

Richard Rorty

From Pragmatist Philosophy to
Cultural Politics

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Kindness to Babies and Other Radical Ideas

Rorty's Anti-Cynical Philosophy

Esa Saarinen

At such a time when the history of the philosophical thought of our times is one day written, the name Richard Rorty will loom large. In philosophy departments throughout the world, this towering thinker is unfortunately too infrequently read with the respect and enthusiasm that he deserves. Amongst those in the academic discipline of philosophy, in fact, Rorty is often stripped of his own intellectual self-description and charged with not being a *true* or *real* philosopher.

In the introduction to a volume titled *The Future for Philosophy*, Brian Leiter exemplifies the prevailing tone:

If *real* philosophy, then, as portrayed in the essays in this volume, is less familiar to readers and scholars outside the field, the explanation is, in part, that a handful of philosophers who have, in recent years, reached a wide audience outside the discipline have generally done a poor job representing the *actual* state of affairs. Richard Rorty is both the best-known and worst offender on this score—his depictions of philosophy are widely regarded by philosophers as shameless fabrications.

(2004, p. 18)

Leiter adds, simply if not provocatively, 'most philosophers have stopped reading him' (p. 18).

Is Rorty *really* not a *real* philosopher? Certainly, it is undeniable that, in a move shocking to academic theorizing, Rorty infamously suggested that philosophy has centered too much of its efforts around securing a firm 'foundation' for theories, 'truth,' and 'knowledge.' Instead of spending all our time on these empty promises, he argued, we should look more directly at action and practices that build toward a better, that is a more free and egalitarian, future. In a pithy but provocative formulation: 'Take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself' (see *TCF*).

The trouble with 'truth' is a trouble with representations and the philosopher's preoccupation with self-imposed problems. As Rorty puts it, 'philosophers have given their subject a bad name by seeing difficulties nobody else sees' (*CIS*, p. 12). Instead of dwelling on 'unprofitable topics' like 'the nature of truth,' Rorty argues for a more engaged and action-intensive role for philosophy (*CIS*, p. 8).

We have to agree with Marx that our job is to help make the future different from the past. We have to shift from the kind of role that philosophers have shared with priests and sages to a social role that has more in common with the engineer or the lawyer.

(Rorty, 1995, p. 197)

But as long as philosophy engages itself only with analytical issues of its own making it will not face, head on, life's crucial pragmatic questions and moral quandaries. Philosophers have represented reality in various intellectually intriguing ways, but the point is to change it.

I consider myself a pragmatist philosopher, although I have not written on pragmatism nor have I studied systematically its recent debates. But when reading Rorty, I realize that the key point of pragmatism is not to come up with a theory of pragmatism, but to direct our attention to conduct. Herein, I would like to add, lies its radicalism. With or without philosophy, people will address their lives' themes from the point of how to live the life, struggling through complexities as they encounter them, with an eye to what seems like the big picture. The way I read Rorty, he calls attention to the instantly recognizable if professionally bypassed fact that there is potential for philosophy here, namely for philosophy that takes such challenges seriously. That the philosopher could, and should, help is the very essence of Rorty's point.

In lieu of an argument

Rorty's pragmatism is a call for the better. His is a philosophy of a better life as a practical art. Let us assume for the sake of argument that Rorty's discussions of 'edifying philosophy' in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* will come to be regarded as weak and uninformed scholarship. Granted that contentious criticism, the fact still remains that Rorty in that groundbreaking book *sets out a vision* that people presently find, and in the future are likely to find, inspiring and elevating.

The life and times of visions are different from those of arguments. Visions can be enlightening, inspiring, upsetting, agonizing, eye-opening, personally relevant, and indeed life-transforming. The history of philosophy is rich in visions that have enhanced 'the conversation of mankind.' How significant, in retrospect, are the arguments for those visions, as opposed to the visions themselves? How significant are the debates surrounding them? The fact is that apart from a few privileged scholars, hardly anyone cares.²

Visions inspire, elevate, transform lives, trigger renewal, and create magical uplift, because people cry out for meaning. But there is a cost. The visions do not reduce to the discourse of 'truth,' and thus fall short of being of interest to practices devoted to the discourse of 'truth.' That is the state of affairs, Rorty argues in so many words, in academic philosophy. As a result, it oftentimes fails to achieve visionary impact.

How could anyone be so flat-footed as to deny the significance of visions, and the need to work with visions in an effort to renew one's own? How could any responsible and intellectually-acute human being be so disillusioned as to overlook this task, much less feel proud of it?

Socrates taught us that one should not declare certainty regarding everything one feels certain about. Wisdom is, Rorty rightly insists, adopting the stance of one who 'worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being' (*CIS*, p. 75). I submit that this is the categorical imperative of Rorty's thinking: *focus on life as a pragmatic art directed to betterment, to moral and social progress, in a mode that is self-critical of its discourses and modes of action*. Is this conviction not quintessentially sustainable, morally uplifting common sense that most parents would want their children to demonstrate? I think it is.

