RECOVERING RICHARD RORTY'S SENSE OF EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In this dissertation I critically examine Richard Rorty's dismissal of the concept of experience following the "linguistic turn". I challenge Rorty's belief that all appeals to experience imply foundationalism and that we should focus only on language. In developing a non-foundational account of experience I emphasize the qualities of action and meliorism that we find in Classical Pragmatist notions of experience. I exploit Rorty's concession that nonlinguistic experiences exist and refute Rorty's claim that these nonlinguistic experiences remain in the private sphere of life and have no relevance to politics. Then, examining Rorty's romanticism I observe how Rorty does not address the role that experience plays in our ability to develop new linguistic schemes.

For my parents

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Introduction

> "So doesn't this just affirm that nothing other than language, on your view, counts? – In a way that is utterly false and in a way utterly true. What I think can be said is that while of course there are things in the world other than language, for those creatures for whom language is our form of life, those who are what "Experience" entitles "victims of expression" – mortals – language is everywhere we find ourselves, which means everywhere in philosophy. – Found for philosophy, I clap my hands in infantine joy, thus risking infantilization, leaping free of enforced speech, so succeeding it. Thus is philosophy successful"
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> (Stanley Cavell, 1989, 117-118)

Richard Rorty believed that the lessons of the twentieth century had taught us of the importance of language and the declining importance of experiences. In Rorty's words, there was a need to "talk about *sentences* a lot but to say very little about ideas or experience" (Rorty, 1998, 291). For Rorty, experience was an anachronistic concept that could not be used without implying foundations to our knowledge, and Rorty argued at length for antifoundationalism. Around the time that Rorty was pronouncing the arrival of the "linguistic turn" there was increasing scepticism from a growing number of scholars about the meaning of experience, and the hope that experience was a "tool" to overcome oppression in its varied forms was brought

into doubt. The qualities of rawness and immediacy that had given accounts of "lived experience" their emancipatory appeal were challenged by the realization that experience could not be separated from ideology – the assumption of "pure" experience was naïve. In Rorty's view, once we have recognized the degree to which we are constituted by language and we have seen that our identities and ideas are discursive products, discussions about signs and symbols become more fruitful than appeals to experience. In short, Rorty has asked us to replace experience with language so that language will do all the descriptive and explanatory work that was once expected of experience. Our primary concern then should be that language is not "up to the task" and that something other than language is needed to succeed in the social vision Rorty has in mind.

Rorty's turn away from experience has not gone uncontested. The opposition between language and experience is an unstable dichotomy, and Rorty's privileging of language has led to him being accused of linguistic idealism (Bernstein, 2010, Putnam, 2000 Farrell, 1995). Rorty's neglect of experience has also been a puzzle to those who have attempted to revitalize the work of the classical American pragmatists from which Rorty has drawn much inspiration. The concept of experience was central to the work of William James, Charles Saunders Peirce and most notably John Dewey. As such, one of the features that distinguish classical pragmatism from Rorty's neo-pragmatism is the former group's dedication to experience which is contrasted to Rorty's commitment to language. While the classical pragmatists saw no need to distinguish between language and experience, Rorty asks that we make such a distinction so as to separate the faulty assumptions about experience from the worthwhile attempts to study language.

In this dissertation I argue that despite Rorty's proclamations there are ways to recover a concept of experience that is neither burdened by the metaphysical problems Rorty describes, nor

naïve to the importance of language. We can identify Rorty's lingering dedication to the concept of experience in his description of the part of the self that is concerned with "private, incommunicable interests". Here Rorty presents a bifurcated view of the individual where there is a non-dialectical relationship between the part of the self that is concerned with a public vision for a future society and a sequestered part of the self that contains idiosyncratic features. For Rorty, we need not connect these two aspects of the self to form a "single vision". Still in a seeming contradiction, Rorty persuades us that there are connections between the private and the public as he warns that private narratives can every so often transform public discourse.

With this in mind, of interest to me is Rorty's concession that the private self **can** have experiences that are non-linguistic, but that these ought to be of little interest to us because they are not connected to issues of truth or justification. Drawing significantly on the work of John Dewey I argue that these experiences of the private self can be vital to us if we are willing to expand our notion of knowledge to include that which is non-linguistic. Stated differently, there are many reasons to be interested in experience, for experience is not only concerned with knowledge.

In assessing Rorty's neglect of experience I also argue that experience is a challenged concept when selfhood is conceived as intersubjective in character. This is reflected in Rorty's description of the self as "socialized to the core" and entirely constituted by language. In contrast, experience gains potency when selfhood is described in individualistic terms. Rorty's division between the public and private spheres of life is problematic to this scheme because it implies a bifurcated sense of self that allows Rorty to acknowledge the importance of experience in private acts of self-creation, but not in relation to public issues. I will show that Rorty's position toward the public/private divide is not as secure as he himself asserts. Rorty admits that

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there is a bridge between the private and the public, but his point is only that one cannot occupy both places at once. Because our interest is to recover a socially relevant type of experience we will not be troubled when we are told that we cannot inhabit both the public and private realm at the same time. What matters is that public discourse can be impacted by private acts of creation, and that these experiences need not be linguistic.

I argue that Rorty occasionally demonstrates symptoms of linguistic idealism - a term that is usually understood to mean that "everything is language or that objects are only linguistic constructs" (Farrell, 1995, 161). In this view, language does not aim to represent extralinguistic objects, for there is nothing that exists external to language that can pressure language to change its form. In other words, "the world is however we choose to describe it" (Kuipers, 2013, 160). In *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982) Rorty provides his critics with "ammunition" for their charge. Rorty writes of a "post-philosophical culture that takes seriously the ubiquity of language" (1982, xxxix as cited in Marvin, 2011, 273). Later, in the same book, he endorses Derrida when Derrida claims that language is "a reality in which we live and move" (Rorty, 1982, 86 as cited in Marvin, 2011, 273). These readings of Rorty support the idea that language is a sort of prison from which we cannot escape, for there is nothing outside of language that can free us.

Rorty has defended himself against the charge by making a distinction between the *causal* and the *linguistic,* where the *causal* refers to that which is experiential and unimpeachable and the *linguistic* refers to the linguistic reasons we give for our belief (Hildebrand, 2003, 109). Rorty writes: "None of us antirepresentationalists ever doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us. What we question is whether they are representationally independent of us" (Rorty, 1998, 86 as cited in Hildebrand, 2003, 109). As Hildebrand rightly

observes, the diminished form of causality that Rorty alludes to is still left unexplained. "It is untenable to believe both (1) that justification has no other resources but conversation and (2) that causality is an irremediably nonlinguistic feature of the world" (Hildebrand, 2003, 110). I argue that this diminished form of causality is of central importance in recovering Rorty's notion of experience. Rorty does not deny that there are non-linguistic experiences; his point is that all experiences have the *potential* to be linguistic. Rorty is a realist in a limited sense then, in that he believes that the world is "out there" and exerts causal pressures on our beliefs. "The world can blindly and inarticulately crush us; mute despair, intense mental pain, can cause us to blot ourselves out" (Rorty, 1989, 39). The idea that a world of non-linguistic experience is "out there" is not the same as the idea that the Truth is "out there". We can admit to having non-linguistic experience without arguing for a representationalist view of language where the world dictates what language we use to describe it. In a quote I will return to again, Rorty writes that we should think of language "as a way of grabbing hold of causal forces and making them do what we want, altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations" (Rorty, 1991a, 81). In this view, language is not simply a representation of experience, and what we know is not simply a matter of describing the relation between non-linguistic objects and language. For Rorty, language is what allows us to respond in various, creative ways to our non-linguistic experiences, and from this insight we can add that these non-linguistic experiences need not be foundational to our knowledge. Instead, these seemingly private experiences can provide the inspiration for new languages that because of their inherently social nature become part of the public sphere. Ultimately, the distinction Rorty draws between linguistic reasons and experiential causes becomes unclear if we realize that our choice of various linguistic descriptions become causes themselves – language can be an experience.

Questions of Personhood and Intersubjectivity

> "…the philosophy of consciousness privileged the internal over the external, the private over the public, the immediacy of subjective experience over discursive mediation"
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> (Habermas, 2003, 2).

In tracing the historical trajectory of experience I suggest that we take notice of how Jurgen Habermas has described and advocated for a paradigm shift in which we remove ourselves from a "philosophy of consciousness" (alternatively called a "philosophy of the subject") and substitute a "philosophy of intersubjectivity" (Habermas, 2003, 2). A philosophy of consciousness takes metaphysics seriously and presumes a certain relation between the self and the world. Within this paradigm consciousness and subjectivity exist separate from society, so that our beliefs and our interests are a result of our private experience of the world rather than on our shared understandings. A philosophy of subjectivity relies on the Cartesian distinctions between mind and world that Rorty and Habermas ask us to overcome. For Habermas, privileging *private experience* should be replaced by a model of action that creates the space for unobstructed communication to take occur. Habermas observes that pragmatism is of use to us in preventing solipsistic retreats into the mind, for pragmatism contains within it a properly intersubjective assessment of the self and its relation to society (1971). Although given our understanding of "power" we might quibble with Habermas' ideas about the possibility of free communication, the general scheme he provides is a good one, and useful for understanding the broader context in which our conceptions of experience are situated.

I have said that experience takes on its most potent form when it is situated within a philosophical system that privileges discussions of individual consciousness and I take the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, the early work of John Dewey and the early

phenomenological inquiry of Edmund Husserl as operating within this vaguely defined system. In contrast to this group we find that experience is challenged when it is situated in a context where the social character of the self is dominant. The later work of John Dewey, the emergence of French post-structural thought, and the work of Rorty provide a context in which intersubjectivity becomes so pronounced that it culminates in the "postmodern loss of the subject". The "contingency of selfhood" as Rorty calls it, or the anti-essentialist view of the self that characterizes post-structural thought, make for an unstable subject, and without a reliable subject there is no place to situate the type of individual consciousness that is necessary for a robust concept of experience.

I argue that we can revitalize a concept of experience that is emphatic of the *actions* that we undertake as part of the shared projects we engage in. I use Hans Joas' concept of *practical intersubjectivity* to guide us towards such an understanding, and noted that this concept is coherent with a self that is both "socialized to the core" yet also capable of acts of creative individuality. Having understood this we are able to see that experience is neither a passive reception of the world that is incommunicable to others, nor is it something that can be explained away by referring to our complete socialization into a given linguistic scheme.

The "problem of intersubjectivity" (which is sometimes referred to as the "Cartesian Dilemma") is related to questions of personhood. The problem has been phrased as follows: "How can we at all reach the subjectivity of the Other in its givenness among the other objects of the world when we cannot avoid starting from the subjectivity of our own perceiving and judging?" (Grathoff, 1978, xxi).

Writing on what he called "the paradox of subjectivity" Husserl phrased the issue as follows:

> "How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world…one which has always already become what it is and continues to develop, formed by the universal interconnection of intentionally accomplishing subjectivity, while the latter, the subjects accomplishing in cooperation, are themselves only a partial formation within the total accomplishment? The subjective part of the world swallows up, so to speak, the whole world and thus itself too. What an absurdity!" (Husserl, 1970, 179).

Rorty's understanding of intersubjectivity is evident in his refusal to participate in such Cartesian dilemmas. The problem of intersubjectivity is illustrative of the types of questions philosophers should avoid – it is "not only a bad question, but the root of much wasted philosophical energy" (Rorty, 1999, xxiv). It is not that Rorty has provided an adequate solution to the problem, for he has dissolved the problem rather than solved it. In Rorty's view, there is no distinction between what occurs on the "inside" and what occurs on the "outside". When we attempt to communicate our experiences to others we are merely aiding those around us to predict our actions, we are not externalizing something that is internal. The Darwinian, biologistic view of the self that Rorty inherits via Dewey allows him to discard the idea that the mind is an interior space in which the self is located. As already noted, such a view presupposes the Cartesian notion of a mind that unbelievably operates independently of the forces that are exerted on it by the world. Thus, in relation to the problem of intersubjectivity Rorty dismisses the problem in the same way that he dismisses the need for a concept of experience: "It is only this picture of a Cartesian Theatre which makes one think that there is a big philosophical or scientific problem about the nature of the origin of consciousness" (Rorty, 1999, xxiii).

The Outline

Chapter One: A History of Experience

A key part of Rorty's argument is that by historicizing experience we will come to see that it is a relatively recent invention – one that we have managed to do well without for most of human history. In the first chapter I discuss Rorty's dismissal of experience and investigate the more general questions that postmodernity has asked of experience. Rorty traces the emergence of the concept of experience to the writings of Descartes, in particular the distinction Descartes makes between the "outer world" and the world within us - where the mind acts as a mirror to reflect that which is external to us. For Rorty, drawing a line between our private consciousness and a world "outside" us implies the concept of experience – for the world is now something that needs to be represented by the mind through our experience of the world. It is here that we see how experience is historically linked to the need for epistemology – the need for a theory of knowledge. Rorty says that we have no such need; either for epistemology or for a concept of experience. Instead we can follow Hegel's lead and claim that the mind is *not* like a lens that distorts reality. For Rorty, there does not need to be an interface between the self and the world that we call experience. Experience is simply a matter to be dealt with by natural scientists – those who concern themselves with the biological mechanisms in our body that receive stimuli from the world. There is nothing important here if our interest is in matters of culture and politics. What is interesting is what happens after we have received our stimuli; how we interpret the world through the discourses that are available to us.

Wilfrid Sellars has been a significant influence on Rorty's post-foundational vision, and as I describe why Rorty believes that his anti-foundationalism cannot accommodate a meaningful concept of experience I engage with Sellars' "myth of the Given". This is the idea that there is a

pre-conceptual "given" in which our experiences can be grounded. Rorty's argument is that focus on experience lends itself to reproducing metaphysical assumptions – the type of which pragmatists have traditionally prided themselves in overcoming. By appealing to experience we are referencing a foundation that was so strongly claimed to be illusory. Dewey is guilty of this, as are James and Peirce.

Rorty's rejection of experience is not unique, towards the end of the first chapter I briefly trace a parallel movement that occurred within feminist theory. Due to the linguistic turn and the ascendancy of postmodernism the authority of appeals to experience has become suspect. The opposition between theory and experience is unclear for what it assumes: that experience is untutored and unblemished by politics. Critics argue that "experience" is a loaded term – one that can perhaps be reduced to ideology. If experiences are always embedded in ideology then our hope to use experience to correct ideology is naïve. If experience is theory-dependent (if our experiences are a result of our exposure to theories) then the presumed authority of experience would be significantly undermined.

In the final section of the first chapter I describe a brief history of experience. This section provides the reader with a broader context in which to situate the argument. Martin Jay, in his *Songs of Experience* (2005) has provided the most comprehensive history of the concept, and in the opening chapter I rely heavily on his work to outline the different possible conceptions of experience. I then describe the value that experience had to classical pragmatists, for this will demonstrate the significance of what Rorty is dismantling – it will become clear exactly what is being lost when we forfeit the concept of experience. I discuss the meaning that experience had to Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James and John Dewey.

Chapter Two: Rorty's Public/Private Divide

In the second chapter I elucidate Rorty's public/private distinction. One of my ambitions is to unite two debates that are currently popular within pragmatism: that of what to make of experience after the linguistic turn and that of Rorty's awkward and contentious division between the public and the private domains of life. I believe that such a task can be accomplished if we recognize that at the centre of Rorty's public/private division is a postmodern articulation of personhood. Rorty believes in the complete contingency of the self – human beings have no essence that can be discovered. I argue that the postmodern "loss of the subject" is detrimental to a meaningful concept of experience *and* permitting of the private acts of self-creation that Rorty advocates should replace the search for "who we really are". In reference to the first point I trace the history of experience and observe the transition from individualistic conceptions of experience toward an understanding of how experience is an intersubjective affair. This historical movement is positively correlated to a trend that sees experience as a vital concept whe
n it is used in conjunction with a view of the self as distinct from the world, and sees experience as a depleted concept when the postmodern deconstruction of the self is operational. Experience is challenged when the self is unstable, "socialized to the core", and unable to be independent from the linguistic schemes that is has been socialized into. For Rorty, the self is nothing more than "a web of relations to be rewoven…a centreless web of beliefs and desires" (Rorty, 1989, 43). The essentialist and foundationalist philosophers whose work Rorty denies believed that there was a 'central faculty', or a stable self that we could use to build our theories around. There is no such self, and so Rorty asks us to forfeit the hope that we can locate a coherent self to embody our institutions and social structures. It is the "centreless self" that is the

crucial variable in finding the relationship between Rorty's attitude towards experience and his favoured stance towards the public/private split.

In reference to the public/private split I note that Rorty's "centreless self" is what allows us to pursue acts of self-creation, which Rorty tells us occur in the private realm and are distinct from public pursuits of greater social solidarity. If there is no enduring self that is waiting to be discovered then poetic acts of self-creation are fit to be pursued. And because there is no shared human nature, self-creation can only be a private affair, for there is no hope of grounding our idiosyncratic pleasures in something that is common to all.

Thus, in the second chapter I explore why Rorty felt such a rigid distinction was warranted and what the implication is for our experiences. Secondly, I summarize the various critiques that have been made of Rorty's claim: A) a distinction between the public and private spheres is undesirable, and B) the distinction is unobtainable even if it were desirable. I conclude this chapter by observing the need to reformulate an understanding of the relationship between the public and private sphere that is compatible with a meaningful conception of experience.

By maintaining a division between the private and the public sphere of life Rorty complicates how we understand his conception of the self. Although Rorty clearly admonishes the idea that there is a distinction between the mind and the world, there is a sense in which his clear separation between the private and the public realm retraces this distinction. Rorty famously describes the self as being "socialized to the core". His belief in the historical contingency of the self is matched by his belief that we have the capacity for autonomous acts of self-creation (Rorty, 1989). His conception of the self sees individuals as having interior freedom in their capacity for private ruminations, and yet these acts of self-determination must somehow be represented in the world. The issue is not that there is an authentic or pure self that must

somehow be transformed and compromised to take on an external form, for there is no sense of purity or authenticity within Rorty's work. There is no essential self that can be revealed to the world. Yet there is a sense in which a paradox exists, for a private act of self-creation cannot remain within the mind as a mere possibility, it must somehow be made concrete in the world. Rorty's presents us with a self that is both incommunicable to the world and also entirely intersubjective in character.

Chapter Three: Phenomenology and Pragmatism

In the third chapter I show that if we are to recover a concept of experience that is worthwhile having considered Rorty's critique, we would do well to look towards a pragmatic understanding of experience. I write of the correspondence between pragmatism and phenomenology and bring attention to the role that action plays in pragmatist notions of experience, and how a viable theory of action is essential for recovering experience. I argue that the key to understanding the divergent theories of action that we find in pragmatism and phenomenology are necessarily connected to how each discipline reacts to the "problem of intersubjectivity".

In addressing this question I begin by examining how phenomenologists have dealt with this matter. I first examine the influence that William James had on Edmund Husserl, and trace the development in James' thought from an egological conception of the self to a theory of experience that recognizes the self as a social being. I agree with the interpretation of James offered by Bruce Wilshire (1968) who notes that in the *Principles of Psychology* James struggled to rid himself of metaphysical inclinations in his account of experience. While James begins by describing the need to overcome metaphysics and an appeal to foundations of knowledge, his description of experience unavoidably returns to claim an essential foundation to what is

experienced. It is this quality of James' work on experience that causes Rorty to reject the importance of experience in general. On this note, Rorty would direct the same criticism against phenomenologists as he does the classical pragmatists. I note that although Husserlian phenomenology often carries the same anti-naturalistic impulse that we find in Rorty, Husserl is concerned with experience in relation to the search for epistemic certainty, and this offends Rorty's suggestion that we replace epistemology with sociology, and that we replace questions of ontology with questions of history. For Rorty, Husserlian and Jamesian ideas about experience are connected to the misguided search for something that is essential – something that exists beyond time and chance.

Within phenomenology, I argue that Max Scheler has taken the pragmatist view of action seriously and incorporated it into his sociological phenomenology. I draw on the work of Kenneth Stikkers (1980, 2009) who has described at length how Scheler took his cue from the classical pragmatists in developing a version of phenomenology that was grounded in action. While Husserl pursues experience for epistemological reasons, Max Scheler describes phenomenology as more of an "attitude". For Scheler, phenomenology is better seen as a technique that we can use to gain special types of insight that need not be foundational. As noted, the treatment of intersubjectivity is central to this insight, as Scheler is able to transcend questions of subjectivity and objectivity while describing the self as constituted by a unity of acts.

While I describe Scheler as providing a suitable guide to understanding what pragmatism can add to phenomenology, I also take the time to describe precisely where phenomenology in general is lacking a proper account of action. Aside from Scheler I identify Alfred Schutz as the theorist who comes closest to providing a theory of action that moves beyond the type of

foundationalism that Rorty warns us of. Schutz provides us with a syncretic perspective that unites Husserlian phenomenology with Max Weber's theory of action and also carries strands of pragmatism. Yet in the end, I show that Schutz carried a misguided conception of pragmatism and described action as something that could be added onto experience, rather than seeing experience as being inherently about action. In short, my argument in the third chapter is that Rorty's views on experience can be rectified by the work of certain sociologists. Yet in relation to a concept of experience, those sociologists that are valuable to us take their impulse from classical pragmatism.

Chapter Four: Experience Without Foundations

In the fourth chapter I engage with the presumed epistemological gap that exists between the classical pragmatists who favoured experience and the neoclassical pragmatists who preferred to write about language. In the fourth chapter I argue that we can re-think the extent to which Dewey's notion of experience implied epistemological foundations. I first examine the evidence that the "myth of the Given" is at work within Dewey's work, and later I describe Dewey's controversial move towards a preference for aesthetic experience, as I interpret this mode of experience to be the least burdened by metaphysical inclinations.

I build on these insights and continue to assess the need for an epistemological scheme that will permit us to move beyond an undesirable choice between interpreting experience as epiphenomenal to discourse and treating experience as implying foundations to our knowledge. I argue that the most plausible way forward is to enlarge our understanding of knowledge so that it has greater epistemic elasticity than a strict version of foundationalism. This will allow experience and language to exist without contradiction. I identify the work of Colin Koopman (2007) as offering the most promise, as he has attempted to find harmony between what he calls

"prima-pragmatism" and neo-pragmatism. In Koopman's words: "knowledge is understood as occurring within a temporal field of experience which is neither narrowly linguistic nor rigidly foundational" (2007, 710). I critically analyze Koopman's description of an epistemology of "transitionalism" that for him "bridges the gap" between experiential pragmatism and linguistic pragmatism. I argue that Koopman is mistaken in believing that there is an epistemological division between the two pragmatisms, because Dewey's notion of experience was not as metaphysical as Koopman and Rorty believe – making the need for a special epistemology that unites language and experience redundant.

Rorty has asked that we not engage with epistemology and that we replace epistemology with history. One of the many paradoxes of Rorty's work is that he asks us not to participate in epistemological debates yet has contributed significantly to such conversations. He is not in favour of argumentation either, but has argued forcefully for his position. Michael Williams has described Rorty as a sceptic about epistemology as opposed to an epistemological sceptic, meaning that an epistemological sceptic is someone who has doubts about our epistemic capacities, while a sceptic about epistemology believes that it is not useful to even have theories of knowledge (2009, xxvii). Rorty's concern over epistemological projects is that any attempt to legitimize knowledge "will necessarily follow a transcendental form of argumentation, or will follow the path of realism in assuming that we can guarantee correspondence of logic, or language…to the world" (Rorty, 1979b, 79). There is no way, in Rorty's view, to develop epistemology in a way that is not in some way self-referential. Wolfgang Carl has aptly criticized Rorty for not taking into consideration the different ways in which knowledge can be legitimated (Carl, 1979). In Carl's interpretation: "different philosophers have held different views about what a legitimation of knowledge might be, if only because they have held different views about

what knowledge consists in" (Carl, 1979, 106). In recovering a pragmatic concept of experience I have found it necessary to engage with epistemology, if only because there is the presumption of a clear epistemological "gap" between classical pragmatism and neopragmatism, and this obstacle must somehow be addressed.

Chapter Five: Imagination and Experience: A Linguistic Approach

In the fifth chapter I show how concerns of intersubjectivity are also present in another dilemma related to experience: How to account for imagination and creativity in experience. This is a relatively unexplored area of pragmatism, yet the ability to imagine a world that is somehow better than the current one is a key aspect of Rorty's work. While Rorty is committed to romanticism and writes at length of the importance of imagining new vocabularies, he does not address the paradoxical nature of imagination, preferring instead to see linguistic innovation as a matter of chance. Stated simply, the paradox of imagination is that it situates the subject *outside* of the world, but also *within* the world. Imagination allows us to *escape* the world of perception, but also to actively *participate* in the world by reconstituting it according to what we envisage. *I argue that had Rorty addressed the confusing nature of imagination he may have come to appreciate the role that experience has in creating new metaphors.*

I observe that our ability to imagine has been subjected to the same postmodern deconstructive efforts that have made experience difficult to believe in, and the "independent variable" in these relationships is postmodern "loss of the subject". In the same way that our ability to experience is muted if we are entirely constituted by language, our capacity to imagine is limited to being reproductive rather than productive. As I state it later, if by imagination we can only refer to a type of parody where the images we produce in our minds are simple

replications of previous images, then the subject who imagines is as dead as the subject who experiences.

In the same chapter I conclude by examining the attempts that have been made to ground imagination in experience. These attempts are worth investigating as they approach the issue from the opposing end of the dichotomy between experience and language. That is, while the starting point of *my* analysis is to describe the value that experience has and then attempt to incorporate language into a workable theory, the authors I describe in this chapter begin with an appreciation for language and then, recognizing its limitations, turn towards experience. This is particularly true of Charles Altieri, who, in writing of the "aesthetics of literary experience" aims to correct a romantic view of imagination as an accomplishment of individual will by grounding imagination in perception and concrete practice (2015). A similarly intriguing approach is offered by Saulius Geniusas (2015) who observes Ricoeur's turn away from phenomenology towards hermeneutics as being unhelpful in understanding the paradox of imagination. Geniusas' solution, which I describe in detail, is to take Ricoeur's insight that the ability to imagine is rooted in language and give it phenomenological treatment. Much like Altieri, Geniusas persuades us to notice the limitations of a purely linguistic account of imagination and suggests we see the capacity to be imaginative in language as dependent upon experience.

<u>Defining Experience</u>

> We can refer to experience as "the concrete whole which analysis divides into 'experiencing' and 'what is experienced. Experiencing and what is experienced are, taken separately, meaningless abstractions; they cannot, in fact be separated (Oakshott, *Experience and its Modes*, p.9).

Despite the felt obligation to define the concept that is at stake, there is a danger in any attempt to "control" what the word experience is allowed to indicate. The conversation about what experience refers to should be left open for discussion, and affixing a rigidly singular definition can limit the potential of new discoveries. Yet, admitting that the concept is multifaceted, has been subject to many diverse applications and is infinitely flexible is also unsatisfactory if no attempt is made to at least place *some* parameters on the subject matter. A common compromise is to offer a host of etymological insights into what was originally intended by the word experience. As I will later show in this chapter, Dewey succeeds in this project when he refers to the ancient Greek roots of the term, as he tells how the Greek understanding supports a definition of experience that connects it intrinsically to everyday, practical activities. I will elaborate on Dewey's understanding later.

In searching for the language in which to sediment our understanding of experience it is clear that the English language is deficient in this regard - *experience* can mean too many things. By contrast, the German language has a vocabulary that offers us more tools to make the distinctions about experience that we want to make. As detailed well by Walter Benjamin (1968, 163 as cited in Wolin, 1982), the words *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* can both be translated into the English word *experience*, yet these words have come to imply different things. *Erlebnis* has within it the word *leben* (life), and could conceivably be translated into the term "lived experience". *Erlebnis* can suggest a quality of immediacy within the experience; something

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personal and pre-reflective. This is an experience of the commonplace (the *lebenswelt*), the ordinary practices that are not subjected to interpretation or theory.

By contrast, the word *Erfahrung* has a contemplative tone to it, as it can be associated with cognitive judgements we make about sense impressions. While *Erlebnis* is imbued with immediacy, *Erfahrung* is stretched out over time, it is a gradual movement towards something new, as is implied by the German word *fahrt* (journey). There is a dialectical quality to *Erfahrung* where experiences are "strung together" and eventually composed into a comprehensible narrative.

Although the precise meaning of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* can be contested and has been subjected to different uses by German theorists such as Martin Buber and Wilhelm Dilthey, the general meanings associated with each word allow us to imagine the variety of ideas that can be represented by the word *experience*. Having understood the differences between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* there is a further distinction to be made that is particularly useful for the ongoing argument being made here. This is the distinction between an experience that is private and incommunicable as possibly represented in the immediate and pre-reflective character of *Erlebnis,* and an experience that is public in its character as represented by the slow learning process of *Erfahrung*.

When this schema is superimposed onto Rorty's pronouncement of the end of experience after the "linguistic turn" it is possible to imagine how we might concede that *Erfahrung* is indeed a problematic notion if it is taken to imply a cognitive process by which we gradually come to know something "real" (something that exists as a "given" outside of semantic categories). Instead of being immediate, or foundational, this mode of experience is for Rorty simply a function of the concepts and counter-concepts that we employ in a discursive field, and

there is never an inclination to move beyond the discourses available to us. *Erfahrung* is also problematic if it refers to Joan Scott's warning against the idea of a unitary or "essentialized" subject whose experience can be drawn upon by the historian (1991). Employing this mode of experience as a tool to overcome oppression risks not giving proper attention to the processes by which the subject is itself a discursive construction, bringing into question the substance of the experience that we withdraw from the subject.

While the interrogation of *Erfahrung* is justified if it is given such an interpretation, the concept of *Erlebnis* seems to evoke the types of private experiences that for Rorty do not require public justification. If *Erfahrung* is an attempt to reach into the past in order to gather accumulated strands of memory in the hope of creating a singular metanarrative that will explain the apparent incongruences of experience, then *Erlebnis* is an attempt to dwell unreflective in the moment of an experience. Stated in the language of pragmatism, the difference is between making an appeal to experience based on the assumption that experience is always situated firmly in the past, and appealing to experience in the vague hope that it might guide us towards an undefined future that is somehow better than the present. The former scenario is associated with attempts to define the object of experience, and the latter is concerned with what the subject might gain (or lose) through the process of experiencing. The hope of the classical pragmatists, in particular John Dewey, was to overcome this separation of object and subject – to create a concept of experience that spoke to both realities. Experience was both a path towards knowing, and an end in itself. I will argue that Rorty, in his critique of Dewey's metaphysics, focused only on Dewey's claim that experience was about knowing. To this extent, Rorty's critique of experience is not without merit, and the general postmodern/feminist critique of the "authority of

experience" is equally admirable. Yet the history of experience should not end there, for there is much more to be said about the concept.

If we were to concede to Rorty's persuasions and make the turn away from experience and towards language we would do so without a proper understanding of what is meant by experience. That is, Rorty helps us to understand what experience *is not.* Experience *is not* a tool that we can rely on to give us unmediated access to the past. Experience cannot always be trusted to create knowledge "from below", for experience *is not* something visceral, and it *is not* something transparent. Similarly, the postmodern scepticism towards experience as represented by the debate over identity politics and the politics of representation has left us with a void. Once we have deconstructed the concept and have become suspicious of any appeal to experience, we are still left uncertain about what experience actually *is*. Clearly, the word itself has not disappeared from our vocabulary, although many have been tempted to cast it aside. In an often-quoted passage Joan Scott writes that: "Experience is not a word we can do without, although, given its usage to essentialize identity and reify the subject, it is tempting to abandon it altogether. But experience is so much a part of everyday language, so imbricated in our narratives that it seems futile to argue for its expulsion" (Scott, 1991, 797).

The challenge before us then, is to continue the conversation about experience in a manner that is sensitive to the risk of foundationalism and essentialism while also being aware that Rorty's occasional linguistic idealism is an unsatisfactory solution to the paradox of *experience* without a coherent subject. We need not choose between experience and language as Rorty asks us to do, but should instead come to see language as being part of our experiential world. Furthermore, we should recognize that there is something about experience that is beyond the grasp of language. Martin Jay has offered a tentative definition of experience as follows:

"Experience, we might say, is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior" (Jay, 2005, 6).

Chapter One: A History of Experience

1. Rorty's Anti-foundationalism

> "The philosophers of today…reject the question "Are relations given immediately in experience?' as presupposing a notion of "givenness" that is just one dogma of empiricism. Following up on Sellars's criticism of the Myth of the Given, they do not think anything is given immediately in experience. They are enthusiastic about Peirce's claim that "my language is the sum total of myself"…but they regret that these are passages to which neither James nor Dewey, nor even Peirce himself, paid much attention" (Rorty, 1998, 291-292)

In this opening chapter, as I describe how we arrived at Rorty's pronouncement of the end of experience I will begin the historical narrative of experience at the end of its story, as I explain first what Rorty found objectionable about experience. To broaden the discussion I will observe a similar sentiment carried within post-structural feminism, where appeals to experience have become suspect. I will then reverse the chronological flow to describe the history of experience prior to Rorty.

I will begin by discussing Rorty in general terms before moving into a discussion that addresses his thoughts on experience in particular. This approach is beneficial in that understanding Rorty's opposition to the concept of experience is aided by first coming to terms with his critique of foundationalist thought. The principle reason Rorty is antagonistic towards any attempt to theorize experience is that he links such attempts to epistemological foundationalism. The hope that we might find a foundation for our knowledge – whether through abstract analysis or through an account of our direct experience with the world – is a hope we would do well to forfeit. Rorty claims first that we have no philosophical tools that are able to locate any such foundation to our knowledge, and secondly that knowledge needs no foundations.

In order to comprehend the magnitude of Rorty's assertion it must be understood within the broader context of philosophy. For much of our intellectual history the Platonic and Socratic teachings were taken for granted and went unchallenged. The idea that there was a singular Truth to the world, one that could be discovered through appropriate methods of philosophical inquiry, was hegemonic. There was genuine hope that we might find a grand narrative that would explain once and for all times how we ought to live. The path to salvation was through inquiry, and eventually we would arrive at a point where we had certainty; the truth would be known to us. Philosophical inquiry was a means to escape history, as the absolute notion of truth could transcend any historical bias.

We can find the most forceful critique of foundational thought in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). In the trajectory of Rorty's academic life this book marks his departure from the analytic tradition of philosophy (although the book was intended only as a culmination of the analytic approach). If we were to take analytic philosophy to its ultimate end-point then we would come to see the validity of what Rorty describes. Louis Menand has compared Rorty's destabilizing of the analytic tradition to the labour of a termite: "undermining foundations, collapsing distinctions, deflating abstractions, suggesting that the real work of the world is being done somewhere other than philosophy departments" (Menand, 1997, xxxi).

The central metaphor that Rorty uses to describe his critique is that of the mind as a mirror that reflects the world. This is the view within foundationalist philosophy, and is particularly present in the work of Descartes. It is here that Rorty locates the historical advent of the concept of experience, and connects foundationalism and the need for a theory of knowledge to the emergence of this concept. As previously noted, the specific element of Descartes work that captures Rorty's attention is the distinction that Descartes makes between us and the world.

In this view, the mind is described as separate from the world – there is an "outer world" and the world within us. Under such a schema there is a need to interrogate the relationship between what transpires in our minds and what occurs in the outer world. For us to construct knowledge there must be accurate correspondence between the mind and the world – the mind is like a mirror that functions to reflect what is external to us. The difference between how things appear to us when reflected in our minds and how they exist in reality is a distinction we must observe, and the concept of experience emerges out of this distinction, for it is our experience of the outer world that becomes represented in the mind.

Rorty denies the need for all of Descarte's dichotomies and the foundational philosophies that are associated with such thought. The metaphysical distinction between appearance and reality and the notion of representationalism understood through the metaphor of the mind as the mirror of nature should be replaced with a schema that acknowledges that we are active in the world. We do not *find* the truth as much as we *create* it. The idea that the truth is something that is *made* rather than *found* challenged the foundational logic that describes a knowing subject with a unique faculty for finding universal truths. Our minds do not function like mirrors that can capture and reflect that which is "real" in the world, for our minds are part of the world. Instead of describing ourselves as attempting to represent the world, we would do well to see ourselves as actively engaged with the world – our inquiry into the nature of things is only an attempt to alter the world to better suit our needs.

In sum, our relationship with the world is *causal* rather than *representational*, for our activities in the world cause us to hold certain beliefs. These beliefs will prove useful for fulfilling the tasks we have chosen to pursue, but since these beliefs are connected to our actions they are merely contingent on historical circumstance. Our beliefs are not representational of

some foundation to our knowledge, instead they are more like habits of action, and when these habits are challenged or broken new beliefs will be constructed to suit the changed environment.

In pointing to Rorty's anti-foundationalism and his subsequent attack on the notion of experience we can also examine his critique of the "myth of the Given". As expressed by Wilfrid Sellars, and articulated well by Scott Aiken (2009), the "myth of the Given" is constituted by two features: first, the idea that people have direct "non-inferential cognitive awareness of the content and/or character of some of their non-doxastic representations, experiences, and apprehensions" (Aiken, 2009, 19). Secondly, at least some of a person's beliefs can be justified because of this awareness they have over their experiences.

In identifying the "myth of the given" Sellars is critiquing the substance of empirical knowledge for the assumptions that are being made. The belief that we are granted direct access to unmediated knowledge, that something is "given", is for Sellars an incoherent notion. Sellars provides an alternative schema in which each piece of knowledge makes demands of the knower – the knower is required to have mastered certain concepts that allow that piece of knowledge to be understood.

To further clarify the relationship between three terms that can be mistakenly treated as synonyms, I have taken representationalism, foundationalism and givenism to mean the following: the thesis of *representationalism* holds that what we perceive in our minds is accurate if it corresponds to what exists outside of the mind. *Foundationalism* is the view that there are some representations that are unquestionable, and can serve as foundations to our knowledge. The immediacy of experience ensures that what is represented in the mind is incorrigible – it is a type of non-inferential awareness that can serve as a foundation precisely because it is non-inferential. *Givenism* should then be understood as a synthesis of these two theses: first, that we

are able to have non-inferential experiences that exist as accurate reflections of the world in our minds, and second that these experiences play a role in what we do and what we know. With this formulation in mind it stands to reason that if we take Sellar's suggestion seriously and abolish our belief in the Given, we will be simultaneously ridding ourselves of foundationalism and representationalism. Put differently, once we have recognized the "myth of the Given" there is no hope to recover foundationalism and representationalism.

Sellars was not the first to critique foundationalism, nor was he the first anti-Cartesian thinker, or the first to describe a holistic theory of meaning. What makes Sellars unique, and someone with resources to offer Rorty, is that he specified how these three themes were connected and dependent on each other. If we fail to properly refute Cartesianism then it is inevitable that we will fall into a form of foundationalism. Likewise, if we posit language to have a meaning that is connected to something other than a different language we will be forced to explain ourselves by referencing a state of being that is permanent and in-line with what would be expected of foundationalism and Cartesian thought.

In forming a critique of foundationalism Rorty draws on Sellars' account of the myth of the Given as he directs our attention to the faulty claim that we can have direct access to what is being experienced. Taken together, the two postulates imply a scenario that for Rorty is disagreeable; the mind and the world are conceived of as separate entities. If we are able to justify our beliefs because of the manner in which our experience with the world is direct and non-inferential, then we have laid a claim to the idea that there is foundation to our knowledge. Our beliefs can be justified not simply by their relation to other beliefs but by the non-conceptual experiences that serve to mediate between our minds and the world. Rorty, as we have seen, has argued vehemently that we are unable to make sense of the idea that we can experience the world

"as it really is". We are unable to find a neutral vantage point outside of history that gives us access to knowledge.

What this means then for a concept of experience is that without the need to ground our knowledge in something divine, or "natural", we need not treat experience as something that mediates between us and the world. By referring to experience we are hoping to find grounding for our knowledge, we are hoping to escape the contingency and temporality of our condition by locating a viewpoint that is transcendent. Rational minds can be brought to consensus where the subject is capable of experiences that exist at the universal level. Rorty argues that we can replace foundationalism with historicism (1989). Because there is no self that exists outside of history there is no use in asking questions about a human condition that exists apart from local conditions. The only self that exists is a historically situated one, for we have no essential character and we can see ourselves as composed of a web of different beliefs and desires that have been historically conditioned. In Rorty's words, our socialization "goes all the way down".

Understanding this view of historicism is important if are to understand why Rorty is reluctant to grant experience much importance. Under the historicist schema I have described, our beliefs and desires are not the result of our own idiosyncratic experience of the world, but rather, even our deepest beliefs have merely been inherited from the communities that have socialized us. Rorty rejects the cultural hegemony that is implied in foundationalist narratives. Once we have accepted that there is no neutral standpoint from which to evaluate experiences and that the attempts of the foundationalists to universalize experience are futile, we are left with the view of experience as something that is merely reflective of some locale (and there is a plurality of different standpoints). Experience is an epiphenomenon – something that reflects a

deeper historical condition rather than something that reflects anything eternal. Once experience

has been historicized, it loses its philosophical potency.

There are of course critical responses to the work of Sellars, and these criticisms echo

those commonly directed at Rorty. John McDowell has argued that embracing Sellars' view

leads us only to a state of "frictionless coherentism" (1994). If we accept that our senses cannot

be trusted to justify our beliefs then we are left with little to grasp onto. Thus, when Sellars

renounces empiricism and in its place seems to promote coherentism, he fails to observe how

there are limitations to our knowledge – knowledge is constrained by the limits of the real world.

On this topic, William Alston is a member of the same school of thought as McDowell.

In an article titled: "What's wrong with immediate knowledge?" (1983) Alston notes that attacks

on immediate knowledge have a considerable history and are not limited to the work of Sellars

and Rorty. Nineteenth-century idealists made this critique, and it was their work that largely

inspired the classical pragmatists to make the same arguments. The distinction between

immediate knowledge and *mediate knowledge* is not an obvious one, and the very notion of

knowledge is contestable on many fronts. In the fourth chapter I will revisit this distinction as I

attempt to reformulate a type of experience that is relevant to our purposes. For now, what

matters is only to observe that the anti-foundational slant that Rorty promotes via reliance on

Sellars' "myth of the Given" has directly been critiqued by the likes of Alston. As Alston notes:

"The rough idea is that whereas mediate knowledge depends for its status as knowledge on other

knowledge of the same subject, immediate knowledge does not" (1983, 73).

C.I. Lewis has persuaded us to accept an interpretation of the given that sees the given to

be only *a part* of experience. Unless we bring something to our experience there can be no

knowledge acquisition. And yet for Lewis, there *is* such a thing as experience, where the content

of experience cannot be invented or innately possessed but can only be found (1946, 182). Without this conception of the given knowledge would be both arbitrary and without content. In *Mind and the World Order* Lewis describes the given as being the substance "that remains untouched and unaltered, however it is construed by thought" (1929, 53). The given is unaffected by how we examine it or what our interests might be. The given, then, is only a part of experience – it is that which remains left standing after we subtract all of our interpretations. In this sense, the pure expression of the given cannot count as knowledge. We cannot ever know what the given is because such knowledge is a result of the concepts that we bring to the experience. "The given is *in*, not before experience" (1929, 55). We can only know that the given exists, but we cannot know its form or substance – we cannot know *what* it is.

These modes of criticism against Rorty will be variously incorporated into later chapters as I address the problematic notion of "the given" and attempt to develop the idea of non-linguistic experience that is non-foundational but still meaningful.

To summarize the content of this section of the chapter: We have examined Rorty's critique of foundationalism and have seen Rorty describe how Plato and Socrates initiated an intellectual journey that aimed to discover the foundations to knowledge. Rorty's point is that we have never succeeded in this journey. We have never managed to find any foundations – we have never been able to find or construct a theory of truth that is satisfyingly coherent for all. The fact that we have tried and failed in the past does not necessarily mean that we will not succeed at some point in the future, but at some point we should stop trying and turn our attention elsewhere. The point is to change the conversation – to put aside Platonic questions and instead address concrete forms of suffering. What makes Rorty's thinking attractive to many is that he removes the pressure we feel to find a universal truth; we are no longer burdened by the task of

reaching beyond the limits of our culture towards the promise of ahistorical truth. Rather, Rorty offers us a framework that allows us to re-think what philosophy might be good for, and encourages us to see philosophy as carrying the potential to be a significant force in people's lives.

2.**Feminist Critiques of Experience**

Having considered Rorty's move against a concept of experience we can trace a similar revolt occurring within the feminist movement during the ascendancy of post-structural thought. Of course, the feminist movement has a history of relying on the "lived experiences" of women to help reveal oppression that is taken to be very much real. Thus, appealing to the experiences of women seemed for the longest time to be a legitimate and trustworthy tool that could be used to create a new epistemic standpoint from which to mount resistance. This brand of knowledge was seen to carry much weight – it was seen by feminists to be superior to knowledge that was abstract or theoretical. In contrast to such forms of academic knowledge, the lived experiences of women (or of any oppressed group) were given their epistemic privilege due to their quality of immediacy. Experiences offered a path to knowledge that was closer to what was "real" – it offered an undistorted way of knowing the truth of existence.

On the feminist front, Dorothy Smith has perhaps been the most vocal advocate of taking everyday experience as the "point of entry" to our sociological investigations (Smith, 1987). As a proponent of taking experience seriously, Smith cites Merleau-Ponty as having influenced her stance. Standpoint theory – characterized by the idea that what we know is affected by where we stand (our subjective position in society), depends heavily on treating experience as key to knowledge creation. What we know of the world – our experience of it – is contingent on our given

standpoint, and given what Smith tells us of the "relations of ruling" that characterize our patriarchal society, these standpoints from which we experience should be problematized. Because we do not all share the same standpoint, our experience of the world can never be unified; there can never be the creation of objective knowledge. Yet the particular experiences of oppressed groups are what Smith tells us to pay attention to if our aim is to create new and critical epistemologies.

The turn against this hope was instigated by the same general paradigm shift that was touching the intellectual history of pragmatism. The linguistic turn and the growing prominence of post-structural theory similarly caused feminists to treat narratives of experience with suspicion. Where discourses were seen to be inevitably embedded with ideology, and where it seemed unlikely that individuals could transcend discourse to offer an account of their experience that was an original expression, experience was muted. In short, experience could be reduced to an expression of ideology – to reference the lived experience of an individual was to not recognize that "experience" was now a loaded term, one that required significant justification for being used. Whereas previously the lived experience of a subject was of value in that it provided a favorable contrast to knowledge that was strictly theoretical, the post-structural shift in feminist politics now made it unclear in what way theory and experience were in opposition. This is because it is no longer certain that our experiences are pure expressions, they are most certainly laden with politics. As such, if we are forced to acknowledge that experience is theory dependent, if what we experience is merely the result of having been previously exposed to one discourse rather than another, then it stands to reason that there is little justification for giving authority to experience. If our hope is to undermine dominant expressions of patriarchy by

drawing on experience of such structures then our hopes will be dampened when we realize that our experiences have themselves been influenced by ideology.

