Rethinking Truth: Re-description in Rortian Solidarity

A thesis submitted
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By

Alexander E. Martin

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Thesis written by
Alexander E. Martin
B.S., Ohio University, Ohio 2004
B.S., Kent State University, 2016
M.A., Kent State University, 2018

Approved by
____________________________________, Advisor
Dr. Frank Ryan

____________________________________, Chair, Department of Philosophy
Dr. Deborah Barnbaum

____________________________________, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
James L. Blank
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Chapter 1: Richard Rorty’s Contingent Existence

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity (CIS)* Richard Rorty claimed that we should abandon the search for objective truth and seek human solidarity. Rorty contended that due to the contingent nature of languages, individuals, and societies we would always be prevented in our efforts to define such truths. Rorty did not claim that truths do not exist, rather he argued that any truth claim is always dependent upon a society’s language game. It is due to the fact that a society can never get outside of its language game that society will always be stifled in its attempts at an epistemological justification for a truth claim. Due to this lack of access, Rorty concluded that a search for objective truth is a futile project and society’s time would be better spent seeking human solidarity. For Rorty, human solidarity is measured by increasing the number of people included in the term ‘we’ when expressing our justified beliefs. For example, when we say, “we believe X” the more people included in that ‘we’ the closer we are to human solidarity.

Rorty’s *Contingency Argument* is separated into three distinct sections: contingency of language, the contingency of individuals, and the contingency of society. I will primarily be addressing the contingency of language section, and the conclusions that Rorty drew in his analysis of language games. He claimed that a society’s understanding of what is true is wrapped up in the language game that society is playing. The effect is then reciprocal, as the language affects our notions of what is true, then our notions of what is true is simultaneously affected by the language. In effect, Rorty claimed that society formulates its justified beliefs through a language game and its justified beliefs are dependent upon the language game it is currently playing. According to Rorty, there is an inseparable bond between the language game a society is playing and the justified beliefs that society holds. Thus,
according to Rorty, the most important activity a society participates in is the shaping and developing of its language game. Rorty also introduced the ironist, an individual he believed to be uniquely suited for facilitating changes in a society’s language game. Consequently, Rorty believed, the ironist and the role she had to play in the development of a society, was paramount. The ironist is responsible for the development of new metaphors in society’s language, and Rorty believed, new metaphors create new ways of thinking.

In the first chapter I will explain the contingency of language and Rorty’s call for an ironist. I will show why Rorty believed the ironist to be so important. I will explain how the ironist’s ability to develop new metaphors leads to new languages. I will demonstrate how new language games bring about new meanings, and how new meanings lead to new justified beliefs. These arguments provide the foundation for my argument: Because our society is not engaging with members of opposing ideologies in a meaningful manner, we may be developing two separate justified beliefs from two separate language games within the confines of a single culture. It is my opinion that these language games may eventually prove to be incommensurable with one another.

In chapter two I will begin to develop this idea with a detailed analysis of George Orwell’s 1984. I will review Rorty’s reading of 1984, and how he uses it to demonstrate and emphasize the importance of a society’s ability to make a claim – any claim. However, I will provide a reading of 1984 that focuses on social alienation as it was enacted by the Party. I will argue that Orwell’s novel demonstrates that the best way to control a society is to prevent meaningful interaction, thereby limiting the validity of any claims at all. Rorty’s analysis and his emphasis on the ability for a culture to make a claim is important, and it plays a fundamental role in the interpretation I provide. However, it is a wonder that he did not also draw the same conclusion due to his beliefs on solidarity. Therefore, I will show how this interpretation of 1984 has direct parallels to the American political system, and point out the possible pitfalls we are heading for as a culture.
Chapter three will analyze Rorty’s claims on human solidarity, and how he believes we can begin to move toward that goal. Rorty claims “our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us,’ where ‘us’ means something smaller and more local than the human race.” Moreover, it is the language game we are engaged with which hinders society from expanding its notion of “one of us.” I will not disagree, but I believe there is an additional problem we must solve prior if we intended to develop a more inclusive language game. I will demonstrate that if we want to advance the solidarity as a goal we need to first address the problem of social alienation, otherwise we may not be able ever bridge the language gap. Using Rorty’s own argument, that societal languages games can often prevent social cooperation between cultures, we may be thwarting our own goal at national solidarity. I will argue that within our own culture we may be heading towards the irreconcilable gap due to social alienation.

Rorty’s understanding of societal development plays a fundamental role in my conclusion that society is growing apart in a more partisan fashion than ever before. Therefore, I will critically evaluate Rorty’s contingency argument. I hope to demonstrate that if the language game a society uses has a fundamental impact on our justified beliefs, then this social alienation is a significant problem in the strive toward solidarity. If I am successful, then the dangers I demonstrate should be applicable regardless of whether the whole of Rorty’s argument is accepted or not.

1.1 Rorty: Truth, Belief, and Language Games

Rorty’s goal was to challenge the epistemological justification for making truth claims. Rorty had two goals in his argument demonstrating the contingency of language: 1) He wanted to cast doubt on particular notions of truth, and 2) he wanted to demonstrate the influence language has on society’s justified beliefs. Rorty claimed that the word ‘true’ should not be understood as a claim of

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correspondence to a state of affairs about the world. Rather the word ‘true’ should be understood as an adjective expressing the justified belief in a sentence. A justified belief is not a claim to Truth, capital T. Nor does a justified belief correspond to a Truth. One should understand the word Truth, as an objectively True statement, and understand true, as justified belief within the confines of our language game. Rorty claimed our justified beliefs are a relationship between the language we use and our descriptions of the world. We are justified in believing something when our descriptions cohere with the language. For example, if I claim I love someone, then it is because of how I understand the meaning of the word love. How I understand the word ‘love’ provides the criteria upon which I form the belief, I love person X. The relationship of the word love, my understanding of its meaning, and the object of my affection is what establishes my justified belief. However, love may be considered a subjective belief, unique to the individual, and Rorty wanted to demonstrate how this same structure applies to things we do not think of as subjective. He wanted to show that it applies equally to our scientific and social beliefs.

If Rorty can accomplish this, then he can demonstrate how the adoption of certain language games influences a society’s truth claims. Language games are vocabularies and their associated connotations as employed by a society. According to Rorty, societies are amidst these language games when they describe the world. Society’s understanding of what is true, i.e. a justified belief, is also rooted in the language game it is playing. Furthermore, he claims these language games change over time. The changing and constant development of new language games is why Rorty challenges the epistemological justification of Truth claims. If language games change over time, then the justifications for making Truth claims changes over time. If our justifications for making Truth claims change over time, then our justified beliefs change over time. Therefore, he claims that justified beliefs do not reflect Truths, but rather our language game.
We now have two goals. The first goal is to explore whether Rorty is justified in his interpretation of the word ‘true.’ The second goal is to demonstrate how language games develop. Subsequently, we must show that those language games are also contingent. If these two arguments can be established, then we can demonstrate how the contingency of language affects the development of individuals and the development of societies. The argument is this:

P1: If justified beliefs are dependent on a contingent language game, then an individual’s justified beliefs will also be contingent on that language game.

P2: If a society is made up of multiple individuals, then a society’s justified beliefs will also be contingent upon that language game.

C1: Therefore, if the language game is contingent, then all justified beliefs are contingent.

Our two goals fall under demonstrating that language games are contingent.

1.2 Rorty’s Understanding of ‘true’

The contingency of language argument opens with, “About two hundred years ago, the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe.” The Age of Enlightenment brought about a reformation in the culture. Before the enlightenment, it was widely held that truth meant understanding God’s plan or language. This idea began to lose its authority as a more scientific method for understanding the world began to take hold. A fundamental shift in the way individuals understood the world began to ripple through different disciplines and shifts in the culture began to take place as a result of these ripples. However, it manifested in radically different ways even within disciplines, and few things were left unaffected.

\[2\] Ibid., 3
Art changed; it went from being pieces meant to reflect nature to works that were expressions of the subjective self. The art world’s understanding of truth became less of an absolute and more of an interpretation. However, the scientific disciplines were able to double down. Science became even more systemized and demonstrable. It began to develop tools that defined the world in terms of mathematics and cause and effect relationships. Those in the scientific community no longer relied upon God for truth. Scientists believed they could demonstrate what was true with repeatable tests and experiments. These changes brought about sharp divisions in the philosophical community. “Whereas the first kind of philosopher contrasts ‘hard scientific fact’ with the ‘subjective’ or with ‘metaphor,’ the second kind sees science as one more human activity, rather as the place at which human beings encounter a ‘hard,’ nonhuman reality.” The question arises among the philosophical community, does science have access to Truth or is it merely another way to view the world? Two fundamentally opposed camps on the idea of truth develop.

One philosophical camp supported the absolute correspondence of scientific descriptions to the world. There is a way the world is and science either merely discovers it or describes it. The second camp believed there are only ‘ways’ we describe the world and that those descriptions do not necessarily correspond to ‘the way’ the world is. This distinction arises from an inability of philosophers to agree on what is necessary for the epistemological justification of a Truth claim. The modern camps on this debate are referred to as realist and anti-realist respectively. A realist believes sciences’ descriptions are True with a capital T, i.e. there is a correspondence between their proposition and a reality. The anti-realist claims that those descriptions are helpful, but that does not mean those descriptions correspondence with reality – they are useful interpretations.

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3 Ibid., 4
Rorty was controversial because he wanted to remain faithful to the world as independent of humans while retaining the belief that any statements about the world are dependent on humans. He challenged the degree to which individuals should feel justified in making Truth claims about the world and claimed that without the ability to step outside our language game we cannot make Truth claims. It is because we cannot step outside of our language game that we consequently we have no way knowing if our claim corresponds with some Truth. Rorty also claimed that there is no such outside view, because we are always wrapped up in our language game.

We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.4

Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own – unaided by the describing activities of human beings – cannot.5

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4 Ibid., 5
5 Ibid., 5
This captures the heart of what Rorty claimed. This argument requires some unpacking as many of Rorty’s arguments will stem from it.

The first distinction Rorty makes is between *the world being out there* and that *Truth is out there*. Rorty did not deny that the world is something independent of humans. However, any declaration about the status of the world would appear to be a truth claim. This may be a point of contention for the uncharitable reader of Rorty. I offer two possible explanations.

I believe Rorty was trying to avoid charges of idealism when he articulated this distinction. The world’s existence is not dependent on humans. Descriptions of the world are dependent on humans. Rorty wanted to allow for a world independent of humans, but he also wanted to claim that any statement about the functioning of that world is dependent on humans. As long as any statements about the world’s functionality are understood in reference to a language game rather than a state of affairs, then the charge that Rorty is being inconsistent is unwarranted. Everything should be understood to be within the confines of a language game, even statements related to causal laws. I believe Rorty’s claim was merely an expression that hoped to thwart the charge of idealism. I also believe this to be a fair assessment of his goals. Rorty only wished to establish that the world is independent of humans in a common-sense way. “To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation,”⁶ is to say that it is not dependent on human minds. However, the world remains dependent on human minds for descriptions of its functioning.

Rorty had a more important claim: *where there are no humans there can be no things called truths*. Rorty claimed where there are no humans, there is no language game; and where there are no language games, there can be no sentences. Where there are no sentences there are no things that can be judged true or false. The word ‘true’ should be understood as an adjective used to describe an

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⁶ Ibid., 5
uttered justified belief within the confines of our language game. The word true should not be understood as a declaration to a correspondence claim about the world. Rorty believed that to say it is true that \( X \), we are declaring whether one feels justified in believing the sentence uttered. We should not think of it as a Truth claim about the world itself. This does not mean that we are not justified in believing things about the world. Rorty wanted to draw a distinction between justified beliefs and Truth claims. He claimed they are not the same thing. We may not always be able to check whether our own beliefs are justified, but we can never check to see if our Truth claim is true, because our claim is always wrapped up in our language game. Rorty takes this further by demonstrating that, there are no truths, capital T or otherwise, outside of our language game.

Rorty does believe the word “true” has value. It is a shorthand for the expression I have a justified belief that. The difference between Rorty's claim and a correspondence theory of truth is subtle. Correspondence theories of truth attempt to make epistemological claims about Truth that in turn lead to knowledge. The epistemological claim, for a theory correspondence, is a claim about knowledge gained from explicating those types of Truth; and a Truth is established when an objective fact corresponded with a proposition. Thus, correspondence theories of truth attempt to define Truth. However, Rorty did not attempt to describe Truths of this sort, rather he focused only on what we are justified in believing within the confines of our language game. This is because, for Rorty, there is no truth outside of the language game. He claimed that in order to make a claim of this sort one would require a meta-vocabulary: “I call the ‘Contingency of language,’ the fact that there is no way to step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a meta-vocabulary which somehow takes account of all possible vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling.”

\[ \text{Ibid.}, \ xvi \]
meta-vocabulary, that any claim attempting to explicate a Truth of this sort had no role in the discussion.

Rorty rejects Truth, however he does not go as far as the radical deflationist, who claims the word ‘true’ is an empty predicate. I will compare two sentences, *it is true that my coffee is on my desk*, and *my coffee is on my desk*. The deflationist claims that we get no new information by adding the word ‘true’ to the statement that we did not already have. Davidson states, “Aside from emphasis and verbosity, the phrase adds nothing to what we can say.” The sentence, *my coffee is on my desk*, provides the same information without the word “true.” Nor does asserting its truth make one of these statements more believable than another. An individual is no more justified in believing the statement with the word ‘true’ in it than they are justified in believing the statement without the word ‘true’ in it. However, this does not mean that we are not justified in believing that the coffee is on the desk. However, Rorty believed that the word ‘true’ does have a use, it represents a justified belief within the language game. Thus, the word ‘true’ is not entirely an empty predicate as it indicates that I have justified reasons for believing the coffee is on my desk.

