

RORTY

AND HIS CRITICS

Edited by

Robert B. Brandom

 **BLACKWELL**
Publishers

Freedom, Cruelty, and Truth: Rorty versus Orwell

JAMES CONANT

Liberal . . . [F]rom the Latin *liberalis*, pertaining to a free man.

Oxford English Dictionary

[L]iberals are people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do . . . Somewhere we all know that philosophically sophisticated debate about . . . objective truth . . . is pretty harmless stuff.

Richard Rorty¹

There is some hope that the liberal habit of mind, which thinks of truth as something outside yourself, something to be discovered, and not as something you can make up as you go along, will survive . . .

[T]he feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world . . . frightens me much more than bombs.

George Orwell²

This paper compares and contrasts Richard Rorty's and George Orwell's respective conceptions of what it means to be a liberal – their respective views of the relation between preservation of freedom, prevention of cruelty, and regard for truth. In his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Rorty reads Orwell as espousing the variety of liberalism that Rorty himself seeks to champion. The aim of this paper is to suggest, not only that what is offered there is a misreading of Orwell, but that it is a singularly instructive misreading – one which illuminates the shortcomings of Rorty's preferred method of dissolving philosophical problems.

I. The Aims and Method of this Paper

There are few contemporary philosophers who have been criticized from as many different quarters as Richard Rorty has. There are also few contemporary philosophers who have been as generous and patient in replying to their critics as he has. In preparation for writing this paper, I read through some of Rorty's many replies to his critics. I was struck by how completely unfazed Rorty remains in the face of most criticisms of his work. (This failure on his part to be impressed by a criticism of his work naturally impresses me most when I am impressed by the criticism.) His reply to

every critic is thoughtful and gracious, sometimes repeating things he says elsewhere, but never with any trace of a suggestion that he secretly thinks the critic a moron. Still, many of the replies are pervaded by a common mood and tone. The mood is one of weariness (of having heard it all before) and the tone is one of forbearance (of wishing the topic under discussion were more interesting). And, to some extent, even the content of many of the replies is similar: it is a content which could be most economically expressed simply through a shrug of the shoulders.

The common subtext of these extended verbal shrugs of the shoulders might be put as follows:

Yes, yes, you want to accuse me of having made a *philosophical* mistake, or of slighting the importance of a *metaphysical* insight, or of violating *common sense*, or of being out of touch with *reality*, or . . .; but don't you see that criticism of this sort is only effective against someone who *cares* about philosophical correctness, metaphysical insight, common sense, being in touch with reality, or . . .; and don't you see that my whole goal is to try to get you to stop caring about the problems to which these ways of talking give rise and to start caring about problems that are worth caring about. My whole point is that we don't *need* to care about the sorts of problems that philosophers say we have to care about – we only think we have to; and my aim is to demonstrate the utter dispensability of caring about such problems by offering a practical demonstration of how well one can get on without caring about them.

Though I sympathize with many of Rorty's specific criticisms of the post-Cartesian metaphysical tradition, I also sympathize with many of the critics who find his own putatively non-metaphysical views as philosophically unsound as those he opposes. But the fact remains that criticisms to the effect that his views are philosophically unsound are bound to strike Rorty as point-missing. So what sort of criticism might strike home? What sort of criticism has a hope of eliciting from him something other than a verbal equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders? Rorty himself likes to recommend his epistemological doctrines on *therapeutic* and on *political* grounds – that is, on the ground that their adoption will liberate us from disabling metaphysical obsessions, and on the ground that they cohere more comfortably with the sort of politics that we (that is, citizens of our sort of liberal democracy) cannot help wanting. This suggests two possible avenues of criticism which might provoke a more searching response from Rorty: (i) a criticism which could succeed in demonstrating to him that his way of leaving philosophy behind fails to accomplish its purpose, and (ii) a criticism which could succeed in demonstrating to him that his way of rejecting philosophical problems does not enable us to care about the very sorts of goods that he thinks we should care about instead. The most effective way of making out the former criticism would be to show that, his sincere belief to the contrary notwithstanding, his thought remains controlled by the philosophical controversies he wishes to put behind him. The most effective way of making out the latter criticism would be to show that the consequences of his views for the things he thinks we should care about are not only not what he believes and wants them to be, but are in fact roughly the opposite of what he believes and wants them to be.³

The aim of this paper is to mount a version of each of these criticisms in tandem with the other. The strategy for doing this will be to juxtapose Rorty's reading of Orwell with the texts of Orwell's he purports to read and with passages from Orwell which comment or otherwise bear on those texts. I hope to show that there is a fairly literal sense in which Rorty is *unable to read* Orwell and that this inability is tied to an

inability to free himself from certain philosophical preoccupations. It will also emerge that many of the things that Orwell himself is most concerned to be able to say – and to preserve as sayable for future generations – turn out to be things that Rorty’s strategy for dissolving philosophical problems (namely, one of “vocabulary replacement”), if successful, would deprive us of the resources for saying.

Rorty tends to see philosophers as *obsessed* with unprofitable controversies, and prides himself on having liberated himself from those obsessions. But there remains something obsessive about Rorty’s own relation to these unprofitable controversies.⁴ Consider the following syndrome: someone does not believe certain doctrines, thinks that much time has been wasted trying to refute them, and that we should no longer occupy ourselves with them; yet this person’s thought remains controlled by the worry that he might be falling back into the very doctrines he wishes no longer to occupy himself with. I will refer to a syndrome of this sort when it is directed towards doctrines of an epistemological nature as *epistemologism*.⁵ Epistemologism is a species of *fixation* – an inability to detach one’s mind from certain ideas (however much one may claim to be no longer interested in attending to them). The strategy of this paper will be to treat Rorty’s writing on Orwell as a field within which the symptoms of his epistemologism manifest themselves.

The attempt to mount a criticism of Rorty which Rorty himself might find compelling encounters an additional obstacle in Rorty’s views on philosophical *method*. Rorty frankly admits to no longer being much interested in either offering or responding to philosophical arguments *per se*. He sometimes seems to claim to find the arguments of a philosopher persuasive only to the extent that they can be shown to be *parasitic upon* or *abbreviations for* a claim to the effect that a certain old way of talking leads to intellectual dead-ends, whereas a proposed new way of talking assists in the avoidance of those dead-ends.⁶ The method of philosophical persuasion that Rorty himself officially favors in his recent work is that of *redescription*:

On the view of philosophy which I am offering, philosophers should not be asked for arguments against, for example, the correspondence theory of truth or the idea of the “intrinsic nature of reality” . . . Interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. Usually it is, implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed vocabulary which vaguely promises great things . . . Conforming to my own precepts, 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.⁷

The method of this paper, accordingly, will be to offer a redescription of Rorty’s doctrines. In particular, starting in the section on Rortian Totalitarianism of the paper, the goal is to furnish a description of how Rorty’s doctrines appear when viewed from the perspective of Orwell – an author Rorty professes to admire and whose work he views as innocent of the sort of philosophy he deplores. My aim, in offering such a redescription, will be roughly the opposite of Rorty’s own: to try to make “the vocabulary” he favors look unattractive by showing how poorly it describes a variety of topics he himself uses it to describe.⁸ The point of the exercise is to suggest that Rorty’s own attempt to junk an “entrenched vocabulary” (which has allegedly become a nuisance) in favor of a “half-formed vocabulary” (which vaguely promises great things) deprives us of the very resources we require to address some of “the great things” the pared-down replacement “vocabulary” was supposed to help us address.

II. The Genre of Realism

Rorty's favorite label for the view which he is most concerned to oppose is *Realism*. It is not at all easy to say what Rorty thinks Realism is. There are two aspects of his employment of the term that are responsible for this: (i) sometimes the term seems to denote a fairly *narrow* epistemological or metaphysical thesis, while, at other times, it seems to denote an extraordinarily *broad* doctrine encompassing a variety of theses in ethics, aesthetics and political philosophy,⁹ (ii) in both its narrow and its broad employment, the term appears alternately to denote quite different doctrines – doctrines which are not only distinct but mutually *inconsistent*. One might be led to conclude on these grounds that the term 'Realism' as it figures in Rorty's writings simply has no clear meaning.

I do not think this is true. Although it is by no means readily apparent to me how to define the term as it figures in Rorty's writings, I can readily perceive affinities between the various doctrines that Rorty groups together under this heading. Moreover, I take myself to be able to tell which doctrines Rorty himself would and which ones he would not count as examples of Realism; that is, I take myself to have acquired a practical mastery of Rorty's use of the term, as I imagine many of Rorty's other readers also have (though without necessarily being able to formulate a definition which is sufficiently inclusive to cover all of his uses of the term.) For the purposes of this paper, I propose to offer a partial reconstruction of Rorty's employment of the term by construing the set of doctrines which it comprehends as collectively comprising a philosophical *genre*.