Within feminist literature the most disruptive critique of experience has been given by Joan Scott in her work "The Evidence of Experience" (1991). In accordance with the general critique of experience I have outlined, Scott is concerned that historians in general, and perhaps feminists in particular, have been mistaken in attempting draw on experience to create a new epistemological base. The desire to go beyond a conventional account of history in order to gain exposure to those histories that have been marginalized and concealed is fraught with difficulties. Yet for Scott there are additional problems associated with giving authority to experience beyond the fuzzy connection between ideology and experience that I have described. For Scott, a significant problem is that in attempting to "give voice" to marginalized groups the result is that differences between groups are unintentionally cemented and given validity. Rather than overturning the orthodox version of history by expanding our narrative to now include those experiences not accounted for, the incumbent system is given support. To illustrate, when we show interest in the divergent life-experiences of black women in the south to white women of wealth in the north, these differences are at risk of being taken for granted – they become the starting point for our analysis rather than a point of criticism. The identity categories that give rise to competing experiences ought not to be naturalized. Instead, what is needed is a tool that allows us to critique the ideological structures that create differences in the first place. I argue that this interrogation of experience can begin in earnest when we are willing to alter the way we construct the relationship between the individual, the experience and society. Experiences are not had by individuals in isolation from whatever discourses prevail, yet nor are ideological constructs so potent that they make the examination of experience a futile endeavor. Rather, we

must seek a middle-ground, and specify what we mean by experience and why it should matter to us.

3.**Experience Prior to Classical Pragmatism**

Having explained the contemporary objections to experience, in the remainder of this chapter I describe the prior history of how experience was conceptualized. Due to the varied uses of the word *experience* it is overambitious to attempt to write a singular and linear historical reconstruction of how the concept has been interpreted. There are many different histories, and for analytic purposes we can observe Marianne Janak's distinctions between the following modes of experience: aesthetic, religious, epistemological, political, and historical (2012). Venturing into the realm of *political experience* we might encounter the common lamentation that our modern world is lacking a true sense of experience. Hannah Arendt, although not normally referenced for her work on experience, wrote in *The Human Condition* (1958) that the modern world is distinguished from the past by the absence of meaningful political experience. There is something about our modern condition that has made "real" experience impossible. A *historical* account of experience would reveal different narratives. The work of E.P. Thompson and his well-known text *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966) illustrates one of the first attempts to use experience as a method to write "history from below" (see Martin Jay, 2005, 76) Here, the experiences of labourers were taken as self-evident and uncritically assumed to be a viable substitute to dry and abstract theory. Were we to focus on *religious experience* we might write of what experience meant for the Protestants: it was now possible to have direct access to God through personal experience. An account of religious experience might also include mention of the modern religious reaction to a world that was becoming increasingly scientific to the

detriment of spirituality. If we reduce experience to its cognitive dimensions we risk losing something that is vital for life. William James was an active participant in this discourse, as he attempted to preserve a space for religious experience while remaining politically and scientifically progressive.

Examining the history of the concept we find that John Dewey's lamentation of classical thought was centred on the neglect of experience that we find in this period (Dewey, 1920). In the Greek period references to the concept of experience are minimal; it occurs only occasionally in Aristotle's work, and usually as a mere "footnote" to his ideas. The denigration of experience is connected to the values of the rationalist tradition, where logic and intellect are arranged in hierarchical preference over experience; the latter is associated with the mundane forms of everyday life. For Plato, experience was what stood in the way of discovering the Truth, experience was associated with opinion rather than fact and custom and habit as opposed to rational thought. Dewey critiqued this understanding of experience, suggesting the Greeks were mistaken in assuming that experience was a barrier that stood in the way of proper reasoning. The presumed gap between reason and experience was a result of the Greek's bias towards abstraction, and this was to the detriment of an engaged understanding of the everyday world.

While Dewey observes that the classical period was marked by an absence of experience, Martin Jay, in his comprehensive historical account "*Songs of Experience*" (2005) professes his general agreement with Dewey while noting that one exception to this disdain for experience is found in the work of Augustine. Drawing on the insight of Hans Blumenberg (1983), Jay describes Augustine as introducing Western thought to the notion of inward reflexivity (Jay, 2005, 19). Augustine's introspections and his first-person narratives are perhaps the first example of "inner experience" that we can find. Yet the work of Augustine is exceptional to this period,

and it is difficult to argue against Dewey's claim that generally, discussions about experience were muted during the classical period and it was not until the seventeenth century that experience came to the forefront of intellectual inquiry.

Without denying the appeals to religious experience that would continuously surface at later points in history, it has been suggested that a serious discourse about experience is somehow connected to an emerging secular trend in the West and the period of scientific enlightenment that accompanied it (Dear, 1995). The modern period, as loosely defined by the declining centrality of religion in our lives, brought increasing significance to the experiences of people whose lives were no longer filled with inherent meaning. Where religion was losing its grip and could no longer be relied upon to provide all the answers to an uncertain and chaotic existence, appeals to experience began to emerge as a viable substitute. Experience was made more powerful if its potential could be harnessed and organized into an experimental format, i.e., the scientific method. Here, experience was not valued as an end in itself, but as a means to a greater end; that of generating reliable knowledge. "Inner experience" was put aside in favour of a model of experience that was intersubjectively verifiable through a method that was standardized – if everyone followed the same procedure then experience could be controlled.

As a brief interlude in our narration of the history of experience we can pause to consider a comment from Rorty that for him summarizes the chronology I have described:

> "There's still a tendency to want somebody to occupy the role formerly held by priests. The physicist tends to be nominated for that role, as someone in touch with the nature of reality, with, reality apart from human needs and interests. This tendency to need a priest-figure is unfortunate; it seems to me a form of self-abasement" (Rorty, 2006, 49)

Rorty observes that the values that lie dormant in the scientific account of experience are not far removed from the ideals of the Platonists, and there is a similar sentiment carried by

religion. The Platonic search for the Truth was motivated by the belief that there was something outside of human existence that could be drawn upon for guidance. Reason and rationality were tools that could be used to transcend the current state of existence. Religion, for Rorty is a continuation of this metaphysical trend, as truth and goodness take a non-human form and constitute a reality that is knowable through faith and is purported to exist independently of values and practical affairs. The scientific worldview that emerges in the seventeenth century and is typically characterized by the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Rene Descartes (1596-1650), contains within it the continuing commitment to the search for something extra-human that will guide us towards a better world. Experience of the world is central to accomplishing this end, but it is an experience that is distrustful of random, everyday encounters with the world. The "quest for certainty" required that experience be ordered and predictably systematized so that the resulting knowledge would transcend the conditions from which it emerged and be able to "stand on its own", independent of any values. For Rorty, appeals to experience, in whatever guise they come, always carry the unfavourable legacy of Platonic ideals – there is always the presumption of a world that exists beyond everyday human affairs and a belief that there can be a foundation to our knowledge.

To continue the historical narrative, the scientific developments of the seventeenth century led to an increasing popularity of the "empirical". This was most true in Britain, and in what came to be known as British empiricism, David Hume, John Locke and George Berkeley carried forward the inductive scientific method as first defined by the work of Bacon. As noted, the systematic organization of experience was pursued as an antidote to untrustworthy intuition, abstract theory and deductive reasoning. The foundation of experience was sense impressions.

British empiricism would be one of the primary philosophical influences of Classical American pragmatism, as James, Dewey and Peirce would engage with the naturalism found latent in empiricism and would to differing degrees approve of the notion that experience be placed at the forefront of inquiry. Yet, as I will show in the section that follows, American pragmatism also arose as a direct reaction to some of the traits of British empiricism that were deemed unsatisfactory to the project of creating a vital and holistic account of experience. There were many aspects of Hume's work in particular that begged questions to be asked. Given Hume's insistence that our beliefs are a result of sense impressions it is not clear how sense impressions can be isolated from each other and be uninfluenced by existing beliefs. The beliefs we hold as a result of habit, memory and imagination must somehow structure our experience in a way that Hume does not consider. If this is true, then it raises the question of how Hume can isolate perception from the multi-layered context in which it occurs and place it uncritically before the formation of belief. A further problem for the pragmatists in adopting empiricism was Hume's description of the self, as individuals appeared to function only as passive recipients of stimuli. Rather than describe the individual as actively engaged and possessing an identity that allowed for creative interaction with the environment, Hume's account of the self appeared one-dimensional.

In sum then, the empiricist account of experience had an enduring impact on the intellectual landscape, and the general schema of experience favoured by the empiricists proved attractive to the American pragmatists. Yet it is also clear that the belief that the dynamics of cognition could simply by traced to experience was fraught with controversy from the beginning. One site of contestation was the manner in which experiences could be studied as discrete, isolated entities, which related to assumptions about how the subject was constructed. Problems

of activity and passivity also emerged, as the reduction of experience to its cognitive components betrayed a more nuanced understanding of how individuals interacted with their environment in an engaged manner.

Martin Jay has noted that these problems with the empiricist account of experience led to two distinct trajectories of how experience was regarded (Jay, 2005, 76). First, alternate modes of experience were given serious consideration and commonly elevated above the rigidly epistemological variant that was offered by the empiricists. Here, political, religious and aesthetic modes of experience gained prominence. E.P Thompson, in his *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966) resisted the empiricist reduction of experience and described experience as a "privileged medium" that did not depend on scientific explanation for its justification. Thompson's attempt at creating "history from below" was countered by Marxists such as Althusser (1971) who argued that there is no clear separation between ideology and experience, and that ideology has a way of infusing itself into the ordinary lived-experiences of individuals. As I will show later in relation to Rorty's postmodern critique of experience, Thompson's work was also criticized by those feminists who saw his description of the working class as being unrealistically uniform.

The move away from empiricism and towards an alternative account of experience was also evident in the religious appeals to experience that would arise in reaction to the presumed deficiencies of a modern world. As noted by Jay (2005, 92) Kant's preference for moral obligation over religious experience engaged a strong reaction from Protestant theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) who emphasized the intense emotional quality of religious experience as something that was better understood by the heart than the head. Jay identifies Rudolph Otto (1869-1937), William James (1842-1910) and Martin Buber (1878-1965) as being

twentieth century thinkers who embraced the value of religious experience in the face of a spreading scientism. These were the varied attempts to create a conception of experience that was qualitatively different from that of the British empiricists.

A second way forward was to take what had been left by the empiricists and attempt to integrate their understanding into a new and more comprehensive account of experience. This ambitious task was embraced foremost by John Dewey who decried the modern attempts to partition experience into separate spheres of life. When experience is fragmented into different modes of existence, Dewey argued, the result is a deprived and alienating concept of experience. In order to comprehend the totality of experience one must acknowledge the connections between aesthetic experience and political experience, for example. The atomistic epistemology of Hume neglected to see how all cognitive experience was infused with aesthetic moments. In short, Dewey sought to reverse the process of differentiation that was occurring in regards to how experience was thought of.

4.**Experience and Classical American Pragmatism**

> "On the active end, experience is trying—a meaning which is made explicit in the connected term experiment. On the passive, it is undergoing. When we experience something, we act upon it, we do something to it; then we suffer or undergo the consequences. We do something to the thing and it does something to us in return" (Dewey, 1916, 146).

In all that I have written I have used the dichotomy between experience and language as a theoretical framework to make sense of the issues I have discussed. I have also created a complimentary framework that refers to the tensions between individualistic notions of experience and the intersubjective conceptions of experience that potentially lead to the demise

of experience. It is worth considering how the themes that I have written on have been phrased differently and have been interpreted as speaking to different intellectual projects. Noteworthy here is Paul Jay's *Contingency Blues: The Search for Foundations in American Criticism* (1997), in which Paul Jay's interest is to engage with the "legitimation crisis" that he sees as characteristic of modernity, by which he means that our efforts to ground our beliefs and practices in something substantial are frustrated. Paul Jay identifies two distinct reactions to this crisis. One strand of literature is marked by a preoccupation with the inherent uncertainty of our epistemologies – our claims to knowledge are in doubt – they are, as Rorty has phrased it, 'contingent'. Paul Jay labels the contributors to this genre as the 'poststructuralist pragmatists', and includes Rorty as a key figure. In contrast to this, the second strand of literature is characterized by concern over legitimacy. Within this set of literature appeals to experience are made in the hope of latching onto something 'real'. Paul Jay calls this group the 'literary Emersonians', whose principle members are Giles Gunn, Peter Carofiol and Richard Poirier. This schema that Paul Jay provides is much broader than the friction between classical pragmatism and neopragmatism that I have described, although I have attempted to broaden the debate about experience to include social theory in general. For Paul Jay, the issue extends beyond the boundaries of pragmatist theory and speaks to contemporary American criticism as a whole. Yet the fundamental point of Paul Jay will ultimately be familiar to us, as he describes a seemingly insurmountable impasse between a postmodern preference for models of contingency that are self-referential and provide no substantial guidance for "what ought to be done", and the anachronistic appeals to experience that cannot avoid relying on foundationalism.

Although the concept of experience has played a significant role in many philosophies, within classical pragmatism the concept was elevated to a new level of importance. Many have

suggested that this can be explained by an American predilection towards experience, and that the classical pragmatists were only reflecting an idea that was always latent within the culture of the country. John McDermott has described America as a "culture of experience" that extends from the Puritans forward to Dewey and beyond (1976). He notes: "Taking experience to mean nothing less than what we do and what is done to us, as well as the "way" in which these transactions proceed, we note that only in the American philosophical tradition is this the *primary* concern" (1976, ix). From the time of colonization, experience intertwined with the process of experimentation and adaptation to a new environment. It referred to the necessary methods of improvisation that were practiced, for experience was a valued replacement to the authoritative texts of the past. The American enthusiasm for strict equality in the face of authority, as outlined by Alexis De Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* (1945), was likely well-served by the democratizing quality of experience. The shift away from the unquestioned expertness embedded in abstract and dogmatic guidance "from above" (whether theological or political in nature) was marked by a move towards the ordinary lessons that could be derived from everyday experience.

There are other commentaries about America's relationship to experience that are worth noting. Bruce Wilshire has taken a more radical approach to identifying the origins of America's apparent fascination with experience, as he has found convincing evidence that Native American traditions are replete with experiences of oneness with nature (2000). These notions of "primal" experiences have been synthesized with colonial traditions and form the syncretic beliefs about experience we hold today. Not in contrast to Wilshire, John Stuhr has noted that what is distinct about the American conceptualization of experience is that it describes experience as a continuous flow of belief and action, and is not concerned with the rigid classification of

experience into discrete units of analysis (Stuhr, 1997). Ralph Waldo Emerson is commonly cited as evidence of America's preoccupation with experience, with particular attention given to Emerson's essays "Experience" and "The American Scholar". In "Experience" Emerson grapples with the concept of experience by recounting the loss of his son: "I grieve that grief can teach me nothing" (Emerson, 1983 [1844]). In "The American Scholar" Emerson delivers the now familiar refrain that we ought to forfeit traditional "book learning" and in its place pursue a richer brand of experience that connects us more closely to who we want to become (Emerson, 1983 [1837]).

To be sure, pragmatism and its emphasis on experience were present in Europe as well, albeit with varying degrees of commitment from its theorists. Emile Durkheim, in *Pragmatism and Sociology* (1983) professed admiration for most aspects of pragmatism, yet on the topic of experience he seems to have embraced the direction of the trend I have described: that of a historical movement away from an individualistic/psychological account of experience and towards an understanding of experience that stresses intersubjective arrangements. This is clearly evident in his consistent referral to *collective* experience rather than subjective, inner experience. The former type of experience is relevant to Durkheim for the primacy it gives to social structures, while the latter type of experience is merely epiphenomenal – by examining the subjective aspects of experience we are simply seeing society reflected back at us.

As I will show in this chapter, this "vanishing of the subject" has posed a challenge to the relevance of the concept, and although this challenge has led many postmodern theorists such as Rorty to dismiss the concept entirely, there have been other postmodern attempts to embrace experience precisely because of its uncertain character. After describing the value that Emerson, James and Dewey found in experience, and after describing Rorty's postmodern rejection of

experience after the linguistic turn, I re-describe the tenets of classical pragmatism as anticipating many postmodern issues. James Kloppenberg has positioned pragmatism as a reaction to the dogmas of empiricism and rationalism and noted that early pragmatists were distinguished by their willingness to tolerate the uncertainties of modernity; they were content to acknowledge the limits of understanding (Kloppenberg, 1986). Rorty, for his part, acknowledges and admires the postmodern qualities of classical pragmatism, yet sees the classical pragmatist's continued commitment to experience as being their faulty adherence to a modernist paradigm that pushes for epistemological certainty and the discovery of universal truth within experience.

As I describe the work of William James, it will be clear that the influence of British empiricism is significant for his work. Despite the pragmatist turn against the empiricism of Hume, there are clear remnants of empiricism within the work of James and Dewey as seen in the way experiences are grounded in something "real". While Dewey developed his notion of experience in relation to art and the idea that truth was a matter of achieving consensus within a particular community, William James' notion of experience was inspired by slightly different inclinations. James' description of experience was more individualistic and psychological in orientation than Dewey's concept. James aimed to protect a space for religious life during a time when religious life was threatened by secular ideas. Religious experiences were relevant to James for what they might allow us to do – their worth was in the comfort they might give us during times of strain. Despite this difference, both Dewey and James described experience as progressive: Dewey valued experience for its uncertain and experimental nature, while James valued experience not because it corresponded to an external reality, but for the potential it had to produce practical benefit to our lives.

Although I emphasize the contribution of William James as being fundamental to what John McDermott has called "the culture of experience" in America (1976, 15), his account of experience is perhaps more of a challenge to recover than Dewey's. While the "linguistic turn" posed a challenge to experience in general – making the concept appear anachronistic and naïve to how experience was structured – James' individualistic account of experience appears more at odds with our contemporary scepticism than does Dewey's communal/cultural approach to experience. Although James did not describe experience as a purely isolated event in the mind of the subject, at times his psychologism betrays an understanding of how experience is structured according to the social context. Robert Danisch, for instance, has noted that for scholars interested in the intersection of rhetoric and pragmatism, James' work has been a problem to incorporate because of his focus on individual experience rather than on collective experience (Danisch, 2007).

Paul Stob has made similar complaints about James while attempting to resuscitate parts of his work, describing him as a "rugged individualist" who makes experience seem like an "outmoded modernist idea" (Stob, 2011, 227). Yet Stob is able to rally against the popular criticism of James by bringing attention to the social consequences of James' notion of experience as evidenced primarily by James' lecture "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" (1900) in which James addresses the growing question surrounding American imperialism. In this lecture James demonstrates the social and political consequences of experience in a manner that should satisfy those perturbed by an interpretation of James as being concerned only with the individual's private religious experience. While these contemporary attempts to rethink James' work have merit, I have still favoured Dewey as the best-suited guide to recovering a notion of experience that is compatible with Rorty's pronouncement of the linguistic turn. One

reason for this is Rorty's consistent referral to Dewey as his "intellectual hero"; another reason is Dewey's prolific and wide-ranging inquiries into experience. In what follows I elaborate first on the importance that experience had to Emerson, before examining James and Dewey in the sections that follow.

A.Emerson

Because of the often artistic style of Emerson's prose his work is subject to many interpretations and has been used for many purposes. In Rorty's later work, in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Rorty advises us to substitute "…hope for knowledge, imagination for certainty, and the idea of a better human future for notions of reality, reason and nature" (1999, 27). Rorty employs Emerson as a guide to fulfill this project when he says we, as scholars "should stop trying to provide reassurance and instead encourage what Emerson called 'self-reliance'" (Rorty, 1999, 28). The meaning of "self-reliance" has been contested, for it is not clear what type of a metaphysical program one must be committed to in order to embrace such a notion. For Emerson, *experience* is of central importance to becoming self-reliant, and our experience is what we use to locate an identity that is uniquely *ours*. In order to have the necessary types of experiences that allow for self-sufficiency we must have the courage to remove ourselves from society to experience the world in its pure form. This is evident in *Nature* (1836) where Emerson attempts to find the proper role for the individual in relation to society and the cosmos (Wilson, 1970). In order for the individual to enter into a harmonious relationship with the cosmos (or, the "spirit") we must "step outside" of the common associations of society that immerse us and locate our true self via a new experience with the cosmos.

Based on this description of Emerson's attitude toward experience it should be apparent that we can conveniently situate Emerson within the paradigm that Habermas described as a philosophy of subjectivity. Emerson's conception of selfhood seems to aptly fit this model as he advocates that the individual must retreat into his consciousness to find perfection – social relations are an obstacle to the growth of the individual. We are also able to observe the confused and paradoxical nature of selfhood as it relates to experience. As the Emersonian self attempts to become detached from his culture in the hope of finding an authentic identity, the identity that is gained by direct experience of nature is soon lost. This is evident in Emerson's well-known passage in which he describes how we relate to nature: "All mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all" (Emerson, 1836, 1). To have an identity in isolation from others is to have no identity at all. The lesson here seems to be that if we conceptualize experience as a purely private affair our theory will culminate in the complete denial of individuality. I have said that this is true on the opposite side of the "spectrum of personhood" as well, for if we conceptualize the self as being merely a product of discourse, as being "socialized through and through" we will be confronted with a "loss of the subject" and an untenable context for experience to operate in.

It should not surprise us that Emerson does not feature prominently in Rorty's work. Richard Poirier, in *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992, 8) complained of Rorty's unwillingness to grant Emerson a founding role in American pragmatism. Rorty approves of Emerson's general distrust of traditional philosophical systems and admires Emerson's way of valuing ideas without referring to their philosophical foundations. Rorty discourages us from interpreting any metaphysical commitments in Emerson; his notion of self-reliance does not gain its power from the fact that our acts of self-creation are grounded in something foundational or metaphysical,

but from the fact that these acts belong to *us.* We can say that Rorty prefers to see Emerson's conception of selfhood as involving metaphors of *making* rather than *finding.* The self is not in search of authenticity – it is not trying to discover "who it really is" – but rather, the self is involved in acts of creation. At other times Rorty seems content to reference the notion of self-reliance while avoiding questions of personhood. In "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality" Rorty states that: "To encourage self-reliance, in this sense, is to encourage the willingness to turn one's back both on the past and the attempt of 'the classical philosophy of Europe' to ground the past in the eternal. It is to attempt Emersonian self-creation on a communal scale" (Rorty, 1999, 260).

Russell Goodman's interpretation of Emerson is on this topic consistent with Rorty's, as he asks that we see Emerson's sense of freedom as being more like a virtue than a metaphysical reality (Goodman, 1987). Some people possess a greater sense of freedom than others, in the same way that some people possess more courage than others. Thus, when Emerson encourages us to be self-reliant he is not asking for a complete separation between mind and world that would allow the mind to achieve purity of thought. Instead, Emerson's claim is more moderate: he advises us that we can, to some extent, obtain a degree of freedom and control over our situation – but this is a matter of degree rather than a matter of achieving absolute autonomy.

Emerson's valuation of experience is also exemplary of another trend that is central within this dissertation, and this is the dichotomy between experience and language. For this interpretation of Emerson the credit must be given to Stanley Cavell, for Cavell has observed in Emerson the way he understands language to be in opposition to achieving the types of experience necessary for self-reliance (1988, 40). Stated somewhat differently, language is unable to adequately capture our experience. This is expressed most clearly in Emerson's

melancholic essay "Experience" where Emerson attempts to negotiate the emotions of mourning that accompany the loss of his son. Referring to Emerson's writing in general Cavell states the issue in a way that will resonate with what I have described: "…our antagonism to fate, to which we are fated, and in which our freedom resides, is a struggle with the language we emit, of our character with itself…his writing is meant to enact his subject, that it is a struggle against itself, hence of language with itself, for its freedom (Cavell, 1988, 40). Again, Cavell writes: "Our relation to our language – to the fact that we are subject to expression and comprehension, victims of meaning – is accordingly a key to our sense of distance from our lives, of our sense of the alien, of ourselves as alien to ourselves…" (Cavell, 1988, 40).

We can imagine that Rorty would respond to this problem by dissolving the issue rather than arguing for a solution. If Emerson is troubled by the inability of language to connect to experience it is because he assumes that the relationship of language to the world is representational rather than causal. Language, for Rorty, is not supposed to mirror reality – it is not supposed to reflect our experience of the world as much as it makes certain experiences possible. Our experience of tragedy causes us to hold certain beliefs about the world, but we cannot expect language to connect to "real" experiences in the world because language only connects to itself.

I have stated that Rorty rejects the metaphysical implications of Emerson's commitment to experience and appropriates Emerson's notion of self-reliance. In chapter three I will describe Rorty's attention to private irony which I note carries a similar impulse of self-transformation and self-critique to Emerson's ideal of self-reliance. We will find that Rorty's notion of a private self is also similarly troubled; much like the paradox of identity that Emerson encountered when his ideal self withdrew from social associations, we are led to wonder about the plausibility of

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Rorty's private self maintaining no connections to the public sphere. While Rorty attempts to escape the issue by describing self-reliance as a communal achievement that does not depend on metaphysically problematic ideas about experience, he continues to insist on a public/private split in which non-linguistic experience exists, but only in the private sphere. Because Rorty does not admit a socially useful notion of experience he leaves himself open to the criticism that the private self makes an aesthetic and self-indulgent leap into an Emersonian search for individual purity while participating in politics is reduced to an arbitrary affair.

B.William James

To understand the classical pragmatist's attachment to the notion of experience we can examine how James refuted the traditional empiricist account of experience. The empiricism of Hume and Herbert Spencer was unsatisfactory for James, and in response he formulated a version of empiricism he called "radical". The traditional empiricist view that we are blind to the relations between experiences is a reflection of the idea that the individual exists separately from the world. If we see ourselves as being removed from the world then we will also see that our experience of the world is our own perception. The empiricists had been committed to a type of dualism that was a hindrance for James; the dualism between the mind and the external world is associated with the view that knowledge is formed through accurate representation. Knowledge is produced if our experience corresponds with what exists in the world. From the empiricist standpoint, experience is something that is imposed on us through our senses. As seen in the work of Herbert Spencer and critically recounted by James, the mind is inevitably molded through exposure to the world, there is "…direct pressure, very much as a seal presses wax into harmony with itself" (James, 1880, 622).

James rejected this view, for he did not see that the world forces itself onto us, but instead describes how the mind consciously attends to what is experienced. Our senses receive countless pieces of information form the world, yet our mind attends only to select stimuli. Many things that are perceived by the senses never reach the point where they become part of our experience. So while it is true that the mind is shaped by the experience of the world, it is also true that the relationship is conditional; the mind carries a degree of agency over what it selects to adopt as experience. As James notes: "My experience, is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind..." (1878b, pp. 929-930; 1890i, p. 402).

The idea that experience is not merely a matter of biological stimuli that the mind reacts to is further developed in James' claim that experiences are not isolated events but connected to larger social forces. While Hume claimed that we are unable to experience the relations between experiences (we do not experience the causal connections between events), James argued that we *can* experience the relation between events, and it is this that makes experience so central to our lives. For James, we are not merely receiving our experience from the world in a passive manner, we are instead actively participating in the world and playing a role in the creation of our experiences. Thus, while James agreed with the empiricists that sensory experiences are the base of knowledge, he argued that the creation of such experiences and knowledge is a result of our active engagement with the world. For instance, as musicians, our experience of a certain gesture by the conductor is interpreted within a particular context. The meaning of the gesture is derived from understanding the relations that exist surrounding the gesture. The movement of the hand cannot itself be understood unless we bring awareness to the different relations that preceded the gesture.

Within the context of an emerging evolutionary theory, James took seriously the thought that we are driven by interests. In relation to experience he believed that our subjective interests are not simply given to us by external stimuli, for our interests exist independently of any stimuli we encounter in the world. This claim is a key part of his critique of empiricism, for as alluded to, our interests play a role in what stimuli we choose to attend to, and subsequently what is experienced by us. The idea that our experiences are structured by more than what is immediately perceived by the senses is a challenge to the empiricist theory of knowledge that assumes that the mind is in fact molded plainly by what is received by the senses.

This should not be taken to mean that our understanding of the relations involved in an experience is always a conscious act. While James wrote of the mind as having a degree of agency over what phenomenon could be preserved as an experience, it is also true that there is something like intuition that we use to understand the meaning of experience. While a musician may deliberately induce in himself an understanding of the particular nuanced movements of a conductor, in other cases there is no conscious effort to conjoin the relations between experiences, for it is simply a matter of us living in a world where these relationships naturally flow into each other. Our experience of the world is naturally an experience of different relationships. This observation is also reflected in James' well-known idea of the "stream of consciousness" (James, 1890). Here, one thought connects seamlessly to the next and we cannot remove ourselves from the context in which a thought occurs. In the same way that we have no way of removing ourselves from the context in which a thought occurs, our experiences are immersed in a particular set of relations that give the experience meaning.

As a final note, towards the end of *Varieties of Religious Experience* James seemingly betrays his own pragmatism by running together two questions that pragmatists would prefer to

keep separate. The first question asks "what is important for human life?" while the second question replicates that common platonic search for absolutes by asking "what is really real?" Throughout the *Will to Believe* James had made an effort to keep these questions distinct, yet in the *Varieties of Religious Experiences* James says the following: "By being religious we establish ourselves in possession of ultimate reality at the only points in which reality is given us to guard. Our responsible concern is with our private destiny, after all" (James, 364. This passage contains two concerns that for Rorty need not be reconciled: a concern over the nature of reality and a concern for what gives us comfort in our private lives. This is an issue Rorty charmingly takes up in an autobiographical essay where he concludes that despite the temptation to unify our idiosyncratic pleasures with our hopes for solidarity, they need not be reconciled. As I have said, I will address this issue in the chapter three.

C.John Dewey

John Dewey, having written three books with the word "experience" in the title, understood experience to be an art form. For Dewey, an artistic venture was not the outcome of the mysterious inner processes of the mind, instead, art was a result of our interactions with the world. Rorty noted that we can easily see how Dewey's concept of experience can be construed as having the same meaning as the term "culture" (Rorty, 1982). While the defining trait of culture is that it is shared rather than something particular to the individual, Dewey's discussion on the value of experience illuminates that experience is a social reality. In the same way that we cannot remove ourselves from the impact of culture (we are socialized to the core), our experiences are a result of our relationships with others. In practice, this means that we are

always testing our experiences against the experiences of others. Whether our experiences are significant to us depends on the beliefs and values of the local communities that we are a part of.

As was similarly noted by James, Dewey thought that experiences are not the result of passive reception on our part, but that we make our experiences much like we make art (*Experience and Nature*, 1925). Referencing the Greek expression of art as "techne" Dewey wrote of experience as something that can be harnessed and fostered by the individual – we can positively seek out certain experiences. Although there is more to experience than the acquisition of knowledge and fact, Dewey's description of art as a type of experienced knowing is indeed similar to how we might describe a master carpenter producing a new piece of work. Our desire to realize certain patterns of conduct and certain aesthetic designs is fulfilled not through intellectual abstraction, but through *action*. In *Art as Experience* (1934) Dewey develops his theory of experience by taking his cue from the practical arts, as he focuses on the fine arts and how we create and interpret aesthetic experience. In doing this Dewey provides us with the historical root of the word "experience": it comes from the Latin word "experiri", meaning "try", and is also associated with the word "expert" (Dewey, 1925, 354). The combination of the two words "try" and "expert" gives us the impression that experience is an active process rather than something that simply happens to us. Dewey writes that for the Greeks, experience: "…..signified a store of practical wisdom, a fund of insights useful in conducting the affairs of life" (1925, 354). It is of course true that today we refer to people with practical skills as being "experienced" – they have mastered their art and acquired the necessary habits to perform their duties well. Thus, in the same way that art is a product of deliberate action, experience as well is an activity undertaken with a degree of expertise.

This being the case, Dewey stressed that the aesthetic experiences we have are not limited to how we react to objects of art. Instead, aesthetic experiences are present in everyday activities, and these experiences can be used to make adjustments to our habitual ways of living. Since it is our habits that structure our world, it is aesthetic experience that allows us to continually reconstruct how we live. Dewey also narrates to us how experience is cumulative – it builds upon itself and finally culminates into something qualitatively different than the sum of its parts. This quality of experience is important to Dewey in that it infuses experience with the potential for both personal and societal growth. Where experiences can be harnessed and controlled they are also a vehicle for social change.

Stuhr argues, and I agree, that we can think of Dewey's description of experience as being a theory of contingency (1997). Although Stuhr does not go into as much depth as I would like in describing the contingent qualities of experience we find in Dewey, the clearest example we are given is in the social character of experience. That is, rather than describe our experiences as being autonomous and self-sufficient, they are irreducibly social. Dewey does not distinguish between experiences that are communally shared and those that are private in nature – those types of dualisms were overcome by recognizing the manner in which certain facets of life were inseparable. Instead he proposes a reciprocal relationship between the individual and the community. Rorty, as I will show, argued vehemently that we acknowledge the contingency of our lives, so it stands to reason that he might approve of Stuhr's account – yet it is puzzling that he did not himself recognize this quality in Dewey's work.

In relation to the notion of private or "inner" experience Dewey recognizes that such a notion is a relatively recent development. The commonly asked question today in relation to experience is: *whose* experience? Dewey observes that for the ancient Greeks there was a never a

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question of how to move from a subjective account of experience towards something objective, for experience was necessarily a social affair (1925, 172). The trend of individualizing experience does hold emancipatory potential, and there is something that is gained by recognizing that the individual is not merely a passive reflector of a cultural milieu. Yet Dewey was concerned that placing too much emphasis on the individual's private experience was detrimental to the aim of creating community. Dewey's wariness of this trend should not surprise us when we consider that classical pragmatism arose in part as a response to the "rugged individualism" of American society, and the hope of the classical pragmatists was to establish communal solidarity as a replacement for individualism. To demonstrate Dewey's trepidation toward accentuating inner experience we can observe how he warned us many positive words are ruined when the prefix of "self" is attached them: confidence, pity, love etc. (Dewey, 1922, 138). Dewey's reasoning is that the word "self" is imbued with a sense of introversion and isolation, and while a degree of self-focus is healthy to the development of the individual, this self-awareness always risks becoming egocentric.

Not only is this heightened sense of individuality detrimental to the individual, there is also a problem for the philosopher who believes that the experience of the isolated individual can provide access to a world beyond the self. As I will show in detail later on, Dewey seeks to overcome the distinction between mind and world; between a mind that passively receives and represents information about the world. This is the project that Rorty embraces and culminates in his neo-pragmatist work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). For Dewey, the individual is not isolated from the world, but is actively engaged with his surroundings, and instead of discovering knowledge about the world he is complicit in creating it. Therefore, the question of *who experiences?* is an outcome of the assumption that experience is owned by someone rather

than being a product of community: the assumption is "…that experience by its very nature is owned by someone; and that the ownership is such in kind that everything about experience is affected by a private and exclusive quality" (Dewey, 1925, 231).

Dewey further demonstrates our distorted ideas about the private ownership of experience by drawing an analogy to the private ownership of a house (1925, 231). It is common to refer to houses as being subject to private ownership to the point where it is difficult to imagine another arrangement. Yet it is clear that a house can only be owned if it has properties that exist independent of being owned. "The quality of belonging to someone is not an all-absorbing maw in which independent properties and relations disappear to be digested into egohood" (Dewey, 1925, 232). If we were to substitute the word "experience" for "house", the point could be made that "…experience when it happens has the same dependence upon objective natural events, physical and social, as has the occurrence of a house" (Dewey, 1925, 232). In the same way that a house can be described without referring to a self because it holds objective qualities (rooms, stairs, etc), experience does not require a private owner. To quote again: "…it is not exact or relevant to say "I experience" or "I think". "It experiences or is experienced, "it" thinks or is thought, is a juster phrase. Experience, a serial course of affairs with their own characteristic properties and relationships, occurs…" (Dewey, 1925, 232).

As I will show in coming chapters, Dewey does not entirely neglect the role of the individual in experience. He does not limit the potential for individual agency by promoting an overly structural account of experience. Rather, the point I make is that we are able to witness in Dewey the culmination of a transition from thinking about experience in a purely egoistic and personal sense to recognizing the intersubjective aspect of experience. This is most evident in Dewey's commentary on experience that he offered towards the end of his life; here he

demonstrated his frustration over the vague meaning of the term experience and exclaimed that had he the opportunity to rewrite *Experience and Nature* he would have replaced the word "experience" with "culture" (Dewey, 1951, 361). Dewey has not been the only scholar tempted to "throw away" the concept of experience entirely. In Dewey's case, the substitution of the word "culture" for "experience" was justified by Dewey's belief that the closest synonyms for the word "experience" were "life", "history" and "culture".

What is particularly important for our purposes is that Dewey's interest in experience is not limited to the object of experience, for his appreciation of the word culture demonstrates his commitment to the different modes and processes of experience. As I have just noted, one implication of this is that these processes of experience cannot be understood by a purely psychological examination of the self, but must be grasped with appreciation of social context. Another implication of Dewey's attention to the *processes* of experience rather than merely the *object* of experience is that experience is treated as an end in itself rather than a means to end. This distinction is vital if we are to describe a mode of experience that transcends the quest for knowledge. If Rorty's consternation over the concept of experience is based on his understanding of what experience indicates about the external world (i.e. the object of experience) then it is indeed difficult to use the concept of experience without becoming enmeshed in issues of epistemology and ontology. Rorty asks that we avoid these types of metaphysical disputes at all costs. As such, if we turn our attention away from *what is experienced* and direct our efforts towards the *ways in which we experience* there is hope of recovering a concept of experience that Rorty might approve of.

To be sure, Dewey's general description of experience is an attempt to overcome the distinction I have just constructed. His conception of experience refers to the "totality" of

experience, by which he means that experience includes everything between *what* is experienced and *how* it is experienced. The totality of experience is often divided into analytic categories that serve only to uphold a hegemonic, Platonic view: "mind" and "subject" are isolated from "world" and "object". Yet the point of observing the totality of experience, or the all-encompassing quality of culture is to bring attention to the "reciprocal interconnections" that constitute experience (1951, 363). In sum then, although I have observed the gradual, historical shift in thinking away from an account of experience that emphasizes the private experiences of the mind and a movement towards an intersubjective account of experience, it would be a mistake to crudely portray Dewey as arguing that experience happens in the world, and not the mind. For Dewey's belief in the totality of experience aims to overcome the dichotomy between mind and world by insisting that experience is an interactional, ecological phenomenon where we create and recreate experiences through our relationships with objects and other subjects.

As observed by James T. Kloppenberg in his historical account of pragmatism, the classical pragmatists' conviction that the truth of an idea need only be tested against experience in order to be verified drew passionate criticism from philosophers such as George Santayana, Bertrand Russell, Josiah Royce and Arthur Lovejoy (Kloppenberg, 1996). These critics asserted that pragmatists were guilty of "elevating expedient, novel, narrowly individualistic, instrumental and technocratic considerations above truth and goodness" (Kloppenberg, 1996, 21). Although Dewey and James would revise their views in response to these criticisms and develop more intricate theories of experience, by the middle of the twentieth century most American philosophers preferred the rigorous approach of analytic philosophy to James and Dewey's ideas about "lived experience" and "concrete realities". Having eclipsed classical pragmatism and the primacy that pragmatists gave to experience analytic philosophy would

remain the dominant philosophy in America until pragmatism unexpectedly re-emerged in the late 1970's due largely to the work of Richard Rorty. Yet pragmatism was now in a different intellectual environment, and in the section that follows I outline how two qualities of Rorty's work ensured that Rorty's neo-pragmatism was void of the concept of experience: his anti-foundationalism and his linguisticism.

In the chapters that follow the task will be to mediate between Sellars' and Rorty's view that experiences cannot be relied upon for direct access to the "real" world and the classical empiricist view that sensory perception is the driving force of knowledge acquisition. Neither perspective is satisfactory on its own. As discussed, the classical pragmatists did well to observe the limitations of classical empiricism: subjects are described as passive recipients of stimuli in which there is a false dichotomy between the mind the world, and between thinking and doing. To make an "observation report" with an understanding of what has been experienced is synonymous with claiming that true knowledge has been discovered. For this reason the classical empiricist view of perceptual knowledge is rightly identified as a foundationalist view, and was rightly critiqued by Dewey and James. Yet Rorty's and Sellars' view is in need of remedy as well: Sellars' critique of empirical knowledge and Rorty's rejection of experience leaves little to work with if our aim is to find something within the concept of experience that is worth preserving. A closer reading of Dewey will reveal how we can reformulate experience so that it is not merely a result of linguistic concepts, and that we might find a concept of experience that Rorty would have found agreeable. I argue that this is possible if we reconsider Rorty's bifurcated view of the individual where there is a gap between the public and private self. Yet if we give attention to what is experienced by the private self we are forced to contend with Rorty's argument that these non-linguistic experiences have little social value – that they cannot be

connected to any epistemological debate. In chapter five I will remedy this conflict by asking

that we re-think what is meant by knowledge, and while this might appear an overly ambitious

task we can find support from classical pragmatists in this task. Rather than grounding

knowledge in something that is final or describing knowledge as merely an effect of what the

boundaries of a given discourse will permit, we can identify a third option.

5.**Classical Pragmatism as Anticipating Postmodernity**

I have shown that Rorty's critique of experience is not an isolated venture, but can be

better understood as part of a broader postmodern movement that has deconstructed experience.

Yet it would be inaccurate to describe all of postmodernism as homogenous in its reaction to

experience. For instance, in the final chapter I identify a contemporary trend that is suitably

postmodern and yet aimed at reconstructing experience with an emphasis on aesthetic

experience. It would be equally flawed to describe all of Rorty's views as being synonymous

with a vaguely defined "postmodern spirit" and as Tamanaha proclaims of the classical

pragmatists, they were "consummate modernists who believed in progress" (1997, 9). This form

of modernism provided a way forward beyond the limits of postmodernity, because while

Rorty's antifoundationalism resonates well with what we would expect from French post-

structural thinkers, Rorty is at odds with the "deconstructive urge" that is omnipresent in the

work of Foucault and Derrida. In this section I show that much of what we associate with

postmodern thought was anticipated by the American pragmatists, and I also show that Rorty

believes pragmatism can be corrective of a postmodern ethos that has left us with little to believe

in following the deconstruction of all our valued concepts.

Despite writing half a century before the emergence of post-structuralism, Dewey's identification and attempted removal of the aforementioned dualisms that pervade philosophical thought is remarkably consistent with the projects we now associate only with Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, etc. This observation is not lost on Rorty, and he has written dismissively of the "fashionable French men", arguing persuasively that most of what we today learn from Foucault we could easily have learned from Dewey. "Foucault's vision of discourse as a network of power-relations isn't very different from Dewey's vision of it as instrumental…Once "power" is freed from its connotation of "repression," then Foucault's "structures of power" will not seem much different from Dewey's "structures of culture" (Rorty, 1982, 203).

To take this point further, we can note that Dewey does not use the word *power*, but writes about *habits of action.* In the same way that we cannot escape from power, we are constituted by our habits so that the challenge is not to rid ourselves of habit, but to seek out new experiences that lead to new habits. Dewey's attention to seeking out new experiences is not dissimilar to the general thrust of Foucault's work, especially if we agree with Thomas Lemke's (2011) interpretation of Foucault. Lemke urges us to consider Foucault not as aiming at historical reconstruction, but as aiming for the production of new experiences. He writes: "Foucault understands his books less as "truth books" than as "experience books" (2011, 65). That is, his ambition is not to produce historical facts about the true nature of sexuality, but to communicate the experiences of those who are deprived of dignity and must live in the shadows. Although "experience" is not a central concept for Foucault, what is implied by this ambition is that the concept of experience has roughly the same meaning to Foucault as it does to Dewey: rather than characterize experience as a strictly private affair where personal feelings of being an "outsider" remain incommunicable, experience is part of a larger collective practice that is not so much

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concerned with *understanding* oppression as it is with *altering* the relations that characterize it. As Lemke makes clear of Foucault's account of experience: "The term also points to the "local" and "experimental" character of critique. It refers to a "critical ontology of ourselves" that seeks to make new historical experiences possible by moving beyond the limits of the present" (Lemke, 2011, 65).

Given that these similar orientations exist between Dewey and Foucault one is led to wonder why Rorty finds inspiration in the former thinker but not the latter. Rorty provides us with the answer, as he laments the influence that Foucault has had on academia. "The idea was to resist the biopower exercised by capitalist society, but without any political program, without any political utopia. Foucault's effect on the American intellectual community has been one of profound resentment" (Rorty, 2006, 40). And again, "What I find disturbing about the fashionable French is that they aren't utopian. They hold out no hope" (Rorty, 2006, 22). In Rorty's view, Foucault failed in the task that Dewey succeeded in, as Dewey was able to use genealogical reflection as a tool to help those in question. Dewey made practical his life's work and spent his life publicly advocating for social justice while the ultimate effect of Foucault' work was the disengagement of scholars from practical matters.

In sum, While Foucault and Dewey shared the same postmodern ethos of putting aside the search for a grand narrative that would explain away oppression "once and for all", Foucault's legacy has left us unable to believe in the idea of progress, while Dewey created the space in his intellectual schema for "unjustifiable hope". In the third chapter I expand on the pragmatist's dedication to hope and belief in the possibility for progress: I identify this trait as being one of the features of a pragmatist account of experience that distinguishes it from the analysis of experience we find in phenomenology.

In arguing that there are similarities between classical pragmatist ideas about experience and post-structural projects we can find hope for the successful completion of this project if we identify similar projects that carry the same impulse. Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996) has noted that feminism shares with pragmatism a similar starting point, in that feminism, like pragmatism begins by making a strong move away from the logocentrism of modern philosophy. Philosophy's concern with epistemology has meant that those entering the discipline must be indoctrinated into what Dewey called in *The Quest for Certainty* the "the great intellectualist fallacy" (LW, vol 4, 175). By this he meant that if all experiences are reduced to their cognitive dimensions, then the result is that certain forms of knowledge are subordinated. For early feminists, the everyday, qualitative experience of women was denigrated in philosophy in favour of abstractions that were explicitly masculine. If the objects of our knowledge did not have properties that could be clearly delineated they were disparaged and cast aside for being merely subjective and unable to withstand any serious scrutiny. The turn Dewey instigated placed experience at the centre of philosophy, and at the time he was writing, the examinations that were being conducted into how experiences varied by race, class and gender became the starting point for a new philosophy (see Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, 1938). Specifically, Seigfried observes four aspects of Dewey's analysis of experience that can enrich feminist scholarship: 1) the pragmatist rejection of the many philosophical dualisms that have distorted our understanding of everyday experience, 2) the realization that ignoring the perspectival nature of experience is a potential source of oppression, 3) the development of standards of judgement and values from experience, and 4) the role of feeling and emotion in experience (Seigfried, 1996, 146).

In relation to Seigfried's first point, that of overcoming the many philosophical dualisms, there are four principle dualisms that the pragmatists saw as distorting our experience, and Seigfried notes that these are the same dualisms that feminists have identified as being causes of oppression (1996, 146). In no particular order, these dualisms are the devaluing of *doing* versus *thinking*, the neglect of the *body* in favour of *immateriality*, or the spirit, *theory* versus *practice* and the superiority of a *fixed reality* as opposed to a world of *constant change*.

In specifying the political implications of how we treat experience, the emphasis I give to *action* in experience will also resonate with other trajectories of feminist politics. The familiar refrain "gender is not something we *have*, it is something we *do*" carries the same sentiment I express regarding experience in general: that we need no search for any essential trait of experience but should instead focus on how experience connects to action. The dichotomies that are supported by a patriarchal system assume that there are gaps between the genders that cannot be surmounted, and Dewey challenges these constructs by introducing us to the richness and complexity of experience. The neatness of and linear quality of logic is replaced by an account of experience that is deliberately vague and muddled, so that the meaning of all experiences might be left open for discussion.

