

Rorty on Ethnocentrism and Exclusion

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Rorty claims in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1980) that the Cartesian picture of the mind as mirror of reality has outworn its use, and he sets out for twentieth-century thinkers a new picture and a new vocabulary. Rorty draws on three representatives of what he calls the "therapeutic" tradition in philosophy—Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey—to "help pierce the crust of philosophical convention" (13).

My major project in this paper is to show the ways in which Rorty does not really dispense with the major components of the Descartes-Locke-Kant tradition, as he calls it, but instead displaces them to the realm of the social. By looking at Rorty's redescription of *objectivity* as solidarity, I want to bring out the ways in which Rorty retains some of the precepts of this tradition. His redescription of objectivity moves these precepts to the realm of social groups, rather than positioning them in existing in a "mind." However, his picture of social groups carries with it the assumptions about mind and body that are characteristic of the Descartes-Locke-Kant tradition.

Contrasting objectivity with solidarity, Rorty claims that the desire for objectivity is the desire to explain one's life without reference to a particular group of individuals, whereas the desire for solidarity is an attempt to place one's life story within a context that does not seek validation from outside a given community (1991). The desire for objectivity, Rorty says, is simply a hankering for some validation of our practices that transcends a particular community or group. The desire for solidarity involves no such hankering. It is merely an attachment to the practices of a certain community that does not require that something outside those practices somehow support them.

Realists, in Rorty's terminology, are those people who wish to ground solidarity in objectivity (1991). The realist is looking for a special relationship between the beliefs characteristic of her community and something transcending that community that will give her sufficient assurance that those beliefs and practices are not historically and socially specific, but are grounded in the way things are in and of themselves. According to Rorty, the realist must construct an epistemology that

has room for a kind of justification which is not merely social but natural, springing from human nature itself, and made possible by a link between that part of nature and the rest of nature. On the realist's view, the various

procedures which are thought of as providing rational justification by one or another culture may or may not really *be* rational. For to be truly rational, procedures of justification *must* lead to the truth, to correspondence to reality, to the intrinsic nature of things. (1991, 22)

The realist must employ the machinery necessary for this world view: a correspondence theory of truth, a foundationalist epistemology, and an ontology that includes things-in-themselves.

Rorty's pragmatist, in contrast, seeks to ground objectivity on solidarity. According to Rorty, the pragmatist has no need of either an epistemology or a metaphysics and does not require that truth be a correspondence to the way things *really* are: "For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one's community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of 'us' as far as we can" (1991, 23). The conception of objectivity that Rorty advocates, based on the pragmatist's perspective, does not require a God's eye view—a detachment from our particular and historically specific human community. Instead, it embraces this particularity. Pragmatists do not give up on the notions of truth and rationality; they simply have less grandiose notions of what those are. Truth does not require support from a world of things in themselves, which are known by some process of belief formation whose rationality is guaranteed by an unchanging human nature: "From a pragmatist point of view, to say that what is rational for us now to believe may not be true, is simply to say that somebody may come up with a better idea. It is to say that there is always room for improved belief, since new evidence, or new hypotheses, or a whole new vocabulary may come along" (1991, 23).

The realist might venture a question here, however. On what basis does a pragmatist make the judgment that one belief is better than another belief, or that one hypothesis is better than another hypothesis, if not on the basis of correspondence to reality? Rorty's pragmatist will give this answer: One belief is better than another belief, one hypothesis better than another hypothesis, insofar as that belief or hypothesis gives us a rule for action that is better than the rule for action that follows from the other belief or hypothesis. According to Rorty, truth is simply "what is good for us to believe" (1991, 22).

For Rorty, the inescapable use of the terms *better* and *good* point to the fact that beliefs are not representations of reality *an sich*. They are normative and action guiding, and so are inextricably tied to human evaluation and interest. According to Rorty, this is true, not only of his own pragmatism, but also of the realist's metaphysics and epistemology.