Not knowing the practices of professional philosophy or the discourses, metanarratives, and institutional arrangements that justify them, a concerned citizen might take it for granted that philosophers as professional thinkers *ought to be* contributing to the 'conversation of mankind' by making use of the intellectually imaginative, holistic grand visions of their honored discipline. Few can imagine how professional philosophers have somehow managed to end up isolating themselves and not contributing.

In the 2,000 pages of Christopher Alexander's eloquent and richly documented *The Nature of Order*, one finds chapters like 'The Phenomenon of Life,' 'The Impact of Living Structure on Human Life,' 'Living Processes,' 'Deep Feeling,' 'Our Belonging to the World,' 'Positive Space in Structure and Materials,'

and 'Making Wholeness Heals the Maker.' Clearly a visionary and bold mind, the learned architecture professor is engaged in serious thinking, and in stimulating the thinking of others. He is adding a voice to the conversation of mankind. In what sense is Alexander's work not 'philosophy'? Only in the sense in which philosophy is understood as specialized academic philosophy carried out by its legitimized semi-scientific methodologies.

In his uplifting essay 'The Inspirational Value of Great Works of Literature' (published as an appendix to *Achieving Our Country*), Rorty notes the dramatic change that can take place in the university in 'the sort of talents that get you tenure' (AOC, p. 128). 'A discipline'—Rorty explicitly discusses sociology, philosophy, and literature—'can quite quickly start attracting a new sort of person, while becoming inhospitable to the kind of person it used to welcome' (AOC, p. 128).

A characteristic feature of Rorty's *Mirror* is its focus on the classic philosophers of the past (Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Dewey) as enriched by a select few from the more contemporary scene (Davidson, Sellars, Quine, Putnam, Apel, Hacking, Ryle, Gadamer). Like Alexander, Rorty engages in visionary, serious, and cross-cultural thinking, in a way that future generations will appreciate because of the fact that this kind of philosophy characterized by genuine thinking will always be in demand.

Apologies for apology

Suppose we take the view that *the vision* Plato describes in *Apologia* is still relevant. This vision calls out to human virtues such as integrity, courage, and wisdom. It is a vision according to which 'the unexamined life is not worth living for men' (*Apologia*, 38a), a vision according to which the challenge for a human being is 'not to care for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible' (*Apologia*, 36c).

As a matter of fact, *Apologia* sets out a vision that has inspired people throughout the ages. For the profession of academic philosophy, however, the piece is a bit of an embarrassment. Its arguments are weak, and no real theories are presented. The point is that visionary philosophy, of the kind that Rorty represents, is simply dismissed by academic philosophers because they envision another task for philosophy. Rorty is disregarded, just like the Socrates of the *Apologia*.

Surely this is an absurd state of affairs. It is absurd because even a superficial

reading of the greatest works of Western philosophy, starting with a few pages of Plato's *Apologia*, indisputably shows that the project of philosophy has always been *to contribute to our lives* in the name of something better. The point is to bring about a change in actual life, as opposed to a change in a particular representation or model of that life, or in the arguments offered in favor of a particular theory for life. Whatever the role of representations, descriptions, arguments, justifications, and the like are supposed to be, they are to be secondary only. The key point is *living a life*, continuously under scrutiny, *an examined life, a better and flourishing-aiming life*. Accomplishing this calls for life-and-self-examining thought, and this calls for philosophy.

The social side of the absurdity is an outrage. The outrage of the good Athenians was not stirred by the views of Socrates on this or that, but by his *practice* that aimed to challenge the way people *actually lived*.

Has the Socratic call disappeared from philosophy within universities? Apart from Rorty and a few other exceptions, the answer unfortunately must be tendered in the affirmative.³ The Socratic call has been overridden by the bandwagon of *radically narrowed-down, alienated practices* that restrict the philosopher and make him or her irrelevant.

But for Rorty, life deserves more.

Sense of life

In a striking section in the first volume of his *The Nature of Order*, Alexander shows pairs of photographs of fences by a road, of two downtown streets, of lobbies in two office buildings, of two parking lots at the University of California, and asks, 'which makes you feel more alive within yourself?' (2002a, p. 68). Most people point to the same pictures. Noticing this, Alexander suggests that we seem to 'recognize the subtle distinction' between 'differing degrees of life' (2002a, p. 64). Alexander then goes on to suggest that the distinction is something 'empirically real, even for cases where not much distinction seems to exist' (2002a, p. 71). Using persuasive strategies that are likely to strike as unacceptable many argumentatively conscious and methodologically pure academic philosophers, Alexander works his way to presenting a highly elaborate and enriching discourse on 'the phenomenon of life.'

Alexander's thinking might seem *prima facie* to be strongly opposite to Rorty's. For one thing, Alexander seems openly essentialistic. And where

Rorty despises visual metaphors—‘we must get the visual, and in particular the mirroring, metaphors out of our speech altogether’ (*PMN*, p. 371)—Alexander’s *The Nature of Order* not only embraces visual metaphors in its discourse, but presents visual images on virtually each page of the nearly 2,000 pages of its four volumes.

