinkers like Rawls and Habermas (following such models as Locke, Kant, and Hegel) to exhibit commitments to goals like these as always already implicit in giving and asking for reasons in a vocabulary at all. For him, the practical efficacy of appeals to this sort of concern is always relative, not only to our embodiment and social nature, but also to our historical circumstance. That we cannot and need not insist that these considerations can be shown to be pressing from the vantage point provided by *every possible vocabulary* whatsoever is the upshot

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of the realization of the contingency of the conditions that make even a liberal polity possible. Nonetheless, though the goals of justice and freedom in these minimal senses may not *move* all those to whom we would in our actual circumstances, and with our actual traditions, like to address political claims in a public vocabulary, those goals are evidently *intelligible* to them. The problems posed by the collision of the aims of justice and freedom with the ruthless public pursuit of private interest by an arbitrarily privileged few, whether in Athens or in Washington, is not that the parties to the dispute cannot *understand* one another's goals. They understand each other all too well. The problems are rather practical: the wrong side too often wins. Disagreements of this sort do not belie a shared public vocabulary. (Indeed, a striking feature of contemporary political discourse—and not only in the developed, prosperous part of the world—is the extent to which debates are framed in terms of the opposition between justice and freedom in these minimal senses, on the one hand, and the ruthless public pursuit of private interest by an arbitrarily privileged few, on the other. The disputants just disagree about who is who.)

X. Discursive Practice

Lining up the public/private split in this way with the two sorts of purposes pragmatists can appeal to—those that are most salient from the perspective of the naturalist, who starts out employing the metavocabulary of causes, and those that are most salient from the perspective of the historicist, who starts out employing the metavocabulary of vocabularies—suggests a way of using the vocabulary vocabulary to conceptualize the complementary relation between these perspectives. For this way of thinking about them emphasizes the divide between routine

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purposes and novel ones, and hence between shared, tradition-sustaining norms and idiosyncratic, tradition-transforming performances. And the way in which these two presuppose and involve one another is of the essence of specifically *linguistic* practices.

For the characteristic feature distinguishing vocabularies from nondiscursive tools is their function in generating novel claims, and hence novel purposes. Forty years ago Chomsky made the epochal observation that novelty is the rule, rather than the exception, in human languages. In fact, almost every sentence uttered by an adult native speaker is new—not only in the sense that that speaker has never uttered it before, but more surprisingly, also in the sense that *no one* has ever uttered it before. A relatively few hackneyed sentences may get a lot of play: "Have a nice day," "I'm hungry," "You'll be sorry," and so on. But it is exceptionally unlikely that an unquoted sentence chosen at random from an essay such as this one will ever have been uttered before. Nor is this preponderance of novelty a feature special to the special vocabularies and complex sentences of professor-speak. Even the chit-chat we use to organize routine enterprises in our everyday lives consists largely of strings of words that have never before appeared together in just that order. Almost surely, no one has ever before said exactly "If it rains, we'll have to take both the baseball equipment and the picnic stuff out of the trunk of the car, because it leaks." That is, even where the sentiment is routine, the expression of it seldom is. (How much more unlikely is it that anyone before Sam Johnson had ever described an acquaintance as "obscurely wise and coarsely kind"!) This phenomenon has been repeatedly confirmed empirically, by searches of large corpora of spoken and written sentences. And it is easily

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deduced almost from first principles by a comparison of the number of sentences of, say, twenty words or fewer, generated by simple grammatical constructions from the very limited five thousand-word vocabulary of Basic English (readers of this essay probably not only passively understand, but actively use an order of magnitude more English words than that), with the number of sentences there has been time for all human beings to utter in the history of the world, even if they all always spoke nothing but English and did nothing but utter sentences.

Now some of this novelty is conceptually trivial—a matter of there being many ways to convey (what we want to call) essentially the same thought. But a great deal of it is not. As one moves away from the careless imprecision that can be perfectly in order in casual conversation, either in the direction of literature (with poems as the textual pole defining the dimension I mean to be pointing at) or in the direction of a technical discipline such as metallurgy (with equations couched in the mathematical language of fundamental physics as the textual pole defining that dimension), one finds more and more that to use a different string of words is to say something importantly different. The more specialized the vocabulary, the more likely it is that lexical or syntactic differences carry with them substantial differences in *inferential* behavior, and hence conceptual significance. Far more often than not, the uttering of novel sentences is the making of novel claims. The difference between ordinary and specialized idioms in this regard is only one of degree: intensified, the phenomenon that is already evident in everyday life becomes more striking still in more specialized disciplinary idioms.

