RORTY'S DEBT TO SELLARSIAN METAPHYSICS: NATURALISM, SECULARIZATION, AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

CARL B. SACHS

Abstract: Rorty regards himself as furthering the project of the Enlightenment by separating Enlightenment liberalism from Enlightenment rationalism. To do so, he rejects the very need for explicit metaphysical theorizing. Yet his commitments to naturalism, nominalism, and the irreducibility of the normative come from the metaphysics of Wilfrid Sellars. Rorty's debt to Sellars is concealed by his use of Davidsonian arguments against the scheme/content distinction and the nonsemantic concept of truth. The Davidsonian arguments are used for Deweyan ends: to advance secularization and anti-authoritarianism. However, Rorty's conflation of theology and metaphysics conceals the possibility of post-theological metaphysics. The key distinction lies between "metaphysics" and "Metaphysics." The former provisionally models the relations between different vocabularies; the latter continues theology by other means. Sellars shows how to do metaphysics without Metaphysics. This approach complements Rorty's prioritization of cultural politics over ontology and his vision of Enlightenment liberalism without Enlightenment rationalism.

Keywords: Richard Rorty, Wilfrid Sellars, Donald Davidson, metaphysics, theology, naturalism, the Enlightenment, secularism, normativity, pragmatism.

Introduction

With the passing of Richard Rorty, our global intellectual culture has lost one of the most eloquent and passionate defenders of the Enlightenment. Rorty's commitment to secularism, human rights, and a patriotic American Left are interwoven with his rejection of explicit metaphysical theorizing. I argue in this article that a correct appreciation of the former requires understanding the latter, and vice versa. In his rejection of metaphysics and embrace of naturalism, Rorty builds on themes from Quine, Davidson, and Sellars to further his broader commitment to the further secularization of Western culture. In this respect Rorty is clearly aligned with two of the greatest nineteenth-century naturalistic and secularizing philosophers, Nietzsche and Dewey, though his criticisms of each have also received much-deserved attention.

Rorty's dual commitment to naturalism and to secularization illuminates his disdain of traditional epistemology and metaphysics (the concern

with appearance/reality, accident/essence, inner mind/outer world, mind/body, and free will/determinism). As Rorty puts it, "We need to peel apart Enlightenment liberalism from Enlightenment rationalism" (Rorty 2001a, 235): we can and should uphold the politics and ethics of the Enlightenment without "grounding" that ethics in deep knowledge of the nature of reality or the nature of the rational self. On the one hand, he criticizes Nietzsche and Foucault for rejecting Enlightenment liberalism along with rejecting Enlightenment rationalism; on the other hand, he criticizes Habermas (and, to a much lesser extent, Rawls) for retaining Enlightenment rationalism in order to retain Enlightenment liberalism.[1] A central ingredient in his attempt to disentangle Enlightenment rationalism from Enlightenment liberalism is his contention that explicit metaphysical theorizing, as traditionally understood, should no longer be regarded as an obligatory undertaking for Western intellectuals. The problem with which I shall be concerned is the extent to which his argument for this position itself presupposes certain metaphysical commitments.

As is well known, Rorty sees no need for what he calls "metaphysics," a term often paired in his rhetoric with "theology." Though this pairing is indeed insightful, Rorty's rhetoric conceals his debt to a complicated set of assumptions and positions he inherits from Wilfrid Sellars. Rorty's immense intellectual debt to Sellars has been generally underrecognized, in large part because it has been concealed by his appropriation of certain Davidsonian arguments. A close examination of Rorty's metaphilosophy is thus of foremost importance to the question of how a thinker who identifies herself with the values and principles of the Enlightenment ought to regard the inherited metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical problematics with which she is confronted when she begins to reflect.

I begin with a brief sketch of Rorty's critique of metaphysics as a compulsory undertaking, on the grounds that metaphysical realism and antirealism are largely useless enterprises (section 1). I then turn to some of the salient points of Sellars's philosophy and metaphilosophy through a close reading of "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (section 2). In those terms, I show how Rorty's philosophical commitments remain strikingly close to those of Sellars (section 3). There is, in short, a "permanent Sellarsian deposit" in Rorty's thought. I then turn to how Rorty used arguments and conclusions indebted to Davidson in order to distance himself from metaphysics in general, including Sellarsian metaphysics (section 4). Finally, I argue for a distinction between "Metaphysics" and "metaphysics," such that while the former inherits the mantle of Enlightenment rationalism and so could be a threat to democracy (at least, if not handled with exceeding care), the latter is not (section 5).

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[1] It is beyond the scope of this article to examine Rorty's arguments for these interpretations or to determine their merit.

1. Rorty's Attitude Toward Metaphysics

Rorty typically describes "metaphysics" as a transhistorical, absolute conception or picture of the world that, if fully specified, would correspond with how the world really is. Metaphysics thus goes together with a conception of epistemology as "a permanent neutral matrix for inquiry."[2] In what follows, I pay particularly close attention to how Rorty understands "metaphysics" as a continuation of theology by other means, where "Reason" or "Reality" or "the World" takes the place of "God." Thus, for example, he remarks: "Once God and his view goes, there is just us and our view. What Sartre calls 'a consistent atheism' would prevent us from inventing God surrogates like Reason, Nature, CSP [Conceptual Scheme Peirceish], or a Matter of Fact about Warrant" (Rorty 1998a, 54).[3] Rorty frames his disdain for metaphysics as a radicalization of Enlightenment disdain for theology, and for much the same reasons: because it represents a stage of our cultural evolution that we need to fully get over, and because it is a threat to liberal democratic institutions. I think it would be a mistake, however, to see him as simply appropriating the antimetaphysical orientation of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Rather, Rorty first came to reject metaphysics due to his sustained reflections on and engagement with Quine, Sellars, Davidson, and Putnam, and it was on that basis that he then reached out to engage with thinkers of the Continental tradition. Accordingly, I restrict my attention here to how Rorty's critique of metaphysics takes shape in his earlier essays.

The idea that metaphysical realism is vacuous, and that our need for it ought to be overcome, is central to Rorty (1982c). Here, he builds on insights from Austin, Quine, and Davidson to question whether there is any *sense* to be had in talking about "the world." If there is not, then metaphysics, as the branch of philosophy that aims at disclosing the truth about the world—How the World Really Is, one might say—is as irrelevant as scholastic theology. Here is how Rorty describes the stance of his "realist" opponent, the one who insists on talking about how the world really is: "For our notion of the world—it will be said—is not a notion of unquestioned beliefs, or unquestionable beliefs, or ideally coherent beliefs, but rather of a hard, unyielding, rigid *être-en-soi* which stands aloof, sublimely indifferent to the attentions we lavish upon it" (1982c, 13). Rorty has seemingly stacked the decks rhetorically against the realist by describing *any* candidate for "the world" in terms that are best suited to Aristotle's unmoved mover, likewise "aloof" and "sublimely indifferent" and yet also the origin of the world's order and the goal of our desire to comprehend that order.

