

CORRESPONDENCE THEORY OF TRUTH: THE ROOT
CAUSE OF FUNDAMENTALISM
IN AMERICA

by

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Abstract

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Christian fundamentalism in America is alive and well and serves as an impediment to the progress of a democratic society because of its tendency to seek universal subordination of all truth to “Biblical truth”. In this paper I argue the source of strength for the resilience of this religious movement comes from their implicit adherence to the correspondence theory of truth as they apply it to their interpretation of the Bible. Furthermore, I will argue Richard Rorty’s attack on the correspondence theory of truth provides a challenge to fundamentalism and reveals an alternative to fundamentalists who might join him in a careful study of how language works.

By developing a healthy skepticism about the universal application of the correspondence theory of truth, fundamentalists can bracket off their religious convictions and joining their fellow citizens in democratic progress without the unhelpful culture war of religion versus modernism.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Religion and Humanities

A philosophy professor was holding a lecture one morning on the nature of objects. This was a metaphysics course and the discussion centered on the professor's blue necktie. The professor asked the class "what makes this tie blue?" This was not intended as a trick question. "Pigment" one student stated. "Refracted light on our rods and cones?" another proposed. Dissatisfied with the answers given thus far, the professor waited patiently to see if more suggestions were offered from the class. Finally a student in the back raised his hand and said "God makes your tie blue. God makes everything happen, so God must be the reason that your tie is blue."

The professor was a kind man and a patient teacher. He said to the student "That is a very common belief. But unfortunately you can't have GOD in your ontology." This surprised the student, and he asked "Why?" The professor replied, "You can't have GOD in your ontology because he does too much work."

Good knowledge is earned through effort; there are rarely shortcuts of any value. We come to our studies with our own biases and our desires and curiosity, and what we end up with at the end is not always the same as what we expected (or even wanted). It is the same for me, it was the same for Richard Rorty, and it is likely the same for you.

My thesis paper will draw on analytic and pragmatist philosophy of the 20th century. Most of my study has been around philosophy of language, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and epistemology. Ultimately it has been a course of study exploring what exactly we can claim to know and why. What is most interesting to me from a Humanities perspective however, is what we plan on doing with our knowledge once we have it.

Beliefs guide behavior. My aim is to address religion in this paper. Not the content of religious beliefs, rather the methodology employed to attain and sustain those beliefs. Far from being dismissive of religious groups as some are, I find great reason to pay attention to them, specifically religious fundamentalism. The 9/11 attacks certainly showed us what contemporary fundamentalists can do when they organize behind a common goal of destruction. But I do not think fundamentalists are simply “crazy” (though some may be). I think many are rationally misguided. I will spend much of this paper in and around the arguments of Richard Rorty. His plain spoken rejection of the representationalist model of the “mind as a mirror” in philosophy of language and his dismissal of the correspondence theory of truth in epistemology can serve as real world tactics to step away from flawed linguistic assumptions used by fundamentalist faith communities.

I will focus on contemporary North American Christian fundamentalists in this paper. One view of religion is to see it as the enterprise of locking down the future by locking down the past. I will explain how modern fundamentalists gain what they believe to be their legitimacy directly from the texts they revere as holy. Specifically they prove the legitimacy of their origin story by a strict application of the correspondence theory of truth to the text. It is the primacy of their origin story that is critical to fundamentalists. They believe that this is the foundation they can build their claims upon. I will argue that by challenging the correspondence theory of truth as Rorty does in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that fundamentalists are left with a decision to make: continue to hold to a broken linguistic model as the foundation of their beliefs, or abandon the effort spent defending origins and choose to go and create the kind of world their tradition instructs them to.

I hope at the end of this paper to have argued successfully that ironically the approach of an atheist philosopher such as Richard Rorty can free these religious communities up to more effectively participate in democracy (and with integrity) be what they believe their god wants them to be!

Chapter 2

Rorty

Rorty Introduction

I have spent 40 years looking for a coherent and convincing way of formulating my worries about what, if anything, philosophy is good for.¹

Reading Rorty is at times like listening to a disappointed parishioner. He is someone who expected one thing from the philosophical project he engaged in, but received something else entirely. But rather than ending his writing career as a cynical sourpuss, Rorty espouses hope. Hope for something greater than we currently have. It may seem odd to engage Rorty in a paper that is intended to target the religious. But late in life Rorty himself engaged religion. A lifelong atheist himself (later he called himself anti-clerical), he didn't become religious in these latter writings; however he recognized religion as a ubiquitous conversation in every culture and found it difficult not to engage at some point. With so many resources piped into religion it should not go ignored or dismissed when engaging the world from a humanities perspective.

So my engagement of Rorty and the religious is intentional. I understand the provocative nature of his critique of philosophy, and I certainly understand why the average observant religious person would find great objection in his ideas being entertained seriously. But this is just where I find Rorty to be so interesting. He is a bit of a "man without a country". Too unorthodox for the philosophical academy and too Philistine for the church. Here are two passages that show Rorty's views of religion:

Even unbelievers like myself can agree that without the churches influence, without all those sermons being taught from the biblical texts

¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 11.

² Richard Rorty, "Buds that Never Fully Opened," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis in*

of Luke- we would have had neither the democratic revolutions of the 18th century, nor the rise of the socialist ideals of the 19th century.²

(on calling himself anti-clerical as opposed to atheist):

Anticlericalism is a political point of view, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. It is a view that ecclesiastical institutions, despite all the good they do- despite all the comfort they provide to those in need or despair- are dangerous to the health of democratic societies... On this view religion is only unobjectionable as long as it is privatized- as long as ecclesiastical institutions do not attempt to rally the faithful behind political proposals and as long as believers and unbelievers agree to follow a policy of live and let live.³

To the faithful religious community the first passage gets a yawn and the second one gets a howl of disapproval. In chapter four I will explore the implications of this privatized religion that Rorty suggests. It is difficult to imagine the success of the Worker's Movement, Women's Suffrage, the Civil Rights movement or even the end of slavery without the active involvement of the Christian Church in the United States, but those movements were a long time ago. What is this church doing today? This will be a conversation for chapter two, but first I will explore the philosophy of Richard Rorty himself, its potential implications for culture and if it might be used as a tool for social impact at all.

Rorty is famous for his rejection of the representationalist metaphor in epistemology where the mind is viewed like a mirror that accurately (or inaccurately) corresponds to reality. This "mirror" is an example of the "ocular metaphor" that according to Rorty leads philosophers to believe they are engaging a body of knowledge (reality) and developing theories of knowledge that can be debated to get a clearer picture of reality. Basically put: Rorty thinks a theory of knowledge is an extra step. It's

² Richard Rorty, "Buds that Never Fully Opened," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke up the Church*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 350.

³ Richard Rorty, "Anticlericalism and Atheism," in *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia, 2005), 33.

unnecessary. He replaced this approach with a pragmatic approach where we recognize the contingency of our vocabularies and view the philosophical vocabulary as one more scheme we use to get what we ultimately want. In his view the thing we ultimately want is happiness.

We are fortunate that Rorty wrote autobiographically about his own origin story in a collection of essays titled *Philosophy and Social Hope*. With the benefit of hindsight over a lifetime of writing Rorty gives context to his career as a pursuit of what (if anything) philosophy is good for. Consider these two paragraphs:

I figured that if I became a philosopher I might get to the top of Plato's 'divided line'- the place 'beyond hypothesis' where the full sunshine of Truth irradiates the purified soul of the wise and good: an Elysian field dotted with immaterial orchids. It seemed obvious to me that getting to such a place was what everybody with any brains really wanted. It also seemed clear that Platonism had all the advantages of religion without requiring any of the humility which Christianity demanded, and of which I was apparently incapable. For all these reasons I wanted very much to be some kind of Platonist and from 15-20 I did my best, but it didn't pan out.⁴

Platonism in the sense in which I use it does not denote the (very complex, shifting, dubiously consistent) thoughts of the genius who wrote the Dialogues. Instead it refers to a set of philosophical distinctions (appearance- reality, matter-mind, made-found, sensible-intellectual, etc.): what Dewey called 'a brood and nest of dualisms'. These dualisms dominate the history of Western philosophy and can be traced back to one or another of Plato's writings. Dewey thought, as I do, that the vocabulary that centers around these traditional distinctions, has become an obstacle to our social hope.⁵

Rorty's project can be described as living in the balance between these two paragraphs. In his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and Wild Orchids", he tells the story of coming to philosophy with a purpose, but finding that purpose was unable to be fulfilled: "I have tried to say something about how I got into my present position- how I got into philosophy and then found myself unable to use philosophy for the purpose I had in

⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 9.

⁵ Rorty, xii.

mind.”⁶ This tension between Platonic ideals and our present reality drives Rorty’s iconoclastic style. But drives it towards what? What is his project?

Rorty was raised the only child of two caring, socialist, ‘Trotskyite’ parents in New York and New Jersey in the 1930 & 40s. It was a different kind of upbringing. It was the kind of place where in place of the family Bible sat the books *The Case for Leon Trotsky* and *Not Guilty*. It was the kind of house where Soviet defectors like John Frank hid out from the GPU. His parents were activists and when Rorty was 12 he worked as an unpaid office boy for the Worker’s Defense League in New York City. While his peers were probably reading stats on baseball cards, or comic books, Rorty was reading pro-Union publications telling stories about what factory owners were doing to union organizers, plantation owners to sharecroppers and what the White Locomotive Engineers Union was doing to the black firemen (whose jobs white men wanted because the diesel engine was replacing coal-fired steam engines).

So, at 12, I knew that the point of being human was to spend one’s life fighting social injustice.⁷

And even though he was the kind of boy who would write letters to the child Dalai Lama to show his support, he was also a bright and curious young boy who loved nature and spent his summers learning to love the orchids of rural New Jersey.

I was not quite sure why those orchids were so important, but I was convinced that they were. I was sure that our noble pure chaste North American wild orchids were morally superior to the showy, hybridized tropical orchids displayed in florists’ shops. I was also convinced there was a deep significance to the fact that they are the latest and most complex plants to have been developed in the course of evolution.⁸

The tension between these two passions, the desire for public social justice through organized labor and the personal satisfaction that comes through a private hobby like

⁶ Rorty, 5.

⁷ Rorty, 6.

⁸ Rorty, 7.

learning the orchids in the forest foreshadows what ultimately becomes Rorty's public/private dichotomy. It is in this crucible that Rorty's project is formed. And at 15 years old he went off to the University of Chicago to begin his formal study of analytic philosophy to find a way to 'hold justice and reality in a single vision'.

Philosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art or religion. It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind... It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge and it finds the foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the "mental process" or the "activity of representation" which make knowledge possible. To know is to represent accurately what is outside of the mind; so to understand the nature and possibility of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations. Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into areas which will represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it well at all (despite their pretense of doing so).⁹

Few passages summarize Rorty's assessment of philosophy better than this one.

And I should state from the outset that Rorty's desire is nothing less than to break your confidence that philosophy can do what the above paragraph describes. He thinks philosophy as a discipline has become unfruitful and problematic. His argument is that we are deceived into believing we are getting at the essence of truth and drawing a clear picture of the knowing subject apprehending clearly marked truths in the world. Instead he thinks we are using language as a tool to better or worse get what we want in life and all this talk of getting at the genuine truth of the matter is a matter of "paying compliments" to sentences that are successful at getting us what we want.

Why is this his aim? Many disagree with Rorty's project and call him dangerous, a nihilist and an antirealist. He is none of those things. Rorty is a pragmatist and spent the last 30 years of his life articulating a position that attempts to free us from the task of

⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 3.

trying to find the genuine truth beneath it all, and create the meaning we want in life. Gaining anything from a study of Rorty requires the principle of charity. Before we head into a survey of Rorty I think its important to understand a little bit of what Rorty is not doing. He is not really trying to say, "Poetry and science are the same thing", as he is often accused. And he is not saying that there is no truth and no meaning, as others want to puppet him as saying. He is more like Mark Twain and Jonathan Swift than his analytic credentials give him credit for. He is a human, and a citizen. And the older he got, the more unapologetic he became.

Rorty has a flair for language and often uses the word insouciance. I think this is apt. It doesn't mean careless or reckless, it means carefree. Like he is free from the burden of someone else's project. He says things like "we are done worshipping dead metaphors" or " we have used this project as a ladder and now we are free to kick the ladder a way". He has moved on. Often people trained in the hard-nosed analytic scene read Rorty and say, "Wait a minute, this isn't serious philosophy!" He agrees with them, he just doesn't think they are doing serious philosophy either (despite their pretense at doing so).

If you come at him with a stick hoping to dash him when he steps out of school, you will find yourself striking an innocent tour guide. He is not interested in telling you what you really are (or aren't), but if you are interested he will show a map he finds helpful to get where he wants to go (and maybe you can use this map to go somewhere too). I want to be clear: if one has decided already they have nothing to learn from a divergent opinion, or a re-description of how we might endeavor as a community to get things done, this paper will do little to persuade. But if you are open to a new way you might conceive of collaborating, you might find Rorty to be a refreshing new tour guide.