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Novel claims have novel inferential consequences, are subject to novel challenges, and require novel justifications. The game of giving and asking for reasons largely consists in the entertainment of the possibilities for such novel commitments, and the exploration both of their consequences and of what would be required in order to become entitled to them. We spend most of our time on untrodden inferential ground. Although what else a novel claim would commit one to, what it would be incompatible with, and what would entitle one to it must in some sense be *controlled* by shared norms that antecedently govern the concepts one deploys in making such a claim; in the sense that the inferential moves are answerable for their correctness to those norms, it is simply a mistake to think of the antecedent norms as *determining* the process. In exploring the inferential significance of novel claims, we are not simply tracing out paths already determined in advance. For the inferential norms that govern the use of concepts are not handed down to us on tablets from above; they are not guaranteed in advance to be complete or coherent with each other. They are at best constraints that aim us in a direction when assessing novel claims. They neither determine the resultant vector of their interaction, nor are they themselves immune from alteration as a result of the collision of competing claims or inferential commitments that have never before been confronted with one another.

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Philosophy proper was born when Plato took as an explicit topic of understanding and explanation the Socratic procedure of exploring, querying, and grooming our concepts by eliciting novel claims and producing novel juxtapositions of commitments his interlocutors were already inclined to undertake so as to expose their potentially incompatible consequences.

Socrates showed how it was possible for us to investigate the cotenability, by our *own* lights, of our various commitments, and indeed, of the coherence of concepts we deploy. Engaging in these characteristic exercises in Socratic rationality typically changes our dispositions to endorse claims and make inferences. Where these changes are substantial, the result is a change in the conceptual norms to which one acknowledges allegiance: a change in vocabulary. Such changes can be partially ordered along a dimension that has something that looks like change of meaning at one end, and something that looks like change of belief at the other.

Dummett points to the (now happily archaic) expression 'Boche' as a useful paradigm of inappropriate pejoratives: its circumstances of appropriate application are that someone is of German nationality, and its consequences of application include being barbarous or more prone to cruelty than other Europeans.[22] Using the word, applying the concept, commits one to accepting the propriety of the inference from the circumstances to the consequences of application. If, once Socratic exploration of the inferential and doxastic potential of this concept has made this implicit inferential commitment explicit, one does not endorse that inference, then one must relinquish the concept and refuse to apply the term at all. This is most like a change of meaning—but notice that it is occasioned by confronting that meaning with substantive beliefs, perhaps about the Germany of Bach, Goethe, and Kant. Again, I may be committed to the inference from something's tasting sour to its being an acid, and also to the inference from something's being acid to its turning litmus paper red. If I then run across something that tastes sour and turns litmus paper blue, I have a problem. Whether what I do should count as a change

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of belief about acids or a change in what I mean by acid is just not clear. My discovery that not *all* green tractors are made by John Deere and not *all* red ones by International Harvester presumably belongs pretty close to the change-of-belief end of the spectrum. But as we saw in Section I, the vocabulary vocabulary was originally introduced precisely to express our acknowledgment of the practical inadequacy of the theoretical vocabulary of meaning and belief that committed us to answering one way or the other to the question: change of meaning or change of belief?

So Quine's original point should be developed further. Every claim and inference we make at once sustains and transforms the tradition in which the conceptual norms that govern that process are implicit. The vocabulary vocabulary that replaces meaning-belief talk must incorporate and express our realization that *applying* conceptual norms and *transforming* them are two sides of one coin. (This is the point of Hegel's talk about the "restless negativity of the Concept.") The only practical significance of conceptual norms lies in the role they play in governing the use and application of those concepts, in concert with their fellows. That use consists largely in making novel claims and novel inferences. And doing that leads inexorably to changes, not just in the claims we are disposed to make, but thereby in the concepts themselves. To use a vocabulary is to change it. This is what distinguishes vocabularies from other tools.