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[2] Rorty uses this phrase throughout his writings; for one conspicuous example, see Rorty 1982b, 80.

[3] CSP, or Conceptual Scheme Peirceish, figures prominently in Sellars's account of the terminus of inquiry; see Sellars 1967, 140–50.

In response to the realist, Rorty writes: "I think that the realistic true believer's notion of the world is an obsession rather than an intuition" (1982c, 13). But there is also a line of argument here that takes up Davidson's critique of the scheme/content distinction and deploys it at purposes somewhat at odds with Davidson's own: "The notion of 'the world' as used in a phrase like 'different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently' must be the notion of something *completely* unspecified and unspecifiable—the thing-in-itself, in fact" (1982c, 14), as a result of which "I want to claim that 'the world' is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which are at the moment not being moved about" (1982c, 15). Rorty thus poses the metaphysical realist with a catch-22: either the notion of the world is *vacuous*, being utterly indescribable and hence unintelligible, or else it is *redundant*, since it adds nothing to how we think about the various descriptive vocabularies that are of concern to us. But if metaphysical realism is vacuous, so too is metaphysical antirealism. Hence we as modern (or postmodern) Western intellectuals need not be concerned with adopting either position.

This dismissive attitude toward metaphysics reappears in Rorty's criticism of Dewey's "naturalistic metaphysics." The culmination of this criticism is that "[n]othing is to be gained for an understanding of human knowledge by running together the vocabularies in which we describe the causal antecedents of knowledge with those in which we offer justifications of our claims to knowledge" (1982b, 81). We can and should articulate the various causal antecedents of human knowledge (for example, physics and neurophysiology), and we can and should both articulate the norms of justification and propose new ones, but it makes no sense to conflate these two projects. The descriptive vocabulary of empirical knowledge and the prescriptive vocabulary of justification must be held apart. To do otherwise is to attempt to ascend to a neutral point of view, but Rorty argues that "[t]he 'ontology of the sensible manifold' is the common destiny of all philosophers who try for an account of subject-and-object, mind-and-body, which has this generic quality" (1982b, 85).[4] Though we can, if we so wish, circumvent the subject/object distinction, and frame such circumvention as "digging down" to a "stratum" of "pure experience," the result will be a concept so generic and vague as to be useless for explanation or problem solving; it will be as useless as the Kantian attempt to account for "[t]he constitution of the knowable by the constitution of two unknowables" (1982b, 85). Any "metaphysics of existence" as to how the world really is will be either vacuous or redundant; any "metaphysics of experience," Kantian, Deweyan, or otherwise, would be so generic as to be useless for solving any problems, whether theoretical or practical.

[4] "The ontology of the sensible manifold" is borrowed from Austin 1964, 61.

The crux of Rorty's attitude toward metaphysics, as he says in a response to Conway, is "I use 'metaphysics' as the name of the belief in something non-human which justifies our deep attachments" (Rorty 2001b, 89). Justification is one thing; nonhuman reality quite another, and nothing we say about the latter extends the space of reasons beyond the realm of human social practices. Continuing this line of thought, Rorty remarks:

> I wish, just as Conway suggests, "to reject only that pathological quest for transcendent verities and ahistorical essences" which Plato initiated and Nietzsche mocked. I do not see why the replacement of the metaphysician by the strong poet as cultural hero presupposes the (albeit diminished) role of the metaphysician. It does not take a metaphysician to beat a metaphysician. . . . But surely we have already had enough experience with attempts to use the weapons of metaphysics against metaphysics? I think of British empiricism, positivism, contemporary Australian philosophical physicalism, and the like, as such attempts. All they accomplished was to replace one non-human source of justification (the Will of God, the Idea of the Good) with another (the Intrinsic Nature of Physical Reality). . . . So I think we should follow Nietzsche's and James's leads, and break with the onto-theological tradition more radically than did Comte or Bertrand Russell. (2001b, 90–91)

Regardless of whether it "takes a metaphysician to beat a metaphysician," there is something slightly amiss in Rorty's own dismissal of the onto-theological tradition. His crucial move is that we should not seek any nonhuman sources of justification; all justification is, from first to last, a human affair, and indeed a social and linguistic affair. The vocabulary of empirical description, which tells us how things are with nonhuman reality, provides no grounding or foundation for the vocabulary of justification, whether ethical and epistemic, nor do we need any higher metavocabulary that illustrates the relation between the two. Yet this very move depends on the work of Sellars, who not only was Rorty's own early philosophical hero but also provided core doctrines that frame much of what Rorty says (and does not say). There is, I shall argue, a "permanent Sellarsian deposit" in Rorty's thought.[5] While it might not take a metaphysician to beat a metaphysician *as such*, Rorty himself is, even in late statements such as his response to Conway, more indebted to Sellarsian metaphysics than even he acknowledges. I shall therefore turn to an overview of Sellars's metaphysics (and metaphilosophy) in order to illustrate the depth of that debt.

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[5] The allusion here is to "the permanent Hegelian deposit" that Dewey acknowledged in his own philosophy (see Shook and Good 2010).

2. Fusing the Scientific and Manifest Images

Sellars's wide-ranging and ambitious philosophy has been described as "naturalism with a normative turn" (O'Shea 2007, 3). In order to reconcile the conceptual order and the causal order, as Sellars himself puts it, it became necessary to see that "the solution to the puzzle lay in correctly locating the conceptual order in the causal order and correctly interpreting the causality involved" (cited in deVries 2005, 5). O'Shea helpfully remarks that for Sellars "a robustly naturalistic Humean picture of reality typically underlies his various Kantian conceptual analyses, as their ultimate causal presupposition" (2007, 185). As most readers of Sellars appreciate, he holds that the structuring norms of our activities as perceivers, thinkers, and agents must (somehow) supervene on the right sorts of causal regularities but cannot be analyzed in terms of those regularities.[6]

DeVries (2005) identifies three overriding substantial commitments that define Sellars's approach: naturalism, realism, and nominalism. Sellars is a naturalist both ontologically, in holding that the causal nexus of spatiotemporal events is all there is, and epistemologically, in holding that human cognitive activity is part of the natural world. He is a realist about perceptual objects who denies epistemic intermediaries between mind and world, such as "sense data" or "seemings," as well as a scientific realist (and also, in a certain sense, a moral realist). Finally, he is a nominalist who identifies "abstract entities" as talk in the material mode of metalinguistic categories, that is, of the various roles items play within a natural language, and especially the norms that govern those items. As deVries notes, "Naturalism, realism, and nominalism adumbrate a fairly radical position in Western philosophy . . . [and s]uch radicals are often identified as nay-sayers, for they deny much of the metaphysical architecture that, to the Platonic tradition, has seemed absolutely essential to the analysis of the world and our place in it; indeed, they often deny the possibility of metaphysics" (2005, 19). Yet, unlike other radicals, Sellars maintains that we need a metaphysics that takes seriously the critique of metaphysics in order to avoid succumbing to the temptations of the Platonic tradition.[7]

This commitment to naturalism, nominalism, and realism requires rethinking both philosophy and personhood. In "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" Sellars asserts that "the aim of philosophy . . . is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term" (1963d, 1).