Membership in a genre is not achieved by satisfying certain necessary or sufficient conditions for membership. A genre is defined by *features*. But each feature is in principle optional. (There is no *one* thing, for instance, that makes a film a *western* – for any feature you name, I can name a film that is recognizably a western but lacks the feature in question.) And no feature suffices for membership. (A film can have, for instance, cowboys in it and yet not be a western.) Certain features are, admittedly, more basic than others – more central to the structure of the genre than others. But even in the absence of an apparently fundamental feature, membership in the genre can still be achieved through the presence of a compensating feature. Such pairs of compensating features can be mutually incompatible with one another. Most importantly, membership in a genre is not an all or nothing affair: it is a matter of *degree* – the greater the number of generic features an object exhibits, the more fully it exemplifies the genre in question.¹⁰

I propose, for the purposes of this paper, to define Realism as a genre of philosophical doctrine.¹¹ All subsequent references to Realism in this paper are to this genre of doctrine.¹² I have specified eight characteristically Realist theses below. No one of them is a necessary feature of the genre.¹³ Some of them are mutually incompatible; some are limiting cases of others. My aim in distinguishing these eight theses has not been to capture the full extent of Rorty's use of the term,¹⁴ but to isolate those features of (what Rorty calls) Realism which play – either directly or indirectly – an important role in his discussion of Orwell.

1 *The thesis that the Thing-in-Itself is a condition of the possibility of knowledge.* All our experiences of the world are of appearances, views of it from some particular point of view. The only sorts of truths we are able to formulate are truths about the

world under some description. But we should not mistake the limitations of our knowledge, imposed on us by our finite cognitive capacities, for limitations that are inherent in the nature of reality as such. The idea that our experience is *of* the world (that the appearances are *appearances* and not mere illusions) – that is that there is something which our descriptions are *about* – presupposes the further idea that there is a way which is *the way the world is in itself*. For the world to be a possible object of knowledge there must be such a way that it is, apart from any description of it – a way the world is when “viewed from nowhere”, that is from no particular point of view (or, alternatively, from a God’s-eye point of view). Moreover, though such knowledge of the world (as it is in itself) is in principle unattainable for us, we are able to *think* what we cannot know: we are able to grasp in thought that there is such a way the world is, apart from the conditions under which we know it. It is only by postulating the existence of such a noumenal reality that we render coherent the supposition that all our apparent knowledge of reality is indeed *knowledge* of a genuinely mind-independent external reality.¹⁵

- 2 *The thesis that objectivity is non-perspectival.* Some descriptions of the world are to be preferred to others. Descriptions can be more or less accurate. Descriptions of the world are more accurate – that is, better *mirror* the actual structure of reality – to the extent that they are *purified* of everything in them that is an artifact of our partial parochial perspectives on reality. Though it is not possible for us to describe reality without using concepts which human beings can understand, it is possible for us to use concepts which are *not peculiarly ours* – concepts which every properly conducted inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality, be it conducted by humans or non-humans, is eventually fated to converge upon. In so far as our aim is to achieve a knowledge of things as they really are, a description of reality formulated solely in terms of concepts of this latter sort represents a *metaphysically privileged mode of description*. Such concepts furnish us with the means to achieve a non-perspectival, transparent mode of access to how things really are in themselves. The resulting descriptions are descriptions of objective reality.¹⁶
- 3 *The thesis that the fabric of reality is value-neutral.* A description of objective reality must be purged of all concepts that involve a reference to subjective properties. Subjective properties are those which are extrinsic to reality and only intelligible with reference to the effects of reality on sentient beings. The *objective properties* of reality are those which are not subjective but inherent in reality itself. Evaluative concepts – since they are only intelligible with reference to human needs, interests and desires – do not describe objective features of reality. A description of the objective features of reality must confine itself to employing purely descriptive, *value-neutral concepts*.
- 4 *The thesis that there exists an independent moral order.* True moral statements correspond to an independent moral reality or moral order. The aim of moral enquiry is (a) to arrive at a set of *metaphysically privileged moral concepts* for describing or characterizing this reality or order,¹⁷ and (b) to answer all genuine moral questions, that is, all genuine questions which can be formulated employing such concepts. The existence of an independent moral order guarantees that every such question, no matter how seemingly difficult, has a right answer. For every genuine moral statement, there is a self-subsistent moral fact or truth corresponding

either to it or to its negation. There are *no hard moral cases* – that is, cases which do not admit of unequivocal resolution. There are only apparently hard cases. The apparent hardness of a genuine moral case is due (never to the nature of the case itself, but rather) always to our clouded or otherwise distorted view of moral reality.¹⁸

- 5 *The thesis of anti-historicism.* There is such a thing as *the* actual course of history; but it can only come into view in a narrative which furnishes an *objective description* of the unfolding of historical processes. Such a description of historical processes is “objective” in the sense defined in the section above on the thesis that the fabric of reality is value-neutral. The processes which figure in such a description are fully intelligible without the mediation of our own (present) needs, values and interests or of the (past) needs, values and interests of the communities caught up in the processes which are the target of description. The aim of historical understanding, in so far as it aims at objective truth, is to achieve such an unmediated understanding of past events.

- 6 *The thesis of the commensurability of goods.* All fundamental goods are commensurable. There are, in reality, *no tragic conflicts* – situations in which we can only pursue one fundamental good by compromising our allegiance to another. If the demands of happiness, truth, and justice appear to pull in opposite directions, this can only be because we have failed properly to understand the nature of the Good, the True, or the Just. The central task of philosophy is to formulate a *single unifying vision* which, while fully respecting each distinct kind of good, harmoniously synthesizes the (only apparently incompatible) sorts of demands imposed by each.

- 7 *The thesis of the criterial nature of moral status.* We form a moral community with all other beings who share *morally relevant properties* with us. (Favorite candidates for morally relevant properties include: an essential humanity, a rational nature, a capacity for self-consciousness, personhood, membership in a biological species, sentience.) Possession of the relevant property or properties is *the criterion* for being an appropriate subject of moral concern. A morally relevant property is an *objective property* (in the sense defined in the paragraph on the thesis that the fabric of reality is value-neutral) and thus *ahistorical* and *transcultural* in nature. The existence of such properties is the source of all moral obligation and entitlement. We owe moral obligations to all and only those beings who possess the relevant properties. Every being who possesses the relevant properties possesses thereby certain *rights*, and each of us has an obligation to see that those rights are upheld to the best of her ability.

- 8 *The thesis of the possible transparency of language to fact and the relative non-transparency of literature.* *Transparent prose* is the linguistic medium which permits the formulation of undistorted descriptions of objective reality of the sort specified in the section above on the thesis that objectivity is non-perspectival. Literary works – since they deal with actions, persons and events that are fictional and employ imprecise or innovative uses of language – do not offer transparent representations of objective reality. The legitimate aims of literary works are threefold: (i) *decorative* – to entertain, divert, or prettify, (ii) *emotive* – to address

our non-cognitive faculties (iii) *illustrative* – to exemplify an antecedently understood principle, for instance by telling a story that has a moral.¹⁹

Any doctrine which embraces a version of one or more of the above eight theses qualifies for the purposes of this paper as a species of Realism. The greater the number of the above theses a doctrine embraces, the more central a member of the genre – the more Realist – it is.

Any of the above eight theses could be formulated in a more sympathetic and nuanced manner. I have intentionally formulated each so as to render it maximally vulnerable to Rorty's arguments against Realism. I will make no attempt in this paper to rehearse the arguments that Rorty employs against these theses or to justify the claim that these theses are indeed vulnerable to his arguments. I shall simply express my sympathy with Rorty's work in so far as that work is animated by a desire to help us see that we can reject all eight of the above theses without thereby giving up anything we should want. I shall therefore not be concerned in this paper to criticize Rorty on the grounds on which his Realist critics do. The preliminary point of identifying the eight theses listed above as instances of philosophy gone wrong is to define a *space of agreement* between Rorty and myself.²⁰ The eventual point of the exercise will be to demonstrate how much room that still leaves for disagreement. I turn now to the more delicate task of indicating our space of disagreement.

III. Rorty's Metaphysics

The title of this section of the paper is intentionally provocative. Rorty would bristle at the suggestion that he has a metaphysics. Rorty counts philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger among his heroes and says that he shares their avowedly anti-metaphysical aims – aims such as that of “showing the philosopher the way out of the philosophical fly-bottle” and of “deconstructing the Western metaphysical tradition.” But whenever Rorty enters into a detailed engagement with Realist theses, such as the eight listed above, he does not tend to do what these two of his heroes represent themselves as attempting to do. He does not show us why apparently compulsory philosophical problems (for which the Realist purports to offer solutions) are not compulsory²¹ or how we can get out from under the questions (which the Realist purports to answer) by coming to see what is wrong with the questions.²² When Rorty stands back from his arguments with Realism and pronounces on the nature of his objectives, he tends to characterize his aims in terms which echo those of philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger. He describes himself as wanting to dissolve philosophical problems and unmask philosophical questions. But such pronouncements are generally at odds with the actual character of Rorty's detailed engagements with Realism. In his criticisms of Realism, Rorty invariably formulates his rejection of a thesis of Realism in terms of a counterposed thesis. He thus invariably ends up affirming a thesis that has the same logical form as a thesis which the Realist affirms, but with one difference: a negation operator has been introduced into the content-clause of the thesis. Rorty does not merely refuse to affirm what the Realist says, but ends up affirming an alternative answer to the Realist's question. He ends up claiming that there is something we cannot do or have which the Realist claimed we can do or have. More significantly, where the Realist purports to offer an explication of some notion – such as objectivity, knowledge, or representation – Rorty invariably ends up

rejecting not merely the explication of the notion but the notion itself. Despite his protestations that he has no interest in the activity of constructive philosophizing, Rorty often goes on to elaborate the outlines of an alternative theory showing how we can make sense of our existing practices (of assertion, description, justification, criticism, etc.) in the absence of the seemingly indispensable notion. This inevitably involves him in the elaboration of further theses, as metaphysically contentious as any of those he sought to reject. Rorty thus ends up enunciating what certainly appear to be (at least partially) worked-out metaphysical doctrines of his own – doctrines which he opposes to those of the Realists and which (at least appear to) offer alternative answers to the Realist's questions.