On a deeper level, however, Alexander demonstrates and exemplifies what Rorty calls for. He wants to enhance the conversation of mankind, he is creating a discourse of hope. The fundamental camaraderie and side-by-side-ness of these two towering figures is evident in a shared commitment that seldom gains academic focus despite its gravity and significance—*anti-cynicism*. Working from different discourses and argumentative backgrounds, thus adopting different strategies and vocabularies, Alexander and Rorty fundamentally reject the cool and detached cynicism that is dominant in much of current modes of academic thinking.⁴

Alexander’s crusade is in terms of materially built environments influenced by architects; Rorty’s crusade is in terms of the conceptual environments of philosophers. Their shared vision is to open the eyes of the current and future professionals of their fields, as well as the eyes of people at large, to the vital possibilities hitherto bypassed and dismissed, in the dimension of *life* as the chief category of the constructed environment (Alexander) and in the dimension of *practice* as the chief category of the conceptual environment (Rorty). In their respective efforts to attack the sacred cow of cynicism, Alexander and Rorty engage in a detailed analysis of how *something so obvious as life itself* (Alexander) and *practice and hope* (Rorty) could have been bypassed.

For both thinkers, the essentials of life are at stake. Their greatness is in their courage to stand up and speak in plain language for life itself as the ultimate adventure of our making and of our responsibility.

Philosophy of life as the first philosophy

According to the Socratic conception of philosophy, philosophy is a practice conducted among people in all walks of life. The practice concerns life as perceived as something to be examined and as something that calls for improvement. The first philosophy, therefore, is philosophy of life, and that in terms of actual conduct as opposed to mere reflection.

Rorty’s vision of what he calls *edifying philosophy*, described vividly towards the end of *Mirror*, has not energized most professional philosophers to adopt

new communicative strategies and methodological techniques in their actual practices. A professional philosopher might be willing to debate a particular articulation of, say, Gadamer’s view of *Bildung*. But that is different from being mesmerized by what Gadamer *meant* when he spoke of *Bildung*.

The opposition Rorty faced among colleagues was not due to the fact that he had gotten some part of his analysis of, say, Sellars, Quine, or Davidson wrong. A lot of people have written about Sellars, Quine, and Davidson, getting something wrong on some count, and yet have not been despised for it. In fact, most people that have written about them not only have continued their careers after doing so, but have found their status more legitimized because of their papers on Sellars, Quine, or Davidson. So why the emotional reaction against Rorty? Why the dismissal of Rorty from among the ‘serious’ academic philosophers?

It is not what Rorty says or claims or argues that triggers the reaction, but what he implies, as a modern Socrates, about the ways of life of his fellow Athenians. Rorty implies that what his fellow philosophers are doing with their lives is not good or virtuous enough. It is not what they would be doing if they chose to examine their ways of life. Their ways amount to cynicism, Rorty implies. And he does not allow himself to be impressed by the intellectual brilliance of their tricks. The path chosen is itself the problem.

This is a discomfiting view for many. The business of philosophy is to mind its own business. Adopting such a detached view of ‘philosophy as an autonomous quasi-science,’ a philosopher can step aside and concentrate upon his theories, while his former teacher is harassed out of his job, and while neighbours are disappearing (*PCP*, p. x). You can continue your research, as indeed Heidegger did, without whispering a word about it even afterward, perhaps because by your count what happened was only an ephemeral factual event, accidental and passing, and your job as a philosopher is to carry out your reflections distanced from contingent worldly factualities.

Or suppose you engage as a philosopher with perhaps the biggest collective challenge of the twenty-first century, climate change, by analyzing your fellow-philosophers’ views of this or that conceptual aspect of climate change. Chances are excellent that whatever you end up contributing in that expert cultural philosophical debate is not going to have any effect on the actual problem of climate change. Philosophers can create never-ending debates about anything and everything imaginable. But how significant is that debate in terms of actual practice, in terms of life itself? Rorty’s blunt and quite possibly correct view of most epistemologically- and ontologically-focused philosophical controversies is that these debates are too often (though not always) a dead end.

Radicalism of babies

One of the most lasting aspects of Rorty's legacy is his style of writing and speaking—that is, the explosive power of his thinking. I say 'thinking' as opposed to 'theorizing' or 'philosophizing' in order to emphasize that something more is at stake than mere academic quarrels. And I say 'explosive power' as opposed to 'strength of analysis' or 'brilliance of the argument' because I believe that Rorty's thinking has *emotional energy* (in the sense of Collins, 2004) of the kind we should embrace.

One of Rorty's most peculiar lightning bolts of thought is his reference to *kindness to babies* in connection with his discussion of Sellars in *Mirror*.⁵ This reference to babies should not be viewed as anything but extraordinary. It brings out Rorty's anti-cynical philosophy in a tone that is illuminating and exemplary—it gives us a way of thinking according to which kindness to babies is a *relevant criterion* for philosophy.