The *us* to which Rorty refers is what he takes to be "our community"—that of "the liberal Rawlsian searchers for consensus, the heirs of Socrates, the people

who wish to link their days dialectically each to each" (1991, 29). Rorty's pragmatist tells us that *we* (understood as this collection of people) must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though the practices of our community are not immune to criticism or revision: "We Western liberal intellectuals should accept the fact that we have to start from where we are, and that this means that there are lots of views which we simply cannot take seriously" (1991, 29). Thus, Rorty concludes, the pragmatist must recognize the necessity of an ethnocentrism that does not give us any noncircular justification for our practices. These are simply the practices of our community and, as such, we must privilege them—we must assume them to be better than the practices of other possible or actual communities, at least in practice, because we cannot justify everything. All justifications of our practices must rely on those practices, and some of our beliefs must remain fixed if we are to examine others. We cannot jettison or suspend our belief system wholesale, but neither can we provide an ahistorical viewpoint from which to endorse or criticize that system.

Objectivity, according to Rorty, should be understood as intersubjective agreement, and the desire to be objective should be seen as simply the desire to have beliefs that would, "in the course of a free and open encounter with people holding other beliefs"—that is, an encounter free of coercion—tend to be agreed upon at the end of the encounter. We do not need an epistemology, Rorty claims, to bring about such agreement.

Epistemological issues are at heart moral and political issues, on Rorty's analysis. The realist concern about the specter of relativism arising out of pragmatism is really a concern about the possibility of Enlightenment values and ideals—liberal democracy and moral codes—surviving without an epistemology to prop them up. Rorty prefers to cast the issues in this light because it allows us to discuss what's *really* at stake, namely, how we should live.

Alas, Rorty says, no noncircular justification of our liberal practices is available to the pragmatist. This does not put her at a serious disadvantage, however, since no noncircular justification of our practices is available to the realist, either. Any justification must presume at least some of those habits, beliefs, and practices. Thus, the realist attempt to forge an epistemology out of things-in-themselves and a correspondence theory of truth in order to bolster our moral and political inheritance from the Enlightenment focuses intellectual energy on a project that is doomed to fail. Rorty suggests we give it up.

PHILOSOPHY WITHOUT EPISTEMOLOGY AND OBJECTIVITY AS INTERSUBJECTIVE AGREEMENT

What is philosophy without epistemology? Rorty's vision of the new philosophy is a dialogue among the liberal intellectuals of the West. The purpose of the dialogue is to discuss and improve upon our Enlightenment heritage. Revolution-

aries need not apply since, Rorty tells us, revolution cannot be a live option for our community, given the fact that we must be ethnocentric at least in practice.

Rorty's insistence that philosophy ought to abandon epistemology is connected to his argument that the ocular metaphor that assumes that knowledge must be founded on some sort of privileged representations is outworn. I take Rorty to be saying that, without privileged representations, epistemology dies.

What is left of objectivity after epistemology dies? Objectivity becomes intersubjective agreement. The distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' claims, then, is just the distinction between those claims on which people readily agree and those that do not usually admit of such agreement. Objectivity places no normative constraints upon knowledge beyond this general agreement among us.

Rorty recognizes that, given this reading, objectivity requires a sorting of "those people to whom we must justify our beliefs" (1991, 30) and the others, and it is clear that the agreement which is objectivity need only be achieved noncoercively among us; yet he seems to miss the fact that agreement among us is often achieved, not really coercively, but through the exclusion of some us—from taking part in the conversation in any meaningful way. An example will help to illustrate my point.

As my husband and I watched *The Graduate* one day, he remarked on the scene in which Benjamin relentlessly pursues Elaine around Berkeley: "That used to be considered the height of romantic love. Today it would be called stalking." Of course, the reason we once considered that to be romantic love is that, until recently, the women who experienced such pursuit by men and felt that it was threatening were not taken seriously and, moreover, the fact that many women were actually killed or maimed by their male pursuers was not acknowledged. Indeed, women were often encouraged by their friends, sisters, parents, the man himself, and popular culture (as exemplified by the movie) to view this kind of behavior as both a compliment and an expression of deep and wild masculine love. The very real physical and emotional consequences suffered by women as a result of these "expressions of love" were generally not viewed systematically as part of a larger picture, and so *our* definition of romantic love was untouched by revisionary evidence.

It was not until the Women's Movement of the 1970s, with its emphasis on consciousness-raising, that individual women were able to use their experiences as evidence for why *our* conception of romantic love was not a good one.