While serving as the president of the American Philosophical Association in 1979 Rorty released *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* as his treatise against the tradition he grew up with. Greatly criticized by professionals, it is an “in-house critique” of the methods used to nail down truth. His approach to philosophy is historicist. He thinks we come to find ourselves in our current time and place accidentally. We are a product of time and chance rather than a product of rational inevitability, and the way things are might very well have been another way. His is a non-teleological approach and he has no sacred cows that are off limits, save for his main guiding principle that “cruelty is the worst thing we can do.”¹⁰

Rorty's History of Philosophy

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature was an important book. It marked a turning point in Rorty's career where he looked back and gave a critical reflection of the analytic tradition he came from and sought to turn it on its head. The scope of his project was bold and aggressive. His aim was no less than to question the entire premise of Western philosophy as a program that adjudicates truth claims. Just as the patient needs to relive his past to answer his questions, so philosophy needs to relive its past in order to answer its questions.¹¹

His introductory chapter clearly outlines what his intentions are. Rorty wants to show that traditional philosophical problems are unhelpful in getting “real work” done, and optional. This is to say that Rorty thinks much of the debate is unfruitful and tends to lead to stalemate arguments that depend on representational assumptions (the mind can only come to know reality by representing it correctly).

¹⁰ Richard Rorty, *Contingency Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), XV.

¹¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 33.

Rorty's intro lays out a historical sequence beginning with Plato. Plato describes that the differences to the degree of certainty we have of things corresponds to the things themselves, from here Rorty moves to Descartes methodological skepticism and his epistemic conception of the mind that knows itself better than it knows anything else. This preferential treatment of the mind and the knowing subject is then carried into Locke. Locke made Descartes's "mind" into a distinct subject matter, "the science of man", (moral philosophy as opposed to natural philosophy). Locke's move was to adopt Newton's view of particle mechanics for "inner space" to the mind and to see, what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with. But before epistemology can become fully realized, it must become non-empirical. Kant took Locke's ideas about Newton and brought "outer space" inside.

Kant put philosophy "on the secure path of a science" by putting outer space inside inner space (the space of the constituting activity of the transcendental ego) and then claiming Cartesian certainty about the inner for the laws of what had previously been thought to be outer. He thus reconciled the Cartesian claim that we can have certainty about our ideas with the fact that we already had certainty – a priori knowledge- about what seemed not to be ideas... Once Kant replaced the "physiology of the human understanding" of the celebrated Mr. Locke with (in Strawson's words) "the mythical subject of transcendental psychology," "epistemology" as a discipline came of age.¹²

The modern era of philosophy began with Descartes and Hobbes. Prior to them philosophy was not seen as a discipline distinct from science. Throughout the Enlightenment, philosophy served as a winnowing rod separating the domain of religion

¹² Rorty, 139.

from the domain of science. “They were fighting (albeit discreetly) to make the intellectual world safe for Copernicus and Galileo.”¹³

Once the spell of religion over all knowledge was broken, and science was free to be explored apart from the church, philosophy found itself looking for a new role as a distinct discipline. Since metaphysics (the study of how the heavens and earth are stitched together) was being replaced by physics and the other sciences had their own path, without epistemology it is difficult to see how philosophy becomes a distinct discipline along side mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. But philosophy secured its new role by developing a “theory of knowledge”. This was a new field of study distinct from the sciences because it was their foundation.

It is this speculation of knowledge as a field about which we ought to have a theory that Rorty wants to dismiss as optional. Kant’s move enabled philosophy professors to see themselves as presiding over a “tribunal of pure reason” determining whether experts in other subject matters were staying within the “legal bounds” and structures of possibility with the rules laid out by epistemology.

To Rorty, the movement of the philosophical tradition into the judge’s seat is actually an accident of history. It was a result of thinkers in their day responding to losing intellectual real estate to the growth of empiricism. The steps taken to allow philosophy to ascend as the “queen of the sciences” have to do with this understanding of the ‘mind’ and its ‘mirror’. The ‘mind’ is the object of study for philosophers, because of its intimate involvement with how we adjudicate knowledge claims. The tradition claims to do so based on its “special understanding” of knowledge and the mind.

This special understanding has two principal parts. Firstly, what knowledge is, its essence: knowledge is reality truly represented. Secondly it comes as comprehension of

¹³ Rorty, 131.

the proper criteria for determining accurate representation. “The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is one of the mind as a great mirror containing various representations- some accurate, some not, and capable of being studied by non-empirical means.”¹⁴

In this way we can view traditional philosophy as an attempt to escape history, by escaping empiricism altogether. It’s an effort to stakeout a presuppositionless vantage points where un-mediated knowledge can be gained. Rorty has a deep suspicion about philosophical techniques that philosophers use to get a leg-up on other intellectual disciplines. To Rorty these maneuvers seem more like professional strategy than substance.

By following Rorty’s historical outline we find Rorty at his main concern: “knowledge which presents a problem and about which we ought to have a theory, is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations.”¹⁵ And the “problem” of epistemology is centered on our suspicion about whether our representations were accurate. But to Rorty this is a pseudo problem. He writes:

The notion that there can be such a thing as “foundations of knowledge” or a “theory of representation” depends on the assumption that there is some a priori constraint. But if we have a Deweyan conception of knowledge, as what we are justified in believing, then we will not imagine that there are enduring constraints on what can count as knowledge since we will see justification as a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between the knowing subject and reality. If we have a Wittgensteinian notion of language as a tool rather than a mirror we will not look for necessary conditions of the possibility of linguistic representation.¹⁶

¹⁴ Rorty, 12.

¹⁵ Rorty, 136.

¹⁶ Rorty, 9.

This Deweyan notion of justification as social phenomenon and the Wittgensteinian view of language as a tool is key to understanding Rorty's stance against traditional epistemology. In an earlier essay Rorty writes:

Ever since philosophy became a self-conscious and professionalized discipline, around the time of Kant, philosophers have enjoyed explaining how different their subject is from merely "first-intentional" matters of science, art and religion. Philosophers are forever claiming to have discovered methods which are presuppositionless, or perfectly rigorous, or transcendental, or at any rate purer than those of non-philosophers. (Or, indeed, of any philosophers save themselves, their friends and their disciples.) Philosophers who betray this gnostic ideal (Kierkegaard and Dewey, for example) are often discovered not to have been "real philosophers".¹⁷

This "real philosophers" comment illustrates the spell of "the priestly function of philosophy" that analytic philosophy had fallen under. Wittgenstein thought in the beginning that he had made philosophy so pure that its problems merely needed to be stated to be dissolved of their complications. Mere fact can be said, but philosophy is a function of showing. His propositions in the *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus* were an exercise in showing the forms of all possible facts. Once shown, he reasoned, all philosophical disputes could be dissolved and in this way he thought philosophy had been brought to its end! But Wittgenstein reversed his view and came to deride his former position in *Philosophical Investigations* and especially his pretense to purity of philosophy. But while he distanced from his views in the *Tractatus*, he still wished to show what could not be said: "the source of philosophy itself".

In the famous phrase from the *Tractatus* "that we cannot speak of we must pass over in silence"¹⁸, we have come to see what Wittgenstein believed to be the limits of language and thus the end of discursive inquiry. In *Philosophical Investigations*

¹⁷ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982), 19.

¹⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 2001), 89.

Wittgenstein relents that one can retain as much of a discursive discipline as you wish to “but do you really want to?”

Supplanting the hermetic but still indicative sentences of the *Tractatus* by the rhetorical questions of the *Investigations* was a move away from precision, a move away from argument, away from the Kantian attempt to “place philosophy on a secure path of science” by abjuring the empirical... but in a way one can see both Kant and Wittgenstein as yearning for that purity of heart which replaces the need to explain, justify and expound. This purity is only possible for the twice-born-- for those who once abandoned themselves to the satisfaction of this need, but who are now redeemed.¹⁹

Rorty is describing a new schism in 20th century thought: systematic linguistic philosophy on the one hand, and Wittgensteinian philosophy on the other. For the first sort of philosopher, the structure of language, our ability to master language and manipulate how it connects with the world addresses problems which are traditionally “philosophical” and which lend themselves to discursive argument and thus potentially to precise solutions to linguistic “problems”. Taking their inspiration from early Wittgenstein, these thinkers see philosophy as bound to logic and as a “quasi-scientific” discipline, a discipline that not only solves linguistic conundrums, but at the same time avoids the “pseudo-problematic” created by the Descartes division of subject and object, mind and matter. These philosophers view Wittgenstein as properly critical of the Cartesian tradition, but think he has little to say to philosophy of language- “a subject they see as co-extensive with metaphysics and possibly with life itself”.

Philosophers who view themselves as sympathetic to later Wittgenstein tend to see the destruction of the Cartesian problematic as not simply the de-bunking of a few textbooks in the western canon, but rather as a deep shift in thinking that will be “thought through over generations, as deeply and fully as men thought out the destruction of the

¹⁹ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982), 20.

Christian frame of reference common to Augustine and Newman.” Rorty believes the split which occurred during the Enlightenment between writers who dismissed religion and went on to “serious matters” and those who took religious skepticism seriously are analogous to current philosophers reacting to Wittgenstein’s skepticism about the post-Renaissance philosophical tradition.

But the question at hand is whether there is anyway a method suitable to apply to language to get at the “real” nature of our existence. If with Dewey “one sees vocabularies as instruments for coping with things rather than representations of their intrinsic natures and if we cease to think of their being an intrinsic connection, (nor an intrinsic lack of connection) between “explanation” and “understanding”, One will not think there are two “methods”- one for explaining somebody’s behavior and another for understanding his nature.”²⁰

When reading Rorty one is struck by two distinctive approaches. The first is his prodigious ability to utilize (some might say co-opt) the writings of other philosophers for his purposes. Nietzsche, Putnam, Quine, Kuhn, Davidson, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Wittgenstein seem to effortlessly join in his cause. He does so with such flair that one might think they are all friends. Since Rorty will seemingly adopt anyone’s ideas that he thinks will help him make his point he is seen by some as undisciplined. But Rorty is not so interested in arguing against the tradition that he rejects as he is encouraging his audience to set aside these “pseudo problems” as he sees them.

They (Wittgenstein, Dewey, Heidegger) set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines. I say “set aside” rather than “argue against” because their argument toward the traditional problematic is like the attitude of seventeenth century philosophers against the scholastic problematic. They do not devote themselves to finding bad arguments or false presuppositions (though they occasionally do that too). Rather they glimpse the possibility of a form of intellectual life in which the vocabulary

²⁰ Rorty, 198.

of philosophical reflection inherited from the seventeenth century seems as pointless as the vocabulary of the thirteenth century would seem to the Enlightenment.²¹

To engage the analytic tradition on its own terms would be to risk 'entrapment' and the reinforcement of both the methodological assumptions and problems of the tradition he is trying to move away from. And this has brought on accusations of self-refutation, circularity or incoherence. His critics argue that he uses the same tools he seeks to diminish, making him some sort of academic hypocrite. (We will address these below.)

A fair reading of Rorty will show that he is certainly argumentative, and he certainly uses language to make his points, but Rorty is not trying to refine or improve the project he inherited, he is suggesting we participate in a different activity altogether. Not a project of discovery, but a project of self-creation. As I mentioned Quine is one of Rorty's "co-opted" comrades. In *The Two Dogmas of Empiricism*, Quine writes:

One [dogma] is a belief in a fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic, or grounded in meanings independent of matters of fact, and truths which are synthetic, or grounded in fact. The other dogma is reductionism: the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to experience.²²

In this paper Quine claims that the impenetrable boundary between truths that are true by definition (analytic) and truth that is true by experience (the synthetic) is false. In Quine's treatment of the first dogma there is no permanent boundary between truths that are analytic and truths that "come what may", and as for the second dogma he claims that language and synthetic truths are unavoidably holistic: "our statements about the external

²¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 6.

²² W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 20.

world face the tribunal of experience not individually, but as a corporate body.”²³

Additionally it is Quine’s naturalistic holism that Rorty adopts. In this scheme truth is not set in place permanently opposed to things in reality that they must correspond to. “Thus for Quine, a necessary truth is just a statement that nobody has given us any interesting alternative which would lead us to question it.”²⁴ It is this epistemic authority with reference to what society lets us say about a subject that Rorty calls “epistemic behaviorism”, an attitude he attributes to both Dewey and Wittgenstein.

But doesn’t this holism require some sort of ontological underpinning? Rorty extends this naturalistic holism as a way to further explain how truth is still socially grounded.

Imagine a philosopher believes something philosophically significant, say Q. They believe Q because it is true (and for no other reason). When, over time, they – or those who come after them– change their minds and come to believe R instead (where R implies that Q is false) it is the truth of R that does the explanatory work: they believe R because it is true (and for no other reason). But is it the bare truth of R that did the explanation? How did the philosopher come to be persuaded to change their belief in Q to a belief in R? If Q was believed to be true because it is true, what was the path to this switch? Did they not actually have the truth of Q but rather they had the appearance of the truth of Q? Bringing in something debatable like appearance requires us to begin to widen our lens and look at other ancillary explanatory criteria. This is obviously a simplified example of apprehending truth, but it illustrates in a small way how truth hangs in a web of other agreed upon criteria and not in strict correspondence between word and object.

²³ Quine, 41.

²⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 175.