Few people in actual practice challenge kindness to babies as a viable category. Most people respect it and live by it.⁶ Most people agree that a world where kindness to babies is prevalent is a better place than one where it is not. Rorty unselfconsciously uses kindness to babies to demonstrate the life-enhancing application of philosophical thinking in action. This is something which conventional wisdom in academic philosophy signally fails to do.

How could anything matter more than kindness to babies? One possibility is to hold representations to be more significant, more worthy of attention, than what they stand for. Instead of hugging a baby, say, you end up contemplating the concept of 'a baby' or 'a hug.' You might think that as a prerequisite to being kind to babies, we will need to get clear on the concept of 'kindness' and 'babies,' perhaps even of 'interaction' or 'bodily encounter' or the problem of 'other minds'—an effort that is likely to take some time.

Is such an outcome not somewhat perverse? Yet this is what philosophy departments everywhere *de facto* generate. Kindness to babies is just not high on the list of what is considered relevant. But how can it be that some of the finest minds of all time can bypass babies? How can it be that the best and the brightest can overlook tenderness? Rorty has an answer. The answer points to the metaphysical and epistemological biases of Western thinking, all the way from Plato through Descartes and Kant right up to the present.

I deem cynical any philosophy and any way of thinking that does not assign first priority to kindness to babies. It reduces the miracle of life, it languishes

life's flourishing. Yet the logic is clear. As life is reduced to thinking, and thinking to thinking of representations, kindness to babies becomes secondary.

With brilliant intuition and an uplifting tone, Rorty departs sharply from the mainstream of academic philosophy. The move is natural given his commitment to pragmatism. Indeed, I submit kindness to babies as an excellent metaphor for what Rorty's pragmatically-minded philosophy is all about. Babies are the future, and kindness to babies is to care about the apotheosis of that future.

Furthermore, kindness to babies is a *participatory* metaphor of the kind Rorty quite rightly insists that we find and cultivate as part of 'panrelationism,'⁷ the view of 'everything as relational through and through' (*PSH*, p. 72). Philosophy, thus perceived, sees it vital to engage in activities and practices outside its own realm, adopting interactionist strategies as opposed to isolationist ones.

'Growth itself,' Rorty quotes from his favourite philosopher, John Dewey, 'is the only moral end' (*PSH*, p. 28). As philosophers, we should serve the goal of growth. More so than arguments or conceptual clarifications, we should focus on *kindness to babies*.

Rorty's anti-ismism

For a philosopher reading Rorty, it is tempting to try to figure out *his position*, to identify the relevant labels. For instance, one might be tempted to follow his own example and opt for negative descriptions, and thus describe Rorty as anti-Platonist, anti-metaphysician, anti-foundationalist (*PSH*, p. xvi), or anti-Cartesian, anti-dualist, anti-representationalist, anti-essentialist (*EHO*, p. 2), or anti-universalist, anti-divinist, anti-privilegist (*PCP*, pp. 75–6).⁸ Yet there is something misleading about such descriptions.

For I would say that Rorty is not an -ism kind of guy in the first place. As a visionary and culturally-enriching thinker, his point is not to advocate for a particular theoretical position. Rorty's call is for a philosophy with a cause. Instead of describing life, or debating such descriptions, he wants to nurture life, improve it, and make it emerge in more hopeful forms than currently is the case. Let us define *the Philosopher's Index of Self-Indulgence* as the sum you get, per page, from adding up the following:

- a) the number of times a word appears with the ending '-ism';
- b) the number of times some word begins with a capital letter although it should be written with a lowercase letter;

- c) the number of words contained in an example that would be found boring by your medical doctor daughter, architect son, engineer brother, and retired aunt;
- d) the number of references to 'argument,' 'distinction,' 'theory,' or 'position.'

Using this criterion, we can observe that works such as Plato's *Faidon*, Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Epictetus's *Notebook*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, Descartes's *Discourse on the Method*, John Stuart Mills' *On Liberty*, de Tocqueville's *America*, all of Nietzsche's writings, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*, many of Heidegger's writings, such as 'The Question Concerning Technology,' as well as Wittgenstein's writings (including also the *Tractatus*), not to mention Sir Isaiah Berlin, Iris Murdoch, or Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, are low in the Philosopher's Index of Self-Indulgence. The same is true even of much of Kant, whose heavy terminology does not *per se* drive up the index. Foucault is low. Sartre is relatively low, even in *Being and Nothingness*.

In much of his writing (and contrary to James or Dewey, who are low throughout their writing), Rorty is higher than he might want to be, I submit. This is because much of his writing aims at revealing the myths, assumptions, tacit doctrines of Western philosophy as part of his meta-level narrative that he hopes will open the eyes of his fellow academic philosophers. He writes in the discourse of positions because he wants to convince people whose discourse embraces this framework due to the contingency of their language. At the verge of adopting ism-ism, he appears ism-ismical himself, but in my opinion this is not the heart of the matter for him. Rorty cares primarily about what happens. Far from dismissing the university, his dream is for a practice and a living out of philosophy from within that grand institution that is able to influence culture in a way that currently does not happen.⁹

Rorty, it seems to me, is a thinker whose vision of philosophy involves work, energy, and effort outside of debating the -isms. The point concerns the practice of philosophy and the conduct of thinking, the way professional thinkers use their creative endowment from the point of view of mankind and the future of the world. Like his pragmatist hero Dewey, Rorty wants to awaken philosophy from its self-indulgences and bring it to the realm of the relevant.