However, we have seen that those who have hoped that focusing on the experiences of marginalized groups will help us overcome oppression have had their views challenged. The view that oppression could be overcome by creating a new type of knowledge based on the lived-experiences of those excluded from opportunity was made problematic by a number of developments. Rorty's recognition that an appeal to experience was synonymous with appealing to a foundation to our knowledge is also reflected in the move within feminist theory towards observing the unintended essentialism of such claims. Collecting the experiences of a group of

people does not offer us direct access to who they are – for there is no natural condition that we can hope to "latch onto". In addition, experiences are not an antidote to hegemonic culture, for experiences are not immune to ideological forces and may be theory dependent.

6.**Rorty and the Linguistic Turn: Language over Experience**

Prior to gaining a reputation as a pragmatist, and more than a decade before the publication of his iconic *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) Rorty published an edited book of essays that demonstrated for him a ground shift in philosophy: traditional philosophical problems were being reconfigured according to language. In the often cited introduction to *The Linguistic Turn* (1967) Rorty tells us that the solution to the philosophical problems we have collectively been struggling with for thousands of years is found in the way we use language. We can dissolve philosophical problems by finding clever ways to re-describe them, and often we then recognize that there was never a problem to begin with – the problem was simply the language we had fallen into a habit of using. In short, Rorty recognized that the issue that deserves our attention in philosophy is not experience, but language.

Rorty explains the difference between classical pragmatism and contemporary pragmatism as follows:

> "The new pragmatism differs from the old in just two respects. . . . The first is that we new pragmatists talk about language instead of experience or mind, or consciousness as the old pragmatists did. The second respect is that we have all read Kuhn, Hanson, Toulmin, and Feyerabend, and have thereby become suspicious of the term scientific method" (Rorty, 1999, 95).

By the time Rorty began praising the work of John Dewey a decade after publishing the *Linguistic Turn* thereby instigating a renewed interest in Classical pragmatism, pragmatism now

needed to be revised so as to fit with the developments of the linguistic turn. Rorty found support

for his cause from linguistically oriented scholars such as Donald Davidson and Robert Brandom

who expanded on Rorty's pronouncement of the linguistic turn and helped initiate a new type of

"linguistic pragmatism". Richard Poirier is perhaps the best example of someone who has taken

"linguistic pragmatism" most seriously, as in *Poetry and Pragmatism* (1992) he claims to have

identified an unbroken literary tradition of "linguistic skepticism" where the participants of this

genre have wholeheartedly lived up to Rorty's suggestion that words do not correspond to

anything "real" in the world; language only connects back to itself. This tradition begins with

Ralph Waldo Emerson and extends through the poems of Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, and

Gertrude Stein.

Jonathan Levin's *The Poetics of Transition* (1999), Joan Richardson's *A Natural History

of Pragmatism* (2007), Kristen Case's *American Pragmatism and Poetic Practice: Crosscurrents

from Emerson to Susan Howe* (2011) are synonymous within Poirier's genre, each making

attempts in different ways to demonstrate that James and Emerson were responsible for

instigating a pragmatic movement in poetry whose first inheritors included Wallace Stevens and

Gertrude Stein. Kristen Case's contribution is perhaps the most promising for our intentions, as

she makes an effort to include those philosophers who have received less attention from literary

critics: John Dewey, Henry David Thoreau and Charles Saunders Peirce. These individuals are

important to us because of the degree to which they emphasized experience in their work –

thereby making more plausible the idea that the dichotomy between experience and language can

be bridged. Case notes: "Because the pragmatist writers I investigate valued experience over the

inherited problems and vocabulary of philosophy, many of their epistemological positions may

be arrived at by non-philosophers in the habit of attending closely to their own experience and

relations – the kind of habit cultivated in poetic practice" (Case, 2011, xxi). Later she notes that "The philosophers in whom I am most interested are frequently dismissed as failed (or non-) philosophers. By extending the terrain of philosophy to include more of the texture of lived-experience, Emerson, James and Thoreau risk illegibility within the frame of philosophical discourse" (Case, 2011, xiii). These writers do not so much provide solutions to philosophical problems as much as they describe how they experience their lived-engagements with these problems. Yet Case has no interest in reviving experience, and she makes these points only in passing. This is generally true of those who have engaged with linguistic pragmatism; they follow Rorty's lead in sidestepping issues of experience.

In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) Rorty would take his views on language and combine them with the anti-foundational work he had done in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). The correspondence theory of truth – the idea that there is a universal, absolute version of truth – is an illusion that has been created through the way we have used language. Our discussions on truth are inherently linked to the "language games" we are playing. When we speak of the truth of our ideas we are referring to the manner in which sentences connect to each other. Any idea can be made to seem good or bad by the vocabulary that we choose to describe the idea, and what matters is the coherence of our vocabulary. An idea will appear to be true if our language is internally consistent.

Rorty's pragmatism underlies his views on language. Language is simply a tool that we use to help us survive. If we have given up the search for foundations to knowledge then we must also forego the idea that language can provide us with a privileged view of the world. In speaking of the coherence of language and focusing on its practical consequences we are saying that a true sentence is one that works for us. If believing in a God helps us to cope with the

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uncertainties of life, then such beliefs will become part of our vocabulary. As long as the language of these beliefs does not contradict other beliefs our vocabulary will be coherent and our practical needs will be met.

Rorty viewed all of our vocabularies as contingent and incomplete. When he refuted foundational logic he was left with no natural vocabulary; languages too, are made rather than found – they are constructed by communities. Rorty often writes of a person's "final vocabulary", by which he means the sets of words that people employ "to justify their actions, their beliefs and their lives" (1989). These final vocabularies are not incidental to people's lives; they are not simple appendages that are attached to the personality of an individual. Instead, in-line with what Rorty proposes of the linguistic turn, these vocabularies determine who we are. The finality of these vocabularies should not be interpreted as an unintended lapse towards foundationalism, for vocabularies are revisable and can be adjusted by communities.

The significance of final vocabularies for us is of course the implications for experience. If we inherit our final vocabularies from the community in which we reside, and if it is true that "socialization goes all the way down", then our vocabulary will be at the very core of how we interpret the world. Language is the tool we use to understand the world, and we do not have experiences of the world that are separate from language. Stated more simply, we cannot escape the language games we play, and so all of our experiences are mediated by the language we inherit. So why then, would we focus on experience when it is language that is the driving force?

If there are no foundational criteria available for us to evaluate truth claims then the only constraints that we face in creating social change are conversational ones. Drawing an example from Marianne Janak's critique of Rorty we can contemplate the following: "Consider a language that uses the term concubine to mean a lucky girl who gets chosen for the great honor

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of serving in the leader's stable of women. Now consider another language that uses the term

sexual slavery to refer to exactly the same practice" (Janak, 2010, 142). When a women finds

that the vocabulary she has inherited from her community contains too many anomalies and it

does not match up with her experience, or it does not allow her to be the type of person she

would like to be—she will take advantage of the privacy afforded her by the liberal state to

create a new vocabulary.

We can imagine if a woman was trapped within that context, and the only word to

describe her situation was concubine, we have little hope. In this situation, feminists had not yet

invented a new linguistic term, and so women could only describe themselves in the language of

the oppressors. The most humiliating and cruel thing we can do to a person, or group of people,

is to describe them in a vocabulary that is not their own. What we are doing when we invent new

words, is we are creating hope.

We can see that because we have called ourselves anti-foundationalists we are limited to

a particular argument. This is what we cannot argue: we cannot claim that the term "sexual

slavery" is a description that is closer to reality than the previous description that relied on the

word "concubine". Our words are not representational to reality, they are causal – they cause us

to react a certain way. When we alter our language we are not getting rid of prejudice, we are

simply offering a new description, and each description that we have made available to us serves

its own purpose.

This example of the power of language from Rorty's work is telling of how experience

has been relegated to the "backburner". The concrete experience of the woman in the role of

concubine is entirely dictated by the language at her disposal. Her experience is only of interest

to us as a means to uncover how we might be more innovative in our language. Such an account

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is clearly unsatisfactory – one is left with the feeling that experience has more value than Rorty is willing to ascribe it. This feeling is made more pressing when we consider Rorty's recurring descriptions of pain and suffering as he promotes his belief in moral progress. Such progress is marked by less cruelty and suffering and less pain and humiliation. It is difficult to believe that such traits are purely linguistic affairs.

Towards Rorty's Romanticism

Having forfeited the use of experience as a tool to overcome oppression we are tasked with finding a new approach to creating social change and overcoming oppression. If appeals to experience are not the answer then we must work on cultivating a new source of social hope, and for Rorty language is the new instigator for social change. Instead of using experience to find out how things "really are", we should use language to imagine how things might be different in the future. If we are interested in questions of purpose and identity, philosophy cannot provide us with the answers to these questions. We must then turn to the arts to find a new self-image.

Social progress occurs through linguistic innovation, and it is the poet or ironist who envisions a better society through their creative uses of language. For Rorty, "…the novel is the characteristic genre of democracy, the genre most closely associated with the struggle for freedom and equality" (Rorty, 1991a, 309). In order to create greater human solidarity we should not count on reasoned argumentation, for the power of logical persuasion is not nearly as forceful as sentiment in creating change. New languages can inspire new sentiments, and we can develop a wider moral imagination by reading many different books, because not only do we develop empathy, but we are also left uncertain which narrative to believe. We then begin to doubt whether the things we believed in so deeply can be trusted at all. As we expose ourselves to

different vocabularies and different narratives we see that our moral vocabulary - our way of speaking on a given topic - is merely contingent, and we become historicists (Rorty, 1989).

The implications of Rorty's romanticism will become clear in the final chapter as I describe how our ability to imagine new vocabularies is not addressed by Rorty. He sees new vocabularies emerging as matters of chance, while I describe them as rooted in experience. Rorty distinguishes between two types of books: those aimed at a new private vocabulary, and those aimed at a public one (Rorty, 1989). Books like those of Charles Dickens, or George Orwell help us to recognize public issues – we are able to notice people who are suffering; people we had not noticed before. Authors like Proust and Nietzsche help us to see what types of people we are, and what types of people we might become.

Here we can observe Rorty's romanticism and his stance on what the role of philosophy should be. Rorty argues that philosophers should occupy themselves with future possibilities rather than past truths. The title of Rorty's book *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself* (2006) reflects the idea that the role of the philosopher should be as cultural critic rather than arbiter of truth. To use the analogy of boxing: the philosopher is positioned not as the judge whose authority decides who has scored the most points, but as the promoter of the event. The philosopher does not have authoritative access to the truth and is therefore not in a position to decide whose argument proves logically superior. Instead, the philosopher encourages the exchange to take place, for the right cultural conditions must be in place in order for dialogue to exist.

In order to understand the role that experience plays when situated in the "correct cultural conditions" we can look further into Rorty's presumed division between the public and private spheres, for he sees this division as being characteristic of modern liberal societies. Recall that in

Rorty's view, individuals can have private, non-linguistic experiences, but that these experiences cannot be connected to public issues of truth and justification. In the chapter that follows the reader will notice an uncomfortable tension between Rorty's romanticism and Rorty's idea of private irony. The romanticism that I have briefly described here asks us to be deeply engaged with public affairs, as the move towards self-creation is a communal affair with implications for democracy. Romanticism involves a public language. Meanwhile, Rorty's sense of private irony asks that we detach ourselves from such concerns and employ tactics of self-creation on an individualistic level that has no bearing on the social issues of our time. Aine Mahon has phrased the issue as follows: "…Rorty's irony negates the possibility of stable personhood…Irony presupposes a sharp break between realms public and private while romanticism endorses self-creation not only as an end in itself but as the very foundation for democratic and responsible community" (Mahon, 2014, 153).

I agree with Mahon's description of Rorty's inconsistent commitments that are evident in his irony and romanticism, and exploit this tension to bring attention to why Rorty's division between the public and the private is seemingly at odds with the rest of his work. Yet I disagree with Mahon's claim that it is Rorty's irony that leads to an unstable notion of selfhood, and believe that she has inverted the issue. Consistent with what I have described throughout this work, I suggest that it is the unstable or "contingent" self that allows the self to pursue acts of self-creation. If we hold an anti-essentialist view of the self we are creating the conditions for freedom whereby individuals can self-create. I will return to examine the nuances of Rorty's brand of romanticism in the final chapter where I argue that the ability to imagine new vocabularies is not a purely linguistic endeavor, but is rooted in a type of experience that does not require a stable subject. The general thrust of my argument is that we will be aided in

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recovering a workable concept of experience if we emphasize a modified version of Rorty's

romanticism while de-emphasizing the importance of Rorty's public/private division. It is the

latter task that I now turn to.

<u>Chapter Two: Rorty's Public/Private Divide</u>

"The attempt to fuse the public and the private lies behind both Plato's attempt to answer the question "Why is it in one's interest to be just?" and Christianity's claim that perfect self-realization can be attained through service to others. Such metaphysical or theological attempts to unite a striving for perfection with a sense of community require us to acknowledge a common human nature" (Rorty, 1989, xiii)

One of the paradoxes of experience is that we commonly use the word to indicate something that is so powerful and so interior that language cannot reach it. An experience can exceed the limits of language so that we are left with an unnerving inability to communicate what was felt. This feeling manifests itself in the commonly heard phrase "you had to be there" in order to understand, or, "unless you are black, you wouldn't know what it's like". The suggestion of such phrases is that the only one who truly knows what has been experienced is the subject. See for instance the *Sociology of Black Experience* (Thompson, 1974), where a repeated concern for the author is the degree to which experiences can be "exchanged". We cannot really know what it is like to have been wrongly imprisoned because a "genuine" experience cannot be acquired vicariously. The paradox of experience then, is that as much as we may use our experience as a type of "social currency" we also lay a claim to our experience as though it were an inherently private phenomenon. We alone are in possession of our experiences, and these experiences can never be taken away from us. Yet despite the personal nature of certain experiences, even the most intimate experience is acquired through a set of relationships – there is always something *outside* the individual that is active in an experience. This is not simply a suggestion that there is an object of experience or something that is "given" in experience. It is a suggestion that when we experience we have a relationship with something outside of ourselves, and this "something" may be human, but perhaps not. When we recall Martin Jay's definition of

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experience that I offered earlier, where experience is defined as the fuzzy point of intersection between that which is private and that which is part of a public language, we can use this to guide our understanding of Rorty's presumed split between the public and private spheres and what this means for his neglect of the concept of experience.

In this second chapter I focus on Rorty's much-discussed division between the private and public realm that he sees as characterizing modern liberal societies. If we are worried that losing the concept of experience means losing trust in subjectivity then we can find comfort in Rorty's discussion of the private self. What Rorty argues is that there are two sides to life: the public and the private – and there is no need to unify this division. In describing the history of the public/private distinction and its first emergence Rorty draws our attention to the legacy of Thomas Jefferson and his views on religion and politics. In *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (1991a) Rorty tells us that Jefferson believed that religion was "irrelevant to social order but relevant to, and possibly essential for, individual perfection" (1991a, 175). There is no need to reconcile our public hopes for a certain type of society with our private desires. As Rorty writes: "…one should abjure the temptation to tie in one's moral responsibilities to other people with one's relation to whatever idiosyncratic things one loves with all one's heart and soul and mind…" (Rorty, 1999). This thought is not merely incidental to Rorty's work – it is the basis of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) and Rorty later returns to this idea in his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" (1999).

One of the aims in writing this dissertation is to encourage new scholars to join the neo-pragmatist movement. By recovering a version of experience I hope to tempt those who have been turned away from the genre to take a second look at what pragmatism might be able to offer them. There have been many factors that have been responsible for dissuading broader

participation within the pragmatist revival – perhaps too many to name here. Charlene Haddock Seigfried has directly commented on the central point of this chapter when she notes that many feminists have either avoided pragmatism or strongly critiqued it because of Rorty's incessant assertion that we create a split between the public and private realms of life (1996). Rorty's assertion of liberal individualism, where he describes the individual as engaging in strictly private, asocial attempts to reach perfection has been disappointmenting for feminists. Haddock's recurring critique of Rorty is that he has incidentally blocked the path for feminists to discover the virtues of classical pragmatism, as there are many feminists who wrongly see Rorty as representing all that pragmatism has to offer.

I contrast Rorty's position with John Dewey's, showing that Dewey profitably overcame the distinction that Rorty felt it was worthwhile to preserve. Referencing primarily Dewey's "*The Public and it's Problems*" (1927) I make the case for re-thinking Rorty's stance. Both Rorty and Dewey agree that within a liberal democracy the highest value is self-realization, and that this type of self-fulfillment is uniquely aesthetic and individual. To be sure, the distinction between public and private is not synonymous with a distinction between the social and the individual. For Dewey, the public and private realms can be related to the distinction between those who are *directly* affected and *indirectly* affected by some activity. Many social activities can be considered private if they have no serious indirect consequence. Conversely, as we examine the role of experience in our lives, some seemingly private acts are of public concern.

1. Rorty's Private Experience

The account I gave of Rorty's anti-foundational commitments is connected to Rorty's claim that we need not reconcile private ambitions for self-creation with public hopes for greater solidarity. In a world where we assume foundations to our knowledge we are left with the task of

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finding all-encompassing narratives that legitimize *all* of our practices, both public and private. Our private desires must be consistent with our actions in the public realm. In abandoning the quest for foundations Rorty claims that there is no single narrative that we can find that will justify all of our commitments. Instead, there are public narratives and private ones, and these narratives are not in competition – they are on par with each other. What this accomplishes is the creation of a shelter for our private impulses where we no longer feel the pressure to conform to the demands made of us by public discourse. Within a liberal society where the privacy of the individual is protected, space is created for creative thought. The impact is also felt in the public realm, where the playing field is leveled by the creation of a space for democratic dialogue where there is no theological or philosophical privilege of thought.

In describing how he arrived at this insight Rorty offers an honest account of his intellectual development (1999). Rorty describes two competing interests that he had while young: his interest in the search for social justice that he inherited from his socialist parents, and his "snobbish" hobby of hunting for wild orchids in the forests of New Jersey. He characterizes his passion for orchids as being concerned with liberty and the sublime, and is unable to share or communicate the significance of these experiences to anyone. His fear was that his obsession with orchids would be met with scorn by those he admired in the socialist/Trotskeyite camp. Hunting for orchids was a socially useless activity that did nothing to help anyone overcome economic oppression. As such, the tension within Rorty was between his desire for social justice on the largest level imaginable and his desire for the transcendent feeling acquired by being alone in the forest.

The task for the young Rorty was to try to find a way to reconcile this tension, and his first attempt was to become religious. Those who were lucky enough to be Christian were able to

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accomplish the task Rorty had in mind – their private pursuit of perfection was in natural harmony with their public hopes for solidarity. Yet Rorty's pursuit of becoming religious was only half-hearted, and so his first attempt to unify the public and private aspects of life ended in disappointment.

Having given up on religion Rorty turned to philosophy. His hope now was that his intellectual snobbery might easily be combined with his fight for social justice by observing how philosophers managed their affairs. Rather than being at odds, the separate activities in Rorty's life might reinforce each other. Implicit within much classical Greek philosophy was the idea that there was a necessary connection between all seemingly disparate ideas. What philosophy promised was a path towards developing one unified theory that could account for everything. A singular truth would emerge and resolve the tension Rorty felt.

Yet traditional philosophy proved to be a fruitless source of hope for Rorty, and he soon became disenchanted with the analytic tradition. The continental philosophers of Hegel and Nietzsche became relatively attractive in comparison, but it was the pragmatism of John Dewey that provided Rorty with the most significant set of intellectual tools to overcome the problem he had in mind. As Rorty explains: "I decided to write a book about what intellectual life might be like if one could manage to give up the Platonic attempt to hold reality and justice in a single vision" (1999, 12–13).

This book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (from now on CIS) indicates a shift in Rorty's focus, as moral and political theory replace his attention to the philosophy of language and mind. Having addressed the implications of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* for analytic philosophy, in *CIS* Rorty now pursued the question of whether it was possible to achieve both social justice and individual liberty – whether he could have both Trotsky and his orchids. The

answer to this question was a compromise. Rorty concedes that is indeed possible to have both, but never simultaneously. The sublime can never be combined with social justice - the two will always be incommensurable. Yet it is conceivable that within certain moments in our lives we might pursue a Nietzschian vision of self-perfection and at other moments a Marxist vision of social hope. For this to work, the former pursuit must be limited to the private sphere of life, while the latter goal belongs in the public sphere.

Having previously explained Rorty's theory of language we can recall his distinction between two types of books: those that aim for the sublime and those that aim to diminish cruelty. We can now superimpose this framework onto his distinction of the public and private. Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida can be read as speaking to the potential for poetic self-creation. For Rorty, these theorists have little to contribute to a discussion on democratic politics. Their domain is the private sphere. The focus of democratic politics is on identifying ways to lessen cases of cruelty while providing the space for each person to realize their own private vocabulary of self-perfection. As long as our leaders do not impose their private vision onto the public, this is a workable scenario. Charles Dickens and George Orwell, recall, were treated by Rorty as contributing to the lessening of cruelty and suffering in the public sphere and bringing attention to real public problems. In sum, the private realm is reserved for irony and that which is aesthetic – it is the place for private visions of the self. Meanwhile, the public realm is the space to reduce suffering by creating a more inclusive social arrangement.

Within this schema, it is the private sphere as it relates to experience that is of most interest to us. We have understood Rorty's rejection of experience for the foundationalism it presumes, but in Rorty's description of the private realm of life we now see that he still articulates the importance of private experiences of the sublime. These experiences are idiosyncratic – they

contain private imaginings of self-perfection. For Rorty, these experiences are unimportant only because they cannot be connected to larger public issues. Some of these experiences are in fact incommunicable events that are beyond the realm of the linguistic. Yet, Rorty leads us to believe that there *is* a connection between the private and the public when he notes that certain private imaginings of new narratives can sometimes accidentally transform public discourse. In an essay Rorty wrote late in his life he admits that "…many responsibilities begin in dreams, and many transfigurations of the tradition begin in private fantasies" (Rorty, 1991b, 120)

As such, when we reconsider Rorty's stance toward the public/private divide we can say that his position is not as firm as we have been made to believe. Rorty concedes that there is a link that can be drawn from the private to the public, but his point is only that one cannot occupy both spaces at the same time. Since we are interested in what all this means for the concept of experience we are not bothered by the claim that we cannot inhabit both the public and private realm at the same time – for it is not even clear that this is desirable or possible within a singular experience. What ought to matter to us then, is only that out private experiences can have an impact on public discourse and that we are capable of having experiences that are not exclusively linguistic.

2.**Non-linguistic Experience**

Rorty's acceptance of a link between the private and public is a conditional one – the link can only be made if we are referring to private experiences that are linguistic. Yet the notion of a "private language" is perhaps unobtainable because of the way the self is socially constituted from the start, and because language is necessarily a shared enterprise. Rorty admits that there are *non-linguistic experiences*, and that we can find a purpose for such experiences without

contradicting ourselves. This is possible if we say that non-linguistic experiences are unrelated to issues of truth or justification – that they are exclusively private. These non-linguistic experiences are important, but not relevant to public goals of greater solidarity.

While in "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids" Rorty favorably describes the type of nonlinguistic experience he has while hunting for wild flowers, on other occasions he reminds us that not all experience is pleasant, and that in our ironic attempts to refashion ourselves we are constrained by the world. Recall that: "The world can blindly and inarticulately crush us; mute despair, intense mental pain, can cause us to blot ourselves out" (1989, 39). In this sense, there *is* a separation between the Self and the World, as the world causes us to have an experience. From Rorty's description that follows it is evident that we are not so much actively engaged with these experiences as much as we are physically receiving and enduring them.

> "For our relation to the world, to brute power and naked pain, is not the sort of relation we have to persons. Faced with the nonhuman, the non-linguistic, we no longer have an ability to overcome contingency and pain by appropriation and transformation, but only the ability to recognize the contingency and pain" (Rorty, 1989, 40)

From this passage it is clear that Rorty concedes that we do have non-linguistic experiences, and in a limited sense he is a realist on this matter. This point is made by Ronald Kuipers who observes that with respect to Rorty's private ironist, he agrees with the philosophical realist who believes that there is a brute, physical reality that is "out there" (2013, 91). But unlike the realist, Rorty does not believe that we can somehow convert this non-linguistic experience into "facts" about the world. This is because in matters of non-linguistic experience we have no say in the matter – we cannot *choose* to have these experiences – it is simply a matter of being helplessly exposed to the world. "To say that we have must have respect for unmediated causal forces is

pointless. It is like saying that the blank must have respect for the impressed die. The blank has no choice, nor do we" (Rorty, 1991a, 81 as cited in Kuipers, 2013, 92).

It is this final point that will be the basis of our critique, as we will agree with Rorty that there are private, non-linguistic experiences but disagree with his claim that these are unimportant to public concerns. This will be accomplished by further rethinking the division between the public and the private, and it is this task that we undertake in the following section.

3.**Critiquing the Public/Private Divide**

> "…an experience is, of course, something one has alone; but it cannot have its full impact unless the individual manages to escape from pure subjectivity in such a way that others can –I won't say re-experience it exactly – but at least cross paths with it or retrace it" (Foucault, as cited in Jay, 2005, 399).

A.**The Division is Undesirable**

In dismantling the public/private distinction we can first distinguish between the idea that such a distinction *should not be desired* and the claim that such a distinction *cannot be obtained*. For instance, Lior Erez (2013) has argued that Rorty's work speaks only to the idea that not distinguishing between the public and private spheres is *undesirable*, but that Rorty has no sophisticated argument for why the public and private sphere *cannot* be united. In relation to Rorty's claim that a division between spheres is preferable, Erez identifies two variations of critique: (a) the feminist critique, and (b) the liberal commitment problem (2013, 193). I will summarize the crux of each criticism below.

The feminist critique of Rorty is easy to anticipate, as one of the most well-known accomplishments of feminist theory has been to demonstrate that what occurs in the private sphere is political. As such, Rorty's position is seen as anachronistic – he is ignoring one of the

major insights of feminist theory. In order for women's liberation to see continued progress we must recognize that the hope Rorty places in lessening cases of cruelty in the public realm is connected to what takes place in the private sphere of women's lives. The liberal tradition that Rorty embraces is seen by most feminists as being part of the problem, in that the ideal of protecting the private sphere is in fact the *cause* of women's oppression. While the problem for liberals is that the private sphere can be violated, the problem for feminists like Catherine Mackinnon is that the very existence of the private sphere allows for oppression to continue (1989).

For Nancy Fraser, the idea that any individual can carry within themselves two opposing impulses – those of the introverted poet and those of the political activist – is an implausibly romantic notion (1989). Such a categorical division is an illusion with harmful consequences for social progress. The costs of making such a distinction are evident when we consider the political implications of women's movements. In Fraser's words: "women's movements, as illuminated by feminist theory, have taught us that the domestic and the personal are political. A whole range of New Left social movements . . . have taught us that the cultural, the medical, the educational - everything that Hannah Arendt called "the social," as distinct from the private and the public - that all this, too, is political. Yet, the partition position requires us to bury these insights, to turn our backs on one hundred years of social history" (1989, 264).

In arguing for the partition that Fraser rejects, Rorty is arguing that we privatize theory. Recall that in "*Feminism and Pragmatism"* (1999) Rorty boldly declares that traditional philosophical theory has no political value, and that feminists should not rely on philosophy to provide them with support for their cause. Theory is for Rorty an aesthetic process that has no relevance for political concerns. Instead, it is the ironist who can lead the way – paving new

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paths towards moral progress. In Fraser's view this privatization of theory is equivalent to taking the most useful tool away from feminists; we need theory to expose the real inequities in society. Restraining the activities of the ironist by secluding him in the private sphere may be a useful antidote to the harms that can be felt when antisocial inclinations are forced into the public arena, yet this desire for exclusion also leads to political complacency.

Rorty has responded directly to this criticism, and his response is generally convincing. Rorty cites confusion over what he meant by the term "private". In defining what he means Rorty takes his cue from John Dewey, in particular, Dewey's work in *The Public and Its Problems* (1927). Dewey makes a distinction between the different types of action that we take, noting that there are public actions that affect those around us, and then there are private actions that are significant only to those agents carrying out the actions – these actions are not impactful to the people around us.

Viewed from this perspective, Fraser is at fault for reading Rorty too literally. The public/private division should not be interpreted as a distinction that is categorical, for within Rorty's account there is ambiguity and room for a nuanced interpretation of what is meant. While Fraser focuses her attention on what she sees as the anachronistic move Rorty makes in undoing the social progress that has been made, she would have done well to give equal focus to Rorty's work in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) where he outlines the role that the ironist plays in instigating moral progress and social change.

Within this in mind, it is clear that Rorty's use of the term private was not merely an expression of the classical liberal idea. Yet, this is the definition that the feminist critique of Rorty assumes he is employing. While the feminist interpretation of the private sphere is synonymous with that which is domestic, this interpretation is largely irrelevant to Rorty's point.

We need not speculate on this matter, for Rorty has responded succinctly to the feminist critique. Responding to Nancy Fraser, Rorty writes: "I think [Nancy Fraser] and I were at cross purposes. I was thinking of one sense of private, something like Whitehead's definition of religion: 'what you do with your solitude.' Fraser was thinking of the private as the kitchen or bedroom, as opposed to the marketplace and the office. There was no relevance to what I was saying" (2006, 62).

Lior Erez (2013) has identified the second line of critique against Rorty's public/private division as being concerned with the potential for private schemes of self-fulfillment to find their way into the public sphere. Erez names this the "liberal commitment problem". Rorty asks us to think of the private sphere as being entirely constituted by attempts at self-perfection. I have stated that this process is a private one in the sense that our quest for self-creation does not take others into consideration. Yet the segregation that Rorty demands of the private sphere has implications for the vitality of the public sphere. Without adequate interaction between the private and the public sphere, the public sphere becomes sterile – public discourse cannot be fully challenged. One is left with the impression that if the private realm contains as much creativity and imagination as Rorty describes, then there is an opportunity being missed when we do not allow this type of ingenuity to influence public politics.

This particular critique of Rorty is of course connected to the more general complaint that Rorty is too conservative in his politics – that he is offering an apology for the status quo and not providing enough grounds to challenge the existing state. In a sense, public criticism has been privatized, for while Rorty does create the space for public debate, these debates are not as vigorous and challenging to the status quo as we would like. Lior Erez has therefore referred to this problem as the "false consensus problem" (2013), meaning that Rorty is guilty of imagining

that the public sphere is more harmonious than it actually is. In reality, the public sphere is a place of conflict where competing values clash in a manner that is both public and private.

Generally, the utility of Rorty's distinction is intended as an antidote to the struggles we encounter in a modern liberal society. Within society there are those who clearly have a private vocabulary that is detrimental to the public ideal that Rorty identifies: the lessening of cruelty. Creating a boundary around the private vocabulary is Rorty's method of keeping these people "in check". Rather than stifling the activities of the private sphere entirely Rorty sees the value in allowing people to innovate their own private language as they seek self-perfection.

Yet the manner in which Rorty seems to exclude individuals from the public sphere based on the potential consequences of their private language has led to sharp criticism from those who interpret this stance as being synonymous with the exclusion of minority viewpoints from public discourse. For instance, Rorty treats religious views as being solely private endeavors. While Rorty has described Christianity as offering people the gift of a public hope for solidarity that is in harmony with the private hope for self-improvement, he has often referred to religion as a "conversation stopper" when active in the public realm. That is, if the aspiration we have for the public realm is to create an environment of intellectual uncertainty where all ideas are left open for discussion, then religion is antithetical to this aim for its dogmatism. The problem then, is that the distinction between public and private realms might be undesirable in that it excludes the potential for all narratives to be the source of positive change in society. After all, we cannot be certain of where the next innovative vocabulary will arise from.

In *CIS* (1989), Rorty describes how oppressed groups can benefit from being "ironic", and his concept of "irony" helps to make clear the distinction between public and private realm. The ironist is somebody who understands the contingency of his own beliefs – he is trained to

understand the varied vocabularies that exist in the world. As such, he is well-positioned to negotiate between competing belief systems and is more likely to recognize how his own idiosyncratic desires might be at odds with the well-being of others. In short, irony is the medium through which we are able to foster more empathy and discover forms of cruelty that we were previously oblivious to.

With this in mind, there is still work to be done in specifying the nuances of the relationship between Rorty's hope for greater solidarity and self-creation. For Rorty, the principle public goal we ought to pursue is that of diminishing cruelty, yet it is still unclear who is positioned to instigate such change if we are socialized through and through and are unable to escape the limits of culture. This question is manifest in the problem of intersubjectivity, for if we begin, as Rorty does, by noting that the self is entirely constituted by culture, then how can be begin our analysis by examining the subjective experience of a poet or novelist?

Putting aside the question of where creativity can come from, Nancy Fraser (1989) has argued that over the course of his life Rorty altered his stance on this question of how social change occurs. In Rorty's early work he appears to advocate for an approach that could be described as the "invisible hand" approach. In this view, poets and other writers of fiction will naturally provide the rest of us with innovative metaphors that will renew our perspective – we will gain greater sensitivity to those we had not noticed before by reading of their story. If poets and novelists are given enough private freedom to develop their ideas they will be led naturally by an invisible hand to craft a language game that is more inclusive and less cruel than the existing language game. In the work Rorty did in the mid to late 1980's (including *CIS*) the division between normal and abnormal discourse was for Rorty equivalent to the division between private and public. Because of this division, "…there was no place for collective

subjects who engaged in abnormal discourse, no place for social movements that contested dominant discourses" (Fraser, 1989, 262). If anyone used a non-hegemonic discourse, it must necessarily be a private discourse. Thus, linguistic innovation was aestheticized and narcissistic rather than a communal project.

Yet Nancy Fraser argues that this "invisible hand" approach was later abandoned by Rorty due to his recognition that there would always be those poets who paid no attention to the suffering of others and sought only for what was sublime to them. This would of course by counterproductive to the aim of achieving greater solidarity, leading us to believe that if the aim is to reduce cases of cruelty than we would do well to limit the freedom individuals have to self-create. Fraser observes that in Rorty's later writings on feminism the distinction between public and private is extinguished: "...the enterprise of remaking oneself through redescription is not opposed to political transformation, but rather it is part and parcel of it". In his later work: "When Rorty takes up the question of feminism, the opposition between the public and the private, the community and the individual and the political and the aesthetic are exploded" . (Fraser, 1989, 262). Having recognized the deficits of a strong separation between the public and the private spheres of life, Rorty, according to Fraser, began to see that linguistic innovation was not solely the work of eccentric and reclusive individuals. As in the case of feminism, linguistic innovation was inspired by individuals who were actively engaged in their communities. The idea of a private language was unrealistic.

B.**The Division is Unobtainable**

      Thus far I have demonstrated through the work of Lior Erez and Nancy Fraser the different reasons why the distinction between public and private might be undesirable. Yet there is a more forceful critique that can be mounted against Rorty on the basis that the distinction he draws is in fact unobtainable. While there are many reasons why we should want no separation between the private and the public, there are perhaps more persuasive reasons as to why such a separation cannot be achieved. These reasons are uncovered when we consider the work of John Dewey, and the critique of Rorty composed by Ernesto Laclau and Richard Shusterman, among others.

      To begin with Dewey, it is remarkable that Rorty does not follow Dewey's lead in advising us that we ought to forfeit the division between the public and private. It is notable because Rorty consistently cites Dewey as his "intellectual hero". Of all the classical pragmatists Rorty professes his admiration for Dewey above all others. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) Rorty begins his book by boldly claiming that the three most important philosophers of the last century have been Heidegger, Wittgenstein and *Dewey*. More to the point, Rorty generally approves of Dewey's project of undermining the traditional dichotomies found within Western Philosophy. Rorty shares with Dewey the aim of overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice, fact and value, and subject and object. Rorty rightly sees these dichotomies as being merely historical contingencies – modes of thought that do not reflect anything essential about our condition but are merely tools that we have used in the past to adapt to our environment. These tools may not be as sharp and as useful as they once were, for the

environment we are in today is notably different than that of the past. As I have noted, Rorty sees that we are no longer in an age where foundational truths are important – we are no longer as occupied with attempts to discover how things really are – our views are now future-oriented. As such, the dichotomies of traditional philosophy are less useful now than before.

In arguing that the distinction Rorty choses to uphold is unstable and "constantly trespassed from both sides", there are different grounds on which to proceed. Ernesto Laclau and Richard Shusterman both make similarly compelling cases in arguing that Rorty's insistent description of an idiosyncratic and private vocabulary can never be as private as Rorty might wish. For Shusterman, the private language of the "strong poet" (those of us that Rorty describes as having access to language that is creatively original) is a language that is necessarily informed by public discourse (Shusterman, 2000, 38). Our public language will always inform the types of idiosyncratic vocabularies we have. Laclau makes the point more directly when he notes that one's private vocabulary can never emerge out of nothing, it must always have its roots in something that is social and shared (1996).

For Rorty, one benefit of creating the space for private self-creation is that it allows for the greater possibility of emancipatory social change. A safe-guarded private sphere will permit alternative voices to be heard. These voices might be marginalized if operational in the public sphere, but within the private sphere they have a chance to be refined. With time, these alternative vocabularies might gain traction with others and gain enough followers so that a new type of solidarity can be created that challenges whatever ideas are hegemonic in the public realm.

Lior Erez has phrased the problem differently when he makes us consider the role that *action* plays in the public and private divide (2013). If we recall Rorty's counter to the feminist

critique we will remember that Rorty described the public and private division with reference to the effects of actions on ourselves versus the effects on others. While feminists construed the public with what takes place at work and the private with what is domestic, Rorty follows Dewey in stating that we need only consider who our actions might impact. The private sphere is defined by acts that affect our attempts at self-creation while the public sphere contains acts that impact public discourse. With this schema in mind, we can also recall that Rorty was a lead figure in the "linguistic turn" and as such, his focus on the impacts of our actions are centered on how literature might act on our sentiment. When Rorty describes Derrida's work as contributing only to our private desire for self-creation, it is not clear why Derrida's writing should not have an impact on public discourse. Yet Rorty insists that it does not. More generally, the act of writing is a public act – there are real consequences in our lives for the literature we choose to take seriously. Of course, Rorty does not deny that literature impacts others, but we can remember that he creates a division between literature that has public consequences and writing that has ramifications only for our private hopes. The point here is that the literature Rorty describes as having exclusively private consequences does in fact have an impact on the lives of others. Thus, if we are told by Rorty that the division between public and private only exists in terms of actions that have impacts on our own lives and actions that impact others, then Rorty's illustration of this via literature does not seem to "fit the mold" he has created.

Aside from the impact that private literary expressions can have on public discourse, there is further reason to doubt that the private self as expressed through literature can be created in isolation from the public. I began this chapter by specifying Rorty's critique of experience with reference to his attack on foundationalism. Rorty's stance was that we replace foundational logic with a paradigm that is historicist. I described this historicism by recounting Rorty's well-known

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claim that there is no essential character to the human form – "socialization goes all the way down". The paradigm that Rorty asks us to embrace would seemingly have an impact on our ability to form a vocabulary that is so private that it is immune from that which is public knowledge.

To summarize, when Laclau observes that the distinction Rorty draws between the public and private is "trespassed from both sides", we can see how this might be true. First, as Lior Erez has noted, our private desires do in fact "bleed into" the public realm (2013). Our private vocabularies are constantly being incorporated into the public language. Secondly, our private ambitions for self-creation are necessarily informed by the public discourses that are available to us in whatever historical period we are in. Taken this way, *there is no private self* that can be protected from what occurs in the public realm, for the self is inherently social, as is language.

4.**Dewey on Private, Emotional Experience**

I argue that if our goal is to overcome the public/private split we can find inspiration in Dewey's conception of experience for Dewey's awareness that all experience is inevitably linked to the social. Yet Dewey's position is not as straightforward as we might presume, for Dewey does not rashly deny the existence of private consciousness. Having understood that conventional Western thinking carries the legacy of Cartesian dualism in the beliefs we have about knowledge and individualism, we might be tempted to argue that Western thinking supports the idea of purely private experiences while Dewey offers a corrective view that denies the existence of private thoughts. This would seem to fit with the commonly held view about classical pragmatism in general; classical pragmatists provided an antidote to the "rugged

individualism" that characterised American culture, and offered ideas about community as a substitute. Yet Dewey does not deny the role that consciousness plays in creating knowledge, despite his clear focus on the interactional, intersubjective processes that are at work. Dewey preserves a space for consciousness when he notes that our patterns of interaction often mimic the patterns of our consciousness.

In writing of private experience Dewey historicizes the notion by arguing that our desire to focus on the personal and subjective character of experience is a relatively recent development. In *Experience and Nature* (1929) Dewey refers to the "modern discovery of inner experience" (172). Beginning with the Greek conception of experience, Dewey observes that for the Greeks the notion of "private" or "inner" experience was nearly non-existent. As I have noted elsewhere, the term was associated with the practical arts; one could literally become experienced in a particular type of action. On another level, the term experience was for the Greeks nearly synonymous with the word *culture*, thereby implying that experience was something contained within a whole system rather than being an isolated venture.

Dewey does not historicize the development of inner experience in order to show that our assumptions about the "facts" of private experience are merely social constructions and that we can do well without them. He is ambiguous about how the "discovery" of inner experience has altered our lives: it has at once created a liberating potential where individuality is taken seriously, and yet it has created an unhealthy "egotistic strain in modern thought" (Dewey, 1929, 73). Where our understanding of inner experience has been of value is in the agency it ascribes to the individual, so that the individual is not characterized as being a simple product of circumstance. While Dewey may have commonly expressed a need to move beyond the man versus nature dichotomy this should not be taken to imply that man is submerged in nature and

indistinguishable from his environment. There is room for individuality, as man is able to add and contribute to nature (Dewey, 1929, 172).

It is here that we find notes of harmony between Dewey and Rorty, both in relation to the meaning of one's private experience, and in terms of how the relationship between the individual and nature is theorized. Rorty agrees with Dewey that the emphasis on individuality and on the private qualities of experience is a product of Western, liberal thought, and agrees with Dewey that despite our need to take evolution seriously for what is taught about our connection to nature, this does not mean that individuality is reduced to a mechanical type of behaviourism. Rorty has noted that we ought to see ourselves as a species that is slowly learning to take control over its own evolution. There is room for individuality, both in terms of how man is distinct from nature, and in terms of the ability to have experiences that are private. Rorty of course, praises the liberal tradition of thought for affording us the space to have private experiences. Inner experience is for Rorty a type of refuge from the world, in that there is no pressure to justify these experiences in a language that is public. He would agree with the following passage from Dewey: "The modern discovery of inner experience, of a realm of purely personal events that are always at the individual's command, and that are exclusively as well as inexpensively for refuge, consolation and thrill is also a great and liberating discovery" (Dewey, 1929, 172).

Dewey's use of the words "purely personal" may give the impression that he is in agreement with Rorty's suggestion that there ought to be a division between public and private – that the public realm ought to be structured so as to afford each individual the ability to self-creation. Here we encounter the discrepancy I observed earlier between believing that the public/private split is a desired end for a democracy and believing that such a division is possible given what we know about individuals being "socialized to the core". When Dewey writes about

the historical advent of inner experience I interpret him as commenting on the former issue, as he outlines the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong conception of inner experiences. While in the aforementioned quotation Dewey praises the emancipatory potential that is stored within "the modern discovery of inner experience", he clearly shows trepidation towards its effects. Dewey laments that the modern western view of subjectivity is naïve and distorted. There is a persistent failure to recognize that the individual is a product of a particular set of interactions that are shaped by the culture in which he participates. While the ancient Greek conception of experience saw the individual as being subsumed within culture and immersed within activity so that private experience was nearly non-existent, the modern trend in the west is at risk of moving too far in the opposite direction; too much inner focus can be pathological.

Dewey's concern with the move towards inner experience is two-fold: there is a risk to the individual who is preoccupied with self-focus, and there is a risk to the philosopher who believes that he is able to access the world through the undistorted lens of the self. The Cartesian hypothesis "I think therefore I am" leads us astray in its presumption that it is the cognitive powers of the mind that are the source of our wisdom of the world.

Dewey is still able to avoid the troublesome question of how we are able to transcend or "get outside" of our private consciousness and collect knowledge of the world "outside". Inner experiences are real, but they are always connected to the *actions* we undertake towards others. Dewey describes private consciousness as being supplementary to experience rather than of primary importance. He writes: "experience is no slipping along in a path fixed by inner consciousness. Private consciousness is an incidental outcome of experience of a vital objective sort; it is not its source" (1917, 11). As noted, the "vital" and "objective" part of experience is its connection to the concrete actions we commit in the world, while the private consciousness is for

Dewey something like an epiphenomenon – it exists as an attendant to the experience. The *substance* of experience is not found in private consciousness. As a result, Dewey did not dedicate much attention to the dynamics of inner experience or private consciousness, and he did not share Rorty's concern over how private experience can be connected to acts of self-creation.

Yet despite Dewey's unwillingness to engage in a discussion of private experience we might still have lingering questions regarding how Dewey accounted for certain types of phenomenon that seem to be intrinsically private affairs. Of the different types of experience that are available to us, we might regard *emotional experience* as being exemplary of an experience that is "private and incommunicable". A common understanding of emotions might be that they are experiences that can only be accessed through deep introspection. Yet Dewey again steers us away from such an understanding: "Experience, in the degree in which it *is* experience is heightened vitality. Instead of being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations it signifies complete interpenetration of the self and the world of objects and events" (Dewey, 1934, 22).

This understanding of emotions is not unique to Dewey. Merleau-Ponty shared Dewey's stance towards emotions, noting that we cannot establish the meaning of a given emotion without somehow connecting that emotion to an object in the world. There is little hope in understanding the significance of an emotion by applying a purely subjective account of the phenomenon. As has been a common refrain, the point again is that emotions cannot be studied apart from the environment in which they persist. Merleau-Ponty notes that:

> Today's psychologists have made us notice that in reality introspection gives
> us almost nothing. If I try to study love or anger from inner observation alone,
> I will find little to describe: a few pangs, a few heart-throbs—in short, trite
> agitations which do not reveal the essence of love and hate…Each time I find
> something worth saying, it is because I have succeeded in studying it as a way

of behaving, as a modification of my relations with others and with the world (1947, 52).

To appreciate this point requires that we overcome our common-sense understanding of emotions. The language that we use to describe these phenomena makes reference to events that are "inside of us": we feel depressed *inside*, or we feel a sense of excitement *within* us. The point is not to deny that these feelings exist, or to claim that such feelings are easy to communicate into something that is a shared experience, but to acknowledge, as Dewey does, that emotions require an object of focus – that they cannot be purely private. In conjunction with what I have argued about the intersubjective nature of our experiences, we can say that emotions are how we negotiate our way through relationships and events in the world. We may not always feel in control of our emotions, but when we complain that "our emotions got the better of us", this does not mean that our experience originates in some mysterious place inside of us. In a passage that has been critically quoted by Rorty, Dewey writes of the qualities of emotions by noting that: "The qualities were never "in" the organism: they always were qualities of interactions in which both extra-organic things and organism partake' (Dewey, 1929, 412 as cited in Rorty, 1982, 83). As I will speak to in my forthcoming description of Mead's account of *the situation*, emotions can be constituted within structured situations. We will find that this is true when we consider the language we use to describe situations. The mood of a board game might be tense, a wedding might carry a feeling of excitement, and the situation on the subway during a heavy commute might be exhausting.