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[6] The closest Sellars comes to articulating this idea is in his remark "espousal of principle must be reflected in uniformities of performance" (Sellars 1963c, 216). O'Shea calls this the "norm/nature metaprinciple" (2007, 50): normative principles must supervene on behavior (both occurrent and dispositional).

[7] Here I am taking "the Platonic tradition" in the extremely broad sense to include not just realism about universals or generals but also any view of norms that cannot accommodate norms within the natural, causal order.

Philosophers differ from specialists in that "the specialist knows his way around his own neighborhood, as his neighborhood, but he doesn't know his way around it in the same way *as part of the landscape as a whole*" (1963d, 4). Considered as a theoretical enterprise, philosophy aims at acquaintance with different neighborhoods of knowledge as parts of a single unified whole.

In pursuit of this aim, the philosopher recognizes that we are confronted with two "images," as Sellars puts it, "two pictures of essentially the same order of complexity, each of which purports to be a complete picture of man-in-the-world, and which, after separate scrutiny, he must fuse into one vision" (1963d, 5). These "images" are what Sellars calls the "Manifest Image" and the "Scientific Image"—the former the result of millennia of speculation and reflection, and the latter the result of the past few hundred years of disciplined, empirically tested explanation. Each image provides a comprehensive understanding of human existence and the place of human beings in the world.

Since each image is also an ontological system, we can characterize each in terms of its basic objects. According to Sellars, "there is an important sense in which the primary objects of the manifest image are persons" (1963d, 9)—beings that are perceivers, thinkers, and agents. Initially, all beings are regarded as persons; as the image is transformed by generations of philosophers, writers, artists, and religious figures, the category of personhood is both narrowed and refined. This process of narrowing and refining encompasses, on Sellars's view, much of the history of philosophy from Plato and Aristotle through Hegel and to the ordinary language philosophers. And, importantly, there is room for *progress* within the manifest image; Sellars regards Kant and Hegel as having seen things about the manifest image that were not recognized before. The manifest image has a kind of objectivity to it, insofar as one can get it right or wrong to varying degrees. Finally, as a way of seeing the systematic interconnectedness of systems as adumbrating different aspects of human experience in the world, the Manifest Image is not identifiable with any particular thinker or school.

The objectivity of the manifest image, however, is consistent with accepting that "the image itself might have to be rejected, in the last analysis, as false" (1963d, 14). The scientific image is also an integrated, complete picture of the natural world, and as a complete picture it necessarily includes a conception of the place of humanity in that world. Since the scientific image regards a human being as a "complex physical system" (1963d, 25) rather than as a person, the scientific image must be regarded as a "rival image" (1963d, 20). There is a serious conflict here; the images cannot both correspond to what really exists.[8] In the final analysis, one

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[8] For an earlier attempt on Sellars's part to think through conflicts between conceptual schemes, see Sellars 1963b.

must have ontological priority over the other. Sellars then considers three options for resolving this conflict: "(1) Manifest objects are identical with systems of imperceptible particles in that simple sense in which a forest is identical with a number of trees. (2) Manifest objects are what really exist; systems of imperceptible particles being 'abstract' or 'symbolic' ways of representing them. (3) Manifest objects are 'appearances' to human minds of a reality which is constituted by systems of imperceptible particles" (1963d, 26). Sellars says of the second option only that it has its able-bodied defenders; his aim is to argue against the first option and defend the third.

The viability of the third option depends on whether we can provide an account of *persons* in terms of *particles*: "If the human body is a system of particles, the body cannot be the subject of thinking and feeling, unless thinking and feeling are capable of interpretation as complex interactions of physical particles; unless, that is to say, the manifest framework of man as *one* being, a *person* capable of doing radically different kinds of things can be replaced without loss of descriptive and explanatory power by a postulational image in which he is a complex of physical particles, and all his activities a matter of the particles changing in state and relationship" (1963d, 29). Sellars treats conceptual thought in the scientific image by conceiving of thoughts in terms of functions: "[I]f thoughts are items which are conceived in terms of the roles they play, then there is no barrier *in principle* to the identification of conceptual thinking with neurophysiological processes" (1963d, 34). By doing so, we can identify the picture of persons as bearers of conceptual thoughts with a special case of the objects of the scientific image. In this way, "*the manifest and scientific images could merge without clash in the synoptic view*" (1963d, 34). This does not mean that the manifest image—the image of persons as sensing, thinking, and acting—is reduced into, or replaced by, the scientific image. Sellars defends the ultimate ontological priority of the scientific image, but he is no reductionist. The two images are fused in an idealized science—a "CSP" or "Conceptual Scheme Peirceish," the idealized end of inquiry—where the conceptual order of social norms is integrated with the causal order of microphysical processes. Such an idealized science, which we today, like Sellars, can only imagine, would fully reconcile the natural and the normative.

Sellars thus advances a nonscientistic naturalism which limits the kind of priority that science has, as expressed in his famous *scientia measura* thesis: "In the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" (1963a, 173). *Scientia measura* does not mean that science has ultimate authority in all things; rather, scientific techniques of inquiry have indefeasible authority with regard to that dimension of discourse concerned with describing and explaining the world, which is not the only dimension of discourse of concern to us. More specifically, Sellars is

careful to note, prescriptive and proscriptive discourse, which are indispensable to language and thought, are not reducible to descriptive discourse. Thus, he also insists that "the idea that epistemic facts can be analysed without remainder—even 'in principle'—into non-epistemic facts, whether phenomenal or behavioral, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals is, I believe, a radical mistake—a mistake of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics" (1963a, 131), and in much the same spirit, that "in characterizing an episode or state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (1963a, 169). It is because the norms of the space of reasons *cannot* be reduced to any set of naturalistic describable regularities that the normative must be *fused with* the natural in the synoptic view.