There follow eight examples of such theses. I will refer to the conjunction of these eight theses as *Rortianism*. I do not thereby mean to suggest that these eight theses encompass either everything that Rorty himself takes to be central in his work or everything that I myself take to be centrally contentious in Rorty's work. Rortianism, as defined here, is simply the complement of Realism, as defined above. The aim, in thus defining 'Rortianism', is to isolate those of Rorty's own substantial metaphysical commitments which play – either directly or indirectly – an important role in his discussion of Orwell. In characterizing the eight theses listed below, I have tried to remain close to Rorty's own presentation of his views and to furnish some hint at the motivation for each thesis by indicating the sorts of views each is concerned to repudiate.

- 1' *The thesis that solidarity should replace objectivity.* To aspire to *objectivity* is to aspire in making claims to make oneself answerable to the world itself.²³ To aspire to *solidarity* is to aspire in making claims to make oneself answerable to nothing further than the verdicts of the members of one's community.²⁴ The idea that a claim can stand in a normative relation to the world – a relation which would make the claim correct or incorrect (true or false) *in light of how things are with the world* – is to be rejected.²⁵ Since claims cannot be justified in the light of how things are, the only way for a claim to be justified is by its being justified *to some other person(s)*.²⁶ Justification is a sociological matter, a matter of seeing whether something is acceptable to my peers.²⁷ Solidarity (agreement with one's community) should therefore replace objectivity (agreement with how things are) as the end of inquiry. Inquiry should aim not at Truth, but at ever-widening circles of consensus.²⁸ The traditional distinction between knowledge and opinion should be re-interpreted as the distinction between topics on which it is comparatively easy to achieve agreement and those on which it is comparatively difficult to achieve agreement.²⁹
- 2' *The thesis of linguistic idealism.* Only descriptions of the world can be true or false, and descriptions must be formulated in sentences. Thus where there are no sentences there is no truth. Sentences, however, are elements of human languages, and human languages are human creations. Truth cannot exist independently of the human activity of employing language to make claims because sentences cannot so exist. Apart from the activity of human beings there is no language, hence no true claims, hence no truths.³⁰
- 3' *The thesis of instrumentalism concerning linguistic norms.* The aim of employing a vocabulary is to achieve not the accurate representation of how things are but

rather the satisfaction of our needs, interests and purposes. Vocabularies should be thought of not as mirrors but as *tools*. The assessment of the adequacy of a vocabulary – like that of a tool – is always relative to a purpose.³¹ Not only is there no such thing as a value-neutral description of the world that can be understood without reference to human interests, but the adequacy of any description – however apparently value-free – can only be assessed with reference to such interests. Alternative descriptions should be compared not with reality, but with each other, and evaluated not according to how well they enable us to represent the world, but according to how well they help us *cope*.³²

- 4' *The thesis of the conversational basis of moral belief.* The only sense in which a moral belief can “get things right” is for it to be a belief which those of my peers who are competent in the norms of my community’s current practices of claim-making will let me get away with.³³ These communal norms furnish a limited pool of persuasive resources: certain disputes may remain adjudicable. In the absence of agreement, all we can do is to continue to participate in an ongoing *conversation* – a conversation in which we try to bring our conversational partners over to our point of view. To think that a moral belief can be “right” or “true” in some further sense – to think that it can be answerable to how things are – is to think that there is some non-human authority to which we should appeal in order to resolve moral disputes. To think this is to fail to acknowledge the *contingency* of our historically evolved practices of moral claim-making and the ineliminable *hardness* of the “hard” moral questions we confront when working within such practices. It is to fail fully to *de-divinize the world*: to continue to yearn for a secular surrogate for the concept of the Divine – a non-human entity onto which we can transfer the burdens of hard moral thinking and ongoing moral conversation.
- 5' *The thesis of historicism.*³⁴ Historical processes are not governed by laws. They are fundamentally *contingent*, influenced by human agency and unforeseeable chance events. Historical understanding is always *situated* and necessarily colored by our present values and interests. Historical accounts are stories we tell to provide a coherent narrative about who we are and how, through interacting with each other and the world, we got here. Such stories are inherently *retrospective* – each community in each age will tell the story differently – and they are *constructed*.³⁵ The only sense in which a historical narrative can “get things right” is by telling a story which proves to be both acceptable and enabling to the members of a community; and the only sense in which one such narrative can be “better” than another is – not by offering a more faithful description of the objective sequence of events, but rather – by *re-describing* the events in a novel and helpful way.³⁶
- 6' *The thesis that public and private goods are incommensurable.* The relation between the significant products of human reflection concerning *autonomy* and those concerning *justice* is like the relation between two kinds of tools. They are no more in need of synthesis than are paintbrushes and crowbars. Autonomy has to do with our interest in self-creation; justice with our interest in fostering human solidarity. These interests are equally valid, but forever *incommensurable*. There is no useful way to bring them together at the level of theory. They point in opposite directions: the one away from others to private pursuits and the cultivation of individuality; the other outwards to the community at large and the amelioration

of its public institutions and shared practices. The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily *esoteric*: difficult to share and unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily *exoteric*: susceptible of being widely shared and able to serve as a medium for argumentative exchange. The latter furnishes us with the means to join in a common purpose and thus to *preserve our community*, the former with the means to discover novel purposes and thus to *transform ourselves*.³⁷

- 7' *The thesis of Rortian liberalism.* A moral status is not something one possesses simply in virtue of possessing certain "objective" properties. A moral community is something that is *forged* rather than found, something which is *produced within historically evolved practices*, not something which exists simply as a function of brute ahistorical fact. Moral status is thus conferred and moral concern acquired *through a cultural process* – through participation in certain kinds of communities: communities which have evolved vocabularies which enable one (a) to engage in the activity of moral reflection and deliberation, (b) to express one's solidarity with fellow members of one's community (for instance, by using expressions such as 'we' and 'us' for insiders and 'them' for outsiders), and (c) to view those with whom one expresses solidarity as appropriate subjects of moral concern. One such vocabulary our community has evolved is *the vocabulary of liberalism*. A liberal is someone who thinks *cruelty is the worst thing we can do* and that 'morality' should not be taken to denote anything other than our abilities to notice, identify with, and alleviate pain and humiliation.³⁸ Someone who is committed to the vocabulary of liberalism thinks that there is *no noncircular theoretical justification* for his belief that cruelty is a horrible thing. He thinks and talks from within the midst of certain historically and culturally local practices. He does not take the validity of those practices to rest on an ahistorical or transcultural foundation. He takes his commitment to liberalism to be nothing more than a function of his commitment to his community.³⁹
- 8' *The thesis of ironism.* Ironism is *opposed to common sense*. To be commonsensical is to take for granted that statements formulated in one's current vocabulary – the vocabulary to one which one has become habituated – suffice to describe and judge the beliefs, actions and lives of those who employ alternative vocabularies. An ironist is someone who thinks there is no single preferred vocabulary. No vocabulary is closer or more transparent to reality than any other. An ironist realizes that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed in an alternative vocabulary. She renounces the attempt to formulate neutral criteria of choice between vocabularies. While provisionally continuing to employ her present vocabulary, she nourishes radical and abiding doubts concerning it, and has no truck with arguments phrased in it which seek either to underwrite or to dissolve these doubts. She cherishes works of literature as precious cognitive resources because they initiate her into *new vocabularies*, furnishing her with novel means – not for seeing reality as it is, but rather – for *playing off descriptions against redescriptions*.⁴⁰

Two comments are in order on the numerically correlated pairs of Realist and Rortian theses – that is (1) and (1'), (2) and (2'), etc. First, none of these pairs stand to one another in a straightforward relation of thesis to antithesis. On the contrary, the pairs have been constructed in such a way that a modicum of reflection should suffice to

establish that there is plenty of room to maneuver between the Realist and Rortian members of each pair. (The point of constructing these pairs is to show that Rorty's thought is pervasively controlled by them, with the result that the intervening space of intellectual options remains invisible to him.)⁴¹ Second, the Rortian member of each pair is motivated in part by an implicit proposal for how to go on talking without having to employ vocabulary which plays a crucial role in the formulation of the Realist member of each pair – vocabulary such as “objective truth,” “the way the world is,” “transparency to fact,” etc.⁴²

The Rortian theses all participate in a single underlying strategy for bringing fruitless forms of philosophical controversy to an end. The strategy is to adopt a mode of discourse from within which one no longer has any occasion to call upon the vocabulary requisite for the formulation of Realist theses.⁴³ The underlying injunction concerning how to dissolve philosophical problems might be summed up as follows: “Free yourself from the problems by *jettisoning the vocabulary* in which the problems are couched!” Rorty's confidence in the wisdom of this strategy encourages a blindness to intellectual options that occupy the intervening space between the rejection of Realist theses and the affirmation of their Rortian counterparts. When Rorty encounters occurrences of vocabulary which he would, on philosophically prophylactic grounds, prefer to jettison, he tends to become immediately suspicious. He tends to assume that the motivation behind calling upon the vocabulary must be an attachment to some Realist thesis in the neighborhood; and he tends to proceed to argue as if the only way to steer clear of the Realist thesis in question were to adopt its Rortian counterpart. But Rorty's preferred strategy for dissolving philosophical problems is a wise one only if the sole function within our linguistic community of the vocabulary in which Realist theses are formulated is to enable such theses to be formulated. If there are other discursive possibilities – apart from the formulation of Realist theses – whose availability depends upon the availability of that vocabulary,⁴⁴ then a pragmatist has no business enjoining us to jettison that vocabulary unless he can first demonstrate that the loss of those other discursive possibilities is vastly outweighed by the gain of rendering ourselves immune to the temptations of Realism.⁴⁵