Thus, we can say of emotions that they betray their presumed privacy in that they require first an object in the world that can carry its substance (there must be an object of our despair or hope), and secondly, emotions can be found attached to situations that are structured by certain

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relations. The meaning of a particular emotion is not evident until it has been put into action –
we do not understand the meaning of love until we have acted with love towards another. Yet to
reiterate again, Dewey is not attempting to deny all accounts of private consciousness as much as
he is attempting to show that experience need not be thought of as an exclusively "inner"
process. Having described the Greek origins of the word "experience" as being indicative of an
accumulated practical wisdom, and having observed that for the Greeks there was never a
question of how to "get outside" of private experience; Dewey now tells us that most emotions
can easily be described without referring to an "inner" process. In fact, if we attempt to describe
emotions without the aid of an external reference point, what we describe will be unintelligible.

5.**An Alternative Framework**

Rather than casting aside Rorty's private/public distinction entirely we might seek to find an
intermediate approach that recognizes the utility of the division while acknowledging the clear
limitations of such a formulation. Treated pragmatically, we might say that our public visions for
social justice and our private desire for self-perfection are simply different tools that can be
applied to different objectives. Sometimes these two tools can be used for the same purpose,
such as for those "lucky Christians" that Rorty jealously describes as having private goals that
are in harmony with their public vision. In the same way that a keyboard is a tool that can be
used to write an essay, another tool such as a fountain pen can accomplish the same objective. Of
course, this does not mean that a tool such as a keyboard can be used to fulfill any aim – its
potential is limited to a range of tasks. Similarly, we should not assume that our private

vocabulary can *always* function as a tool that helps complete our public hopes. In some cases it may serve that purpose in addition to other purposes, but in other cases it might not.

The simple solution has been implied: we need only to describe a softer distinction than the firm one offered by Rorty. We can concede that the division might serve some analytical purposes, but that in practice there are many interactions between these two spheres of life. As we are interested in recovering Rorty's conception of experience we would do well to explore precisely how we can have private, non-linguistic experiences that are connected to public discourse.

I have noted that when we sift through Rorty's later work we find that his description of the public/private divide is not as firm as he boldly claimed in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989). Often, Rorty seems to be giving us permission to rework the distinction. For instance, in a series of lectures held in 1997 Rorty states that the difference between the public and the private sphere is not dichotomous, but is instead a spectrum. Like any spectrum, there are extremes on either end, while the majority of people are somewhere near the centre. On the public side of the spectrum there are "dull public bureaucrats", while on the far end of the private side there are writers like Nietzsche and Heidegger. For Rorty, the distinction is still necessary, because in order to be agreeable members of a modern liberal society we should be wary of uniting the parts of our lives that seem at odds. We should not insist that others share our private concerns – these concerns need not be significant to anyone else. As such, creating separation between the different parts of our lives can be beneficial to the whole of society, and for us.

Yet claiming that having the public/private distinction *can* be beneficial is not the same as arguing that it is *always* beneficial to us. Clearly, this is not the case, for if moral progress is to occur then the innovative private metaphors must have a way of impacting public life. I have

shown that within Rorty's worldview it is *desirable* that there be a way to trespass between private and public affairs, never mind that the distinction might be unobtainable anyway.

In an interview conducted late in Rorty's life we find he is further hesitant about the rigidity of the distinction. He clarifies: "I didn't say everybody had a public/private split, but some people do… I was, instead, urging that there was nothing wrong with letting people divide their lives along the private/public line… It was a negative point, not a positive recommendation about how everybody should behave" (2006, 62). Seen here, Rorty is not providing a normative account of how the self should be bifurcated; he is merely constructing a viewpoint that is therapeutic to mainstream philosophy. He is providing us with the moral possibility that we are not required to harmonize our lives – it is acceptable and in some cases desirable that there be disjuncture in our lives.

In critiquing the division between public and private the claim has not been that the private self does not exist because of the social nature of the self. I have shown through Dewey that we can still conceive of individuality and that this is necessary for experience to be meaningful. We must only remain guarded against excessively individualistic expressions of the self, and in Rorty's commitment to the private self it is puzzling that the thoughts and actions of the self are seen to be unconnected to public affairs. The notion of a private language is also challenged. Yet can we agree with Rorty that there are "private", non-linguistic experiences but disagree with his claim that these are unimportant to public concerns? As sociologists we must live up to the fundamental recommendation of C.W. Mills to develop a sociological imagination – one where we see the connection between our private success and failure and broader social realities. David Haney has convincingly re-described Mill's call for the transformation of private struggles into public issues as a doctrine of pragmatism, as he explores the pragmatic foundation

of Mill's thought (2008). He highlights Dewey as having had a particularly persuasive influence on the concept of a sociological imagination, and for support he references Mill's dissertation, written on Deweyan pragmatism. Similarly, Frank Nutch notes that "…following in the footsteps of the pragmatists before him, Mills believed that sociology (like philosophy) needs to become part of the wider community, to become a living component of the consciousness of the citizenry" (1979, 2). Private experiences have their meaning principally when connected to broader public issues.

Chapter Three: Phenomenology and Pragmatism

Having elaborated on Richard Rorty's reasons for rejecting the concept of experience, it should come as no surprise that phenomenology is absent from his work. While the classical pragmatists did much to claim the importance of bodily experience and presented this field of study as being full of potential, Rorty avoids any discussion of phenomenology, the "lived experience", the importance of the body, or nature. While classical pragmatism in general had appeal to Rorty, these particular tracts of classical pragmatism did not. I aim to show that had Rorty taken discussions of the body and of nature seriously, we would be better positioned to understand why experience as a general concept has more utility than he was willing to afford it.

In this chapter I also anticipate the criticism that a pragmatist account of experience is unnecessary and redundant in the face of phenomenology, and in response I note that pragmatism can be supplemental to phenomenology. Specifically, I observe two main ways in which pragmatism improves upon phenomenological insights: pragmatism specifies the role that action plays in experience, and pragmatism sees experience to be associated with melioristic change.

In writing of what pragmatism has to offer phenomenology the task is also to specify what elements of James and Dewey we see as being representative of pragmatism. Pragmatism can mean many things, and the aspects of pragmatism that I find distinctive and important are of course connected to the broader argument I have in mind. I favour Hans Joas' description of pragmatism as being concerned with action, or more specifically, with *creativity of action* (1996). Rather than describe experience as being an empirically understandable phenomenon

where the mind receives stimuli form the world, as James was first inclined to do, the later development of a humanistic, socially aware account of action is key to understanding what pragmatism "brings to the table".

To further develop this idea we can turn first to Neil Gross' specification of what pragmatism has contributed to contemporary American sociology, and later to Bruce Wilshire's account of how William James contributed to the development of phenomenology. While Gross convinces us that pragmatism and phenomenology share a common heritage of treating subjectivity as something that is both constrained by its environment and yet capable of directing cognitive processes on the environment, I ultimately show that pragmatism does more to specify the role of action. This characteristic of action in experience will be crucial to developing a type of experience that is nonfoundational.

1. **The Influence of Pragmatism and Phenomenology on Sociology**

> "The systematic interrelation between phenomenology and sociology emerged in a shared interest in clarifying the nature of intersubjectivity. Phenomenological insights pointed directly to the centrality of intersubjectivity, that is, both the natural attitude and the phenomenologically reduced transcendental ego were intersubjective in character…Sociology could not be independent of phenomenology, nor could phenomenology proceed without regard to the knowledge of intersubjective realities revealed by sociology" (Ferguson, 2006, 83-84)

I will begin this chapter by describing the historical dependence that sociology has on both pragmatism and phenomenology. The picture I sketch will not be an original one, for the blueprint has already been provided by Neil Gross in an article called "Pragmatism and Phenomenology" (2007). As such, I will only trace the lines of thought made by Gross, and later add colour to the picture by describing other insights into the relationship between pragmatism and phenomenology. And although this dissertation is largely a portrait of Richard Rorty, for

parts of this chapter I will place him in the background, for the aim here is to understand pragmatism more generally so as to highlight what pragmatism can offer phenomenologists.

In documenting the history of sociology in America Neil Gross convincingly argues that we would do well to observe that there have been two philosophical movements that have significantly shaped the trajectory of sociological work (2007). The first philosophical movement is classical American Pragmatism carried by the work of Dewey, James, Peirce and others. The second philosophical inspiration to sociology is phenomenology, and this European tradition was principally led by Merleau-Ponty and Husserl. There is something common to both these traditions – something that is of value to sociologists – and this is the way that both traditions describe the nature of subjectivity. Sociologists, in their awareness of both social structures and individual agency have had a need to observe the distinction between man as an object that is acted upon by the world and man as an active, creative being. There is an image of man as an isolated entity that is pushed around by forces external to him, and this image competes with the belief that man creatively uses the tools given by culture to forge something new. Gross argues that this understanding of the dual nature of subjectivity is mutual to pragmatism and phenomenology, and has been appropriated by sociologists.

The most obvious site of transmission between pragmatism and sociology is the early Chicago School. Sidestepping the issue of whether the Chicago School was really as homogenous in thought as is often presumed, Gross identifies two main areas where pragmatists influenced the direction of sociology: the place of meaning and interpretation in social life, and the admittedly more speculative area of human action – action as a response to a problematic situation.

The first area of influence is relatively free of contention, as pragmatists worked to understand how people responded to situations based on the meaning that they interpreted those situations to have. While a similar project existed in German historicism, the pragmatists linked this way of thinking to empirical issues, as evidenced in the work of Peirce, James, Dewey, and most importantly, Mead. Mead specified the distinction between how humans interact and how lower organisms interact, the difference being that humans operate in a world of culture and language. Our intersubjectivity is the result of having been socialized to communicate through symbols.

The second area of influence is more central to the project we are engaged with here. Gross advises us to observe how Chicago sociology was shaped by the pragmatist's vision of social action. Rather than focus on large, macro theoretical paradigms that promised to explain behaviour without relying on empirical data, Chicago school sociology focused on how people experienced practical problems. Often, the starting point of research was the experiences of different groups, and what action might be taken to improve these experiences in the future.

Later in this chapter, in a section titled "Action and Experience", I attempt to articulate how the two areas of influence that Gross identifies are connected. *Concerns about the nature of intersubjectivity prompt us to examine the role of action*. Focusing on the work of Alfred Schutz I explore how the contradictory assumptions about intersubjectivity that are embedded within his phenomenology urge us to supplement his work with a pragmatic theory of action. Notably, I draw on the critique of Schutz offered by Joachim Renn (2006) who complains that Schutz oscillates unsteadily between an egological conception of experience where the subject occupies a private stream of consciousness, and a view that acknowledges the inevitably social and shared nature of experience. The groundwork for this discussion must first be put in place, and in the

next section I discuss how Husserl "wrestled" with the "problem of intersubjectivity". Following this I discuss the points of correspondence between pragmatism and phenomenology, by describing how William James anticipated many of the concerns that would be later taken up by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

2. <u>**The Problem of Intersubjectivity**</u>

Considering what I have described of the beginnings of phenomenology we can re-describe my account with reference to the problem of intersubjectivity that I have said characterizes the varied approaches to experience. Here I have examined the problem of intersubjectivity as it was encountered by Husserl, and rephrased the problem by bringing attention to the rupture in Husserl's work between the idea of the "empirical" ego and the "pure" ego. This is the tension between that which is natural and that which is transcendent. The early phenomenological tendency that we find in Husserl is a reductive one, where the self is condensed into a series of individuated and private experiences. This is perhaps reminiscent of a type of romanticism where the "true" self is located in a mysterious place deep inside of the self. By the end of Husserl's life we find that an awkward move in the opposite direction is taking place, the self is no longer a stable element that can reflect the experience of the world, as an intersubjective unfolding is underway.

In an assessment that I find agreeable, Ferguson finds that Husserl comes close to reconciling himself to this problem – he is prepared to recognize an intersubjective reality - but ultimately falls short of clearly formulating how this might be possible (Ferguson, 2006, 55). The body and discussions of embodiment have the potential to bring awareness to how experience is an intersubjective affair and how the conflict between the natural and transcendental can be

dissolved. While the earliest strands of phenomenology began with a transcendent reduction of the body whereby consciousness and experience were individuated, Husserl later recognized that this conceptualization was flawed: the body, although initially seen as an exterior "fact", contained within it strong elements of sociality. Ferguson demonstrates this by contrasting Husserl's attitude in the *Cartesian Meditations* (1929) where he fully embraces the notion of a "transcendental ego" to his later reflections in the second book of *Ideas* (1952) where he acknowledges that the body cannot be as unified as we might hope – that it cannot function as what we would now call a "given". Instead of describing the body as an expression of pure subjectivity, we would do better to describe the body as being part of a "collective subjectivity".

The manner in which Husserl attempts to arrive at an intersubjective account of experience is telling for why he was unable to formulate a fully satisfactory understanding of this matter. Husserl makes an uncomfortable compromise between different notions of intersubjectivity (Ferguson, 2006, 57). There is a confused relationship between *interactive subjectivity* and *intersubjectivity*, and Husserl attempts to combine these two concepts in a way that leaves much to be explained. By placing the transcendental ego within the body the first step towards intersubjectivity is taken, yet Husserl develops his idea with reference to a problematic notion of "interactive ego" that exists in the body. Referring specifically to the "Fifth Meditation" within the *Cartesian Meditations* Ferguson documents the trajectory of Husserl's thought that "intersubjectivity is the "pure" collective consciousness upon which the empirical interactive ego is founded" (2006, 57). As cited by Ferguson, Husserl explains as follows:

> "Within the limits of my transcendentally reduced pure conscious life, I experience the world (including others) – and, according to its experiential sense, not (so to speak) my private synthetic formation but as other than mine alone, as an intersubjective world, actually there for

everyone, accessible in respect of its Objects to everyone" (Husserl, 1967, 91
as cited in Ferguson, 2006, 57).

Reading this quotation leaves the impression that Husserl has made the issue of intersubjectivity unnecessarily complex. There is no need for Husserl to cling to the idea of an interactive ego that has an empirical existence apart from the intersubjective self. Such a construct serves only to reproduce a problematic attachment to naturalism – a reductive habit that Husserl aimed to avoid in most of his work. The interactive ego is construed by Husserl as an "experiencing monad" that bears no relations to others and experiences the world in a private way (Ferguson, 2006, 58).

To be sure, Ferguson's reading of Husserl is accompanied by other intepretations of Husserl's work in this area. Susi Ferrarello has clarified (or added complexity) to the issue by observing that Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity contains *three* different types of ego, or stated differently, "every ego seems to live many lives at once": an empirical life, a transcendent life, and an intersubjective life (2012, 6). There is first the "empirical ego" that lives a naïve life rooted in nature and detached from others. This ego experiences the world in terms of the sense data that it collects. Through a process of reduction the empirical ego puts into brackets all the experiences that do not coincide with its own intentional life (the experience of "transcendent objects" that mark the barrier between the self and others). This is the transcendent life of the ego. From here the ego, having already been reduced, rediscovers itself not as an isolated monad, but as an intersubjective being.

I see Ferrarello's nuanced reading of Husserl's stumbling path towards intersubjectivty as being additive to the interpretation of Ferguson rather than contradictory. In Ferrarello's account the relationship between the empirical ego (Ferguson's interactive ego) and the intersubjective ego is mediated by the transcendental ego. The transcendental ego is what restrains the direct

move towards an intersubjective being, yet it is also necessary as a way of grounding our intersubjective understandings. In Ferguson's account, recall, the problem of intersubjectivity is presented more simply as the tension between an empirical account of the self that is always at risk of naturalistic reduction, and a transcendent notion of the self that risks idealism.

However we might choose to phrase Husserl's dilemma, the problem of intersubjectivity is central to how we theorize experience. The problem is not simply a matter of articulating the relationship between Husserl's confused notions of an empirical interactive ego and a pure transcendental intersubjectivity, for this dilemma is perhaps epiphenomenal to the underlying question of in what sense our experience of the world can be shared among others given that the minds of others remain inaccessible to us. Clearly, we are able to recognize other people as having minds and as carrying out conscious acts despite the fact that we have no access to their minds – we are unable to have immediate access to how they experience their world. This necessitates that we constitute the world as being an intersubjective reality. All of this is reflected in how we explain our experience of the world as a series of private incommunicable events *or* as an inevitably social affair in which the subject has become "lost". The former scenario assumes a type of rigid empiricism that renders experience as paramount in the pursuit of knowledge, while the latter schema embraces the reality of the "linguistic turn" and carries the lamentation that we cannot experience the world independently of the way we have been socialized through the language of our culture. Neither scenario should impress us.

3. <u>**William James and Phenomenology**</u>

Much has been made of William James' connection to phenomenology with considerable debate about the extent to which European phenomenologists such as Husserl were influenced by James' writing. Alongside Bruce Wilshire (1968), Alfred Schutz (1941) and John Wild (1969)

are key figures in the movement to re-orient James' work. Chronologically, James' writing preceded most of the work done by European phenomenologists, and there is much evidence that indicates that European theorists depended on James for guidance in the development of their phenomenological themes. Some of this evidence is merely anecdotal, as when James Edie writes in a footnote that Husserl often enthusiastically advised his visiting American scholars to read James (Edie, 1970, 486). Yet as Edie also points out, if we are to make a serious effort to connect James to phenomenologists we will need to do more than "cherry-pick" quotations from James that might indicate his inclination towards phenomenology. In any case, the relationship between James and the phenomenologists was one-directional – for there is no evidence that James took any interest in the European tradition. Yet, there are significant points of overlap between James' work and the thoughts developed by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, and these similarities are not accidental, as I take them to indicate a shared philosophical project.

It is a common mission to persistently push back the earliest origins of any tradition, and where pragmatism is concerned Emerson and Thoreau are often labelled as the unknowing founders of classical pragmatism. Cornell West (1989) has made this point, as has Stanley Cavell (1989) who pointed to the seemingly unlikely connection between Heidegger, Derrida, Emerson and Thoreau. The earliest points of contact between American pragmatism and phenomenology might date back farther than commonly assumed. Bruce Wilshire (2000) has led the way in forging an intriguing connection between Native American thought, pragmatism and phenomenology. Wilshire describes European phenomenologists as having taken their cue from the Classical Pragmatists, who in turn relied significantly on Native American myth and tradition. Pragmatism and its insistent demand that we not lose ourselves in abstraction – that we see ourselves as organisms that are enmeshed *in* the world and not separate from it – has an

intuitive link to the Native American worldview. Wilshire places particular emphasis on William James' concept of *pure experience*, arguing that it is here that we encounter a "radically prereflective, somewhat trance-like, level of experiencing - the primal level… (Wilshire, 2000, 7). Again: "Phenomenology opens up the vastness of our immediate involvements in the world. As practiced – particularly by James as we will see – it is a broad pathway into indigenous or primal life" (Wilshire, 2000, 9). Scott Pratt (2002) has begun a similar pursuit to that of Wilshire, describing pragmatism as having its origins during the encounter between Native Americans and Europeans. Here pragmatism was a type of resistance that was practiced by "European Americans" as a hedge against the influence of European ideology.

As noted, Bruce Wilshire has perhaps done the most to organize the elements of James' work that seem to foreshadow the phenomenological insights. Within James' catalogue of work it is the content of *The Principles of Psychology* that is widely believed to have the most significance for phenomenology. The phenomenological breakthrough that is most potent for Wilshire is James' elaboration of the "intentional theory of consciousness". The understanding of this phenomenon closely ties James to Husserl, for in Husserl's work we later see the full and satisfactory expansion of this idea, due largely to the work of James.

What James implies by the "intentionality of consciousness" is that consciousness cannot exist on its own, we must always speak of consciousness *of* something. Consciousness involves objects that hold our attention – our consciousness is world-directed. Yet this view should not be associated with strict empiricism, since James is also interested in the *meaning* of experience. According to Edie's view on James, there is a transcendent quality to experience, as experience cannot be confirmed or disproved by empirical procedures alone (Edie, 1970).

There is more that can be said of James theory of intentionality. Herbert Spiegelberg (1960) explains that intentionality of consciousness refers to consciousness that is active rather than passive. The mind actively selects objects to focus on, and these objects have their essence independent of their becoming an object of consciousness. In other words, these objects can be of identical form for different acts of consciousness. This brand of realism is replicated in Husserl's appropriation of James' theory.

Tracing the thought of James, Wilshire describes James' shifting inclination from first eschewing the need for metaphysical understandings of experience, to later becoming almost exclusively metaphysical. For this reason, Wilshire laments the *Principles of Psychology* as being a failed project, or at least one that has internal inconsistencies. These inconsistencies are worth examining for they help to demonstrate not only what Rorty found at fault in James concept of experience, but they help direct us towards the fault lines we will need to avoid in reconstructing experience.

In the *Principles of Psychology* we see James begin by proclaiming a clear program for those keen on understanding the psychology of cognition. The aim is to develop a properly scientific study of the mind that is suitably naturalistic, and he begins by stating that such a study must avoid all metaphysics in order to be useful:

> "This book, assuming that thoughts and feelings exist and are vehicles of knowledge, thereupon contends that psychology when she has ascertained the empirical correlation of the various sorts of thought or feeling with definite conditions of the brain, can go no farther, that is as a natural science. If she goes farther she becomes metaphysical". (James, 218 as cited in Edie, 1970, 495)

The task James sets for himself is to map the correlations between our feelings, thoughts, and desires and the conditions that give rise to these phenomena. There is a causal relationship

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between the neurological patterns of the brain and the resulting phenomena that we experience. For James, it first appears that there is nothing controversial about developing such a science where "mental states" and "brain states" are causally linked. Psychology is exactly the study of the connection between the physiological events of the brain and our feelings. And yet, Wilshire documents the struggles that James has in upholding this schema. There is first the problem created by a dualistic separation between mind and world. There is also the related problem of meaning; how can we identify what our experiences mean by employing a purely naturalistic approach?

The first issue arises when James attempts to find support for his dualistic program of separating the mind from the world. We cannot clearly see what a "mental state" actually *is* simply by describing it as something that is conditioned by forces external to it. This dualism presupposes the type of metaphysics that James intended to avoid, and his hope to progress beyond this line of thinking is challenged. The result is that James begins to distinguish between competing interests: the physiological investigations of the mind, and the phenomenological questions of meaning (Wilshire, 1968, 16). Where he initially placed much value in uncovering the causal conditions of our thoughts, he soon places this project on the "backburner" and proceeds to develop a theory of meaning. "Repeatedly, we observe James' strange mode of progression in the *Principles*: he cannot sustain his forward pace because he must always go back to uncover the *foundation* of his own presuppositions" (Wilshire, 1968, 17).

If we take the basic thesis of phenomenology to be that we can only understand the world by understanding how it is reflected in our mind, and that we cannot conceive of our minds existing independently of the world, then we have already implied that there is some structure to reality. By observing the intentionality of consciousness James tells us that our consciousness

requires an object of attention – knowledge must be *about* something – and so our experiences must be grounded in something that is given. It is thus not possible to write on phenomenology without some commentary on metaphysics and the foundation to our knowledge that is being implied. Wilshire describes for us how James was frustrated by his attempts to develop a strictly scientific study of the mind and how these irritations anticipated the need for a phenomenological approach. If we cannot rely exclusively on empiricism in a study of the mind then a humanistic approach needs consideration, for the mind cannot be known without awareness of the cultural conditions that create meaning in experience.

4. <u>James on Selfhood</u>

This line-of-thinking connects to James' theory of a self that is "non-egological", and his theory of consciousness carries the same insights into the self that are fundamental to phenomenology. The development of James' theories of the self follows the same hesitant pattern that we see in James' eventual call for a humanistic approach to understanding experiences. As noted by Wilshire, in chapter nine of the *Principles of Psychology* we see James describe the self as something that is *separate* from the world: our thoughts are private affairs, and our experiences can only be our own. There is "absolute insulation", so that if two minds perceive the same object there will be two separate thoughts, and one object. This description of the self is supported by James' idea of the stream of consciousness. Here, one can never have the same thought twice, in the same way that one can never step into the same stream twice, for the object of our experience is always shifting. The consequence is a type of pluralism where experiences cannot be shared – they are private affairs.

James later questions this commitment in the following chapter of *Principles*. Commenting on the content of chapter 10, Wilshire writes: "…the self is not a sealed container full of intrinsically private thoughts. It is as if the self were blasted open and distributed across the face of the lived world" (Wilshire, 1968, 125). This is a dramatic reversal of thought on James' part, for the question now is not how our experiences can be public, but how it is possible that they can be purely private events. Our thoughts and experiences are unavoidably social. While there might be something intuitively appealing about dividing all of reality into the categories of "self" and "world" ("me" and "not me") it soon becomes clear that the self is "out there" as well. As we have tried with difficulty to define precisely what consciousness is we have come to see that consciousness itself cannot be grasped – there is no essence that is distinct or independent from its environment. The object of consciousness is the self, and "the self is an object that is "out there" with other objects – only not so far out as the others" (Edie, 1970, 511).

To summarize what we have covered so far, we see a hesitant transition in James' thinking about experience that lays the foundations for phenomenology. In *Principles* he begins with a description of experience as something that is subjective – we have a consciousness distinct from others. This consciousness can be examined through scientific inquiry. Psychology can avoid metaphysics by striving to become more naturalistic; we can develop an empirical study of the connections between the mind and the world. Yet this hopeful project soon meets resistance. There is the problem of dualism and the metaphysical assumptions that are implied, and there is growing awareness from James that a purely naturalistic approach cannot account for the *meaning* of experience. To fix this problem we need to supplement naturalism with humanism. An examination of the meaning of experience requires that we understand how the self is connected to culture and society. This leads James to ask: *Does consciousness exist?* If the

self is inherently social, then writing on experience as a subjective phenomenon loses its potency. "…then it must follow that all that is experience is strictly speaking "objective" (Edie, 1970, 513).

While Wilshire denotes the intentional theory of consciousness and the non-egological conception of the self as being key ideas in James' work that connect him to the development of phenomenology, D.C. Mathur has identified other elements of James' work that point us toward phenomenology (1971). For Mathur, it is specifically James' pragmatism and his radical empiricism that link him to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology. James and Husserl were both united in attempting to undercut metaphysics by investigating the directness of our experiences, and they shared similar discontent with the traditional empiricism of Hume. They were both "radical empiricists", although of somewhat different sorts. Also, they shared a similar concern with meaning in relation to experience: in Husserl's *Ideas* we see him describe consciousness as having the role of creating meaning (1931, 139). I have described the strain in James' work between the desire to establish a holistic account of experience and the constant and unavoidable return to metaphysical distinctions as points of reference, and within Husserl's work Mathur observes the same confused patterns. Within *Ideas* and *Cartesian Meditations* "…there is …a constant tension in Husserl's writings between the phenomenological program of describing essences and the transcendental one of 'constituting not only 'meanings', but reality also" (Mathur, 1971, 11-12).

Yet there are features that distinguish Husserl from James. Husserl's background was in mathematics, and his embrace of Descartes and the quest for absolute certainty in knowledge is clear. For him, we must identify what is "given" in experience – for this is the foundation to our knowledge. Consciousness is a metaphysical absolute. As Mathur helpfully illustrates, we can

associate Husserl with terms such as "certainty", "absoluteness" and "purity". In contrast, James' work is laden with terms such as "contingency", "rawness" and the "lived experience" (Mathur, 1971, 9). Thus, while James and Husserl both were aware of the limitations of traditional empiricism and appealed to the immediacy of experience, their interpretation of the immediacy of experience was still different. While Husserl was committed to the metaphysical program and saw no problem with maintaining a division between the mental and the physical, James was more successful in undercutting such distinctions and freeing experience from the reflections of our consciousness. Where Husserl was reductive in his search for the essence of experience, James' discoveries were additive – his radical empiricism made us aware of the social relations between experiences (Perry, 1938, 75).

5. <u>Humanism and Naturalism: Compatible Doctrines?</u>

Having outlined how James provided some of the intellectual groundwork needed to develop phenomenology we can now proceed to excavate more deeply into the relationship between pragmatism and phenomenology. While the humanistic qualities of James' work may point us toward phenomenology, a question has been raised concerning whether this humanism is compatible with the naturalism we find in the work of classical pragmatists. In an argument that is typically polemical of his work Scott Aiken argues forcefully that we pay attention to the basic opposition between pragmatism and phenomenology (2006). In short, the argument is that pragmatism's naturalism is inconsistent with the tradition of anti-naturalism we find in phenomenology. To expand on this point, if we define pragmatists by their belief in both naturalism *and* humanism, and if we assert that phenomenologists believe humanism and naturalism to be incompatible doctrines, then there is a contradiction within pragmatism. While

phenomenologists agree with the broad form of humanism that is part of pragmatism, they are less enchanted with the epistemic and ontological naturalism of pragmatism. Thus, Aiken argues, it is time for pragmatists to decide where they stand: either they turn away from the naturalism that is central to pragmatism (essentially giving up on pragmatism) or they reject the anti-naturalistic tradition of phenomenology.

To address Aiken's argument, whether we agree with his position or not, his lucid description of the commitments of pragmatists and phenomenologists is helpful in that it forces us to confront the areas of dissonance between the two disciplines. Of course, there have been responses to Aiken, and it is clear that despite the nuance within Aiken's argument he presents narrow definitions of both pragmatism and phenomenology and these definitions can easily be contested. Aiken follows the lead of Joseph Margolis (2002) in arguing that we can identify a Fregean tradition of pragmatism made up the following figures: Wilfred Sellers, Richard Rorty, John McDowell, and Robert Brandom. Aiken agrees with Margolis that these theorists are not pragmatists at all, because if we see John Dewey and his Darwinian naturalism as being the paradigm figure of pragmatism, then we must acknowledge that none of these characters support Dewey's Darwinian brand of naturalism. Yet there are ways in which Rorty does embrace a type of Darwinian naturalism and so the issue is complicated further.

On this note, there are questions about what can be meant by "naturalism". Bourgeois and Rosenthal (from here on "B and R") (1979) have addressed this issue, noting that while Husserl and Merleau-Ponty share the same disdain for naturalistic science, within Merleau-Ponty's work there is ambiguity about his stance toward different types of naturalisms. B and R argue that there are two meanings for the term naturalism: one is associated with a reductive, modernistic appeal to Newtonian science, while the second type of naturalism is contemporary in its

awareness of the demise of such a worldview and its replacement with a nuanced postmodern mode of naturalism (1979, 329). Aiken is aware of this and maintains his argument nonetheless.

The general impulse that drives Bourgeois and Rosenthal's argument is the same that drives my argument, as they aim to show that phenomenology can be enriched by pragmatism if it adopts the pragmatic understanding of naturalism. Pragmatism has often been stereotyped as a reductive program – its brand of naturalism misunderstood for what is implied. When Dewey describes man as being a part of nature this is taken to mean that we can understand man through the same scientific process that we apply to nature. All of man's behaviour can be reduced to causal mechanisms. Yet the account of nature we find in Dewey is distinct from this interpretation, for while it is true that man lives within nature rather than apart from it, we also see that Dewey formulates the man-nature relationship without relying on reductionism or dualistic thinking.

Merleau-Ponty shares with pragmatism the belief that a reductive and mechanistic view of the social world will not suffice, for the meaning and interpretive qualities of experience require a humanistic approach. Yet for B and R, Merleau-Ponty does not reach a conclusive stance on his attitude towards naturalism, and had he taken seriously the insights of pragmatism (in particular those of Dewey towards nature) we would be better positioned to demonstrate how naturalism and humanism are not mutually exclusive systems of thought. B and R interpret Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior* (1963) as follows, when they note that the entire endeavor is "…to arrive at a correlation between nature and consciousness, allowing the "truth of naturalism" to emerge and to be clarified in a broader context" (1979, 330).

The debate over what is meant by "naturalism" and the incompatibility between pragmatism and phenomenology that B and R claim exists can be clarified by considering the

publication of Merleau-Ponty's work on nature that was not available to B and R at the time they

constructed their argument. In *Nature* (2003), Merleau-Ponty develops an understanding of

nature that shares with Dewey's pragmatism an attention to how we are implicated in nature.

Like Dewey, Merleau-Ponty acknowledges the limitations that arise when attempting to

understand nature from a purely empirical or positivistic perspective. We cannot study nature as

something that exists apart from us, for our understanding is compromised if we reify nature as

something that exists above us or in addition to us. In *Nature,* Merleau-Ponty encourages us to

overcome the division between nature and ourselves. "The problematic of philosophy.

Nature:…by examining it, we have retrieved everything, not that everything is nature, but

because everything is or becomes natural for us…There are no substantial differences between

physical Nature, life and mind" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, 212). I have interpreted Merleau-Ponty as

writing in harmony with Dewey with regards to the recommendation of both theorists that we see

nature not as an assortment of different objects but as a series of mutually constitutive

relationships. In accordance with what I argue throughout this chapter, I stress that one of the key

distinctions between a phenomenological account of nature and a pragmatic approach to the topic

is that phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty showed interest in our experience of nature

and sought to comprehend the relationship between experience and nature, while pragmatists like

Dewey explored our experience of nature principally in relation to our use of nature (what we

DO with the world).

  Let us further explore Merleau-Ponty's study of nature. Merleau-Ponty's reason for

investigating the concept of nature was to better understand animality and how the body emerged

from nature (*Nature*, 2003, 208). "Regarding Nature, the concern was to study it as an

ontological leaf – and in particular, regarding life, the concern was to study the unfolding of the

leaf of Nature – regarding the human, the concern is to take him at his point of emergence" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, 208). An experiential, phenomenological approach to investigating our relation to nature can aid us in overcoming the problems with a strictly biological perspective. By becoming aware of how our bodies are touched by the world we can experience how we are linked to nature in a way that is dependent yet not deterministic. In transcending the separation between nature and ourselves we should no longer see ourselves as being constituted by an animal body with the addition of the capacity for reason. We should, instead, see ourselves as emergent – as becoming aware of how our bodies experience nature.

I have interpreted Merleau-Ponty's work on nature as at times being foundational in his belief that nature has a sense of order and meaning that exists independently of our perceptions. At times, he describes how we, through our bodies, orient ourselves towards the meaning that is inherent in nature. "…human being is not animality (in the sense of mechanism) + reason. And this is why we are concerened with the body: *before being reason, humanity is another corporeity*" (my emphasis) (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, 208). I have interpreted the last sentence to mean that there is order and meaning within nature that is more elementary than thought and language. This interpretation is supported by Merleau-Ponty's work in *Signs* (1964) where again, we see evidence of something being essential to the body: "My carnal world has a "pre-given" meaning which I personally do not constitute. My body moves, and a world spreads out, takes shape, and becomes visible and meaningful" (xvii) . And later in Signs: ""Everywhere there are meanings, dimensions and forms in excess of what each "consciousness" could have produced" (20)

Yet in other parts of Merleau-Ponty's work the idea that there is something "given" in nature - something that can be comprehended in a bodily manner not dependent on language, is

tempered by his suggestion that our relationship to nature is expressive – that we engage with what we perceive in nature. Contrasting the movements of our bodies to the movements of an urchin (the latter *is moved* rather than moving itself) Merleau-Ponty comes close to linking perception and action. "The body is not only a thing but also a relation to an Umwelt…The human body is thus a body that moves, and this also means a body that perceives…to make the body appear as a subject of movement and a subject of perception – if that is not verbal, it means: the body as touching-touched, seeing-seen…" (Merleau-Ponty, 2003, 209). It is this thought that I argue should have been elaborated by Merleau-Ponty, and it appears in *Nature* that he was on the path towards solidifying this perspective. This is the desirable approach to nature that we find in Dewey's pragmatism: the idea that our relationship to nature is productive and that we encounter nature through action. Such an approach would better clarify the dialectic I have identified as being implicit in Merleau-Ponty's work on nature: that between an attitude of nature being *assumed*, and an attitude of *transcendence* of nature.

In other articles Bourgeois has written more, searching for "the pragmatic thrust" of phenomenology and arguing that European phenomenology has been challenged by the postmodern, deconstructive environment we now find ourselves in (1996a, 1996b). Phenomenology can renew its strength if it aligns itself with the postmodern themes we find in pragmatism (1996a). Having identified different types of naturalisms, Bourgeois notes that the scientific method described by pragmatists as being pervasive throughout experience should not be rejected by phenomenologists for its feared association with ultimate categories of knowledge. The qualities of empiricism, realism and scientific objectivism that we might associate with the scientific method are similarly refuted by Merleau-Ponty and the classical pragmatists, yet if we come to see the scientific method as being a program that is comfortable

with epistemological uncertainty we are better able to incorporate it into contemporary phenomenology. For the pragmatist, scientific activity is comprised of the "lived experience", much as in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

Bourgeois also makes brief in-roads into the path we are following when he notes that creativity is an essential part of the scientific method (1996a, 123). After describing Dewey's account of the scientific method, noting its experimental and uncertain nature, Bourgeois writes the following: "The elements of creativity, anticipation in terms of possibilities of experience, and fulfillment of anticipation within the activity of the scientist, uncovered by the quasi-phenomenological analysis above, correlate well with the essential features of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception" (Bourgeois, 1996a, 123). This is also evident in Merleau-Ponty's writing on "painting, writing and being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, 184). Here we see a shift in his thought from adhering to a model of experience that emphasizes stimulus and response to a model that shows awareness for how the organism plays an active role in experience.

To conclude this section on the possible conflict between humanism and naturalism, we can say that when we search for compatibility between phenomenology and pragmatism we must first specify which aspects of either tradition are important to us. Clearly, there is significant diversity of thought within both pragmatism and phenomenology. On this note, I have made clear that I favour a definition of pragmatism that is distinct from that chosen by Aiken. While Aiken (2006) and Bourgeois and Rosenthal (1979) stress the feature of *naturalism* in their definitions of pragmatism, I have chosen to emphasize *action,* and it is this characteristic of pragmatism that is evident in how pragmatists theorize experience and distinguishes a pragmatist account of experience from a phenomenological one.

6. __The Body in Phenomenology, Pragmatism and Sociology__

We can observe that the tension between naturalism and humanism that we find in pragmatism manifests itself in discussions of the body and the role that the body plays in experience. Aiken is correct in identifying the strong humanistic bend in Rorty, and Rorty has described himself as aiming to recover humanism from those who label humanism as merely naive and easily corrupted. Yet Rorty's humanism is also matched by his unwillingness to engage in other areas of work. Bruce Wilshire (1997) has written of Rorty's reluctance to write about nature or the body, and it is this deficit in Rorty's work that I seek to remedy here. Importantly, Rorty does write on the pain and humiliation that we suffer, and this seemingly indicates that we are bodily beings. But his conception of the body is rudimentary at best. Perhaps because of his allegiance to the analytic tradition of philosophy early on in his career, he reduces the body to its scientific composition – writing on the "neural states of the brain" to indicate the form of our beliefs. Yet we have seen that the body is capable of experiencing more than pain, and by recasting the division between nature and culture we are better positioned to capture the depth and breadth of our experiences, and how the body mediates between the natural and the social.

We can also see that a dichotomy has been created where experience is reduced to either biological stimuli or discourse. Marianne Janak has observed the difficulties that this creates for us if we wish to make use of the classical pragmatist's project of bridging the divide between what is natural and what is social (2012). We can do as Rorty suggests and treat our encounter with the brute world as non-discursive, unconceptualized content where our acquisition of beliefs is unintelligible to us. Through sensory perception we receive "thin input" – information that is

non-cognitive in its reception. In this case, our interaction with the world can be easily described with reference to neurological processes. We are then left to examine the world of discourse; how we interpret our interaction with the world due to the conceptual schemes we have acquired through our culture. Thus the linguistic turn has created a dividing line between what occurs to us in the realm of nature (our direct exposure to the world and the reception of stimuli), and that which is social (our capacity to acquire language). Had Rorty given more attention to the body in his work he might have been more likely to accept a non-linguistic account of experience where experience was more than stimulus of the senses.

Making use of Dewey's understanding of the unavoidable connection between the "natural" and the "cultural" directly addresses Rorty's tendency to create a dichotomy between experience as biological stimuli and experience as reducible to discourse. While a phenomenological approach to experience sets us on the right path, there are still those linguistic-turn theorists who will be perturbed by the naturalistic emphasis that phenomenologists give to the body. Despite the general anti-naturalistic attitude we find in much phenomenology, phenomenological accounts are inevitably laced with invocations of the naturalness of the body, as I have observed in Merleau-Ponty's account of nature. In order to reconcile this tension we can turn to a Deweyan understanding of nature and our role in it. For Dewey, the nature/culture division is profitably overcome, and I argue that Dewey's treatment of the lived body allows us to further clarify the often presumed dichotomy between that which is natural and that which is social. This might also "open the door" to finding further harmony between phenomenology and pragmatism, for upon a proper understanding of Dewey the phenomenologists might come to see that the naturalism within pragmatism that disturbed them is not as reductionist as they have believed.

The idea of nondiscursive, bodily experience has fallen out of favour due to the influence of the "linguistic turn", but we should avoid the tendency to believe that the latest philosophy is always the best and would do well to recognize the limitations that an overwhelming textualism places on our work and what we have forfeited along the way. Rorty's reluctance to write about the body, experience or bodily experience stems from the fashionable idea that the body is itself discursively produced. A dominant perspective on the body is that it *has* no nondiscursive aspects, that it is a total product of discourse. The shadow of this view is reflected in Rorty's assertion that we are socialized "to the core" – we have no essence that is untouched by culture. This view is also popular among much feminist work on the body where appeals to bodily experience have become suspect for their naïve assumption that the body gives us unmediated access to something "real". In Foucault's work we find that the body has been infiltrated by the disciplinary practices of our society and that there is no escape from the power that the dominant discourses have on us (Foucault, 1991, 1998). Yet despite these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, we can find reason and grounds to reconstruct a nondiscursive type of experience that is inevitably an experience of the body. Despite Foucault's pessimism we can point out that even he engaged in experiments with his body that were both transgressive and pragmatic – he deliberately sought to improve his experience of his body despite its discursive production.

Richard Shusterman has written at length of how the body is notably absent in Rorty's work (1997, 13). Shusterman attributes the general philosophical resistance to discussions of the body as being caused by its apparently nondiscursive nature which contradicts the fashionable ideas of textualism that render that body a total discursive production. Shusterman attempts to revive a notion of nondiscursive somatic experience by revisiting Dewey. This project is believable because Dewey wrote about experience before the linguistic turn and therefore had no

difficulty in recognizing and celebrating nonlinguistic experience. Experiences for Dewey are "had" rather than "known" - there is a noncognitive dimension that is strictly bodily. Dewey describes these forms of bodily experiences as being primitive, we share them with "bird and beast" (Dewey, 1934, 19 as cited in Shusterman, 1997, 31).

In Part One of *Phenomenology of Perception* we see Merleau-Ponty's first description of the importance of the body to his phenomenology (1962). Embodied perception is what allows us to be open and receptive to the world in a manner that is active and aware. In his account of the body we are not reduced to either mind or matter. Instead, Merleau-Ponty writes of incarnate subjectivity, where subjectivity becomes physical: "I am my body". In his later work *The Visible and the Visible* (1968) made further inroads towards the goal we are pursuing - that of articulating a mode of experience that is socially relevant yet potentially non-linguistic. Here Merleau-Ponty moved further away from the traditional philosophical perspective that places the source of knowledge in consciousness and advanced his view that we should consider the primary site of knowing to be the body. The primacy of embodiment became for him an "ontology of the flesh" or, indirect ontology, as he wrote of in the chapter on "Preobjective Being" (1968, 159). In this late work of Merleau-Ponty we see the closest similarity to the pragmatism of Dewey in the sense that Merleau-Ponty is concerned with how we actively cope with our environment. This *coping* is not an existential preoccupation, nor is he concerned with how formal rules and concepts guide our actions. "We see the things themselves, the world is what we see" (Merleau-Ponty, 1959, 3). Our perceptual experience is not contingent on anything abstract. Instead, he emphasizes how the body is able to immediately grasp the gestalt of the situation we are in and skillfully manage it.

Richard Shusterman has contrasted the way the body is treated by Merleau-Ponty to how John Dewey gives attention to the body (2011). For Shusterman, Merleau-Ponty's account of the body is unsatisfactory for how it places the body in the background: it is "silent, structuring, concealed background" (Shusterman, 2011, 207). Of course, Merleau-Ponty gives considerable attention to the body in his work, but Shusterman's point is that there are theoretical and practical benefits to viewing the body's role as one of purposive action and conscious mental activity, and that this interpretation of the body goes against the phenomenological view of the body as unreflective background. Shusterman quotes Merleau-Ponty as follows: "The body...is the place where life hides away from the world, where I retreat from my interest in observing or acting in the world, lose myself in some pleasure or pain…" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 164, as cited in Shusterman, 2011, 207). There is thus a tension within Merleau-Ponty's work where the body is at once treated as the locus of experience, yet also placed in the background. As Hubert Dreyfus observes about Merleau-Ponty: "The background, qua background, must withdraw to do its job" (Dreyfus, 2011, 1).

What Dreyfus is indicating in the latter quote is that there are surely evolutionary reasons why much bodily activity is non-conscious, and why our bodies react instinctively without our having to contemplate our actions. Towards the end of this chapter I will elaborate on this idea through the work of Zdravko Radman who illustrates that much action occurs without a knowing subject (2011) and through Dewey's notion of *habit*. The point of this being to "set the stage" for an explanation of how a pragmatics of action is possible within a postmodern framework that claims "the loss of the subject" and challenges the agency of the subject, as I explain how most action is habitual rather than deliberate.

For now though, the point is to show that although the body is often placed in the background of experience, there are occasions where bringing the body to the forefront of experience and connecting it to deliberate action is useful in theory and practice. Shusterman provides both mundane examples and more socially critical illustrations of how this is possible and desirable (2011, 219). A commonplace example of bringing experiential awareness to the body is in a learned activity such as swimming, where we refine our methods by monitoring how our body performs in a given series of movements. Much about the activity of swimming is habitual and remains in the background most of the time, but sometimes, perhaps in moments of duress, we are able to bring the experience of our body to the forefront and critically examine our habits so as to develop new ones.

A more sociological example of the importance of bringing the body to the forefront of experience is seen in Shusterman's case of the musculature discomfort that we experience while sitting at our work station, and using this bodily experience to critique the unjust social conditions of labour (Shusterman, 2011, 220). A further example is for Shusterman the most poignant as he describes how it is possible to critically scrutinize our "somatic feelings" so that we become aware of how our bodies become tense when we are surrounded with people of a different race or religious group. He notes: "One reason why racial and ethnic enmity are so hard to cure is that its visceral roots lie in the background feelings and habits that do not come to clear, foregrounded consciousness…" (Shusterman, 2011, 220).