3. Rorty's Variations on Sellarsian Themes

Though Rorty encountered Sellars early in his intellectual development and continued to allude to Sellars throughout his career, the extent of Rorty's intellectual debt to Sellars has been rarely noticed.[9] In his "Intellectual Autobiography," Rorty mentions that he was an advocate of Sellars in the 1950s through the early 1970s (Rorty 2010, 8–9). Several of his earliest works, such as his explanation of the authority of first-person reports in terms of the authority of public language, are firmly grounded in an overarching commitment to a broadly Sellarsian approach to the social nature of linguistic authority (Rorty 1965). The importance of Sellars to Rorty can also be seen in Rorty's 1970 review of Sellars's *Science and Metaphysics* (1967), in which Rorty concludes by comparing Sellars with Wittgenstein and Quine, in a remark worth quoting at length:

> I have confined myself to Sellars' treatment of the clash between science and common sense. As a closing note, let me remark that the nature of Sellars' approach to philosophy, and the difficulty of his system, is determined by his attitude towards this clash. He accepts the clash at face value and sees philosophy as having to provide a complicated and subtle set of distinctions in terms of which the two sides may be reconciled. By contrast, the Wittgensteinian tradition sees no clash, and sees the task of philosophy as dissolving the appearance of such a clash not by drawing elaborate distinctions but by adopting an instrumentalist approach to science. A third position is that of Quine—who is as much a scientific realist as Sellars, but who would discard the notion of distinct conceptual structures as a relic of the analytic-synthetic distinction and would simply insist on the outright falsity of common-sense statements, given the superior explanatory efficiency of their scientific replacements. Both the Wittgensteinian and the Quinean positions are simpler, more elegant, and

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[9] Two important exceptions are Gustafsson 2009 and Miller 2011.

easier to grasp than Sellars'. But the price of elegance is paradox, and in the end we may have to do philosophy the hard way and make all the sorts of distinctions Sellars claims we need. (Rorty 1970, 69–70)

On Rorty's interpretation, Sellars's "hard way" of doing philosophy turns on the distinction between truth as a semantic notion and truth as a nonsemantic notion. As a semantic notion, truth is explicated as "semantic assertability" ("S-assertable") within a conceptual scheme. As a nonsemantic notion, the so-called correspondence theory of truth is rehabilitated as what Sellars calls "picturing," which *is* a relation between language and the world. Picturing is not itself a *semantic* relation, however; rather, it is a relation between linguistic items *conceived of as items in the natural order* ("natural-linguistic items") and nonlinguistic natural items. Since we can think of language as *itself* an element within the natural order, picturing is a relation *within* the natural order rather than *between* the natural order and the conceptual order. On the one hand, the rules that govern S-assertability do not involve any relation with extralinguistic reality; on the other hand, the picturing relation between the conceptual order and the natural order does not consider the conceptual order qua normative, only qua natural.[10]

By the mid-1970s, Rorty had changed his attitude towards Sellars. A crucial step in Rorty's emerging break with Sellars can be found in articles published just prior to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979a) that rehearse much of that argument. In Rorty's "Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism," Davidson's critique of the scheme/content distinction is described as "a transcendental argument to end all transcendental arguments" (Rorty 1979b, 78), *including* the transcendental arguments made by Sellars and by Jay Rosenberg. On Rorty's interpretation, post-Sellarsian philosophers who have figured out how "to think of the Myth of the Given as a confusion of causal conditions with justifications are inclined to think that the project of finding connections between inquiry and the world needs elimination rather than naturalization" (1979b, 91). It deserves emphasis, then, that Rorty dismisses Sellarsian picturing, which does naturalize the connection between inquiry and the world, on the following grounds: once the account of the relation between inquiry and the world is "naturalized," it thereby becomes incorporated into inquiry itself. But then it can no longer exhibit the relation between inquiry and the world, since picturing cannot be simultaneously immanent to inquiry and transcendent of inquiry. A theory about our theories is, at the end of the day, still just a theory. On Rorty's view, Sellars should have abstained from trying to give us a metatheory that would be

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[10] See Sellars 1963c for an account of why we need to rescue the account of correspondence, and why the semantic concept of truth is not enough; see also Sellars 1967, chap. 5. For sympathetic accounts of the role of picturing in Sellars, see deVries 2010 and O'Shea 2010.

anything more than one more theory; hence, Rorty concludes, "we prag-matists mourn Sellars as a lost leader" (1979b, 91). Along much the same lines, he remarks: "Sellars' treatment of intentions is connected with his Tractarian doctrine of picturing. I have criticized this doctrine in 'Tran-scendental Arguments, Self-Reference, and Pragmatism'" (1978, 126 n. 13). Yet he also says that Sellars sees "the true and interesting irreducibil-ity in the areas not as between one sort of particular (mental, intentional) and another (physical) but as between descriptions on the one hand and norms, practices, and values on the other" (1978, 18 n. 15).

In short, Rorty's philosophy should be seen as the Sellarsian commit-ment to the irreducibility of the normative *and* the commitment to the ontological authority of science *together with* the rejection of picturing. In terms of Rorty's contrast between Sellars and Wittgenstein on the one hand and Quine on the other, Rorty is *both* a "Wittgensteinian" with respect to the social-practices account of language *and* a "Quinean" with respect to the ontological priority of science, but without the distinctions once seemed needed to hold naturalism and normativity together, such as the distinction between truth-qua-S-assertability and truth-qua-picturing. We no longer need to do philosophy "the hard way" by making the careful distinctions that frustrate and delight the readers of *Science and Meta-physics*. The nonsemantic dimension of truth, indeed the very attempt to follow through on Peirce's scientific metaphysics, can be safely repudiated. We can be Wittgensteinian-Sellarsians when we want to affirm the irre-ducibility of the normative, and we can be Quinean-Sellarsians when we want to affirm naturalism.[11] But we need not follow Sellars himself in trying to construct an *Aufhebung* beyond the opposition between Wittgensteinian descriptions of ordinary language and Quinean revisions of our conceptual scheme—for there is no opposition between vocabu-laries that are no more than tools that satisfy different purposes.

Rorty's turn away from Sellars informs much of his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1979a; hereafter *PMN*), which adopts toward epistemology the attitude that the logical empiricists adopted toward metaphysics: that it ought to be overcome or eliminated. The pivotal moment of the "overcoming" consists in the chapter "Privileged Representations," where Rorty notices that the central dogmas of logical empiricism—the analytic/synthetic distinction and the idea of "givenness"—were each rejected by Quine and by Sellars. If we synthesize the rejection of analytic/synthetic distinction with the critique of the Myth of the Given, Rorty suggests, nothing would be left that inherits the problematic of Descartes, Locke, and Kant; there would be nothing for a

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[11] "I think of myself as stealing the point from Sellars that one's categories in metaphysics should be the categories of the sciences of one's day. But that's simply to say what a boring subject metaphysics is" (Rorty 2006, 27).

"theory of knowledge" to be.[12] At the same time, Rorty complains that neither Quine nor Sellars really appreciated the critique leveled against logical empiricism by the other; Quine retained the Given in his account of "stimulus meanings," and Sellars retained the analytic/synthetic distinction by distinguishing between "analysis" and "explanation." Neither Quine nor Sellars appreciated that they had caught a glimpse of the Promised Land. Rorty's *Überwindung* culminates in philosophy that is postepistemological, postmetaphysical, and postpositivist. After *PMN*, Rorty's attention shifts largely to Davidson (and to Brandom); as a result, Rorty's relation to Sellars has, unfortunately, become obscured.