I mentioned in the previous section that in employing the vocabulary vocabulary as he does to distinguish the public from the private dimension of our discourse, Rorty is placing himself in a tradition whose most influential contemporary practitioner is Habermas. It is a tradition that

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pursues a Kantian project with more contemporary tools—a tradition that seeks at least to explicate (and in its stronger versions, which Rorty does not endorse, even to justify) the fundamental commitments of its *political* theory in terms of an account of the specifically *linguistic* practices that structure our discursive activity. The considerations advanced previously provide the raw materials for a pragmatist in Rorty's sense to develop this project along lines he has not pursued.

For perhaps the fundamental challenge of traditional (Enlightenment) political philosophy is to explain exactly why it is rational (if it is rational) for an individual to surrender any freedom of action by constraining herself by communal norms.[23] What, it is asked, is in it for her? The most natural answers all seem to justify only the conclusion that it would be in her interest for most or all *others* to do so. But our discussion of what is distinctive of vocabularies as tools—their essential self-transcendence as systems of norms that maintain themselves only by the generation of novelty that transforms them, their status, in short as engines that generate and serve the novel, idiosyncratic purposes highlighted by the historicist, as well as the familiar, common ones highlighted by the naturalist—suggests that things will look different if the communal norms in terms of which we address the challenge are modeled on *linguistic* norms. For when the question "What purpose of the individual would be served by trading away some freedom for constraint by communal norms?" is asked, it has usually been assumed that the purpose in question must be one that is *antecedently* envisageable by the individual: security, access to collective means, the sentimental rewards of engagement in a common enterprise, and so on. This is to view

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community, with its normative demands on the behavior of individuals, as a tool subserving purposes that come into view from the standpoint of the naturalist.

Linguistic norms are special, in that being *constrained* by them gives us a distinctive sort of *freedom.* Subjecting oneself to linguistic norms by embracing a vocabulary is undeniably a form of constraint. It involves the surrender of what Isaiah Berlin calls negative freedom—that is, freedom *from* constraint. Not just anything one does counts as making a move in the language game. But since it also enables one to make and understand an indefinite number of novel claims, formulate an indefinite number of novel concepts, frame an indefinite number of novel purposes, and so on, subjecting oneself to constraint by the norms implicit in a vocabulary at the same time confers unparalleled positive freedom—that is, freedom *to* do things one could not only not do before, but could not even *want* to do. As Sellars says: "Clearly human beings could dispense with all discourse, though only at the expense of having nothing to say."[24] The point of speaking the common language of the tribe, binding oneself by the shared norms of a public vocabulary, is not limited to the capacity to pursue shared public goals. It consists largely in the private (in the sense of novel and idiosyncratic) uses to which the vocabulary can be put. Not the least of these is the capacity to generate new specialized vocabularies, the way in which private sprouts branch off of the public stem. Likening the point of constraining oneself by political norms to the point of constraining oneself by linguistic norms[25] opens up new theoretical possibilities for a response to the traditional challenge of political philosophy—possibilities that come into view only from the perspective of the historicist pragmatist. This model promises a

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different way of pursuing what I called in Section III of this chapter "the larger project of reconceptualizing the constellation of freedom and constraint characteristic of vocabularies."

I am inclined to extract more specific political claims from this observation by following the model of Kant and Habermas. Doing that is thinking of our moral value—in terms of which the purpose and limitations of political institutions and activities are to be understood—as deriving from our nature as essentially discursive creatures: vocabulary-mongers. What matters about us *morally,* and so ultimately *politically,* is not ultimately to be understood in terms of goals available from the inevitably reductive perspective of the naturalist: paradigmatically, the avoidance of mammalian pain. It is the capacity each of us discursive creatures has to say things that no one else has ever said, things furthermore that would never have been said if we did not say them. It is our capacity to transform the vocabularies in which we live and move and have our being, and so to create new ways of being (for creatures like us). Our moral worth is our dignity as potential contributors to the conversation. This is what our political institutions have a duty to recognize, secure, and promote. Seen from this point of view, it is a contingent fact about us that physiological agony is such a distraction from sprightly repartee and the production of fruitful novel utterances. But it is a fact, nonetheless. And for that reason pain, and like it various sorts of social and economic deprivation, have a secondhand, but nonetheless genuine, moral significance. And from that moral significance, these phenomena inherit political significance. Pragmatist political theory has a place for the concerns of the naturalist, which appear as minimal necessary conditions of access to the conversation. Intrinsically they have no more moral