Shusterman's complaint that Merleau-Ponty's treatment of the body is marked by an ambiguity that sees the body as both a central point of analysis but also mysteriously concealed and passive in character, has been has been expressed similarly in sociological accounts of the body. In *Body/Embodiment* Dennis Vaskul and Phillip Vannini (2006, 9) have observed that

phenomenological approaches to experiences of embodiment express the relationship between the body and world in two contradictory ways. On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty has shown us that the work of the body is responsible for giving structure to society and the self. Here the body is unquestionably *present* in the world. Yet, on the other hand, we are told by Merleau-Ponty that within our modern world the phenomenological body is *absent.* That is, within contemporary society the body is involved in work activities and leisurely undertakings marked by objectives that exist external to the body. In this sense, the body is relatively unimportant – it is an afterthought to the outcome-oriented pursuits people are involved in. Thus there is conflict where body is magnified in importance, yet also placed in the background and believed to be of only minor significance to a person's sense of self relative to the activities they engage in.

I approve of Shusterman's attempt to generate a form of experience that is antifoundational and applaud the work he does to distinguish between the foundational and the non-discursive in a way that is more lucid than Dewey. The central problem with Shusterman's approach is that he does not engage with the reality of language in a way that is satisfactory. Although Shusterman does on occasion claim that he appreciates the contributions of the linguistic turn and recognizes the need to take its lessons seriously, his conception of bodily experience is ultimately an escape from the power of language rather than an engagement with it. He notes: "Though appreciative of the linguistic turn, I fear its totalizing tendencies and refuse to abandon pragmatism's traditional concern with the somatic and nondiscursive" (1997, 171). Shusterman is right to observe that an ideology of textualism that dominates philosophy has repressed the idea of non-linguistic experience. Within such a context bodily experience is either relegated to the fields of neuroscience and psychology, or the body is described as entirely textual, where all of our social practices are inscribed on the body. Yet I argue that Shusterman

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moves too far away from language, and rather than attempting to "bridge the gap" between language and experience he has chosen to argue for his side of the debate.

Prior to the 1990's there was no sustained focus on the body within sociology. Shilling has described the body as an "absent presence" in sociology – meaning that although the body was "at the very heart of the sociological imagination", the body as an object of analysis received only scattered attention (Shilling, 2003, 17 as cited in Vaskul and Vannini, 2006, 1). This changed in the 1990's, and it is not clear why; Vaskul and Vannini are only able to vaguely identify "social, cultural and political changes" as the instigating factor in a sudden abundance of sociological literature on the body and experiences of embodiment (2006, 1). Within this varied set of literature we cannot discern a singular "sociology of the body", but rather many sociologies of the body. Yet dominant within this genre of scholarship is the symbolic interactionist approach to the body (Synnot, 1993). Perhaps this is only due to a contemporary preference among sociologists to use symbolic interactionism as a theoretical base for their work, but I suspect that it is also because the work of Dewey, Mead (and other pragmatist theorists that have been the main inspiration for symbolic interactionism) have provided accounts of the body that are useful for contemporary sociological projects. This is evident not only in the theoretical approach that sociologists have preferred, but it is also manifest in the types of projects that these theorists have undertaken. Everyday problems make up the bulk of contemporary studies of the body; a sample of common topics might include: fitness (Glassner, 1989), tattooing (Gay and Whittington, 2002), plastic surgery (Pitts, 2003), fashion (Entwistle, 2000) and dance (Ramsey, 1995). As would be expected of studies that have been influenced by the teachings of pragmatism, these authors ground their examination of the body in practical problems, and describe individuals as being active and creative in their engagement with the world – their

subjectivity arising only as a result of the actions they commit. Consciousness and meaning do not exist before experience, but emerge only through interaction. Within these studies of the body, action is the primary analytical focal point.

To summarize this section we can say that a pragmatic theory of the body and its role in experience is able to place the body at the forefront of experience by connecting it to purposeful action. While much bodily activity remains in the background, as is crystalized in a phenomenological account of experience, there are practical and theoretical reasons for bringing the body to the foreground as was argued by Richard Shusterman. In the next two sections that follow I describe the two characteristics of pragmatism that are additive to phenomenological accounts of experience: *meliorism* and a theory of *action*.

What Pragmatism Adds to Phenomenology

A. Experience and Meliorism

> "My candidate for the most distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity is our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people, and in particular to work together so as to improve the future" (Rorty, 1999, xiii)

By bringing attention to the body and its locus for nondiscursive experience it allows us to fulfill the meliorative aim of pragmatism. By turning away from the metaphysical question of "who we are" we are able to direct our attention to the question of who we might become. The idea that the body is a site of "aesthetic refashioning" is common to Dewey. This leads us to recognize the first distinction between pragmatism and phenomenology that is significant for us, as the quality of meliorism that pragmatists ascribe to experience is not found in

phenomenology. For pragmatists experience is not simply something to be described so that it can stand on its own, nor is it something that can be submitted for a psychological explanation of causes. Instead, experiences can continually be *improved* if we become aware of how our habits shape our actions and how our actions shape what we experience.

Colin Koopman (2009) has provided insight into pragmatic meliorism by identifying its two constitutive components, both of which are central to the pragmatist's vision. *Pluralism* and *humanism*, if taken together, provide us with the melioristic thesis that we have the capacity to better ourselves and improve our institutions. Pluralism, as best developed by William James in *A Pluralistic Universe* (1909) and *On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings* (1900) is the notion that our current beliefs and practices do not represent a monopoly on the truth. Much of the conflict that we see in the world is a result of us not being able to imagine the interests of others. When we become mindful of the way that our experience of the world might be unique to us we will come to sympathize with alternative perspectives. In short, pluralism is in contrast to absolutism and monism which presume a view of realty as being coherent and unified, while the pluralistic thesis holds that there is no need to unify a diverse set of views. Putting aside the much-discussed question of whether pragmatism and pluralism are compatible doctrines (see Talisse and Aiken, 2005, Misak, 2005 and Jackman, 2005), in relation to meliorism the important point is that pluralism allows us to see the contingency of our institutions and of ourselves. The way things are at the moment is not necessarily how things will be in the future. Thus, the "piecemeal" approach to solving concrete problems has its origins in a worldview that acknowledges the historical contingency of our lives. The search for timeless truth that characterized ancient Greek philosophy; the belief in fixed and unchanging features of our world, was challenged by the Darwinian insights into change that so strongly influenced the classical

pragmatists. Within the work of Dewey the search for stability and timelessness was subordinated to notions of change and growth.

In addition to pluralism the other component of meliorism is *humanism*, which holds that humans are able to definitively contribute to whatever part of the pluralistic universe they are a part of. Rather than seeing the world as being "ready-made", humanism acknowledges that the world is malleable according to our interests. "If pluralism is the thesis that better futures are possible and humanism the thesis that possibilities are often enough decided by human energies, then meliorism combines the two in asserting that better futures are made real by our effort" (Koopman, 2009, 19).

As I have discussed in relation to the differing meanings of the term "naturalism" within classical pragmatism, the attnetion to evolutionary theory should not be presumed to imply a mechanical interpretation of how change takes place. Rather than finding a deterministic view of change, in Dewey we find a cautious approach that stresses probabilism, fallibilism, and of course, an active, creative approach to solving real world problems. This being the case, the quality of melioristic change that pragmatism offers is connected to how everyday experience is dramatized. The philosophical questions that we ask must arise out of our experience of conflict and disharmony in our lives. The search for intellectual certainty and regularity in nature is itself a product of a particular experience of the world, and it is an experience that we are losing touch with. The questions asked by the ancient Greeks may have seemed to them to be everlasting questions, but we have since begun to ask different questions. The aim of the classical pragmatists is to instigate new questions that have their origins in our lived-experience. Thus, embracing evolutionary theory is not indicative of biological reductionism, for the lesson to be

learned from Darwin is that we are slowly learning to take control over our own evolution by continually improving upon our experiences.

Rosenthal and Bourgeois have distinguished between phenomenology and pragmatism by referring to the varied emphasis on *description* and *explanation* (Rosenthal, 1977, Rosenthal and Bourgeois, 1980). Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty indicate the relevance of the descriptive method while renouncing the need to explain experience. The phenomenology of Husserl was in part a critique of the pretensions of natural science – Husserl strongly doubted that the methods of natural science could be of much value in explaining the richness of human experience. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty's antagonism toward explanation is rooted in the fear that the biological sciences might explain away that which is uniquely human. This might be taken as further evidence of the phenomenologist's belief that naturalism and humanism are incompatible.

The classical pragmatist, on the other hand, believes firmly in the utility of the scientific method as applied to human problems. To be satisfied with mere description of experience is to miss a significant opportunity to improve future experiences. The pragmatist sees as necessary the inquiry into the nature of our experiences, and the principles of the scientific method, although fallible, are the best methods currently available to us. As such, the pragmatist seeks to explain experience, while the phenomenologist, because he believes that apprehending the structures of experience is fundamental relative to explanation, aims only to describe.

We can recall that Rorty sees no use in what he perceives to be the foundational embrace of experience held by phenomenologists, nor does he find any value in the scientific method exercised by the classical pragmatists. For Rorty, the scientific method, if taken to mean an organized and predictable approach to inquiring into the problems of our lives, does not exist. So

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while Rorty might agree with the phenomenologist's disdain for the scientific method he would likely find no fault in the pragmatist's *intentions* to improve our experiences by paying attention to the consequences of what a given experience might be.

In the first chapter I described Rorty's anti-foundationalism and his movement away from metaphysical questions and how this was connected to his negative attitude toward experience. Here we see how the transition away from the traditions of European philosophy and metaphysical problems has a political component to it as well; there is hope that we might alter our experiences. Following Dewey, Rorty saw the professionalization of philosophy as serving the requirements of an unequal society. The dualisms that pervade metaphysical philosophy; the distinction between essence and accident, appearance and reality, substance and property, mind and body, are connected to the division in society between the "thinkers" from the "doers". Thus far philosophy has had a conservative effect on society – the leisure class has been favoured over the productive class. Metaphysics was a tool by which exclusionary customs could be justified by reference to foundations that stood outside of time and space. Once we deny that those foundations exist, and once we shift our attention away from that which is eternal to that which is the future, we are able to turn philosophy into an instrument of change rather than one of conservation.

Rorty's meliorism and his social hope are deliberately vague. His is not the type of rational utopian scheme that is offered by John Rawls, where a rigid, theoretical blueprint is offered for how we can negotiate politics. Rorty's preference for unprincipled experimentation with different ideas to see what might work is consistent with what Dewey and James described. Dewey asked that we identify the situation we find ourselves in and locate the resources within

that situation to improve future experiences. In James' work we find a similar emphasis on undisciplined and improvised movements toward an uncertain future.

As a final note, there is perhaps a dominant sentiment in academe towards hope that interprets optimism as being "too easy" – it is seen as naïve and a result of ignorance. Social hope is only possible in an environment of anti-intellectualism and sentimentalism. So called "serious" thinking is that which deals with the "cold reality" of our existence. Dewey, and perhaps pragmatism in general, is often accused of being blissfully unaware of the potential evils of man, as evidenced in Dewey's faith that social cooperation and what we learn from experience will lead us in the right direction rather than lead us astray. Yet Dewey was witness to two World Wars and the Great Depression, and as Crick as noted: "If Dewey remained hopeful even after witnessing the worst of humanity it is not because he possessed a childlike blindness to the darkness but because he refused to acquiesce to it. That courage is not naïve, it is genuinely radical" (Crick, 2010). Having described the pessimism that pervades throughout our postmodern milieu as a result of being uncertain about whose standards we can use to evaluate progress, we can identify the opposing tendency as being the unbridled optimism that was carried by the scientific enlightenment. A meliorist does not subscribe to the latter paradigm of thought, for pragmatists do not treat progress as inevitable. Of course, meliorism does not treat progress as impossible either. Believing in meliorism allows us to decline both the naive optimism of the enlightenment period and the pessimism of the postmodern period by treating progress only as a possibility. When meliorism is combined with *action* we are able to turn our attention to the different ways we can quicken our progress.

Although I treat meliorism and action as being two separate qualities that give pragmatism a character that is distinct from phenomenology, there are of course connections

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between the possibility of progress and a theory of action. According to William James' conception of meliorism, the possibility of improving our experience of ourselves and our institutions is realized only by our acts. The traditional philosophical hope that contemplation will allow us to make social progress is no longer plausible, for our salvation is not something we can expect to *find*, it is something we must *create*. The difference between *finding* and *making* is the difference between believing that the answer to our current social problems already exists and can be discovered through closer inspection of nature, appeals to logic or a closer following of scripture, and the recognition that future experiences can be improved by creative action. James has rhetorically asked in the final chapter of *Pragmatism*: "Why may our acts not be the actual turning-places and growing-places which they seem to be, of the world, why not the work-shop of being where we catch fact in the making, so that nowhere may the world grow in any other kind of way of than this" (James, 1907, 125).

B. Phenomenology and Action

The existing literature on the phenomenology of action is sparse, and the work that has been done in this field is slanted towards purely scientific explanations of action. In a recent publication Elisabeth Pacherie has made this observation as she laments the lack of clarity as to what a phenomenology of action might entail (2008). Pacherie notes that recent improvements in neuroscientific and psychological methods have contributed to a surge of interest in how the phenomenology of action can be put to empirical investigation. She attempts to consolidate a fragmented set of literature that carries the burden of a struggle to find agreeable definitions of the terms that are being used. To demonstrate how multifaceted the literature is, in relation to the question of what constitutes "action" some of the distinctions that are part of the debate include "awareness of a goal, awareness of an intention to act, awareness of initiation of action, awareness

of movements, sense of activity, sense of mental effort, sense of physical effort, sense of control, experience of authorship, experience of intentionality, experience of purposiveness, experience of freedom, and experience of mental causation" (Pacherie, 2008, 180).

While it might be unrealistic to expect a unified perspective that we can confidently describe as "a phenomenological theory of action", the amount of terminological variation makes it difficult to ascertain in what way these approaches are related and whether they even belong to the same academic project. Answering this question is the task Pacherie has set for herself, and most of what she accomplishes is of little use to us, for as I have noted, this genre of scholarship is indicative of what Rorty warned us of – that contemporary evaluations of experience are projects that are best left for the scientists, and that philosophers have little that they can contribute to the discussion.

Yet it is worth paying attention to three primary questions that Pacherie identifies as being prominent in past and contemporary attempts to construct a phenomenology of action: 1) the question of agency 2) questions over whether by "action" we mean *physical* action or also *mental* action, and 3) the nature of the distinction between "detached" and "immersed" awareness of our action. We will find each of these three themes reflected satisfactorily in the pragmatic theory of action that we are working towards in this chapter, and this being the case, it is useful to begin this section by illuminating the nature of the issues at stake.

First, the question of agency is predictably central to a theory of action. The role of agency as possibly measured by "feelings of agency" or feelings of awareness is a topic that has received much attention and is still plagued by contention. Dominant theorists in this field include Wegner and Wheatley (1999) who have argued that our experience of agency is basically an illusion; the dynamic processes that generate a phenomenology of agency are distinct from the processes

responsible for action, so that our conscious experience is not causally connected to bodily action. This bold claim has been contested and countered by the more moderate assertion that while some of our actions may be linked to conscious experience it is also true that some actions are independent of conscious cognitive processes (Naccache et al. 2005). Although understanding the content of either argument necessitates an understanding of neuropsychology, the latter claim is a pragmatic compromise we might find agreeable. This insight will also be summarized in Hans Joas' theory of *practical intersubjectivity* that I bring forward at the end of this chapter as a means to demonstrate how a pragmatic theory of action can mediate between theories of action that are overzealous in their attention to agency and theories of action that are too deterministic and leave little room for the creative expression of the individual.

Still in relation to questions of agency Pacherie makes another distinction that we should be intrigued by for how it speaks to the bifurcated nature of experience that I wrote of in the introduction. Here I distinguished between the meaning of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, as was first distinguished by Walter Benjamin (1968). Pacherie distinguishes between an "occurrent sense of agency" and a "long-term sense of agency" (2008, 195). The former term refers to the sense of agency that one experiences in the moment that one acts – one feels a sense of control as one prepares for and performs a particular action. This is distinguishable from a "long-term sense of agency" which is a commentary on our experience of having a more general sense of agency separate from any particular act. We experience ourselves as having the potential to act over time, and this is connected to the narratives we construct about our lives; "past actions and projected future actions are given a general coherence and unified through a set of overarching goals, motivations, projects and general lines of conduct" (Pacherie, 2008, 195).

It does not take much imaginative effort to believe that we can superimpose Pacherie's ideal-types of agency onto Walter Benjamin's identification of two types of experience. Recall that *Erlebnis* refers to the quality of immediacy in experience – our experience of being "in the moment". This notion of experience can easily be associated with what Pacherie calls an "occurrent sense of agency". Meanwhile, *Erfahrung* is an experience that is "stretched out over time" where past and present experiences are synthesized into a coherent narrative. This mode of experience is likely associated with Pacherie's "long-term sense of agency" – the characteristics of which I have already described.

The second theme that Pacherie identifies in phenomenological approaches to action is that of a distinction between physical and mental actions. The difference between these two types of actions is that physical actions are associated with causal effects that are produced by the body in the world, while mental actions do not have such external effects. For Pacherie, most phenomenological literature on action privileges the view that action is only associated with the body. I will show that the classical pragmatist approach to this issue is to blur the distinction between the body and the mind, and question the associated dichotomy between knowing and doing.

The final theme that Pacherie identifies is between "detached" and "immersed" awareness. As might be expected, immersed awareness refers to an experience that is non-reflective – it is the sort of experience one has when one is completely engaged in an action. By contrast, detached awareness is a form of experience that involves reflective consciousness – the individual "mentally steps back and observes himself acting or introspects what he is doing" (Pacherie, 2006, 195). This understanding of the how action involves both detached and immersed awareness resonates with Dewey's idea that most action is habitual and that only when our actions are frustrated do we

become conscious of our experience and are able to reshape our habits in a new and productive way.

Having examined the most recent literature on the phenomenology of action we might conclude that much of the literature is reductive towards a discussion of the latest advancements in neuroscience and psychology and that we should cast such literature aside for being asocial and beyond the boundaries of sociology or philosophy. Yet we might still come to better understand the problems at hand by examining how they have been articulated in the sciences. Here I have tried here to elucidate how phenomenological themes of action might be similarly imagined by a pragmatic theory of action and experience.

I will argue that generally, while phenomenology acknowledges the agency of the subject who experiences it does not do enough to specify how experience is connected to action. This is truer of the earlier phenomenology of Husserl then it is of the later work of Merleau-Ponty, as much of what Merleau-Ponty wrote was a reaction against the strict ontological position of Husserl (Rosenthal and Bourgeois, 1980, 188). While Husserl locates "being" in "knowing", the pragmatist (whether classical pragmatist or neo-pragmatist) finds no use in such a formulation. Ontological issues are put aside and there is no need to locate being in a form of transcendental consciousness. Instead experience is conceived as an *activity,* where the ontological context emerges and becomes known through action. Experience is not made meaningful by language, theory, or by the right combination of neural input, it is made meaningful by the activities we undertake. The primary "input" of experience is found not in objects, but in situations.

1. <u>Max Scheler</u>

As I have described at the outset of this chapter in my discussion on James' likely influence on Husserl, general pragmatic themes have influenced the direction of

phenomenological inquiry. This is also true of the theme of action, as the pragmatic respect for action has made its way into Max Scheler's phenomenology. I have found this is most evident in Scheler's *The Nature of Sympathy* (1954) and *Problems of a Sociology of Knowledge* (1980). Kenneth Stikker (1980, 2009) has perhaps done the most to trace the manner in which Scheler developed his sociological theories of knowledge with reference to pragmatism. In Scheler we find a phenomenologist who has incorporated precisely the aspects of pragmatism that are important to us for the project at hand. As such, there is little that separates Scheler's views on action from those of Dewey and James. Scheler's views on knowledge are derived from pragmatism, as he sees that knowledge "neither precedes our experience of things (ideae ante res), as in Platonic idealism, nor follows from experience in an empirical correspondence with an objective world (ideae post res)" (Kellog, 2012, 117). As made clear by Stikker (2009) and affirmed by Kellog (2012), Scheler took his impulse from Dewey and James in describing knowledge as being intrinsically connected to action.

Manfred Frings (1996) is the authoritative scholar on the thought of Scheler, and has written at length on how Scheler's phenomenology diverges from "mainstream" phenomenology. I have highlighted the theory of intentionality as being fundamental to most phenomenological insight, and Frings identifies how Scheler problematizes this notion. Recall that Husserl had claimed that consciousness could not be apart from perception. The Kantian notion of cognition involving a mind that perceived and an object of perception was refuted by Husserl in favour of the idea that consciousness and perception occurred simultaneously. Scheler offers a dramatic re-interpretation of this scheme by boldly claiming that there is no subject that perceives. As noted by Stephan Schneck, "Scheler's contention is not only that persons are not objects; they are also not subjects" (2002, 4). This insight of overcoming the dualism between

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subject and object, is derived from the pragmatist tradition and is linked to a particular conception of action and a particular epistemology. While Husserl pursued phenomenological inquiry in the hope of finding epistemological certainty, the acquisition of knowledge was unimportant to Scheler (Frings, 1996, 33). *Knowing* was not important to Scheler, but *acting* was key. To suggest that there is no object or subject is to suggest that a person is constituted by a unity of acts. Consciousness, then, is preceded by action, so that it is not the subject that acts, because what we normally imagine subjectivity to be is replaced by a unity of acts.

On the topic of intersubjectivity, Scheler, upon receiving Husserl's attempt to understand the nature of the problem, offered an alternative schema. In explaining how we could recognize the experiences of others without having direct access to their minds Husserl's attempt to develop a theory based on empathy was unsatisfactory to Scheler. Husserl's formulation depended on a process of deduction whereby we come to understand "the other" by projecting our experiences onto others. In the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl clearly states that the only thing that is "given" in experience is the physical presence of the other. In other words, Husserl preserves Descarte's distinction between the body and the mind by claiming that we can only encounter other people's bodies and not their minds, and that this requires us to make a deductive leap in which we recognize that the bodies of others are much like our own and must therefore function as the physical store of consciousness.

Scheler's recommendation was that we see how it is not simply the body that is "given" in our interrelations, but that we can better account for the intersubjective nature of life by observing that we encounter each other as fully formed persons with emotions rather than merely encountering the physical body of others. In *The Nature of Sympathy* (1954, 33) Scheler comments that Husserl may have been right to describe our bodily consciousness as being ours

alone, but Scheler adds that our way of interacting with others is based on a communal spirit that is endowed with shared feelings. We are not required to make a deductive determination in order to recognize the consciousness of others, and as such, Husserl's notion of projective empathy was not a necessary step, for we have other means by which to grasp the meaning in situations that are outside of our immediate experience.

Despite Scheler's apparent improvement of Husserl's understanding of intersubjectivity, we should not be so quick to congratulate Scheler for having resolved the issue "once and for all". Scheler's ideas on sympathy are in many ways as enigmatic as Husserl's description of empathy. It is of course true that we are able to recognize others as having experiences similar to our own, and that we are able to sympathize with others despite not having access to their minds, but how this is possible is not clear. In *The Nature of Sympathy* Scheler does not seem willing to stray far enough from the most basic phenomenological thesis that claims that we have access to reality through experience. He still believes that there is something *real* that grounds our experience and that we are able to sympathize with others because reality imposes itself on us and forces a consensus view. Although Scheler is aided by the pragmatist attention to action when he describes the individual as a "unity of acts", one is still left with the feeling that the general problem of intersubjectivity persists. To explain further, Scheler does well to shift our attention away from questions of epistemology when he observes that the problem of intersubjectivity is not about *knowledge* and whether we perceive the world accurately. Instead, intersubjectivity is about how we *feel*, and that feelings and emotions are not matters of perception. Yet how we feel and what emotions we hold is still an individualized affair and we are still not certain how the final product of our experience can have an intersubjective character.

2. **Alfred Schutz**

Aside from the work of Max Scheler, within "pure" phenomenology the closest we come to the theory of action we are looking for is in Alfred Schutz's appropriation of Weber's theory of action. Yet the formulation we are offered here is limited by its narrow conception of action; conduct is only considered to be action in specific circumstances – in cases where the individual attaches meaning onto the action that gives the act direction. Under such a schema action is only worth considering where it is *meaningful action*, rather than action in general. This being the case, the task is now to specify precisely *why phenomenology has lacked a proper theory of action*, and by examining the work of Alfred Schutz I emphasize the phenomenological treatment of intersubjectivity as being key to the inadequate conception of action that we find.

A dominant interpretation of Alfred Schutz is that he aimed to synthesize the work of Husserl and Weber. For Schutz, the shortcoming of Husserl's work was in Husserl's inability to overcome "the problem of intersubjectivity" (Schutz, 1966, 58). This was partly due to Husserl's inadequate understanding of sociology and the nuances of social relations and social groups. While Husserl had approached the problem of intersubjectivity as a philosophical problem of consciousness, Schutz began his investigation on a different note; he conceptualized intersubjectivity as a phenomenon that was socially constituted (Ferguson, 2006, 91). Our "natural attitude", our propensity to observe a reality external to us as something that is simply "given", is socially constructed. This being the case, transcendental phenomenology had produced an investigation into the problem of intersubjectivity that was superfluous. There was no need to engage in a transcendental reduction of intersubjectivity where the "transcendental ego" is set apart from social relations. The point was not to give a sociological treatment to the

problem, for the point was that within a sociological framework the problem of intersubjectivity did not arise as urgently. "Society and social action were both the precondition for, and the consequence of, the ever renewed positing of the natural attitude itself" (Ferguson, 2006, 92).

The challenge for Schutz was to explain how our "natural attitude" was consistently reproduced; how is it that we continually perceive the structure of society as being an intersubjective reality that is "given". The remedy applied by Schutz came in the form of Weber and his conception of subjective meaning as being constituent of social action. We pursue our interests through action, and it is through our interactions that we employ ready-made meanings so that the problem of intersubjectivity (in terms of our belief in the natural attitude) is solved when we come to see that the reality that appears as external to our private experiences is composed of shared meanings. Our apparently subjective act of perception is in fact from the beginning constituted by a world of culture. In sum, our experience of the world may be of a singular reality that is "given", but the unity that we experience is a result of our everyday actions, and there is no hope of penetrating through this appearance to reality. The reality that we perceive is not founded on anything other than itself.

Schutz's effort has drawn a noteworthy critical response from Joachim Renn who claims that Schutz was unable to find an agreeable synthesis between the phenomenological strand of his work and a pragmatic strand that was also present (2006). For Renn, phenomenology describes a version of the self that is separate from others – it is an egological scheme where consciousness is a private affair. The self is withdrawn from its environment. As summarized nicely by Michael Barber "Gaps between separated consciousnesses block synchronization and access to others, and objective symbol schemes, absorbed within the egological outlook, cannot bridge these gaps" (Barber, 2006, 1). While Schutz makes an effort to address the complexities

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of intersubjectivity, an adequate and consistent view of the social world in experience is missing.

Barber notes that when Schutz (1966, 58) comments on Husserl's *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* (1960, 91) Schutz affirms that what we experience of the world is not a private affair, we experience an intersubjective reality that can be accessed by all. Stated differently, there is no ontologically separate sphere that contains our private reality of experience, for the reality of experience is housed in the everyday events that are shared. Yet Schutz tempers his enthusiasm for the social reality of experience by preserving a space for that which is purely subjective. The objectivism of social reality – the conditions that are shared, live in an awkward relation to the inner self. While Rorty was known for saying that we are socialized "to the core", in Schutz we find a more hesitant approach where some aspect of the core is left untouched by social relations. "It is as though Schutz conceived intersubjective influence in terms of "the rigid intrusion of social convention into the innermost self-relation of the interpreting subject," leaving the ego a passive resonator of conventional intersubjective sense" (Barber, 2006, 3). In sum, Schutz admires Husserl's "transcendental consciousness", yet refuses to believe that intersubjectivity is simply an offshoot of subjectivity.

Joachim Renn expands on his critique by observing that in relation to the confused nature of subjectivity and intersubjectivity Schutz adopts a model of communication between subjects that is both phenomenological and pragmatic, but that the pragmatic elements of communication are not suitably developed. The first method of communication that Renn identifies in Schutz's work is that of synchronization, and here Schutz demonstrates the idea with the example of two people growing old together (1962:317). Their experience of an event (Schutz's example is the flight of a bird) is simultaneous – the two streams of consciousness are in-line with each other – in an empirical and naturalistic way. Yet, for Renn there is a problem in the dissonance between

the perception of outer time and inner time, as each individual constructs inner time differently. This forms a barrier to communication between individuals, even when consciousness of outer time is the same in terms of an "outward sequence of observable action" (Barber, 2007, 271). As such, the problem with the synchronization argument has to do with the limited access that each subject has to the other's experience.

Schutz is aware of this problem and accounts for it by referring to Husserl's concept of appresentation (Schutz, 1962, 323). Here, symbolic structures form a type of pregiven intersubjectivity. While we may be enclosed in a stream of consciousness that is unique to us, there is a way out, and this is found by observing how prior to our conscious perception signs are associated with objects. What is "given" in our experience is a type of intersubjective arrangement of symbols and signs.

This blending of symbolic interactionism with phenomenology might be intuitive for sociologists, yet for Renn there is still much to be desired. Renn claims that Schutz is unable to grasp a "genuine interactive symbol generalization" (Renn, 2006, 10). Such a model would give proper attention to the "regularity of cooperative action as the basis of context-transcending symbolization" (Renn, 2006, 10).

Renn's point is not without merit, yet needs to be modified when we consider the distinction Schutz makes between "typifications" and "interpretations" – a distinction that one can assume is somehow related to the distinction Schutz makes between Umwelt and Mitwelt. I have said that Schutz was influenced by Weber, and in Schutz's understanding of typification we find further evidence of this. Schutz's discussions on typification are widespread in his work and seem to refer to a broad range phenomena connected to knowledge and experience. Stated plainly, typifications are what mediate how we apprehend the world – our immediate experiences

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are structured according to existing ideal types (Schutz, 1962, 274). To elaborate further we can utilize Schutz's distinction between Umwelt and Mitwelt (1970, 11), and we can also see here how Schutz distinguishes his work from Weber. Umwelt refers to how we experience people directly - we encounter individuals as they are, in all their complexity. By describing the Mitwelt Schutz leads us to see how we experience people as types. For instance, we encounter the man serving us coffee as being the barista – his character confronts us in an ideal form. I have noted that Schutz's contribution to phenomenology is to steer the conversation away from a Husserlian emphasis on transcendence and subjectivity and towards a phenomenological sociology where the social aspects of our experience are appropriately acknowledged (this point has been made clearly by Wanderer, 2005, 127). This being the case, it stands to reason then that developing a nuanced understanding of typification was necessary in integrating the social characteristics of our experience into a theory. This is particularly true where the Umwelt is concerned, as these types of direct social encounters ask us to consider the intersubjective nature of experience. Yet despite Schutz's engagement with these problems we still find that a complete theory of action is missing in his work.

The model of action that we desire and that Schutz leaves unfulfilled is of course precisely the model of action we find in Dewey and Mead, and Renn's suggestion has been that we can improve Schutz's sociological phenomenology by adopting some pragmatic themes. While Husserl's concept of appresentation carries elements of pragmatism that Schutz adopted, the fault is that Schutz carried a mistaken or rudimentary conception of pragmatism. Schutz relied too much on Mead's pragmatism – taking Mead's behavioristic version of pragmatism as representative of all that pragmatism had to offer. As recounted by Barber, Renn's suggestion is

that we substitute Schutz's behavioristic pragmatism with a type of pragmatism that makes use

of the theories of action that are unique to pragmatism (Barber, 2207, 272).

> "Rules of action and speaking cannot be reduced to cognitive concepts that actors and speakers "have in mind", although insofar as Schutz did envision typifications as including role-taking, he did make overtures toward a pragmatic understanding of action. Schutz, though, treats neither the problem of social order nor the conditions of the internalization of meaning that for pragmatists play a central role in the social constitution of the sense-constituting subject itself" (Barber, 2007, 272).

3. **A Summary of Action within Phenomenology**

To summarize, I have argued that in recovering a concept of experience that avoids

Rorty's fear of foundationalism we would do well to turn to the concept of intersubjectivity and

interrogate what we mean when we use this term. I observed the "problem of intersubjectivity"

as being the problem of locating subjectivity and using it as a starting point for our methodology

while simultaneously being cognizant of the pressure to develop a social science that is properly

objective. For Rorty experience is unimportant and should not be the starting point of any

analysis because the attempt to locate the subject is futile. We are socialized "to the core", and

we have no essence that we can latch onto. Since there is no "self" that exists outside of the

boundaries of culture, when we inquire into the experiences of the subject we will find nothing

other than a reflection of the hegemonic practices of our time. For Rorty, the boundaries of

culture are marked by the language games we play; we cannot escape the vocabulary that we

inherit, and our experience of the world is entirely an experience of language. Rorty's solution to

the problem of intersubjectivity is to deny the existence of the subject.

As I traced the chronology of phenomenologists and pragmatists who valued the concept

of experience I attempted to show that as pragmatic themes were adopted by Alfred Schutz and

Max Scheler we also gained a more nuanced understanding of the problem of intersubjectivity

and how this problem could be understood. Beginning with Husserl, often called the founder of

European phenomenology, we saw an ontological position that promised the existence of a "real

world" accessible through perception and understandable through the methods of science. I

described Husserl's struggles with the problem of intersubjectivity as similar to those of William

James: both thinkers showed a tendency to oscillate uncomfortably between an egological

understanding of the self where experiences are individualized in a "stream of consciousness"

unique to each person, and a view that shows our experiences to be inevitably social events. The

first view presupposes the need for metaphysics – experiences can be the foundation to

knowledge. The second perspective places this project in doubt, for our experience of the world

is no longer direct – it is mediated by culture.

I described Merleau-Ponty as writing in reaction to the ontological position of Husserl,

and I described Alfred Schutz as attempting to mitigate the ontological and epistemological

implications of Husserl by synthesizing his thought with Max Weber's theory of rational action.

Prior to this I noted that it is in Max Scheler that we find the clearest strands of a pragmatic

theory of action, and also a tentative solution to the problem of intersubjectivity. Scheler

challenges the status of perception as the starting point of our methodology, and in its place he

identifies action as being the dominant theme. As with Rorty, there is no attempt by Scheler to

locate subjectivity, for questions of subjectivity and objectivity have been replaced with

questions about situations, and about actions. Similar again to Rorty is Scheler's insistence that

we need not pursue epistemology, for the importance of experience is not connected to theories

of knowledge. And yet, unlike Rorty, Scheler still takes experience seriously. Concern about

action does not exclude concern about experience; it is only that our point of departure has

shifted. Our experiences are not the result of linguistic schemes, but an outcome of the action we

undertake. The point has been to exhibit what distinguishes a pragmatist narrative about experience from a phenomenological account, and I have directed our attention to the role that action plays in experience. While the phenomenology of Husserl or Schutz treats action as something that can be added to experience, the pragmatist sees experiences to be entirely constituted by action – without action there is no experience.

C.<u>Action and Experience in Classical Pragmatism</u>

> "Yes, the world is not so much found as it is made, Homo faber. Philosophy has been too preoccupied with the eyes, with vision. Return the hands to philosophy; to touch is to be touched" (John McDermott, 1976)

For pragmatists, to understand our perceptions is to be involved in an activity, for action is not simply something that can be added to experience, it is necessarily constitutive of experience. Thus, when Rorty tells us that linguistic concepts are key to experience – that our experiences of the world must be synthesized by concepts in order to be understood – what is missing is recognition that concepts are not simply beliefs or ideas, they are active applications. Concepts are ways of intervening in the world, and to hold a particular paradigm of thought is to be committed to a practical orientation to the world. Hans Joas (1993, 1997) is a suitable guide for learning how we might apply this idea, and I will draw on his work in the final chapter as I urge us to consider not just the role of action, but the significance of creativity within action in relation to experience. In connecting the work of Mead to the early pragmatists Hans Joas has developed a theory of action that is more useful to us than Weber's theory of rational action for the emphasis Joas gives to intersubjectivity. In describing Mead's work in *Mind, Self and Society* Joas coins the term "practical intersubjectivity" which refers to a theoretical compromise between a theory of action that is overly individualistic and a theory that is overweight in its

emphasis on social structures (Joas, 1980, 13). There are structural constraints to our actions, this is certain, yet we also have agency – we have the potential to act creatively. In specifying the *practical* nature of intersubjectivity Joas is committing himself to a philosophy of praxis. We do not act in isolation from each other, and when we encounter each other we do so in a practical way. Our action is geared towards accomplishing a given task and we rely on each other to meet the desired ends.

This emphasis on the quality of action within experience is of course connected to the broader pragmatist agenda, and in James' conception of truth we find the same commitments. In his well-known dictum "what's the difference that a difference makes?" James stresses the *utility* of our truth claims. An idea is true if it satisfies a want, and the human mind is able to store up theoretical truths not in order to admire their intellectual goodness, but to apply them in action (1909b, 82). Our experience of the consequence of these actions will be the test of their utility. The truth then, is connected to action in the sense that truth is something that happens to an idea – there is an action or event that occurs that makes something true. The truth is not a fixed quality of an idea, for an idea can only become true when put into action. While there are variations of this idea within different genres of pragmatism, the basic proposition that the truth is *made* rather than *found* is echoed in most work, including Rorty's.

As noted by Mathur, in select pieces of James' work such as "The Experience of Activity" (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*), "Does Consciousness Exist" (*Essays in Radical Empiricism*), and *A Pluralistic Universe,* we are given a description of the mind and its relationship to the world that emphasizes activity (Mathur, 1971, 33). James tells us that we know the mind not by its substance (what it is composed of), but that we know the mind by the activities it engages in; we know the mind by what it *does*. While we may find it difficult to

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describe the essence of mind or consciousness, we find more success in describing the concrete activities that constitute the mind. As I have already described at length, James saw the mind not as a passive recipient of experience, but as an active agent that selects its target. The activities of the mind are an outcome of selective interests, for we are driven by practical goals that we hope to achieve. "The organism with its selective interests is in dynamic interaction with the environment. It shows care, concern, develops foresight, makes effort and suffers frustration or feels satisfaction; it 'knows', 'believes' etc., etc." (Mathur, 1971, 35).

1. **Dewey on Action**

Following Joas' guidance, when we examine Dewey's account of experience we are able to locate his awareness of the relationship between structure and agency that informs how we theorize experience. Dewey tells us that while it may seem that there are an infinite number of possible actions that any being can undertake, there are clear limitations. Dewey's illustration of the constraints on our action carries a naturalistic tone; he describes how our fingers are limited in their range of movements by their physical composition, and as such, our encounter with the world is already constrained. In *Art and Experience* (1929) we find Dewey's description of the artistic process as one that is creative, but not free from structural limitations. The materials that are available for use by the artist limit the creative potential. When we come to see the structural limitations of our actions as being limitations on what we are actually able to *do,* then the notion of pure or direct experience is replaced by a view of experience as being reconstructive. We need not define a structure by what it *is*, but by what it allows. The structures of our experience can be defined by "what they can do and what can be done with them" (Dewey, 1920, 115).

There has been some contemporary work that has been done on the mind that speaks to how Dewey situates the individual in relation to the environment, and the degree to which action is intentional. In an edited book of essays titled *Knowing without Thinking: Mind, Action, Cognition, and the Phenomenon of the Background* (2011) Zdravko Radman convinces us that most actions do not originate in deliberation, but that there is a "background environment" that is made up of the "non-conscious, implicit, non-conceptual, skilled and automatic" (Radman, 2011, x). This realization challenges most modern studies in the philosophy of mind that are guilty of "conceptual chauvinism" and marked by a hegemony of thought where reason and intellect are placed at the foreground of mental activity. Yet if much of our mental activity is non-conscious, then how are we to explain how we are able to effortlessly participate in the world and mold ourselves into situations? The answer for Radman and his contributors is that it is due to the "background of the mind" – we are able to *know without thinking*. We can imagine that Dewey would find this convincing for how it harmonizes with his notion of *habit* and how we are governed by routine action as much as contemplative action. As noted by Radman: "We are capacitated to do more than we explicitly know; and what we know is a lot more than is processed in consciousness, language, and rational deliberation. It is an automatic and skilled competence – the know-how acquired by the body" (2011, xi).

Here we can expand on Dewey's notion of habit and the importance it has for understanding how action can be non-conceptual and pre-linguistic. The aim is not to describe John Dewey as being a phenomenologist in disguise, or to claim Dewey as being a "founding father" of phenomenology, for Dewey's work has already been given enough labels. Yet we can re-describe Dewey's concept of habit as being indicative of a type of experience that is committed to action while also observing the pre-linguistic and non-conscious qualities of habits.

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Victor Kestenbaum (1977) has used the term "pre-objective intentionality" to refer to Dewey's notion of experience, and reminds us that for Dewey, habits are not experienced by the organism as conscious phenomena. Instead, "habits operate on a level of experience which precedes any sort of deliberate, critical positing of distinct objects of reflection or consciousness" (Kestenbaum, 1977, 4).

For Kestenbaum, the notion of habit is central to Dewey's theory of experience, although the two areas of *habit* and *experience* are often treated separately by Deweyan scholars. The concept of habit captures the insight that our being cannot be reduced to what it knows – that there is more to what we experience than the accumulation of knowledge. Meaning exists in experience before these meanings can be known. This is true of everyday experiences, where our acquired habits effortlessly guide our actions, and it is also true in less ordinary experiences, such as in our experience of scientific paradigms. Kestenbaum briefly illustrates this by referring to Thomas Kuhn's work – noting that paradigms of thought are influential to us not because we know and follow a series of rules, but because paradigms form collective habits and create an "atmosphere of tacit meaning" (Kestenbaum, 1977, 7).

In *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) Dewey tells us that we are constituted by our habits, and that our *character* can be seen as the interpenetration of habits. We are constituted by what we do, and how we act is a result of our previous interactions with our environment, so that the objective environment is incorporated into who we are. "All habits are demands for certain kinds of activity; and they constitute the self" (Dewey, 1922, 125). For most of our lives we are unaware of our habits, but when they are interrupted there is an opportunity for transformation. This was the point I observed earlier in relation to the body, where consciously cultivating our bodily experience allows for improvements in our future experiences. Elena Cuffari (2011) and

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Shannon Sullivan (2001) have both utilized Dewey's notion of habit to describe how we are able to transform our gendered identities, making good of Dewey's insistence that self-growth and social justice can be accomplished by positive habit formation. When our habits encounter resistance we have an experience of discomfort that allows us to cultivate awareness and restructure our habits. This does not mean we are completely free to act how we please, for our habits reflect our previous experiences and provide us with the resources for future experiences (Kestenbaum, 1977, 3). Yet as I have repeated ad nauseum, we are relying on a pragmatist theory of action based on Hans Joas' concept of practical intersubjectivity, and such a formulation takes into consideration both the agency of the subject and the manner in which behaviour is coerced by environmental/cultural forces. On this note, Cuffari seems to observe that Dewey's concept of habit is consistent with this view of action when she praises Dewey by observing that "habit uniquely holds together the ambiguities of freedom and determinism, transcendence and immanence, and stability and plasticity (Cuffari, 2001, 535).

Thus, Dewey's attention to the creative component of action should not be taken to imply that we are able to arbitrarily decide what meaning our experiences will have to us. We are not able to freely direct our experiences towards whatever desired ends we may have imagined. But to say that experience is active, purposeful, and developmental is to say that we are able to have an awareness that allows us to sense certain tendencies within our experience, and willfully nurture these tendencies so as to heighten our awareness and deepen our experience.

To quote Dewey again at length:

> "Experience becomes an affair primarily of doing. The organism does not stand about, Micawber-like, waiting for something to turn up. It does not wait passive or inert for something to impress itself upon it from without….The living creature undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behaviour. This close connection between doing and suffering or undergoing

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forms what we call experience. Disconnected doing and disconnected suffering are neither of them experiences" (Dewey, 86, as cited in Mathur, 1971, 77).

2. <u>**Action and Experience within "Situations"**</u>

The passage with which I ended the previous section carries significance not only for its confirmation of the role of action in experience, but for the distinction that is implied between something that is an object of experience and the situation itself as "given". Having outlined the "theory of intentionality" as being a central tenet of phenomenology, a view that was perhaps first anticipated by William James, in Dewey and Mead's account of experience we find a shift in a slightly different direction. While the theory of intentionality specified that consciousness by itself could not be, that there must always be an object of consciousness, Dewey's interactionist approach denotes the importance of the *situation*. To be clear, Dewey does not forfeit the notion of intentionality, as I showed in the interpretation of Dewey given by Victor Kestenbaum (1977). Yet writing of Dewey's notion of the situation, Mathur notes that the situation is composed of the entire context of objects in the environment, and the events that are experienced by the organism. The situation "is experienced as permeated by an immediate and unique quality" (Mathur, 1971, 77).

In harmony with Dewey, in Mead we also see a clear movement away from an egological account of experience and a move towards understanding the social contours of experience. And further like Dewey, despite Mead's emphasis on the intersubjective, or social character of experience his concern with action does not entirely ignore the subjective, or "inner experiences" of the individual. In seeming conflict to the behaviourism that Mead adheres to he describes the individual as being able to grasp the dynamics of experience from within (Rosenthal, 1999, 62). There is an introspective element to Mead's conception of experience, and in *Mind, Self and*

Society he describes himself as being particularly concerned with the "…inner experiences of the individual – the inner phases of the process or activity" (Mead, 1934, 7 as cited in Rosenthal, 1999, 62).

In Mead's detailed elaboration of "the act" we find clarification and greater insight into how perception and action are intertwined (1936, 3). The object that we perceive emerges out of the act, so that the content of perception is constituted by action. Mead puts aside those theories of perception that emphasize mirroring and representation, or neurological mechanisms of passive reception, and puts forward a model of perception where sensing itself is an active process. Every act that is undertaken by an individual is an act of adaptation to a changing environment, and the mind is not characterized as something that exists in a given state and receives these changing stimuli, instead, the mind is something that emerges out of action and is continuously being reformed.

As told by Mead, "the act" is comprised of four stages: the anticipatory attitude (or impulse), perception, manipulation, and consummation (1936, 3). Here it can be noted that the second stage of perception *follows* the stage of impulse; our perception of objects arises out of the action we are undertaking. Stated even more simply, perception presupposes action. This attention to impulse in Mead's work is likely connected to his behaviourism, yet there are features that distinguish human perception and activity from the activities of animals. Notably, of the four stages of the act, animals lack the second and third stage of *perception* and *manipulation*. The activities of animals are governed by an immediate contact experience which is part of the same stage of consummation. Because there is no stage of perception or manipulation animals do not have the same opportunity to find meaning in their experiences – we do not see the same "emergence of the mind" as we see in humans. Mead's behaviourism is

not one of reductionism where causal analyses are carried out, for his elaboration of the act demonstrates the experimental and uncertain nature of action.

Earlier I wrote of the preferred phenomenological progression of thought marked by an ultimate move away from focus on sensory perception and towards an account of action, and in Mead's analysis of "the act" we find further evidence of how classical pragmatists were responsible for instigating this trend. Unlike most other theories of perception that were dominant at the time, Mead choses to describe perception not with reference to *visual experience*, but by referring to the *physical contact* we experience when we act in the world. The perceptual stage of the act that Mead delineates is modified by the stage of manipulation. Stated more bluntly, the way we perceive objects in the world is dependent on what we might do with them. Our initial impulse allows us to see the different possibilities for how we might use the objects we find in our environment, and these possibilities for action shape our perception.