IV. Enter Orwell

Orwell's biographer Bernard Crick claims that Orwell “would have been incapable of writing a contemporary philosophical monograph” and that he was “scarcely capable of understanding one.”⁴⁶ Crick documents this claim with examples, anecdotes and testimony.⁴⁷ In a footnote, Rorty refers to Crick's evidence for this claim.⁴⁸ The claim, as we shall see, is important to Rorty. He adduces Orwell's lack of taste for or skill at constructing philosophical arguments⁴⁹ as a ground for thinking that standard readings of Orwell must be wrong. I think that Rorty is right that Orwell's writings are innocent of the philosophical obsessions which Rorty deplors. This renders Orwell's writings potentially useful in two ways. They can furnish: (i) a measure of Rorty's epistemologism, and (ii) a ground for questioning the wisdom of Rorty's strategy of dissolving philosophical problems. They can furnish (i) if it can be shown that Rorty's reading of Orwell remains controlled by the very obsessions which he takes to be irrelevant to an understanding of Orwell. It is the task of the sections on Rorty on Orwell's Admirers and An Outline of Rorty's reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of this paper to show this. They can furnish (ii) if it can be shown that they make generous use of the vocabulary

in which Realist theses are formulated, but exclusively in the service of discursive ends which have nothing to do with the formulation of such theses. It is the task of the sections on Orwell on Totalitarianism, Rortian Totalitarianism, and Politics and Literature (VII, VIII, and IX) of this paper to show this.

Below is a list of eight examples of the sorts of things which we will encounter Orwell saying in the sections VII, VIII, and IX of this paper. Versions of all eight of these remarks recur throughout Orwell's corpus.⁵⁰ They are examples of (what I take to be) *ordinary* uses of language⁵¹ – but each of them contains occurrences of the sort of vocabulary which Rorty views with great suspicion (vocabulary such as “truth,” “facts,” “independent,” “wrongness,” “objectivity,” “human”) and which he urges us to learn to dispense with.⁵²

- 1" The feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world is – and should be – frightening.
- 2" Facts exist independently of us and are more or less discoverable.
- 3" One should constantly struggle to efface the distortions in one's view of the facts that are due to one's personality and to the varieties of bias and self-deception from which every observer necessarily suffers.
- 4" Some moral cases are not hard cases. It is possible to see the unspeakable wrongness of an act.
- 5" There are objective historical truths. Historical facts are independent of what we say or believe happened in the past.
- 6" There is an important connection between politics and literature. Literature provides a means for fighting a kind of corruption of language which facilitates the task of those who seek to hide the truth. The enemies of intellectual liberty thus seek to keep the issue of truth-versus-untruth as far in the background as possible in their discussions of both politics and literature.
- 7" The protagonist of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is the last human being in Europe – the sole remaining guardian of the human spirit. A liberal is someone who thinks that the human spirit will only survive as long as we think of truth as something to be discovered, and not as something we make up as we go along. The worst thing we can do is – not cruelty, but – to undermine someone's capacity to think of truth in these terms.
- 8" Good prose is like a window pane. It places the truth in plain and open view.

Since I agree with Rorty that Orwell's work is innocent of any militantly metaphysical preoccupations, I think (1")–(8"), as they occur in Orwell's writing, are *not* happily characterized as *metaphysical theses*.⁵³ But, regardless of how one chooses to characterize (1")–(8"), the fact remains that they are examples of things that Orwell has it at heart to say.

One aim of this paper is to show – by looking first (in the sections on Rorty and Orwell's Admirers and An Outline of Rorty's Reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in this

paper) at what Rorty says about Orwell and then (in sections VII–IX of this paper) at what Orwell himself says – that (1'')–(8'') are *inaudible* to Rorty. They are literally inaudible to him in the sense that he simply never hears Orwell saying most of these things. With respect to most of these remarks, as far as I can ascertain, Rorty manages to read Orwell without ever realizing that such remarks recur throughout his corpus. With respect to the two remarks that Rorty does realize are in Orwell – namely (3'') and (8'') – he views them as unfortunate and dangerously misleading rhetorical flourishes. But (1'')–(8'') are also inaudible to Rorty in a more irremediable sense. Even if Rorty were brought to see that Orwell really does want to say these things, I think it would be difficult for Rorty to see how these remarks could be innocent of Realist metaphysics: (1'') would appear to him to presuppose a commitment to (1), (2'') a commitment to (2), etc. Moreover, (1'') certainly appears to be something that a proponent of (1') should not want to say, and similarly for (2'') and (2'), etc. Sections VII and IX of this paper will seek to show that when our intellectual options are confined to a forced choice between Realist and Rortian theses – between members of the pairs (1) and (1'), (2) and (2'), etc. – we are unable to recover the thoughts Orwell sought to express in (1'')–(8'').

We are now in a position to offer the following more precise characterization of Rorty's epistemologism: when Rorty comes across remarks such as (1'')–(8''), he assumes that they must either be attempts to assert (1)–(8) or bits of mere rhetoric; he is thus unable to read an author, such as Orwell, who is concerned neither to attack nor to defend (1)–(8), but whose writings abound with remarks such as (1'')–(8'') and who attaches great importance to the thoughts which such remarks express.

V. Rorty on Orwell's Admirers

The aim of this section of the paper is twofold: first, to furnish some examples of Rorty's concluding that a commentator on Orwell must be concerned to recommend some form of Realism on the ground that the commentator employs certain vocabulary; second, to provide an overview of the reading of Orwell which Rorty assumes such commentators must endorse and which serves as the foil for his own reading of Orwell.

Indeed, it would be difficult to outline Rorty's own reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* without first discussing the reading of the novel he opposes. Rorty's discussion of Orwell is structured around the assumption that there are two natural ways to read Orwell: either as a Realist or as a Rortian. Though Rorty himself never explicitly represents the issue of how to read Orwell in such bald terms, such a view of the issue implicitly structures his entire discussion. Thus Rorty's procedure for justifying his own reading turns in no small part on entering objections to a Realist construal of Orwell's texts. But this is a reasonable procedure only if these two readings exhaust the field of promising possible readings of Orwell. That Rorty should think that they do is itself a striking symptom of his epistemologism.

Rorty takes the following claim to be an uncontroversial point of common ground between himself and those readers of Orwell with whom he disagrees: the major aim – or at least one of the major aims – of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is to offer an imaginative redescription of Soviet Russia.⁵⁴ The disagreement, as Rorty represents it, turns on how to answer the following two questions: (i) how is such a redescription accomplished and (ii) what is the point of furnishing such a redescription? As regards (i), this is how Rorty describes what the readers of Orwell with whom he disagrees think:

[Orwell] accomplished the redescription by reminding us of some plain truths – moral truths whose obviousness is on a par with “two plus two is four.”⁵⁵

As an example of a reader of Orwell who says things like this, Rorty quotes the following extract from an essay by Lionel Trilling:

Orwell’s native gifts are perhaps not of the transcendent kind; they have their roots in a quality of mind that is as frequent as it is modest. This quality may be described as a sort of moral centrality, a directness of relation to moral – and political fact.⁵⁶

This suggests that Orwell is especially good at doing something which, for the moment, we may provisionally gloss as “getting at the truth.” This, in turn, suggests the following answer to (i): it is Orwell’s “gift” for “getting at the truth” which allows him to furnish a compelling redescription. Rorty takes this to be the answer to (i) that readers such as Trilling endorse.⁵⁷ Rorty, moreover, thinks it a terrible answer because he takes it to rest on a *Realist conception* of what it is that makes descriptions (or redescriptions) compelling.⁵⁸ How is Rorty able to tell that readers of Orwell such as Trilling are captivated by Realism? By the vocabulary they employ. The two passages above contain words like “plain truths,” “moral truths” (worse still: “moral truths” which are *obvious*), “a directness of relation to fact” (and worst of all: “a directness of relation to *moral* fact”) – words which trigger Rorty’s philosophical alarms.

As regards (ii), here is how Rorty summarizes what he thinks Trilling et al take the point of Orwell’s novel to be:

Orwell teaches us to set our faces against all those sneaky intellectuals who try to tell us that truth is not “out there,” that what counts as a possible truth is a function of the vocabulary you use, and what counts as a truth is a function of the rest of your beliefs. Orwell has, in short, been read as a realist philosopher, a defender of common sense against its cultured, ironist despisers.⁵⁹

Rorty concedes that there are some passages which, when taken out of context, appear to support this reading. He mentions two examples of such passages. The first is a set of remarks from Orwell’s essay “Why I Write.” Rorty concedes that in this particular set of remarks “Trilling’s way of speaking is echoed by Orwell himself.”⁶⁰ The remarks that Rorty particularly has in mind in this connection are Orwell’s remark that “good prose is like a window pane” and the remark that the effort to write prose of this sort requires that one “strive constantly to efface one’s own personality.”⁶¹ These remarks, according to Rorty, are “often read together” by Orwell’s Realist admirers with the following passage from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential, command. [Winston’s] heart sank as he thought of the enormous power arrayed against him, the ease with which any Party intellectual would overthrow him in debate . . . And yet he was in the right! . . . The obvious, the silly, and the true has 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 towards the earth’s centre. With the feeling that he was speaking to O’Brien, and also that he was setting forth an important axiom, [Winston] wrote: “Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows.”⁶²

Rorty takes this passage to be the main support of the Realist reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Thus, when giving his own reading of the novel, Rorty takes some trouble

to sketch his own (purportedly) non-metaphysical alternative interpretation of the passage. Rorty concurs that this is a pivotal passage,⁶³ but he takes its concern to be with *freedom* rather than *truth*. Since this passage occupies a central place in the quarrel Rorty takes himself to have with other readers of Orwell, and since we will often have occasion to recur to it, I will henceforth refer to it as “the focal passage.”