Rorty's subsequent attitude toward metaphysics can be found at the beginning of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989; hereafter *CIS*)—a significant work in Rorty's corpus insofar as it shows where the conclusions sketched in *PMN* took him. Rorty here regards "theology and metaphysics" as motivated by "the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance" (1989, xiii) or as the belief in "an order beyond time and change" (1989, xv). Thus construed, the alternative to theology and metaphysics is to be found in a thoroughgoing historicism. But Rorty's historicism is complemented by his commitment to naturalism and to nominalism, and here the permanent Sellarsian deposit comes through clearly.

Central to *CIS* is Rorty's distinction between the "domain of causation" and the "domain of justification." As a naturalist, Rorty regards causation as extending universally—there are no noncausal relations between items in the natural order, and the natural order is all there is. The domain of justification is limited to language users; what we say to one another may be justified (or not). Thus there is no epistemic relation between us and the world; that relation is brutally and merely causal. As Rorty puts it in *CIS*,

> We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but our descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own—unaided by the describing activities of human beings—cannot. (1989, 4–5)

[12] The thought that rejecting both the *a priori* and the given would amount to rejecting the very idea of "theory of knowledge" depends on a very specific conception of "the theory of knowledge"—that of C. I. Lewis (1929). As I understand Rorty, he would be quite happy to say that *PMN* stands in relation to Lewis's *Mind and the World Order* roughly as (in his view) Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* stood to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

First, Rorty asserts that the natural world is the only world there is and that it is largely independent of those things that are not merely and brutally causal, for example, human mental states. Secondly, Rorty claims that truth is a function of sentences—what Sellars would call "S-assertability"—rather than a matter of adequate representation of reality. These two claims together reflect a significant overlap with Sellars; Sellars also maintained strict metaphysical and epistemological naturalism, yet also treated truth, as S-assertability, as relative to conceptual scheme—or to what Rorty comes to call a "vocabulary." Denying these principles, Rorty thinks, allows for epistemology to have a future, but we need neither epistemology nor metaphysics in order to do philosophy or to articulate the importance of Enlightenment ideals. With an apology to Quine, Rorty's mature position is that "philosophy as cultural politics" (Rorty 2007, 5) is philosophy enough.

To better understand Rorty's mature position, I now wish briefly to compare Rorty with other contemporary philosophers influenced by Sellars. It is, by now, fairly common to distinguish between "left-wing" and "right-wing" Sellarsians. As O'Shea puts it, the left-wing Sellarsians stress "the importance of a distinction between the normatively structured 'logical space of reasons' on the one hand, and the proper domain of naturalistic causal explanations characteristic of modern natural science on the other" (O'Shea 2009, 187), whereas the "right-wing Sellarsians" are those who "in their different ways have been inspired rather than put off by Sellars' defense of a strongly scientific realist conception of reality, and in particular by his resulting investigations into how it is possible to reconcile that conception with our own experiential self-understanding as it appears within what Sellars called the 'manifest image of man-in-the-world'" (2009, 187–88).

In making this distinction, O'Shea classifies Rorty among the left-wing Sellarsians, along with Robert Brandom and John McDowell, in contrast with right-wing Sellarsians (such as Paul Churchland, Dan Dennett, Ruth Millikan, and Jay Rosenberg). Yet O'Shea ignores Rorty's close relation to right-wing Sellarsianism—for example, it was Rorty who played an important role in the development of what is now known as "eliminative materialism," which has deep (but not unambiguous) roots in Sellars. As Brandom notes, Rorty freely uses "the vocabulary of naturalism" and "the vocabulary of historicism" as needed (Brandom 2000, 167ff.). Rorty emphasizes the contingency and historicity of our evolving self-conceptions, but he also emphasizes the continuity between human behavior and the natural world as described by our best science. Here too Sellars's distinction between the scientific and manifest images illuminates the tensions in Rorty's thought. For Sellars, the difference between "preconceptual patterns of behavior" and "conceptual thinking" is "a radical difference in level between man and his precursors . . . [which] appears as an irreducible discontinuity in the *manifest* image, but as . . . a

reducible difference in the *scientific* image" (Sellars 1963b, 6). Sellars therefore claims that we need a synoptic vision that fuses the two images; we need to appreciate simultaneously the continuity *and* discontinuity between human beings and the rest of the natural world.

Much like Sellars himself, and unlike most left-wing and right-wing Sellarsians, Rorty appreciates both continuity and discontinuity. Thus, he says that "as good Darwinians, we want to introduce as few discontinuities as possible into the story of how we got from the apes to the Enlightenment" (Rorty 1998b, 40); he approves of Dewey's view that there are "no breaks in the hierarchy of increasingly complex adjustments to novel stimulation—the hierarchy which has amoebae adjusting themselves to changed water temperature at the bottom, bees dancing and chess players check-mating in the middle, and people fomenting scientific, artistic, and political revolutions at the top" (Rorty 1991a, 109); and, in response to McDowell, he expresses doubt that there is a different kind of discontinuity between rationality and elementary particles than there is between avian monogamy and elementary particles (Rorty 1998c, 393).[13]

The conceptual thinking found in "scientific, artistic, and political revolutions" is not different *in kind* from the preconceptual patterns of behavior found in amoebae and bees; the discontinuity between human rationality and animal behavior is not different *in kind* from the discontinuity between animal behavior and microphysical states. Rorty is thus firmly on the side of the contemporary defenders of the scientific image—the so-called right-wing Sellarsians, such as Churchland and Dennett. Yet he also consistently affirms the historicity—in his terms, the "contingency" and "irony"—of our self-conceptions as beings-in-the-world who are constantly finding and refinding a place for ourselves in the conversation of humanity. Here he affirms a commitment to carrying on the Romantic legacy as developed by Hegel, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Derrida.