Concepts are good, but not good enough. As Habermas puts it in a warmly-tuned and illuminating address, 'Richard Rorty had in mind nothing less than to foster a culture that liberated itself from what he saw as the conceptual obsessions of Greek philosophy—and a fetishism of science that sprouted from the furrows of that metaphysics' (Habermas, this volume, p. 00).

In the footsteps of the greatest

While Rorty does not seem to acknowledge Socrates as a pragmatist in his sense, I think Rorty follows in the footsteps of the greatest. Rorty's call is essentially for what could be called the original Socratic ideal. That ideal calls for interventions. The call is to care, and to take action. 'Dewey hoped that philosophy professors would see such intervention as their principal assignment' (PCP, p. ix).

Philosophy should conceive of itself as a cultural force and seek to contribute in the service of hope. To that effect, philosophy should give up its self-centered practices and step back into the marketplace of Athens to participate in the actual lives of actual people. But notice that this call for relevance is in no way an invitation to some kind of *neo-simplicism* (to coin a phrase). The point of philosophy is to join forces with historical processes of piecemeal building of a more fair, more just, richer, and happier society and human life. This is going to be anything but a simple matter.

The call here is for sensitivity, for operational brilliance, and for 'communicative reason' (as indeed Rorty emphasises in PCP, see especially p. 77). It is a call to what Raimo P. Härmäläinen and I have called *systems intelligence*—intelligence in the interactive and feedback-rich environments in which we live our lives and conduct our affairs.¹⁰ Philosophy will be relevant only if it finds communicative practices *that work*.

Mothers without borders

In the finding of communicative strategies *that work*, mothers are masters. In their interaction with babies, I propose, mothers are prime candidates of Rortyan growth-oriented pragmatism. Just like Rorty argues, the mother and the infant break from the 'the Cartesian theatre' where the human being is reduced to an 'entity whose relations with the rest of the universe are representational rather than causal' (PSH, p. xxiii). Mother and infant are the original examples of Rortyan anti-representationalism and anti-dualism. Indeed, autonomy won't work for a mother or for the infant. As infant research makes clear, the growth of the infant is a systems phenomenon, involving agency that is interactive, co-regulated, and bi-directional from the very beginning (Beebe and Lachmann, 2002; Hobson, 2002; Fogel, 1993). Far from being Cartesian isolated selves, mother and infant form a dyad where dualistic logic has lost its

grip. The radicalism of babies in Rorty becomes a call for acknowledging the crucial nature of the mother-infant dyad as the original form of life and one not accountable in terms of philosophy as a mirror of nature. 'Plato and Aristotle were wrong in thinking that humankind's most distinctive and praiseworthy capacity is to know things as they really are,' Rorty writes in the preface to *PSH* (p. xiii). 'My candidate for the most distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity is our ability to trust and to cooperate with other people' (*PSH*, p. xiii). What demonstrates that distinctive and praiseworthy human capacity more vitally than the infant-mother dyad?

Furthermore, the mother-infant dyad illuminates strikingly Rortyan pragmatism in its 'thinking of everything as relational through and through' (*PSH*, p. 72). The structural parallels carry over to language. As a remarkable demonstration of Rortyan vision in action, the mother engages with the infant with *motherese*, partly created on the fly and with sensitivity to the specifics of this particular baby. The point is not to represent things, but to make things happen. She engages in what infant researchers call 'preverbal dialogue' with the infant (Jaffe *et al.*, 2001), creating a context for a 'recognition process,' a 'fitting together' (Sander, 2000), a 'moving along' (Stern, 2004). In a demonstration of the astonishing human endowment for mutuality, what emerges is the 'co-construction of interactive patterns and self-regulatory ranges' (Beebe and Lachmann, 2002, p. 23). The 'bi-directional coordination' of the mother and the infant starts to emerge (Cohn and Tronick, 1988). What comes out takes place in rich patterns and rhythms of interaction in which the infant, far from being a mere Cartesian object for a Cartesian subject mother, is very much an active partner in the process of 'co-creativity' (Fogel, 1993).

Kindness to babies, as an actual practice, and the agency of babies as embraced by such kindness, implies the adoption of communicative strategies and interaction styles that are designed to foster the emergence of growth by taking into account the specific capabilities of the baby. The mother and the infant enter into a 'co-creational process,' forming a 'dyadic system,' allowing for 'dyadic expansion of consciousness' (Tronick *et al.*, 1998) whereby 'a state emerges that is more inclusive than what either system alone could generate' (Beebe, 2008). What emerges from that systemic whole is more than either party could have achieved on their own because both partners bring their unique contribution to what is essentially a cooperative enterprise. I submit that these aspects of the mother-infant dyad forcefully illustrate Rorty's call for hopeful and pragmatic philosophy of *working together for the purpose of growth*. The mother-infant dyad provides a striking example of a Rortyan 'non-representationalist account

of language' in the service of 'a working program of action, a prophecy of the future' (*PCP*, p. ix). The implication for philosophy is to look to mothers and infants for guidance.