We risk falling into an empiricist trap, if all our language justification stems merely from empirical sense data. However, our justifications are not merely wrapped up in sensory perceptions. There is always a language game being played and our perceptions are influenced by our language game. I will provide a more in-depth look at this, and a detailed explanation, in the section on language game development but the argument is: If our perceptions are related to our language game, then by extension our justifications are only related to our language game. I believe this to be the core of Rorty’s argument. Our language game permeates everything, which according to Rorty makes it impossible to know or even articulate things outside of that language game. If my language game does not have the

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tools necessary to articulate or justify a belief, then I am not able to make a claim or declare a justified belief.

Rorty’s observations on truth should fundamentally alter the way we use the word “true.” Declaring something as true should no longer be understood as a correspondence to a state of affairs of the world. Rather if we say that something is “true,” then it should be understood as, I feel justified in my belief of a statement about a particular state of affairs. True, with a lower-case t, should be understood as a referent to the sentence, not the state of affairs.

Rorty claimed that these points about truth are useful distinctions to understand. We use this type of Truth talk, capital T, because of a belief that the world can be broken up into fact sized bits of information. Somewhat of an antiquated belief now, it may still be influencing a language game. If science has a language of its own, then a full account of that language would lead to a full account of the way things are – i.e. Truth. Science’s language is made up of mathematical expressions and cause and effect descriptions that attempt to break the world down into tiny factoid truth claims. Rorty’s claim:

In such cases, it is easy to run together the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified in holding a belief with the claim that some nonlinguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth, or that some such state ‘makes a belief true’ by ‘corresponding’ to it. But it is not so easy when we turn from individual sentences to vocabularies as wholes.⁹

I give an account of Thomas Kuhn’s Theory of Science as Paradigms, in section 1.4 that deals with this very issue. For now, Rorty only wanted to show how viewing the world in this manner is a mistake

⁹ Ibid. 1, 5
because our individual justified beliefs are dependent on the *whole* of the language game being played. Moreover, a more complete understanding of the language game we are playing will cast doubt on the validity of the fact sized bits. Again, this will become clearer as I begin to articulate how language games develop, or why society chooses one language game over another.

We have beliefs, justified or otherwise, and we use our linguistic tools to describe or justify our beliefs, but that is all. Those linguistic tools do not necessarily correspond to any state of affairs concerning the world, nor are they required to. There is nothing about the language we use that necessitates a correlation to the way the world is. Rorty believed that considering the language game as a whole, rather than individual descriptive sentences, casts considerable doubt on the vivacity of correspondence.

### 1.3 The Development of Language Games

This section will focus on how language games develop in society. There are multiple disciplines that contribute to the development of a language game. These disciplines include the arts, poetry, literature, science, philosophy, and folklore. This list is not conclusive. Anything that wedges itself into the vernacular can contribute to the development of a language game. Rorty focuses on a few disciplines that appear to have the greatest influence. These disciplines are science, philosophy, and the literary arts. According to Rorty none of these disciplines are better at discovering or explicating truth than any other discipline. First, Rorty does not go in for truth talk in such a manner, as I have shown. Second, the development of a new language game does have a random element. I refer to Daniel Dennett, *From Bacteria to Bach and Back*. In this work he provides a description of memes and meme development: “[Words are] culturally transmitted items that evolve by differential replication. That is by natural selection... And inquiring into the evolution of words will serve as a feasible entry into daunting
questions about the cultural evolution and its role in shaping our minds.”  

Memes are meant to be the cultural informational equivalent to genes. To understand the claim being put forth here, it is best to look at the genetic account of evolution and then draw parallels to the cultural account.

According to Dennett, evolution appears as ‘directed adaptation,’ but that is a misunderstanding of what is happening. Adaptations only appear to be ‘directed’ because the species that adapted is the species that survived. The genes did not choose or otherwise direct a particular change. The accurate description is that a mutation merely happens to a species, and that mutation happens randomly and without provocation. It is only because the species were able to use that mutation to their advantage that the species survived. The species that continues to be able to use their mutations to their advantage is the species that continues to survive.

A helpful example should make this clear. Humans have two arms. A directed adaption explanation of evolution, i.e. telological in nature, claims the genes directed themselves to develop two arms to solve some environmental problem. However, a proper understanding shows that the genes mutated and a species with two arms developed, then that species adapted their way of life around having two arms. If the species could not do so, adapt their way of life around this mutation, then that species would not have survived.

Humans are amazingly adept at modifying their environment in ways that other species cannot, and as such we were able to develop our society around our specific features. Humans adapted their environment to suit their features, as much as mutated features were selected by environmental conditions to begin with. And just as there was no purposive development of a specific feature to suit a specific environment, our world would be substantially different if we tackled it with a different set of

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features. Evolution does not have direction, it only appears to have direction because the adaptable species survived.

There is a parallel to be demonstrated here to memes. Dennett: “Words are autonomous in some regards; they can migrate from language to language and occur in many different roles, public and private. A word, like a virus, is a minimal kind of agent: it wants to get itself said. Why? Because if it doesn’t, it will soon go extinct.”\(^{11}\) There is some danger in this metaphor, but as Dennett says, “Don’t be afraid of a little metaphor; it won’t bite you, but you should always be sure you know how to cash it in for unvarnished fact when you feel the urge.”\(^{12}\) I do not want to extend agency to words, and I do not believe Dennett does either, hence the quote about metaphor. Quite to the contrary, both he and I are attempting to demonstrate how words can either control or influence our ability to think. Dennett is showing that some words can influence the way we think in ways we do not recognize or may not even be aware of. If memes, bits of social information – the tiniest of which is words, do develop and spread randomly, then there is going to be an element to their replication that may be beyond our control. However, as was mentioned in gene evolution, humans have better control over their environment than other species. We may be unable to predict or know which words, and their associated connotations, will “survive” – becoming part of our language game – however we may also be able to manipulate the environment so that non-useful memes cannot gain a foothold to replicate in the current language game. However, memes can create meanings for us and as such influence our thoughts, therefore we need to be extra vigilant about the memes we choose to employ and help spread.

In the beginning of this section I mentioned some disciplines Rorty believed may be able to help us in this regard: science, philosophy, and the literary arts. The aforementioned disciplines specialize in developing language games. These disciplines are primarily responsible for developing new words and

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 189
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 189
metaphors that are not understood within the current language game. These disciplines are most apt at demonstrating to humanity where it does not have a sufficient understanding of a particular subject. It could be said that these disciplines show us where we need to adapt by demonstrating where our current language game does not have the tools to adequately address a certain subject. These disciplines substantially contribute to the development of new languages games.

Languages are the creation of human beings. Rorty states, “The world does not speak. Only we do.” We are all aware that particular utterances assigned to particular objects are contingent. By contingent I mean there is no objective criteria for a particular denotation of an object over another denotation. Therefore, we need to be particularly concerned with words – memes – we allow to spread through our culture as they have a substantial effect on our beliefs. Rorty says,

The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that. The realization that the world does not tell us what language games to play should not, however, lead us to say that a decision about which to play is arbitrary.

We must recognize the contingent nature of language, but we do not want to dismiss the importance of language. Rorty wanted us to recognize that our language game shapes the way we perceive and understand the world. We can only describe the world with words we have access to and our continued use of certain terms also has an influence on how we understand the world. As Dennett has shown, there is a reciprocity at work here. As much as our thinking is guided by the words that gain a position in

13 Ibid. 1, 6
14 Ibid., 6
our society, the words that are able to gain a position in our society are also influenced by our thinking. Humanity employs those terms in more than its descriptions; we also use them in our justifications. Thus, our language game does affect our worldview, but our worldview also influences what words can take hold and become a part of our language game. Moreover, it also affects how we justify that worldview.

The language game humanity is currently playing was not decided by us in particular, i.e. you and I; it has evolved and changed over time and consequently we adopted it. Thus, if we recognize that we have had less influence on our current language game than we understand, and we recognize the importance of a language game on our understanding of the world, then we must find a way to influence our language game.

1.4 Science and the Language Game

I have already shown, with Dennett, that there is an unavoidable accidental\(^\text{15}\) element involved in our language game. However, Rorty shows we can and do have an influence over our language game. He focuses specifically on the poets, the great novelists, scientists, and philosophers, but he in no way claims that they are the only individuals influencing our language. Thus, our concern is with how individuals influence our language game, especially for scientists who are believed to be operating on an objective view of the world unencumbered by a particular language game.

I believe Thomas Kuhn’s\(^\text{16}\) idea of science as a series of paradigms can help us understand how language games change over time or how one language game may displace another. Kuhn’s explanation

\(\text{15}\) Here I have decided to use the word ‘accidental’ rather than ‘random’ to explain a word taking hold in the current language game. Random implies that a meme developed out of nowhere and then supplanted itself in the language game. However, ‘accidental’ shows that it did develop from something specific, but its adoption in the language game was not purposeful.

\(\text{16}\) Ibid., 6: Rorty does make this point as well. He cites The Copernican Revolution by Kuhn.
can also elucidate influences in the development of new language games and show how language games give rise to new ways of thinking when replacing their predecessor.

In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn claims that science should be understood as a series of conceptual paradigms rather than as an accumulation of scientific knowledge. Kuhn’s theory of paradigmatic science confounded the common notion that science was a cumulative venture. He claimed that science goes through two main stages: periods of normal science and revolutionary science.

Normal science is a period of time when scientific research is guided by a particular scientific theory. During periods of normal science the current theory about a state of affairs is understood as true. Consequently, that true theory guides the activities of the scientific community involved. The scientific theory being utilized dictates the manner in which that scientific community gathers data, performs tests, publishes research, and speaks about the phenomenon being studied.

Periods of revolutionary science happen when the theory guiding the collection of data collects data that was unexpected – an anomaly occurs. If attempts to explain the anomaly within the confines of the current theory continue to fail, then new theories about the existing phenomenon arise. “An anomaly comes to seem more than just another puzzle of normal science, the transition to crisis and extraordinary science has begun.” For example, if the current scientific theory dictates that the data should provide X but the data collected implies Y, then we may enter a period of revolutionary science. During this period of Kuhn’s “extraordinary science” a multitude of explanations may be purported to explain the collected data. The scientific community splits. Small groups of scientists will take up different theories, “An even more important source of change is the divergent nature of the numerous

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17 It should be noted that Kuhn would probably not be supportive of the claims I am going to draw parallels to here in this project. For details see the section marked “Truth” in the introductory essay of the 50th anniversary edition of his book.

partial solutions that concerted attention to the problem has made available.”¹⁹ Each group is attempting, separately, to explain the data by purporting a new explanation, “though there is still a paradigm, few practitioners prove to be entirely agreed about what it is.”²⁰ Each scientific group purporting a new solution is essentially purporting a new future paradigm. Each new purposed paradigm may fundamentally alter the way the data is understood.

In learning a paradigm the scientists acquires theory, methods, and standards together, usually in an extricable mixture. Therefore, when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions.²¹

The new theories purported to explain the data may radically alter the way science views the data. These new views may then change the nature of the problem and consequently the nature of the solution. Therefore, theories purported to explain the data may radically alter the way future states of normal science view the world.

Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before... paradigm changes do cause scientists to see the world of their research-engagement differently.²²

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¹⁹ Ibid., 83
²⁰ Ibid., 83
²¹ Ibid., 109
²² Ibid., 111
Kuhn claims that if a scientific belief is confounded by data that cannot be explained under a current theory, then upon the creation of a new theory the objects that were previously being observed are fundamentally different. The world changes in light of the new paradigm that the scientists have adopted.

A particularly concise example of this shift in views can be demonstrated by comparing Newtonian physics to Einsteinian physics. Within the paradigm of Newtonian physics space and time were two separate entities. Einsteinian physics has shown that they are not two entities. Space and time are one single entity—Space-time. This is no small change. This change had a fundamental effect on of our perception the universe. Moreover, the language the two groups were using became incompatible. Scientists using Newtonian physics lingo could not have a direct conversation with a scientist using Einsteinian jargon. The two languages are different and the way they view the world is different as a result of the development of that language. The same argument can be demonstrated with Aristotle and Galileo viewing the pendulum or Priestley and Lavoisier investigating oxygen.23

The common objection to this view is that the world does not change, rather our interpretation of those perceptions changes. Kuhn phrases the objection, “What changes with a paradigm is only the scientist’s interpretation of observations that themselves are fixed once and for all by the nature of the environment and of the perceptual apparatus.”24 This is precisely what we are here to confront. I believe Kuhn is walking the same line that Rorty is walking. Kuhn makes two points with his retort, both of which are fundamental for our purposes. I would like to break down Kuhn’s response.

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23 Ibid., 120
24 Ibid., 120
Let me say at once that this very usual view of what occurs when scientists change their minds about fundamental matters can be neither all wrong nor a mere mistake. Rather it is an essential part of philosophical paradigm initiated by Descartes and developed at the same time as Newtonian dynamics. That paradigm has served both science and philosophy well. Its exploitation, like that of dynamics itself, has been fruitful of a fundamental understanding that perhaps could not have been achieved in another way.25

First, Kuhn claims that the shift from Descartes’ paradigm to Newton’s provided a change in the way we view the world. The breakdown in Descartes’s scientific understanding of the world, in light of Newton’s, caused a fundamental shift, a shift that caused us to see the world differently – as the sum of quantifiable laws. As Kuhn notes, this served both science and philosophy well until Newton’s objectivism was in turn challenged by an approach Kuhn regards as more pragmatic—i.e. informed by all of the ways in which humanity attempts to understand itself. The world was ready for a philosophy that embraces the notion that things change and develop over time and that these changes involve more than merely a quantifiable approach when it comes understanding them.