In his *1914 Lectures in Social Psychology* Mead notes the following:

> "The perceptual world is made up of ends and means. All of the objects are organized by means of that particular act…The percept is a field of activity, with the goal at its centre and other objects as obstacles and means of its attainment. The goal of activity is there as imagery of the result of the act. Perception always involves such a complete field and has behind it an act" (Mead, 1914 [1982], 31).

Through Mead's account of the act we are also able to see how his ontological position is distinguished from the early phenomenological work of Husserl. I described Husserl as committed to the metaphysical program as evidenced by his belief that experience was what connected us to a world outside of our selves. In Mead we find that the self is subsumed within

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the environment so that we are not interested in experience in order to prove the existence of an external world, but instead we are actively immersed in the world. His concern with the *instrumental* character of our beliefs should not be interpreted as a statement regarding knowledge as a technological tool, for as I argue, experience is not simply a knowledge affair. We begin to see this idea expressed in Mead when he describes how the creation of meaning is on ongoing process with little to suggest that we might arrive at a meaning that is "fixed" and independent from the contingencies of a particular situation or act.

The action we undertake is inevitably social in character, to the point where we can comfortably say that all objects of perception are of social origin. This is the case because in considering the original impulse to action and the array of potentiality that is available to us, our perception is inherently driven by symbols. These shared qualities guide our action as we consider not only the social consequences of how we use objects, but we rely on symbols to determine how objects can be used. "The ability of anticipatory role taking, developed in social interrelations, is applied in the emergence of non-social objects. Thus, all objects are originally social objects" (Rosenthal, 1999, 65).

Yet the sociality of our actions and perceptions does not negate individuality entirely, for although we are immersed in an arrangement of structures that constitute each situation, this does not oppose individuation. This is a key insight in Hans Joas' theory of intersubjectivity that he interprets from Mead's work – intersubjectivity is a middle-ground between a theory of action that is overly deterministic and a theory that is optimistically individualized (Joas, 1993). To rephrase the issue, we should rethink the traditional distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. The perspective of the individual is not a pure account of subjectivity, for all perspectives are reflections of the relationship between the organism and the environment.

Instead of distinguishing between objectivity and subjectivity Mead encourages us to distinguish between perceptions that are common and perceptions that are individual. The "objective" is not that which exists external to interpretation, it is merely that which is common.

As noted earlier, in the final chapter of this dissertation I will attempt to articulate a form of experience that is pragmatic in its attention to action and relevant to Rorty for its potential to stand for something more than the passive reflection of the linguistic schemes we inherit. Here I have noted that active participation is key to the character of the situation. Rather than seeing the situation as a static structure, something composed of mere historical stuff, Dewey's treatment of the situation sees constant movement. The relations that compose a situation are always evolving. Of course, in order for melioristic change to occur we must be able to inquire into these situations. In a well-known section of *Experience and Nature* Dewey describes inquiry as being "…the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole" (Dewey, 1925, 37). Thus, action and melioristic change are intrinsically connected.

8.**The Post-structural Challenge to Phenomenology**

> "Once one becomes dubious about the Cartesian notion of privileged access
> to one's own subjectivity, the status of transcendental argumentation becomes
> problematic…For we now see that whether or not there is a 'contribution of
> our subjectivity' to the world we know, we have no special knowledge of
> what that contribution is" (Rorty, 1979b, 80)

In the history of experience, phenomenological accounts of experience were challenged by the emergence of postmodern theories. As I have already described in detail, Richard Rorty is a key figure in this postmodern genre, as are Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray and Joan Scott on the feminist front. The historical narrative of experience I have favoured is that of a slow and

awkward transition away from believing that experience is best understood as an inner phenomenon – an experience of pure subjectivity – and a move towards understanding the intersubjective nature of experience. The arrival of postmodernity posed a problem to phenomenologists whose work often depended upon a stable subject, and for many, postmodernity marked the end of experience entirely – the end of the transition from experience as subjective expression to experience as merely an effect of culture. Phenomenological appeals to "lived experience" are easily deconstructed by feminists keen on observing the effects of a patriarchal culture and how any experience is infused with such ideology, and by "linguistic turn" theorists like Rorty who claim that the subject is discursively produced anyway, regardless of what the specific content of a discourse might be. French post-structural thinkers such as Jean Francois Lyotard dismissed experience as an anachronistic, modernistic idea for precisely the same reason I have given: "It needs a subject first of all, the instance of an "I", someone who speaks in the first-person" (Lyotard, 1981, as cited in Jay, 2005, 361).

Yet despite the postmodern challenge to experience, it would be inaccurate to describe all of postmodern theory as being one homogenous move against experience. Despite the paradoxical challenge of attempting to resuscitate an understanding of experience while simultaneously lamenting the "loss of the subject", such attempts have been made. In the previous chapter I observed how Bourgeois (1996) has attempted to rescue phenomenology from the thrust of postmodernity by aligning phenomenology with the elements of classical pragmatism that harmonize well with the contemporary preference for epistemological uncertainty. Such attempts should not be surprising when we consider the remarkable similarities between classical pragmatism and postmodernism that I identified in the first chapter. Exemplary of another work in this genre is Peter Steeves' *The Things Themselves: Phenomenology and the*

Return to the Everyday (2006). As the title suggests, Steeves takes Husserl's phenomenology and applies it to our mundane experiences of watching television or cooking vegetarian food. As demanded both by classical pragmatists and contemporary postmodern theorists, Steeves uses his account of everyday experience to overcome the distinction between theory and praxis. More generally, the commonly held view that phenomenology ended when post-structuralism began has been refuted by Tilottama Rajan, whose extensive work in *Deconstruction and the Remainders of Phenomenology: Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard* (2002) documents how the legacy of phenomenology is evident in the thoughts of the most important post-structuralists. David Wood (2002) is another writer who finds the connection between phenomenology and post-structuralism evident, as he pays particular attention to Derrida, claiming that we ought to interpret Derrida as being a radical phenomenologist. As an antidote to the closed nature of conceptual reason, Derrida is said to value experience for its openness. Rei Terada's *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (2001) is another notable effort in this area. Terada's contention is that despite Derrida's proclamations against experience, the concept is active and well-defined in his attention to emotions and madness. The area between rational and emotional identities is the place of experience, and in the individual's awareness of the self-differentiation that is produced by mental instability, experience is central. Importantly, this experience does not require an integral subject – it is a type of "nonsubjective experience" (Terada, 2001, 24). While Husserl was committed to the notion of a coherent subject, as evident in his idea of "auto-effectivity", Derrida counters this idea with a concept that Terada refers to as "hetero-effectivity". In short, Husserl's ideal of a self-sufficient subject is confronted by the reality of emotions.

Perhaps most well-known of the post-structural writers is Foucault, and Foucault's writings on experience are centred on the topics of madness, crime, death, suffering and desire. Notably, Foucault's ideas do not carry any serious phenomenological inflection, as he became suspicious of the power and ideology that were concealed within accounts of "lived experience". Although towards the end of his life he would describe his books as "experience books" rather than "knowledge books" (by which he can be interpreted as indicating the possibility of overcoming the dichotomy between language and experience), he was generally skeptical of appeals to experience. Martin Jay has noted that when Foucault wrote in *Madness and Civilization* (1967) that there was a point in madness when "undifferentiated experience" existed, he quickly refuted the primacy he gave to experience in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972): "Generally speaking *Madness and Civilization* accorded far too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too, to what I called an 'experience', thus showing to what extent one was still close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history" (Foucault, 1969, 16, as cited in Jay, 2005, 391).

While phenomenological accounts had promoted the "transcendental subject" as capable of carrying epistemology, Foucault saw experience as being transgressive of the dominant, western epistemological project. The hope of drawing on personal experience in order to slowly gain knowledge of how subjectivity mirrored the objective conditions of the world was undermined by the idea of transgression as the only type of experience. The experience we have is of the *limits* of knowledge, such as in the case of madness or sexual excess. In the ordinary moments of our lives when we act within the norms of society we have no meaningful experience, and it is only when we feel our identity being torn from us that we truly experience.

This is the process of desubjectification, where our sense of coherency in our identity is challenged by our encounter with the limits of knowledge.

There are other post-structural writers who have written on the topic of emotional experience (in particular on madness). In his work *Inner Experience* Georges Bataille embraces the notion of experience for its potential to transcend language, and this move beyond discourse is necessary if we aim to exceed ourselves in a Nietszchian fashion (1943 [1988, 27]). In one of the many footnotes that Martin Jay has written about Bataille's work we find a biographical passage from Pierre Prevost who narrates Bataille's most heightened sense of experience that occurred following the Second World War. Here Bataille is depicted walking through a Parisian street carrying an umbrella: "At a certain moment, he began to laugh. An intense laugh, and let the umbrella drop. It covered his head. He immediately fell into a state of unique entrancement, like none he had ever known…it was that night that he discovered 'inner experience' (Prevost, 1987, 74, as cited in Jay, 2005, 371).

In Bataille's account the self is decentered, and although "inner experience" seems to imply the existence of interior depth, Bataille's concept of experience does not refer to a robust sense of self. Bataille was heavily influenced by Durkheimian sociology and the idea of the collective identity being privileged over the individual identity, and as a result he did not find any attraction to the idea of subjective individuality (Jay, 2005, 370). Experience could not be located in a self that was able to accumulate wisdom and be transformative. As remarked on by Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, the dramatization of experience that Bataille wrote of was a path towards experiencing *community* (2009, 101).

I have already written on the topic of emotional experience in chapter two for the presumed privacy that it holds to the individual, and observed Dewey's insistence that emotional

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experience cannot be a purely private affair since there must always be an object of emotion –

there must be something outside of the individual that is the focus of the emotion. Now in

relation to Derrida's and Bataille's work on madness and the emotional experience found within,

we can further observe that Dewey, although writing before the "deconstruction of the self", has

made comments similar in tone to what Terada identifies in Derrida and what we identify in

Bataille. For Dewey, madness occurs when emotions do not have an object of focus. When we

are not able to make the connection between ourselves and others our emotions cause us to "lash

out" at inopportune moments – perhaps we interpret slights against us where none have occurred.

Recall again Dewey's commentary on the relatively recent emergence of a heightened sense of

individuality and his awareness that too much inward focus is an obsession with dire

consequence for the individual's health. To be sure, the comparison I have drawn between

Dewey and Battaile may appear inapt when we consider that Battaile's writings on madness

referred to a type of mystical experience that was divine while secular and that Bataille did not

write about madness in the medical sense that Dewey did. Yet the point here is that like Dewey,

Bataille's notion of experience was very much real in its political consequences despite

orginating within a self that was unstable. Recall how Dewey believes the individual to be

constituted: while he does not use the phrase "loss of the subject", he anticipates this postmodern

inclination when he writes that "There is no one ready-made self behind activities." Instead, the

individual is composed of "complex, unstable, opposing attitudes, habits and impulses which

gradually come to terms with one another (Dewey, *Human Nature*, 138, as cited in Albrecht,

2012, 201). The point then, is that the postmodern "loss of the subject" should not prevent us

from believing that there is a place for experience within this paradigm.

Yet, as I wrote in the opening chapter on the similarities between classical pragmatism and postmodernism, there is something unsatisfactory and pessimistic about post-structuralism when compared to the hopeful air of pragmatists like John Dewey. This is evident in how experience is characterized by Derrida, Bataille and Foucault, as all seem to describe experience as though it were only something that could be suffered through – it is a test of endurance rather than something that should be sought for. These accounts of experience are similar in tone to the commonly heard and sarcastic suggestion that experience after the linguistic turn amounts to sudden blows to the head, the know-how of newly born infants, and drug-infused states of being. Any other type of experience is overwhelmed by language and culture, or requires an impossibly coherent subject. Thus, while the conceptualization of experience by Derrida, Bataille and Foucault meets the requirement of being consistent with the postmodern "loss of subject", there is very little about this mode of experience that is worth the effort to recover.

To be sure, the transgressive character of the post-structural account of experience does provide a commentary on social change, and like Dewey, Foucault emphasizes the ruptures in everyday experience as being key moments of change. Yet in Foucault we find that there is no positive plan of action that is guiding the creation of new experiences. We find a similar problem in Bataille's account of experience where Bataille routinely uses the metaphor of the wind striking us to explain what experience means (1943 [1988, 13]). Contrasting philosophy to experience Bataille writes that for the former what matters is the message that is carried by the wind, while for the latter it is the wind itself that matters. While experience is disruptive of discourse, nothing is stated within experience, and nothingness cannot be expressed. The metaphor of the wind striking us offers only a description of our passive reception of experience rather than an active engagement with it.

Recall Rorty's characterization of Foucaultian scholarship as being enthused with Foucault's suggestion that "to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system..." (Foucault, 1980, 230). For Dewey, of course, imagination was a primary virtue, and the willingness to imagine a different system that was somehow better was a key source of his "unjustifiable hope". Consider the following two passages: first from Foucault on the possibility that our present-day experiences will lead us to a new social order, and then Rorty's commentary on the impact of Foucault's literature.

> "...it is possible that the rough outline of a future society is supplied by the recent experiences with drugs, sex, communes, other forms of consciousness, and other forms of individuality. If scientific socialism emerged from the Utopias of the nineteenth century, it is possible that a real socialization will emerge, in the twentieth century, from experiences" (Foucault, 1971, 231 as cited in Jay, 2005, 394).

In the quotation above Foucault speaks to the transgressive character of experience, but it is clear that there is no utopian vision. Foucault does not offer us any "cultural heroes" (like Rorty's Walt Whitman) whose texts we can use to inspire us, for such texts can easily be deconstructed and shown to be merely a product of a particular system of knowledge. While Foucault allows that experiences might lead to melioristic social change, his enthusiasm for this possibility is always tempered by the realization that there is no escape from systems of power. Now consider Rorty's reaction to Foucault:

> "Readers of Foucault often come away believing that no shackles have been broken in the past two hundred years: the harsh old chains have merely been replaced with slightly more comfortable ones…We are told over and over again that Derrida has shown meaning to be undecidable, that Lyotard has shown commensuration between oppressed and oppressors to be impossible, and that events such as the Holocaust or the massacre of the original Americans are unrepresentable. Hopelessness has become fashionable on the

left – principled, theorized, philosophical hopelessness" (Rorty, 2010a, 374-387).

The post-structuralist account of experience is also problematic for another reason, and this is the absence of a positive account of *action* within experience. Earlier I specified that aside from the ontological and epistemological assumptions that were made by phenomenologists, another point of weakness was the limited connection that these theorists made to action. I argued that the closest phenomenology came to embracing action was when it came into contact with elements of classical pragmatism, as was the case with Alfred Schutz. Within the post-structural variant of experience that we find in Foucault, Derrida and Bataille, the active component is similarly muted. Within this schema experience is something that happens to us, and we are not able to exert any control over the phenomenon. Such an account of experience carries the same reductive tendency that we find in Rorty when Rorty claims that analysis of experience should be left to neurologists, for experience is nothing more than a matter of interpreting biological stimuli.

Thus, while Martin Jay praises Bataille as having delivered an account of experience that does not require a coherent and integrated subject, our problem, as pragmatists, is that there is no hope of turning Bataille's "inner experience" into a deliberate plan of action. Experience is not a positive move towards a future state of being; it is more of a retreat away from the influence language and culture. Quoting sections from an opening passage in Bataille's *Inner Experience* (1988, 46), Jay admits the following:

> "Inner experience," Bataille insisted, "is the opposite of action. Nothing more. 'Action' is utterly dependent on project". The problem with a project, Bataille explained, is that it is dependent on prior discursive intentions, which define it in advance. As such, it is too much a result of

reflection, of the knowledge that Bataille, deliberately resisting Hegelian totalization, saw as the antithesis of inner experience (Jay, 2005, 375).

9.**Chapter Conclusion**

In Martin Jay's much-praised *Songs of Experience* (2005) a post-structural interpretation of experience makes up the final chapter of his book. While this might be justified for the project that Jay has chosen, the nature of our project requires us to move beyond what post-structuralism can offer so as to identify a form of experience that is pragmatic enough that it will be agreeable to Rorty, yet also sensitive to the implications of Rorty's "linguistic turn". While Rorty would agree with the post-structural "loss of subject" and the idea that we are socialized "all the way down", we can imagine that Rorty's pragmatic sensibilities are offended by the post-structural accounts of experience that do not adequately speak to the quality of melioristic social change that was key to Dewey's pragmatism, or to the quality of action within experience. In this chapter I argued that these are the characteristics of a pragmatist account of experience that distinguish pragmatism from phenomenology, and I have now shown that a similar deficit exists within a post-structural account of experience. If our aim is to develop a meaningful account of experience that Rorty would be persuaded by, an alternative account of experience is needed.

If there is a theory of action that can be found within a post-structural account of experience it is surely one that is biased towards a deterministic outlook rather than one that privileges the individual's ability to act freely without the constraint of culture. I have said that it is incompatible to believe in the Derridean "deconstruction of the self", or what I have interpreted to be the Rortyian parallel of a subject that is "socialized to the core", while also promoting a rugged individualism that finds the locus of action solely in the self. What is needed

then, is a theory of action that is not naïve to the presence of language and culture but yet leaves room for creativity in action. This is the concept of practical intersubjectivity that Hans Joas developed in relation to the classical pragmatists, in particular Mead. As I have noted in the section titled *Action and Experience within Classical Pragmatism*: "The concept of intersubjectivity designates a structure of communicate relations between subjects, a structure that is suited for transcending, on the theoretical plane, the opposition between the individualistic bias in the theory of action and a structural theory that does not recognize subjects of human agency" (Joas, 1980, 13). I suggested then, as I remind us here, that this is the model of action that can be applied to experience, and that the historical transition from thinking of experience as a strictly inner phenomenon to theorizing about the social character of experience culminates in an interpretation of experience that is aware of intersubjectivity.

Joas' notion of practical intersubjectivity is useful to us for another reason, and this is that his theory of action takes into consideration how language structures our experience without resorting to a purely linguistic account of action. Here Joas follows Mead's lead in *Mind, Self and Society* (1959), where Mead recognized that language structured the emergence of the self, but also noted that we experience the world in a very practical way. Language may mediate many of our interactions, but when we encounter each other it is not only through language. If our hope is to overcome Rorty's linguistic idealism while acknowledging the general lessons of the "linguistic turn", and if we aim to give a pragmatic account of experience that emphasizes action, then Joas' notion of practical intersubjectivity provides us with a useful template upon which to build.

With this in mind, the much dramatized notion of the "loss of the subject" does not need to be taken as a "given", nor does it need to lead to a pessimistic description of experience as

something that is forced on us by our culture. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty has

given us guidance for how we can still believe in social progress while simultaneously

acknowledging the contingency of the "self" and the socially constructed nature of our beliefs

(Rorty, 1989). Our recognition of the fragmented nature of the self – our acknowledgement that

we are discursively produced – does not prevent us from committing ourselves to a program of

action. We are able to accept that the self has no essential character – that there is no "core"

quality that makes us human – without resorting to a form of cultural determinism. While I have

questioned Rorty's potential linguistic idealism for his belief that all social change is a result of

playing "language games", Rorty does not allow the post-modern "loss of the subject" to detract

from the agency of the subject and the hope that we are able to be innovative in our social

practices. In short, discussions of "action" and "practice" are not forfeited by the reality of the

"loss of the subject".

Chapter 4: Experience without Foundations

Throughout the chapters I have presented I have referred to two competing strands of pragmatism: The classical pragmatists who prioritized experience and did not incorporate language into their schema, and the neopragmatism of Rorty that shifted the focus entirely onto language while refuting any notion of experience. In characterizing these two conceptions of pragmatism Rorty has argued that our choice is binary between historicist metaphors of breadth and foundational metaphors of depth (Rorty, 2000, 24). The shift Rorty instigated in pragmatism allowed epistemic relations to be described not as foundational, but as historical. To be properly antifoundational requires that we forfeit the concept of experience, for try as we might, we cannot create a historicized concept of experience that has the type of breadth we desire of a philosophy that privileges temporality and historicity. This epistemological barrier between classical pragmatism and neopragmatism appears insurmountable, and Rorty's creation of a dichotomy between experience and language often seems to have no alternative. Our choice is between appealing to experience for the fixed foundation to knowledge that it provides (in which case language functions only as a mirror that represents our experience) or we describe all knowledge as linguistic, in which case experience has no bearing on whether the language we use is internally coherent.

The previous chapter spoke to the different approaches to experience that we find in pragmatism and phenomenology, and to identify the link between this current chapter and the previous one we can observe how proponents of the "linguistic turn" reacted against phenomenology in the same way they reacted to the classical pragmatist's approach to experience. Rorty has commonly cited Hans George Gadamer as being an ally to the "linguistic turn", and Rorty makes considerable use of Gadamer. This is not to suggest that Rorty and

Gadamer share the identical perspective on all matters, for as Wachterhauser (2002) has noted, there is much that separates these two thinkers (principally, there is a divide between Rorty and Gadamer in terms of what they believe are the implications of hermeneutics for the future of philosophy). Yet of importance here is Gadamer's overt criticism of phenomenology, as he targets the foundationalism that he identifies as being most prominent in the work of Edmund Husserl (Gadamer, 1960). For Gadamer, foundationalism was akin to a sickness within phenomenology, and the remedy that would sooth this ailment was to give phenomenology the hermeneutical treatment. Phenomenological experience needed to be made historical, and this task could only be accomplished if our experiences were re-described as entirely linguistic. Both Gadamer and Rorty believed that we cannot overcome foundationalism unless we make the linguistic turn. This is in contrast to what I will describe in this chapter, as I aim to show that there is a way to separate linguisticism from antifoundationalism. Stated differently, there is a way to be antifoundational and still take experience seriously without resorting to linguistic idealism.

As I have spent the preceding two chapters addressing first Rorty's distinction between the public and private sphere and second the pragmatic contribution to phenomenology, it is worthwhile to dedicate the following two paragraphs to reminding the reader of the problem I identified in the opening chapter – that of identifying a concept of experience that is wise to Rorty's linguisticism yet cautious of the epistemological conundrums of treating experience as an unmediated encounter with "the truth of the world". To review the validity of the two options Rorty has presented us with, we can begin by recounting what is problematic about the classical pragmatist's approach to experience before we identify what is troublesome about Rorty's linguistic pragmatism.

Rorty saw Dewey and James' commitment to experience as being wrongly assumptive of the potential for experience to properly relate non-linguistic and linguistic items. Stated differently, for experience to be meaningful we would have to believe that there is something outside of language that makes language accurate – our experience of the world determines whether our language corresponds to reality. Rorty and his most prominent allies (here I identified Donald Davidson, Hans George Gadamer and Wilfrid Sellars as being most significant) refuted this idea, arguing, as Davidson did that "no thing makes sentences and theories true: not experience…not the world, can make a sentence true" (Davidson, 1984, 194), and as Gadamer did that "being that can be understood is language" (Gadamer, 1960, 474 as cited in Rorty, 2000, 24). While Dewey and James stressed the need to overcome foundationalism for the unresolvable epistemological problems it created, it was Sellars, Davidson and Rorty who alerted us to the "experiential givenness" that was implicit in their work and how this unintentionally reproduced the type of foundationalism they had sought to overcome. Rorty's solution to this dilemma was to cast aside all discussions that related epistemology to givenism and propose a distinction between our practices of epistemic justification which are entirely linguistic in nature, and the experiential moments in our lives which are non-linguistic, non-epistemic and more accurately described as being mere causal sensations. This summarizes the problem with the classical pragmatist approach to experience; because we can find no way to linguistically represent the type of givenism we find in Dewey and James we must concede that givenism – upon which experience depends - plays no role in our epistemic practices.

In contrast to the model of experience we find in classical pragmatism, Rorty's contemporary genre of linguistic pragmatism offers a markedly different account of the

relationship between experience and language. Here, the problem is that Rorty has placed too much emphasis on language while leaving experience as an anachronistic idea that is not worth the trouble it causes. I have noted that Richard Bernstein (2010) has accused Rorty of linguistic idealism, and this is perhaps a most dominant criticism against Rorty; that he posits all understanding to be linguistic, so that all of our experience can be comprehended through language.

Having presented the two options we have for approaching experience from a pragmatic perspective – that of the classical pragmatists and that of Rorty's neopragmatism – we are now left with the task of either picking a side in the debate or forging a synthesis that incorporates elements of both perspectives. As I have identified the specific problems that each version of pragmatism holds we would do well to avoid any dogmatic attempt to wholeheartedly embrace either option. Nor should we simply dismiss either option – we should not rashly discount classical pragmatism, although we should feel obligated to offer a corrective interpretation based on what we now know about both givenism and language.

1. **Chapter Outline**

In the opening section of this chapter I seek a path that might allow us to move beyond an exclusionary choice between seeing experience as merely a product of discourse and seeing experience as implying foundations to our knowledge. I see Koopman's "transitionalist epistemology" as being the most thorough and promising attempt to find a "third way" between experience and language, and so I take the time to explore Koopman's work in detail (2009). In contrast to Richard Shusterman, whose work I have similarly described as attempting to revive experience from Rorty's grasp, Koopman's work is an attempt to synthesize experience and language while Shusterman, through his theory of somatic experience attempts to describe a type

of experience that is non-linguistic. Yet upon closely examining Koopman's attempt to unite classical pragmatism and neopragmatism, I conclude that although there is much in Koopman's work that we can benefit from, we can also improve upon his work by observing what he fails to accomplish. I first note that Koopman's distinction between *transitionalism* and *meliorism* is not clear enough, and we are left to wonder how transitionalism is additive to the discussion of meliorism I have already presented. Secondly, I note that Koopman assumes a firm epistemological divide exists between classical and neopragmatism, as he inconsistently describes Dewey's foundationalism as being an obstacle that stands in the way of synthesizing experience and language. Following my appraisal of Koopman's work I show that Dewey's notions of experience were never as foundational as Koopman and Rorty assumed, and thus, the need for Koopman's ambitious new epistemological scheme is redundant – Koopman's attempt to instigate a "third wave" of pragmatism is unnecessary.

Following my critique of Koopman I elaborate on my stance that Rorty incorrectly interprets Dewey's views on experience as being metaphysical. I ask that we re-interpret Dewey's apparent equating of experience with knowledge. I urge that we see "knowledge" not as something "final", but more as a localized notion of truth that is historically contingent and malleable to the practical interests of a community. Dewey is accepting of epistemological uncertainty rather than hoping to overcome it via experience. Put simply, I ask that we rethink the classical pragmatist's commitment to "the given".

In the next section of the chapter I address the mode of aesthetic experience. While there has been contention surrounding the extent to which Dewey is non-foundational in his treatment of experience, this discussion appears muted in the context of his views on aesthetic experience. Within the aesthetic variant of experience it is clear that Dewey values experience as a normative

goal that is future-oriented rather than as a phenomenon that is reflective of a deeper, ahistorical reality that we can access through the senses.

I conclude this chapter by writing favourably of Richard Shusterman's distinction between *understanding* and *interpretation*, for I see this distinction as necessary in order to counter Rorty's hermeneutic universalism; his belief that "everything is interpretation". In Rorty's view, all intelligent and meaningful human activity is interpretive, so that all understanding and *all perception* is touched by our interpretation. The task of distinguishing between understanding and interpretation is made easier having already observed that Rorty is allowing for non-linguistic, non-interpretive experience. Yet I specify what this difference is, and take care to draw the distinction without endorsing the foundationalist doctrine that is usually associated with the idea of immediate, unreflective understanding.

2. <u>Koopman's Transitionalist Epistemology and Meliorism: What is the Difference?</u>

In an attempt to make experience and language coexist within the same worldview Colin Koopman (2007) has attempted to find harmony between classical pragmatism and neo-pragmatism by developing an understanding of knowledge that allows for greater epistemic elasticity than could be granted by foundationalism. He puts forward the idea of a "transitionalist epistemology". In Koopman's words: "knowledge is understood as occurring within a temporal field of experience which is neither narrowly linguistic nor rigidly foundational. The temporal flow of experience, understood as the very field in which knowledge continuously evolves, is both broad enough and flexible enough to accommodate all of what we should want to count as knowledge without forcing this knowledge to conform to a pattern which would evade the contingencies of the human condition" (Koopman, 2007, 710). Koopman argues that the elements of transitionalism

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are already present in all varieties of pragmatism, from Dewey and James through to Rorty. There are moments in which all pragmatists demonstrate awareness of transitions in history or experience.

We can begin to describe Koopman's transitional epistemology by observing that both Rorty's linguisticism and empiricist foundationalism share a similar view of knowledge as being *static*. This does not mean that there is the belief that knowledge cannot change, for as we see in Rorty's linguisticism, new linguistic schemes are constantly being invented. Similarly, correspondence theories of knowledge are subject to revision as closer correspondence is achieved. Yet in Rorty's case, what counts as knowledge is whatever a group of people form a consensus on, and thus knowledge expresses a static relation between a particular judgement of a group of people and the broader set of beliefs to which that judgement must cohere. With respect to an empiricist/foundationalist epistemology, there is the same presumption of a fixed relation between our immediate experience and the object of our experience.

Transitionalism, as the name implies, challenges this fixity of knowledge. We can see where Koopman took his inspiration from. In the first chapter I described the classical pragmatist's objection to traditional empiricism where experiences were described as discrete sets of isolated events that can be analyzed in isolation from each other. I then contrasted this conception of experience with William James' version of radical empiricism, where James claimed that our experiences were experiences of relations, and not of isolated events. I applied James' analogy of a stream of consciousness towards how we can understand experience, and used this analogy to show the perspectival and contingent character of experience. We can never "step into the same stream twice" in the sense that we can never have the same experience twice, for experience is a process that will unfold differently each time depending on the different sets

of relations that are present. Although I did not, in the first chapter, stress the temporal quality of experience that we find in James account of experience, we are prepared to observe these characteristics now in the idea of a transitionalist epistemology.

The traditional empiricist would see experience as a set of atomistic events with no necessary connection between experiences. In this model we could hypothesize that one experience is temporally separated from another and that in the time in between we find room for contemplation. While the traditional empiricists described experience as a series of isolated events, James countered that such a conception is not reflective of how we encounter the world. We experience the world, James argued, as a continuous flow of experiences. We are constantly immersed in experience and cannot break from its flow. In addition, we need not distinguish between the subject of experience and the object of what is experienced by the subject, for the two are inevitably woven together. So rather than reduce experience to sense perception, James turned away from the empiricist approach and towards a more naturalistic account of experience.

To go further, we can distinguish between an epistemology that concedes to change and an epistemology that embraces transition. "Transitionality, in the sense in which it is central to pragmatism, needs to be distinguished from mere change. Transitionality suggests temporally mediated development, whereas change suggests temporally mediated difference…The best way in which to state this difference is in terms of a distinction between purposive activity and undirected change. Transitionality connotes purposiveness and directness such that change can be regarded as something more than just random and dumb difference" (Koopman, 2009, 13).

In creating a distinction between *change* and *difference* attention is brought to how the basic idea of transitionality is already embedded within classical pragmatism, for I have described at length how pragmatism is inclined towards *action.* Following Kant pragmatists see

our thoughts to be constituted by purposive activity. "Mind for the pragmatist is act, effort and deed" (Koopman, 2009, 13). As I have noted elsewhere, respect for action and meliorism are closely intertwined, and we find that this is suitably true in Koopman's transitionalism. In emphasizing deliberate action and the temporal aspect of how we negotiate situations, Koopman asks that we turn away from questions about the inherent truth or goodness of actions and instead see actions as being truer or better. Transitionalism does not aim for epistemic rightness, it brings attention to "epistemic or moral melioration, improvement, development and growth" (Koopman, 2009, 12).

I have consistently praised the qualities of action and meliorism and have said that these attributes not only distinguish pragmatism generally from other philosophical systems, but that these qualities are of particular importance in reviving a theory of experience that has relevance in the constrained intellectual environment that we find ourselves in today. It is for this reason that I am attracted to Koopman's epistemology of transitionalism. Yet, in Koopman's description of transitionalism it is often unclear how to distinguish transitionalism from meliorism, which makes me wonder what specifically is so special about transitionalism that we have not already grasped through my description of meliorism. I examine this further.

There are many competing definitions of transitionalism that Koopman presents to us. We are told that: "Transitions are those temporal structures and historical shapes in virtue of which we get from here to there" (2009, 2). Meanwhile, in my earlier discussion of meliorism I described Koopman as observing that meliorism is constituted by "humanism" and "pluralism", and these qualities are what give the otherwise value-neutral transitionalism its potency and direction. Koopman defines meliorism as follows: "Meliorism is successful transitionalism. Meliorist transitionalism is a philosophical practice of reconstruction" (2009, 17). From these

descriptions we can glean that transitionalism asks us to be aware of the historical and temporal aspects of cultural critique; it is a form of genealogy. In my discussion of meliorism I have already noted that temporality is implicit in meliorism, and it now appears that Koopman's hope is that transitionalism will make us more aware of how temporality is necessarily embedded in the melioristic attitude of pragmatism. Interpreted this way, what we are ultimately left with is the unimpressive realization that if pragmatism is to be melioristic, it *has* to be transitional. Meliorism necessitates that we interpret transformations and improvements as historically contingent and occurring within a sphere of time that is akin to occurring within Mead's account of "the situation".

In sum then, transitionalism is useful for our purposes in that it alerts us to the temporal aspect of the meliorism that I have described as being a key feature of the pragmatist notion of experience. Whether transitionalism is itself enough to "bridge the gap" between classical and neopragmatism is doubtful, for it is still unclear how transitionalism is more than a temperament that we can adopt to make ourselves aware of how time is implicated in a notion of meliorism. What should be important to us is the question of foundationalism and to what extent a concept of experience requires foundational grounding to have meaning. Here Koopman presents his epistemology of transitionalism as a compromise between an experiential view that is foundational and a linguistic approach that is non-foundational but also non-experiential. While Koopman argues that transitionalism is a type of "umbrella" epistemology that has always been implicit in all pragmatisms, he also uses the term to indicate the need for a "third way" to replace the dichotomous choice between calling oneself a "prima-pragmatist" and a neo-pragmatist. Here he constructs a scenario whereby classical pragmatists are necessarily foundationalists for their adherence to experience. This charge against classical pragmatism is the key premise in

Koopman's argument, although he does not clearly identify it as such. Yet it stands to reason that if this premise is faulty, then we do not need a theory of transitionalism to "bridge the gap" between the two versions of pragmatism.

While Koopman constructs his argument on the premise that there is an epistemological division that separates experiential pragmatists from linguistic pragmatists, in the bulk of this chapter I refute Koopman's and Rorty's belief that Dewey was a foundationalist. As such, I argue that we need not develop a sophisticated epistemological scheme that can accommodate the foundational urges of experiential pragmatists and the antifoundational inclinations of the linguistic pragmatists. In other words, the classical pragmatists did not always hold a foundational account of experience, and so the stale-mate that Koopman describes between a first-wave of experience-centric pragmatism and a second-wave of language-centric pragmatism does not require a third-wave of transitionalism.

Koopman is inconsistent with his critique of Dewey as a foundationalist, observing himself that Dewey lacked the vocabulary to distinguish himself from the threat. Instead, Koopman writes of Dewey as unintentionally inviting subtle forms of givenism in his work and displaying strong foundationalist tendencies. On other occasions Koopman writes that Dewey was actually not a foundationalist, but could easily be misinterpreted as being one because he poorly chose his words. Yet the premise of Koopman's argument is that there *is* a distinct foundational impulse in classical pragmatism that needs to be reconciled via an epistemology of transitionalism.

I have repeatedly referred to Wilfrid Sellars' critique of the "myth of the given" to illustrate how Rorty identifies this myth in the classical pragmatist account of experience and uses it to justify his treatment of experience as expendable. What I will show in this chapter is

that the classical pragmatists (Dewey in particular) conceptualized experience in a way that Sellars' and Rorty's criticism does not hinder. As I have demonstrated from the outset, Rorty's critique of experience is that it implies a certain form of knowledge, where experience, taken in its modern meaning, can be used to construct an epistemology that is valid independently of practical interests. This is not the type of epistemological foundationalism that is found in Dewey's work. Although because Dewey did not possess the intellectual repertoire we benefit from today, he was not as aware of the threat of givenism and foundationalism as we would have liked him to be and the clarity of his work suffers because of this.

While Koopman urges us to see that what all pragmatists have in common is a vaguely defined theory of transitionalism, I have urged that we turn our attention to the problem of intersubjectivity to understand why differing attitudes towards experience exist. It would be wrong to describe all classical pragmatists as carrying the equivalent conception of experience, for as I noted in the introduction, Emerson, James and Dewey were all engaged in different intellectual projects. Yet, I have also suggested that we can identify a common project within classical pragmatism related to the progressive movement away from philosophies of subjectivity towards an intersubjective understanding of the world. The starting point of modern philosophy, subjectivism, was similarly problematic to all classical pragmatists for the unrealistic account of experience that such a starting point was associated with. Such a starting point for philosophy led to the creation of philosophical problems that were unworkable and inauthentic to how life was lived. I noted that James spotted the subjective starting point in the atomistic British empiricism that he proposed to remedy through his "radical empiricism". Dewey described such a starting point as "philosophical fallacy". Pragmatism promised to discard these philosophical problems and instigate a new series of questions grounded in concrete experience. I argued then

that a thoroughly intersubjective perspective poses a challenge to experience, as seen in Dewey's later recognition that we can substitute the word culture for experience, much as Rorty later suggested. When Rorty does speak of experience it is only of a privatized, purely subjective version of experience that does not connect to anything intersubjective. In short, while Koopman argues that we can unite all strands of pragmatism by fully articulating an epistemology of transitionalism that is already implicit in the work of all pragmatists, I have argued that we are better able to understand the divergent attachments to experience by focusing on the relative commitment to an intersubjective account of the self.

3. **A Review of the Problem: Rethinking Classical Pragmatism's Belief in the "Given"**

Not only is there a choice we can make between favouring a classical pragmatist approach to experience and a neo-pragmatist approach, but if we dedicate ourselves to following Dewey's lead we must provide a response to the following option: We can argue with Dewey that experiential givens have an aesthetic quality that can be detached from the pursuit of knowledge, *or* we can argue that experience *does* provide us with the material out of which we can fashion and re-fashion our social practices. If we choose the first option then we should feel obligated to explain why such a conception of experience is important if it is indeed unconnected to our epistemic practices. If we choose the second option we should feel beholden to provide a non-foundational account of experience that allows our knowledge and our practices to relate to our experiences. In this section of the chapter I address both of these options.

As promised, in this section I challenge Rorty's reading of Dewey as someone who is committed to the "metaphysical program". If we proceed along this path we can re-interpret what Dewey meant when he equated experience with knowledge. We can argue that "knowledge" for

Dewey was not something that was "final" - it was not the outcome of the Platonic quest for certainty, but was instead recognized by Dewey to be a localized truth that was malleable to the needs of a community. Dewey's ideas about experience are accepting of uncertainty rather than hoping to overcome it. In short, I ask that we rethink the classical pragmatist's commitment to "the given".

I have noted that in an essay called "Dewey's Metaphysics" Rorty identifies what he sees to be Dewey's lingering attachment to the Platonic search for certainty (1982). The degree to which Rorty's reading of Dewey is accurate has been contested on many levels, most notably for us by those who argue that Dewey's account of experience is non-foundational. Ralph Sleeper is most vocal in this regard, as he has offered an interpretation of Dewey that is in contrast to Rorty's impression (Sleeper, 1986). While Rorty interprets Dewey as being wholly committed to a metaphysics of experience, Sleeper argues that Dewey in fact favours a metaphysics of existence, and that within this scheme experience is important, but does not constitute all of reality. Joseph Margolis has also questioned Rorty's reading of Dewey, as he argues that instead of searching for a synthesis between Dewey and Heidegger, Rorty would have done well to consider the work of another phenomenologist: Merleau-Ponty (Margolis, 1998). Merleau-Ponty's attention to the importance of the body would have been corrective of Rorty's contrasting neglect of the body, and would have also worked well in conjunction with what Margolis interprets as Dewey's evolutionary view of the body. While Rorty accuses Dewey of panpsychism (the view that mind or consciousness is a universal feature), Margolis offers an alternative reading of Dewey as an evolutionary biologist.

In a section of *Experience and Nature* (1925) Dewey demonstrates a keen awareness of the problems with experience that Rorty would later identify. Dewey is not naïve to the manner

in which our experience is inevitably intertwined with the prejudices we carry. He notes: "…this experience is already overlaid and saturated with the products of the reflection of past generations and by-gone ages. It is filled with interpretations, classifications, due to sophisticated thought, which have become incorporated into what seems to be fresh naïve empirical material" (Dewey, 1925, 11). In rescuing experience from a philosophy that has subordinated experience in favour of abstraction and intellectualism, Dewey is not attempting to recover an experience that is "pure". In a later passage Dewey explains further: "We cannot achieve recovery of primitive naiveté. But there is attainable a cultivated naiveté of eye, ear and thought..." (Dewey, 1925, 12). Thus, in writing of experience Dewey is not trying to "reach outside of time and space" in hope of latching onto something eternal. While Rorty accuses Dewey of reproducing these metaphysical inclinations, Dewey knows that any useful conception of experience cannot make an appeal to a world that is "out there" waiting to be discovered. The task implicit in Dewey's "cultivated naiveté" is one that Rorty might find agreeable: experiences are acts of creation rather than discovery – we are making new worlds possible rather than claiming to find a world that is outside of history.

As has been well-illustrated by Richard Shusterman (1997, 162), the two most noteworthy instances where Dewey deliberately eschews reproducing metaphysical biases can be found in his essay "Qualitative Thought" (1931) and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938). While Dewey wrote more well-known books on experience that Rorty cites as evidence of Dewey's metaphysics, it is within these two texts that Dewey most clearly demonstrates how immediate experience cannot function as incorrigible evidence for a foundation to our knowledge. Dewey favours an account of experience that is unconnected to knowing – experiences are not so much *known* as they are *had*. In order for experiences to be known they would need to reconstructed by

the subject according to a linguistic scheme that could serve as justification for a knowledge claim. Within the two texts identified by Shusterman, Dewey invokes immediate experience not in order to justify a particular claim to truth but to assert that these non-discursive experiences provide the grounding for all discursive thought. To propose that immediate experience *underlies* discursive thought might appear suggestive of a foundation, and this would be similar to my earlier suggestion that Merleau-Ponty's placement of the body in the "background" is indicative of a foundation where the body functions as a type of "given". Yet as if anticipating this criticism Dewey notes that immediate experience is simply that which is necessary for thoughts to have coherence, and that immediate experience will remain unknowable and inexpressible, although through introspection we can come to know it exists.

Interpreted this way, Dewey's subtle escape from the threat of foundationalism should resonate with what Rorty has suggested about experience and our relationship to the world: our experience of the world is *causal* rather than *representational*. We cannot use immediate experience to justify our beliefs (meaning that we cannot claim that our experience of the world corresponds to reality) but we can observe that immediate experience facilitates the acquisition of beliefs and that in order for our thoughts to be coherent they must be grounded in *something*. I have already discussed what this *something* is in the third chapter, where I specified that for Dewey and Mead the key to grounding experience is in understanding the dynamics of "the situation".

The task then is to describe a type of experience that is consistent with Rorty's anti-foundationalism while also retaining something of what the classical pragmatists valued in experience. There are different paths that can be taken to accomplish this task, and I have made an effort to explore the two most promising trajectories of thought. In the second chapter I asked

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that we rethink what can be meant by "the given", and specified that for Mead it was "the situation" that was given. Having outlined the classical pragmatist's dedication to action and how this pertained to experience we are able to re-interpret the given as something similar to a social structure that gives pattern and consistency to our experience. A second way forward can be imagined if we critique the assumption that is implicit in Aiken's work that all experience must be experimental. This is another way of suggesting that there is more to experience than the accumulation of knowledge, and I address this in more detail in the final chapter.

In the opening chapter I explained why Rorty believed that the classical pragmatist's adherence to experience implied a type of foundational logic. In order for experience to be meaningful it must be connected to something that is real; something that exists beyond the boundaries of culture as a form of ahistorical truth. When Peirce wrote "The Fixation of Belief" and identified the different errors that characterized previous attempts at proper inquiry, the principle flaw in all previous methods was that none made reference to something that existed external to the believer. Scott Aiken (2009) interpreted classical pragmatism as being intrinsically reliant on the hope of scientific inquiry, where experience is a tool that we use in our experiments of what makes for a good social life. For Aiken, and also for Rorty, this conception of experience entails the "doctrine of the Given". In order for us to conduct this type of inquiry we must first believe in the given – we must believe that there is something outside of our experience that determines whether our experiments succeed or fail. In order for experience to be relevant it must be representative of something "real", and this model of mirroring and representation was at the centre of Rorty's critique of the traditional philosophical enterprise that he made in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979).

In the first chapter I contrasted the classical pragmatist's treatment of experience to that of the empiricists: the empiricists, I noted, had no objections to belief in the given, for they believed firmly that there *was* an epistemological foundation that could be accessed through experience. I then described how James and Dewey rejected the idea that experiences were discrete sets of isolated events where the world was represented to us in mind, and instead proposed that we were complicit in experience – experience was a result of our interests. In the third chapter I specified that a pragmatist account of experience also differs from a phenomenological one based on the pragmatist's dedication to action, and the hope that experiences can be improved rather than merely understood. This last point, the hope for melioristic change in our experience, has implications for our understanding of what is meant by the doctrine of the given. At first glance it might appear that belief in melioristic change necessitates belief in the given, for if there is nothing that is given then there is nothing that can be changed. Stated differently, in order to change reality there must first be a reality. Viewed from this angle the distinction I proposed between classical pragmatism and empiricism loses its rigidity. While I described classical pragmatism as emerging in reaction to the metaphysical assumptions of traditional philosophy, it is no longer obvious that the pragmatists have done enough to distinguish themselves from the modes of inquiry of the past, and this of course is Rorty's justification for why we should put aside experience. Rorty would argue that when it comes to discussions about the value of experience the difference between empiricists and classical pragmatists is not that the former group believes in the given while the latter group does not. Instead, the difference is that empiricists are interested in experience in relation to knowledge (what can we understand of the given), while pragmatists are interested in changing experience (what can be done with the given).

Yet this understanding simplifies the predicament, and perhaps also leads us to an unstable dichotomy between the desire to *know* and the desire to *do.* From what I have described of Dewey's emphasis on action and the contingent and uncertain qualities of experience it should be evident that for Dewey experience is not only about knowledge. Yet this does not mean that knowledge plays no role in experience. Dewey's account of action does not describe a type of mindless, reactionary form of action, for he commonly refers to the dynamics of *intelligent action.* In order for action to be intelligent, it would seem that the actor must know something – they must at least have an inkling about the consequences of their actions and must also understand something of the context in which they are acting. Thus, when I argue that experience need not only be a knowledge affair, this should not be taken to mean that we can never speak of knowledge again, for the challenge is to specify a type of knowledge that does not imply the foundationalism that Rorty abjures. This can partly be accomplished if we rethink the dichotomy between knowing and doing.