Quine's web of belief holds that epistemic justification is holistic and inherently social. It shows that justification is horizontal in that it "links up" with a community of knowers socially as opposed to being vertically oriented and going down to the non human foundations or the real-reality of knowledge. Rorty's reading of Quine is that "we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation."²⁵

Once conversation replaces confrontation, the notion of the Mind as Mirror can be discarded. Then the notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible. A thoroughgoing holism has no place for the notion of philosophy as 'conceptual', as 'apodictic', as picking out the 'foundations' of the rest of culture, as explaining which representations are 'purely given' or 'purely conceptual', as presenting a 'canonical notation' rather than an empirical discovery, or as isolating 'trans-framework heuristic categories'.²⁶

Against Correspondence/ For Contingency

Rorty's main point of attack in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is the correspondence theory of truth, and Rorty believes that we need to free ourselves from the habit of viewing truth as the union of subject and object where language is used to "hook up" with an external world. He is not an anti-realist. His critique is not of the nature of reality, rather his critique is on the way we use language itself. As stated before, his attack is the denial of privileged representations. An attack that Rorty attributes to Sellars and Quine. It is a "family argument". It's an in-house critique against "fully paid up analytic philosophers" against the scheme of "intuitions and concepts", against what Rorty calls the "Kantian foundations of analytic philosophy".

²⁵ Rorty, 170.

²⁶ Rorty, 170-171.

Quoting C.I. Lewis, “There are in our cognitive experience, two elements; the immediate data, such as those of the sense, which are presented or given to the mind, and a form, a construction, or interpretation, which represents the activity of thought.”²⁷ Rorty claims that rather than being a product of ‘bare insight’ what is described here is the product of a tradition where metaphors of ‘epistemic confrontation’ between the mind and reality or rather a confrontation between an apprehending mind and the objects of knowledge. This scheme-content dualism is what some call third “the third dogma” of empiricism.

There is a tendency to see scientists as serving a priestly function, putting us in touch with a reality that transcends the human. Rorty denies that there is a transcendent nature to our reality (that we can relate to). This to him is an outmoded view of the world as “God’s artifact”, “The work of someone who had something in mind”. Truth in this way is successful linguistic representation of the true state of affairs “beneath it all”. Rorty believes the way we use language is in a Wittgensteinian way overly anthropocentric. The idea that the world has an intrinsic nature supports the idea that either the world was created by a ‘person’ and should be spoken of in the terms that that person dictated or the world itself should be viewed as a sort of person in itself and taken on their terms (i.e. something with a unique point of view and preferences about how it should be described). Either way this is a way of saying we have come accustomed to speaking about discovery as though we are looking for a “god’s eye view”. But this synoptic vision is held together not by empirical data, but by assumed metaphors.

Rorty’s account of ‘traditional’ philosophy is the enterprise of seeking knowledge as an object. In this way the mind is one big butterfly net capturing things called ‘truth’

²⁷ C.I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), 38.

'out there'. The traditional view Rorty attacks is where the mind has been seen as having a special relationship with knowledge whereby it does two things.

First, the world is out there, but truth is not out there; truth is a function of language. Sentences are true, and it is humans who make those sentences. Since humans create sentences there is a sense in which if there were no humans, thus no human minds to make and apprehend sentences there would not be much sense in speaking about truth. Secondly, people have a tendency to conflate the fact that the world makes sentences true and that truth is in the world. As though the world is divided up into truth-shaped nuggets to be collected as facts. The habit of corresponding these sentences with truth-shaped-nuggets is reinforced by focusing on single words and sentences instead of focusing on vocabularies as whole sets. The notion of looking at whole vocabularies instead of sentences supports Rorty's view that we should look into the social justification of knowledge. Communities dictate what can and cannot be said to be true.

Rorty is accused by some as merely trying to make a good story. An edifying historical story about how our Western mind has come to be.²⁸ But stories are important. They can instruct action in ways just as powerfully (or more so) than discursive persuasion- it just depends on what the chief aims of the community in question are. As stated earlier, Rorty is dissatisfied with what we are doing with our tradition and the relatively anemic role that philosophy serves currently to motivate cultural change.

Once upon a time we felt the need to worship something which lay beyond the visible world. Beginning in the seventeenth century we tried to substitute the love of truth for the love of God, treating the world described by science as a quasi divinity. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century we tried to substitute a love of ourselves for the love

²⁸ Tom Sorrell, "The World from its Own Point of View." in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 1990), 16.

of scientific truth, a worship of our own deep spiritual or poetic nature, treated as one more quasi divinity.²⁹

It's this historicist telling that Rorty employs that helps us understand the arc of Rorty's thought. According to Rorty, we have been formed contingently and are evolving our purpose as we go. There is not a final settlement to be found, but rather a trajectory. And the habit of confusing what was helpful to get things done in the past will not necessarily be helpful to get things done in the future. Rather than search for a non-circular justification for our defense of the kind of world we want, we should admit that "a circular justification which makes one feature of our culture look good by citing still another, or comparing our culture insidiously with others by reference to our own standards, is the only justification we are going to get".³⁰

I titled this paper "The Correspondence Theory of Truth: The Root Cause of Fundamentalism in America." This is not because I think some esoteric discussion around truth conditionals promotes radical behavior. But I do think people use language in radical ways, as we will see in the following chapter. If you read Rorty with charity you will see he is trying to use story telling to motivate change, and if you read what he says he wants in society, he wants the kind of change that is freedom making and suffering reducing.

I don't think Rorty has a problem with the functional application of the correspondence theory in many forms of life especially scientific and technical aspects. I can't imagine Rorty having much objection with a cardiologist having a correspondence appreciation for where a blockage is in your vascular system, or an airline pilot using the correspondence relation between language, his map and the reality of where the runway

²⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989), 22.

³⁰ Rorty, 54.

is to land your airplane. What I think Rorty would say is that these are unique ends-related examples of a task (removing a vascular blockage or landing an airplane) that fit within language-games and are supported by communities organized that want something accomplished.

In my example I offered two professions: medical doctors, and airline pilots. But you could come up with an almost endless list of language games and micro communities who have a vested interest in supporting the rules of these games. These communities evolutionarily have a desire for happiness and a lack of pain. And they organize around these principles. They constantly (most likely intuitively and without much rhetoric or discourse) move about their lives in a way promoting these desired ends.

The objection and the problem Rorty has with communities who assert a strong commitment to the correspondence theory of truth is that one can “reverse-engineer” desires back to language. In this way a community can use language as a relatively benign rhetorical tool, “Buy this laundry detergent! It’s scientifically proven that it’s the BEST!” or worse it’s used as a rhetorical weapon sending ignorant people to do violence in the name of “truth” (of God). When language is used in the guise of “strict correspondence” and ESPECIALLY when used to correspond to metaphysical truths this is too much to bear. This is EXACTLY what religion does with its truth claims in a fundamentalist context, and an antidote to this illness is recognition of the contingency of our language.

In the book *Contingency Irony and Solidarity* Rorty continues in his historical fashion telling a story of two types of philosophers. The first is like a scientist. He sees himself as working along side science and helping clear the way for uncluttered thought. Making category distinctions straight and making sure that the foundations of a synoptic

vision are sound. In this way knowledge is a whole set, and all of our activity is an effort to fit our knowledge from the varying disciplines together in a coherent picture. “These sorts of philosophers see science as the paradigmatic human activity, these sorts of philosophers insist that science discovers truth rather than makes it. They regard “making truth” as a merely metaphorical and thoroughly misleading phrase”.³¹ To them activities such as art, religion and politics don’t belong in this form of philosophy because they don’t involve finding “hard truths”.

The second kind of philosopher seeing that the first offers no moral teaching views them as merely serving as the handmaiden to technology. The second sort of philosopher finds herself more kindred to political utopias and poets and artists. This second sort of philosopher sees the first as merely participating in “one more human activity” as opposed to locating the place where subjective experiences intersect with a hard “reality”.

On this view great scientists invent descriptions of the world which are useful for purposes of predicting and controlling what happens, just as poets and political thinkers invent other descriptions of it for other purposes. But there is no sense in which any of these descriptions is an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself. These philosophers regard the very idea of such a representation as pointless.³²

In this way Rorty is describing all human activity as a collection of micro-enterprises with different desired outcomes. Aeronautics, cardiology, website design, dog training, culinary arts, analytic philosophy, the Holy Roman Catholic Church. These are all human enterprises with unique vocabularies that are developed ad hoc for particular outcomes.

The more effective these vocabularies become at successfully predicting outcomes, the more they appear to the first philosopher as confirmation of having

³¹ Rorty, 3.

³² Rorty, 4.

connected with a deep reality. The first type of philosopher is enticed to think that if we can only get more and more points of contact with this “bed rock” we will be able to have a comprehensive understanding of human knowledge. The second philosopher thinks this is a misguided effort and we should be content to allow these different activities (and their attendant vocabularies) to stay separate lest we conflate the conclusions of one for knowledge of the other. Rorty argues that this confusion is a result of the conflation between the work of sentences versus whole vocabularies.

In the next chapter I am going to develop my argument against the fundamentalist religious community. The fundamentalist community is quite robust in America today and for historical reasons that I will outline, the fundamentalists actually side with the first sort of philosopher. Theirs is a move is to universalize all knowledge into one Christian language game. I suspect with the exception of a few “Christian philosophers” this move goes largely unnoticed by the scientific community who has long since set aside concerns about the “truth” of the Bible, or how “God feels” about a certain scientific discovery. There are literally dozens of millions of fundamentalist Americans and even dozens of universities that believe that they are discovering “biblical truths” by being as rigorous as they can be with respect to how the language of the bible corresponds to reality. By my reading this is an example of another human activity that needs to be segmented off and separated from science, or medicine or politics and made private. If fundamentalists can listen to Rorty’s critique of language they will be able to be fully participating members of a democratic society while keeping their religious commitments. But the two do not need to be combined.

Chapter 3

Fundamentalism in America

A Brief Historical View of Modern Fundamentalism

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of the universe, which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented 'knowing'. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.³³

Karl Barth wrote that in a certain light, all of theology is eschatology. Much of what modern religion focuses on is what happens after we die more than what is happening right now as we live. Religion is an amazing human artifact. It is a brilliant example of our species' ingenuity but questions arise when we reflect on the way the language we use for everyday activities preserves the truth claims of our religion over time. Nature teaches us that all of time marches towards death, and being clever, aware mammals we become stressed about this impending horizon and search for solutions. So we, being clever creatures, build a conceptual bridge between our private local precious things and the Universal in an effort to save for eternity that which we love.

The religious project is beautiful. It is a pursuit for a synoptic vision. But there is a dark side to this pursuit. Once we feel we have landed on a correct vision we might lose sight of all of the synoptic visions that other thinkers have developed over the years with the best knowledge they had available. It is this that Nietzsche refers to as 'arrogant' and 'mendacious'. Religion has its place in the human experience, but it can't do everything. Religion needs to know its place.

³³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (London, Vintage Publications, 1967), 1.

Whitehead said all of Western philosophy is just footnotes to Plato. And our Western tradition has had our world divided into a dualist scheme for millennia. But how do we articulate this divide? Where does the material end and the transcendent begin? In this paper I want to tell a story about a rich beautiful tradition of aspirational projects, one where people are genuinely trying to connect with goodness and truth. But it is also a story of people who got confused along the way, and despite good intentions misplaced their priorities, and in the process people, animals and environments got hurt.

Looking for an Escape Plan

By now I am pretty sure that looking for such a presence and such a (synoptic) vision is a bad idea. The main trouble is that you might succeed, and your success might lead you to imagine that you have something more to rely on than the tolerance and decency of your fellow human beings.³⁴

Which one of these is different: One's commitment to the US Constitution. One's belief in quantum physics. One's commitment to capitalism or our local economy. One's belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth as told in Christian scriptures.

Some may read this list and say, "What's the problem, it's a list of beliefs?" But one of these things is not like the other. One of these does not fit. The first three have in common temporality, locality, and the ability to be revised and changed over time. The fourth does not.

We can amend the U.S. Constitution, we can discover a new physics, and we can create new economic engines to benefit our friends and neighbors. But the Jesus part is not so easy. For fundamentalist Christians, Jesus is transcendent and unchanging. He represents millennia of theological commitments that are part of cultural institutions resistant to change. To these institutions, the Jesus piece cannot change. The strength of "Jesus facts" as a piece of knowledge in their scheme comes from the

³⁴ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 20.

special revelation that religious communities employ. Jesus knowledge is fixed. And to see how one gains this special knowledge we must go back and reflect on one's linguistic commitments and how one believes they ascertain truth.

Fundamentalist religions can be problematic to a democratic society because they are usually non-revisable. They gain strength culturally because of their inflexibility. The strength of this inflexibility comes in seeing the religious pursuit as uncovering "facts about God" in scripture. There is no scientific method in fundamentalism, no peer review. It is the ahistorical quality given to these religious "facts" that give them their cache in religious communities. In some circles ignorance of modern facts with deference to tradition are seen as noble and serve as a weapon against a rapidly changing world (the changing world is seen as a threat to values).

I believe like Rorty that there is a way to argue a philosophically defensible way for a 6-day creationist, biblical literalist, non-evolution believing Christian to literally hold on to their faith and also participate in the public discourse along side atheists. I am arguing that there is a way to hold public commitment to your fellow human and keep your incompatible religious commitments private. We all have private idiosyncratic things that we love, things that we have no non-circular defense for loving.