Today’s research in parts of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and even art history, all converge to suggest that the traditional paradigm is somehow askew... None of these crisis-promoting subjects has yet produced a viable alternate to the traditional epistemological paradigm, but they do begin to suggest what some of that paradigm’s characteristics will be.26

25 Ibid., 121
26 Ibid., 121
Kuhn claims philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and even art history is informing our understanding of the world. As these disciplines struggle to articulate ways the world is, as of yet no discipline has the right to claim how the world is. Moreover, under this new paradigm that promotes normality to change, I contend, that none of them should. That is to say, no one conceptual apparatus articulates Truth better than any other. Kuhn final statement on the matter is poignant and ties in directly to Rorty. He states,

*Though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world.*

Nevertheless, I am convinced that we must learn to make sense of statements that at least resemble these [the aforementioned sentence].

I believe this statement by Kuhn draws a direct parallel to a claim Rorty’s made earlier.

We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states.

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27 Kuhn does not italicize. My emphasis.
28 Ibid., 121
29 Ibid. 1, 5
Kuhn and Rorty both make a similar claim. First, they share the same common sense understanding that the world is not dependent on humans. Second, and more importantly, our justified beliefs about the world are only in reference to the way we describe it. If the world does not change with the paradigm but scientists do work in a different world, then that world is different because their descriptions of it are different. If our descriptions of the world are what make up our justified beliefs, then as those descriptions change so will our justified beliefs. This is a new philosophical paradigm in which other scientific paradigms will eventually arise. The new paradigm put forth is one in which we accept that world will change as our description of it changes, and this is something we need to embrace.

Kuhn has demonstrated how scientific disciplines have a significant impact on our language game. He has also demonstrated how periods of scientific revolution can change or replace previous language games. Scientific revolutions cause the adoption of new scientific paradigms. New scientific paradigms develop new words or change the connotations of familiar words. Kuhn has also reinforced Rorty’s claim with his own similar claim: “Though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world,” thus demonstrating that our descriptions of the world inform and make up our justified beliefs. The world the scientist lives in is different because of a change in the description of the world, which is caused by the adoption of a new paradigm.

1.5 Metaphor and the Language Game

The literary arts have a different role to play in the development of our language game; they employ literary tools to challenge or confound the current understandings we associate with notions. Rorty believes that the most important tool the literary arts employs is the use metaphor. The romantics demonstrated that human experience cannot be expressed merely in descriptive statements that attempt to define feelings or sentiments. Thus, they created characters with personas that serve as metaphors for the human experience: characters we simultaneously love and hate, simultaneously
sympathize with yet despise. To understand their characters, we were required to analyze and interpret them in works. The literary arts created awkward situations for readers that force readers to confront their own understanding of the human condition. In this way we confronted ourselves by interpreting the characters the artists provided us. For example, Nabakov’s Humbert Humbert and Orwell’s Winston challenge our understanding of love. In presenting us with these characters, these authors forced us to partake in their struggle to understand what love is. Rorty claims that our personal beliefs undergo modification as we attempt to understand these works and the struggles they present. An understanding of these characters as metaphors for the human experience is the way that Rorty introduces his notion of metaphor.

Rorty does not use the term ‘metaphor’ in the way that it is generally understood. The general understanding of metaphor is what Rorty would call a ‘dead metaphor.’ These are the types of metaphors that Dennett referred to earlier when he said, “Don’t be afraid of a little metaphor; it won’t bite you, but you should always be sure you know how to cash it in for unvarnished fact when you feel the urge.” For example: “I’ve got no dogs in this fight,” means I have no particular interest in the outcome of this situation. For metaphors of this nature, a general understanding requires little or no interpretation and can easily be cashed in for a factual description. Rorty views dead metaphors as merely colorful rhetoric. Dead metaphors have already become an integral part of the current language game. These are not the type of metaphors Rorty is attempting to articulate.

Rorty wants us to view a metaphor as a way to represent a sentiment that cannot be expressed in any other manner within the current language game. Thus, a writer may employ a metaphor when none of the current connotations available can express an idea or sentiment properly. After a metaphor is developed, others come along to interpret and disseminate that metaphor in an attempt to provide it

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30 Ibid. 17, 189
with concrete meaning, i.e. they attempt to cash it out. Only after the metaphor has been disseminated or interpreted can the metaphor facilitate a change to the language game. The interpretation of a metaphor helps to formulate a new *final language*, which is Rorty’s technical term for the current language game a society is playing. He uses the term ‘final’ ironically, as I have been trying to demonstrate, languages are never final.

Rorty is trying to show how society gives birth to a concept that does not yet exist. It is the inability to articulate oneself accurately within the language game that brings about new metaphors. Rorty describes it as, “The unparaphrasability of metaphor is just the unsuitability of any such familiar sentence for one’s purpose.”³¹ By un-paraphraseability he means that the idea is not expressible in any other way. According to Rorty’s use of metaphor, a metaphor has no meaning upon its first utterance.

Uttering a sentence without a fixed place in a language game is, as the positivists rightly have said, to utter something which is neither true nor false. ...This is because it is a sentence which one cannot confirm or disconfirm, argue for or against. One can only savor it or spit it out.³²

According to Rorty, a metaphor attempts to create a sentiment that can only be properly understood through dissemination. When Rorty claims that a metaphor is being savored, he is saying that society is attempting to disseminate, interpret, and make it part of their language game. As society goes through this process and comes to meaning for the metaphor, society may then choose to reject it as false, or claim it as true. It is essential to recognize that before the metaphor was created there was no way to express the sentiment associated with that metaphor. Effectively this means that the sentiment did not

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³¹ Ibid. 1, 18
³² Ibid., 18
exist within that society and consequently could not be understood as true or false. Only after a
metaphor is integrated into a language game, i.e. cashed out, may it alter the way we view the world. “It
is changing the way we talk and thereby changing what we want to do and what we think we are,” 33
Rorty claimed that adopting new metaphors, disseminating, and interpreting them lead to new ways of
understanding the world, even if those ways are eventually rejected.

Rorty’s account of how meanings develop in a society could have been based upon
argumentation and analysis. Instead, he chose metaphors for a specific reason that becomes clearer as
we compare two forms of metaphor, “classical” and “Rortian:”

1) Classical metaphor: The sea at night is like a dark glass of red wine.

2) Rortian metaphor: The world is the absolute attempting to understand itself. 34 (Hegel)

In analyzing the classical metaphor, we see that it can easily be cashed out. It is not terribly
taxing on the imagination to see how the sea at night can be intoxicating, dark, and mysterious as it
sloshes back and forth like a glass of wine, and as we take in all its wonder, we drink it up. The list of
comparisons could probably go on. Of course, the sea is not literally like a glass of wine and should not
be literally understood as such – drinking it will kill you.

Turning to the Rortian metaphor, Rorty is claiming that when Hegel’s philosophy was first put
forth it had no place in the language game but forms one over time in being savored rather than spat
out. Rorty states, “Then it will gradually require a habitual use, a familiar place in the language game. It
will thereby have ceased to be a metaphor – or if you like, it will have become what most sentences of
our language are, a dead metaphor.” 35 After it is savored, interpreted, and disseminated, it gains a place

33 Ibid., 20
34 This is obviously a very narrow understanding of Hegel’s philosophy and is only used here as an example for easy
comparison.
35 Ibid. 1, 18
in the language game even as it facilitates the development of a new language game that eventually permeates society and turns it into a dead metaphor.

As a live metaphor, it provokes discussion that may change our view of the world over time, but as a dead metaphor it merely serves to explain phenomena in a way alternative to that of literal description. Consider our example, “the world is the absolute attempting to understand itself.” As a live metaphor we needed time to disseminate it and make it part of our language game, but afterwards we now understand it as something like “the universe becoming conscious of itself.” Cashed out like this, it becomes a dead metaphor. Rorty claims, “It will be just one more, literally true or literally false, sentence of the language,” i.e. it becomes just another description.

Rorty wants us to view cashed out philosophical descriptions of the world in a similar fashion to how we view the classical metaphors — as dead metaphors. Rorty is claiming that if we can understand philosophical description as metaphors, then they become just another way the world could be understood rather than as competing descriptions for a True state of affairs. If we can do this, then we look at the descriptions as ways of expanding our language game. According to Rorty this is the role philosophers should understand themselves to be in, one of developing metaphors. Philosophers are the creators of metaphors, but they are not the only ones suitable for this role. This task can be accomplished by philosophers, writers, poets, and scientists alike. Rorty designates these types of people as ironists.

Rorty describes the an ironist as having three primary characteristics, “(1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses... (2) She realizes that arguments phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others,

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36 Ibid., 18: personally italicized ‘sentence’ for emphasis.
that it is in touch with a power not herself.”\textsuperscript{37} The ironist realizes that the final language she is currently using could be flawed, she needs to provide a new description of the state of affairs with a new final language, and that the final language she employs in her description is not any closer to Truth, than any other. The ironist, according to Rorty, is “Always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies.”\textsuperscript{38} This liberates the ironist, providing her freedom to develop re-descriptions the world. However, she knows that her re-descriptions of the world are not literal truths. She presents society with a different way of understanding the world, a re-interpretation, which we as a society may accept or reject – savor or spit out. Future ironists should understand that their descriptions are not True, but merely different ways to view the world, some of which may provide a language suitable for achieving solidarity.

\textbf{1.6 Language Games and Contingent justified beliefs}

The previous three sections have all attempted to show the contingent nature by which certain language games develop: 1) accidental development through the replication of memes, 2) scientific descriptions based on the development of different paradigms, and 3) literary descriptions that are constantly confounding or affording new ways to understand the world. Each of these play a part in the development of our language games and sometimes develop their own terminologies, jargons, and meanings. Moreover, each demonstrates how languages are constantly evolving, changing, and developing over time. It is for this reason that we should be hesitant in making a definitive claim that our particular language game has the potential or ability to correspond to a Truth. If our terms, jargons, and their associated meanings are how we describe the world and all of those are constantly in motion, then our justifications beliefs based on those terms, jargons, and meanings also constantly in motion.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 73
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 74
There are multiple different language games being played by a single society at a one time. How many is not a concern of ours, only that sometimes they overlap and sometimes they do not. We should also recognize as individuals we do not choose the language game we will play. The particular language we use is given to us, as we are thrust into an arbitrary point in time that already has a codified language game at play. We are taught what words mean and how they relate to different things in our society. That is to say, we adopt a language game. However, as we have shown, that does not mean we do not have the power to change it over time. But initially, we do not choose our language game and we understand the world in light of the language game we adopt. The language we adopt is contingent upon our place in time and culture when it was given to us.

The goal is to develop a unified societal language game, but we are not there yet. As individuals, if we can recognize the contingent nature of the language game, then we can recognize the contingent nature of our personal worldview. One’s worldview is understood, described, and limited by the words within their language game. Moreover, we have no other way to describe the world then by employing the language game we have access to. Therefore, any Truth claims about the world would fall prey to this contingent nature and any attempt at an epistemological justification for describing a True state of affairs would be obstructed by this contingent nature as well. The contingency of language argument calls into question the legitimacy of any Truth claims as correspondence for this reason. If the statement is made using language, then due to the contingency of language the criterion on which the objectivity of the statement is made gets cast into doubt. Therefore, any correspondence of any statement to a True state of the world becomes less grounded.

Our notion of a justified belief should not be one of correspondence. Rather a justified belief should be understood as correlation within our language game. In the background of any claim there should be a tacit understanding of two notions: 1) What I consider a justified belief is only understood to be so within the confines of the language game I am playing, and 2) Within the confines of my language
game this is the best justification of the state of affairs I am personally able to provide. Neither of these should be understood as Truth claims. Our justified beliefs should be understood as statements that relate to our language game in order to provide a justification of some state of affairs, and no more.

At this point, I would like to address the charge of relativism that Rorty is often accused of. Relativism can be avoided because in short periods of time there are substantive ways to show that one language game is superior to another. A language game can be compared to its predecessor in terms of predictive power. Predictive power is the ability to anticipate the consequences of actions. The predictive power of science is better than the predictive power astrology. However, this does not imply that predictive power should be used as epistemological justification for a philosophical foundation, it merely shows which language game is more likely to be useful. It gives society a good reason to use one language game over another without it relying merely on societal preference.

Realists who charge Rorty with relativism assert that something has predictive power because it more accurately represents the way the world is. It is because of this assertion that they charge Rorty with relativism in the first place. However, Rorty made no claims as to how the world is to begin with.

For the pragmatist is not holding a positive theory that says that something relative to something else. He is, instead, making the purely negative point that we should drop the traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion, construed as the distinction between truth as correspondence to reality and truth as a commendatory term for well-justified beliefs.39

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Rorty claimed it is the distinction that is incorrect, and without it there can be no charge of relativism. We can all agree with the opinion: science has greater predictive power or that science has demonstrated “well-justified beliefs,” however these do not amount to a knowledge claim about science. Without making a knowledge claim Rorty believed he excused himself from being a relativist. I recognize that to the uncharitable reader this will not be much of consolation.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that our justified beliefs are based on our language game—a language game that we are thrown into, already set with fixed connotations and meanings. We simultaneously attempt to understand and describe the world through our use of that language game. However, that language game changes over time. It is because we use our language game to justify our beliefs, that our justified beliefs are situational and change over time. This is the main thesis in Rorty’s account of the contingency of language and it leads him to conclude that society should seek solidarity rather than Truth. Rorty’s main contribution and his corresponding champion is the ironist, an individual who can create and usher in new ways of thinking by developing new metaphors. This will be reflected in his analysis of 1984, by George Orwell. He attempts to demonstrate that the worst thing the Party does is to try to control what a person has the ability to say. However, I intended to show that the worst thing the Party does is force a situation of social alienation.