4. **Knowledge and Action**

To understand the relationship between knowledge and action we would do well to consider Dewey's elaboration on *intelligent action*. Dewey rejects the notion that intelligent action must always be synonymous with activity that is conscious. If we assume that intelligent action necessarily implies a heightened form of consciousness then it is likely that we will be led to ask the types of questions that pragmatists have sought to avoid: questions about how it is possible to escape our private consciousness so that we can gain objective knowledge of the world. Such questions assume a long list of dualisms that should profitably be overcome, most notably in this case between knowing and doing. For Dewey, knowing is not an activity that

occurs internally, in the mind, knowing is instead something that we do (Dewey, 1916, 331). In *Experience and Nature* (1929, 193) Dewey tells us that as long as theories about knowledge are framed with reference to those bodily organs we associate with consciousness then the resulting philosophies will be constrained in terms of what they allows us to accomplish. As later confirmed by Rorty, these philosophies aim at positive representation of the world – the hope is to get reality right rather than to improve the quality of our lives. On the other hand, if our aim is to develop a philosophy that can improve our life-experiences we require a different starting point, one that does not assume that intelligent action is a result of consciousness.

To further illustrate the relationship between knowing and doing we can refer to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, both of whom observed that our lives are largely made up of "pre-reflective" actions. The work of Heidegger in particular resonates with Dewey's observation that most of our daily action is habitual rather than strictly conscious. Heidegger (1927, 103) illustrates this by referring to the way we use manual tools to complete a project. We employ our tools without much conscious deliberation, and for the most part, our actions can be considered successful and intelligent. It is only when our tools break down that we are forced to become conscious of our actions. When we are unable to act intelligently in the manner we are accustomed to we are forced to become reflective. This latter point summarizes Dewey's ideas about "habits of action", as it is only when our habits are obstructed – when we encounter resistance – that we bring awareness to our actions (Dewey, 1925, 314).

Yet Heidegger's point about pre-reflective action and the example of the use of a tool can be dramatized if we are willing to entertain other examples of action that we might typically associate with more conscious deliberation. The actions of a chess player, for example, are presumed to involve a high degree of consciousness. It is often thought that there is a significant

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amount of deliberation (and often very little action), and this is taken to indicate the internal workings of the mind of the chess player. Yet chess players often report acting without much thought; their experience of an analytic game indicates something counter-intuitive: Their moves are instinctual and although apparently reflective, do not involve much consciousness. This is despite the fact that chess is a game whereby each player composes problems to be solved by the other player. In Dewey's vocabulary, we might say that our actions are constantly encountering resistance, and as our moves are obstructed this should prompt conscious action. So how then, is it possible that our experience of such an analytic and "brainy" activity has such a forceful non-cognitive dimension?

Clearly, the actions of a chess player fall into the category of intelligent action despite the fact that at least some moves are carried out by the players without much conscious thought. The claim is not that consciousness and intelligent action are entirely unrelated. Unless we were willing to forfeit the idea of consciousness altogether we must concede that deliberate thought exists and aids us in adapting quickly when our otherwise intelligent actions are impeded. As scholars we cannot imagine having intelligent debate in the absence of consciousness. Yet as Wittgenstein noted, we can recall that when we were young we made a conscious effort to learn to read, and the spelling of certain words required conscious attempts at memorization, and now that we have become literate our experience of reading is that it "simply happens" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 156). The same logic would apply to a game of chess, in that a child's first experience of the game is one of heightened awareness as he learns the different possibilities for action that each piece has. Over time, the experiences of the game accumulate for the learner and become congealed into a general knowledge of the game that allows for habitual moves to be made with little conscious effort.

It is here that our analogy of a game of chess runs out of moves, for the accumulated knowledge of a game of chess is not the same as the accumulated experiences of life in general. If our aim is to experience then a distinction must be made between life and a game of chess. True knowledge of chess is possible because the rules of the game are fixed and the object of our knowledge is not in question. Life in general has many more "moving parts" than chess, and the "rules of the game" are contingent on the circumstances and subject to change.

With this in mind, we can identify how Dewey's views on intelligence and knowledge might be brought to coincide with Rorty's outlook. In *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (1929) Dewey distinguishes between a view that sees the mind as representing the world that exists on the "outside" and a mind that is actively participating and interacting with other objects. I have already elaborated on the nature of this distinction in the first chapter, where I discussed Rorty's anti-foundationalism. Recall that Rorty asked us to put aside the quest for knowledge entirely, noting that questions of epistemology are not helpful in producing social change. Rorty concedes that there is nothing wrong with believing that we have knowledge, for in our everyday lives we routinely act on the presumption of knowledge. Yet for Rorty the problem arises only in the philosophical attempt to prove that we have knowledge, for there is no non-circular argument that can made about our claim to have discovered something "real". Rorty's view parallels that of Dewey when we consider that although Dewey writes about experience in relation to generating knowledge of the world, he recognizes that such knowledge is unstable and relevant only to what we are able to do with it. He writes:

> "...*we may say that the worth of any object that lays claim to being an object of knowledge is dependent upon the intelligence employed in reaching it. In saying this, we must bear in mind that intelligence means operations actually*

performed in the modification of conditions, including all the guidance that
is given by means of ideas, both direct and symbolic" (Dewey, 1929, 200).

Dewey's use of the word "knowing" in relation to experience does not need to imply the foundational "given" that Rorty assumes it does. Both intelligent action and the process of coming to know are inherently connected to the actions we undertake, and this type of knowing is possible without positive reflection. Given this interpretation of Dewey it should be evident that there is more to knowledge than the collection of social facts about the world, and there is more to experience than knowledge. What might be known about experience is always subject to revision, for what is "given" in the pragmatist account is a product of construction and reconstruction.

Having said what I have about the contingent and historical nature of Dewey's account of experience we can now imagine that in relation to Rorty's belief that there must be something that is "given" in experience we might suggest that the forward-thinking character of pragmatism asks us to make a distinction. As I alluded to at the outset of this section, and as noted by Aiken (2009), the contrast between Dewey and the empiricists is that Dewey's views were always future-oriented, while the empiricists were concerned over what *is*, or what *has* been. Aiken has used this distinction to bolster his argument that all accounts of experience must be about what is given: a pragmatist account of experience does not reject the "given", it simply places the "given" in a future-oriented context. "…empiricists and pragmatists agree over whether there's a Given, but they disagree over what to do with it" (Aiken, 2009, 20). I have argued that this presumes an unstable distinction between knowing and doing. As Dewey noted: "Empiricism is conceived as tied up with what has been, or is 'given.' But experience in its vital form is experimental…it is characterized by projection, by reaching forward into the unknown; connection with the future is its 'salient trait' (Dewey, 1917, 6).

Equating experience with that which is "unknown", and showing comfort and appreciation for this quality of uncertainty demonstrates an inclination that is markedly different from that of the empiricists. This is emblematic of the postmodern ethos of classical pragmatism that I identified in the introduction to this dissertation. The aim of experience may in some cases be experimental (this is not necessarily so), but the purpose of experimentation is not to arrive at a point where knowledge of the world is certain. To paraphrase what Rorty has said, "the aim of inquiry is to continue a conversation". The aim is to avoid the dogmatism that comes with the pretense of certainty – so that future experiences are not pre-defined.

In this section I have attempted to re-think what the "given" might mean for Dewey in light of how he describes the process of knowing. While Rorty interprets Dewey's use of experience as unintentionally continuing the legacy of Platonic ideals, I have shifted our attention towards the hesitant and uncertain qualities that "knowing" have for Dewey. I observed that the process of coming to know does not stand apart from the processes of everyday life – Dewey does not subscribe to a hierarchy in which knowing is placed above action.

5. <u>**Aesthetic Experience**</u>

In the third chapter I distinguished a pragmatic account of experience from a phenomenological one by observing the attention to action that classical pragmatists definitively hold. In writing of the pragmatist's devotion to action and remarking on how this diverges from a purely visionary account of perception, I did not mean to give the impression of a strict division between *hand* and *eye* where pragmatists favour the former and phenomenologists the latter. Clearly such a distinction is not warranted, yet the connection between pragmatism and aesthetics is not obvious. Pragmatism is associated with that which is *practical* – it is equated with utilitarian values. On the other hand, aesthetics inspires different associations; beauty can

stand independently from concern over its use. As I attempt to show now, emphasizing action does not negate the importance of aesthetic experience, and the prejudiced assumptions we carry toward the relationship between aesthetics and pragmatism are the result of the types of dichotomies that classical pragmatists saw as being inherently unstable. The dualism of life and art, practice and theory, and means and ends can be overcome if we consider the role of aesthetic experience in our lives. Consistent with the general ontology of pragmatism that I have described, pragmatists are future-oriented in the sense that they are not concerned to prove what exists, for their focus is on what is possible. Imagination and creativity is ingredient in action and in aesthetic experience.

There has of course been much debate about what Dewey's theory of aesthetics means in relation to his philosophy as a whole. Often Dewey's venture into aesthetics is treated by Deweyan scholars as a mere footnote to his general ideas. Making an effort to understand his views on aesthetics is optional rather than a requirement. The most poignant example of this attitude is perhaps found in Rorty who consistently refers to Dewey as his "intellectual hero" but does not cite Dewey's thoughts on aesthetics. Of course, Rorty neglects to engage in any discussion of experience in general, so his omission of Dewey's aesthetics in particular should not surprise us. Yet seeing that my argument criticizes Rorty for casting aside experience so rashly, Dewey's investigations of aesthetic experience cannot be ignored. Rather than treat Dewey's aesthetics as being an appendage to a much grander philosophy I will ask that we interpret experience as being central to Dewey's work, and aesthetic experience as being a central part of this schema. Dewey himself supported such an interpretation when he wrote of the importance of aesthetic theory by noting that: "The theory of esthetics put forward by a philosopher…is a test of the capacity of the system he sets forth to grasp the nature of experience

itself. There is no test that so surely reveals the one-sidedness of a philosophy as its treatment of art and esthetic experience" (1925, LW, 10: 278 as cited in Alexander, 1999, 164).

I have said that Dewey's account of aesthetic experience is less frequently criticized for reproducing foundationalism, yet turning towards an aesthetic mode of experience does not leave us "free and clear" of the problems we identified in the epistemological variant of experience. Many admirers of Dewey have felt betrayed by his sudden interest in the field of aesthetics that he developed towards the end of his career. It is not clear how consistent Dewey's views on aesthetics are with his general stance towards experience, for here Dewey seems to hold two differing opinions about experience: On the one hand, we have seen Dewey describe experience as something that is future-oriented; experience is an instrument that can be used to move us in the direction of a goal that we are not able to presently define. Yet when Dewey discusses art and aesthetic experience he tells us that art is the pinnacle of experience, and that these moments of intensity (that are clearly situated in the present) should become the model of all experience. In our ordinary lives we should strive to have these artistic moments. Yet there is not necessarily a contradiction between placing experience in the context of an undefined future, asking that we use experience as a tool to move us towards a hopeful but uncertain goal, and asking that we treat experience as an end in itself – as something that can have consummated meaning in the present.

There have also been those critics who worry that Dewey has rashly dismissed what experience can tell us about the past. John Patrick Diggins, who has been critical of many aspects of pragmatism, has argued that Dewey's foundationless conception of aesthetic experience is misguided, and that without the quest for certainty we are just as likely to move towards fascism as we are towards democracy (Diggins, 1994, 220) . Diggins' critique is not dissimilar from the

argument of Scott Aiken that we encountered in the first chapter – that experience must be grounded in something that is "given".

Finally, although I found Koopman's method of argumentation problematic, in my description of aesthetic experience we can make use of his emphasis on the temporal aspect of experience for how it challenges foundationalism. Dewey directs us towards understanding the temporal contingency of the aesthetic when he notes that to have an aesthetic experience is not a matter of catching a glimpse of something eternal; it is a *process* in which there is a temporal unfolding of an interaction between the organism and the environment. This process may never be complete, but it is marked by a movement towards a sense of oneness between the subject and its environment. Describing experience as a *process* as opposed to an *event* that is fixed aids us in moving away from an account of experience that makes a claim to have discovered an objective base of knowledge.

A Brief History of Aesthetic Experience

Having given a history of experience in the opening chapter, a similar treatment should now be given to the aesthetic. In order to understand how John Dewey came to value aesthetic experience for its emancipatory potential we would do well to first understand the history of what has been meant by aesthetics. Thomas Alexander, in an essay titled "John Dewey and the Aesthetics of Human Experience" (1999) offers a suitable guide to this field. Through Alexander we learn that the term aesthetics has its origins in the mid-eighteenth century, and the term was first used by Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) who took his impulse from the Greek word aesthesis, meaning "sensation" (Alexander, 1999, 160). Prior to Baumgarten, Alexander identifies a large and differentiated set of literature that is loosely concerned with the nature of beauty. Here, the form or content of beauty is not so much connected with experience or

sensation as it is associated with the presumed nature of reality. In other words, questions of the aesthetic are concerned with metaphysics. To illustrate simply, an object of beauty has the features of "unity, harmony, balance and proportion" (Alexander, 1999, 161). In the West, Christianity carries these same values – God is the reality that is "out there" and through our art we are attempting to transcend our worldly disharmony to find divine perfection. These features are reflective of eternal ideals – in searching for the aesthetic there is an attempt to capture the essence of reality. To be clear, this early treatment of the aesthetic does not relegate concerns over experience in favour of metaphysical beliefs, for our experience of the transcendent carries metaphysical assumptions, as we are experiencing something that is eternal and "real".

This classical or Platonic period of history was then replaced with the modern, scientific enterprise. Within this period the aesthetic was demoted to a strictly subjective experience because it was exclusively located within the mind. The aesthetic is no longer "out there", it is merely a product of our psychology that we come to identify certain patterns as aesthetically pleasing. Within this schema art itself strove towards realism, as there was an attempt to capture nature as it was – in a state unmediated by subjective experience. Alexander tells us: "Whereas Plato or St. Augustine stressed the importance of the *experience* of beauty in leading us to the highest reality, modern skepticism dismissed the imagination and the aesthetic as sources of truth: Only clear and distinct ideas could be trusted" (emphasis added) (Alexander, 1999, 161). This is also evident in the work of Descartes, as he describes the mind as being comprehensible independently from considerations of sensations. Within the modern period the study of aesthetics is displaced by a scientific approach heavily influenced by developments in physics and biology.

Here Alexander touches on the issue I specified earlier: There is an unstable dichotomy between a concern for experience and a reductive tendency to associate experience with the neurology of the brain. I noted then that Rorty is guilty of the latter tendency, he dismisses experience as a phenomenon that is best left to those capable of understanding our biology and how we react to stimuli. As noted by Alexander, within the modern period the study of aesthetics was believed to be best handled through a rigid scientific endeavor: absolute idealism and psychological empiricism were dominant in the nineteenth century, while phenomenology and linguistic or conceptual analysis was part of the twentieth century (Alexander, 1999, 162).

While positivists may have declined an invitation to participate in the study of aesthetics because they believed meaning could only be found in events that were cognitively verifiable, postmodernists would later embrace aesthetics for precisely this reason. The study of aesthetics was complex and nuanced and there was no threat of achieving certainty of knowledge in relation to the aesthetic. As would be desired by postmodernists, discussions about aesthetics will always be left open for discussion. Within this historical account of aesthetics we can imagine Rorty agreeing with the latter postmodern preference for uncertainty and open-endedness, yet the discrepancy in Rorty's work is that he does still dismiss experience as an affair reducible to biological stimuli. It is this inconsistency that is at the centre of this project of recovering experience in a way that does not ignore the achievements of the linguistic turn, but still treats experience as being more than mere neurology.

In the first chapter I noted that classical pragmatism emerged largely as a response to modernism, in particular to the dualisms that pervaded modernistic thought, such as thinking versus doing, human versus nature, theory versus practice, and reason versus feeling. This is true generally, and also in the particular treatment of aesthetics. Of course, not all classical

pragmatists shared the same enthusiasm for discussions of aesthetics. Charles Peirce, for instance, wrote little on the topic. A project could perhaps be made out of recovering Peirce's attention to aesthetics by re-examining the role he gave to imagination in the scientific method, or drawing attention to the dynamics of "firstness" in his account of experience and the manner in which "firstness" might embody an aesthetic component that is non-conceptual. Similarly I could draw on selections from the work of William James as an aid to understanding the pragmatist conception of the aesthetic. James likely had more to say about aesthetics than Peirce, as James was himself an artist (music and painting). James' solution to the suffering of everyday life was to approach life artistically – the path towards salvation was not through strict and linear rational thought, but through creativity and imagination, and it is unlikely that James would disapprove of any aesthetic experience that would provide us with the courage to act in the absence of intellectual certainty. Yet it is in the work of Dewey that we see most clearly what a pragmatist conception of aesthetics entails, and we would do well to focus our attention here.

Like much of Dewey's work, the starting point of his philosophy of aesthetic experience is distinct from that of traditional philosophical attempts to theorize aesthetics. Rather than beginning by isolating an area of inquiry called "aesthetics", where the boundaries of the subject matter are strictly defined so that we can identify the properties that are essential to aesthetic experience, Dewey takes his starting point from the everyday experiences people have. Joseph Margolis and Richard Shusterman are the most notable figures who are interested in pragmatic understandings of aesthetics. Both have followed Dewey's lead in approaching the study of aesthetics from a practical perspective rather than as a theoretical problem. For Margolis, "works of art exist only in cultural contexts, as intentional entities". They are culturally emergent entities…embodied in physical objects (Margolis, 1980, 24). Richard Shusterman (1992) has

elaborated on this theme and has provided a deliberate contrast to Rorty's often critiqued "high-brow" description of art where reading only the "classics" will expand our awareness of cruelty. Leaning heavily on insights from Dewey's *Experience and Nature* Shusterman describes a scenario where aesthetic experience is not limited to our isolated ventures into the world of fine art. Aesthetic experience is, as Dewey told us, part of everyday life, and its subject matter is not limited to the static representations we find in museums and galleries. Applying this recognition drives Shusterman to carry out the task that Dewey would surely approve of – that of democratizing experience. He accomplishes this task by delving into contemporary, mainstream art such as hip-hop and country music, describing why it is important to understand how we experience such art and what potential is held within such experiences (2000).

I have said that Dewey's attention to aesthetic experience is less commonly criticized for being foundational because it is usually conceived as a nondiscursive form of experience with no clear threat to epistemology and no relevance for issues of public justification. Yet Rorty has dismissed nondiscursive experience as being of no philosophical importance because of philosophy's central distinction between *causes* and *reasons.* Quite often, Rorty notes, we are guilty of "…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" (1979, 182). It is true that our aesthetic experience of the world causes us to hold certain beliefs, but this should not be confused with us having a *reason* to hold a given belief. If we confuse the issue, if we wrongly believe that our nondiscursive experience of the world can justify our beliefs, then we have reverted to believing in the "myth of the given". When we believe that there is something that is naturally "given" in experience we will have no problem believing that our immediate aesthetic experience of the world automatically justifies our beliefs. As such, Rorty

dismisses nondiscursive, aesthetic experience as merely causal – it does not give us grounds for knowledge, it only gives us the causal conditions for knowledge. This is another way of saying that such experience is passively received as stimuli rather than actively engaged with, and because of this it is a matter not suited for philosophical investigation. It is a matter best suited for psychologists and physiologists.

Yet as I have argued through the work of Shusterman, we should not dismiss aesthetic experience as being any less practical for public affairs. In exploring aesthetic experience we are not hoping to ground our knowledge, and we are not reliant on language to justify our experiences. Countering Rorty in way that Rorty might find agreeable, Shusterman has asked that we rethink what philosophy is good for: Philosophy *can* be concerned with the causes that modify our behavior and not just concerned with the justifications we produce through reasoned argumentation. We have already seen that Rorty has embraced such a philosophy of causation, if only in the field of linguistics. Rorty has asked that we develop new vocabularies that cause us to feel something novel. The hope is to transform how we describe things rather than describe things more accurately. As Shusterman notes, later in his career Rorty loosened his stance towards the importance of the philosophical distinction between causes and reasons. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* Rorty states the following: "once we raise the question of how we get from one vocabulary to another, from one dominant metaphoric to another, the distinction between reasons and causes begins to lose utility" (Rorty, 1989, 48, as cited in Shusterman, 1997, 173). With this in mind, if our general aim is to improve our experiences we need not limit philosophy to the realm of the linguistic. Language games can improve our experience, but so can our awareness of embodied experiences. Aesthetic, non-discursive experiences can be conceived as another tool that we can use alongside language to improve our future experiences.

6. <u>**Shusterman's Distinction between Understanding and Interpretation**</u>

To further comprehend how we can utilize experience without referring to foundations to knowledge we must closely examine Rorty's belief that interpretation and experience are inseparable. For Rorty, interpretation is key to all thought. In a world without foundations there is no "real world" that our experiences can latch onto. As such, we are left to fend in a world of interpretation. It is clear that for Rorty, the notion that everything we know falls into the category of interpretation is dependent on the assumption that all of our understandings are linguistic affairs. Yet drawing on Shusterman's (2000) critique of Rorty and combining it with Koopman's transitionalist epistemology we can claim first that the difference between understanding and interpretation is not equivalent to the difference between non-linguistic and linguistic comprehension, and secondly there is a temporal aspect to consider, as understanding often occurs before interpretation. This is not to suggest there is an ontological difference between understanding and interpretation, but there is a functional one.

For Rorty, a foundational approach to this issue would hold that what we perceive in the world can be described as an unmediated encounter. Here our perceptions and our understandings have the potential to be pure – we are able to capture aspects of the world in their essence. This "purity" would of course refer to the absence of linguistic interference where what we perceive is unaffected by vocabularies we have inherited from our culture. The purity also refers to the absence of interpretation, for the reception of the brute world must be accurate without the subject having to reflect on it. Whether the experience is true is a matter of correspondence to reality, and the subjective interpretation is what stands in the way of achieving beliefs that are infallible. This is the foundational approach Rorty rejects. Language functions as

the medium through which we perceive events. In this case, our experience of a chess player making a move towards the king is an experience that is understood because language is doing the work of interpretation for us. There can be no possibility of understanding that exists below or beyond the level of interpretation, for this is precisely the philosophical dream that Rorty is telling us we should decline. The dream is to find an epistemological scheme that is not subject to interpretation, one that will provide us with unguarded access to what is "real". The dream, is to find access to knowledge that is not contingent on the "language games" we play. It is this hopeful scenario that Rorty is advocating we turn away from, and we ought to instead confess to the ultimate contingency of our experiences and acknowledge that language is the mediating factor in all that we know and do. Thus Rorty opts for a brand of "hermeneutic universalism". Interpretation is all that we have. This stance is closely connected to the theme of fallibilism that has been so central to the doctrine of the classical pragmatists. Our experiences do not lead to beliefs that are categorically true or false, for in a world of interpretation all knowledge claims are open to contestation. The beliefs that are forced onto us by the world are always subject to revision. The beliefs that we hold today are those that are currently working for us, and there is no guarantee that they will continue to be effective tools in the future. Interpretation is always contextual, and within any context our perceptions and resulting beliefs will be motivated by our aim to complete practical tasks. As the context in which we find ourselves is altered, our practical aims will be altered as well, and we will experience the objects of our interpretation differently. To repeat, the objects of our interpretation carry no fixed qualities – they lack any essential character. We can see interpretation as going "all the way down".

Richard Shusterman's response to this stance is to say that the distinction he draws between *understanding* and *interpretation* is not synonymous with the distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic comprehension (2000, 115). It should be apparent to us that there are linguistic understandings that are not necessarily interpretive. That is, if we are presented with a set of linguistic statements to follow (either in written or oral form) we are usually able to understand these statements without having to reflect on what they mean. We are able to respond immediately to what we encounter without having to interpret. As such, we can confirm that there are forms of immediate understanding that are linguistic. By contrast, questions of interpretation arise only in moments of ambiguity – when it is unclear what is meant by a linguistic statement.

The problem is that Rorty has broadened interpretation so that it encompasses everything we know. This is in contrast to the distinction we could make between interpretation and a form of understanding that is more immediate. This immediate type of understanding is usually associated with foundationalism – it is a type of understanding that is unmediated by bias with direct access to what is "real". Shusterman's point is that we can maintain a distinction between interpretation and understanding where we need not adopt a stance of interpretive universalism as Rorty does. Most importantly though, the point is that we can distinguish *understanding* from *interpretation* without reference to foundational logic. That is, we can construe understanding to mean something that is well clear of any commitments to foundationalism. Shusterman writes: "Understanding, in my view, can itself be nonfoundationally construed as perspectival, fallible, partial, plural, selective, and goal directed" (Shusterman, 2012, 167).

Drawing such a distinction between understanding and interpretation is partly justified by pointing out that such a division is part of our everyday usage of the two terms. Typically, we do

differentiate forms of understanding that exist without reflection from moments of interpretation where the subject pauses to compare and contrast an experience with existing knowledge. Moments of understanding have a quality of immediacy to them - we understand what is occurring without having to intentionally draw upon our cognitive resources. Interpretation, on the other hand, is generally understood to be associated not with immediacy, but with an engaged process of deliberation. This distinction, admittedly basic as it might be, is how we comprehend the terms *interpretation* and *understanding* in the routine moments of our everyday lives.

The point to be remembered is that in claiming this distinction we are not suggesting that moments of understanding carry epistemic privilege. The apparent immediacy of understanding is not a claim that we are closer to what is "real" in the world. All that is meant is that when we compare and contrast understanding to interpretation, the former appears to us as functionally more basic than the latter. Viewed temporally, understanding occurs before interpretation. To be clear, this does not mean that prior interpretations have no effect on understanding. Even a basic understanding, one that seemingly occurs instantaneously, might be conditioned by an earlier interpretation that in turn was reliant on a prior understanding.

As such, understandings are not isolated incidents that bear no relation to culture or tradition. Such a stance was promoted by the classical empiricists and this view was countered by classical pragmatists such as James who saw us as being continuously immersed in experience. Our understandings are not immune from the effects of culture – they do not give us purified access to anything extra-cultural. Instead, understandings are mediated by culture, they are perspectival, and it is this feature that allows us to describe immediate understandings as nonfoundational and conceptually distinct from interpretation.

The utility of distinguishing between understanding and interpretation is that we might recognize the importance of the extemporaneous aspects of our lives – the actions we take that are not immune from cultural forces, but that occur without reflection. Shusterman describes these moments in Deweyan language as "habitual". Within this dimension of our cognitive life we encounter situations and react through "intelligent, unreflective habit without having to interpret or consciously decide what should be done" (Shusterman, 2012, 168). Later, Shusterman offers an example of immediate understanding when he writes that "the intentional gestures or movements of a dancer, lover, or ballplayer can be understood and appropriately responded to (by a partner, teammate, or audience) without ever being articulated into words (real or imagined)" (Shusterman, 2012, 169).

To add to Shusterman's idea we can make use of Barry Allen's critique of Rorty where Allen accuses Rorty of not being pragmatic enough when he describes knowledge as being little more than a matter of sociolinguistic agreement (Allen, 2000). Having criticized the need for epistemology Rorty deviates from a theory of knowledge via his anti-representationalism. Recall that this is the notion that the truth of a statement depends only on whether the correct cultural group receives the statement as being agreeable. "Knowledge" is formed through the consensus of a particular community rather than through the authority of logic, or God etc. Here Rorty takes inspiration from Wilfrid Sellars in believing that knowledge revolves within what Sellars called "the logical space of reasons". For Sellars, to characterize ourselves as knowing something is not to empirically describe the state we are in, but to place our knowledge in the logical space of reasons, and this alone justifies our beliefs.

I agree with Allen when he says that Rorty, due to the influence of Sellars has had on him, "loses sight of the technical, artifactual, physical accomplishment of knowledge" (Allen,

2000, 143). Rorty's linguisticism gives him the view that the only context for understanding knowledge is a conversational one. As I have shown in this section, there is more to knowledge than conversation and agreement, and the pragmatist's attention to the technical and physical aspects of knowledge do not indicate a preference for some type of naïve empiricism, but instead serve to distinguish knowledge from mere belief. Rorty's reading of pragmatism is different from Allen's, as Rorty has claimed that pragmatists distinguish knowledge and opinion only by observing that knowledge exists for topics on which it is easy to reach agreement while opinion represents topics on which agreement is difficult to reach. We can agree with Rorty that traditional epistemological debates (especially those that have inherited a representational view of knowledge) have been unfruitful, and that our beliefs are often subject to conversational and linguistic conditions. But we should take our cue from Allen who directs us back to the greater accomplishments of knowledge beyond the conversational qualities Rorty reduces it to. "The important thing is the quality of performance that knowledge (as opposed to mere belief) enables, performances which typically mobilize a whole ensemble of artifacts and not merely speech acts" (Allen, 2000, 143).

To conclude, I have been building towards a model of experience that recognizes the role that language plays in our lives but emphasizes also a non-discursive form of experience that exists beyond interpretation. The construction of such a model is not the ultimate endpoint of our analysis, for upon recognizing non-discursive experience we are still left with an unsatisfactory dichotomy between the discursive and non-discursive. To argue then that language can itself be a type of experience is an intuitive way to "bridge the gap" between language and experience, although one is still left to fend off the charge that all other forms of experience can be made linguistic as well. These are the issues I address in the final chapter, where I attempt to identify

the closest possible connection between experience and language. There I describe the ability to imagine new vocabularies as being contingent on experience. Having observed that Rorty is not averse to the causal impact the world has on us, I also observe that within Rorty's romanticism Rorty does not make an effort to identify where new vocabularies come from. Being imaginative, for Rorty, is simply a matter of time and chance. I argue that the ability to write new metaphors is a type of social action that is sometimes accidental in its effects, but quite often involves deliberate effort and is contingent on our experience of the world.

Distinguishing between understanding and interpretation is vital if we are to identify a type of experience that is not contingent on language to have significance. In the final chapter I argue that language is itself contingent on experience – that our ability to construct new metaphors is dependent on non-discursive understandings; the types of bodily experiences Shusterman wrote of. This scenario is not presumptive of a body that is naturalized, or an identity that is essentialized. The body remains immersed in culture, and the identity of the self is still fragmented and uncertain. The world that we encounter as external to ourselves is in Rorty's sense a physical reality that modifies our behaviour; it is a world that "can blindly and inarticulately crush us; mute despair, intense mental pain, can cause us to blot ourselves out" (1989, 39). We can admit to the contingency of the self while making an experiential addition to Rorty's claim for the contingency of language. Although Rorty insists that language does not connect to anything "real" in the world (that it can only connect to itself) we can exploit Rorty's concession that nonlinguistic experiences exist and shape our emotions. Having already critiqued Rorty's suggestion that these nonlinguistic experiences remain trapped in the private sphere, we are prepared to see how these experiences allow us to imagine new language games to play that are part of the public sphere. The distinction I drew between understanding and interpretation in

this section will be closely connected to the distinction between *productive* and *reproductive* imagination that I examine in the chapter to come. *Productive* imagination refers to the original creative impulses of the individual, and *reproductive* imagination refers to the postmodern fear that what we are able to imagine is simply a parody of previous images.

Chapter 5: Imagination and Experience: A Linguistic Approach

"At the heart of Romanticism, I said, was the claim that reason can only follow paths that the imagination has first broken. No words, no reasoning. No imagination, no new words" (Rorty, 2007, 129)

"A universe of experience is a precondition of a universe of discourse" (Dewey, 1938, 74)

In writing of the contingency of the self Rorty alerts us to the potential for self-creation, and it is here that he also draws our attention to the recurrent "quarrel" that we find between poetry and philosophy in the intellectual history of the West (1989, 25). He notes that "the important philosophers of our own century are those who have tried to follow through on the Romantic poets by breaking with Plato and seeing freedom as the recognition of contingency" (Rorty, 1989, 26). The tension between traditional philosophy and romanticism is exemplified by the respective hope of overcoming contingency in order to achieve universality, and the hope of recognizing contingency in order to make self-creation plausible. It is the difference between discovering who we "really are" and believing that we have no essence that can be discovered. Rorty has asked that we side with the Romantics and see ourselves as free to "write our own script".

Imagination is a central concept in Rorty's work, as Rorty's blending of pragmatism and romanticism would not have its potency were it not for the power of imagination. The pragmatist's appreciation for imagination is of course connected to meliorism and the hope for a better future. As Steven Fesmire writes of John Dewey: "Imagination in Dewey's central sense is the capacity to concretely perceive what is before us in light of what could be. Its opposite is

experience narrowed by acclimation to standardized meanings" (Fesmire, 2003, 65). The vitality

of romanticism depends on our ability to transcend reason and forge a new path that leads away

from a purely rational or scientific enterprise and towards a worldview that values imaginative

effort. Schulenberg (2015) has done well to specify how Rorty's commitment to romanticism

and imagination connects to the antifoundational narrative of progress that I wrote of in Chapter

One. Without grounding our beliefs and practices in reason and logic, a new method of progress

is needed, and romanticism provides the background with which we can impress Rorty's

conviction that linguistic innovation is the instigating factor in moral progress. Following Harold

Bloom's recommendation Rorty specifically advocates that it is books of "imaginative novelty"

rather than books of argumentation that we should allow to capture our attention (Rorty, 2010b,

389). Here we see Rorty synthesize Dewey's understanding of moral progress with Davidson's

account of language, the result being that we see moral progress as a poetic accomplishment – it

is a matter of imaginative creation rather than deductive reasoning (Rorty, 1991a).

While Rorty writes at length of the importance of creating imaginative metaphors and of

engaging in "strong misreadings" of texts he gives little attention to how it is possible to

transcend the standard use of language and actually be imaginative. In Rorty's romanticism we

find that he is concerned only with how imaginative texts are *consumed* and takes no interest in

how they are *produced. In this chapter I illustrate how our ability to imagine can be rooted in

experience*, and that we can use this insight to further imagine how we might proceed to

overcome the dichotomy between experience and language. Rorty is a self-described romantic,

but I suggest that Rorty has privileged one aspect of romanticism while neglecting another. Rorty

prefers to write about the linguistic accomplishments of romanticism while not mentioning that

this broad-based movement also alerted us to the value of aesthetic experience and the role that

emotions have in our experience. Despite the attention Rorty pays to our ability to imagine he does not seem interested in understanding how this occurs, and simply describes poetic achievements as being the product of "radically situated individuals" (2010c, 252).

Rorty may simply be taking the pragmatic approach in believing that the origin of new vocabularies is unimportant relative to what the effects of a given vocabulary have on social life. If this is Rorty's stance, and I believe it is, he may be justified in his attitude. But I also believe that it is worthwhile to investigate the marvel of imagination more closely than Rorty does, for upon closer inspection it contains many of the paradoxical traits that we have observed in experience, and I attempt to communicate this here. Had Rorty investigated the origins of imagination more closely he may have found that these origins are closely connected to experience.

In this chapter, following my elaboration of this argument, I will present a detailed study that builds upon a hopeful attempt that has been made to unify experience and language via an exploration of Paul Ricoeur's reaction to the paradoxical character of imagination. I argue that Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn against phenomenology is of the same order as Rorty's linguistic turn against experience, and that both can be made to return to experience by better understanding the nuanced qualities of imagination.

1. **The Paradox of Imagination**

Within philosophical discussions of imagination there is a paradox that mirrors "the problem of intersubjectivity" that I have argued is also reflected in the theoretically confused treatment of experience throughout history. Saulius Geniusas has phrased the paradoxical structure of imagination as follows: "It enables one both to flee one's socio-cultural reality and to

constitute one's socio-cultural world" (Geniusas, 2014, 230). There is a tension between using imagination to *escape* the reality of the present and using imagination to *shape* reality, and Geniusas finds that most philosophical accounts of imagination do not do much to explore the compatibility of these two characteristics. "How can one and the same power enable one to escape and to build, to flee and to form, to suspend and to constitute?" (Geniusas, 2014, 230). For Geniusas, most philosophy carries a prejudiced stance towards imagination that leaves "the paradox of irreality" unexamined; imagination is assumed to be merely the ability to produce replications of a pregiven reality.

To make clear the similar character between the paradox of imagination and Joas' recommendation for "practical intersubjectivity" we can recall that Joas developed his concept from his recognition that a "middle ground" was needed to compensate for theories of action that were either overly individualistic or too deterministic. Human agency needed to be described in a way that took into consideration the constraints that culture and language placed on action but still allowed for original thought and action to occur. When this insight is superimposed onto how we theorize experience the lesson to be learned is that experience cannot be reduced to an effect of culture as Rorty claims via language, for such a view of experience is too deterministic. For experience to be a worthwhile enterprise for scholars there must either be a concession of a nondiscursive, somatic mode of experience as elaborated by Shusterman or an approach to experience that at least leaves room for an active, creative component of experience that exists despite the mediation of culture. I will show in this section that interrogating the problem of imagination helps us clarify the dynamics of such an approach.

I have observed the tension within experience between a need for a heightened sense of individuality so that experience is not merely a reflection of the social, and the awareness of how

language as representative of the social might overwhelm experience. I described the paradox of imagination as constituted by the same dilemma; our ability to transcend the limits of culture is in question and we are perturbed by the possibility that what we imagine to be a unique expression of individuality is merely replication of a prior pattern. Given the close connection between imagination and romanticism it should not surprise us that we find romanticism generally fraught with the same difficulties. This is illuminated by Richard Eldridge (2001, 11) who describes the romantic figure as engaged in a problematic struggle to become transcendent; to become independent and critical of the milieu in which he finds himself. This task involves persistent effort on the part of the protagonist who must constantly harness personal experience and mold it into something expressive of true individuality. "Claims of intimacy, solidarity and cathexis to daily routine jostle against claims to knowledge, objectivity, and clear-sightedness about what there "at bottom" "really" is" (Eldridge, 2008, 8). The mundane experiences through which we pass must be made exemplary – they must be humanized in a way that risks estranging the subject from nature. In order for the Romantic's project to be successful the *private imagination* must become active to serve as a critical authority of the culture from which it has distanced itself. The danger of romanticism is that it might culminate in "mad, solipsistic preoccupation" (Eldridge, 2001, 20).

We will recognize this criticism as similar to the common complaints leveled against Rorty's notion of *irony,* which I described in the second chapter where I outlined Rorty's distinction between "private irony" and "public liberalism". Mahon, in her work *The Ironist and the Romantic* (2014), allows us to see the connections between Rorty's conception of irony and his romanticism. The ironist must, in order to succeed in acts of self-creation, detach himself from the world. Here Rorty would quickly interject and argue that "detachment" is not indicative

of any metaphysical separation between the self and the world, and we could concede that he is

correct while still observing that there is a *practical* tension within a self that is torn between

attending to private, incommunicable interests and attending to the suffering of the world. Simon

Critchley, for instance, describes this as a psychological conflict within the self (1996, 25).

Again, Rorty would respond by saying that there *is* a distinction between the *aesthetic* and the

moral that closely mirrors the division between the private and the public, and that we can, at

different moments of our lives, pursue both private, aesthetic bliss and attend to the moral (which

corresponds to the hope of greater social solidarity). The *moral* is what we engage with when we

feel driven to alleviate the suffering in the world, and the *aesthetic* is what we allow ourselves to

indulge in when the demand to relieve suffering "lets up" for a while. As I have already

suggested two separate ways to refute Rorty's private/public division by noting that it is perhaps

both unobtainable and undesirable, I will not revisit this argument here. The point here is that in

relation to the individualistic sense of self that I described as being commonplace within early

conceptions of experience we can now see how Rorty's romanticism and his irony speak to the

existence of such a self. As Mahon explains: "Like irony, romanticism has always been faulted

for subjectivism and irresponsibility, for too little attention to the social and political realities of

everyday life" (2014, 9).

While I applaud Mahon's effort to connect Rorty's romanticism to his irony, as I noted

before, I argue that she inverts the causal relationship and essentially misunderstands the

direction of the relationship. For Mahon, the postmodern loss of the subject is the unintended and

undesirable outcome of Rorty's irony. This is evident when she says: "A focus on idiosyncrasy

and self-creation…leaves little room for a self to define itself in relation to a particular set of

cares and commitments. The self becomes radically decentred, in other words" (Mahon, 2014,

134). I have argued the opposite, observing that Rorty writes at length of the ultimate contingency of the self and sees this as an opportunity for irony and imaginative re-fashioning of the self. It is not the case, as Mahon states, that the detrminetal loss of the subject follows from Rorty's irony. In fact, it is that the contingency of the self creates the conditions where irony and imagination can exist.

The possible definitions of romanticism are varied, but we can identify a set of recurring concerns within romanticism with the aim of understanding how Rorty's romanticism could be expanded to include experience without compromising his preference for imaginative language. Aine Mahon identifies the following cluster of focal points that romanticism has, and one can also observe, while reading the following list, how questions of intersubjectivity can be discerned: "(1) from nature and the self a feeling of loss and estrangement; (2) a related sense of quest, challenge and difficulty; (3) a faith in the magic or the power of everyday language and life; (4) a pursuit of the fixed and individual self; (5) and emphasis on expressiveness and emotiveness; (6) an emphasis on intuition and intensity; (7) an emphasis on reanimation and redemption" (Mahon, 2014, 8).

Russel Goodman interprets Rorty's romanticism as composed of three principle aspects: moral attention to de-divinization, political attention to the importance of anti-authoritarianism, and most importantly for us, a focus on the aesthetic qualities of imagination and creativity (Goodman, 2008, 80). Goodman has described Rorty as belonging to a lineage of pragmatism that has taken European romanticism seriously (Goodman, 2008). Aside from Rorty, William James and John Dewey feature prominently in this tradition.

Yet in examining the aesthetic qualities of imagination that Rorty draws our attention to we find that his explanation of the process of imagining new metaphors is rudimentary: he describes it as a matter of luck. In "Pragmatism and Romanticism" Rorty states the following:

> "We should try to think of imagination not as a faculty that generates mental images but as the ability to change social practices by proposing advantageous new uses of marks and noises. To be imaginative, as opposed to being merely fantastical, one must both do something new and be lucky enough to have that novelty adopted by one's fellows – incorporated into their ways of doing things. The distinction between fantasy and imagination is between novelties that do not get taken up and put to use by one's fellows and those that do" (Rorty, 2007a, 107)

We cannot deny that luck plays a significant role in what new imaginings become parts of the social fabric of our lives, for it is clear that the correct cultural conditions must be in place in order for a novel idea to resonate with an audience. The point, however, is to show that Rorty does not adequately distinguish between the capacity for *productive imagination* and *reproductive imagination*, where the first term carries the hope of genuinely original ideas and the second term refers to the replication of existing patterns as the result of complete immersion in a culture or language. We have seen that Rorty rejected discussions about experience because he believed that original experiences were not possible because all experience is potentially linguistic and that language is necessarily something we share rather than something we actively produce on our own. This being the case, the ability to experience something in a novel way is just as unlikely as the ability to reach beyond an existing language and imagine a new way of describing something. As Rorty notes on the ability to imagine: "It is a relation between the human present and the human past, not a relation between the human and the non-human" (2007a, 108). To the extent that we are able to experience or imagine something in an idiosyncratic way, such expressions remain in the private sphere and cannot be articulated in a

public language. Yet I have argued that Rorty was too defensive of the division between the public and private, and that he himself conceded that what occurs in the private sphere does occasionally have an impact on public politics. I have previously noted that in a late essay on Derrida Rorty concedes that "…many responsibilities begin in dreams, and many transfigurations of the tradition begin in private fantasies" (Rorty, 1991b, 120). In sum, Rorty's romanticism is awkwardly positioned between the idea that imagination cannot transcend the limits of language and the idea that there are non-linguistic experiences that people have and that these experiences *can* be connected to the public sphere in how they inspire us to imagine how new languages games can be played. Because Rorty did not want to engage with experience and only occasionally wrote of its non-linguistic expression he was not prepared to see how such experience can ground our ability to imagine. As a result, he accounted for imagination by describing it only as a matter of chance.

Even if we postulate that our experience of the imaginary is a purely linguistic affair, as Rorty does, we would do well to place this assumption within the context of the different theories of imagination. I have not conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on imagination here, for such a task is too ambitious and not necessary given our general objective. Yet in the section that follows I briefly review and organize the varied postmodern approaches to imagination, for as I have said, there are close parallels between the postmodern scepticism of experience that results from the recognition that experience simply parodies language, and the deconstruction of imagination where imagination is viewed as merely reproductive of language rather than an authentic expression of individuality. I suggest that the "independent variable" that explains these phenomenon is an emergent understanding of the social character of the self in opposition to a description of the self as an isolated being with the uncanny ability to transcend

the cultural/linguistic milieu of their time. As we develop a more thorough understanding of intersubjectivity, our ability to theorize imagination is as challenged as our ability to theorize experience.

2. <u>Imagination and Phenomenology</u>

The enigmatic character of imagination was also commented on by phenomenologists. Imagination is a recurring topic for Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and others, but Geniusas alerts us to the fact that although these phenomenologists wrote about imagination, the ambiguity of imagination – the paradox we have identified – remains unacknowledged. To illustrate, Geniusas places Edmund Husserl (2005) and Jean Paul Sartre (1962) in the category of thinkers who addressed the *utopian* quality of imagination. This is the quality of imagination that speaks to the innocent ability to visualize objects that are absent or non-existent – the type of imagining that leaves us cut off from the reality of our surroundings. In contrast, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1993), Gaston Bachelard (1994) and Cornelius Castoriadis (1997) write about imagination in a way that emphasizes the *constitutive* power that imagination has. In this view, imagination is far from innocent, as it allows us to criticize the status quo and reconfigure reality. In sum then, one group of phenomenologists address imagination relative to its capacity to *remove* us from reality, while the other group discuss imagination for its potential to *engage* and transform reality, but no phenomenologist is alert to the contradictory nature of these projects.

The relationship between imagination and perception must also be commented on. In early phenomenology we find that in relation to Husserl's essential insight that all consciousness is intentional, imagination is treated as a unique form of consciousness that exists apart from acts of perception. In contrast to the pragmatist where imagination blends together with creative

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habit, judgement and understanding, Husserl and those phenomenologists that followed described imagination as an activity that was unique within our intentional acts of consciousness (Bourgeois, 2013, 67). In short, in phenomenology the role of the imagination is "to direct the analysis away from the factual lived experience of the phenomenon to the essential structure inherent within it, thus giving rise to the realm of the possible" (Bourgeois, 2013, 67-68). In other words, the imagination is what is needed in order to grasp the essential structure of consciousness, and the essential dimensions of the objects we perceive. Imagination is an act that is distinct from an act of intellect or habit.

I have suggested elsewhere that of all the phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty is perhaps the most pragmatic, and this idea is supported when we consider his approach to imagination, for he stresses the positive, creative aspect of imagination. While Merleau-Ponty did abide by the general phenomenological view of imagination as irreducible and unique, he seemed to recognize the practical value that imagination could have in our lives. Imagination was not simply something that was necessary for experience to take place; it was also something that could be harnessed to make visible what was unseen. As we see in the *Visible and the Invisible* (1968) the invisible, for Merleau-Ponty is not that which is non-existent, or unreal, it is that which pre-exists in the visible. This is demonstrated in Merleau-Ponty's insistent referral to the act of the painter, who through his actions is able to grasp what exits only as potential and make visible that which is unseen. This is another way of saying that we need not follow the commonly held belief that imagination is in stark contrast to that which is "real". This aspect of Merleau-Ponty's work has been embraced and elaborated on in many contemporary contexts. Most recently Kathleen Lennon has put forward a conception of the imaginary in which imagination is not the domain of illusion, but rather, imagination is "that by which the real is

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made available to us" (Lennon, 2015, 2). The "real", for Lennon, as it was for Merleau-Ponty, is not saddled with the troublesome metaphysical implications one might expect, because the "real" is not a reference to a timeless reality that exists regardless of how we perceive it, it is only an indication of the world, or the *actual.*

In reference to the problem of intersubjectivity, we might say that in Merleau-Ponty's later work imagination is not only marked by everyday *action*, it is also what allows us to overcome the dualism between our inner selves and an outer world. The distinction between what exists inside of us and what exists exterior to us is trespassed by imagination. Merleau-Ponty notes: "…my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, 125). As I will soon show in relation to a post-structural account of imagination, collapsing the metaphysical distinction between inner and outer results in a lethal deconstruction of imagination in the same way it does for experience, and without Merleau-Ponty's pragmatic emphasis on action in imagination and a hesitant belief in progress he might have arrived at the same determination as Derrida and Foucault.