Fundamentalist Beginnings

"There is not a young man alive today who will not die a Unitarian".³⁵ This was the prediction of Thomas Jefferson who believed that the Unitarian Church with its focus on rationality and its denial of the divinity of Jesus would soon supplant the irrational beliefs of other non-scientific creeds. He was wrong. In fact he was wrong to the count

³⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, Federal Edition (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904). 12.

of 175 million people who today profess a Christian faith.³⁶ And of those, fully 100 million can be described as fundamentalist Christians. Or put another way, the population of Texas, California, New York and Florida combined. America is a religious country. And if Jefferson's contemporary James Madison is considered the father of the US constitution, then a man named John Nelson Darby can be considered the father of modern Christian fundamentalism.

John Nelson Darby was an Englishman who studied law in Ireland. In 1827 he joined a group of Christians named the Brethren who were most notable for their rejection of the requirement of Christian ordination for preaching and teaching. This group of Christians who eventually made legalism the heart of their practice ironically claimed that because the Apostle Paul was also not a properly ordained Christian (he was Jewish) yet could still preach the gospel, they reasoned they too were not bound by legalism or restricted from working on their own interpretations of scripture. In the 1840s Darby founded a splinter group known as the Plymouth Brethren (Darbyites) who held to a new theology known as dispensational premillennialism. If you have ever heard of the best-selling modern book series *Left Behind* (which has sold 65 million copies) or heard of the Christian concept of the rapture than you are already familiar with dispensational premillennialism.

This dispensational view of eschatology, or end times, describes all of time as fitting within seven dispensations or specific periods of time. This theological division of history explains that the modern era (the one we currently are in) fits into the sixth dispensation "the church age" and by their description the Church age is one of great moral relapse and Christian apostasy. This age will continue on until God decides, "he

³⁶ *Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life/ US Religious Landscape Survey 2007:* <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports> (accessed January 3, 2013)

has had enough of our wickedness” and will call the church “home”. This homecoming is the rapture. The sixth dispensation ends with the “secret rapture of the true Christians” where they will be called to the sky to meet up with a resurrected Jesus where they will be protected from the “Great Tribulation”. According to their prophecy, the Great Tribulation will be a time of unbelievable hardship and toil for all non-Christians. During the tribulation the remaining unconverted (those who weren’t raptured in the first place) will have to decide to believe in God while the Anti-Christ (literally) runs amok on earth planning all kinds of devious and immoral schemes. At the end of the tribulation Christ returns for judgment of all, the destruction of the Anti-Christ, the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of a literal Satan. At its conclusion, a literal New Jerusalem is established with Jesus of Nazareth as the literal king of the new earth.

For the time allotted for this paper I have summarized extremely quickly the fundamentalist view of the end times. And as I stated earlier, for Christian fundamentalists it’s all about end times. This eschatological scheme is based on interpretations of prophecy in the Christian bible, mostly from the book of Revelation. And by those who believe in this view, it is taken as literally true. I can’t make this point plain enough: literally true. Ice freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit and boils at 212 degrees, mammals give live birth and Jesus will return to ‘judge the quick and the dead’ any moment now.

Although adherents of this view claim to be literalist and that they are merely “reading the bible”, it cannot go without stating that “it’s extensive use of typology, its commitment to numerology and its dependence on highly debatable (if not to say fanciful) interpretations of some obscure apocalyptic passages have led many to insist that its

interpretation is anything but literal.”³⁷ And though the “Darbyites” are not a household name today, their influence reaches far beyond their original congregation due to a massive response to two 19th century cultural factors: Charles Darwin, and German Biblical Criticism.

Science and Criticism

Charles Darwin was a contemporary of Darby. When he published the *Origin of the Species* in 1859 there was a cry of disapproval in the conservative protestant Christian community. Previously there had not been much concern over the timeline of the creation of the earth. The Old Testament describes a 6-day creation timeline and the traditional Christian view was accepting of this. Until fossil records came of age there had not been much reason not to question the traditional view.

But Darwin’s findings created a wrinkle in time. Through his study of fossil records Darwin placed the earth’s beginning at a much, much earlier date than the approximate 5000 that the Biblical community believed in. While some more moderate Christians accepted this new timeline without much hesitation, fundamentalists saw this as an attack on their core beliefs.

In 1835 there was also another threat to Christian literalists’ cause: German Higher Criticism. A German scholar named David Friedrich Straus wrote a book titled *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*. Strauss set about on a historical and archeological study to find out as much as possible about the real Jesus and juxtapose it with what we know in scripture. His study revealed a great amount of contradictions between the Bible and history, the Bible and science and also found contradictions within scripture itself. To

³⁷ Sydney Ahlstrom, *Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 134.

our 21st century eyes this may not seem so scandalous, but in the 19th century it was seen as a major threat to the fundamentalists.

The two-headed threat of Darwinism and German Higher Criticism in America came together to create a panic scene for literalist Christians in the 19th century. Science with its universities and scientific method had already taken over biology, chemistry and physics and now it seemed poised to overtake “God” as well. The church has been warning against atheists and skeptics for a long time, but those people could always have been shrugged off by the Church as lunatics and pagans ‘destined for hell’. But this problem was different. The very same science that was making possible advances in medicine and technology, the same science that was making it easier to predict the weather and help southern farmers battle infections and crop failure and frankly the science that made possible the entire Industrial Revolution itself was setting itself up as the great Goliath to overcome the “good ole time” religion.

The solution for this panic in 19th century America was dispensationalism. Dispensationalism provided for Christians a perfect “scientific” defense against the “godlessness” of Darwinism but best of all it lead followers directly back to their preconceived notion of God and confirmed their traditional faith. Dispensationalism looks and smells “scientific”. It has rules and complex sounding terms. It uses a historical approach to the text and it seems quasi-philosophical. Protestant pastors and professors in seminaries learned Greek and Latin and Hebrew and Aramaic. This is unique because historically this was reserved for Catholics but since the printing press had made the Bible translatable to common local languages hundreds of years earlier Protestants of many varieties got into the translation business.

These conservative Christians studied the “real” meaning of words in their “original manuscripts”. This is the beginning of what becomes Christianity’s version of

logical positivism. It is in this moment that Protestant Christianity shifts from a faith worked out in community with religious experience as the guiding principle to a discursive and hyper literalist approach. It is in this moment that the faithful latched on to a correct understanding of language as the path to salvation. It is this move that makes the correspondence theory of truth the root cause of modern fundamentalism in America.

This dispensational view of scripture is codified in a “reference bible” known as the Scofield Reference Bible. You may have never heard of such a book but its importance to the movement cannot be overstated. Though it looks like a normal Bible, CI Scofield (who deserves a chapter all himself) filled the margins of his version of the Bible with running commentary throughout to explain to the reader what the Bible means. It is a hefty book that is 50% bible and 50% commentary. Some readers take to skipping the scripture altogether and read what Scofield tells them the Bible means. In this way the Scofield reference Bible is like Cliff’s Notes for the Big Book. This is a radical departure and transition from a 2000-year history of wrestling with the mystery of faith into a “scientifically” organized collection of “God truths”. Phrases like “God wrote it, I believe it, that settles it” are not uncommon for adherents to this type of faith. This is a prime example of what we will see later in the “closing off” of inquiry that is so problematic with fundamentalism.

The shift to dispensationalism in the American south was profound. It was a shift from viewing religion as a religious experience between the individual and God to a rational adherence to “facts”. Fundamentalists turned religion of spiritual experience into religious reductionism; literally a formula for getting into heaven.

In 1920 in an article in the Baptist publication *The Watchman Examiner*, editor Curtis Lee Laws writes about members of a new group of anti-modernists in the Northern Baptist Convention. Looking for a new name to capture the essence of this movement he

recalled the title of a pamphlet that had been circulated years earlier, *The Fundamentals*. This is how the term Fundamentalism in modern America was born.³⁸

The Fundamentals were a series of pamphlets distributed between 1910-1915. Sponsored by two wealthy benefactors Milton and Lyman Stewart, the authors believed that “the time has come when a new statement of Christian fundamentals should be made”. This new statement was to be a repudiation of the dangerous path of science and biblical criticism to contemporary Christian faith. One of the pamphlet’s authors wrote that in a world where all experience was subject to scientific analysis,

There would be all science and no religion. In the array of scientific fact all religion would be evaporated. God, Christ, the Bible and all else would be reduced to a mathematical or chemical formula. This is the ideal and goal of the evolutionary hypothesis. The Rationalist rejoices in it, but the Christian mind shrinks from it. The Christian consciousness perceives that a hypothesis that leads to such results is one of its deadliest foes.³⁹

And thus the scene is set: the essentialist Christians, the “faithful remnant”, holding the line against the secular rationalists.

Technically speaking a fundamentalist holds to five tenets as outlined at the 1895 Niagara Bible conference: (1) the divinity of Jesus (2) the virgin birth of Jesus (3) Jesus’ physical resurrection (4) Jesus’ future physical return to earth (5) Jesus’ death as the substitutionary atonement for humanity’s sin. These 5 principles of fundamentalism are held together by a view of scripture known as inerrancy. The inerrantist view of scripture holds that the Bible is the perfect word of God in the original manuscripts (never mind the fact that the Bible they are referring to is a copy of a copy of a copy that has been translated to and from several different languages). This is a strategic move to ‘close the loop’ for fundamentalists. By faith they believe in the original purity of the Bible. They

³⁸ AC Dixon, *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Ada, MI: Baker Publishing, 2003) 16.

³⁹ Watchman Examiner (New York: Watchman Examiner, 1911), 42.

recognize its been modified a bit over time, but largely go on believing in the Bible as a textbook of God facts that can be used to guide them through life.

Fundamentalism is a sub-section within the Christian tradition. Generally speaking, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Disciples of Christ are not characterized as fundamentalist. Most Christian fundamentalism comes out of the southern Baptist and the Bible Church movement.

What is troubling on a go-ahead basis is the rather lax view they put towards the interpretive apparatus used against the text. Since history doesn't stop, there is a constant revising of the way fundamentalists approach scripture. For example, at some points in history, the Bible has been used to endorse slavery and to subjugate women, but democratically slavery has been outlawed and women's right's have been increased, but in the end for the fundamentalists scripture cannot be revised as incorrect or anything less than the "word of God". We will engage Kuhn below, but this approach is exactly the same as if in the scientific realm we decided Aristotle or Newton had it right and never allowed their body of knowledge to be revised, but instead continued to mold our application of this sacred text to our modern context.

In a religious essay delivered late in life Rorty sets up a dichotomy of relativism vs. fundamentalism that will be helpful. Since Rorty has already established his conviction "that there is not an essence" or a core to try to correspond to, he does not think being called a relativist is such a bad thing.

What the pope disparagingly calls the relativists' habit of being carried about by every wind of doctrine is viewed by philosophers such as myself as openness to new possibilities, willingness to consider all suggestions about what might increase human happiness. Being open to doctrinal change, we believe, is the only way to avoid the evils of the past.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Richard Rorty, *An Ethics for Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11.

Since relativism and fundamentalism are both often used as pejoratives, Rorty seeks to clarify. Fundamentalism is often used to describe an absurd, widely uncritical interpretation of a text or scripture whereas relativism is viewed as the idea that every idea is as good as any other, an idea that Rorty says no respectable philosopher would try to defend.

One can, however, give a useful, respectable sense of the word “fundamentalism” by using it simply to designate the view that ideals are valid only in reality. This is the view put forward by the Church. One can give a respectable and useful sense to the “relativism” by defining it simply as the denial of fundamentalism. Relativists on this definition are those who believe that we would be better off without such notions as unconditional moral obligations grounded in the structure of human existence.⁴¹

It is the belief that we have arrived at a collection of unconditional moral obligations grounded in reality by a literalist view of scripture that fundamentalists think they have. And it is this view that I’m arguing against. Rorty does not oppose moral obligation. What Rorty opposes is the method by which we declare we have arrived at these moral obligations. For Rorty, these obligations are formed, not found.

⁴¹ Rorty, 11.

Fundamentalism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth

The modern Christian philosopher JP Moreland is a professor of philosophy at BIOLA University and is considered to be a leading Christian thinker in the fundamentalist community. And though you may have never heard of him or BIOLA (the Bible Institute Of Los Angeles), millions of fundamentalist Christians have, and they listen to him.

Moreland clearly outlined a fundamentalist approach to scripture using the correspondence theory of truth in an essay he delivered in 2004. He delivered this essay specifically in response to what he calls moral relativism and postmodernism (terms he considers to be coextensive). Moreland outlines five attacks on what he calls the postmodern (sometimes interchangeable with pragmatist) view of truth and juxtaposes these views with what he calls the correct correspondence interpretation.

Moreland outlines the traditional view that one obtains truth when a truth bearer stands in an appropriate correspondence relationship with a truth maker:

Truth bearer (prop.) → CORRESPONDENCE RELATION → Truth Maker (state of affairs)

The truth bearer in this scheme is a proposition or sentence and the truth maker is a state of affairs. "The grass is green" is the statement that sits in a correspondence relationship to grass indeed being green. And with this account there is very little to object. For most simple statements (or even many more complicated statements) this scheme works out just fine. Moreland goes on to explain that this correspondence relation holds whether the thinker is aware of it or not. So for Moreland, a blind person who does not have the ability to ascertain 'greenness' the correspondence of grass and

green still holds in reality. Grass is still green even if you can't confirm the truth of this proposition. No problems here, because this is an inconsequential example.