Rorty provided a persona that we should embrace—the ironist. I agree, that this persona should be embraced. However, he does not provide any criteria to challenge the metaphors the ironist creates, except perhaps future metaphors. As Dennett demonstrated, words and memes can replicate fast and without control, like a virus. It is possible for two different final languages to take their place in a society while simultaneously being contradictory. That is to say: Two different descriptions of the world can dominate at the same time within a unified culture. In theory, a healthy democracy would sort this out
on its own, if messily sometimes. However, it’s my opinion that the healthy social interaction required to
do this is no longer occurring. Meaningful and constructive social interaction has been subjugated by
dogmatic party lines, such a society cannot recognize when it has accepted two competing metaphors. If
I am correct in this assessment, then over time we will not end up with two competing metaphors
within one language game, but two completely different language games.

Rorty provided a detailed analysis of George Orwell’s *1984*. In chapter two I will take a closer
look at his analysis. Rorty demonstrated that if a contradiction to a justified belief is revealed to an
individual, then he can no longer weave a coherent story to himself. The inability to justify one’s self to
one’s self must result in the abandoning of certain justified beliefs. However, what Rorty doesn’t discuss
is the social alienation that is present in *1984*. The social alienation makes it impossible for an individual
to interact with another member of society, therefore, each is never able to recognize their beliefs as
incoherent. Even Winston required O’Brien.
Chapter 2: Rorty, Orwell, and 1984

In chapter one I examined Rorty’s views on truth and justified belief and advocated for the abandonment of a correspondence theory of truth. I also supported Rorty’s claim that instead of looking for Truth, a philosopher’s time would be better spent imagining alternative ways for society to develop that lead towards solidarity. In this chapter, I will be analyzing Rorty’s interpretation of 1984, and in addition my own different interpretation of Orwell’s intentions. Orwell’s novel describes a dystopian future in which a totalitarian government controls almost all aspects of life. While the novel has many themes worthy of analysis, I will focus on one theme in particular: What is the Party’s most effective form of control over the citizens of Oceania? In answering this question, I will be exploring multiple interwoven themes that will demonstrate three main things: 1) The ability to make claims takes precedence over the quality of those claims, 2) Collaboration and cooperation are required to justify a belief, and 3) The greatest form of control over a citizenry is in alienating the citizens from one another. If a society is alienated from itself, it cannot hold reliable justified beliefs. The third claim is the most damning for society, if that society is striving for solidarity. The majority of this chapter will focus on the third issue and I will return to the consequences it has on solidarity in chapter 3. I contend that if something is not done to facilitate collaboration or thwart the ongoing social alienation, this could lead to devastating consequences. I will argue that the current state of American culture is approaching this point. I warn that the political environment in America is causing our society to develop two separate cultural language games side by side, a situation that fosters allegiance to party rather than communication. If this is allowed to continue, the outcome will create a situation where a peaceful social resolution may be untenable.
In examining *1984* we will be confronted with two separate ways of interpreting the novel; we can interpret it from a realist perspective or from an anti-realist perspective. A realist reading of *1984* focuses on the distortion of truth as the main theme. Thus, the worst thing the Party does for the realist is distort past events. An anti-realist interpretation will show that the worst thing the Party did was prevent social interaction and collaboration with other citizens. I believe both interpretations have merit and provide different warnings. Moreover, we need not reject one reading and favor the other. The juxtaposition demonstrated by Orwell between truth and the ability to confirm a truth is what makes this novel remarkable. I favor an anti-realist reading of *1984*.

**2.1 How should we read *1984***?

*1984* demonstrates how people in power manipulate information to retain that power. As such, it is often employed as a warning demonstrating those dangers. The novel shows that by controlling the information individuals have access to, one can gain control of the individuals themselves. In Rorty’s interpretation of *1984*, he accentuated the importance of an individual’s right to make claims. He thought the greatest threat to the citizens of Oceania was the prohibition of any claims contrary to the Party’s beliefs or expressed consent. Rorty claimed that in doing so the Party effectively gained complete control over the thoughts of citizens in Oceania. I agree with Rorty that this was a key factor in the Party’s control scheme. However, I believe Orwell is describing something much more sinister. I believe Orwell is demonstrating the ways in which our claims are dependent on social interaction with others. Further, when a society is denied the ability to confirm or deny their claims with others, their individual beliefs become inconsequential.

In my interpretation of *1984*, the Party’s goal was not to change the truth or create its own version of the truth. The Party’s goal was to make the truth irrelevant by preventing collaboration with others and fostering a social atmosphere that alienated citizens from one another. The Party wanted to
make the truth so untenable that an individual couldn’t believe anything other than what was presented to them at any given moment.

My reading of 1984 does not conflict with Rorty’s reading; in fact, it requires his interpretation. The ability to make claims is paramount and required before any confirmation about those claims can take place. I do not dispute the importance Rorty placed on the ability of individuals to make claims; it is an important theme in the novel. However, I believe it is secondary to the more substantial point that, any statement is inconsequential without social collaboration and social confirmation, a point Rorty embraces. In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Rorty claims that what counts as the criteria that confirms that something is true, is merely the criteria rational individuals have decided to count as important for truth.¹ That is to say, the criteria that we use to demarcate something as true are socially agreed upon criteria deduced by rational individuals. Thus, our justified beliefs remain related to social agreement in this manner as well:

Knowledge is, like truth, simply a compliment paid to the beliefs we think so well justified that, for the moment, further justification is not needed. An inquiry into the nature of knowledge can, on his view [the pragmatist], only be a socio historical account of how various people have tried to reach agreement on what to believe.²

Therefore, my interpretation does not conflict with Rorty’s interpretation, but in fact augments it. For Rorty, as we’ve seen, anything we can say about belief or justification is tantamount to social

agreement. But if so, then blocking the path to such agreement is the surest way to insure ‘mind control.’

2.2 Rorty’s Reading of 1984

In focusing upon our ability to make statements, Rorty did not intend to convert Orwell’s novel into an advocate for pragmatism or antirealism. He only wished to establish that the novel has more to offer than a realist reading alone can provide. Rorty states, “My reading of him [Orwell] was not intended to claim him as a fellow pragmatist, but to explain why one could be a non-Realist and still have one’s moral horizon expanded by 1984.”³ In order to accomplish this expansion of moral horizon he focuses much of his attention on one specific quote, voiced by main protagonist Winston Smith,

The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential command. His heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would over-throw him in debate, the subtle arguments which he would not be able to understand, much less answer. And yet he was in the right! They were wrong, and he was right. The obvious, the silly, and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall toward the earth’s center. With the feeling that he was speaking to O’Brien, and also that he was setting forth an important axiom, he wrote: *freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted all else follow.*⁴

Rorty claimed that even if Orwell held a realist view of truth, which is hardly conclusive, *1984* still has important role to play in the anti-realist’s interpretation of truth as well.

Rorty narrowed in on the last line of the quote, “freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four.” It is easier to see what Rorty wanted to demonstrate, if we break the sentence into two separate sections: 1) “Freedom is the freedom to say that,” and 2) “two plus two make four.” The first section, “freedom is the freedom to say that,” provides a definition: of freedom. *Freedom* is the uncoerced ability (the freedom) to make a claim X. Rorty wanted to focus on this sentiment specifically: the ability to *make* the claims is the focus rather than what the claim *was*. Even if Orwell was talking about the merit of a claim, (i.e. the claim’s factual content,) it could be read in a way that shifts the focus to the *ability* to make a claim. As such, the content of the claim is a separate consideration for Rorty, who is focused on what it means to live in a free society. According to Rorty, “freedom” is the ability to make a claim, any claim, and as such it is paramount.

It does not matter whether ‘two plus two is four’ is true, much less whether this truth is ‘subjective’ or ‘corresponds to external reality.’ All that matter is that if you do believe it, you can say it without getting hurt. In other words, what matters is your ability to talk to other people about what seems to you true, not what is in fact true. If we take care of freedom truth can take care of itself.\(^5\)

Rorty focuses on the freedom of expression, and as such stresses the ability to make a claim. He does not mean to say that all claims are equal, only that truth can take care of itself through discussion and

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collaboration with others. We can only check our beliefs against the beliefs of others if we are free to state our beliefs openly and freely; because through discussion we challenge our justified beliefs against the justified beliefs of others. Only then are we engaging in a process of deciding on what is best for society to believe. It is through discussion with others that we learn which things we are entitled to have justified beliefs about.

Rorty showed that *1984* demonstrates the need to retain a particular freedom; the freedom to make a claim expressing one’s own beliefs even if they are contrary to the beliefs of those in power, or the popular beliefs of a society. He claimed that to maintain freedom a culture must embrace the right of individuals to make any claim. In addition, society must be willing to engaging with everyone else’s claims.⁶ I agree. Rorty read Orwell’s *1984* as a cautionary tale. Accepting any truth as an absolute, Truth with a capital T, only inhibits discussion on that subject matter and results in a detriment to that society. Remember, for Rorty, there is not a *True a way it is*, there is only, *a way we describe it*. In choosing to describe it one way over another we embrace a particular language game—a way of understanding things Rorty calls a “final language.” Rorty did not believe that writers like Orwell should be thought of as making political statements or philosophical claims, rather they were providing re-descriptions of the world:

[The kind of thing Orwell and Nabokov both did – sensitizing an audience to cases of cruelty and humiliation which they had not noticed – is not usefully thought of as a matter of stripping away appearance and revealing reality. It is better thought of as a redescription of what may

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⁶ *Ibid.*, 176
happen or has been happening – to be compared, not with reality, but with alternative descriptions of the same events.⁷

As I said in chapter one, literary works challenge our understandings of the world by providing an alternative way to view the world, one that is often contrary to our common conceptions. Orwell showed us a possible world, one that could exist given that certain beliefs were accepted as justified, or that a certain language game was embraced over others. Orwell is playing the role of Rorty’s ironic liberal, but Orwell is offering a negative description of the future. He is providing a possible way to interpret the world. He is showing us how things could turn out, if we accept a particular final language. His description provides warning about what could happen, so it can be avoided. Orwell was not claiming that if we did not change our ways, we would end up there. Rather, he was only demonstrating how certain values, i.e. embracing a certain “final language,” could bring society to a place similar to 1984; not that they would, but merely that they could.

Rorty has shown the importance of one of three aspects we set out to analyze, namely that the ability to make claims takes precedence over the quality of those claims. But, he only implies the second aspect in his interpretation of 1984: collaboration and cooperation are required to justify a belief, as I demonstrated in section 2.1a. However, he does not develop this theme in his interpretation of 1984. In my interpretation I will explore this in more depth. I focus specifically on the Party’s control over social interaction, an aspect of control I believe Orwell purposely made explicit.

I claim that the tactics used by the Party were not necessarily designed to create a particular truth corresponding to the Party’s beliefs, but to ensure that individuals could not confirm or deny

⁷ Ibid., 173
whatever truth the Party provided. I will show how Orwell presents a totalitarian government that attempts to control its citizens by hindering social interaction. Without social interaction there can be no confirmation or denial of the facts provided by the Party. Without social interaction it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for individuals to establish any belief other than the Party’s propaganda. Perhaps, Rorty ignored this aspect because if a member of society cannot make a claim, then what good is it to discuss ways of confirming a claim? However, the reverse would have to hold as well for Rorty, what good is making a claim, if you cannot discuss it with members of society in the hopes of confirming it? The ability to make a claim is important, it is not however paramount. One without the other is just as inconsequential.

2.3 The Party’s Goals: Truth vs. Social Collaboration

In order to demonstrate this particular reading of 1984, we must analyze the ways in which the Party attempts to control or manipulate what is true. This will require two separate analysis: 1) an analysis of The Party’s techniques as presented by Orwell, and 2) an analysis of the interplay among these techniques. The Party’s techniques are certainly meant to manipulate the truth, this cannot be denied. However, as I analyze the techniques the Party employs, I will demonstrate that this is not their sole goal. I hope to show that it may not even be their primary goal. I will show how the Party’s techniques are not about rewriting the truth such that it enables their agenda; but rather I will show that their techniques are meant to thwart any collaboration between individuals. The techniques are meant to repress social interaction and eliminate an individual’s ability to confirm anything beyond what the party told them – in that moment. The Party’s strategy is designed to block an individual’s ability to develop any alternative perspectives. The Party’s goal was not about rewriting truth, it was about stopping individuals from confirming or disconfirming those truths with other members of society. I will present this reading of 1984, and demonstrate that the goal of the Party was to ensure an inability to
confirm or deny any information. I will argue that the Party’s tactics, which included creating facts and changing history, are in service to this more sinister goal.

Orwell presents a totalitarian government whose focus is to control the thoughts of those who live within the society. The tactics the Party used were designed to hinder an individual’s ability to think beyond the facts provided by the Party. To accomplish this feat, the Party had to enact other forms of control: surveillance, various form of thought control, and isolation via fear of and distrust in their fellow citizen. Each of these forms had independent value when it came to control over the people of Oceania. However, one form of control is never truly independent of another. It is through this interplay of these different tactics that the Party managed a complete manipulation of the public. The latter two thought control and isolation, appear to have the most relevance to our subject, but surveillance is an age old powerful tool. It has significance concerning the Party’s manipulation of a people.