Notice, however, that the *we* who defined romantic love as it is portrayed in all its dangerous glory in *The Graduate* failed to see its adverse effects on the individual bodies and minds of the women who were and are its victims. Nevertheless, in Rorty's account, this definition of romantic love would count as 'objective' because it enjoyed wide intersubjective agreement among the community of liberal intellectuals of the West. Never mind that, at the time, that com-

munity was comprised almost exclusively of privileged white men, which is not exactly a representative sample of Western society in the late twentieth century.

Among feminists, the debate about romantic love was just beginning to heat up when *The Graduate* was produced. Wide intersubjective agreement was not a characteristic of the dialogue. And yet, the feminist discussions were grounded in a broader understanding of the consequences of viewing romantic love as a relentless pursuit of the beloved.

Which leaves us with an interesting dilemma: If the *objective* conception of romantic love is the one that shares wide agreement among us—in this case, the Western bourgeois liberal intellectuals—and the *less objective* conception of romantic love falls to those who hotly debate the issue, then why should we (Western bourgeois liberals) want objectivity to be a characteristic of our community or its beliefs?

If we wish to maintain *objectivity* as something worth striving for—as a desideratum of inquiry—then it is not clear that Rorty's redefinition of the term is what we want. If *objective* is to be a term that valorizes certain kinds of inquiry or methods of discussion, then, for Rorty's reading of *The Graduate* example, the *kudos* for objectivity must go to the Western bourgeois liberal intellectuals for their rendition of romantic love. Given Rorty's definition, the feminist community, still in deep disagreement about what our best conception of romantic love is, lacks objectivity. We must notice, too, that the agreement among the Western liberal intellectuals of the bourgeois class is not an effect of coercion—it is simply the result of exclusion. Is an objectivity achieved through exclusion what we want?

Perhaps Rorty would respond here that I have reached exactly his point, namely, that it is pluralism rather than agreement that should be valorized in inquiry. This seems to be Rorty's point in "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz" (1986). However, this emphasis on pluralism also has its problems.

According to Clifford Geertz (1986), the danger of such ethnocentrism, (or "to-each-his-own morality," in Geertz's words) is that it makes

both rather more and rather less of the fact of cultural diversity than it should. Rather more, because it suggests that to have had a different life than one has in fact had is a practical option one has somehow to make one's mind up about (should I have been a Bororo? am I not fortunate not to have been a Hitite?); rather less because it obscures the power of such diversity, when personally addressed, to transform our sense of what it is for a human being. Boro, Hitite, Structuralist, or Postmodern Bourgeois Liberal, to believe, to value, to go on. The trouble with ethnocentrism is not that it commits us to our own commitments. We are, by definition, so committed, as we are to having our own headaches. The trouble with ethnocentrism is that it impedes us from discovering at what sort of angle, like

Forster's Cavafy, we stand to the world; what sort of bat we really are. (111-12)

While I don't entirely agree with Geertz, I do agree with certain aspects of this particular criticism. The "we-are-we and they-are-they" approach, which Geertz sees as a consequence of Rorty's ethnocentrism, assumes that we can somehow make a choice about cultural identification and belonging and fails to take seriously the sources of our differences. By making "rather more" of cultural diversity, Geertz seems to be saying that Rorty assumes that we can somehow choose which cultural group we belong to. While this may be true in some instances, such as Rorty's identification with the community of Western bourgeois liberal intellectuals, in other instances we have no such choice. This will become apparent in the ensuing discussion. By making "rather less" of cultural diversity, Rorty fails to see how different versions of the world should serve to challenge our own cherished and unquestioned story line. In the case of *our* definition of romantic love, the source of the difference in definitions between the bourgeois Western intellectual tradition and the feminist community is connected to a difference in social position in a gender-hierarchical society. By making "rather less" of this difference, Rorty fails to grapple with how that structure has systematically affected his life experiences as well as those life experiences of feminists who disagree with the accepted definition.