What Moreland fails to acknowledge is the function of correspondence in our language game. Correspondence has utility. Even a wide utility, but it is a limited utility. What is the point of knowing why grass is green? So one can paint an accurate watercolor picture of grass? OK no problem there. Do we need to know whether grass is green so we can do a scientific experiment involving photosynthesis? No problem there either. In both scenarios the correspondence relation is relevant to outcomes a painter or a community of scientists desire. Language is a tool to achieve the end results of the users.

Moreland's account fails to consider the limits of correspondence as it relates to the desires of the users and what they are trying to achieve. As stated earlier, if we are talking medicine or aerospace there is an end-use of language, such as locating arterial plaque or keeping airplanes in the skies. But it is the universalizing or scaling-up of this correspondence that quickly becomes problematic in the hands of fundamentalists like Moreland. Rather than being interested in Rorty's definition of relativism and having an "openness to new possibilities or a willingness to consider all suggestions about what might increase human happiness", fundamentalists like Moreland are dogmatically focused on nailing down truth as a strict correspondence and for Moreland, the truth of the Christian bible gets preferential treatment above any other language game.

Language can be broken up into at least two categories, theoretical and descriptive (science, law and history for example) and interpretive (ethics, morality, poetry, religion). The mistake that Moreland makes is in thinking that the religious language game is the first kind of truth seeking, descriptive. When in reality religion is the second variety, interpretive. Fundamentalists make a category mistake when they

view their approach to the Bible as uncovering objective truths disclosed in text. They are actually participating in a meaning making interpretive activity where they are deciding what they should do with the biblical text and how it compels them to value their community and their relationship with their environment. Fundamentalism of this type is a reaction to descriptive powers of science.

Moreland and fundamentalist philosophers like him are keen on creating a dichotomy of correspondence theorists vs. postmodern relativists. But his description of postmodernism is a straw man argument and widely applied. He attacks Rorty's coherence view of language as relativism as though Rorty is promoting the "absurd thesis that every moral conviction is as good as every other moral conviction, a thesis no philosopher has ever tried to defend".⁴²

Moreland is a modern philosopher and a fundamentalist Christian who adheres to the 5 tenets of Biblical Fundamentalism listed above. And for Moreland "biblical knowledge" trumps all other knowledge. He soberly explains that when he knows something about God, like that God created the world in 6 days and rested on the seventh or that Jesus will return to judge humanity, that he is merely reading the truth of scripture and believes that he has a correspondence relationship with "capital T" truth. This is Moreland's formula:

Truth bearer:

The sentence *Jesus will return to judge humanity.*

-----→ Correspondence Relation -----→

Truth Maker:

Matthew 16:27, For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's Glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

⁴² Rorty, 11.

Moreland is carrying on the tradition of 19th century fundamentalism and defines those who don't share his correspondence view of language as "immoral postmoderns".

For some time I have been convinced that postmodernism is rooted in pervasive immoral confusions, and I have tried to point out what some of these are. I am also convinced that Postmodernism is an irresponsible, cowardly abrogation of the duties that constitute a disciple's calling to be a Christian intellectual and teacher.⁴³

He concludes his lecture

Faced with such opposition and the pressure it brings, postmodernism is a form of intellectual pacifism that, at the end of the day, recommends backgammon while the barbarians are at the gate. It is the easy, cowardly way out that removes the pressure to engage alternative conceptual schemes, to be different, to risk ridicule, to take a stand outside of the gate. But it is precisely as disciples of Christ, even more, as officers in His army, that the pacifist way out is not an option. However comforting it may be, postmodernism is the cure that kills the patient, the military strategy that concedes defeat before the first shot is fired, the ideology that undermines its own claim to allegiance. And it is an immoral, coward's way out that is not worthy of a movement born out of the martyr's blood.⁴⁴

There are many fundamentalist philosophers I could have selected to characterize the frenzied view of modern Christian fundamentalism. But Moreland perfectly crystalizes the view of fundamentalist Christian scholarship today. Notice how in the above passage there is a sense of being under attack. This is the same anti-intellectual frenzy that drove fundamentalists to adopt a dispensational view of scripture and Moreland beautifully explicates why the correspondence theory of truth is the "weapon" of choice to defend his turf. Notice also how casually Moreland himself employs metaphor:

"Postmodernism is the cure that kills the patient"

⁴³ J.P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn" (*lecture delivered at the Evangelical Theological Society Los Angeles, 11.18.04*), 3.

⁴⁴ Moreland, 7.

“It’s a military strategy the concedes defeat”

“Playing backgammon while the Barbarians are at the gate”

This approach to language is a desire to escape. It’s a desire to escape the tension of living in a complex world where answers don’t come easy, a world where compromise and collaboration are required for societal progress. If anyone has abrogated his or her intellectual responsibility it’s Moreland himself. It is extremely ironic to me that Moreland attacks “postmoderns” as pacifists and cowards, when it appears to be his desire to use the correspondence theory of truth as an end-run on inquiry and as a regress stopper. Moreland uses militaristic language to describe a battle between people in his camp, in his language game, and anyone who disagrees is either a coward or a barbarian. His is a desire to lock it down once and for all.

The impetus for this approach to language is fear. Fear of death. Recall Nietzsche’s ‘mendacious moment’? The utility of this scheme is eternal life. But the cost is too great. No one has been assured of anything beyond the veil of death, and what is sacrificed by Moreland’s strict universalizing application of the correspondence theory of truth is human happiness. It is fairly easy to see that Moreland is prescriptive in his application of correspondence theory and scripture (as are all fundamentalists). Just like every other community, they cherry pick and choose what suits their community’s desires. Consider the following biblical passages:

On women:

Wives submit to your husbands, as if it is fit in the Lord (Colossians 3:18)

...I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ and the head of every woman is the man... (1 Corinthians 11:3)

Let your woman keep silence in churches: for it is not permitted unto them; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also sayeth the law. (1 Corinthians 14:34)

On Slavery:

Slaves, Submit yourself to your masters with all respect, not only those who are good and considerate, but also those who are harsh (1 Peter 2:18)

If a slave is gored by a bull, it is the master not the slave who is to be compensated (Exodus 21:20)

On Homosexuality:

If a man lies with another man as he lies with a woman, they both have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Leviticus 20:13)

I do not have the space in this paper to recount the woeful ways in which Christians have visited harsh treatment and unspeakable violence on one another in the name of God. But one need not spend more than a few minutes with a fundamentalist to see how they go through rhetorical gymnastics to apply with strict correspondence certain passages and treat as poetry and allegory other passages that are inconvenient or illegal. The truth is each faith community has a language game they follow that is influenced by history, tradition, the local laws they must follow and what they are trying to achieve as a community. Fortunately in our 21st century context fundamentalists are usually not as cavalier as Moreland would like for them to be.

But what can we do about these fundamentalists in our community? Is there a way to live with people who have fundamentalist beliefs but still participate in a democratic culture without it becoming either a godless secular society or a totalitarian theocracy?

Rorty, Science, Kuhn and Revolutions

We cannot, I think, imagine a moment at which the human race could settle back and say, "Well, now that we've finally arrived at the truth we can relax." We should relish the thought that the sciences as well as the arts will always provide a spectacle of fierce competition between alternative theories, movements and schools. The end of human activity is not rest, but rather richer and richer human activity.⁴⁵

As I have stated earlier, Rorty is not interested in debunking science in any way. He rather views science as one of many valuable human activities. What Rorty is interested in debunking is scientism, or the idea that science and the empirical method are the only paths to genuine truth and that all other activities are second-rate. Rorty's friend in this pursuit is Thomas Kuhn. Rorty engages Kuhn's 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* in his own writing and he adopts Kuhn's new conception of scientific progress through revolution for his own use against philosophy's traditional understanding of a correspondence theory of truth.

Kuhn's book begins with an explanation of paradigms and normal science. A paradigm is a shared body of knowledge: theories, models, values and scientific methods.⁴⁶ Using this paradigm for a period of time constitutes "normal science". During normal science, things are relatively calm. Practitioners solve prescribed problems in the method they were taught in their community of scientists. Science in this way is routine puzzle solving. The rules of the paradigm are laid out so that practitioners can determine which problems are solvable and solve them. Normal science prevails until an anomaly presents itself. An anomaly is a problem within the paradigm that is supposed to be solvable, but resists solution. The emergence of more anomalies reduces the problem-solving efficacy of the paradigm, and the scientific community enters a stage of crisis.

⁴⁵ Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 39.

⁴⁶ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 11.

The crisis stage is a time of competing methods for problem solving until the community has a revolution (a paradigm shift) and adopts a new paradigm. Once the dust has settled and the community has its new paradigm, normal science begins again. Normal science will prevail until the next crisis causes a revolution and replaces it.

The new paradigm does not prevail because of its excellent adherence to external criteria. It is adopted because of its problem-solving efficacy. In Kuhn's scheme, the community doesn't step back and make a choice, it is compelled to change because the old paradigm was unfit to solve the problems of the day. It is a function of utility. Another important point Kuhn makes is that these paradigms are incommensurable. These transitions are not bit-by-bit, they are wholesale changes. So the new paradigm has little use of the old paradigm. This radical paradigm shift that Kuhn described was controversial amongst his peers because he appeared to be denying the traditionally accepted model of scientific progress.

Fundamentalism and Paradigm Shifts

The problem with fundamentalism is not that they have the bible wrong and the rest of society has it right, its that their view of truth is so inflexible and totalizing that when we want to tackle tough with societal issues that are outside of the religious language game that require cooperation between neighbors, they are resistant to the fact that a new day brings new problems requiring new tactics to solve them.

What do Kuhn and Rorty have to say about this problem with Christian fundamentalism? It would seem obvious that the most adamant fundamentalist is beyond conversion to this view based on rational inquiry. Those who are committed to their apocalyptic vision of rapture and Armageddon are unlikely to be moved by anything I have written so far about language and correspondence. These people aren't interested in reason; they are interested in winning "the war". But there may be people

who are not so committed. I can imagine there are thinking people who grew up with this particular fundamentalist paradigm, who inherited it from their communities who may have not yet been pressed to consider an alternative scheme.

Normal Fundamentalism

Take George. George is an ad executive in Dallas who grew up at Scofield Memorial Bible Church in Dallas, Texas. George and his wife Lauren have two kids and they go to church every Sunday. George's pastor's name is Jeff. Jeff got a Doctorate of Divinity from Dallas Theological Seminary, a seminary that was founded by Lewis Chafer in 1924.

Cl Scofield, who you will remember was the author of the Scofield reference Bible, mentored Dr. Chafer. Dallas seminary is essentially "ground zero" for dispensationalism, pre millennialism and Biblical inerrancy in today's religious landscape. Dallas seminary is also notable for its rigorous linguistic program where it is crucial for students to get the translation of the Bible correct. Most of Jeff's sermons are about common things: marriage, kids, being honest and caring for others. He encourages his congregation to tithe ten percent to the church (as the Bible teaches) and to witness to non-believers. Pastor Jeff is an uncontroversial guy in his community.

Pastor Jeff tells funny stories at church on Sunday, plays golf and likes the Dallas Cowboys. He always reminds his congregation about the seriousness of scripture and the importance of getting the scripture right in a "relativistic and postmodern world". But he isn't always talking about hell, not every week anyway.

George doesn't think too deeply about religious topics and prefers to spend his leisure time reading business books and biographies on the Civil War. Several times a year however there is a sermon series on one of the "big three" topics: homosexuality,

abortion and adultery. These are direct and trenchant studies of scripture where parishioners are given biblical proof-texts for why they should believe what they do.

This past Sunday there was a sermon on homosexuality titled "Why Gay is not OK". The scripture reference was Leviticus 18:22 "Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable". It was the final Sunday in a three-week series with the conclusion being "people who are homosexual choose this lifestyle, they are willfully immoral and continued participation in this lifestyle is against God's teaching." There were several take-aways for the congregants on what they should do should they encounter homosexuals in the "real world". George was taught he should do the following:

- (1) He should witness to them, tell the homosexual that you are a Christian and that God loves them.
- (2) He should be remind them that God has a law that must be followed and continued participation in this lifestyle is direct disobedience to God.
- (3) He should remind them that hell is a very real place, and that God doesn't want to send them to hell, but if they continue to participate in this lifestyle god[CAP] will have no choice but to met [SP]out [SP]judgment.
- (4) A Biblically sound Christian should not befriend an un-repentant homosexual.

Now ordinarily George takes what is taught in Church without much further thought. "The preacher has been to school for this, and understands the Bible way more than I do", George reasons, "So who am I to disagree?"

The next day is Monday and George goes to a charity golf tournament for Young Life. Young Life is a "para-church" organization focused on getting young people to "meet Jesus" and become Christians. George has invited a client from work to play and sees this as an opportunity to both support the Church and do a little business.

Anomaly

While lining up to get his golf cart George meets his golf partner Larry. Larry is a customer of the firm and a good friend. They have known each other for 7 years. They have a lot in common. They both pledged Kappa Sigma (although at different Universities). They are both fathers to two children, they are both -11 handicaps and they both hate the Washington Redskins. (They even both voted for Mitt Romney!) But there is a problem creeping in George's consciousness, Larry is a homosexual. Although he has two kids from a previous marriage, several years ago Larry came out as gay and married a man in a civil ceremony. He has a blended family and has a good relationship with his ex-wife. He is very involved in his children's lives and he goes to an "open and affirming" (gay friendly) church in Dallas.