2.4 Surveillance and Thought Control

The use of constant surveillance is not a new means of controlling a society, it is perhaps one of the oldest and most reliable forms of control. Philosophers such as Plato, Machiavelli, Bentham, and Foucault, to name a few, have spent a considerable amount of ink detailing the ways in which surveillance and overwatch play a role in controlling a group of people. However, in 1984 we see the role of surveillance taken to an extreme. There were two ways in which surveillance was implemented in Oceania: overt observation and subtle observation. Overt observation is demonstrated by the ever-watching two-way TV screens placed around Oceania. The two-way TV represented a constant threat of being observed at any and every moment. The more interesting aspect of the televisions is that they don’t actually need to be observing an individual at any given time. Orwell, voiced by Winston, “You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was
overhead, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.” The looming threat that the screen could be observing an individual was enough to keep one from making a misstep while in their presence. The mere threat of observation was sufficient to instil a sense of paranoia in the citizens of Oceania. Even if this was a healthy paranoia, as it probably was in Oceania, it was still paranoia. Paranoia from observation is our first example of the interplay between the different Party tactics – Observation creates paranoia. Through observation and the resulting paranoia caused by it, the Party was influencing the thought process of individuals.

The subtle ways in which the Party observed its citizens creates a greater concern about societal development. The purpose of subtle observation was to gain insight into the thoughts of individuals by observing sudden changes in their disposition; “He [Winston] had set his features into the expression of quiet optimism which it was advisable to wear when facing the telescreens.” By observing facial expressions and changes in general disposition, the Party hoped to sense any discontent with the status quo or with the Party itself. Thus, an individual had to remain vigilant and in control of their thoughts so as not to display these signs of discontent unconsciously. This form of observation demonstrates another crossover in the Party’s tactics. It demonstrates another way the act of observation leads to a form thought control. The best way to make sure one is not displaying their unconscious or conscious discontent with the Party was to appear content. If there are no thoughts of discontent, then discontent cannot be displayed. Yet again, via observation, we have another form of thought manipulation. Individuals would in Oceana were constantly striving to think positive thoughts about the Party, so as not to display their discontent.

Orwell demonstrated how both forms of observation, the overt and the subtle, become particularly damning when a member of society interacts with another member of society. He illustrated

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8 Ibid. 4, 3
9 Ibid., 5
this paranoia, with Julia and others: “The idea had even crossed his mind that she [Julia] might be an agent of the Thought Police.”\(^\text{10}\) Orwell presented a world where every time an individual was in a public place, be it the streets, work, or the halls of their own apartment building, they felt as if they were under constant surveillance and scrutiny; every action was being judged. It was not only being judged directly from the Party, via the TV screens, but also from other members of society. Thus, individuals fell into routine: “To dissemble your feelings, to control your face, to do what everyone else was doing, was an instinctive reaction.”\(^\text{11}\) Anyone could be a member of the Party, so everyone was a suspect. Open and free conversation between individuals was impossible. All conversation had become disciplined, regurgitated rhetoric, and meant only to persuade the interlocutor of one’s loyalty to the party.

Loyalty to the Party appears to be the sole justification for the Party’s surveillance. However, Orwell’s introduction of Syme offers an interesting insight into the real, less obvious, motives of the Party. Syme was a loyal member of the party. He agreed with the rules, regulations, and ideologies provided by the Party. Syme even worked on one of the forms of thought control that I will be discussing, Newspeak. Despite this, Syme meets with an untimely demise.

Unquestionably Syme will be vaporized... There was something subtly wrong with Syme. There was something that he lacked: discretion, aloofness, a sort of saving stupidity. You could not say that he was unorthodox... He said things that would have been better unsaid, he had read too many books.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{10}\) Ibid., 10
\(^{11}\) Ibid., 17
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 54-55
Here Orwell provides a reason to believe that there is something more sinister going on than merely forcing individuals to believe the things the Party decreed. It shows that the Party’s tactics go beyond such a simple form of control. Syme is later “vaporized,” i.e. killed, because he spoke too openly and too often. If the party was simply concerned with loyalty, then Syme would have survived. This minor character shows that the Party demanded the virtues of isolation and discretion and not simply loyalty to the Party’s ideals. It was never about belief in the Party’s story, it is about isolation. Even if belief in the Party’s rhetoric was preferred, it is not paramount – isolation is paramount.

This subsection demonstrates the role surveillance plays in restraining both thought and societal interaction. The constant surveillance, intentionally meant to result in paranoia, demonstrates that the control implemented by The Party goes beyond merely rewriting facts. The Party was more concerned with how individuals dealt with those facts. Were they accepting of the facts? Did they reject those facts? Did they reject those facts consciously or unconsciously? Most important, did they attempt to confirm or deny those facts with others? Surveillance, in 1984, is shown to be much more sinister than merely watching for acts of volition. It was designed to limit the ability of an individual to confirm or disconfirm facts presented by the Party.

2.5 Thought Control and Newspeak

Orwell introduces Newspeak as one of the prominent forms of thought control. It also provides insight as to why we should not shy from an anti-realist reading of 1984. Orwell develops the language of Newspeak throughout the narrative, but he also takes additional time to write an entire appendix devoted to the structure and ideological purpose of Newspeak.
The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and old speak forgotten, a heretical thought—that is a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc—should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words.13

The entirety of the first chapter is devoted to the connection between language and articulated ideas. As such I will not rehash it all here, but merely point out that Orwell is directing our attention to another form of language manipulation, one that attempts to prevent new ideas from ever arising. Orwell is demonstrating, albeit fictionally, how language can be manipulated to limit how people think. The more a language is limited in the ideas it can articulate, the more individuals are limited in the ideas they are able to think. However, Newspeak also has a role to play in limiting social interaction. Rationalists and realist alike will admit that the language we have access to does affect our ability to articulate certain conventions. At the very least it has a role to play in how we think. This is a non-controversial point, however, since I am articulating the interplay between different forms of control enacted by the party, I would be remise if I did not go over this form as well.

The adoption of one language game over another has a significant affect on an individual’s ability to articulate herself accurately to an interlocutor. Newspeak is a language game. If I had a concept of freedom, other than what was articulated by the Newspeak dictionary, but others only had the definition provided by Newspeak, then how would I convey my definition of freedom to them? Orwell writes, “The word free still existed in Newspeak, but it could only be used in such statements as ‘This dog is free from lice’ or ‘this field is free from weeds.’ It could not be used in its old sense of

13 Ibid., 299-30
‘politically free’ or ‘intellectually free.’

Thus, should I attempt to instill sentiments of revolution by appealing to freedom, I would not be able to articulate it in such a way that my interlocutor would understand. My inability to articulate my thoughts properly would thwart my attempts at collaboration, or at least hinder any meaningful social interaction. Moreover, I could not confirm my idea of freedom with others. Other individuals would have to partake in much lengthier conversation in order to understand the concept I was attempting to convey. I take this to be additional evidence supporting the claim that the Party’s goal was to prevent social interaction. Through Newspeak, Orwell demonstrates that the party does not care what its citizens believe, rather the Party wants to keep the citizens from confirming their beliefs with others. It is the social aspect of Newspeak, i.e. the way it can inhibit social interaction, that makes it important for the discussion, not necessarily how it influences our beliefs.

Newspeak is an extreme representation of language manipulation. It is doubtful that something so sweeping could ever take hold in modern society, at least in the way Orwell envisioned. However, it should not appear as a completely foreign idea as it is comparable to slanting. Slanting is a form of language manipulation that attempts to be both a description and evaluation simultaneously, by contaminating the sentiment in the description. It can also work in the reverse by painting the word with a brighter tone than we would normally associate with the concept.

Without diving too deep into slanting, I only wish to say that it is also used by those who disseminate information to the public on daily basis. We see examples of this in created phrases like, *advanced interrogation techniques*, *Alt-right groups*, and *collateral damage*. All of which are phrases that attempt a form of language manipulation, i.e. slanting. These phrases are less egregious ways of saying, *torture*, *racists*, and *civilian deaths*. The altered phrases are employed because they do not evoke the same emotional response – immediate disdain – that the other expressions do. The danger here is

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14 Ibid., 300
that Newspeak attempts to slant all socially related concepts. Thus, if only the Newspeak versions of sentiments are permitted and used, then the slanted concepts become the concepts themselves.

Don’t you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thought-crime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten.\(^{15}\)

Newspeak represents another way that the Party attempts to close off individuals from ways of thinking that could be contrary to the Party’s agenda. I offer this brief analysis of Newspeak as a cautionary tale. It demonstrates that one of the ways social collaboration can be prevented, by manipulating the language game, is by preventing meaningful discussion with anyone outside that language game. In establishing a different language game, a power structure attempts to hinder meaningful social interaction with those that do not share the same beliefs. Moreover, all discussion within the confines of that language game become inconsequential rhetoric.

2.6 Thought Control and Double-Think

Thus far, I have been showing how the practices of the Party have been predominately about suppressing social interaction. The Party is able to suppress social interaction through surveillance, instilling paranoia, fostering feelings of suspicion, and language manipulation. The Party has effectively

\(^{15}\) Ibid. 4, 52
stripped the citizens of their ability to confirm any belief not prescribed by the party. The aggregate of these forms of control is *doubleshooting*. Orwell describes the situation like this:

The essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty. To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies.\(^{16}\)

Orwell defined Doublethink as, “The power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously and accepting both of them.”\(^{17}\) Doublethink takes place within the mind of the individual and manifests in how that individual interacts publicly. The person feels as if they know one thing but are forced to articulate the opposite when interacting with society. The goal of Doublethink is to confuse the last relationship a person has left: the relationship with the self. Doublethink puts an individual in a place where they believe what the Party provides because there is no reliable source they can call upon to deny it. The citizens are left with no way to justify their beliefs. Doublethink is the culmination of the Party’s techniques that I have outlined. The other forms of control create allow doublethink to emerge as a result. Rorty provides the reason why:

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 214  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 214
The person who has doubts about his own final vocabulary, his own moral identity, and perhaps his own sanity – desperately needs to talk to other people, needs this with the same urgency as people need to make love. He needs to do so because only conversation enables him to handle these doubts, to keep himself together, to keep his web of beliefs and desires coherent enough to enable him to act.\footnote{Ibid. 5, 186}

However, individuals in Oceana were prevented from being able to engage in this form liberating discussion because of constant surveillance, social scrutiny, and a constant state of hypervigilance to avoid suspicion. In this way, the citizens of Oceania were stripped of their ability to form alternative beliefs, because they no longer had a reliable option in which to engage in meaningful social interaction. The result of which, for those in Oceana, is doublethink. It is doublethink that we want to avoid.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, when a realist reads \textit{1984} she sees the distortion of the truth as the main theme, for the realist then, the worst thing the Party does is distort past events. However, for an anti-realist, the worst thing the Party did was prevent social interaction and collaboration with other citizens. It was the lack of social interaction that prevented the \textit{ability of} citizens to form justified beliefs. We need not reject either interpretation, but we must notice that it is the lack of social collaboration that leads to the state of doublethink. Doublethink itself is not a form of control that can be enacted \textit{ex nihilo}, it is a form of self-control that emerges when social interaction is cut off. The alienation of doublethink is the result of meaningful social interaction being prevented.

An anti-realist reading of \textit{1984} helps to demonstrate that claims about truth may not be as important as our ability to justify that truth to one another. As Rorty claimed, knowledge is a socio-
historic account of how we have come to agree on what should be believed. However, in the world that
Orwell created there can be no agreement. There is no meaningful social interaction between the
citizens of Oceania because of the control mechanisms implemented by the Party. Furthermore, without
meaningful social interaction a citizen cannot confirm or deny the information provided by the Party.
The citizens own beliefs have become distorted as they struggle between the Party’s facts and what they
can confirm as facts. It is because there can be no meaningful social interaction that they then slip into a
state of doublethink. When they had the doubts about their own final vocabulary and they desperately
needed to communicate with another individual, they were prevented from doing so by the control
mechanisms in place. The citizens were left in a state where they could not justify their beliefs: they
could not interact with others, they could agree within themselves, and they had no other venue in
which to seek information. They had become completely alienated. They do not have justified beliefs; at
this point they only have beliefs.

It is doublethink that we want to avoid as individuals in society and as a society as whole. It is
my contention that as individuals become more engrained in there political party’s ideology the less
likely they are willing to engage in meaningful discussion outside of that political ethos. As a result, this
leads those individuals into a state similar to doublethink. Individuals are in a state of alienation where
they accept what their party says, even if it seems contrary to what they know, rather than seek out
meaningful discussion with others.

2.7 Tenuous relationships: Trust and Trends in America

The reading of 1984 I have presented concludes that social interaction, collaboration, and open
discussion are the paramount features of a free society. Rorty stressed that the paramount feature of a
free society was, “The ability to say that two plus two is four,” while implying that social interaction was
necessary feature. I have claimed the paramount feature to be the ability to agree that two plus two is
four through social interaction. Rorty and I both believe that truth, as a matter of correspondence, is impossible to confirm. In chapter one, I established that truth is dependent on our language game and we cannot step outside of our language game. Thus, the word ‘true’ is merely an adjective we use to describe our justified beliefs within our current language game. That is to say: Society agrees to denote something as ‘true’ if and only if we do not feel it requires any additional justification. Thus, Rorty and I contend that it is through social interaction and collaboration that we come understand that our beliefs are justified. However, the justification process should not be thought of as merely a convincing of others. Rather it is through the process of discussion that we learn if our own beliefs should be considered justified. Open and free discussions provide either reinforcement or counter arguments to our own beliefs. We may find, through discussion and social interaction, that our beliefs are not justified. It may come to our attention that our own personal beliefs are ill-informed, unwarranted, or blatantly false. However, this can only happen when interaction and free discussion with others is embraced, i.e. engaging in social interaction.