3. <u>Imagination and Action: A Pragmatist Approach</u>

> "Openness to novelty is an enemy of established criteria and literal meanings…But romanticism may just be another name for creativity…it may be more appropriate to speak here not of the display of courage to be but rather of courage to act" (Kolenda, 1990, 114-115)

I have said in this chapter that we can overcome Rorty's dichotomy between experience and language by observing the role that creativity and imagination play in experience. Although I have described at length the active component of experience there is still much to be said of how

imagination is even possible. If we are willing to release the tension between the body and the mind that characterizes the metaphysical distinctions Rorty asks us to replace then it stands to reason that we do not need a separate theory of action to explain how seemingly introverted processes of imagination are linked to experience. I have connected experience to concrete practices to avoid the criticism that experience is strictly about knowledge creation, and it stands to reason that if I am willing to blend processes of *knowing* with processes of *doing* then I should be content to apply the same explanatory scheme to the process of imagining. This is what I aim to do here, as I describe how imagination is rooted in active experience, and not the product of a monastic individual removed from language and culture.

In the literature that attempts to move beyond the postmodern deconstruction of imagination I identify Kant's idea of *productive imagination* as a common reference point. I will dedicate no more than a paragraph to describing Kant's ideas on imagination, although clearly much more could be written. What I describe is also helpful in further understanding the often confusing relationship between imagination and perception. For Kant, as evidenced in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 71)*,* experiences are not possible without the imagination. The sensory input that we receive through perception is unintelligible to us without the faculty of imagination. Imagination is needed to give shape and form to sensory experiences. Experience, then, has two components: that of understanding (concepts) and sensibility (sensory data), and the role of imagination is to mediate between these two components. This is a simplistic description, and as it has been commonly observed, Kant is not always consistent in his account of what role imagination plays, as there is variation between his first and third critiques (Llewelyn, 2000, 50). What is important for us is to recognize that Kant's placement of imagination at the centre of our mental activity was a turning point in philosophy that allowed romanticism to emerge. In *The*

Romantic Legacy Charles Larmore cites Kant's primary influence on romanticism as being "the view that the mind actively determines experience" (as cited in Kneller, 2007, 4). In this view, the Romanticist's appropriation of Kant's power of the imagination was not simply connected to producing new mental images; it was also connected to *experience*. Rorty, as I have noted, embraces romanticism for its attention to the power of imagination, but emphasizes only the linguistic aspect of romanticism while neglecting the role that experience played. Yet in considering Kant's contribution to romanticism we find that Kant placed importance on the experiential role in imagination.

Within the literature where we see attempts to restore imagination it is common to see a return to Kant's work. As examples, Charles Altieri, in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (2015), appropriates Kant's productive imagination while being cautious to avoid Kant's idealism. Altieri is able to avoid Kant's idealizing by grounding imagination in secular experience. Patrick Bourgeois acknowledges the deconstructive threat to imagination and in retrieving imagination finds value in preserving a Kantian-based notion of reason (2013). By "reason" Bourgeois does not defend an absolute or totalitarian sense of reason, but one that is "rooted in the concrete, a reason that is open to lived experience and to the infinite" (2013, xi). Kathleen Lennon follows Kant in arguing that we require imagination to have experiences related to knowledge, *and* that we require imagination for the production of fictions and illusions (2015). In other words, imagination is not only necessary for knowledge; it is also active in the aesthetic, creative sphere of life.

None of these theorists are self-described pragmatists, but in their valuing of productive imagination I detect an impulse to establish an account of imagination that like an account of experience must somehow be active rather than passive in order to be worth our attention. Perhaps then, they would have done well to incorporate some pragmatist theory into their formulas.

Although Kant is an undoubtedly essential resource for developing a theory of imagination, it is clear that for our purposes the deficit in his work is that he does not have a coherent theory of action, and ultimately his notion of the self as being an autonomous ego betrays us. I acknowledge that both of these claims have been contested: Richard McCarty (2009) has attempted to discern a theory of action in Kant's work, while Tamar Japaridze (2000) has argued that in contrast to popular interpretation Kant conceives of the subject as being dependent on "traces of the other". While both of these perspectives are worth acknowledging, the authors themselves confess to the idiosyncrasy of their approach, and we are still left wanting a properly pragmatic notion of action and selfhood to account for the role of experience in imagination.

Within the literature on imagination a common starting point is to describe and define imagination by narrating a story that involves a random image that is produced in the mind. But when we consider a more realistic example of what it is we are doing when we imagine we will find that much of our imaginative effort involves imagining ourselves involved in various forms of action. This is a point that is touched upon by Adam Morton who describes imagination as "a purposeful relation to a possibility, rather than images or words" (2013, 9). Again: "When we imagine, we are trying to achieve something with the representation, trying to get it to do some job" (Morton, 2013, 9). This sense of imagination is not far removed from what we mean when we speak of imagination in our ordinary lives. As Lennon has observed, when we refer to someone as being imaginative we do not usually mean that that individual is living in a world of fiction that is the result of their private, interior life. What we normally mean is that these individuals "are particularly perceptive, sensitive to the shapes which the world around them can take" (2015, 3). Defining imagination in this way may appear to muddle the distinction between imagination and thinking, and it does. But we are reminded of the pragmatist agenda to deliberately overcome the

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dualisms between mind and body, and between thinking and doing, and once we have overcome these distinctions we will be less bothered by the blending of imagination and thought. This sentiment is echoed by Lennon when she notes that "Although we can criticize false and debilitating imaginaries, we cannot draw a sharp distinction between the imaginary and the symbolic, cognition and affect, between what is known and what is imagined" (Lennon, 2015, 1).

The general pragmatic attitude towards imagination, as recounted by Bourgeois is that of imagination being absorbed into creative habit (2005, 89). Because of this, it would seem that there is little to write about how pragmatists treat imagination, for we would do better to write about the creativity of action that emerges out of habits. But there are instances where pragmatists have addressed imagination in a way that is distinct from Dewey's conception of habit. This is the case in William James' work on freedom, where the recognition of the possibilities that are available to us requires imaginative effort (see "The Dilemma of Determinism"). Yet if we were to identify a general pragmatic stance towards imagination we could without problem adopt Bourgeois' view that while phenomenology presents imagination as a unique faculty that is always necessary and sometimes useful for practical tasks, pragmatism treats imagination as intrinsically connected to creative action. This is consistent with my argument that a nuanced theory of action distinguishes a pragmatist account of experience from a phenomenological one.

4. **<u>Postmodern Variations of Imagination</u>**

Patrick Bourgeois (2013, 9) has distinguished between three noteworthy postmodern approaches to imagination that are revealing of the themes I have written about in relation to experience. The three distinct positions are: the extremist deconstructive approach, a softened deconstructive position that remains open to the possibility of a hermeneutical approach, and a third approach (that Bourgeois advocates for) where the positive contribution of the deconstructive approach is acknowledged yet supplemented with insights from phenomenology and pragmatism that illuminate the role that lived experience has in imagination.

In the first approach, the postmodern deconstruction of imagination is most evident in the work of Derrida, as he subjugates imagination to a force outside the individual that leaves imagination as a passive phenomenon rather than a productive act (Bourgeois, 2001). We find support for Bourgeois' reading of Derrida when we focus on Derrida's *Dissemination* (1981). Here Derrida convinces us that the imaginative work of a genius might be more aptly described as a matter of chance (1981, 279). That which is new and fresh does not arise from within the control of the subject, but it is analogous to the role of a die. Bourgeois tells us that this interpretation of Derrida is also the fundamental thesis of Leonard Lawlor in his work *Imagination and Chance: The Difference between the Thought of Ricoeur and Derrida* (1992). Turning to Lawlor we see him write passages such as "…every text, every word, every letter, is out of our control" (1992, 122).

Of course, Derrida's view on imagination is consistent with his general view of language and signs. Language exists in signs which take their meaning because of their relation to other signs, all of which takes places within a broader network of signs. Parallel to this, Derrida

believes that imagination is marked by parody: the image we see in our imagination refers only to other images.

Derrida's deconstruction of imagination and his equivalent embrace of language as all-encompassing in our lives is of course in harmony to what I have described of Rorty's linguisticism. Rorty dismisses experience because he believes that experience does not connect to anything "real" in the world – it only connects to language. We should not describe ourselves as actively experiencing the world, as a more accurate description for Rorty would be that we are simply receptive of stimuli and cannot help interpreting these moments linguistically through whatever vocabularies happen to be available to us in our culture. This results in the "death of experience" in the same that Derrida's move away from productive imagination towards reproductive imagination results in the "death of imagination." If by imagination we mean that the images we see in our mind can only refer to other images and not to actual things in the world, then the subject who imagines is as dead as the subject who experiences.

The second postmodern position towards imagination that Bourgeois identifies is a type of compromise in reaction to the overtly reductive and deconstructive effort found in Derrida. Bourgeois situates Jean Francois Lyotard within this approach, describing his position as "quasi hermeneutical". Here, imagination is granted some creative freedom – it is not, as in the case of Rorty and Derrida, immersed completely within language. Instead, language *does* communicate something real to someone. There are of course many ways to interpret Lyotard's approach to language, and we should not assume that Bourgeois' understanding "gets it right". For example, the extent to which Lyotard is able to avoid the "extreme deconstruction of imagination" that Bourgeois describes as emblematic of the first approach might be reconsidered if we take seriously the interpretation of Lyotard offered by Richard Kearney (1998). While we might take

issue with how Bourgeois distinguishes Lyotard's approach from Derrida's, our main concern should be to note that the type of oppressive linguisticism that I have identified in Rorty's approach to experience (and that Bourgeois identifies in Derrida), can be countered in a way that is still suitably postmodern.

The third postmodern approach to imagination that Bourgeois identifies is the hermeneutical position exemplified most accurately by the work of Paul Ricoeur. There is much to be said of Ricoeur's ideas on imagination, and in the section that follows I will present a case study that demonstrates well how I think we should interpret his work. In Ricoeur we find that imagination is given a central place in the production of knowledge. Knowledge does not depend on abstract reasoning, and reason is not the product of imagination. Yet reason is not cast aside in favour of imagination, as often seems to have occurred amongst the idealist and romantics who followed Kant. For his contribution to this third approach, Bourgeois makes an effort to preserve reason, although not in a totalitarian sense that treats reason as having a special place above all other human faculties, but in the sense that reason is closely connected to concrete action and lived-experience. This of course opens us to the possibilities of a pragmatic and phenomenological interpretation of imagination and experience that is not naïve to the role language plays. The hope should be to resuscitate a sense of productive imagination that has been left dead by the "extreme deconstructive" attacks of other more fashionable postmodern approaches.

As I have alluded to, within the deconstructive approaches to imagination there is a tendency to subordinate Kant's idea of the "productive imagination" by referring instead to time and chance and language as a means to "explain away" the possibility of genuine innovation. As a result of this, imagination becomes *passive* in our lives rather than *active*. I have consistently

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observed the limitations of French post-structural thought, and we see here the general impasse that I have written of, in that having deconstructed imagination Derrida and others of his genre cannot believe that anything can transcend the limits of reason, even where reason itself is in doubt. While Bourgeois targets Derrida in his critique, I have referred more often to Foucault, as I complained in the first chapter about Foucault's belief that to imagine another system is to participate in the present system, and that Foucault was overly pessimistic in his insistence that we not attempt to find a way out of this dilemma. For his part, Rorty does not "gloss together" Foucault and Derrida as is often assumed. He notes: "The big difference between Foucault and Derrida is that Derrida is a sentimental, hopeful, romantically idealistic writer. Foucault, on the other hand, often seems to be doing his best to have no social hope and no human feelings" (Rorty, 1996, 13). These are the primary obstacles that Bourgeois sees Ricoeur and himself striving to overcome in the third approach. "The positive element of deconstruction must not obscure its failure to offer any real extension beyond the limit. It only deconstructs" (Bourgeois, 2013, xi). With this in mind, in the following section I present an interpretation of Ricoeur that builds constructively upon the insights of Bourgeois, as I demonstrate how Ricoeur has addressed the "paradox of imagination". I examine how Saulius Geniusas (2014) has critiqued Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn in a way that allows us to better understand the pragmatic relationship between language and experience.

5. <u>Recovering Ricoeur's Sense of Phenomenology: Uniting Experience and Language</u>

I have described the paradox of imagination as carrying the same problems of intersubjectivity we find in connection to experience, and the manner in which Saulius Geniusas attempts to reconcile the tension within imagination is notable, for he claims that only Paul

Ricoeur explicitly addressed this paradox and that he did so by recognizing that *language* is the source of productive imagination. As Geniusas reminds us, Ricoeur attempted to develop alternative models of imagination to contend with this paradox, and he developed four different frameworks: epistemological imagination, socio-political imagination, religious imagination and poetic imagination (2014, 230). Since our interest is to synthesize experience and language while attending to the creative and intersubjective character of experience we would do well to focus on the model of *poetic imagination* while placing Ricoeur's other models of imagination on "the backburner". Given what I have written in the first chapter about Rorty's belief that social change is a matter of linguistic innovation and the capacity to imagine new vocabularies, the term *poetic imagination* appears to resonate most soundly with the task at hand.

Geniusas' argument is that Ricoeur comes closest to resolving the paradox of imagination by making a hermeneutical turn in phenomenology. Yet in doing so Ricoeur creates a different type of fracture in imagination, creating an unsatisfactory dichotomy between *reproductive* and *productive* imagination. The idea of reproductive imagination carries the standard prejudice against imagination; the idea that when we imagine objects to exist we are simply creating replicas of objects that we have already perceived to exist. Although we are able to create new configurations of the objects we perceive these are still just copies of reality. For Ricoeur, the reproductive character of imagination can only correspond with the utopian tendency of imagination, and cannot speak to the constitutive, productive tendency of imagination. The reason for this being that if through imagination the subject is only able to reproduce what has been experienced then the subject will not have the resources needed to reshape reality. "Such then is Ricoeur's conclusion: if we think of images as copies of reality, then we will end up

thinking of imagination as exclusively reproductive and lose all grounds to meaningfully speak of productive imagination" (Geniusas, 2015, 229).

Speaking to the reproductive character of imagination Ricoeur notes that we can conceptualize the images we reproduce as not only being replications of a world that is "given" but as being fictions. In an article titled "The function of fiction in shaping reality" (1979, 126 as cited in Geniusas, 2015, 230) Ricoeur defines the distinction between fictions and replicas by contrasting two different types of nothingness: that of absence and that of non-existence. When we describe an object that we imagine as being a replica of our experience we can think of the object as being absent. This object has the potential to exist in the real world. In contrast, a fiction is an object of our imagination in which the object is non-existent – these are objects that are not part of our actual experience. What is implied in this schema is that fictions are not merely reproductive, but constitutive of reality. The fictitious character of what we imagine is able to both escape what is "real" and also reconstitute the world. This dialectical struggle is structured by language, and it is language that makes *productive* imagination possible.

Given that we are attempting to find a pragmatic synthesis between experience and language we might be easily satisfied with Ricoeur's blend of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Yet there is still much to be desired from Ricoeur's formulation, for it often appears that Ricoeur has not so much found a way to overcome the dichotomy between language and experience as he has simply chosen a side in the debate – betraying his phenomenological heritage and choosing to privilege language. Here it appears that Ricoeur's turn away from phenomenology and towards language is a move that Rorty would approve of. When Ricoeur writes that productive imagination requires language, that "images are spoken before they are seen", he is apparently shifting his attention away from what we perceive of the world through experience to what we

interpret of the world through language (1979, 129 as cited in Geniusas, 2015, 232). His hermeneutical approach is very much a Rortyian endeavor, and one could easily conclude the conversation by stating that Ricoeur has solved the paradox of imagination by making "the linguistic turn"; all experience - whether visual, acoustic or tactile – are understood through language. Much as Rorty saw social change as being an outcome of an innovative vocabulary, Ricoeur describes the capacity to imagine as being intrinsically connected to the metaphorical use of language. If we do not give primacy to language then our ability to conceptualize imagination will be constrained to its reproductive function – we will be able to explain imagination as the capacity to produce replicas of our experience; a type of nothingness that is absent rather than non-existent. If we are willing to make the "linguistic turn" we will be able to explain the full functionality of imagination by describing how we create the necessary fictions that allow us to bring productive imagination into action.

Aside from our realization that there is nothing particularly pragmatic about Ricoeur's schema, we might also be perturbed by the rupture that Ricoeur has created in imagination between the reproductive and productive aspects. Ricoeur has not so much solved the paradox as he has substituted one paradox for another. This is not to suggest that the paradox *must* be resolved, or that it *can* be, for the challenge might simply be to understand the practical implications of this tension. Yet the attempts to overcome these paradoxes do reveal much about the character of the puzzle, and so we might continue our inquiry into the newly formed contradiction between reproductive and productive imagination. Geniusas questions Ricoeur's conviction that language and perception are two irreconcilable origins of the images we see in our mind, for this is what is implied in Ricoeur's claim that we can associate fiction with productive imagination and that fiction is an exclusive achievement of langugae. For Geniusas,

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our ability to produce fiction is *not* an exclusively linguistic affair, for we can trace the potential

of fiction back to more elementary presuppositions, to a type of "pre-predicative" experience. In

other words, Geniusas asks us to observe Ricoeur's hermeneutical turn in phenomenology and

then asks us to supplement this with what amounts to a phenomenological turn in hermeneutics.

Put simply, Ricoeur postulates that our ability to imagine is dependent on language, while

Geniusas counters that the imaginative capacity of language is in fact rooted in perception. For

Geniusas, the utility of such a formulation is that it allows us to expand our understanding of the

paradox of imagination so that it is not exclusively a problem of language. "Dreams and

daydreaming" and "non-language based art" also play a role in imagination (Geniusas, 2015,

230). Perhaps most importantly for us, it allows us to imagine how we might "bridge the gap"

between experience and language, as Geniusas shows through his call for greater dialogue

between phenomenology and hermeneutics.

Recall my earlier commentary on Rorty's acknowledgement of the causal pressures that

the world exerts on us. I noted that Rorty conceded that there is a world external to us, and that

this manifests in Rorty's concession that we do have raw, non-linguistic experiences. Rorty's

observation of this causal pressure is of course distinct from a strict realism where these

sensations are directly *representational* of a world external to us. Rorty's critique of this

philosophical tradition is that its emphasis on "hardness" and "directness" of sense data is

deterministic in that it misses the cultural space in which we are able to give meaning and

interpretation to these experiences. The idea that language exists as a medium between us and the

world should be replaced with the metaphor of language as a tool that we use to pursue our

interests. We should think of language "as a way of grabbing hold of causal forces and making

them do what we want, altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations" (Rorty,

1991a, 81 as cited in Kuiper, 2013, 92). Thus, the idea that the world is "out there" is not the same as the idea that the world dictates what language we use to describe it. In the same way that the world does not determine how we use a hammer, it does not determine how we use language. For Rorty, pragmatism "exalts spontaneity at the cost of receptivity, as his realist opponent did the reverse" (Rorty, 1991a, 81 as cited in Kuiper, 2013, 93). Given Rorty's acknowledgement of non-linguistic experience I have argued here that much like Geniusas asks us to give Ricoeur's hermeneutics a phenomenological treatment, we can give Rorty's Romantic linguisticism an experiential turn.

Finally, in recovering experience from its postmodern state of malaise I have asked not only that we reconsider what we mean by experience, but that we also reassess how the subject is implicated in experience. This is *not* an attempt to trouble Rorty's suggestion that all knowledge is an intersubjective affair by reclaiming an objective basis for our experience. Rather, there is a need to reclaim the agency of the subject. The "centreless self", alternatively referred to as the postmodern "loss of the subject", or by Rorty the "contingent self", can still be a suitable candidate for experience if we take seriously the pragmatist account of action. Our use of language as a tool to mold future experiences rather than to capture the essence of our experience is compatible with Rorty's claim that language allows us to respond in various ways to the causal forces of the world (ie, our non-linguistic experiences). I argued that this is corrective of Rorty's occasional concern that non-linguistic experience can be reduced to the passive reception of stimuli.

The self must be *active* in experience, and a pragmatist theory of action is also a remedial to Rorty's romanticism where I described Rorty as leaving the paradoxical quality of imagination unexamined. The ability to produce new metaphors – to be *productive* in our

imagination rather than merely *reproductive* - is explained by Rorty as being a matter of chance. Some new vocabularies will resonate with an audience, and some will not, but Rorty does not attempt to explain where the ability to be imaginative originates. Here I appropriate Richard Eldridge's alternate description of the romanticist's progress as involving a deliberate struggle to become exemplary – there is *effort* made by the subject to produce new possibilities (2001, 11). While Rorty's romanticism is void of experience, I describe the romantic self as actively negotiating experience. Selfhood, or individuality, should be re-interpreted so that it does not imply a type of ideal or naïve autonomy of the individual. We are held accountable for the descriptive language we use not because there is a contrast between truth and error, but because we belong to a community that finds variable use in our descriptions. We would do better to conceive of individuality as "a form of social action inextricably linked to questions of belonging" (Amit and Dyck, 2006, 1). The self may be contingent, but the pursuit of individuality through seemingly private acts of self-creation has an active, experiential component not acknowledged by Rorty.

    I have suggested that the manner in which imagination pulls the subject in opposing directions is also present in the divergent tendency to describe experience as being a solipsistic retreat into the private mind of the individual or to describe experience as an overwhelmingly social affair. I have argued that the historical trajectory veers towards the latter interpretation of experience being an intersubjective affair but that it should not culminate in Rorty's pronouncement that experience is so much a product of our engagement with our culture that experience is reducible to language. As I have previously shown, present appeals to experience can proceed through attempts to avoid Rorty's matrix of language by formulating non-discursive modes of experience and, as I am illustrating in this section, by attempts to reformulate

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experience from within Rorty's linguisticism – creating a syncretic understanding composed of

the insight of the linguistic turn with the classical pragmatist's primacy of experience.

Chapter 6: A Biographical Endnote

The project of recovering Rorty's sense of experience would not be complete without at least once probing deeply into Rorty's biography in search of subtleties that might explain how his attitude towards experience was molded. Rorty completed such a task for us in relation to a different query, as in chapter two I allowed Rorty to explain, often in his own words, how he arrived at the idea that a distinction between public and private life was warranted. Here we learned of Rorty's childhood fascination with orchids, and how his *experience* of these wild flowers left him "a bit dubious" because he could think of no way to use the public language of social justice to justify his interest in these "socially useless flowers". Yet this mode of experience that Rorty would deliberately induce in himself was crucially important to Rorty's private and intellectual development. Although Rorty describes these experiences as being incommunicable, based on what he *has* communicated it is clear that these experiences were an important aspect of Rorty's socialization – his sense of self and his awareness of how he related to others was formed through the meaning he attributed to these experiences.

When searching for other clues in Rorty's biography that might lead us to better understand why he chose to turn away from experience, we are fortunate that Rorty kept detailed records of his personal correspondence and that this information is available to us. Perhaps the most detailed biography of Rorty has been written by Neil Gross in *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (2008), as Gross was given what seems to be unlimited access to Rorty's private correspondence by Rorty's family. We might be tempted to learn of Rorty's temperament in order to know whether he had any other private, incommunicable experiences aside from those he felt when hunting for orchids in his youth, or later in his life, observing birds through his binoculars. In an earlier section of this dissertation where I wrote on French Post-

Structuralism the reader may have noticed a biographical commonality of the theorists discussed (aside from their Frenchness). Bataille, Foucault and Derrida not only shared a scholarly interest in the topic of madness, but were affected by the symptoms of mental illness in their lives. Rorty did not often write or speak of his illness, but as a second year undergraduate student at the University of Chicago (Rorty was still only 16) he missed classes which eventuated in him being awarded "two C's". He wrote to his father in worry that this performance "will stand on my record and be a constant drag on the future" (Rorty, 1949 as cited in Gross, 2008, 135).

One year earlier, in a personal note to his father James Rorty, who also suffered from bouts of depression, Richard Rorty wrote the following:

> I would like to describe the way I feel to you. I have just sort of stopped caring about my work, the future, Tanya (a young women he was then dating), or anything else. This seems to be something more than a simple spell of depression, which I have occasionally and which go away again, both in duration and intensity. The most obvious consequence is that I, who participated actively in discussions and always was well ahead in my work last year, haven't said a word in class all year and am far behind in everything… Perhaps the solution is just to buckle down, and use the old grit etc., etc. and get the things done. This doesn't seem to work, but I have probably not persuaded myself into it strongly enough (Rorty, 1948, as cited in Gross, 1948).

James Ryerson has described Rorty's unique personality by bringing attention to his voice and the affect that this has had on Rorty's colleagues. "For all the important mysteries about Rorty, his colleagues call attention to one seemingly insignificant aspect of his personality: his voice. Rorty's voice is, as Daniel Dennett notes, "sort of striking – those firebrand views delivered in the manner of Eeyore" (Ryerson, in Mendieta and Rorty, 2006, 15). Describing Rorty's style of presentation Jonathan Ree has said: "There's a tremendous kind of melancholy about it. He tries to be a Gay Nietzschian, but it's an effort for him" (Ryerson, in Mendieta and Rorty, 2006, 15). James Conant, upon describing how Rorty responds to his critics notes the

following: "The mood is one of weariness (of having heard it all before) and the tone is one of forbearance (of wishing the topic under discussion was more interesting)" (Conant, 2000, 269). For Conant, after hearing Rorty speak for the first time, stated: "It's easy to read his writings in a register of excitement, and a heightened breathless voice", he explains. "But the note that I heard when he was reading his sentences in his own cadences and rhythm was – for want of a better word – depression" (Ryerson, in Mendieta and Rorty, 2006, 15).

Within the biographical literature on Rorty there is no attempt by the authors to find significance in Rorty's private experience of melancholy and his desperate insistence that we not talk about experience and change the conversation towards a discussion of language. Rorty's father, writing in response to his son, warned Rorty not to allow his experience to overwhelm him: "Watch yourself and don't lose your edge. It is too disastrous emotionally…you've seen it happen to students, as I remember your telling me" (James Rorty, 1948, as cited in Gross, 1948). My argument throughout this dissertation has been that Rorty does not deny the importance of the private experiences that people have, his point is only that we not try to bring these experiences into the public realm. The work we do in the classroom and the essays we are asked to write about matters of truth and justification should remain unblemished by what we do with our solitude. We should continue to "buckle down" and do the work scholars are expected to do to ensure that the goals of a more equitable society are comprehensible to a greater number of people, but we should not expect that anything we experience in our private lives will help us accomplish this task.

Joan Richardson has offered a brief biographical commentary on Rorty that is centred not on Rorty's own spiritual malaise, but on how Rorty dealt with his father's slow and painful descent into a psychotic state (2014, 177). During this time of Rorty's life Rorty developed a

keen interest in birds, and in a Dutch television interview he explains how his fascination with birds carried the same qualities of attraction as the wild orchids did in his youth. Richardson observes that when the television interviewer presses Rorty to elaborate on what he experienced in these moments when he was in contact with the birds, Rorty responds by pointing out that his experience of the birds was simply an experience of "listing and classification" and that he cannot look at a bird for more than a few minutes before he becomes bored and must begin a new search for a new bird. Richardson interprets Rorty's attitude towards experience as being a form of subdued naturalism that is similar to that of Emerson but lacking in the courage to be a truly unbridled type of experience that could have been more transformative than it was. Within Emerson's naturalism, Richardson notes, "listing and classification" are necessary steps in building our knowledge of nature, but these are only preliminary steps that we take in the much more important path towards imagining, "allowing the "esemplastic power" of the imagination to make "a guess at the riddle" (2014, 177).

> "For Rorty, having witnessed his father's repeated breakdowns, letting go of reason's claim to order was far too threatening; his aversion to what Emerson called "reception" connected to a fear of losing himself into what he perceived as the "psychotic state of his father…better to split the aesthetic pleasure of participation in the celestial pantomime into five-minute fixes, taking in controlled-doses the beauty of the precipitates of the cosmic weather in the shape of a yellow lady-slipper or the tail feather of a cedar waxwing" (Richardson, 2014, 177).

Richardson's point in bringing awareness to this aspect of Rorty's life is to position him closer to the mode of experience advocated for by Charles Saunders Peirce. Richardson interprets Rorty as displaying a type of scientism and naturalism that may be surprising to us given Rorty's general dismissal of Peirce. The only aspect of Peirce's work that is of interest to Rorty is Peirce's brief venture into the realm of semiotics, and this left Rorty wishing that Peirce had devoted more of his attention to language and less of it to experience. Yet Richardson

substantiates her argument by pointing towards the group of scholars that Rorty worked with and was influenced by at various stages of his career, bringing particular focus to Wilfrid Sellars – an analytic philosopher who relied heavily on Peirce and whose work Rorty would later attend to. I will not elaborate on Rorty's intellectual influences here, but it is worth noting that Richardson's work is part of a broader genre of Rortyian scholarship that aims to situate Rorty in closer alignment to the work of Peirce. A dominant understanding of classical pragmatism is often neglectful of the contribution of Peirce, and this is due largely to the uncritical acceptance of Rorty's version of neo-pragmatism, but also due to the positive reception of historical accounts of pragmatism such as Louis Menand's *Metaphysical Club* (2007), where Peirce's significance to the development of pragmatism is muted. Scholars who have attempted to recover Peirce's contribution to pragmatism and to the thought of Rorty include Richard Bernstein (2010) (a classmate of Rorty's at Chicago), Cheryl Misak (1991, 2000) and Susan Haack (1993). I have stated in the introduction to this dissertation that I believe the best hope of developing an approach to experience that coincides with Rorty's antifoundational stance is through the work of Dewey rather than Peirce. This is due mainly to Dewey's consistent praise for experience and Rorty's consistent admiration for the work of Dewey, coinciding with Rorty's apparent disdain for Peirce's realism and everything else Peirce wrote with the exception of his brief foray into the world of semiotics.

As a final note on the topic of this section, we should not assume that Rorty's experience of the birds reveals the essence of his thought any more than we should interpret Heidegger's Nazism as being a vital clue to the underlying essence of *his* thought. As Rorty wrote on Heidegger, there does not need to be a single vision that incorporates every one of his thoughts (Rorty, 1999, 190). Yet ideas do have origins, and it is plausible that Rorty's temperament in his

youth and his private and inexpressible experience of melancholy are in some way connected to his later desire to relegate all experience to the private realm. To Rorty's credit, he appears to have spent considerable time pontificating about his childhood traumas and fascinations, and in the interviews he permitted late in his life he stubbornly insisted that his private experience of the birds provided no consolation for "oceans of human suffering". In other words, the brief moments of aesthetic bliss that he induced in himself could not be expected to provide solace for the fact that social injustice was continuous. There was no way to "bridge the gap" between a private "Wordsworthian moment" and a public reality.

In 2007 Rorty was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and when asked by his son whether he could find anything consolatory at this stage of his life Rorty responded in the affirmative: "Yes", I found myself blurting out, "poetry" (Rorty, 2007, 230). Rorty then recited the most well-known lines of Swinburne's poem "Garden of Proserpine" for his son. "I found comfort in those slow meanders and those stuttering embers….I now wish that I had spent somewhat more of my life with verse. This is not because I fear having missed out on truths that are incapable of statement in prose. There are no such truths…Rather, it is because I would have lived more fully if I had been able to rattle off more old chestnuts — just as I would have if I had made more close friends (Rorty, 2007, 231). Rorty committed himself to the "linguistic turn" until the end, as rather than attempt to speak directly to the reality of a terminal diagnosis he took comfort in his most favoured linguistic innovations.

Conclusion: Language as Experience

> "Problems arise from thinking of language as a third thing, intruding between subject and object and forming a barrier to human knowledge of how things are in themselves…we should think of the word 'language' not as naming a thing with an intrinsic nature of its own but as a way of abbreviating the kinds of complicated interactions with the rest of the universe which are unique to higher anthropoids" (Rorty, 1999, 64)

John W. Oller (1989) has noted that classical pragmatists did not see the question of language acquisition and the question of experience as being distinct. These were not two separate problems but a single problem to be understood by inquiring into how we form our habits and beliefs. The point was to inquire into the matter of how the facts of experience and our use of language are connected and arranged through everyday living.

In the opening chapter I observed and sympathized with Bernstein's wish for a move beyond an exclusionary choice between experience and language. If it is true that language can be seen as the field in which we develop knowledge then we are given two choices: We can describe language as being representational of experience so that experience offers us a foundation for knowledge, or we can contend that experiences are not epistemologically foundational because they are already linguistic to the core. I have said that the challenge is to develop a concept of experience that is relevant to the melioristic aims of the classical pragmatists but not naïve to the developments of the linguistic turn. As such, neither of the two options I described will suffice by itself.

It may at first appear that we can find a solution to this dilemma in the semiotic approach exemplified by Peirce and others, but this approach has problems as well. Mainly, the problem is that it is difficult to see how we can place emphasis on the *meaning* of experience without eventually relying on language. That is, if we wish to move beyond experience as self-evident

expression and towards an approach that focuses on meaning, it seems as though this path can only lead us towards language. To be sure, there are those semiotic approaches that have described a type of self-evident awareness in relation to experience, and in doing so have been less prone to linguistic idealism. Yet while such approaches might avoid the trap of returning to language, the focus on self-evident awareness will surely mark a path towards foundationalism. If meaning is not found through language then it is not clear where meaning can exist other than in the original consciousness of the mind.

The alternative schema that I propose works in harmony with Rorty's suggestion that all experience is *potentially* linguistic (but not necessarily so). The way to avoid the dichotomy of experience/language is to say that language is a type of experience – one that is not metaphysically different from other types of experience. Of course, this does not contradict the idea that there are nondiscursive experiences that lead to new languages, as I have described. Colin Koopman (2007) has done the most to advocate for this stance. As Koopman notes, we can conceive of language (speaking, writing, and listening) as simply types of experiences that we have. These experiences are not essentially different from experiences such as running, cooking, or learning to use a new tool. There are certain differences between our experience of language and our experience of hunting for orchids, but these differences are not philosophically important. For instance, we might ask why philosophers have traditionally afforded so much privilege to language while placing less importance on other experiences that are equally basic to humans, such as building shelter. The quick retort might be that language can be used to describe how we built our home, but our home cannot be *about* language. But why then, as Koopman asks, is "aboutness" so special? Once we have put aside traditional, abstract philosophical questions (as pragmatists like Rorty ask of us),

why should we care more about the truth of our sentences than the relative warmth of the shelter we have built?

The idea that language is itself a type of experience has predictably been developed most comprehensively in the field of literary studies. At this late stage of the dissertation I will not give an exhaustive account of the theories that speak to how we read text, but there are alternatives to Rorty's argument for "strong misreading". Stephan Best and Shawn Marcus, for instance, advocate for "surface reading", which is supposed to allow for an experience of text that is based on "what is evident, perceptible, apprehensible in the texts, what is neither hidden nor hiding…a surface is what insists on being looked at rather than what we must train ourselves to see through" (Best and Marcus, 2009, 9). I will not elaborate on this idea here or elsewhere, but we can at least imagine the varied ways in which reading is itself an experience.

For Rorty and his love of text, reading was even a bodily experience; one that "sends shivers down the spine" (Rorty, 1991a, 163). Rorty fondly quotes Nabokov when Nabokov wrote that "the study of the sociological or political impact of literature has to be devised mainly for those who are by temperament or education immune to the aesthetic vibrancy of authentic literature, for those who do not experience the telltale tingle between the shoulder blades" (Nabokov, in *Lolita*, 64 as cited by Rorty, 1989, 147). For Rorty, being able to experience that tingle is "the highest form of emotion that humanity has attained…" (1989, 147).

Thus, despite Rorty's preference for language over experience he also finds a purpose for describing language as being simply another tool that we use to cope with the world. Such a tool does not carry any epistemological privilege over the use of other tools. If we are willing to describe language as a type of experience that is not epistemologically distinct from other types of experience - if we are willing to see the construction of sentences as a comparable tool to a hammer

- we are positioned to overcome the dichotomy between language and experience. We are also able to see how language is connected to action. Koopman describes the relationship between experience and language by describing the relationship "as analogous to that between a field and a type of action that occurs within that field" (2007, 712). Such a formulation allows us to describe experience without reference to how language in a foundational way might represent experience, since we have conceived of language as merely a part of the field of experience. Nor do we need to be concerned that we will be reduced to playing "language games", for we have made it clear that language does not merely connect to itself in various ways, it also connects to other experiences.

Yet it would be too simple to conclude this project simply by claiming language as a type of experience, for I have emphasized at length that there are experiences that are non-linguistic, and that these bodily understandings are distinct from interpretation. It is true that language is an experience, but this does not imply a type of linguistic idealism where all experience is necessarily linguistic. Rorty has only argued that all experience is *potentially* linguistic, and I have used this concession to describe immediate, raw experience as being a precondition for language. On a basic level, without the presence of a physical body, language cannot exist. I noted specifically that the ability to imagine new metaphors is grounded in our ability to experience what Rorty described as "mute despair, intense mental pain" but also feelings of intense joy, as in Rorty's experience of orchids and birds. Like language, we can describe such experience as being historically contingent. There is no need for a concept of "givenness" that grounds such experience. In other words, there is no need to develop a theoretical system that allows for an experience of experience. A "metaphysics of experience" would require that our epistemology has reliable foundations. In the same way that the linguistic turn was accompanied by our recognition that we do not need a

singular meta-narrative that explains all other narratives, so it is true that "a new experiential turn can deliver the insight that we do not need any sort of metaexperiential experience of experience itself" (Koopman, 2009, 130).

To explain again, the move we make from our non-linguistic experience of the world to our creative use of language to describe our experience is not a process of mirroring and representation, for our imaginative descriptions are not aimed at capturing the essence of pain or joy. As Bjorne Ramberg notes: "Rorty, we know often speaks of redescription as a way of achieving certain kinds of changes. Some critics see this as a kind of idealism, but that is a misguided response. Rather, different strategies of description are ways of bringing salience to different causal patterns in the world, patterns we engage with" (Ramberg, 2000, 363). As I have noted of Rorty, language allows us to respond in various ways to these experiences – pragmatism allows for creative, active response rather than the passive reception of stimuli that marks empiricist approaches. I have said that Rorty occasionally and problematically commits to such approaches to experience in his turn away from the concept, but that his later work on Romanticism offers him an alternative perspective. Language allows us to bring attention to different features of the "causal nexus" in which we find ourselves, without committing to the hope that we might "get reality right".

I have quoted Rorty as saying that we are helpless in how the world imposes itself on us and forms our beliefs, and this is reflected in his sharp division between *reasons* and *causes.* Recall Rorty's stance that: "To say that we have must have respect for unmediated causal forces is pointless. It is like saying that the blank must have respect for the impressed die. The blank has no choice, nor do we" (Rorty, 1991a, 81 as cited in Kuipers, 2013, 92). Yet in Rorty's later work on romanticism I showed that this passivity is in doubt, for language is a tool that we use to cope with

our experience in different ways. Ramberg has summarized Rorty's position in a way that is simple and intuitive when he observes that as humans we are part of the world much like any other species, in the sense that we are both active subjects who negotiate the world but also objects that are acted upon by forces beyond our control (Ramberg, 2000, 351). Yet we are distinct from other species in our use of language, and the world does not strictly cause us to speak a certain language, for language is something that makes a change in the world and causes us to experience things we had not previously noticed. If language did not function in this way it would not have evolved as a useful tool. Rorty's initial distinction between linguistic reasons and experiential causes is made fuzzy if we realize that our choice of various linguistic descriptions become causes in themselves. All of this causes us to rethink the relationship between language and experience, so that we see experience as a type of knowledge that is practical rather than foundational.

The problems of intersubjectivity that I described revolved loosely around the realization that the minds of others are inaccessible to us and that our experience of the world is singular and subjective. Despite this, we are somehow able to recognize others and sympathize with their experience of the world. For Rorty, the issue is muted if we are willing to recognize that we need not distinguish between the interiority of the mind and the exterior reality of the world. Obtaining intersubjective agreement is a linguistic achievement that does not depend on building knowledge of the relationship between the self and the world. We should replace the pursuit of such knowledge of the mind with the pursuit of greater human happiness, and the latter goal can be accomplished not by logical inquiry but by sensitizing ourselves to the suffering of others. By inventing new vocabularies we are able to see that others experience a type of suffering that is similar to our own. Because Rorty does not see a distinction between the mind and the world he

not only dissolves the problem of intersubjectivity, but he dissolves the need for a concept of experience.

I prefaced the move towards this understanding of experience by developing the idea that experience is connected to action, and that action can be understood as taking place within what Mead called "situations". I saw these "situations" to be constituted by the temporal conditions that Koopman elaborates, yet experiences are not simply received as stimuli within a temporally mediated environment, situations are also constituted by the action we deliberately undertake. While Koopman does not emphasize action as being central to his epistemology of transitionalism, he does hint that it is important when he distinguishes between development and difference, or purposive action and mere change. I have asked that we focus more on action and I evoked Joas' notion of *practical intersubjectivity* to indicate a theory of action that could describe how we do not passively encounter "the other" within a situation, but that their subjectivity and consciousness is made clear to us by the shared activities we undertake. If we experience the world as a set of continuous events rather than a set of isolated ones, then we cannot expect to find creativity and agency anywhere other than embedded within experience. When we see experience as being embedded with creativity we are no longer constrained by Rorty's description of experience as being merely synonymous with culture, nor do we have to worry that in referencing experience we are reproducing foundations. We are not granting authority to experience to claim that it is the unmediated source of knowledge, for we have recast knowledge to include the more humble transitory state through which we pass, rather than think of knowledge as fixed or foundational.

As such, we need not associate experience with the accumulation of knowledge. While the classical pragmatist notion of experience is critiqued for referencing a foundation to knowledge, we are also told by the classical pragmatists (Dewey in particular) that we ought not

to create a division between knowing and doing. When we speak of experience as forming knowledge we are seeing things from a distance. Yet knowing is not a form of contemplation, it is connected to action – to experimentation and creativity. Instead of distinguishing between knowing and doing we ought to distinguish between routine acts that are uninformed by intelligent action, and an experimental spirit that informs action. Here I distinguished between interpretation and understanding, and saw promise in Shusterman's elaboration on somatic experience when he wrote that: "We should therefore reject the intellectualist dogma that condemns the pursuit of somatic improvement as a selfish escape into private narcissism. Disciplines of body care provide instead a promising path toward a better public by creating individuals who are healthier and more flexibly open, perceptive, and effective through heightened somatic sensibility and mastery" (Shusterman, 2000, 153).

It is true that within philosophy and the social sciences experience has been deliberately used for the purpose of laying a foundation to our knowledge claims, but it does not follow that all experiences entail foundationalism. In reviving a conversation about experience the aim is not to locate some originary source of truth, but to improve experience. Experience does not function as a guarantee of knowledge, but within a pragmatically oriented sociology it still has a vital role to play. One value of experience is found in the non-discursive, immediate qualities of experience, and the challenge in promoting such experience is to disentangle the non-discursive from the foundationalism that it is commonly assumed to imply. While Dewey did his best to overcome foundationalism and for the most part succeeded, there are clearly sections of his work on experience where he is guilty of adding to the confusion. Here Rorty was justified in bringing attention to the inconsistencies in Dewey's thoughts.

I have not attempted to determine "once and for all" what Dewey really meant to say in his writings on experience. Admittedly, his points are often seemingly inconsistent and one should not assume that he was able to resolve all intellectual issues in a manner that even satisfied him. Yet the point is to show, as Rorty has wished, that we can use his text as a tool that can be put to different tasks. I argued here that the tool in question is much more multi-faceted than Rorty acknowledges. In contrast to Rorty, Dewey was able to do two things that we should find unsatisfactory in his understanding of experience: bridge the divide between the public and private realms of life (seen mainly in *Experience and Nature*, 1929) and show that we should understand experience as not merely a knowledge affair (*Art as Experience*, 1934). I have described how Rorty articulated a view of experience that he thought to have little value, and in offering an alternative interpretation of Dewey I showed that his description of experience can indeed have significance for us.

Finally, I have argued that it is necessary to move beyond the limits of Rorty's "linguistic pragmatism", because moving beyond the binary of experience/discourse will aid us in developing a more comprehensive understanding of what pragmatism has to offer. I have attempted to re-describe experience in a manner that diverges from Rorty's interpretation of experience as an anachronistic metaphysical device that allows us to see through appearance to reality, and have instead suggested that we see experience as another tool that we can use to fulfill the pragmatist's desire for melioristic social change. To repeat, I have tried to conceptualize a brand of experience that is less metaphysical and more practical. This understanding of pragmatism will help to "bridge the divide" between two camps who have had little in common on the notion of experience: the classical tradition and the neo-pragmatist one. In seeking to bring together the two genres the task is made simpler if we "push from both

sides". Rather than merely provide a re-reading of Dewey where I attempt to pull aspects of Dewey closer to Rorty, I also approached the issue from the other side. Here I re-described the work of Rorty, showing how his views are quite often misconstrued. To be more specific, there has been a tendency when summarizing Rorty's work on experience to include only his early work while omitting his later work on romanticism. While his earlier work is clearly not without merit, if we wish to better understand his views on experience we would do well to give similar attention to his later work where the concept of experience can re-emerge. Thus, in "bridging the divide" between classical and neo-pragmatism I sought to construct a bridge by building from both sides, the end result being that we might view Rorty not just for his familiar stance as a postmodern theorist, but that we might re-imagine how he was more closely situated to the classical pragmatists than perhaps even he cared to admit.

To conclude and broadly summarize: In this dissertation I have integrated two of the most engaging debates currently popular amongst scholars of Rorty: that of what to make of the concept of experience following the linguistic turn and that of Rorty's firm division between the public and the private domains of life. Controversially, Rorty believed that the lessons of the twentieth century had taught us of the importance of language and the declining importance of experiences. In Rorty's words, there was a need to "talk about sentences a lot but to say very little about ideas or experience". Equally contentious was Rorty's insistence that there was no need to reconcile the tension he felt existed between private irony and liberal hope for the future - our poetic attempts at self-creation are distinct from our public hope for social justice.

I have argued that at the centre of Rorty's public-private division is a postmodern notion of personhood, and it is this interpretation of the self that makes experience unworkable as a philosophical concept. Rorty believed in the complete contingency of the self – human beings

have no essence that can be discovered. I argued that the postmodern "loss of the subject" is detrimental to a meaningful concept of experience *and* permitting of the private acts of self-creation that Rorty advocates should replace the search for "who we really are".

In uniting these two debates I have challenged Rorty's belief that all appeals to experience imply foundations to our knowledge. I observed Rorty's concession that nonlinguistic experiences exist and refute his claim that these nonlinguistic experiences remain in the private sphere of life and have no relevance to politics.

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