Now George is a real Christian, he actually believes in God, the Bible and Jesus and is considerate about what he should do in such situations. George is struck with a great deal of dissonance because his guest and friend Larry is exactly the kind of person Pastor Jeff warned him about. Until now George had been operating under normal conditions. He didn't really know any homosexuals before so it wasn't a big deal to own the convictions Pastor Jeff had talked about. George is a "bible-believing-Christian". He even has a Jesus-fish on his Toyota Camry. And it wasn't until today that an anomaly presented itself.

Crisis

"What's the big deal?" George wonders, "Larry is a good guy and an honest businessman. He pays taxes, he takes care of his kids and he is complimentary of his ex wife. He has excellent fashion sense, he is a good tipper and he hates the Redskins, he even votes republican!! What is not to like here?"

George is in crisis. His default system, correspondence fundamentalism is not solving the puzzle for him today. Although he likes what the Bible does for him (reassures him that God is on his side and that he will go to heaven one day), and he likes going to Church on Sundays, he does not like that this system is compelling him to break fellowship with a friend and colleague. "Larry is a good guy! He even goes to church!" George wonders. "Maybe Pastor Jeff is wrong... or maybe the Bible is wrong... or worse yet... maybe we misunderstand what the Bible is? Because Larry is one of the good guys, I know it. So something with our understanding of the Bible is wrong."

Revolution

George got through the Golf tournament and sat quietly on his dissonance. He did not say anything to Larry about religion. Weeks went by and George had pretty much let go of his angst about what the Bible "says" about homosexuality. Life went along just fine until one day George came home from a business trip to his house in Dallas and found his 17 year old son Steven and his wife Lauren fighting in the kitchen. It was a tear-filled rant back and forth. It was unclear what the main issue was, but clearly it was about God, where Steven was supposed to go to school, what he was supposed to do with his life and how the semester was going.

Late to the argument, George tried to make sense of the fight and finally interjected, "Son, your mother and I love you very much we just want what's best for you, we want you to live the life God designed for you, so please, son let us know how we can help?" and in the heat of the moment through tears Steven replied, "Dad I don't know that there is much you can do, God made me gay and wants me to go to hell, so I'm not sure what my grades are or what college I go to matters that much anyway!"

At this point he revolution has begun. The mirror has been broken and there is no putting it back together. The new information George has makes it impossible to live

like he did before. George doesn't want to make a choice, but he is compelled to choose.

George is a real believer so he cannot simply ignore the paradigm crisis of belief:

He can continue to love the God of the Bible as he has known it through his inherited faith tradition at Scofield Memorial Church, thus stay married to the commitment to the correspondence view of language, continue going to his church and believing that he has the textbook of "God knowledge" and in doing this, turn his own son over to "judgment"
OR

He can re-contextualize his understanding of language, how truth is conveyed and inject a sense of epistemic humility around truth correspondence. This loosening of the knot will mean that George cannot make bold claims as forthright as he might have in the past, BUT- he gets to keep his relationship with his son, and it allows him to question other tricky parts of the bible that he may have previously been discouraged from questioning (Jonah and the whale and Noah's Ark come to mind).

He can have his faith as traditionally conceived or he can have his family, but he can't have both, not anymore.

Now before you think my story is a silly example I can state autobiographically that this is a real scenario. I personally know many families where the issue of homosexuality has been the anomaly that forced revolution from the correspondence view of scripture to a coherence view (though they would not likely have used my terms).

Once the revolution has taken place and the dust settles, "normal science" resumes. But incommensurability also occurs and it is impossible for the new paradigm to speak with the old paradigm as it did before. But it could be other issues that force this revolution. For many it is the view of 6-day creationism & science, for others it's the way the Biblical community allows the Bible to speak about women or racial injustices.

One cannot use Kuhn as a tool to cause revolution. In my example the Kuhnian paradigm shift is a description of what has already taken place. Rorty advocates Kuhn as a way to describe the shift that he thinks is taking place in philosophy. Rorty argues that

those who continue to hold fast to the traditional correspondence view are ducking their head and trying to pretend the revolution is not occurring.

The tension that is created when one recognizes the revolution has taken place and that they are living in a new paradigm is caused by the declaration of an individual's agency, an individual actor stepping outside of the popular language game. The agency of the individual is their individual power to declare what is right and wrong for their community. This happens all the time when an individual cries out about an injustice in society. Simply saying "That's not fair!" is a simple act of agency. It is a local example of speaking 'truth to power' and it happens all the time.

The allure of fundamentalism is an overture to the appearance of universal clarity. In the fundamentalist scheme Moreland promotes, there is a desire to keep the status quo and keep the power structures in place. At best it is intellectual laziness, at worst it is willful deception. An actor in his language game can say, "Hey, its not I who makes these claims, its GOD, I'm just reading the Bible as it's written." But this is disingenuous. They move around what can and cannot be said about God in keeping with what the laws will allow to promote their religious industry over science and humanism, and often over human happiness as well.

Philosophers of Moreland's stripe abrogate (to use his words) their responsibility to be careful with language, and to be personally responsible for the consequences of our language games. Moreland's militaristic language is not new in religious communities. Sadly the Church has been involved in real wars caused by battles over belief.

In the scientific community there are ethical rules governing what can and cannot be said about the efficacy of certain drugs or medical procedures or flight protocols. My thesis is that the responsibility of the utility of language lands squarely on the shoulders of the user of the language. And if you are unskilled or unknowing of the rules of the

game you should sit on the bench. That which you cannot speak of you must pass over in silence.

How Now Shall We Live?

We understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief and thus we have no need to view it as accuracy of representation... Justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practices.⁴⁷

In an essay on the need to be careful with the language we choose, cyberneticists Arturo Rosenblueth and Norbert Wiener's warn: The price of metaphor is eternal vigilance. Contemporary Christian fundamentalism is about words. Christian fundamentalism is a philosophy with dualist metaphysical commitment to essentialism. The essence of fundamentalism is fear of change. The attractiveness to its adherents is a promise of unchanging truths that one can use as a guiding star in a confusing sea of constantly changing information.

What words mean and how they are lived out is explicated in sermons on Sunday and in bible studies throughout the week. Some of our most influential politicians spend their days articulating equality for all in the halls of congress, while attending churches on Sunday mornings with agendas very much contradictory to the public good. How is this disconnect possible? I believe it is because they are using different vocabularies, with different utilities. The trouble comes when they try to merge these vocabularies into a synoptic vision.

It is true that the traditional teachings of Jesus in many churches promote a message of love, but in the hands of fundamentalists who are primarily focuses on the

⁴⁷ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 170.

rapture and end times they have taken a message of love and morphed it into a message of laws.

It is not my desire to stoke reactionary sentiments and further widen the divide between the secular or moderates and the fundamentalists. This is not some left wing re-tread of a 150-year-old fight. This is an effort to move on. To find common ground where it is to be found and to set aside differences both real and imaginary. It might seem preferable to ignore fundamentalist Christianity. And some people are quick to dismiss religion and religious thinkers as fuzzy minded or silly metaphysicians. But one should be cautious not to forget that this point of view is a luxury arrived at after millennia of torture, death and holocaust at the hands of fundamentalists of every imaginable stripe. If history is any indicator of our future, religion is very much here to stay.

Next we will revisit Rorty's philosophical critics to see what alternatives to Rorty's critique we can consider. And in chapter five in what I will call the Social Gospel of Richard Rorty, I believe it is possible for atheist scientists and 6-day-creation Christian fundamentalists to work together for social solidarity and peace. Common ground can be found and the Kingdom can come on earth irrespective of your belief in heaven.

Chapter 4

Rorty and His Critics

First Projects, Then Principles

In a seldom-referenced article in *The Nation* magazine Richard Rorty lays out what might be the simplest way to describe his philosophy: “First projects, then principles”. Written in 1997 he was addressing the lack of what he saw as political will on the Left to tackle real problems. He writes,

When I first went into philosophy, I was looking for first principles. I thought if you could get the right principles, everything else would fall into place. I was wrong. I gradually realized that it is only once everything has fallen into place that you can decide what principles you want. Principles are useful for summing up projects, abbreviating decisions already taken and attitudes already assumed. But if you are undecided about alternative projects, you are not going to get much help from contemplating alternative principles.⁴⁸

Which is better: To be correct, or to improve? It can be said that the former focuses on truth, and the latter on progress. In his 50-year career Rorty was not afraid to upset the establishment in his pursuit of truth. But in his autobiographical essays he explains his desire was initially a pursuit of Truth (capital T). As his career progressed however, Rorty began to be less convinced the former could ever be attained and much more interested in the latter: How do we get better as a society; how do we get more just?

After publishing his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in 1979 Rorty stood as the unofficial gadfly to the establishment of analytic philosophy (what he referred to as the self-styled standard-bearers of objectivity). His writings about philosophy, ethics, literature, politics and culture called into question the way we traditionally account for truth and challenged us to establish “projects first” then define our “principles”.

⁴⁸ Richard Rorty, “First Projects, Then Principles: What’s needed is a specific agenda or the left will remain a joke,” *The Nation*, (December 22nd, 1997) 87-90.

Rorty argued that if we organize ourselves as human beings towards creating the kind of world we want to live in, the language we use will fall in line with that pursuit. Language becomes a helper to us as we generate more peace and more justice. The stories we tell and the poems we write will reinforce this. And the net human happiness (which is the point of life for Rorty) will increase. It is when we misunderstand language and stay committed to the ocular metaphor of the “mind as a mirror” that we fall into a language game where we lust after a Platonic certainty that is never satisfied. It is the rejection of this metaphor that set Rorty free and it is this rejection that is the foundation of my Rortyan treatment of Fundamentalism.

Clearly not everyone agrees with Richard Rorty, but the overall goal of this paper is to present an overview of the arguments of Rorty and apply them to Christian fundamentalism. It is outside of the scope of this paper to engage every one of their arguments, or to try and engage all of his analytic critics (that would be several books). Nor am I trying to say that every position Rorty holds is defensible. I am arguing in favor of Rorty’s overall critique of the correspondence theory of truth and how when applied to fundamentalism there is a way to separate private morality and public responsibility. In what follows I will engage his critics and see what Rorty might have to say in response to them.

Blackburn: Classic Critic

Simon Blackburn accuses Rorty of being a relativist. And though generally congenial about Rorty’s intellectual ability he is using this term as a pejorative and accuses Rorty of being merely meta-stable. In order to follow Blackburn’s critique of Rorty in the book *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning*, it is important to note Blackburn’s first move is to view Rorty within the very scheme that Rorty hopes to

set aside (an appeal to something beyond time and chance and an appeal to the 'at the end of the day' 'essential reality' of things).

In his treatment of Rorty, Blackburn draws some very unflattering conclusions that are only possible if one accepts from the outset Blackburn's assumptions. Blackburn accuses Rorty's brand of relativism as leaving the reader with little more than 'cognitive instability' as it relates to consequential and moral issues. Blackburn labels Rorty a common postmodern. But this description stands in contrast to Rorty's own description of relativism and about postmodernism:

Insofar as 'postmodern' philosophical thinking is identified with a mindless and stupid cultural relativism- with the idea that any fool thing that calls itself culture is worthy of respect- then I have no use for such thinking.⁴⁹

One can give a respectable and useful sense to "relativism" by defining it simply as the denial of fundamentalism. Relativists on this definition are those who believe that we would be better off without such notions as unconditional moral obligations grounded in the structure of human existence.⁵⁰

Now to be fair some of Blackburn's attacks on Rorty were during the decade or two after PMN was published, and much of Rorty's own autobiographical work that we use to clarify his position came out in the early 2000s (after some of his critics fiercest works were published). So in this way these critics helped force clarification and for this we are grateful.

Blackburn is in my view a paradigmatic Rorty critic. This is the classic 'Rorty is unstable and contradicts himself' argument. Blackburn applies Rorty's views of truth to

⁴⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 276.

⁵⁰ Richard Rorty, *An Ethics for Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 11.

morality and ethics and describes Rorty as a postmodern who promotes a haunting loss of authority⁵¹ with grave implications within ethics.

The relativist [on Rorty's view] becomes someone who is ready to disown his or her convictions, and eventually, becomes unstable, incapable of conviction at all.⁵²

In this volume Blackburn quickly hits the highlights of Rorty's critique in PMN, and outlines his assessment of Rorty as a liberal ironist who, 1) has radical and continuing doubt about the final vocabulary he currently uses because he has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books he has encountered, 2) he realizes arguments phrased in his present vocabulary cannot underwrite or debunk these doubts, 3) insofar as he philosophizes about his situation he does not think his vocabulary is any further from or closer to reality than other vocabularies. He concludes his summary citing that Rorty states 'anything can be made to look good or bad by being re-described'.

This is alarming to Blackburn as he seems to think that Rorty's view of language will generate in his audience some sort of crass nihilism about EVERYTHING, where everything is constantly being revised at every moment and nothing gets done because we are in constant Derridean play and deferral of 'true-truth'. Blackburn then goes on to hypothesize about scenarios that this process of re-description might be applied towards. He gives an example of an army that could blow up a village and re-describe the desert that remains as 'peace', or even more ludicrous that the holocaust might be re-described as something good by calling it 'the event that prompted the writing of the greatest diary of the second world war'.