I claimed that the worst thing for society was to end up in state of doublethink, but that the only way to get there was to keep individuals isolated and alienated from one another. The Party alienated its citizens by using various forms of control, all working in combination. They instilled fear and paranoia to limit the engagement citizens had with other citizens. The Party eroded a citizen’s faith in information provided by anyone other than the Party, leaving the citizens unable to trust the government, each other, or themselves. I believe that strong enough parallels can be drawn from 1984 to today’s culture that warrant worry. The similarities that demonstrate if we are not careful, then America’s society will split into two separate, Party like groups, each with their own language game which will severely inhibit social development.

A healthy democracy embraces the freedom to make any claims, as was purported by Rorty. But, it must also embrace social cooperation and communication. In the next section I will be analyzing
data that takes a close look at the current state of political social interaction in American culture. I will do my best not to interpret the data beyond what it demonstrates, however, there are strong indications that the American culture no longer interacts in a meaningful way outside of its divided political lines. The data implies that beliefs have become dogmatic and people have become isolated in our own political parties. It is prudent to remember that I am not arguing that a central power has taken hold, as was the case in 1984. There are two parties, both of which are concerned with retaining their political foothold and corresponding power. It is my belief that these parties are less concerned with social collaboration, the hallmark of a healthy democracy, and more concerned in keeping people divided. However, regardless of their motives, there is a dangerous social trend in American society developing that is preventing social collaboration.

In what follows, I'll provide data on America’s trust in government and media. This data indicates how people view their own party and how they view the opposing party. The data will demonstrate that while people have a lack of faith in the government and media, they are not wavering in their loyalty to their respective political party. This data will serve as the lynch pin that connects back with my analysis of 1984. The general structure of the argument is this:

P1) Citizens are divided amongst party lines.
P2) Citizens are unwilling or less likely to engage in discussions across party lines.
P3) Some citizens are less inclined to trust news sources and the government.
C1) Therefore, individuals only get information from those that share their views.
C2) As in 1984, political conversations are merely rhetoric of party beliefs

It should be noted that this discussion pertains to the everyday citizen, the average citizen, not the educated elite. Having said that I do not believe the educated elite to be immune from this criticism either, as much as they would like to believe they are.
2.8 Political Divides are Discouraging Discussion

In this section I will analyze some data from the Pew Research Center. Data of this sort should always be scrutinized and taken as suspect and while I believe the data supports my claim, I recognize that it may not be flawless. I present this data as a cautionary tale, a harbinger of possible things to come. It may very well indicate the direction we may be heading, if we do not recognize this issue before it becomes a bigger problem.

I will show that the data supports a great divide in fundamental cultural beliefs in America split along party lines. Moreover, the parties that individuals align with present their ideas as Truths, and the people who align with those parties accept them as Truths. If two groups hold two opposing yet fundamentally incommensurable beliefs, both of which they believe to be True, and refuse to socially interact, then there can be no resolution to this problem. I will now turn to the data.

According to the Pew Research Center there has been a steady decline in trust of the government and an increasing divide amongst those with opposing political views. I will start by analyzing the partisan divide. The partisan divide in the following statistics indicates the level of which individuals have retreated from a moderate ideological standpoint on political issues. The claim is that as the gap grows individuals are less likely entertain a moderate or compromised solution.

But the bottom line is this: Across 10 measures that Pew Research Center has tracked on the same surveys since 1994, the average partisan gap has increased from 15 percentage points to 36 points.19

and

Republicans and Democrats are now further apart ideologically than at any point in more than two decades, a continuation of the trend Pew Research Center first documented with these measures in 2014.20

Here we see that the partisan gap is increasing. By itself this is not all that damning of evidence. A healthy democracy will always have people with opposing views and some on the fringes. These statistics indicate that fringes are growing, and the moderate opinions are shrinking. Political pluralism is arguably the hallmark of a healthy democracy. However, as this gap grows so does the general disdain and animosity for those of the opposing party.

For the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party. And today, sizable shares of both Democrats and Republicans say the other party stirs feelings of not just frustration, but fear and anger.21

The data shows that 52% of Republicans view Democrats as closed-minded, 47% believe them immoral, and 45% believe them dishonest. The democrats are no better, as 70% view republicans as closed-minded, 35% see them as immoral, and 42% as dishonest. I would like to ask: At what point are you

20 Ibid.
willing to discuss something with someone that you believe to be closed-minded, immoral, dishonest?

This is not conclusive evidence, so let us continue and view the statistics on antipathy.

Our study of polarization in 2014 found that a major element of partisan polarization ‘has been the growing contempt that many Republicans and Democrats have for the opposing party.’ Since then, levels of mutual contempt have grown, and ‘many’ has become ‘most,’ according to a separate survey of 2,008 adults.22

The statistics show that 58% of Republicans have a ‘very unfavorable’ view of Democrats, with 91% republican falling in the top two categories of ‘unfavorable’ and ‘very unfavorable.’ Democrats are no better, while only 86% fall in the top two categories, ‘unfavorable’ and ‘very unfavorable,’ 55% fall in the ‘very unfavorable’ view of republicans.23 These stats demonstrate that as our political divide widens so does our general disdain for those of the opposing party.

If one was unconvinced that viewing someone as closed-minded, immoral, and un-trustworthy, would thwart attempts to reach across the divide to have a discussion, perhaps a general disdain will remain just as unconvincing. After all, this is not about becoming friends with those that oppose our views but working together to use the power of our democracy to provide an equitable solution. There are two final statistics that I wish to consider. These statistics analyze the state people are in after having a conversation with a member of the opposing party and the frequency in which individuals engage in political discourse.

22 Ibid.,
23 Ibid.,
Half of Republicans say they generally find such discussions to be ‘stressful and frustrating,’ while 48% find them ‘interesting and informative.’ Democrats also are divided – 46% say conversations with those with whom they disagree are stressful, while 52% say they are interesting.\textsuperscript{24}

This statistic indicates that half of the population is left in a state of stress and frustration when they engage with members of the other party. Combined with the frequency at which Americans engage in political discussion, “Most Americans don’t talk about politics all that frequently: 58% of the public discusses government and politics a few\textsuperscript{25} times a month or less, while 42% discuss politics more often,”\textsuperscript{26} we can see another problem emerge. In conjunction, these statistics show we aren’t engaging in political discussion that often, and when we do engage we are most likely left in a state of stress and frustration.

These statistics, in themselves, are not conclusive evidence that people aren’t engaging in political discussions across party lines. However, there is a strong indication that this is the case. The Pew Research Center agrees, “These indicators suggest that there is a tendency on the left and the right to associate primarily with like-minded people, to the point of actively avoiding those who disagree.”\textsuperscript{27}

The statistics have shown us that people view members of the opposing party as closed-minded,

\textsuperscript{25} ‘Few’ is not explicitly defined in the data. The stats do provide weekly (29%) and daily discussions (13%) with corresponding drops in likelihood to engage in political discussion.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid
immoral, and dishonest. Moreover, even if half of the conversations taking place result in a state of stress or frustration, it seems hasty to conclude that individuals are actively avoiding such situations. As such, I am not claiming that the current political climate has shut off all communication. I am only claiming that it is discouraging discussion and encouraging social alienation. The political climate is merely a harbinger of potential problems not conclusive evidence of one. Therefore, I believe there are strong indications of P1 and P2.

2.8 Government and Media Trust

The Pew Research Center also provides extensive analysis of the population’s trust level in American government. It also provides statistics on the population’s lack of faith in information provided by the media. It is from there that we draw support for P3: citizens are less inclined to trust news sources and the government. At this point our political situation diverges from 1984. If 1984 was about how a single political structure retained ultimate power and loyalty through social alienation, then our situation is about our allegiance to the codified political ideologies we believe. These codified political ideologies are represented by our allegiance to our political affiliations — our political parties. The forthcoming statistics, statistics that demonstrate our trust in our government (our leaders) is down to historic lows, serve to strengthen the argument that our society is reluctant to trust any source not sufficiently in line with our political affiliation.

The public’s trust in the federal government continues to be at historically low levels. Only 19% of Americans today say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right “just about always” (3%) or “most of the time” (16%).

Faith in the media is down as well.

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Only about two-in-ten Americans (22%) trust the information they get from local news organizations a lot, whether online or offline, and 18% say the same of national organizations, slightly higher than the 14% who say this of the information they get from their friends and family.29

Combining these statistics shows that only about 20% of the people trust the information coming from the media and our leaders. However, our faith and confidence in our respective party’s is generally high. Overall, 90% of core conservatives say the Republican party represents their values very or somewhat well... Among Democratic-leaning groups, solid liberals are the most likely to say their values are at least somewhat well represented by the Democratic party (90%)30

These statistics show that trust in the government is at historic lows, trust in the media is at historic lows, yet faith in our respective parties is relatively unwavering. This data has implied P3, raising an important question: If citizens do not trust these two primary sources of information, and are less likely to cross party lines in discussing politics, then where are people getting their information? The only solution is C1: from others who share their values. If they are only getting information from others who share their values, then C2 becomes far more likely. It is not conclusive by any means, but it is likely indicative.

If we couple the lack of faith in government and media with an alienation from one another because of a sharp political divide, then we have a situation similar to that which led to Orwell’s 1984: ongoing alienation ripe for the imposition of doublethink where individuals only believe and regurgitate political ideologies put forth by their party. We haven’t, of course, entered a position where a

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monolithic power like the Party has emerged, but we are dangerously close to social agendas rooted in political ideology rather than open discussions about what’s actually best. The further apart these parties get, and the longer meaningful social interaction is avoided, the likelier an individual final language develops within that party. At that point the parties will be unable to communicate with one another in a meaningful way.

I now come to the third point I wished to articulate from the onset of this chapter: The greatest form of control over a citizenry comes in the form of alienating the citizens from one another. If a society is alienated from itself, it cannot hold any justified beliefs. The individual parties still hold justified beliefs, but the society at large does not. Moreover, it is the lack of willingness, the steadfast commitment, and conviction to their version of the truth that prevents any meaningful discussion. The situation is strikingly similar to the one Orwell provided in 1984 and isolationist mentality from everyone who does not share similar beliefs. The difference is that America has two parties and as such it provides the facade of having meaningful discussions. The conclusion drawn here is not meant to be a declaration of a state of affairs, but, as I have been saying, merely a harbinger of worse times to come. Traditionally, Americans have endorsed the right to hold competing values and opinions, yet there seems to be a shift away from this tradition growing in our culture.

2.9 Rorty, Orwell, and Re-descriptions

I believe this reading of Orwell offers insight into our society through the parallels I have shown. I also admit that there are some dissimilarities that imply we have time to rectify this problem. As Rorty claimed, the works of Orwell and others are meant to sensitize us to these possible outcomes. Rorty did not want people to read Orwell as a declaration of how things would turn out, rather he thought it should be read as the cautionary tale that we have not been sensitized to the detrimental effects that a divided political culture of this nature could have: a culture that appears to be one society yet holds
fundamentally incommensurable beliefs that split into incommensurable final languages. I cannot speak
to the motives of the parties in particular, but the statistics on individual behaviors appear to indicate
meaningful discussion and resolution is waning. The statistics indicate that we are not seeking out
individuals who do not share our opinions. Therefore, we do not seek out justifications for our beliefs
from anyone who does not already share our beliefs. We accept the rhetoric of the political party we are
endeared too without pause and more often without seeking alternative understandings.

As an anti-realist and a Rortian, I believe there is a solution or at least a form of relief. In chapter
one I said there is no correct description, there are only plausible descriptions. Choosing a certain
description over another will lead our society to develop in a manner that conforms to that choice.
However, without rejecting the notion of Truth, we cannot search for preferred descriptions of society.
This is why I used the previous chapter to establish that seeking Truth is not a fruitful exercise. True
(capital T) descriptions by their nature imply a correct description and an incorrect description. If it were
just a matter of deciding which concept is correct, then one of these parties is going to have to triumph
and the other fail. Unless of course neither has come close to finding Truth, this to me seems the most
likely account. It is also why we should abandon the idea of Truth altogether. It is because there is no
correct or True description of the world that we can end up with two incommensurable ideas; but, it is
also because there are no True or correct description of the world that we are able to reject one or both
ideas.

Our unwillingness to collaborate with one another combined with our distrust in our leaders and
information sources has created this untenable situation. It has left society in a place where it feels
comfortable holding two incommensurable beliefs. These incommensurable beliefs are shaping the way
our society is developing. But, because of their incommensurability they are in constant log jam. As both
incommensurable beliefs become concretized in society, society tries to pursue both goals
simultaneously and neither is achieved. In the coming chapter I will provide two separate solutions to
deal with this problem from different angles, each of which attacks the problem from a different angle. Scientific information should be discussed and justified through measurements of predictive power. Social and humanitarian issues should be discussed and justified through measuring the inclusiveness of the ‘we’ in conjunction with how we want society to develop.
Chapter 3: Solidarity Requires Meaningful Social Interaction

It is my opinion that there is no simple answer that will encourage meaningful dialogue between Democrats and Republicans as long as the more salient detail of our differing descriptions of the world remains mutually exclusive. I understand meaningful dialogue as dialogue that attempts to resolve a social issue in an open and constructive manner, rather than dialogue that is merely the regurgitation of a party’s political beliefs. In the past, philosophers have attempted to discover objective Truths or essential features of humanity that could provide a catalyst for such discussion. Philosophers were looking for something essential that we could all unite behind. I have been denying the existence of this essential feature since the start of this work. It has been my position that there is no such essential feature, and that features of our society are merely contingent socio-historical conditions upon which our current language game was formed; and moreover, it is the contingent nature of that language game that defines how we view our history, traditions, and what consequently establishes our beliefs. It is the contingent nature of humanity that has ultimately presented us with this divide. As individuals define the problems of society in different ways, then different solutions present themselves as a result.