Rorty takes the focal passage to supply admirers of Orwell with a pretext for attributing certain Realist theses to Orwell.⁶⁴ But he also thinks that these admirers attribute Realist theses to Orwell of a sort which the focal passage taken by itself would hardly seem to invite. Rorty adduces the following passage from Samuel Hynes as evidence of the popularity of a broader Realist construal of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

Winston Smith’s beliefs are as simple as two plus two equals four: the past is fixed, love is private, and the truth is beyond change. All have this in common: they set limits to men’s power; they testify to the fact that some things cannot be changed. The point is beyond politics – it is a point of essential humanity.⁶⁵

When Rorty hears someone talking about “a point of essential humanity,” he assumes that what must be at issue is a Realist thesis to the effect that what confers moral worth upon each of us is our partaking of an indestructible human essence.⁶⁶ Central to the reading of the novel that Rorty wishes to ward off is the claim that there is something deep down within each of us – our essential humanity – which we all share and the presence of which guarantees that the actual future of humanity cannot ever resemble the future depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. On Rorty’s reading of the novel, one of its central concerns is to urge that whether our future rulers turn out to be like O’Brien does not depend – “as metaphysicians generally suggest” – on “deep facts about human nature.”⁶⁷ In taking Orwell to be urging such an anti-metaphysical view, Rorty takes himself to be at odds with the proponents of accepted interpretations of the novel. For the proponents of accepted interpretations all declare Orwell to be concerned with something they are happy to call the “preservation of humanity.” Rorty takes such talk to be of a piece with the following sort of reading of the novel:

On this reading, the crucial opposition in Orwell’s thought is the standard metaphysical one between contrived appearance and naked reality. The latter is obscured by bad, untransparent prose and by bad, unnecessarily sophisticated theory. Once the dirt is rubbed off the windowpane, the truth about any moral or political situation will be clear. Only those who have allowed their own personality . . . to cloud their vision will fail to grasp the plain moral facts . . . Only such people will try to evade plain epistemological and metaphysical facts through sneaky philosophical maneuvers . . . Among such facts are that truth is “independent” of human minds and languages, and that gravitation is not “relative” to any human mode of thought.⁶⁸

Some of what Rorty says here leaves no doubt that a proponent of this reading would be committed to Realist theses.⁶⁹ It is also true that much of what Rorty says here echoes remarks that commentators such as Trilling and Hynes actually make.⁷⁰ Rorty takes the presence of such remarks in their writings to be evidence of their desire to offer a Realist reading of Orwell;⁷¹ and, as a matter of charity to Orwell, he thinks one ought to consider whether a “non-metaphysical” reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* might not be available instead.⁷²

I don’t think Rorty is right about Trilling and Hynes.⁷³ But this is not to deny that someone could advance a Realist reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The prose of such a

reader of Orwell would not sound like prose which is animated by the concerns of a Trilling or a Hynes. It would sound like prose which is animated by the concerns of someone who shares Rorty's obsessions. Peter Van Inwagen is such a reader of Orwell. His reading of the focal passage is the mirror-image of the one Rorty advances:

One important component of the Common Western Metaphysic is the thesis that there is such a thing as objective truth . . . Philosophers who deny the existence of objective truth are today usually called "anti-realists" – in opposition, of course, to "realists," who affirm the existence of objective truth . . . [T]he greatest of all attacks on anti-realism [is] George Orwell's novel *1984*. Anyone who is interested in Realism and anti-Realism should be steeped in the message of this book. The reader is particularly directed to the debate between the Realist Winston Smith and the anti-Realist O'Brien that is the climax of the novel. In the end, there is only one question that can be addressed to the anti-Realist: How does your position differ from O'Brien's?⁷⁴

Rorty and Van Inwagen both assume that an affirmation of the sentiments which Winston expresses in the focal passage reflects his commitment to Realism and that the author of the novel's stance towards Realism can be gauged by determining whether he wishes to distance himself or whether he wishes to identify himself with the sentiments of his protagonist.⁷⁵ Neither Van Inwagen nor Rorty is able to envision the possibility that what is at stake in Winston's remarks – remarks such as "The obvious, the silly, and the true have got to be defended" or "The solid world exists, its laws do not change" – is not the truth or falsity of a metaphysical thesis.⁷⁶ Both Van Inwagen and Rorty seek to enlist Orwell on their side of a metaphysical dispute between a Realist and an anti-Realist.⁷⁷ Due to their shared obsession with Realism, neither allows for a reading of the novel which takes the author to identify with the sentiments of his protagonist but doesn't take such an identification to commit the author to Realism.

VI. An Outline of Rorty's Reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The aim of this section of the paper is threefold: first, to sketch an overview of Rorty's own reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, second, to provide some indication of the manner in which Rorty motivates that reading, and third, to lay some groundwork for the charge that Rorty's epistemologism renders him unable to read Orwell's novel.

As soon as we cease to read Orwell's texts through Realist spectacles, Rorty suggests, we will see that Orwell's concern lies with cruelty rather than truth. The underlying charge is that only someone committed to Realism could possibly be led to think that it was Orwell's view that the possibility of sustaining the ideals of liberalism depends on preserving a respect for "truth" or "humanity"; only someone who approached Orwell's texts with Realist spectacles would be led to read the texts as Trilling and Hynes do. One reason Rorty adduces for preferring his own "non-metaphysical" reading of Orwell has already been touched on in section IV: Orwell doesn't seem to be a writer who has much taste for philosophical argument. This allows Rorty to challenge Realist readers of Orwell with the question: is it not perverse to read this author as centrally concerned with mounting a defense of a metaphysical doctrine? Given the reading of Orwell that Rorty himself offers, however, this challenge to Realist readers of Orwell threatens to boomerang back on him: is it not equally perverse to read this author as centrally concerned with defending theses whose motivation depends on the desire to distance oneself as far as possible from Realism? We shall see

that it is Rorty who reads every line of Orwell (and every line of Orwell commentary) through philosophical spectacles, and that it is Rorty – not Trilling or Hynes – who attempts to enlist Orwell on one side of an argument between a Realist and an opponent of Realism.

Rorty offers a very particular gloss on where Orwell's concerns as an author do lie: Orwell's main concern is to "sensitize an audience to cases of cruelty and humiliation which they had not noticed." Orwell is to be read, above all, as a good "liberal ironist": someone whose aim is to "give us an alternative context, an alternative perspective, from which we liberals . . . could describe the political history of our century."⁷⁸ Rorty's subsequent characterization of what is involved in "sensitizing an audience" to cases of cruelty and humiliation clearly bears the marks of a Rortian recoil from Realism. Rorty explains:

[T]he kind of thing Orwell . . . 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 happen or has been happening – to be compared, not with reality, but with alternative descriptions of the same events.⁷⁹

We are offered here a *contrast* between two ways of understanding what is involved in evaluating a description of an event: the description is to be compared with reality or the description is to be compared with alternative descriptions. Throughout his essay on Orwell, Rorty writes as if these constituted mutually opposed ways of understanding what it is to evaluate the adequacy of a description of an event,⁸⁰ and as if we must take Orwell to be always doing only the one and never the other:

Deciding between the descriptions [which Orwell and others offer of Communism] . . . is not a matter of confronting or refusing to confront hard, unpleasant facts. Nor is it a matter of being blinded, or not being blinded, by ideology. It is a matter of playing off scenarios against contrasting scenarios, projects against alternative projects, descriptions against redescriptions.⁸¹

Enabling his readers "to confront hard, unpleasant facts," enabling them to recognize their own individual strategies for "refusing to confront the facts," depicting what it is to be "blinded by an ideology" and what it is not to be so blinded – all such characterizations of Orwell's activity as an author, Rorty claims, are misplaced since they involve the attribution to Orwell of a commitment to Realism. Orwell, according to Rorty, has no use for the idea of truth – for the idea that some descriptions are superior to others in virtue of the relation in which they stand to the subject matter which they describe. According to Rorty's Orwell, some descriptions just happen to be more *useful* than others. This leaves Rorty in the somewhat awkward position of having to conclude that Orwell's own characterizations of the sort of prose he aspires to write (prose that has the transparency of a window pane) must be mischaracterizations of his own writing:

Redescriptions which change our minds on political situations are not much like window-panes. On the contrary, they are the sort of thing which only writers with very special talents, writing at just the right moment in just the right way, are able to bring off.⁸²

As candidate explanations for Orwell's success as an author, we are asked to choose between (i) Orwell's having succeeded in revealing "certain facts" or "moral truths"

and (ii) Orwell's "special talents" as a writer. As Rorty sees the matter, in order to save Orwell from Realism we must opt for (ii) as opposed to (i).⁸³ This, of course, leaves Rorty with the problem of why Orwell says things that sound like (i). Rorty suggests that whenever Orwell says such things he is best read as not really meaning them:

In his better moments, Orwell himself dropped the rhetoric of transparency to plain fact, and recognized that he was doing the same *kind* of thing as his opponents, the apologists for Stalin, were doing.⁸⁴

This is, it seems to me, an extraordinary sentence. There are three claims here about Orwell which, for the moment, I will simply note in ascending order of extraordinariness. First, talk of "transparency to plain fact" figures in Orwell's writing as mere *rhetoric*. Second, in his better moments, Orwell is happy to *drop* this rhetoric. Third, Orwell understood himself to be doing the same *kind* of thing as his opponents, the apologists for Stalin, were doing – offering persuasive redescriptions of recent events. (We will return to these claims in section VII.)