"PRIVILEGED" REPRESENTATIONS:
AUTHORIZED VOICES AND THE REPRESENTATION OF OTHERS

Over my mask
Is your mask
Of me
An Asian woman
Grateful
Gentle
In-the pupils of your eyes
As I gesture with each
New play of
Light
And shadow
This mask be
Comes you
—Mitsuye Yamada, "Masks of Women"¹

Rorty's response to Geertz's criticism goes something like this: It is the job of anthropologists, historians, and novelists—the "connoisseurs of particularity," in Rorty's words—to try to get us to include outsiders in our community by trying to get us to stretch our moral imaginations and by interpreting the experi-

can happen for a variety of reasons, Alcoff claims. It can lead to the spokesperson benefiting economically at the expense of members of the less privileged group.³ The other politically retrograde effect of this practice of "speaking for others" is the continued disempowerment of members of subjugated groups. As Alcoff argues, the practice of privileged speakers speaking on behalf of the less privileged does nothing to disrupt dominant hierarchies of epistemic authority that operate in the public realm (99).

At this point, we might hear confirming evidence of Alcoff's claim from the Native American quarters—that they continue to be excluded from "contemporary America" by being denied many of the privileges and benefits enjoyed by other members of the club—including the privilege of being able to speak for themselves and make their own case for their worth. It is clear that they have no real choice about whether they are "one of us" or not, since we make the rules and determine who we will include.

In the case of *our* definition of romantic love, I doubt very much that Rorty would claim that women were not a part of mid-twentieth-century America. Yet, why is it that the voices of women were tuned out, ignored, ridiculed, dismissed, or subjected to reeducation when they objected to this concept of love? It seems that women and Native Americans share ambiguous space in the club—maybe out in the kitchen—in which we are and are not a part of contemporary America.

The problem here might be traced to a certain ambivalence in Rorty's understanding of what constitutes membership in a community. While at some points he implies that it is adherence to norms that constitutes a community (e.g., in his discussions of Davidson's work), at other times he implies that it is a certain sympathy or identification. His description of "the liberal Rawlsian searchers for consensus" seems to lead to a delineation of community as bounded by liberal norms of deliberation and democracy. But his discussion of the Drunken Indian example implies that inclusion in the community and its story requires that we come to see certain others as "one of us"—that we come to imaginatively identify with them. Thus, in this reading, community is delineated by a certain "fellow-feeling." The desire for objectivity manifests itself as the desire to expand that *us*—those with whom we identify—as far as possible.

Rorty seems to bring together the commitment to liberal ideals with the "imaginary identification" necessary for solidarity in his essay "Solidarity" (1989). In his discussion of inclusion, Rorty says that the liberal commitment to the claim that "we have obligations to human beings simply as such" should be interpreted as a slogan that reminds the liberal

to keep trying to expand our sense of 'us' as far as we can. That slogan urges us to extrapolate further in the direction set by certain events in the past—the inclusion among 'us' of the family in the next cave, then of the

ences of outsiders in ways that make sense to us. In his discussion of Geertz's "Drunken Indian" example,² Rorty disagrees that the case ended badly and says

[W]hy are drunken Indians, in Geertz' words 'as much a part of contemporary America' as yuppie doctors? Roughly, because anthropologists have made them so. . . . Because of the absence of sympathetic interpreters who could place their behavior in the context of an unfamiliar set of beliefs and desires, drunken Indians were not part of nineteenth century America: that is the vast majority of nineteenth century Americans took no more notice of them than they did of criminal psychopaths or village idiots. The Indians, whether drunk or sober, were non-persons, without human dignity, means to our parents' ends. The anthropologists made it hard for us to continue thinking of them that way and thereby made them into part of 'contemporary America'. (1986, 206)

I have quoted this passage at length because it is richly illustrative of the problem I have raised. I think that some nineteenth-century Indians would debate the claim that they were "not a part of nineteenth century America." As with feminists who disagreed with *our* concept of romantic love, they were always there. In fact, they might claim, their right to speak for nineteenth century America is just as legitimate as those nineteenth-century (white) Americans who ignored their existence. Those who claim the right to tell the story of nineteenth-century America are just mistaken about what it actually consisted of. Rorty, however, speaks from the exalted and privileged position, not of the value-neutral and "objective" observer, but of the equally exalted and privileged position of the conquering and dominant (socially, politically, economically, and culturally) group. While Rorty admits that this dominant group does not enjoy objectivity in the sense of value-neutrality, he feels they do retain the term *objective* insofar as their view of nineteenth-century America enjoyed great intersubjective agreement among white Americans.