As individuals, each of us has different ideas on what it means to live in an ideal society, and many of our descriptions of an ideal society are mutually exclusive. It is due to this mutual exclusivity that an answer to the question, “How we achieve an ideal society?” may forever be out of reach. As a partial measure to addressing this problem our society has embraced a pluralistic structure of government. A pluralistic structure of government commits to the idea that there are, or may be, more than one ideal way to organize a society; and moreover, the more ideas presented by a society the better. However, as long as we continue to be dogmatic in our beliefs and claim that there are right or
wrong ways to solve an issue, then a pluralistic structure itself cannot allow a society to progress. I advocate that we need to abandon this notion that right and wrong are discoverable Truths within an already existing world. In the opening chapter of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty says,

> I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favor look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics.¹

He is claiming that the best way to accomplish the goal of solidarity should not rely on philosophical argumentation, rather it should rely on re-descriptions. Rorty is demonstrating through example in his work that re-descriptions are superior than philosophical arguments in changing people’s views. If one challenges a person’s description by claiming, *your way is wrong and mine is right*, then there can be no progress. It is Rorty’s contention that by abandoning a search for Truth, in favor of re-descriptions, society may be able to achieve a form of solidarity. That is to say: If we can be less dogmatic in our beliefs towards truth, consequently we will be more understanding of others language games; and if we are more understanding of others language games, it may allow us to find more salient issues that can bond society together solidarity.

Rorty believed that the best way to achieve solidarity was to increase the number of people included in the ‘we’ when re-describing the world. The ‘we’ in Rorty’s theory is the amount of people who believe, partake in, or are included in a particular re-description of the world. It was the ironists’ job to develop these re-descriptions. In this chapter, I explicate Rorty’s understanding of the ‘we,’ and why

he believes that society should attempt to resolve the issues that divided our culture through re-descriptions. Despite his intentions, Rorty did come dangerously close to expressing an essence of humanity, or a Truth about humanity, when he provided *alleviating pain and humiliation* as the most salient features of our language game. It is only because Rorty labeled it as something we all can recognize, that it then appears as an essential feature of humanity. I explore two different ways his account could be interpreted to avoid the charge of him defining an essential feature.

Our recognition of pain and humiliation only become a shared feature of our humanity after we decide, and agree, that it should be considered as such. It does not exist as a Truth to be discovered, but rather as a justified belief to be agreed upon and included as a more salient feature in a shared language game. Second, even if we all share this part of the language game, that does not, imply that it is always recognized as the most salient feature of our language game. For example, if personal autonomy is compared to pain and suffering in a language game, then either one of these could be the more salient feature. I may be willing to accept some pain and suffering if it allows me to retain my personal autonomy. Thus, the intention is to develop a society that recognizes alleviating pain and humiliation as the most salient feature of shared language game, the result of which forwards our journey toward solidarity. Therefore, it is not an antecedently a property of humanity, it is contingent property of humanity; and even if it is a recognized, denoted, and agreed upon feature of a language game, that does not make it the salient feature in a language game. If we want to anchor our description of solidarity on this feature, then we need to get everyone to share the same language game as it pertains to alleviating pain and humiliation.

We need to accept that people have different perspectives because of the socio-historical conditions that have led them to hold their beliefs. We may need to abandon, or put aside, that which is most important to ourselves, so that we may understand the positions of others. It is not just important to understand that others have different language games, it is also important to understand why and
how individuals developed their particular language games. However, if one is going to remain dogmatic to a notion Truth, or to the idea that there is *a way things should be out in the world awaiting discovery*, then this cannot be accomplished.

### 3.1 Rorty’s Solidarity

Rorty’s notion of solidarity should be viewed as something to be pursued in opposition to the pursuit of objectivity. As I demonstrated in chapter 1, Rorty contends that the pursuit of objective truths is a foolhardy exercise. Moreover, Rorty claims the pursuit of objectivity stands in the way of the pursuit of solidarity. His claim is that by attempting to define Truths a philosopher’s efforts are wasted, and consequently philosophers give less effort in providing re-descriptions of the world that could inspire solidarity. He believes philosophers relentlessly pursue Truth because they refuse to accept the contingent nature of our society. Rorty states,

> My suggestion that the desire for objectivity is in part a disguised form of the fear of the death of our community echoes Nietzsche’s charge that the philosophical tradition that stems from Plato is an attempt to avoid facing up to contingency, to escape from time and chance.²

The implication here is that philosophers are holding on to Truth because they fear that by giving up their pursuit of Truth they will lose their purpose and reason to be part of the intellectual discussion. However, this is not the case. Rorty claims that there is a choice to make: we can pursue objectivity, or we can pursue solidarity; one is a fool’s errand, the other is a fruitful pursuit.

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Rorty’s notion of ‘solidarity’ differs from the colloquial or common notion of ‘solidarity.’ Whereas a common notion of solidarity may be understood as all humankind banded together or humankind living in some sort of harmonious arrangement with one another, Rorty argued that this type of utopian society is not plausible, at least it is not plausible anytime within the foreseeable future. In his “utopian” society, “[the] culture of the sort I envisage would settle instead for narratives which connect the present with the past, on the one hand, and with utopian futures, on the other.”3 His ideal society is one that is structured to embrace constant reformations as it attempts to find solutions, through re-descriptions, for the contingent problems of its time. The conceptual apparatus Rorty is working with is that an ideal society will continually deal with social issues by creating re-descriptions of the world. Over time, and only by comparison to past societal structures, does a “utopian” society emerge. Moreover, as a greater sense of those included in the “we” is developed or emerges, then a greater sense of solidarity will be observed.

It would be incorrect to view Rorty’s thesis as having an end goal or a teleology, rather it is a constant process of re-description: “More important, it would regard the realization of utopias as an endless process – an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth.”4 He claims that these re-descriptions, ones that constantly proliferate the realization of freedom, should also be attempts at increasing the number of people included in the ‘we’ when creating descriptions of who is deserving of those freedoms.

Rorty uses the word ‘we’ in a nuanced manner. Therefore, there are a few different ways we can understand Rorty’s use of ‘we,’ none of which are conceptually separate from another. One description of ‘we’ is those who are included by a particular description of the world. Another way to understand ‘we’ is all those who deserve respect under a certain description of the world. This creates a situation

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3 Ibid. 1, xvi
4 Ibid., xvi
where two different things need to be examined, the person who said it and who the “we” includes. For example, if one claims “We deserve liberty,” we have two questions to ask: Whom does the “we” include? and, whom does the person who uttered it believe it includes? If I say, “We deserve liberty,” I may mean all of humanity; but someone else may say, “We deserve liberty,” and only mean, people of the United States. Thus, there is still a disconnect here that needs to be examined. Even though, we both believe and utter the same statement, we are not describing the same group of people. Thus, we do not have a shared language game.

Rorty is advocating for the continual expanse of both senses of the term. We need to expand whom for which the “we” includes; and we need to expand “we” of those sharing a similar description of the world – i.e. language games. Universal solidarity would understand both these terms to be describing the same people. Thus, when “We deserve liberty,” is uttered, everyone would mean the same thing, and it would mean all of humanity.

Rorty, however, denies that an appeal is to something as broad as humankind can have the significant force to motivate us to solidarity: “I want to deny that ‘that one of us human beings’ … can have the same sort of force as any of the previous examples.” Rorty’s previous examples included smaller and more particular social groups, examples include fellow Catholics or fellow Greeks. He continues, “I claim that the force of ‘us’ is, typically, contrastive in the sense that it contrasts with a ‘they’ which is also made up of human beings – the wrong sort of human beings.” In this case the ‘us’ stands in opposition to the ‘they.’ Rorty is pointing out the power, strength, and importance of a specific common bond. Rorty is claiming, if we want to develop a sense of solidarity, more important than that

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5 Ibid., 190
6 Ibid., 190
of belonging to a particular social group, then we are going to need something more unifying, something stronger, something more appealing, than some blanket appeal to being a human. Rorty states,

> The point of these examples is that our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as ‘one of us,’ where ‘us’ means something smaller and more local than the human race. That is why ‘because she is a human being’ is a weak, unconvincing explanation of a generous action.\(^7\)

In order to explain the conceptual apparatus Rorty is employing, I am going to use a significantly less provocative example. This example will not articulate the socio-historical conditioning that would inevitably be present in our current societal split, nor does it adequately define the monumental hurdles that we will be forced to overcome in such a situation. However, a simple example is best in order to explain what Rorty’s is articulating.

We are on a basketball team made up of five individuals vs another team of five individuals, our team is the ‘us.’ We are the ‘us’ because we have the same understanding of our purpose in this position, defeat the other team. More importantly, we are the ‘us’ because we place the same importance on the idea of beating the other team, than we do on playing the game. The other team is the ‘they,’ which is made up of those that hold an opposite understanding of our purpose, for them our purpose is to lose. The other team is the wrong sort of human beings, because they do not share our goal of winning. More importantly, the other team places a greater level of importance on beating us, than it does on merely playing the game.

\(^7\) Ibid., 191
Cashing out the analogy, we see that one team represents those that hold a shared ideology, an ideology that stands in opposition to the ideology of the other team. Generally, we can assume that these ideologies are mutually exclusive, otherwise there would be no ‘us’ vs ‘them.’ Moreover, the degree of salience placed on an ideology is what creates or defines the divide between the two teams. If both teams placed a greater degree of importance on *playing the game*, than they did on *winning the game*, then there would be no ‘us’ vs ‘them,’ as both teams are required to play the game. It is only when the description is set up to pit one ideology vs another ideology, that an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality may emerge. It is only when a particular descriptions of the world pits one salient feature vs another salient feature that an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ mentality can emerge.

It is the sharing of ideologies, i.e. the shared part of a language game, that establishes our sense of solidarity with one another. In turn, it is the non-shared parts of a language game that divide us as a society, and consequentially establishes the ‘us’ vs ‘them’ dichotomy. The difficulty is in recognizing that the parts of the language game, the parts that divide or unite us, are contingent and as such can be re-described. Rorty says, “Feelings of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a function of historically contingent final vocabulary.”8 The reason upon which we choose one ideology to be the more salient feature in our language game, while denigrating another, is contingent, and moreover, it is merely a matter of our socio-historical conditions.

If an individual is born in America but is also raised Catholic, they have a choice to make: 1) either being American is the more salient feature of their identity or 2) their Catholicism is the more salient feature of their identity. Both options remain a part of their identity, and both may remain salient to the individual, but which salient feature does the individual recognize as more important

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8 Ibid., 192
when the two come into conflict with one another. It is Rorty’s intention to advocate for a system or method that creates re-descriptions of the world such that people will increasingly agree on the same salient feature as the more important feature of their language game. It is through re-descriptions of the world that individuals redefine the priority they place on their own salient feature. It is getting people to prioritize one salient feature over another that prompts Rorty to claim, “My positions is not incompatible with urging that we try to extend our sense of ‘we’ to people whom we have previously thought of as ‘they.’” However, in order to extend our sense of the ‘we,’ we need to stop searching for something True or essential within humanity by which to appeal; rather we need to develop re-description of the world that denote certain salient features as more important than those available in our current description.

Before we move on to what Rorty believes should be the more salient detail in our future re-descriptions of the world we should stop and recap the claims being purported. Thus far, Rorty has claimed that there are two ways to expand our notion of the “we.” First, expand the number of those sharing the same language game, and second, expand the number of those included by the description in the language game. If “we deserve liberty,” we want it to mean, all people deserve liberty, and we want everyone to mean the same thing when they utter it. Second, our socio-historic conditions develop our sense of solidarity by placing more salience on a particular notion, albeit a contingent notion, over and above another notion. We may all be humans, but I am also a Christian; and if the more salient detail for me is being a Christian, then no sense of solidarity beyond that can be established.

3.2 Rorty’s Pain and Humiliation

The account purported thus far claims that socio-historical conditions denote the salient features of an ideology, and that no language game will ever be closer to Truth than another. We dealt

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9 Ibid., 192
with the details of this in chapter 1, where I attempted to demonstrate that our notions of truth are tied inherently to the language game we are thrown into, and that which we can socially justify. However, by accepting this we do not preclude moral progress, it merely means that we have to have go about in different manner.

The view that I am offering says that there is such a thing as moral progress and that this progress is indeed in the direction of greater human solidarity. But that solidarity is not thought of as a recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs and the like) as unimportant when compared to with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation.\textsuperscript{10}

Here, it appears that Rorty has implied that pain and humiliation are traits we all commonly share, similarities with respect to pain and humiliation, thus making them a universal quality in all humankind. However, this would be a misunderstanding of his point. A feature can be universally agreed upon, but that does not in turn not make it a common feature. We can use the black swan problem to demonstrate why this is the case. If we all agree that swans are white, it appears whiteness is a common feature of swans. However, when we discovered a black swan, whiteness did not cease to be a common feature of the swan, it was just recognized that it was never a common feature to begin with. Yet, this does not mean that it was not originally recognized universally as a common feature of the swan.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 192
Whiteness was universally recognized, and still not a common characteristic of the swan. A feature, I might add, that we no longer universally recognize because of an agreed upon re-description of swans.