Over and above offering a persuasive redescription of Soviet Russia, according to Rorty, Orwell also had a second aim in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: to invent O'Brien.⁸⁵ This latter aim occupies the last third of the novel:

Orwell did not invent O'Brien to serve as a dialectical foil, as a modern counterpart to Thrasymachus . . . Orwell is not setting up a philosophical position but trying to make a concrete political possibility plausible . . . He does not view O'Brien as crazy, misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, or blind to the moral facts. He simply views him as *dangerous* and as *possible*.⁸⁶

Rorty identifies a potentially metaphysically innocuous characterization of O'Brien "as misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, and blind to the moral facts" with a tendentious characterization of O'Brien as "a modern counterpart to Thrasymachus," a dialectical foil for Orwell's quasi-Platonic philosophical agenda.⁸⁷ Having made this identification, Rorty opposes to this his own claim that Orwell simply views O'Brien as *dangerous* and as *possible*. But in the absence of an identification of the innocuous and tendentious characterizations, why should one think that these two views of O'Brien cannot easily be made to harmonize? Why can't Orwell view O'Brien as misguided, seduced by a mistaken theory, blind to the moral facts *and* dangerous and possible?

Rorty insists that what is supposed to be really *scary* about the prospect with which the novel presents us is that it forces on us the thought that "as a matter of sheer contingent fact" the future could, at least in principle, resemble the future depicted in the novel.⁸⁸ The thought is, no doubt, scary. In insisting upon this, what Rorty is most concerned to deny is an alternative view of what might be scary about the possible future that the novel depicts: that what is scary is the demise of "the possibility of truth." Rorty knows that Orwell's admirers somehow manage to be frightened by the idea of living in a society in which our leaders have the power to deprive us of our hold on the concept of objective truth. But only a Realist, Rorty thinks, could find *that* prospect frightening. What such readers of Orwell fear losing Rorty regards as well lost. Whenever he hears someone using words such as "objective truth" or "the world" or "reality" as terms for something with which we might lose touch and which we should respect, Rorty hears truth or the world or reality being anthropomorphized – being turned into something personlike. Rorty is aware that people tend to find his

own deflationary accounts of truth and empirical knowledge unsatisfying; and he senses, quite correctly, that there is something about his attitude to truth and reality which strikes some of these people as insufficiently respectful. But he can only see one reason why someone should think this: because she still yearns for a privileged mediator (the scientist, or the philosopher, or the poet, or *somebody*) who can discharge the priestly function of putting us in touch with a realm which transcends the human. Loss of contact with truth or the world or reality could only be frightening to such a person – someone who has failed to realize that the idea of answerability to the world is a secular surrogate for the idea of answerability to an infallible Deity. The only way Rorty can see of ever giving content to such talk of “answerability to something non-human” is through an appeal to Realist theses (such as the thesis that the world has a preferred description of itself). Hence he concludes: once we abandon such theses, there is no longer any reason to think it would be *hubris* on our part to abandon the traditional language of “respect for fact” and “objectivity.”⁸⁹ He identifies a continued attachment to such ways of speaking as a sure sign that the speaker has failed to take the final and crucial step in the post-Enlightenment project of attaining to full intellectual maturity. The speaker still longs for something outside our contingent historically situated practices. He longs for something transhuman which would underwrite practices of which he approves and would condemn practices – such as the practices of the community depicted in Orwell’s novel – of which he disapproves. Rorty cannot see how such a person could, in speaking this way, possibly be speaking for Orwell. Rorty, rightly, takes Orwell to be of the view that the practices of our community are utterly contingent: there is a small but not insignificant possibility that they might be replaced by practices utterly reprehensible to us in the near future. Rorty sees a connection between the repudiation of the (Realist) longing for something transhuman which would underwrite our practices and Orwell’s particular way of illustrating the contingency of those practices. By illustrating the radical contingency (that is the extreme fragility and plasticity) of our present practices of claim-making in the particular way that he does – namely, by making palpable how genuine the possibility is that our society might develop into a future society which rejects so many of our present claims concerning “the obvious, the silly, and the true” – Orwell’s novel reveals that there is nothing outside our current practices of claim-making to which those practices are answerable and which could constrain the direction of their future evolution.⁹⁰ Rorty is thus able to conclude that there is a natural fit between the manner in which Orwell himself illustrates the contingency of our practices and Rorty’s own interpretative claim that Orwell’s admirers distort the concerns of Orwell’s novel when, in characterizing its concerns, they deploy the traditional language of “respect for fact,” “objectivity,” “being in touch with reality,” etc.

Orwell’s view of history, as presented by Rorty, sometimes seems to involve not only a thesis about the contingency of our practices but an additional thesis about the dependence of large-scale historical outcomes on small-scale events not subject to the influence of human agency. It sometimes sounds as if Orwell’s point, according to Rorty, is that only an attachment to a bad metaphysical view would lead us to think that we, readers of the novel, bear a *responsibility* for whether our future will turn out to resemble the one depicted in the novel. Gripped by the worry that someone infatuated with Realism might overlook Orwell’s emphasis on the contingency of our practices, Rorty overlooks the possibility of a reading of Orwell that turns on the (not necessarily Realist) claim that it is only by cherishing and nurturing certain of our present values and ideals that we can forestall the triumph of totalitarianism. Rorty’s

reading invites a gratuitously quietest construal of Orwell's view of the possible influence of human agency on the course of history:

History may create and empower people like O'Brien as a result of the same kind of accidents that have prevented those people from existing until recently . . . What Orwell helps us see is that it may have *just happened* that Europe began to prize benevolent sentiments and the idea of a common humanity, and it may *just happen* that the world will wind up being ruled by people who lack any such sentiments and any such moralities. On my reading, Orwell's denial that there is such a thing as the autonomous individual is part of a larger denial that there is something outside of time or more basic than chance which can be counted on to block, or eventually reverse, such accidental sequences.⁹¹

This makes it sound as if the *overriding* determinants of history are mere matters of chance – outcomes that depend upon *accidents* beyond human control. In his eagerness to oppose a very dubious thesis (“the continuation of civilization as we know it is metaphysically guaranteed”) with an alternative thesis (“nothing is guaranteed: accidents just happen”), Rorty tends to slide from an unobjectionable construal of the exegetical claim that Orwell believes in the contingency of history to what appears to be a far less plausible construal of that claim. He slides – or at least seems to slide – from the claim that Orwell believes that nothing guarantees that things will develop one way rather than another to the claim that Orwell believes that the future outcome of history is essentially *out of our hands*. Rorty never explicitly endorses this fatalistic construal of Orwell's view of history; but, as we shall see, Rorty's slanting of the rhetoric of contingency in the direction of such a construal leaves him with a reading of Orwell's novel which manages completely to overlook Orwell's own ethical and political motivations in writing the novel.⁹²

Rorty cites the following remarks from a 1944 newspaper article by Orwell as further evidence of the soundness of his reading of the novel:

The fallacy is to believe that under a dictatorial government you can be free *inside* . . . The greatest mistake is to imagine that the human being is an autonomous individual. The secret freedom which you can supposedly enjoy under a despotic government is nonsense, because your thoughts are never entirely your own. Philosophers, writers, artists, even scientists, not only need encouragement and an audience, they need constant stimulation from other people . . . Take away freedom of speech, and the creative faculties dry up.⁹³

Rorty seizes on this remark because of its emphasis on the importance of *conversation*.⁹⁴ He takes the passage to express a repudiation of the notions of inner freedom and the autonomous individual,⁹⁵ with the aim of making the same sort of point against the Realist that a Rortian critic seeks to make: truths are not discovered, they are forged; and they are forged in communities through a process of conversation. Apart from joint participation in such an ongoing conversation, nothing binds us together: the mere fact of being human does not assure us of a common bond with others.⁹⁶ Rorty goes on to suggest that the 1944 passage should be read in conjunction with the focal passage, and that these two passages taken together can be seen as pointing the way to the reading of Orwell which Rorty himself favors. On the basis of these two passages, Rorty concludes that Orwell's views swing free of the suspect ideas which Orwell's admirers, such as Trilling and Hynes, try to foist on him – such as the idea that truth is independent of what we say and think, the idea that the possibility of freedom and

morality are tied to such an understanding of truth, and the idea that simply by being human we have some common bond.⁹⁷ The real point of the novel, according to Rorty, lies not in a preoccupation with such ideas but rather in a defense of Rortian liberalism – specifically, in a defense of the ideas that cruelty is the worst thing we do and that what matters is freedom rather than truth.