Thus, while Rorty stresses both continuity and discontinuity, he differs from Sellars in denying the need for system building that stereoscopically fuses the two images. We can happily be left-wing (Wittgensteinian)-Sellarsians (such as Brandom and McDowell) and we can happily be right-wing (Quinean)-Sellarsians (such as Churchland and Dennett), but we need not be Sellarsians *simpliciter*. Consider, for example, how Rorty responds to Putnam, whom he quotes as objecting that "[i]f the same cause-effect description is complete from a philosophical as well as from a behavioral-scientific point of view, if all there is to say about language is that it consists in the production of noises (and subvocalizations) according to a certain causal pattern; if the causal story is not to be and need not

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[13]   Though Rorty holds that all vocabularies are irreducible to one another, he also holds that the irreducibility of normative vocabulary has a distinct status. See his response to Ramberg (Rorty 2000); see also Sachs 2009 on the significance of Rorty's acceptance of Ramberg's criticism.

be supplemented by a normative story . . . then there is no way in which the noises we utter . . . are more than mere 'expressions of our subjectivity'" (Putnam, as cited in Rorty 1991c, 141). In response, Rorty accepts that there is a normative story as well as a causal one—but that it does not fall to the philosopher to provide what Putnam seems to want: "Putnam, I think, still takes a 'philosophical account of X' to be a synoptic vision which will somehow synthesize every other possible view, will somehow bring the outside and the inside points of view together. It seems to me precisely the virtue of James and of Dewey to insist that we cannot have such a synoptic vision—that we cannot back up our norms by 'grounding' them in a metaphysical or scientific account of the world" (1991c, 141). Notice that it is precisely the Sellarsian term—"synoptic vision"—that Rorty employs here. So why does Rorty reject the synoptic vision that would unify the normative and the natural? The answer lies in how he uses Davidsonian means to advance Deweyan ends. That is, he borrows from Davidson a semantic argument against metaphysical realism, including Sellarsian realism, as a tool in a broader, cultural-political criticism of metaphysics, insofar as metaphysics itself is conceived of as a cultural-political project of a specific kind.

4. Refusing to Fuse: Rorty's Debt to Davidson

Though Rorty's frequently comments on his extensive debt to Davidson, several points merit examination. The need for a synoptic fusion of the scientific and manifest images is undermined by two central Davidsonian arguments: the critique of the scheme/content distinction (Davidson 1974) and the semantic conception of truth (Davidson 1986).[14] Rorty uses these arguments to argue further that (1) there is no need for any nonsemantic concept of truth; that (2) the basic units of meaning are "vocabularies"; and that (3) once one sees the possession of a vocabulary as a bit of animal behavior, there is nothing further to be done to reconcile our Wittgensteinian vocabulary and our Quinean vocabulary. Likewise, once we reject the scheme/content distinction as undermining the very idea that there are different conceptual frameworks, Sellars's emphasis on different conceptual frameworks as picturing the real order to varying degrees, more or less adequately, and thus even as conceivably asymptotically approaching it, simply falls away.

Surely, it seems, dispensing with the very idea of conceptual frameworks, and with it any nonsemantic concept of truth, leaves little of the Sellarsian project. Rorty encourages this perception when he stages a

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[14] The irony that Rorty has made antimetaphysical use of the work of someone usually regarded as a metaphysician is not lost on Ramberg's detailed and sympathetic reading of Rorty's use of Davidson; see Ramberg 2000 and 2008. Likewise with Sellars—in both cases Rorty uses a systematic metaphysics to further an antimetaphysical philosophy.

confrontation of Sellars and Davidson (Rorty 1991d). Commenting on Brandom's comparison of Heidegger and Sellars, he writes: "After analyzing truth as S-assertability, he [Sellars] goes on to discuss the question of what happens when the semantical rules themselves change, when we have a change of 'framework.' This is the point at which he introduces his notion of 'adequacy of picturing.' Picturing is for Sellars what disclosedness is for Heidegger. It is the extra dimension that relates social practices to something beyond themselves, and thus recaptures the Greek problematic of humanity's relation to the nonhuman (of *nomos* vs. *physis*). In Sellars' case this non-human something is 'the world'" (1991d, 152). By contrast, Davidson is "a good candidate for the position of *non-*backsliding 'social practices' theorist" (1991d, 152; emphasis in original) because of Davidson's "de-epistemologized conception of truth" (1991d, 153): truth treated as a semantic notion *and nothing more*. Once truth is subjected to this kind of treatment, S-assertability is all we need; the notion of correspondence that Sellars attempted to retain as picturing can be seen as the last vestige of the metaphysics that Sellars, following Carnap, did so much to wean us away from.

It is not just Sellars who falls away; Rorty uses Davidson's considerations to call into question our relationship to the entire metaphysical tradition. If we reject the scheme/content distinction, then we can also reject the latest innovation in analytic metaphysics, what Rorty calls "scientism":

> Scientism . . . is the assumption that every time science lurches forward philosophy must redescribe the face of the whole universe. Scienticists think that every new discovery of micro-structure casts doubt on the "reality" of manifest macro-structure and of any intervening middle structures. If one takes this claim seriously, one may well feel torn between van Fraassen's instrumentalism and Sellars' realism. If one does not, as Davidson does not, then one will simply not ask which of Eddington's two tables is real, and one will be baffled about the difference between van Fraassen's ready belief in tables and his more tentative attitude toward electrons. (1991d, 160–61)

To accept Davidson's coherentism and rejection of the scheme/content distinction is to be indifferent to metaphysics and epistemology, given Rorty's understanding of both Davidson and metaphysics.

In an examination of Rorty's use of Davidson, Ramberg correctly identifies Davidson's criticism of the scheme/content distinction as the linchpin of Rorty's criticism of metaphysics as a whole. If Davidson is correct, then "we simply cannot make sense of the idea that we produce representations of a given world by structuring through subjectivity the input provided by an objective source. So questions concerning the adequacy of our conceptual schemes or the accuracy of our representational capacities must simply be abandoned as resting on an incoherent

view of how thinking agents relate epistemically to the world they operate in" (Ramberg 2008, 435). Elaborating on Rorty's increased reliance on Davidson following *PMN*, Ramberg suggests two interpretations of Rorty's attitude toward Davidson:

a) Davidson's own version of systematic philosophy is "both sufficiently naturalistic and sufficiently anti-scientistic to appeal to Rorty's philosophical sensibilities" (2008, 436), so that Rorty can appeal to one kind of systematic philosophy in his critique of other kinds.

b) Through his interpretation of Davidson, Rorty comes to recognize that a distinction ought to be drawn between metaphysics per se and systematic philosophy (2008, 436), and perhaps a systematic philosopher is just what the struggle against metaphysics requires. But then the struggle against metaphysics requires a justification quite different from the struggle against "systematic philosophy" evident in *PMN*.

That justification appears in the form of what Ramberg identifies as Rorty's intense interest in secularization: "[W]hat he calls *secularization* is precisely the development of a human self-understanding that eschews the need for legitimation of human thought and sentiment by appeal to structures—modes of being—that transcend transitory, finite, situated human existence" (2008, 441). By contrast, what Ramberg terms "positive metaphysics" is what "survives only as long as secularization fails" (2008, 441); metaphysics, in this heavily pejorative sense, is the thought that our normative social practices have at best a derivative validity, a validity that derives from insight into something that transcends them (2008, 444).