In assuming that pain and humiliation are an essential features of mankind, one is implying that it is something that existed before we recognized it or denoted as such. Again, I argued against this in chapter 1. Rorty states, “The wrong way to way is to think of it as urging us to recognize such a solidarity, as something that exists antecedently to our recognition of it.”\textsuperscript{11} If \textit{moral progress}, is that which creates a greater sense of solidarity, then it is getting everyone to: 1) recognize alleviating pain and humiliation as feature of humanity, and 2) recognize it as the more salient feature of the language game. Thus, we need re-descriptions that regard alleviating pain and humiliation as the most important salient feature of our humanity and constantly re-define what is included in that notion. It was Rorty’s claim that writers, such as George Orwell, best provide these re-descriptions. I also attempted to demonstrate this by re-interpreting George Orwell in chapter 2. In my re-description of 1984 I attempted to show that we should make social interaction and cooperation a more salient feature in our society. I also drew parallels to the stress and pain it places on our society when we do not regard these features as salient. If we continue to provide these types of re-descriptions, then no matter what the cultural differences are that divide us, “we” may be able to stand in solidarity by placing the relief of pain and humiliation as the most salient detail in our language game.

Take for example, genocide. The world has agreed to denote genocide as, a crime so atrocious that an appeal to national sovereignty may not be used to prevent international intervention.\textsuperscript{12} The world has constructed a language game in which it recognizes genocide as, an atrocious crime against all of humanity that the world stands in solidarity against. The international community provided a re-

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 196
description of the world when it made this proclamation. Moreover, it was a re-description that included the admonishment of genocide as the more salient feature, above and beyond national sovereignty. The recognition of genocide as crime against humanity did not exist as a salient feature in a shared language game prior to this re-description, nor was it a universal feature on which all nations agreed.

I understand that this may be incredibly difficult to accept. No one wants to believe genocide could be recognized in any other way than as the heinous crime against humanity it is designated as today. It would be easier and more comforting to make the claim, *genocide has always been a horrible crime against all humanity*, and denote those that partook in it as, *the wrong type of people*. However, that simply is not the case, we have only recently created a re-description of our world that denoted it as such. Should it have been recognized and denoted as such earlier in our history? Perhaps, but that is a different philosophical question and one worthy of exploration, but not here. Rorty has been claiming that it is through re-descriptions we come to understand what should be denoted as the more salient in our descriptions of the world. We move toward solidarity only when we recognize something in a re-description as the more salient feature than our previous description.

We do not move toward solidarity by recognizing or discovering antecedent Truths inherent in the world. We create descriptions of the world, and within those descriptions we decide what the more salient features are. Moreover, only through re-descriptions do we expand and develop our notions of those features. Solidarity is formed when we all agree that some features are more salient than others within a given description.

Shifting focus back to the quote on pain and humiliation, we must also take special notice of the word *compared* in Rorty’s claim. The statement should not be read as, *alleviating pain and humiliation are universal standards of humankind, therefore they should be the reason we band together*. Rather it
should be understood as, when compared to the importance of tribe, religion, race, and custom the importance of alleviating, or reducing, pain and humiliation is a more salient feature and should take precedence.

In the example of genocide sovereign nations retain their traditions and their customs until those conflict with the agreed upon understanding of genocide as denoted by the international community. The act of genocide supersedes those other features. Moreover, they are entitled to retain their sovereignty, traditions, and customs provided those features do not include or involve acts of genocide. In this way cultures retain their traditions but recognize that preventing genocide is a more salient feature in their language game. Those who agree to the re-description of the world as set forth by the Geneva Convention have agreed on a more salient feature, one that supersedes their national sovereignty. Moreover, we have achieved both forms of the ‘we’ that was described previously, ‘we’ all agree that genocide is a horrible crime, and by whom it is a horrible crime we also mean everyone. As we continue to create re-descriptions of the world, we can continuously increase the number of things upon which we have solidarity. We can see other examples of this type of re-description, as currently the international community is re-describing women’s rights. I can personally only hope that genital mutilation will achieve the same status as genocide, and as such be included among those things as a salient feature of pain and humiliation.

If we read Rorty’s description in the way that I suggest, then it demonstrates how alleviating pain and humiliation are only being compared to other, sometimes similar, ways we share a bond. In the same way that aversion to genocide is only being compared to the other ways we share bond. We now recognize genocide as a salient feature of our language game, and as such we stand in solidarity against it. It does not provide an objective reason to bond together, only a more salient feature now included in our description of the world, a feature that takes precedent over other socio-historical conditions. We
bond together in solidarity because we share a language game that denotes genocide as heinous crime against all of humanity.

The example of genocide is an obvious example of pain and humiliation; however, it is a specific instantiation which falls under the conceptual apparatus of alleviating pain and humiliation. Rorty’s thesis claims, that we have already placed the conceptual apparatus of pain and humiliation as a salient feature of our language game, but it is through re-description of the world that we may now expand our description of it what is included in it. I believe Rorty is demonstrating how we build up our understanding of pain and humiliation, through denoting specific instantiations, ones that are established through re-descriptions of the world. However, we also need to continue to expand those that are included in those re-descriptions.

The right way to take the slogan ‘we have an obligation to human beings simply as such’ is as a means of reminding ourselves to keep trying to expand our sense of ‘us’ as far as we can.13

As we expand the ‘us’ it becomes the ‘we.’ We want to increase the ‘we’ in both ways: First, who we should include in our descriptions and second, who shares in the salient features of our descriptions. A distinction that should, at this point, be seen as becoming mutually inclusive. We share a description of the world not only because we recognize the same features as salient, but because we make these features a priority for all humanity. However, we must still recognize the historical contingency even within this method and conceptual apparatus.

If one reads that slogan the right way, one will give ‘we’ as concrete and historically specific a sense as possible: it will mean something like ‘we twentieth-century liberals’ or ‘we heirs to the

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13 Ibid., 196. Clarification purposes: we have an obligation to human beings simply as such, is the slogan he is referring to.
historical contingencies which have created more and more cosmopolitan, more and more
democratic political institutions.’ If one reads it the wrong way, one will think of our ‘common
humanity’ or ‘natural human rights’ as a ‘philosophical foundation’ for democratic politics.14

We cannot appeal, nor should we appeal, to anything beyond our socio-historical conditions for re-
descriptions of the world. The socio-historical conditions of World War II brought about a re-description
of the world that established genocide within the conceptual apparatus of pain and suffering. The socio-
historical conditions of the 21st century are bringing about re-descriptions of the world that will
hopefully recognize female genital mutilation with the conceptual framework of pain and humiliation.
There is no common humanity to which we can appeal, only re-descriptions of the world that continue
to place things within the conceptual apparatus of alleviating pain and humiliation.

It was Rorty’s goal to establish re-descriptions of the world that did not deal with the specifics of
pain and humiliation but rather appealed to expanding the conceptual apparatus of alleviating pain and
humiliation. It is through re-descriptions that a more salient feature may arise, one that everyone could
understand as something to be avoided. Rorty had rejected it as an essential trait that existed
antecedently of our recognition of it, “That is why I said, that detailed descriptions of particular varieties
of pain and humiliation (in e.g., novels or ethnographies), rather than philosophical or religious treatises,
were the modern intellectual’s principal contributions to moral progress.”15 The claim is, by continually
exposing ourselves to re-descriptions we establish what constitutes pain and humiliation in our shared
language game. Thus, only through continual re-description do we expand our understanding of the
things that are included under that conceptual apparatus. In this way, we continually expand our

14 Ibid. 1, 196
15 Ibid., 192
inclusion of those who should be included in the ‘we’ when we understand what constitutes pain and humiliation.

Cultural practices are one of the primary ways we are divided as a species. We are all humans, but our race, religion, traditions, customs, and country of origin, demarcate specific boundaries of interaction that generally thwart human solidarity. As long as we continue to make tribe, religion, race, and custom the more salient feature in our language game, then these particular historical contingencies will keep us from achieving any sense of human solidarity.

It must also be remembered that the language game we currently employ is also contingent upon our socio-historical context, as children of the 21st century we can only work within that framework. Moreover, if we attempt to appeal to something too large – i.e. humanity as whole – then our ability to connect with one another will become too strained. Rorty believed, through imagination, new metaphors, collaboration, and constant re-descriptions we could extend the notion of the ‘we’ beyond the current language game we have embraced. There are two important virtues that a society needs to embrace if it wants to increase the size of the ‘we’: 1) We must continue to create re-descriptions of the world purporting different salient features, and 2) those descriptions must be discussed, evaluated, and either agreed upon by society in order to become salient features of our language game.
Conclusion

In this work I focused the majority of my efforts on demonstrating that truth is a social enterprise. In chapter one I demonstrated, what we hold to be true only extends as far as we believe it to be justified. Moreover, as our language evolves and adopts new concepts and ideas, we replace past justified truths in favor of new justified truth. I demonstrated how this happens in science by using Kuhn’s work on science as a system of paradigms. Kuhn showed that as science goes through stages of crisis it purports new theories with ones that re-describe the conceptual apparatus under which the old ones operated. Moreover, those new theories caused the scientists to see the world differently, even when they use the same tools and looked to the same spots. It is this phenomenon, Kuhn claimed, “Though the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world,”¹ and that it is something me must learn to accept.

I then attempted to demonstrate that philosophers and, more importantly for our purposes here, how creative writers reshape our world by providing alternative descriptions and re-descriptions. We employed the word metaphor, not to be used in a colloquial sense, as a merely colorful rhetoric or a literary tool; but as a re-description of the world that currently had no place in our language game. It was a re-description of the world that required one to analyze, play, and chew on, the new description to facilitate an understanding of it. After this process, ‘we,’ as a society, could choose to either accept or reject it that description.

In chapter two Rorty and I provided two separate re-descriptions of Orwell’s 1984. Rorty’s description highlighted the important feature of novel as, the way the Party restricted freedom by denying individuals the ability to make claims. He claimed that the truth of 2+2=4 is not as important as the ability to claim “2+2=4.” I provided a different re-description of 1984, one that demonstrated the importance of social interaction and the detrimental effect it can have on an individual’s ability to confirm or deny claims. Moreover, I claimed that all the devious methods employed by the Party were in lockstep with this, more sinister, goal. In my re-description, this was the important feature of the novel. However, as I conclude this work, I hope I have made it clear that neither interpretation of the novel is more essential or important. Rather, both interpretations have value as, both contribute to the weaving of an ongoing description of oppression, pain, and humiliation. Both interpretations, once understood, contribute to our continually evolving concept of control, the merits of social interaction, and our description of the idea of freedom.

In the past when philosophers have claimed, there is a True way to understand something, the implication is that there is an essential way to understand it. Moreover, once that understanding is clear the enlightenment provided by that Truth will illuminate the way should perform other practices. I, along with Rorty, am proposing that it is through re-descriptions of the world that we build the conceptual apparatus that will then guide us for a short time.

In Pamela Bedore’s lecture series Great Utopian and Dystopian Works of Literature, she claims that one of the reasons we find utopian or dystopian stories so appealing is because they provide us a view of the world which we could have never imagined alone. As we read, live, and feel the struggles provided by the narrative, the author is reweaving and rework our understanding of the important concepts they are exploring. I have focused primarily on concepts that reshape our societal interactions, but this reweaving is present in all re-descriptions. Nabokov challenged our understanding of love through Lolita. It is through his re-description of love, and toiling with that re-description, that we
reorganize our own understanding of love. It does not force us to change our opinion, nor does it advocate for one understanding of love over another, it only provides a different view point on the subject. A view point that we must now work into our own narrative understanding of love. In that narrative we still retain the power to advocate one salient detail over another. After reading *Lolita* we are able to choose and then to prioritize our new understandings of love. We choose either to make the negative sexual objectification of young women the more salient detail or we accept that the overwhelming feeling of love Humbert Humbert had for his Lolita is a justifiable reason for his course of action. We choose to make one the more salient detail in our understanding of love. I do not mean to imply that fiction is the only way that we come to re-describe our world; however, we should not dismiss these types of re-descriptions as having less importance in development of our conceptual descriptions of these notions.

It is through new descriptions, re-descriptions, Rorty’s metaphors, and different interpretations of our world that we come to create and define the conceptual apparatuses that will be our future socio-historical conditions. I break with Rorty only in his belief that philosophy has nothing left to offer society. I agree that we should probably stop searching for Truth, as Truth is not something to be discovered but something we create by reweaving our own narrative. However, who am I to claim that in their search for Truth, philosophers cannot create a description of the world containing a positive salient feature which we can all then choose to acknowledge. However, it must be recognized that this salient feature did not, nor does it, exist antecedently of the philosopher’s creation of it.

Therefore, I advocate that all should be involved in the endeavor of creating re-descriptions of the world. Only then do we have a chance that we will create one upon which we can all agree. A description where everyone recognizes the same salient feature as a priority and moreover, a priority superior to the one the they currently value. Rorty states,
The method is to re-describe lots and lots of things in new ways, until you have created a patter on linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment or new social institutions. This sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analyzing concepts after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather, it works holistically and pragmatically, it says things life ‘try thinking of it this way’ – or more specifically, ‘try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions.’

It is through constant re-descriptions and then more re-descriptions that we may create, and subsequently agree, upon a feature that prioritizes everyone in this current socio-historical context. It was a great accomplishment when humankind agreed that the atrocity of genocide was such an atrocity that it superseded national sovereignty, we need to continue to re-describe the world so that more things similar to this can come about.

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References