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significance than does the oxygen in the atmosphere, without which, as a similar matter of contingent fact, we also cannot carry on a discussion. What is distinctive of the contemporary phase of pragmatism that Rorty has ushered in, however, is its historicist appreciation of the significance of the special social practices whose purpose it is to create new purposes: *linguistic* practices, what Rorty calls 'vocabularies'. There is no reason that the vocabulary in which we conduct our public political debates and determine the purposes toward which our public political institutions are turned should not incorporate the aspiration to nurture and promote its citizens' vocabulary-transforming private exercises of their vocabularies. The vocabulary vocabulary brings into view the possibility that our overarching *public* purpose should be to ensure that a hundred private flowers blossom, and a hundred novel schools of thought contend.

XI. Pragmatist Metaphysics

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I have been urging that the public, tradition-sustaining and the private, tradition-transforming sorts of practices that Rorty discusses are two aspects of all discursive activity, neither intelligible apart from the other. This is to say that we should not think of the distinction between routine speaking of the language of the tribe and creative discursive recreation of the individual—pursuit of old purposes and invention of new purposes—in terms of the distinction between discourse that takes place *within* the boundaries of a vocabulary and discourse that *crosses* those boundaries and enters a new vocabulary. For that way of putting things owes its force to nostalgia for the distinction between deliberating about what we ought to believe, within a set of rules fixed by what we mean, on the one hand, and creating a new set of meanings, on

the other. And that is the very picture the vocabulary vocabulary was introduced to overcome. *Every* use of a vocabulary, every application of a concept in making a claim, *both* is answerable to norms implicit in communal practice—its public dimension, apart from which it cannot mean anything (though it can cause something)—*and* transforms those norms by its novelty—its private dimension, apart from which it does not formulate a belief, plan, or purpose worth expressing.

To propose this sort of friendly amendment to Rorty's use of the vocabulary vocabulary is not to deny that it makes sense to talk about different vocabularies: that there is no difference between two conversations' being conducted in (and so liable to assessment according to the norms implicit in) some *one* vocabulary, and their being conducted in *different* vocabularies. Although to treat something as a vocabulary is to treat it as a fit object to be *translated* (as to adopt the causal vocabulary is to treat it as fit to be in a distinctive way *explained*), this claim does not entail that any two vocabularies must be intertranslatable. Rorty argues forcefully and to my mind convincingly that any two, as we might call them, *fundamental* vocabularies—autonomous language games that one could play though one played no other, vocabularies in which one pursues the common interests that come into view from the perspective of the naturalist—must be at least largely intertranslatable.[26] But *parasitic* vocabularies need not: the vocabulary of quantum mechanics and the vocabulary Eliot puts in play in "The Wasteland" are not in any recognizable sense intertranslatable. Remarks made or conversations conducted in these idioms simply come from different discourses. The purposes they subserve, the norms they

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answer to, are internal to those vocabularies; they are of the sort that come into view only from the perspective of the historicist. It makes perfect sense to call such vocabularies 'incommensurable', if by that we mean just this: they are not intertranslatable and not evaluable as alternative means to a common end, tools adapted to some one purpose specifiable from outside them both.

It does *not* follow, however, that they are incommensurable in the sense that "there is no way to bring them together at the level of theory," as Rorty claims in one of the passages quoted previously in Section X. That is, it does not follow that they cannot be articulated in some one metavocabulary. I have been arguing that public and private vocabularies are not incommensurable in this sense. To pick two examples not entirely at random: either the causal vocabulary or the vocabulary vocabulary can be used to encompass both sorts of vocabulary. Though one surely does not learn *everything* about them by doing so, one can sensibly discuss the social and economic conditions that causally occasioned and conditioned, say, Wordsworth's poetry or Dalton's atomic theory, and the effects those new vocabularies then had on other things. And we need not see two vocabularies as serving the *same* purposes in order to see them as serving some purposes in the way distinctive of vocabularies. Indeed, one of the cardinal virtues of Rorty's vocabulary vocabulary is precisely that it lets us talk about vocabularies—including both the differences and the intimate relations between their public and their private aspects—in just such a general way.