Cruelty certainly does figure prominently in one of the climactic scenes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Through the infliction of much pain and humiliation, O'Brien eventually succeeds in getting Winston Smith to believe that he is speaking the truth when he says "2+2=5". Rorty's discussion of the pivotal scene is structured around an opposition of two ways of understanding what is horrifying about this scene: either the horror derives from O'Brien's success in destroying Winston's hold on the concept of objective truth or the horror derives from the spectacle of O'Brien's practicing his talent for "tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of [his] own choosing."⁹⁸ In the absence of further elaboration, this opposition is bound to seem forced and to beg the question against the proponent of a Realist reading of Orwell⁹⁹: what if (something which can be described as) "undermining someone's hold on the concept of objective truth" is the best way there is of tearing a human mind to pieces? Rorty does elaborate further. But, in developing his reading of the scene, Rorty introduces a new wrinkle into his conception of liberalism which might at first seem only to exacerbate this problem:

[T]he worst thing you can do to somebody is not to make her scream in agony but to use that agony in such a way that even when the agony is over, she cannot reconstitute herself. The idea is to get her to do or say things – and, if possible, believe and desire things, think thoughts – which later she will be unable to cope with having done or thought.¹⁰⁰

The worst thing you can do to somebody is to make her scream in agony in such a way that it has the effect of leaving her unable to reconstitute herself. Beneath the surface one glimpses – both here and throughout Rorty's subsequent discussion – the thought that what is really the worst thing you can do to somebody is (not cruelty *per se*, but rather) to bring it about (by whatever means) that someone is unable to reconstitute herself (cruelty simply being one extremely effective *means* of achieving this end). This thought is unquestionably central to Orwell's novel; but taken by itself it hardly speaks in favor of a Rortian reading of the novel. The question remains: what is the most effective means of rendering someone unable to reconstitute herself? The first sentence of the focal passage appears to suggest a direction in which to look for an answer: "The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential, command." Winston's subsequent thought appears to offer a suggestion about how to defend oneself against the Party's strategy for leaving one unable to reconstitute oneself: "Truisms are true, hold on to that!"

Rorty himself sees the possibility of such a construal of the focal passage. But he can't see a way to separate such a construal from a Realist reading of the novel. This places Rorty in the position of having to argue that the falsity of the propositions of whose truth O'Brien seeks to convince Winston is irrelevant to an understanding of O'Brien's project (of seeking to tear Winston's mind apart and put it together again in a new shape). Rorty insists that on a proper understanding of the pivotal torture scene, it does not matter to the scene that "two plus two is four" happens to be true. All that matters for the scene, according to Rorty, is that Winston believes what he says (when he says "two plus two is four"). The horror of the scene lies entirely in the fact that he

is not permitted to say what he believes without getting hurt. What Orwell cares about is your ability to talk to other people about what seems to you to be true; it doesn't matter in the least for Orwell's purposes whether what is believed is in fact true:

[I]t does not matter whether "two plus two is four" is true, much less whether this is "subjective" or "corresponds to external reality." All that matters 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 to be true, not what is in fact true. If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself. If we are ironic enough about our final vocabularies, and curious enough about everyone else's, we do not have to worry about whether we are in direct contact with moral reality or whether we are blinded by ideology, or whether we are being weakly "relativistic."¹⁰¹

Rorty here confronts "Orwell's admirers" with two options for how to think about what matters in this scene: either (i) what matters is that "2+2=4" is *true* (that is, that what we say is answerable to something beyond what our community holds to be true), or (ii) what matters is *freedom* (that is, the freedom to say 2+2=4 if that is what you believe, or to say 2+2=5, if that is what you believe). Rorty represents the options for reading Orwell as requiring a choice between (i) and (ii) and concludes that Orwell's view is that what matters is freedom and not the answerability of what we say to something outside of what we say. What, Rorty in effect asks, do we lose if we conclude that what destroys Winston is not loss of the concept of objective truth, but rather the loss of his freedom? We lose nothing, Rorty suggests, and we save Orwell from the charge of being needlessly preoccupied with metaphysical issues such as "truth." Winston's real loss – his loss of freedom – is to be traced not to his "losing touch with external reality" but to his loss of overall coherence. I lose my freedom to say and think what I believe, according to Rorty's Orwell, not when I fail to be answerable to something outside of a human community, but when the failure of my beliefs to cohere with each other results in the loss of my ability to justify myself to myself:

The *only* point in making Winston believe that two and two equals five is to break him. Getting somebody to deny a belief for no reason is a first step toward making her incapable of having a self because she becomes incapable of weaving a coherent web of belief and desire. It makes her irrational, in a quite precise sense: She is unable to give a reason for her belief that fits together with her other beliefs. She becomes irrational not in the sense that she has lost contact with reality but in the sense that she can no longer rationalize – no longer justify herself to herself.¹⁰²

Rorty is undoubtedly right that it is Orwell's view that a person becomes incapable of sustaining a self if she becomes systematically unable to give reasons for her beliefs that fit together with her other beliefs. Rorty, however, identifies "constituting oneself as a coherent self" with success in "rationalizing" one's beliefs. Now what does it mean to "rationalize" one's beliefs? Is the criterion of my having successfully rationalized my beliefs the attainment of a web of belief in which all my beliefs in fact stand in rational relations to one another or is it merely that I and my peers take my beliefs to stand in such relations to one another? Much that Rorty says elsewhere suggests that he would reject this as a spurious question. His rejection of such a distinction (between my beliefs' universally seeming and actually being justified) plays a crucial role in his reading of the novel. According to Rorty, at the beginning of their conversation, O'Brien and Winston have equally coherent but distinct sets of beliefs; and, by the end

of their conversation, only one of them – namely, O'Brien – continues to have a coherent set of beliefs. Now it is certainly right that O'Brien does not *experience* any lack of coherence in his web of beliefs. He is in this sense able to justify himself to himself. Does that mean his beliefs are justified? Since Rorty assumes that only someone mired in Realism could be of the view that O'Brien's beliefs remain open to some further criticism, he concludes that Orwell neither wants nor should want to be able to rebut O'Brien's claim to be able to justify himself to himself.

Rorty's argument that the *truth* of "2+2=4" drops out as irrelevant turns on a point that is sound in itself but hardly sufficient to establish his reading of the pivotal scene: namely, that O'Brien could have succeeded in "breaking" Winston without getting him to believe something false. If it were true that O'Brien's only purpose in his treatment of Winston was to achieve a certain "effect," and if it were further true that the desired effect was simply to "break" Winston (by any means possible), then Rorty would be right to conclude:

If there were a *truth*, belief in which would break Winston, making him believe that *truth* would be just as good for O'Brien's purposes . . . The effect would be the same, and the effect is all that matters to O'Brien. Truth and falsity drop out.¹⁰³

The question is whether O'Brien's concern is merely with "breaking" people (in which case truth and falsity can drop out as irrelevant), or whether it is with breaking them in a very particular way, namely in such a way that their minds can subsequently be enslaved. If the aim is to break Winston in such a way that he is able to believe only what the Party wants him to believe, then breaking his hold on the distinction between truth and falsity might not be irrelevant. What does it take to enslave a mind? (One might have thought that the novel as a whole was concerned to explore this question.) It is at this point that Rorty's reading takes a quite surprising turn – one which renders this question utterly otiose. According to Rorty, the ultimate end O'Brien seeks to effect through his torture of Winston is merely to break him: he has no interest in bringing Winston's own ideas into line with those of the Party. This interpretative claim has (what Rorty might regard as) the virtue of making it the case that truth and falsity can drop out as utterly irrelevant to an understanding of the pivotal scene, but only at the apparent cost of rendering much of the action of the latter third of the novel utterly mysterious. If the point is just to "break" Winston, then why does O'Brien spend so much of the final portion of the novel doing things like arguing with Winston whether various historical events happened in the manner in which Winston remembers them to have happened or in the manner in which the Party (currently) decrees that they happened? Why does he spend so much time trying to deprive Winston of his conviction that he once saw a photograph of Rutherford which falsified the Party's official account of Rutherford's demise? Why does O'Brien invest so much energy trying to destroy Winston's ability to arrive at a view of the truth which is independent of the Party's version of the truth? O'Brien seems to take an extraordinarily circuitous route towards his end, if his end is merely to "break" Winston. Rorty's reading threatens to leave O'Brien appearing peculiarly obsessed with getting Winston to assent to falsehoods for no particular reason. Rorty sees the problem this poses for his reading and draws the only conclusion he consistently can in light of his interpretative claim: the obsession with getting Winston to assent to falsehoods is simply O'Brien's obsession and has nothing to do with O'Brien's own attachment to the beliefs of whose truth he tries to convince Winston (let alone, with the novel as a

whole seeking to make some point about the importance of “the possibility of truth”). According to Rorty’s reading, O’Brien just enjoys torturing people in this particular way. He has very perverse tastes with regard to the kinds of suffering he most enjoys causing and he likes to find ways to draw the process out. His aim is to afford himself the pleasure of contemplating the spectacle of the particular sort of mental pain which, through his interrogation, he induces in Winston:

The point of breaking Winston is not to bring Winston into line with the Party’s ideas. The Inner Party is not torturing Winston because it is afraid of a revolution . . . It is torturing Winston for the sake of causing Winston pain, and thereby increasing the pleasure of its members, particularly O’Brien. The only object of O’Brien’s intensive seven-year-long study of Winston was to make possible the rich, complicated, delicate, absorbing spectacle of mental pain which Winston would eventually provide . . . [T]he last third of *1984* is about O’Brien, not about Winston – about torturing, not about being tortured.¹⁰⁴