Broadband philosophy

It is striking that just like priests of the Holy Order in years past, so the school philosopher believes there is a privileged discourse into which he or she has been baptized as a member of academia. Philosophy, of the kind Rorty criticizes, believes it can create, rule, and govern its own discourse by its own criteria. Communicability does not count. Consider the following justification for current school philosophy by Leiter:

It is true, to be sure, that philosophy is now a 'profession'—just like psychology, linguistics, sociology, physics, and mathematics—and it is also true that the discipline is often technical and unintelligible to the lay person. But only a complete ignorance of the history of philosophy could lead anyone to think that this supports a special complaint about contemporary philosophy.

(2004, p. 19)

And Timothy Williamson:

Impatience with the long haul of technical reflection is a form of shallowness, often thinly disguised by histrionic advocacy of depth. Serious philosophy is always likely to bore those with short attention spans.

(2004, pp. 126–7)

Leiter and Williamson do not seem to prioritize the communicability of philosophy to non-philosophers very highly. Yet communicability, service, connectivity, intersubjectivity, interface brilliance, attunement, mutual recognition, co-creativity, and other similar notions do not imply lack of depth or automatic triviality.

Beethoven continues to reach people irrespective of their background, as does music by the Beatles. Likewise does the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao by Frank Gehry, Shakespeare and the Three Tenors, Umberto Eco, and Michaly Csikszentmihalyi. St. Mark's Square in Venice mesmerises people generation after generation in a way that is 'readily accessible—virtually on contact and with little effort' (to use the apt phrase from Noel Carroll from his *A Philosophy*

of *Mass Art* [1998]). Total holistic art experiences such as the Wagnerian opera is a relatively recent innovation, just like open air concerts by opera singers to mass audiences are something that required ingenuity in order to be created. The largest encyclopaedia in the world is readily accessible, distributed free of charge, and is prepared by people without an authorization from any university. The point is, cultural constructs *can* update and renew themselves, even radically. In particular, they *can* create for themselves the quality of addressing new types of people and can even find ways of touching 'audiences with widely differing backgrounds' (Carroll, 1998). Why should philosophy want to give up such a possibility before the game has even started?

The fact that something is difficult and points beyond the *status quo* does not mean the dream is not worth the effort. On the contrary, we should think that if it is easy, it may not be worth the effort, but when the goal is nearly impossible, it is just about right. Rorty's vision calls out for such a dream for philosophy. Why should some dark historic forces, operative since about 1950, doom philosophy to drift in a sea of meaninglessness forever?

Media philosophy Finnish style

In the early 1980s I become a media celebrity to some extent. Being a young philosophy PhD, excited about analytic philosophy but also punk rock, and due to a book I co-authored together with a critic friend of mine as well as some other 'media interventions' (as I called them), the title 'philosopher' made a breakthrough in my country (as opposed to 'professor', 'PhD', or 'teacher').

I think one can say that I helped to popularize philosophy and to make 'philosophy' a household name in Finland. Alas, the process did not take place within the ontology of philosophical theories or through the purely conceptual realm. It happened through my personality and the mass media. Many of my colleagues were outraged. One reason may have been that they could not see how my *media activities* related to debatable philosophical positions. Because I was not out there in public as a representative of a philosophical theory, my philosophy colleagues concluded that the fuss was just an ego trip and so much superficial noise of no significance.

What these thinkers did not appreciate is the point that I think Rorty wants to hammer home, to the effect that there can be philosophically significant practices that *are not reducible to philosophical positions*. Sociologically, culturally, and ideologically, this amounts to a radical move. Suppose your

creative professional life revolves around theoretical positions. Suppose you are a devoted *positionist*, as most professional philosophers are. Your view is that a philosopher's worth is judged by the value of her philosophical positions as articulated in philosophical discourse. For a positionist, it does not make much sense to speak about the creativity, innovativeness, and contributions of a philosopher outside the realm of philosophically conceptualized positions. He or she is not in a service business but in a production business.

Yet I think Rorty's call is for service business on the basis of *a-positionism*. Ultimately positions do not count, as intellectual constructs, as much as service does. This is a core aspect of what I have been calling Rorty's anti-cynical metaphilosophy.

I venture to assume that Rorty would have welcomed my media philosophy as a positive extension of action-oriented philosophy. Media philosophy is an effort of a philosopher to contribute to an ongoing discussion through media, in media, with the instruments of the media.¹¹ I submit it provides a natural platform for a philosopher that wants to engage in Kantian 'public use of reason.'