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This claim raises the issue of just what status what I have called the 'vocabulary vocabulary' has for Rorty. The characterization I have offered of the role it is intended to play—as an overarching metavocabulary—may well be one he is inclined to resist. For that way of putting things seems to place this idiom in the context of a sort of metaphysical project that Rorty explicitly and strenuously rejects as a matter of deep methodological and metaphilosophical principle. I would like to close by attempting to resolve this contradiction by the traditional irenic scholastic method of making a distinction.

Systematic metaphysics is a peculiar literary genre, to be sure. It may be thought of as distinguished by its imperialistic, even totalitarian discursive ambition. For the task it sets itself is to craft by artifice a vocabulary in which everything can be said. This enterprise can be interpreted in two ways: modestly or maniacally. On the maniacal reading, the project is to limn the boundaries of the sayable. What cannot be formulated in its preferred vocabulary is to be rejected as nonsensical. Thought of this way, metaphysics has two characteristics that are seen as objectionable from the point of view of the more modest reading. First, it aims at sculpting a vocabulary adequate to what can be said in every possible vocabulary. Second, it arrogates to itself a distinctive sort of privilege: the authority to determine (on the basis of translatability into its favored terms) what is genuinely sayable, and hence thinkable, and what would be sham-saying and the mere appearance of thought.

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Now it is the first lesson of historicist pragmatism that the notion of "all possible vocabularies" is one to which we can attach no definite meaning. Every new vocabulary brings

with it new purposes for vocabularies to serve. These purposes are not in general so much as formulable in the antecedently available vocabularies. They are the paradigm of something that Rorty claims (I suggested at the outset, as a lesson drawn from his eliminative materialism) we should not think of as part of the furniture of the world patiently awaiting our discovery of them, but as genuinely *created* by our new ways of speaking. As such, there is no way to throw our semantic net over them *in advance* of developing the languages in which they can be expressed. Further, to be a pragmatist about norms is to insist that every claim to authority or privilege be grounded in concrete practices of articulating and acknowledging that authority or privilege—that no normative status at all is conferred simply by *things,* not even by the whole universe, apart from their uptake into and role in some determinate vocabulary. That principle, rooted in Sellars's critique of the ideology of givenness, expands for Rorty into a view of metaphysics (in the maniacal sense) as the pursuit of theology by other means. He has relentlessly pointed out how pervasive are metaphysical claims that some vocabulary possesses a special sort of cognitive authority stemming from ontology alone.

On the modest reading of metaphysics, by contrast, the task of this genre of creative nonfiction writing is still understood as the engineering of a vocabulary in which everything can be said. But, first of all, the quantifier is understood differently. The modest metaphysician aims only to codify the admittedly contingent constellation of vocabularies with which her time (and those that led up to it) happens to present her—to capture her time in thought. She sees her task as that of constructing a vocabulary that will be useful for the purposes of the contemporary

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intellectual: the one who by definition is concerned with seeing the culture whole, trying to make the vocabularies it now seems useful to employ to get various sorts of practical grips on things hang together. As Rorty has pointed out in another connection, one should distinguish the enterprise of such intellectuals from the enterprise of various sorts of researchers, who work within definite disciplinary matrices, pushing back the frontiers of their particular portion of the culture, without in general needing to be concerned with how their area relates to the rest. The special research interest of the metaphysician, I am suggesting, is to build vocabularies useful for the purposes of intellectuals. The only authority such vocabularies can claim is derived from the success of the various vocabularies they address, and the illumination it can provide concerning them. Insofar as there are vocabularies that are practically successful but not codifiable in a particular metaphysical vocabulary, it has failed. And here the measure of success is not only achievement of the sort of goals to which the naturalist draws our attention, but also of those to which the historicist does. But the sortings of vocabularies into those that fit smoothly into the regimented form and those that fit less well can still be valuable. In the past such reorganizations have taught us a lot, even in cases where the metaphysical vocabulary generating those sortings patently fails to fulfill its imperialist ambitions. Once the metaphysician renounces the adoption of an exclusionary or dismissive attitude toward nonconforming vocabularies, the project of metaphysics modestly understood represents one potentially useful discursive tool among others for getting a grip on our multifarious culture. This is not an enterprise that the enlightened pragmatist ought to resist. Indeed, I have been claiming that that is precisely the enterprise on