Notice, too, what it took, in Rorty's view, for Native Americans to "count" as a part of contemporary America. Admission into the club requires recognition from someone in the club (here anthropologists) that the outsiders are at least moderately worthy of inclusion. This recognition, followed by lobbying efforts on the part of these sympathetic club members, has resulted in the admission of Native Americans into "contemporary America."

In Rorty's account, marginalized *theys* must be spoken for by members of "our community" and portrayed to us in a sympathetic light that leads us to see them as more like us than unlike. But the ways in which marginalized others are represented by majority/dominant "authorities" are not unproblematic. As Linda Alcoff makes clear, "[T]he practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (1995, 99). This

we can empathize however much we differ *with* them and enigmatical they-s with whom we cannot, however much we defend to the death their right to differ *from* us. The wogs begin long before Calais" (1986, 112). Geertz is making two important points here: First, he recognizes that those to whom we feel we must justify our beliefs differ only in degree from those to whom we feel we owe no justification. Second, he seems to be saying that the world does not divide neatly into separate culture-groups. Cultures are not natural kinds. They are, instead, human attempts to categorize people for some particular purpose. Even then, people may have different allegiances and count themselves among a number of different groups. In the case of twentieth-century feminists, many of us should be included in the group of bourgeois Western liberal intellectuals and we might also count ourselves among the community of feminists—which is not necessarily a community included within the community of Western bourgeois liberal intellectuals. The boundaries shift according to our purposes. Culture groups are not homogenous unless we define them very narrowly, namely, as containing one member. Even then, we might argue, we may even be foreign to ourselves in some respects.

Michael Sandel identifies another problem with this picture of moral obligation as connected to consensus. Although the problem is identified with Rousseau, it clearly is a near relative of Rorty's position: "Unable to abide disharmony, Rousseau's republican ideal seeks to collapse the distance between persons so that citizens stand in a kind of speechless transparency or immediate presence to one another" (1996, 320). Sandel contrasts this picture of the liberal state with Tocqueville's picture—one that is "more clamorous than consensual." According to Sandel, the picture of the liberal democracy that Tocqueville presents "does not despise differentiation. Instead of collapsing the space between persons, it fills this space with public institutions that gather people together in various capacities, that both separate and relate them" (320). It is the role of public spaces and institutions that differentiates Tocqueville's clamorous republic from Rousseau's consensual republic. Public institutions and spaces serve to preserve both community and a plurality of identities. As Sandel argues, townships, public schools, religious institutions, and "virtue-sustaining occupations" such as community organizations can mediate the strong pull toward differentiation and particularity and the equally strong pull toward the assimilation necessary for Rorty's solidarity.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have suggested that the only criterion which will draw this line is indubitability—that closeness to the Inner Eye which permits Descartes to say (in

tribe across the river, then of the tribal confederation beyond the mountains... (and perhaps last of all of the menials who all this time, have been doing our dirty work). This is a process that we should try to keep going. We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people—people whom we still think of as 'they' rather than 'us'. We should try to notice our similarities with them. The right way to construe the slogan is as urging us to create a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have. (1989, 196)

Imaginative identification is driven by the commitment to liberal norms. But imaginative identification requires the recognition of similarities and, to a certain extent, a blindness to differences (192). Our sense of being obligated to certain *others* is reducible to actual or potential intersubjective agreement among *us* and *the others* (195).

So the conundrum seems to be this: moral obligation requires limiting the ways in which we see others as different. Insofar as imaginative identification and moral obligation are tied up with consensus and agreement, disagreement and lack of consensus militate against "our attempts not to be cruel." And, as Rorty sees one of liberalism's primary virtues as the recognition of the value of trying not to be cruel, disagreement and dissonance can only undermine his liberal ideals.

US/THEM DUALISM: RORTY'S HOMOGENEOUS AND TRANSPARENT COMMUNITIES

Discussions in the philosophy of mind usually start off by assuming that everybody has always known how to divide the world into the mental and the physical—that this distinction is common-sensical and intuitive, even if that between two sorts of 'stuff', material and immaterial, is philosophical and baffling.

—Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

Only homogenous communities can guarantee the kind of consensus, consistency, and coherence that Rorty thinks must be worked toward. But a true pluralism cannot treat communities as internally consistent, yet completely distinct from each other. While Rorty attempts to redescribe our liberal hopes, he reenacts on the macro level Descartes's assumption that the mind is completely transparent to itself. For Rorty, it is the community as self-regulating isolatable "monad" that is transparent and homogenous. While Descartes sees the body as wholly other than the mind, Rorty sees the collection of *theys* that cannot be brought into "our community" as the inscrutable *other*.

Rorty's picture of homogenous communities that are transparent to their members is addressed in another of Geertz's criticisms. As Geertz points out, "The social world does not divide at its joints into perspicuous we-s with whom

becomes simply intersubjective agreement. But Rorty still has a notion of privileged representations—the privilege in his case attaches not to the internal characteristics of the representations, as in Descartes's account, but to the speaker in virtue of her/his social position. So we still need epistemology. Epistemology does not need to assume a correspondence theory of truth, and it need not be engaged with modernist assumptions about foundational theories. We still need epistemology—but a different epistemology. We need an epistemology that describes how the privileging that Rorty unapologetically describes can work against the democratic and liberal ideal. We need an epistemology that can show both how such privileging works against a real pluralism and whether it can be employed in ways that will preserve a real pluralism. The epistemology that Rorty needs is one that articulates both the descriptive connection and the normative connection between our attempts to know and talk about the world and each other and our democratic ideals.

Rorty's attempt to historicize philosophy and place it in the social context in which it occurs is an important project. But the problem of representation of others, the problem of encouraging and living with a Real pluralism, rather than a pluralism that is, at heart, a monism, still presents stumbling blocks for Rorty's theory. Rorty's analysis is still too much a linguistic analysis, albeit one that recognizes claims from anthropology as more significant than claims of logic. Nonetheless, so long as Rorty's analysis remains on the purely linguistic level, it fails to be as "empirical" as it ought, according to Rorty's own account, to be.

It also fails to bolster the liberal views that Rorty thinks are so important. Without an understanding of the material conditions that influence language (i.e., power and authority differentials), his ideal of the "conversation" of humankind cannot be actualized. Rorty needs Sandel's account of public spaces and gathering points to cope with the challenges of democracy in a pluralistic society. And Sandel's account carries with it the understanding of how such public spaces can challenge hierarchies of authority and move us closer to a society in which the *others* can speak for themselves, rather than being spoken for by anthropologists, philosophers, and novelists who count as one of *us*.

By ignoring the material aspects of human existence—the ways in which human communities are constructed and interact, the ways in which privilege and authority differentials undermine liberal ideals of democracy, Rorty replicates the Cartesian framework. But now the question is not the relationship between a transparent mind and the completely other "body," or which representations are privileged enough to confer certitude, or our knowledge of the external world generally. Instead, in Rorty's account, we have a strong us/them dualism, the assumption that human communities are "things in themselves," which, if they are not *ours* remain inscrutably *other*, and the replacement of privileged

a sentence which would have astonished Isabella and antiquity) that "nothing is easier for the mind to know than itself."

—Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

Rorty's intellectual history, presented in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, points out the difference between the Renaissance view, in which the Glassy Essence of the self is inscrutable, and the Modernist view, in which we are transparent to ourselves. Rorty takes the modernist move one step farther. We are transparent to ourselves and the collective *we* is transparent to its members. Inscrutability is a characteristic of only those who are not *we*—and they must be passed over in silence, since *we* cannot seriously engage them in discussion.

In addition, as Geertz points out in the first passage I quoted from his work, this view of cultural difference allows *us* to avoid looking long and hard at the exclusions and the differences. "We-are-we and they-are-they" morality and conceptions of identity mean that no one has to admit that they were wrong to exclude certain others, or to look at the grounds of that exclusion. In Rorty's view, such exclusions are simply the way things are, and, if the members of the club wish to change that, they may do so, but such changes occur only at the behest of the members. However, it is not clear to me that this is how social change and inclusion really occur.⁴ Perhaps some social change occurs in this manner, but often it occurs after marginalized groups make their own case or forge alliances with other marginalized groups. Often social change occurs only through revolution, which is, in Rorty's account, not an option for *us*. Certainly, when marginalized groups feel that their voices go unheard, revolution becomes a viable option for them, and Western liberal intellectuals cannot remain isolated from that. Our various communities are interdependent and must interact and overlap in so many ways that we cannot afford to see ourselves as completely alien from those "other" groups. Rorty's account of the relationships between communities assumes those communities to be far too different from each other and commits him to a view of social life that pictures human communities as windowless, homogenous monads.⁵