That said, we should still ask: Why would Rorty think that taking seriously Davidson's account of language permits us to reject all versions of "positive metaphysics"? The answer lies in how Rorty thinks of positive metaphysics: as a debate between realism and antirealism.[15] Yet both realism and antirealism, Rorty argues, presuppose a representationalist view of the mind. According to realism, successful cognition consists of accurate mental (or linguistic) representation of extramental (or extralinguistic) reality. Antirealism simply denies that mind (or language) can successfully arrive at cognition of the transmental (or translinguistic). In his "Introduction: Antirepresentationalim, Ethnocentrism, and Liberalism" (1991b), Rorty argues that since Davidson allows us to dispense with a representational theory of mind, we can therefore dispense with positive metaphysics. Davidson's alternative to representationalism regards successful cognition in terms of the causal transactions between

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[15] That Rorty takes the question of "realism" (and "antirealism") to constitute metaphysics informs Rorty's review of Kripke's importance; see Rorty 1980.

two or more organisms and their shared environment. On this basis Rorty concludes that there is an "apparent incompatibility of the correspondence theory of truth with a naturalistic account of the origin of human minds" (Rorty 2001a, 235). Thus the entire problematic of realism versus antirealism can now be recognized as optional; positive metaphysics can be (ironically) dismissed.

Up to this point, however, Rorty shows at best only that the representationalist picture of the mind is dispensable, not why we might *want* to dispense with it. To examine this aspect of his thought, we need to turn to his late writings on what he calls "cultural politics," which is to say, "arguments about what words to use" (Rorty 2007, 3), or more generally, conversations about what vocabularies we should use, and for what purposes. Rorty continues, "I want to argue that cultural politics should replace ontology, and also that whether it should or not is *itself* a matter of cultural politics" (2007, 5), which is to say that cultural politics is *inescapable*. As he sees it, the fulfillment of secularization is the inescapability of cultural politics, which is to say the triumph of cultural politics over ontology as such, rather than the triumph of any ontology over any other. The culmination of the Enlightenment consists in the recognition that it is cultural politics, not metaphysics, which has become inescapable for us. So we must now turn from epistemological and semantic considerations to why Rorty regards the inescapability of cultural politics as a positive development.

Rorty uses the Davidsonian theses to undermine metaphysics in a very specific sense; he wants, as Ramberg puts it, to "undermine representationalist thinking from the commitments of an ethical and political nature" (Ramberg 2008, 445). Rorty wants to abolish the picture that forces itself upon us when we think that ethical and political matters, to be taken seriously, must be framed in terms of our answers to metaphysical questions. The real target of his criticism is thus metaphilosophical: it is the distinctive status that metaphysical problems enjoy vis-à-vis other intellectual problems of wide-ranging cultural importance. And that is what it means to say that Rorty uses Davidsonian means to advance Deweyan ends.

The Davidsonian and the Deweyan converge neatly in the following response to Ragg, who remarks on the antifoundationalist, antiessentialist character of Rorty's version of pragmatism. Rorty responds:

> I think anti-essentialism is the heart of the matter. In a culture, either religious or scientific, that says, "Yes, but this is appearance, what we want is reality," or "This is accident, what we want is essence," you get a kind of authoritarian sadomasochism: the wish to subordinate oneself to something larger. I think of pragmatism, either when applied to democratic practice in politics, or when applied to literary criticism, as precisely debunking the appearance-reality, essence-accident distinctions. Pragmatists say, "Look,

there isn't any authority that we can appeal to settle the quarrels between us. We're going to have to deal with them ourselves." (Rorty 2002, 391)

Secularization is the process whereby we come to recognize that there is no transhuman authority that can lay down all of the criteria we need to in order to evaluate our theories, literary texts, works of art, public policies, and visions of the good life. Doing that, in turn, means doing away with traditional metaphysics, and in particular we should feel free to disregard traditional ontotheological distinctions (such as appearance/reality, accident/essence, mind/body, free will/determinism, and inner mind/outer world). It is not distinctions as such that Rorty rejects—as indicated by his reliance on the public/private distinction and the prescriptive/descriptive distinctions. Rorty objects to the distinctions that make up traditional metaphysics and the picture of philosophy as Philosophy. Thus, secularization is advanced by "pragmatism," that is, a postmetaphysical philosophy, or what Rorty often called a philosophy for a "post-Philosophical culture": a self-conception of philosophy as a form of intellectual activity that has dispensed with the pretension to serve as the foundation of culture or as its tribunal (see, e.g., Rorty 1982a, xxxvii–xliv).

Thus understood, Rorty belongs to the tradition of post-Enlightenment secularism that runs through Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Dewey. In radicalizing the Enlightenment, Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud all regarded theology as pernicious because it fosters our sense of intellectual dependence and immaturity. Rorty widens the scope of this attitude by regarding *all* metaphysics, whether religious *or* scientific, as a form of intellectual self-abasement, a sort of sadomasochistic submission (cf. Rorty 2009). Metaphysics, thus understood, consists of the subordination of one's descriptions of the world—one's "vocabularies," in Rortyan terms—to something beyond all of our normative social practices, something beyond us to which we are answerable and which anchors our descriptions of the world, society, and self in something beyond those descriptions.

5. Rorty, Sellars, and the Idea of Post-theological Metaphysics

Rorty combines the cultural-political ethos of nineteenth-century secularism, especially its Deweyan version, with Davidson's semantic argument to generate a powerful critique of positive metaphysics. Yet Rorty nevertheless retains a great deal of the Sellarsian picture. In particular, the following Sellarsian commitments are worth underscoring: (1) the epistemic priority of science with regard to matter-of-factual assertions ("naturalism"); (2) the irreducibility of normative facts to nonnormative facts; (3) the sociolinguistic character of justification and meaning; and (4) a semantic notion of truth as S-assertability. The central Sellarsian doctrine that Rorty rejects, as mentioned above, is Sellars's concept of

picturing; Rorty rejects this concept partly due to the influence of Davidsonian arguments that we do not require either a nonsemantic concept of truth or any kind of "metaphysical" realism more demanding or illuminating than that already at work in everyday language and empirical science. If deVries correctly describes Sellars's philosophy in terms of naturalism, realism, and nominalism, then Rorty departs from Sellars only in his rejection of realism, on account of Davidsonian arguments against the need for a nonsemantic concept of truth and a scheme/content distinction. Sellars's naturalism, nominalism, and "normativism" remain central Rortyan commitments and constitute the permanent Sellarsian deposit in Rorty's thought.[16]

The naturalism, nominalism, and normativism inherited from Sellars are the very commitments necessary for Rorty's critique of "theology and metaphysics." In order to *deny* that our social practices derive their authority from something that transcends them, one needs to have in place a conception of nature as not being the sort of thing that has any authority—nature as norm-less or "disenchanted." One also needs a conception of norms as being the sort of things that are at home only within human social practices. While such conceptions are not a piece of "metaphysics" in Rorty's pejorative sense of that term, it is a piece of metaphysics in a broader sense, in particular, that of Sellars.