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which the most prominent and accomplished such pragmatist has in fact been successfully embarked for the past three decades.[27]

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Notes

[1] This terminology has since been kidnapped (shades of Peirce's complaints about James) and pressed into service as the label for a distinct position it inspired—one that addresses propositional attitudes such as beliefs and desires, rather than the occurrent mental events that were Rorty's target. Although the later pretender to the title is also an interesting philosophical position, and although both trace their ancestries in significant ways to Sellars, the confusion that inevitably results from the adoption of this terminology is a shame. One of its effects, I think, has been to distract attention from the most interesting issues about the relations between vocabularies and what they are about that Rorty's version raises. For those issues are raised precisely by the radical suggestion that materialism could *become* true upon our changing our vocabulary in determinate ways. Those issues do not arise for the successor notion of eliminative materialism about beliefs and desires. For if that view is correct, materialism was *always* true—what a change in vocabulary gets us is *only* a change from a worse to a better vocabulary, given how things always already were.

[2] Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979, hereafter cited as *PMN*.

[3] In *Consequences of Pragmatism,* pp.º139–159.**[AuQ: Cite in full?]**

[4] This is a theme that Putnam has been much concerned to develop, and a deep point of affinity between these two thinkers—though it would take us too far afield to pursue the point here.

[5] *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p.º21, hereafter *CIS*. See also "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.º126–150. Davidson (I think injudiciously) also says things like this in his Dewey Lectures on truth.

[6] New York: Basic Books, 1988.

[7] I explain in detail how I think this story goes in *Making It Explicit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), hereafter *MIE.*

[8] One of the central tasks McDowell sets himself in the opening chapters of his pathbreaking book *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996) is to take issue with this claim in a far more radical way than I sketch here. McDowell, like Sellars, is an *internalist* about justification: to *be* justified one must be *able* to justify, to offer reasons [AuQ: to?]oneself for one's beliefs. The view I am sketching attempts to split the difference between this sort of internalism and the sort of justificatory externalism of which epistemological reliabilism is a paradigm. He and I explore some of these issues (as well as what is involved in not decoupling truth and justification) in his "Knowledge and the Internal" and my "Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons," both in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 40, no. 4 (1995). McDowell and I are both concerned, as Rorty is, to avoid the Myth of the Given, and to abide by the larger lessons Sellars's discussion of it teaches.

[9] It does *not* follow from this claim that 'true' just means 'whatever I believe.' It evidently does not mean that, or I could not wonder about whether all my beliefs are true. It takes a bit of work to develop the view forwarded in the text so as to avoid commitment to such an unwelcome consequence. I show how this can be done in *MIE,* especially chapters 5 and 8. These

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discussions culminate in the *objectivity proofs* (pp.º601–607), which show that the view does not identify the facts with anyone's commitments or dispositions to apply vocabulary—not with mine, not with all of ours, not with those of any ideal community.

[10] If we were to try to be even a little more careful about pinning this general distinction on Kant, we would have to acknowledge that causation is itself a thoroughly normative (rule-governed) affair for Kant—indeed, explaining the significance of this fact is an absolutely central task of the first *Critique*. But the distinction between things that act only according to rules and things that act according to conceptions or representations of laws, the realm of nature, and the realm of freedom, will do pretty well. Rorty sometimes (e.g., in "The World Well Lost") distinguishes these two by saying that what it is for us in practice to *treat* something as belonging to the first realm, is to see its antics as fit to be *explained* (which is the cash-value of adopting the causal vocabulary), while to treat something as belonging to the second realm is to see its antics as fit to be *translated* (which is the cash value of adopting the vocabulary vocabulary).