Rorty's conception of human communities is faulty, and, as a result, the definition of *objectivity* for which he argues suffers. If *objectivity* is to retain its honorific status as a desideratum of inquiry, it cannot be defined simply as "intersubjective agreement." Nor can the proliferation of pluralism simply be valorized. As I have shown, both of these approaches, as they fall out of Rorty's picture of communities, have intractable problems.

The death of epistemology comes about in Rorty's picture because of the dropping of normative constraints connected to notions of privileged representation. Without the normative constraints provided by a concept of privileged representations, according to Rorty, there is no epistemology and objectivity

mental representations with the privileged representations we receive from "our experts." Like Descartes, Rorty, with his linguistic analysis, misses the material aspect of human existence.

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NOTES

1. Quoted by Leslie Bow in "For Every Gesture of Loyalty, There Doesn't Have to Be a Betrayal": Asian American Criticism and the Politics of Locality" (1995).
2. Geertz uses the example of the Drunken Indian to explain how Rorty's pluralism can lead to a lack of understanding when differences arise. In Geertz's example, an Indian who is an unreformed alcoholic gets access to a much-in-demand kidney machine. The doctors at the hospital where the Indian takes his treatment see the machine as an opportunity for him to extend his life, but see giving up alcohol as a necessary step in making the treatment fully effective. The man sees the machine as a means to prolong his days of drinking and refuses to reform. The doctors are left feeling that the machine should have been made available to patients who have given up drinking and the man is left feeling that his sense of his life has been misunderstood.
3. The example Alcoff uses here is Anne Cameron, a First Nation Canadian who was asked by Native Canadian women to stop publishing her first-person accounts of the lives of Native Canadian women.
4. See Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (1964). King claims, "Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor, it must be demanded by the oppressed." This claim seems more accurate than Rorty's implication that the oppressors voluntarily give up their privilege.
5. Although one might argue that Rorty's view of social change can accommodate this challenge, I think that the response open to him is seriously lacking. While it is true that Rorty advocates expanding our community by listening to the voices of excluded others, the recognition of them as "one of us" comes only when the unproblematic members of "our community" grant the others this status. And they are admitted as "one of us" on condition of their assimilability.

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On the Western Modes of World Order

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World order theory is a subject that may be approached at different levels. The first level is the Kantian, that of the human mind or, more precisely, of rational beings, which has to do with the minimum set of features that any conceivable rational mode of world order should exhibit (e.g., logical consistency and the use of some ordering devices such as space, time, substance, etc.). According to Kant, the way in which the rational mind orders the given in experience by means of forms and categories is fixed. It could not be otherwise because it is *a priori*; it is constitutive of its nature. From the Kantian perspective, there is just one basic, universal mode of world order.¹

C. I. Lewis said, following Kant, that "the world of experience is not given in experience: it is constructed by thought from the data of sense" (1929, 29). However, according to Lewis, some amount of variability should be allowed: "The 'human mind' is a coincidence of individual minds which partly, no doubt, must be native, but partly is itself created by the social process" (115). Clearly, this is a step toward a second level in the construction of world order theory, the level of history and culture. Culturalism goes all the way down in this direction by denying any sort of Kantian universalism,² still partially followed by Lewis, and attributing to "cultures" the mind's contribution to the ordering of the world of experience (henceforth *world order*). The following statement made by Foucault provides a good example of such a culturalist stance, if *modes of world order* is substituted for *codes*: "The fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home" (1973, xx).

Now, such a cultural, historical level may be approached either at a grand scale, thereby focusing on a few general modes of order that have dominated entire cultures and civilizations throughout long periods, or at a smaller scale, thereby focusing on a given social group or subculture through a relatively short span and thus probably addressing one specific mode in great detail. Of course, we can go even beyond the cultural level and consider *individual* differences in modes of world order. Phrases such as "Van Gogh's mode of world order" or "John's mode of ordering the world" make perfectly good sense in every-