On this interpretation, Rorty avoids inconsistency only by stipulating that "metaphysics" is a continuation of "theology" by other means. Given this construal of the terms, what goes missing is the possibility of a post-theological metaphysics. By that, I mean a metaphysics that is not only after "the death of God" but more radically a metaphysics that has been purged of all the remaining "shadows of God."[17] With this possibility open, we might wonder whether Sellars's "scientific metaphysics" meets the criteria of a post-theological metaphysics. Construing this possibility in Rortyan terms, the question is whether metaphysics can overcome its historical entanglement with, as Rorty nicely puts it, authoritarian sadomasochism, domination, and the legitimation of violence.

To bring this problem into clearer focus, I turn now to Rorty's distinction between "philosophy" and "Philosophy." As early as his introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982a, xxxvii–xliv), Rorty uses "Philosophy," as distinct from "philosophy," to stress the difference between philosophy as a transhistorical and transcultural tribunal that determines the status of the rest of our cultural practices, and philosophy as a cultural

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[16] Miller (2011) correctly notes yet a fifth major Sellarsian influence on Rorty: Sellars's account of "we-intentions" (Sellars 1967, 175–229) substantially influenced Rorty's mature conception of the moral community (see, e.g., Rorty 2001a, 236 n. 3).

[17] For Nietzsche, see *The Gay Science*, §§ 108–9, esp.: "But when will we be done with our caution and care? When will all these shadows of god no longer darken us? When will we have completely de-deified nature? When may we begin to *naturalize* humanity with a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature?" (Nietzsche 2001, 109).

practice on all fours with all the others. Rorty understands the latter, but not the former, as consistent with the ethical impulse of democracy. On his view, Philosophy (but not philosophy) regards having a coherent epistemological and metaphysical system, or at least identifying oneself as a member of a culture unified and "grounded" in such a system, as indispensable to one's intellectual self-respect. Rorty hopes that the anticlericalism of the Enlightenment can be radicalized into an anti-authoritarianism that adopts an ironic, if not downright dismissive, attitude toward all such comprehensive systems (including one's own). The members of a utopian, post-Philosophical culture would find their intellectual self-respect in terms of their solidarity with one another, not with their orientation toward anything beyond time and chance.

Inspiring as this utopian vision may be, it misses the possibility of making a similar distinction between Metaphysics and metaphysics. By Metaphysics, I mean roughly the target of Rorty's critique: Metaphysics is a single correct descriptive vocabulary in terms of which all other vocabularies—those of agency and of empirical description (Ramberg 2000 and 2004) or historicism and naturalism (Brandom 2000)—are given a determinate sense and purpose. More precisely, Metaphysics is a final metavocabulary, which is to say, with Rorty (following the later Heidegger) that Metaphysics is a continuation of theology by other means. By contrast, metaphysics is an explicitly and self-consciously open-ended and provisional metavocabulary; the metaphysician, unlike the Metaphysician, does not regard his metavocabulary as the end of the story, but only as, to use one of Rorty's favorite metaphors from Hegel, "its time held in thought." Whereas Metaphysics secularizes the theological project and continues theology by other means, metaphysics is resolutely post-theological. Yet the metaphysician *does* take seriously the project of constructing a metavocabulary that captures, from the perspective of a particular sociopolitical situation, how the different vocabularies—of agency and empirical description, of historicism and naturalism, the manifest and scientific images—cohere, or fail to cohere.

To be a metaphysician in this sense is just what Sellars aims at when he says:

> The ideal aim of philosophizing is to become *reflectively* at home in the full complexity of the multi-dimensional conceptual system in terms of which we suffer, think, and act. . . . One begins by constructing simple models—which we understand because we have built them—of fragments of this multi-dimensional framework. These initial models are inevitably over-simple and largely false. . . . And, indeed, the ultimate justification for system building in philosophy is the fact that no model for any region of discourse—perceptual, discursive, practical—can be ultimately satisfying unless its connection with each of the others is itself modeled. To press the metaphor to its limits, the completion of the philosophical enterprise would be a single model—the

working of which, again, we would understand because we had constructed it—which would reproduce the full complexity of the framework in which we were once unreflectively at home. (Sellars 1975, 295–96; emphasis in original)

As Sellars fully understands, a complete model, a final metavocabulary, can never be more than a regulative ideal for philosophy, because the vocabularies it models are themselves never beyond revision. Hence there is no danger, in pursuing the Sellarsian method of metaphysics, that we shall succumb to the illusion that we could "step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of *all possible* vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling" (Rorty 1989, xvi; emphasis in original). The metaphysician, unlike the Metaphysician, is a thoroughgoing fallibilist in all things.

To practice metaphysics this way, inspired both by Sellars and by Rorty's critique of Sellars, suggests that the proper role for philosophers is to help construct open spaces in which collaborations can unfold—spaces where economic or political prestige *do not* translate, all by themselves, into *epistemic* authority.[18] Far from conflicting, Sellarsian metaphysics and Rortyan cultural politics converge in the hope that as the more different vocabularies are brought together, the more comprehensive and thus the more adequate the metaphysical and metaphilosophical metavocabulary would be, even though it would be, necessarily, always under construction. If Rorty had been more alive to this possibility, he would have had to consider whether or not the Sellarsian approach to metaphysics, or something like it, could satisfy our interest in metaphysics without Metaphysics. Rorty retains the deep commitments of Sellarsian metaphysics—especially its naturalism, nominalism, and historicism—together with Davidsonian considerations that undermine Metaphysics. By not considering the distinction between metaphysics and Metaphysics, Rorty invites confusion as to how his use of Davidson interacts with the permanent Sellarsian deposit.

6. Conclusion

According to Rorty's "Enlightenment liberalism without Enlightenment rationalism," we can retain the Enlightenment commitment to moral progress, understood now as expanding the scope of the moral community (those who count as "one of us"), through empathy and imagination, through taking the time to listen to the stories of others, and more generally through calling into question the various putative distinctions

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[18] In putting the point this way, I am indebted to Walzer 1984. It is a further question whether there is any difference that makes a difference between being a metaphysician (as distinct from being a Metaphysician) and being a public intellectual.

between "one of us" and "one of them." My intention here has not been to criticize the general orientation of Rorty's philosophy—on the contrary, Enlightenment liberalism without Enlightenment rationalism strikes me as being very much what is required to defend Enlightenment values and ideals in the twenty-first century. Nor have I intended to show, contra Rorty, that one *must* do metaphysics in order to defend democracy after all. I have, rather, argued that "we Rortyans" have a choice: *either* embrace Rorty's postmetaphysical aspirations by liberating his insights from the (Sellarsian) metaphysical commitments still operating in his thought, *or* reject those aspirations and contend with the possibility, *pace* Rorty, of post-theological metaphysics, a "metaphysics without Metaphysics," understood in good Rortyan fashion as an always-provisional metavocabulary liberated from all voices of transcendent authority and all shadows of God.

2844 Fairway Drive, Apt. 192A
Birmingham, AL 35213
USA
carl.sachs@gmail.com

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