⁵¹ Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions, A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 287.

⁵² Blackburn, 287.

You do not want to be a prig or a bigot, but neither do you want to be a weightless aesthete, to whom all real commitment is a subject of joke or parody. You need to be able to judge when the time for pastiche and irony is past, when the chips are down and people are counted and things need saying. You need to know when talk of other vocabularies and different ways of looking at things is idle, and the moment for standing fast has arrived. Some judge it too quickly, others too slowly, but it lies somewhere.⁵³

I think it is charitable to say Blackburn is making a straw-man argument, and I think at an extreme he is making a gross cartoon out of Rorty with this argument. When taken in context with Rorty's broader work one can see Rorty is concerned with the way our representationalist view of language gets so close it misses the forest for the trees. On Rorty's view, theory is to be used as an aid to practice, as opposed to the traditional view of practice being seen as a degradation of theory.

Blackburn accuses Rorty of being a weightless aesthete, who scares us, by presenting a bogeyman. According to Blackburn this bogeyman is "truth". God's Truth. Objective transcendent truth. Blackburn argues that Rorty has fallen in line with this sense of tactless postmodernism where everything is up for revision at all times and nothing is serious, it's all play all the time. But this is not fair. This is not what Rorty is suggesting. Blackburn's argument borders becoming an ad hominem fallacy in this sentence:

The aesthetic or ironic stance is the privilege of those for whom action is not a priority. The playful stance is appropriate to people for whom most of decisions of life are play.⁵⁴

It's difficult to take this critique of Rorty seriously when Blackburn seems content to attack Rorty the man as much as Rorty's arguments. Minimizing Rorty's arguments as silly by likening him to someone without serious work to do and is merely "at play" is poor form. Much of Rorty's writing, especially his later writing focuses on the importance of

⁵³ Blackburn, 290.

⁵⁴ Blackburn, 291.

action and of organizing around projects supporting civil rights and increased justice (Achieving our Country and Philosophy and Social Hope for example). It makes the reader wonder, "If Rorty's position is so ridiculous, why bother to write about it at all? Why pay it any attention in the first place?"

Rorty feels that the realist-relativist dualism is a farce. His whole critique is built around the idea that strict realists who think they've tapped into something transcendent are making a power grab and are actually detached from reality.

'Relativism' is merely a red herring. The realist is, once again projecting his own habits of thought upon the pragmatist when he charges him with relativism. For the realist thinks the whole point of philosophical thought is to detach oneself from any particular community and look down at it from a more universal standpoint. When he (the realist) hears the pragmatist repudiating the desire for such a standpoint, he cannot quite believe it. He thinks that everyone deep down inside must want such detachment. So he attributes to the pragmatist a perverse form of his own attempted detachment and sees him as an ironic sneering aesthete who refuses to take the choice between communities seriously, a mere relativist.⁵⁵

Rorty is not an unstable, detached aesthete as Blackburn describes because Rorty subscribes to being planted in a local community (undetached), with local ethics and projects and consequences. Rorty feels like this sense of being detached and aspiring towards having a god's-eye-view is a delusion, an impossibility.

Holocaust

The Holocaust is always sensitive example to use in arguments because it represents the ultimate moral trump card. No one can deny the abhorrence and unspeakable moral evil of the holocaust. Or can they? Blackburn accuses relativists like Rorty of promoting an unstable environment where this denial may be possible. The Holocaust is Blackburn's counter example to the idea that "anything can be made to look

⁵⁵ Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 30.

good or bad by being re-described". Blackburn wonders how could a better truer fuller explanation of the Holocaust represent it as anything other than abhorrent?

I think Rorty's answer would be that upon re-examination it remains to be nothing but abhorrent for anyone familiar with the particular history of the crimes. It is through the attachment to the local facts that we do not lose sight of the horror of the Holocaust and it is through abstraction and detachment that one might re-describe it in a way favorable to the Nazi's.

The idea that anything can be re-described to look good or bad is necessarily context driven. Rorty is not saying that all things can be equally good or bad at the same time. Rorty is saying that if we as a community allow for the conversation to allow for these redescriptions then we will indeed be providing an environment that something crazy like 'the Holocaust was the event that prompted the writing of the greatest diary of the Second World War' is possible. This re-description IS possible, but only if we detach from our community of knowers, a community that knows what really happened.

Blackburn concludes:

The conclusion of this brush with postmodernism is, once more, that there is no way of escaping from ethics. But it also shows us that there is no reason to think we have to escape from it, if we would confront our situation clearly. Faced with different vocabularies, and voices, we compare theirs with ours. If they seem to have got something right which we have not, we learn from them. If we have something right and they have not, we may be able to teach them. If their attitudes are foul and frightful, we may have to be at war with them.⁵⁶

I think in this paragraph Blackburn is playing from Rorty's songbook. The key here is the term 'right'. Rorty doubts if there is a resting place for ethics. Rorty's position is that our responsibility as a community is to be always striving to increase the good and minimize cruelty within a community. The Holocaust was not wrong because it was in

⁵⁶ Blackburn, 294.

discord with some ethical universal truth, etched in heaven. The Holocaust was wrong because it perpetrated evil on friends and neighbors. Evil judged locally, because that's the only judgment we ever really have.

Putnam: Pragmatic Instability

Hilary Putnam doubts that Rorty can maintain his position of pragmatic consensus building for his sociological justification of truth. In a critical essay in the volume "Rorty and his Critics" Putnam characterizes Rorty's position as contextual and reforming.

As Putnam acknowledges, Rorty goes out of his way to admit that there is very much a real world "out there" that he thinks we are very much "connected to" in some way. But the correspondence relation is unsatisfying. So it is as if Rorty wants to enjoy what the mere linguistic scheme of science does for him, but he does not want to attribute any more grandiose credit to science than his critique will allow.

How can Rorty so much as use words to tell us that kicking a rock involves a particular rock if those very words do not relate particularly to kicks and rocks?⁵⁷

Contextual

In regard to his contextual views of justification, Putnam claims that there is a problem with Rorty's view of justification as sociological and assent to the majority (since Rorty admits the majority can be wrong). In this way Rorty is either incoherent or being duplicitous by allowing for (or implicitly appealing to) a standard that is independent of the social context. How is it that a "correct" minority can judge the majority to be incorrect?

⁵⁷ Hilary Putnam, "On Reality and Justification," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 84.

What would be their justification? How does the minority apprehending the majority view as being “dubious” count as justification? Putnam is not convinced that this works

Reforming

In the process of playing vocabularies and cultures off of one another, we produce new and better ways of talking and acting- not better by reference to a previously known standard, but just better in the sense that they come to seem clearly better than their predecessors.⁵⁸

Putnam asserts that reform (whether good or bad) is logically independent of whether most people take it to be a reform. So if we think we have arrived at something better is not legitimate criteria for reform. Putnam thinks instead of reform this is nothing more than (using Rorty’s words) a compliment our successors pay towards their preferred way of justification.

To Putnam in order to meaningfully use terms such a “progress” and “reform” there has to be better or worse non-subjective norms we employ as criteria. To Putnam there must be non-sociological objective ways to appreciate reality otherwise in a Rortyan scheme we are only picking our favorite stories and arbitrarily selecting the ones we want to win.

When characterizing him as a reformist Putnam has a problem with Rorty because progress is achieved by working as a community to attain a standard that is better for us. In this way we are not appealing to some transcendent ahistorical standard or an appeal to something bigger than ourselves. This leaves Rorty’s explanatory process as just one more description in a sea of non-privileged descriptions and without much persuasive power.

When reading Rorty’s critics there is a tugging back and forth between the interlocutors asking, “Well Rorty, aren’t you just appealing to a metaphysical standard

⁵⁸ Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1982),182.

that you are describing in a different way?” and Rorty responds that he is trying to get along with his fellow humans and using the language germane to the task at hand. Both sides are suspicious of one another.

Admittedly what Rorty’s critique is not helpful at is any sort of explanatory super-scheme or structure for how truth “works” outside of a community. And while he spends book after book explaining why he doesn’t seem to need such a thing, there is something to those of us in an empirical and scientific tradition (I’m typing on a computer right now, and I go to the doctor when I’m sick and I fly on airplanes, so I appear to benefit from science, right?) that seems too simple or a bit disingenuous about Rorty’s critique.

Putnam concludes his essay by noting

[To Rorty] if the very idea of representing other people (let alone their norms and standards) is a piece of pernicious metaphysics that we have to get out of our system, as Rorty obviously thinks, then any story about what “we” think (we, western democrats, or “good Europeans,” or whatever Rorty wishes to call “us”) think is just that: a story. And stories, Rorty tells us, cannot represent accurately, or fail to represent accurately; they can only enable us... or fail to enable us to “cope” with the flux that bombards our surface neurons... If the story about what “we” are like is confirmed by certain characters in the story called “sociologists”... that is just detail in the story. Given that view, why shouldn’t Rorty just make up his “sociology”.⁵⁹

Rorty’s response rests in what he sees as the difference in value of what Putnam call merely stories:

Putnam succumbs to this urge again when he says that “any story about what ‘we’...think is just that: a story”. I take stories more seriously than Putnam does. One reason is that I think, and he does not, that it makes sense “to ask whether our present construal of the US Constitution are the result of arguments that the Founding Fathers would have recognized as appealing to ‘better versions of themselves’.” It seems to

⁵⁹ Hilary Putnam, “On Reality and Justification,” in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 86.

me that the better sort of judges and politicians ask themselves this sort of question all the time.⁶⁰

Rorty does not think he is making up his sociology, he thinks he is inheriting it. Rather than view our history as merely stories, Rorty thinks that we should strive to be in 'conversation' with our predecessors who have brought prosperity and peace to our condition and glean the practices (projects) they employed. This in Rorty's view is not a process of finding the essence or the core of their actions as some sort of timeless axiom. Rather Rorty thinks we should seek to understand exactly the circumstantial conditions they were working in to learn how similar or different we should be from them. We are always making choices about which story in history to favor based on our preferences.

Once we give up the idea that rationality is a matter of applying ahistorical criteria, (as we have to in order to deal with the fact that criteria of choice between theories and policies are as mutable as the theories and practices themselves) we have nowhere to turn to except to such stories.⁶¹

Rorty also takes exception with Putnam's view of stories and as coping in place of representation as an act of despair. In Rorty's view, when we are problem solving and combing through the records of our predecessors, what we are actually doing is having a conversation between parties. When it comes to Constitutional law and politics we might be having imaginary conversations between FDR and Jefferson, or when it comes to particle physics we might be having conversations with Bohr and Newton. The loss of the representational picture model of language unsaddles us from the burden of carrying the conclusions of one conversation into every conversation we have. This is the mistake that I am arguing fundamentalists are making with their use of language.

⁶⁰ Richard Rorty, "Response: On Reality and Justification," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 89.

⁶¹ Rorty, 89.

These conversations help us determine whether we are progressing or regressing. Rorty asks us to consider Tillich and Heidegger. Both were challenged with the confrontation of Nazi Germany in 1933. Tillich took Nazism as a regression and fled Germany; Heidegger saw Nazism as rational and became a Nazi. To Rorty the idea that we appeal to an ahistorical consensus to resolve our conflicts and come to truth is cold comfort, an unnecessary mirage we pay tribute to.

Davidson: Truth Rehabilitated

Donald Davidson's response to Rorty in his essay *Truth Rehabilitated* serves as a grounding critique of Rorty and may be a way of bringing Rorty back to the "family" of fellow philosophers. Unlike Rorty, Davidson does not seem to have an axe to grind and can seem more conciliatory in his comments, more even and measured. Davidson concludes his essay by saying

Truth is important, then, not because it is especially valuable or useful, though of course it may be on occasion, but because without the idea of truth, we would not be thinking creatures, nor would we understand what it is for someone else to be a thinking creature... Correspondence, while it is empty as a definition, does capture the thought that truth depends on how the world is, and this should be enough to discredit most epistemic and pragmatic theories. Epistemic and pragmatic theories, on the other hand, have the merit of relating the concept of truth to human concerns, like language, belief, thought and intentional action, and it is these connections which make truth the key to how mind apprehends the world.⁶²

The indispensable value of truth to our discourse is well stated by Davidson. There is a sense in which Rorty is guilty of "throwing the baby out with the bath water" when it comes to truth talk. A gentler distinction of two modes of truth (descriptive and interpretive) would provide a way for Rorty to continue the conversation with his fellow

⁶² Donald Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated", in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 72-73.

philosophers where there could be room for self-creation and discovery. Is it possible for both sorts of philosophers to work side by side to develop a better society? I think there is. In his zeal to keep philosophy honest, Rorty loses much of his audience by seeming to question the possibility of truth at all.

In another sense it seems like Rorty is doing the following: imagine an architect is frustrated because every building in the land is built to withstand a hurricane. No matter what the application or the cost (hot dog stand, Winnebago, traditional craftsman, sky scraper, etc.). They are all built with industrial strength building specs just in the event that a possible hurricane could arise, no matter what.

Now imagine our architect has decided that this “waste of resources” is intolerable and wants to protest. His reasoning is that the chief architects and engineers of the land who wrote the building codes are all from coastal areas and presuppose (falsely to our architects belief) that hurricanes can and will happen anywhere as a predetermined fact of life. But rather than offer a tempered view where one argues that sometimes you need hurricane grade (expensive, heavy duty) and sometimes something lighter will do the trick, our architect decides the solution is “there shall be no more structures at all”.