Philosophy for managers

In the early 1990s I started to give broad-scoped lectures in businesses and organizations, partly with the name recognition I had generated in the 1980s through my media interventions. These were the years when Nokia was emerging as a serious challenger to such established giants as Motorola and Ericsson. Soon Nokia took the number one position in mobile phones globally and after that became 50 percent bigger than the number two company. As these industrial breakthroughs were unfolding, unprecedented in Finnish history, I continued extensive discussions with the senior management of the company—almost all of whom were Finns—on life's broad themes, as well as conducting lectures in various parts of the organization year after year. These lectures had such titles as 'Magnificent Life' or 'Passion and Trust.'

One of the differences between lecturing as a professor at a university and lecturing as a philosopher at a high-tech company is that if your lecturing is perceived as boring, irrelevant, and not related to people's life concerns, in the first case you can continue business as usual, whereas in the latter you cannot. If your stuff does not have practical value, if it does not serve the people, if it does not *live* for those people, it does not have philosophical value, for them.

I believe it is valuable to contribute to people's efforts in the dimension of their self-leadership and in their urge to examine their lives. It is valuable to help people conceptualize the critical systems of their lives—to enrich their perspectives as they reach out to attain a conception of the bigger picture and the frame of things. I think it is valuable to serve as a dialogic partner to people as they make their way through the complex environments of their lives, even when they are emerging from and yet remain hidden behind a veil of uncertainty. In fact, I think these are among the key tasks of a philosopher in the current time, as they were in the time of Socrates.

Most professional philosophers see their task otherwise, but I wonder if that is a result of careful consideration and a conscious choice, rather than a necessity dictated by (academic, economic, and institutional) practices the philosopher has not questioned. At the current time, the practice of *Philosophy for Managers* does not loom large in business schools around the world. Hundreds of professional philosophers, however, could be contributing to the ongoing discussion and practices by their skilful, engaging, inspiring, and interactive forms of pedagogy and thinking, to what will become managerial reality through the actions of the participants of the seminars, lectures, and mentoring sessions on *Philosophy for Managers*.¹²

Viewing philosophical lecturing as a life-enhancing practice for the benefit of organizations, managers, and people at large, my own experience, spanning over 20 years, points to the crucial relevance of conceiving the lecture not in information- and content-centered terms, but as a *thought-concert*. One might think about the philosopher-speaker as the soloist, but I prefer to envision him or her as a conductor. The philosopher-speaker serves as the conductor for the thought-concert where the participants each play their thought-instruments.¹³

This shift from information-centered metaphors to musical and performative ones highlights relational and moment-to-moment aspects of the philosophical lecture, and points attention to what Daniel Stern (2004) calls 'the present moment.' The philosophical lecture is conducted more like a performance at a theater than as a content-delivering university lecture. It amounts to something like a musical performance created together by the orchestra of thinkers, and will require special sensitivities from the philosopher-conductor regarding the participants in order to be successful.

Lincoln at Gettysburg

In his fine introduction to a book of interviews with Rorty, Eduardo Mendieta quotes 'the words that remade America,' the words of Abraham Lincoln delivered at the cemetery of Gettysburg in 1863, and states that 'Rorty's America is Lincoln's America' (*TCF*, p. xxx). That America is 'dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,' as Lincoln put it by a reference to the Declaration of Independence in a speech that barely lasted two minutes and left transfixed the 7,000 people present. As historian Doris Kearns Goodwin puts it, 'Lincoln had translated the story of his country and the meaning of the war into words and ideas accessible to every American' (2005, p. 587).

That kind of use of the intellect—communicative and structure-giving, forward-building and inspiring—is exactly what Rorty is after. His instincts are for the common man and woman, for ordinary life and its improvement, and above all for the future—his focus is not upon debate, criticism, or upon founding a new school in philosophy. He is after a vision for a better future, and advocates philosophy—thinking in general¹⁴—to that cause. 'When I attribute inspirational value to works of literature, I mean that these works make people think there is more to life than they ever imagined' (*AOC*, p. 133).

This is Rorty the positive utopian, Rorty the admirer of engineers (who construct better tomorrows in concrete terms), Rorty the admirer of poets (who push the limits of language and extend the imagination,¹⁵ providing romantic inspiration) and Rorty the admirer of novelists (who maintain 'taste for narrative, detail, diversity, and accident' [*EHO*, p. 73])—and Rorty the admirer of philosophers who use their thinking for causes that are just, uplifting, and socially constructive.¹⁶

Notes

- 1 The last section of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is entitled 'Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind.' It takes inspiration from Michael Oakeshott's essay 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind' to which Rorty explicitly refers. For a rich discussion of what such a conversation might involve, see Rorty's *CIS*, arguably the most extensive book-length elaboration of Rorty's views.
- 2 This is not to disclaim the significance of arguments for the purposes of the good life. See Nussbaum (2007) for an excellent discussion of the ways in which philosophical arguments can foster moral progress.