[11] Recall Rorty's observation in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp.º166–167, that near the end of the nineteenth-century philosophy was left with two approaches, historicism and naturalism, neither of which gave philosophical understanding any special dispensation. Russell and Husserl, each in his own way, responded to this situation by coming up with something for philosophy to be apodeictic about in the Kantian manner. It has taken us the better part of a century to see through their fascinating fantasies and work our way back to historicism and naturalism.

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[12] Though that is not to say that causal vocabularies are useless in this case, since we can learn a lot about the vocabularies of these poets by studying the social and political influences to which they were subject, the effects of their early familial experiences, and so on.

[13] See, for instance, the discussion that culminates at *CIS,* p.º21.

[14] Of course, to say this is not to say that there is no point in coming up with some more limited theoretical notion of representation of things that applies to some vocabularies and not others, specifying a more specific purpose to which some but not all can be turned. But such a notion is not Rorty's target, for it does not aspire to being a metavocabulary—a vocabulary for talking about all vocabularies, the essence of what being a vocabulary is.

[15] Of course, the development of nonlinguistic tools can also make new purposes possible, though it is seldom possible to separate this phenomenon firmly from the discursive context in which it takes place.

[16] *CIS,* pp.º12–13.

[17] Notice that this point is independent of, and less radical than, the lesson I suggested at the outset Rorty learned from his treatment of the mind in terms of incorrigibility. That case is different from the engendering of new (and obsolescing of old) *purposes,* because it purports to show how *representeds* can be brought into and out of existence by changes in vocabulary. It would accordingly be an even more extreme variety of alteration that could be wrought by changes in vocabulary. On Rorty's view, for us to have minds just is for us to use vocabulary that incorporates a certain structure of authority.

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[18] I'm waving my hands here at the story Gombrich tells in his magisterial *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Presentation* (London: Phaidon, 1968).

[19] "Private Irony and Liberal Hope," in *CIS,* pp.º73–95.

[20] It should be clear throughout the discussion that Rorty's talk of 'private' uses of vocabulary does not fall afoul of the considerations advanced in the Wittgenstein's arguments against the intelligibility of private languages. Rorty's private vocabularies are private only relatively and de facto, not absolutely, or de jure.

[21] *CIS,* pp. xiv–xv.

[22] *Frege: Philosophy of Language,* 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.º454. See also the related discussion in chapter 2 of *MIE.*

[23] Of course the terms of this question are infinitely contentious. They remain so even when it is not taken to presuppose that this is an issue anyone ever actually faces, but merely a hypothetical whose answer can illuminate the normative status of political institutions. It is not obvious that the validity of political claims depends on their being an answer to any question analogous to this one. It is not clear why it should be norms of *rationality* that are taken to undergird political norms (though that is the thought of those who adopt the strong version of the Kantian tradition I am discussing). Nor, even supposing that, does it go without saying that the rational norms in question should be assimilated to the model of *instrumental* or means-end reasoning (though that is an orienting commitment of the pragmatist tradition that Rorty shares with Dewey). Again, the idea that the default position is one in which individuals possess maximal freedom of action,

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their surrendering, relinquishing, or renouncing of which deserves to be classified either as recompensed or unrecompensed presupposes a very specific Enlightenment picture of the human situation—one that we ought to be chary of root and branch. All these challenges I think are well taken. Nonetheless, it is instructive to see how the considerations assembled in the foregoing permit a novel response to the question of the nature of the authority of political norms even in the broad classical form in which not only Hobbes but Kant can be seen to be addressing it.

[24] "A Semantical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem," in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds,* ed. Jeffrey Sicha (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1980), p.º152.

[25] We need not think it is so much as coherent to conceive of this as a choice anyone ever actually confronts—no nonlinguistic creature would be in a position to weigh the various considerations. But—as was pointed out previously in discussing the perspective of the historicist—that does not mean that the costs and benefits of such a 'decision' cannot sensibly be assessed *retrospectively,* from the point of view of someone who can frame the purposes that only become available along one path.

[26] See "The World Well Lost," in *Consequences of Pragmatism,* pp.º3–18.

[27] I discuss various versions of metaphysics further in the afterword to *Between Saying and Doing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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