Even though our architect has made an extreme statement, he more than likely goes about life living as normal, because whether he is living in a cave (which also has “structure”) or living in “structure-less” objects he has built which happen resemble what we might call “buildings”, he still has to live somewhere out of the elements or he will perish.

Our architect’s response would flatly be too severe and seem a ridiculous response and in the end, our architect would seem like a hypocrite (or a lunatic). He would be accused of playing semantics and not being serious. He would surely not be

living in a field or caves; he would continue to build structures he would just not call them that.

In a certain sense it seems like this is what Rorty is doing because he does not make clear what the alternative to a “structure” might be. Rorty’s response is not always helpful because he seems at times to say, “why do we need to have structure talk at all?” And even though I think Rorty’s critique is helpful for injecting a constructive skepticism into the discussion around theories of truth. And plays a helpful role in illuminating the falsehood of fundamentalist correspondence, his critique does not all the way satisfy.

The project of setting the rules and standards of inquiry and the criteria for defining when we have landed on the genuine truth is not a project Rorty is interested in any longer debating. Rorty is not an atheist who is arguing propositionally against the veracity of another’s beliefs. Rather Rorty is just trying to move on. To many in the philosophy community there is a decided lack of closure in Rorty’s exile.

To extend the religious metaphor, Rorty is happy to quietly attend his nephew’s bar mitzvah or his cousin’s first baptism and not say a word. He is not merely being polite, he is no longer participating in the language game that the religious participate in. If pushed he will surely give his opinions, but he thinks that they are merely his opinions and is relinquishing the fervor he once felt for solving these eternal problems. This might make Rorty a bad philosopher, but it does not make him a bad citizen. And the late Rorty is more interested in being a good citizen than a good philosopher. He gives this example of someone being able to hold beliefs which are incompatible, but non competitive:

I have in mind a very good evolutionary biologist who traces the origins of various species all week long, but takes great comfort from hearing mass on Sundays. She does not see any inferential connections between the beliefs she expresses when reciting the creed and when

lecturing on Evolution 101- though she is vaguely aware that others (for instance Pope Ratzinger) do.⁶³

I think this is a good example of someone participating in two different language games. When the biologist has her lab coat on, she is participating in the descriptive theoretical language game of science, when she is hearing a homily on the psalms she is participating in an interpretive meaning making language game (not science). Clearly Rorty is fed up with science somehow getting all of the good press and seeming to be the more important discipline over all of knowledge. Davidson says at the end of his essay:

Importance is a hard thing to argue about. All these concepts (and more) are essential to thought, and cannot be reduced to anything simpler or more fundamental. Why be niggardly in awarding prizes, I'm happy to hand out golden apples all around.⁶⁴

There are philosophers who think Rorty is dead wrong and that arguing against him will merit progress, or at least provide a defense to protect young philosophy students who might fall under his study. And Rorty is clear on this point. He admits he is provincial and that his democratic views are his own. He even goes so far as to admit that there is no pedagogical difference between what he is trying to do and what the Nazis were doing when they made their students read *Der Stürmer* "the only difference is I serve a better cause, I come from a better province."⁶⁵

This provincial view of knowledge actually plays well into Rorty's defense of a liberal democratic society. But it might have served Rorty better to have focused more on the merits of ideas, instead of trying to vilify the concept of correspondence truth all

⁶³ Richard Rorty, "Response to: Truth Rehabilitated", in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 79.

⁶⁴ Donald Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated", in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 73.

⁶⁵ Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth", in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 2000), 22.

together. It is possible that on a personal level Rorty allowed his frustration with his inability to merge his private desires into a synoptic vision to cause him to create too much separation between the tradition that he was raised in and where he wants to go.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: Richard Rorty and the Kingdom of God

The Pragmatism of Walter Rauschenbusch

Walter Rauschenbusch was an important German Baptist Theologian in the 19th century. Raised in upstate New York by German immigrant parents, he was trained in the method of biblical literalism and substitutionary atonement common to conservative Protestantism of his era (common also to the fundamentalists I have been discussing). But Rauschenbusch found these concepts to be repugnant and challenged his tradition when he went to seminary in Rochester as a young man. After being exposed to German Higher Criticism, Rauschenbusch was unable to maintain the detached views of biblical truth and began re-contextualizing his understanding of Christian scripture. Here are some his thoughts on late 19th century conservative Christianity are crystalized in the following pamphlet he published

Because the Kingdom of God has been dropped as the primary and comprehensive aim of Christianity, and personal salvation has been substituted for it, therefor men seek to save their own souls and are selfishly indifferent to the evangelization of the world.

Because the individualistic conception of personal salvation has pushed out sight the collective idea of a Kingdom of God on earth, Christian men seek for salvation of individuals and are comparatively indifferent to the spread of the spirit of Christ in the political, industrial, social, scientific and artistic life of humanity, and have left these as the undisturbed possession of the spirit of the world.

Because the Kingdom of God has been understood as a state to be inherited in a future life rather than as something to be realized here and now, therefore Christians have been contented with a low plane of life here and have postponed holiness to the future.⁶⁶

The “Kingdom of God” is a popular concept within Christianity of all denominations and became especially dear to Rauschenbusch’s project. It receives its

⁶⁶ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan Publishing: 1917), 131.

popularity from the line from the Lord's Prayer "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be done, on Earth as it is in Heaven". Rauschenbusch took the writings of Sidney Sheldon (who originated the What Would Jesus Do concept in 1896), added them to his Kingdom language and became alarmed that so many Christians of his day were content to sit on their hands and wait for God to come down from heaven and intervene with life's problems. Rauschenbusch's era was the time of Darwinism, the rise of the fundamentalist and the American Industrial Revolution. And many of the mainline Christian denominations had not yet formulated a way to make Christianity relevant to the ills of society in general.

As a young Baptist preacher in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City in 1886 Rauschenbusch saw first hand how his congregants in the Garment District were being treated by their business owners. They were subjected to long hours, low wages, child labor and harsh, sometimes violent treatment. Living with this reality and seeing its impact he made a shift in his approach to preaching and pioneered what has come to be called the Social Gospel. It is important to note that Rauschenbusch did not appeal to an ahistorical or neutral vantage point to make this turn. Rauschenbusch made his change in position based on the realities he saw in his community. It made Rauschenbusch a controversial figure in his

The Social Gospel

The Social Gospel was an important movement in late 19th and early 20th century American Christian reform for several reasons. It was a populist movement spearheaded mostly by liberal Protestant Christians who opposed the dispensational premillennialism of the fundamentalists. Also very characteristic of Social Gospel adherents is the rejection of the salvation of the individual over the salvation of society. There are many others who are notable for participating in this movement, Josiah Strong

and Washington Gladden to name a few. But the impact of Social Gospel in early 20th century America can also be found in the New Deal, Women's Suffrage, and Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr. even invokes Rauschenbusch as a major influence on his early thinking that catalyzed the non-violence movement.

Rauschenbusch had done a great service for the Christian Church by insisting that the gospel deals with the whole man, not only his soul, but his body; not only his spiritual well being but his material well-being. It has been my conviction ever since reading Rauschenbusch that any religion which profess to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried.⁶⁷

For Rauschenbusch faith in the kingdom of God "is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming life on earth into the harmony of heaven."⁶⁸

Christian historian Christopher Evans writes, "Already by 1886, theological liberalism had bequeathed two qualities that became indispensable with the Social Gospel movement in America. An acceptance, if not an outright embrace of, the natural sciences and a belief that the nature of Christian salvation did not rest solely upon the atoning death of Christ, but in the character of Jesus' earthly ministry that enabled one to understand the reasons behind Christ's death on the cross."⁶⁹

Rauschenbusch wrote his most famous book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* in 1907. This was a powerful example of how someone with deep religious convictions can suspend their personal idiosyncratic beliefs and apply them to his neighbor. Not surprisingly, the Social Gospel was rejected by the fundamentalists of the early 20th

⁶⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom*, (London: London Publishing Group, 1959), 91.

⁶⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke up the Church*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 65.

⁶⁹ Christopher Evans, *The Kingdom is Always But Coming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 49.

century. This is amazing because Rauschenbusch's ministry is the clearest example we have of what believers can do with their convictions to help their neighbors contrasted in the same moment with what the fundamentalists chose to do instead.

Rauschenbusch lived his entire life as a bona fide believer in the Christian scriptures and as a practitioner of Christian ministry and by all accounts fully expected the traditional eschatology to play out at the time of his death (judgment before God, heaven and hell etc.). But Rauschenbusch is a unique example because he chose to suspend the traditional detached view of language and scripture in favor of an un-detached version of Christianity that lived in the full light of his faith tradition while remaining in solidarity with his neighbor.

Walter Rauschenbusch is also special because he is Richard Rorty's grandfather.

The Social Gospel of Richard Rorty

I knew there was something "religious" about Richard Rorty the first time I read *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Something about his cadence and his fervor, he sounds evangelical. Rorty refers to Rauschenbusch only three or four times in his entire writing career. He is always complimentary, but never writes as though Rauschenbusch was a major influence. Rorty never met his Grandfather and his own "Trotskyite" parents Winifred and James were either agnostic or atheist.

I had been studying Rorty for many years before I made the connection between his grandfather's project and his own. And when I did, it seemed to make perfect sense. To me they are the same project separated by 90 years. Until recently, the scholars who wrote about Rauschenbusch didn't seem to read Rorty, and the scholars who read Rorty don't seem to know much about Rauschenbusch. The dots rarely connected.

In 2006 Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was rereleased with commentary from thinkers both religious and not, such as Cornel West and Stanley Hauerwas. In this volume Rorty wrote a very brief afterword titled *Buds that Never Opened*. The title of Rorty's essay is an allusion to a line from Rauschenbusch's book

Perhaps these nineteen centuries [since the death of Jesus] have been a long preliminary stage of growth, and now the flower and fruit are almost here.⁷⁰

Rorty writes:

100 years ago there was still a chance that Christian churches could still play a role in social justice- that Christian, rather than Marxist ideas could inspire radical social change. One can imagine a 20th century in which the two World Wars and the Great Depression were avoided, the Bolshevik Revolution collapsed...Decolonization and the entrance of China and India on the international stage could have happened under the consensus, in the West, that building a global egalitarian society was a moral obligation...But our luck was bad, and Christianity has probably missed its chance. The likelihood that religion will play a significant role in social justice seems smaller now than any time since *Christianity and the Social Crisis* was published.⁷¹

Clearly Rorty is pessimistic towards modern religion's ability (specifically fundamentalist Christianity) to make strides in social justice, yet he engaged the religious up to the end of his life. I think this is because he was so desirous of a hope that moves people to action that he would go wherever he thought hope was alive looking for a chance that he might collaborate with the hopeful towards more human happiness.

Rorty's biggest problem with religion is probably the Pauline/ Augustinian concept of original sin. He references it several times in his later writings.

Relativists like myself agree that the collapse of Marxism has helped us see why politics should not try to be redemptive. But that is not because

⁷⁰ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke up the Church*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 343.

⁷¹ Richard Rorty, "Buds that Never Fully Opened," in *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century: The Classic That Woke up the Church*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 349.

there is another sort of redemption available, the sort that Catholics believe is found in the Church. It is because redemption was a bad idea in the first place. Human beings need to be made happier, but they do not need to be redeemed, for they are not degraded beings, not immaterial souls imprisoned in material bodies, not innocent souls corrupted by original sin.⁷²

Rorty goes on to agree with Nietzsche that we are clever animals who have learned to cooperate with one another and have a hope for a better future. This is Rorty's hope :

My sense of the holy, insofar as I have one, is bound up with the hope that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendants will live in a global civilization where love is pretty much the only law. In such a society, communication would be domination free, class and caste would be unknown, hierarchy would be a matter of temporary pragmatic convenience, and power would be entirely at the disposal of the free agreement of a literate and well educated electorate.⁷³

Richard Rorty died in 2007. He died pessimistic that religion could take on the role that he so desperately wanted someone to take on. What Rorty couldn't see and what I think I see is that Rorty himself serves as a catalyst to do just that. Since Rorty's death there has been a renewal in the conversation between Rorty and the religious. Rorty writes voluminously in his career about Hope in Place of Knowledge, Solidarity as Social Hope and Pragmatic Progress. These are all his prophetic yearnings for a world in which we collaborate with our neighbors to provide an environment where cruelty is the worst thing we can do.

Theologians and philosophers are now picking up Rorty's critique of language and asking the same questions I am asking in this paper. An Amazon search of the words "Rorty" and "Religion" will bring up dozens of books written in the last five years

⁷² Richard Rorty, *An Ethics for Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 13.

⁷³ Richard Rorty, "Anticlericalism and Atheism," in *The Future of Religion*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia, 2005), 40.

asking tough questions about how we take Rorty's critique seriously, and how to apply it to our problems today.

What does it mean to have a deep private religious conviction that is seemingly in conflict with my neighbor? A simple perusal of your daily newspaper will show dozens of examples where conflicts can be mitigated if we will let go of the desire to blend our private desires with our public commitments into a synoptic vision. Rorty did not see this kind of world before he died but I have hope that it is still possible.

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