- 3 Among the uplifting exceptions (in English-speaking academic philosophy): Alain de Botton, Stanley Cavell, Thomas Nagel, Martha Nussbaum, Peter Singer, Charles Taylor, Mark C. Taylor, and Cornel West. It is exciting that some leading academic philosophers like Harry Frankfurt (2005) and Colin McGinn (2005, 2007, 2008) have moved on to write on broader themes like bullshit, film, 'mindfucking,' and Shakespeare. Outside philosophy departments in the English-speaking world, the Socratic call is particularly forceful in Zygmunt Bauman, Jerome Bruner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Anthony Giddens, Carol Gilligan, Ellen Langer, Amartya Sen, Martin Seligman, and Peter Senge. The vitality of the French philosophical approach is admirable, with its characteristically seamless integration of philosophy with literature and public life from Sartre through Foucault and Derrida to the flamboyance of Bernard-Henri Lévy. Among the German philosopher-writers, the towering figure for me is Jürgen Habermas who combines theoretical insight with a tremendous sense for the human and the just. The deep humanism of Simon Baron-Cohen, Harold Bloom, George Steiner, and Daniel Stern moves me deeply and they represent to me Socratic academics of the highest order along with the Norwegian great Arne Naess, the founder of deep ecology.
- 4 Alexander is not out there to defend 'essentialism' any more than Shakespeare or Beethoven. To be sure, the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* is a personification of Evil, and so is Don Pizarro in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. 'Ode to Joy' and Beethoven's 'Ninth' celebrate brotherhood in a way that few can forget. The masters are conducting a 'conversation of mankind'—and have adopted essentialism as a discursive strategy without committing to the philosophical position of 'essentialism.' Given Rorty's commitment to pluralism there is nothing to contradict Rorty's perspectives here. See the chapter 'The Contingency of Language' in *CIS*. Alexander is very much 'a strong poet' in the sense that Rorty discusses:

someone like Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel (a "poet" in my wide sense of the term—the sense of "one who makes things new") is typically unable to make clear exactly what it is that he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose.

(*CIS*, pp. 12–13)

- 5 When concluding his analysis of Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given, Rorty makes it a point to emphasize that the conclusions reached are 'compatible with kindness to babies and animals and thus with the common moral consciousness' (*PMN*, p. 192).
- 6 See, however, the important work of Alice Miller (1983, 2005) on the forms of aggression against the dignity and integrity of children.

- 7 Rorty discusses approvingly Annette Baier's views on morality in 'Ethics without Principles' in *PSH*. 'Baier and Dewey agree that the central flaw in much traditional moral philosophy has been the myth of the self as nonrelational, as capable of existing independently of any concern for others' (*PSH*, p. 77). Instead we should 'see everything as constituted by its relations to everything else' (*PSH*, p. 77). The point I am trying to make about kindness to babies as a revolutionary metaphor in Rorty is echoed when he writes: 'To see the point Baier wants us to appreciate, consider the question: Do I have a moral obligation to my mother? My wife? My children? "Morality" and "obligation" here seem inapposite.'

(*PSH*, p. 78)

- 8 He is anti-Aristotelian, that is, he rejects the convention-nature distinction. He is also anti-Thomist, that is, he rejects the natural law-human law distinction. He is also anti-Kantian, that is, he rejects the noumena-phenomena, analytic-synthetic, a priori-a posteriori distinctions. He is also anti-Cartesian, that is, he rejects the mind-matter, innate-acquired distinctions. He is anti-Hegelian, that is, he rejects the notion that there is a logic of history ... He is also anti-Marxist, that is, he rejects the idea that all history is the history of class struggle ... All of this can be translated into anti-essentialism, antirealism, antimentalism, antisubjectivism, anticognitivism, anti-historical materialism—in short anti-metaphysics and antifoundationalism.

(Mendieta, 2006, pp. xiv–xv)

- 9 On Rorty's faith in universities, see in particular *AOC*.
- 10 See Hämäläinen and Saarinen (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008).
- 11 For a discussion of some of the cultural and philosophical aspects involved, see Taylor and Saarinen (1994), Sandbothe (2005), Sandbothe and Nagi (2005), and Munker, Roesler, and Sandbothe (2003).
- 12 For a discussion of some of the key issues involved, see my 'Philosophy for Managers.'
- 13 For a discussion of some of the issues involved, see Saarinen and Slotte (2003).
- 14 In an important interview Rorty remarks:

Dewey in America, Habermas in Germany, Kolakowski in Poland: these are intellectuals who are important for the life of their countries. They happen to be philosophy professors, but if they had been historians or sociologists, they would have done about the same thing. Being a philosopher as opposed to an historian or a literary critic is not all that essential; it's being an intellectual that matters.

(*TCF*, p. 56)

- 15 In his powerful and uplifting John Dewey Lecture at the University of Chicago Law School, Rorty discusses the ultimate significance of moral progress and quotes Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*: 'Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance' (Rorty, 2007b, p. 923). Rorty continues, 'Only the imagination can break through the crust of convention' (Rorty 2007b, p. 923).
- 16 I am grateful for Raimo Härmäläinen, Ernie LePore, Petri Lievonen, Ian Marson, and Mike Sandbothe for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.