This passage is a breathtaking example of how far Rorty is prepared to go in his reading of the novel to minimize the significance of the constant occurrence throughout the novel of vocabulary such as “truth,” “reality,” and “objectivity.” The only way Rorty sees to accord such vocabulary pride of place in a reading of the novel is to opt for a Realist reading. To steer as clear of such a reading as possible, Rorty goes to the length of construing this vocabulary instead as belonging to O’Brien’s arsenal of instruments of torture. This leads Rorty to embrace the following exegetically stunning conclusion: the concern of the last third of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which this vocabulary figures so prominently, has nothing to do with the concepts denoted by this vocabulary.¹⁰⁵ The last third of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is concerned solely with O’Brien and his pleasure in torturing. Thus Rorty sums up his view of the novel as follows: “I think that the fantasy of endless torture . . . is essential to *1984*, and that the question about ‘the possibility of truth’ is a red herring.”¹⁰⁶

VII. Orwell on Totalitarianism

Orwell summed up what he “really meant to do” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by saying that his aim was to display “the *intellectual* implications of *totalitarianism*.”¹⁰⁷ Properly understood, this remark expresses the aim of the novel quite precisely. The two words I have italicized in the quotation, however, are liable to misinterpretation when viewed through Rortian spectacles. A comment on each is in order.

“Intellectual” for Orwell does not mean what “philosophical” does for Rorty. Its reference is not restricted to “fruitless philosophical controversies” of the sort which Rorty identifies, above all, with metaphysical debates concerning Realism. The intellectual implications of X, for Orwell, have to do with X’s implications for the possibility of carrying on an intellectual life.¹⁰⁸ No commitment to highflown metaphysical doctrines is presupposed by such an employment of the locution ‘intellectual implications.’ Something which renders the pursuit of poetry, chemistry or archaeology impossible is something which has negative intellectual implications. Conversely, something has positive intellectual implications if it enables such pursuits to flourish. One can in this sense speak of the intellectual implications of allocating national resources, of passing a law, or of starting a war. What interests Orwell, in much of his work, is the most fundamental way in which something can have negative intellectual

implications: namely by undermining the conditions of the possibility of having an intellectual life altogether. It is “intellectual implications” of this latter sort with which Orwell is, above all, concerned in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. What is harder for a reader of Orwell (such a Rorty or Van Inwagen) who is obsessed with Realism to see is that no highflown metaphysics is required to understand the sorts of things which Orwell counts, in this latter sense, as conditions of the possibility of having an intellectual life.¹⁰⁹

The central topic of Orwell’s novel – the abolition of the conditions of the possibility of having an intellectual life – fails to come into view on Rorty’s reading. This happens for two reasons. First, the vocabulary Orwell employs to characterize many of these conditions is vocabulary which Rorty supposes only someone with Realist motivations would want to put to (any but a merely rhetorical) use. (Rorty therefore, as we saw in section VI, tries to minimize the significance of the numerous passages in the novel in which such vocabulary occurs.) Second, the sorts of tactics which Orwell sees as directed towards undermining these conditions are not ones which Rorty is apt to associate with what goes on in “philosophically sophisticated debate” precisely because such tactics are, as they figure in Orwell’s descriptions of them, highly effective. Rorty tends to picture such debate as an intrinsically barren and ineffectual activity. Orwell, however, is evidently concerned with tactics which can wreak profound and very concrete transformations in our social, cultural and political lives. This encourages Rorty to conclude that Orwell’s concern in the novel must lie not with sophisticated philosophy, but rather with something entirely unrelated: matters of politics and history – matters such as redescribing Soviet Russia and illustrating the contingency of our practices. But, without additional assumptions, one cannot move – as Rorty tends to – from the observation that certain tactics are able to effect concrete changes in our lives to the conclusion that these tactics must therefore not employ the resources of philosophically sophisticated theory. Orwell thinks that some of the most far-reaching transformations of human social, cultural and political life can be brought about only with the aid of a totalitarian tactical employment of sophisticated forms of philosophical pseudotheorizing.¹¹⁰

The following remark structures Rorty’s entire view of the options for how to read Orwell: “Somewhere we all know that philosophically sophisticated debate . . . is pretty harmless stuff.”¹¹¹ The argumentative relevance of this observation to Rorty’s discussion of Orwell lies in the implicit assumption that only a Realist would think that such debates are not “pretty harmless stuff” (and Orwell is no Realist). But what Orwell’s work brings out so powerfully is that a stretch of theorizing which, in one context, has a “merely philosophical” import can, in another context, be tied to modes of thought and action which can have substantial and harmful effects on human lives. One therefore cannot tell whether some stretch of philosophically sophisticated theorizing is pretty harmless stuff without looking (a) to the *uses* to which that theorizing is put, (b) to the institutional and political contexts within which those uses proceed, and (c) to the practical consequences that those uses prove to have in those contexts.¹¹² (If that isn’t a pragmatist point, I don’t know what pragmatism is.) When Rorty comes across the sort of vocabulary that Realists are fond of employing, he assumes that nothing of genuine consequence could possibly be at issue. Rorty’s obsession with Realism thus leaves him unable to identify the concerns which Orwell calls upon such vocabulary to express, even though Orwell himself takes those concerns to be internally related to the very matters which Rorty urges we all should be concerned with (for instance, the prevention of cruelty, the preservation of freedom, and the promotion of conditions under which a liberal polity can flourish).

Even if it were generally true – as Rorty’s contends – that “philosophically sophisticated debate . . . is pretty harmless stuff”, the question which Orwell’s novel forces upon its reader is whether philosophical theory remains harmless when it is exercised in certain institutional settings, backed up by state power and ruthlessly directed towards ideological ends. Consider the following five claims: (i) our social practices do not require metaphysical justification, (ii) we would be better off if we weaned ourselves of the belief that our practices do require such justification, (iii) most contemporary professional philosophical debate about the sort of justification our practices putatively require is pretty harmless stuff, (iv) in certain institutional and political contexts, the belief that our practices do and should rest upon a philosophical foundation is anything but harmless in its effects, (v) the politically responsible intellectual should attend to the negative intellectual implications that this latter sort of recourse to philosophical theorizing can have. Rorty’s discussion of Orwell proceeds as if these five claims were incompatible. Rorty argues as if an acknowledgment of the truth of (iv) or (v) would somehow undercut the truth of (i)–(iii). This blind spot leaves him utterly unable to locate one of the central preoccupations of Orwell’s work: the totalitarian ends to which the labor of intellectuals can be put. Rorty’s work is, of course, animated by a concern to urge (i)–(iii). Rorty insists that Orwell is not much interested in philosophy, yet his reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* leaves one with the impression that its author must share Rorty’s concerns. But it is hard to imagine that Orwell would have much interest in a project describable in the terms which Rorty often uses to describe his own project: one of urging people (who mostly work in the literature and philosophy departments of universities) to cease engaging in forms of theorizing which are inherently ineffectual and harmless.¹¹³ The kind of critique of the theorizing of intellectuals that Orwell is concerned to mount only has application to forms of theorizing which have potentially harmful practical effects.¹¹⁴ This raises the question whether the theorizing of a Rorty – however harmless it may be in *his* hands – might be viewed by Orwell as a kind of theorizing which, once it leaves Rorty’s hands (and falls into the hands of, say, an O’Brien), can have harmful practical effects.

We come now to the second of the words I italicized in the quotation from Orwell with which this section of the paper began. Rorty is not alone among readers of Orwell in assuming that the term “totalitarian” as it figures in his writing should be understood to denote a certain form of government. This exegetical assumption encourages the following gloss of that quotation (in which Orwell sums what he “really meant to do” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*): the primary aim of the novel is to say something about the form of government found in Soviet Russia.¹¹⁵ As we have seen, this assumption structures Rorty’s reading of the first two-thirds of the novel. But the assumption is mistaken. It vastly underestimates the scope of the concept *totalitarian* as it figures in Orwell’s writing.¹¹⁶ The term ‘totalitarianism’, as Orwell uses it, refers to (both practical and intellectual) tactics for “abolishing freedom of thought to an extent unheard of in any previous age”¹¹⁷ – tactics which are so called because they aim to achieve *total* control of human thought, feeling and action. Orwell’s use of the term covers forms of government, but it also covers more pervasive and local sorts of practices and institutions (various journalistic practices are among his favorite examples¹¹⁸). Above all, however, Orwell applies the term to *the ideas of intellectuals* – and not just to ideas in currency in (what American journalists are apt to call) “totalitarian countries,” but to ideas found throughout the modern industrial world.¹¹⁹

Orwell’s novel is as much concerned with describing Capitalist Britain as it is with “re-describing” Soviet Russia.¹²⁰ The point of the re-description is lost on anyone who

fails to grasp that *the triumph of certain ideas* represents a prospect that the author of this novel believes to be possible anywhere, thinks is avoidable, and finds really scary:

I do not believe that the kind of society that I describe [in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*] necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe . . . that something resembling it *could* arrive. I believe . . . that totalitarian ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, and I have tried to draw these ideas out to their logical consequences. The scene of the book is laid in Britain in order to emphasize that the English-speaking races are not innately better than anyone else and that totalitarianism, *if not fought against*, could triumph anywhere.¹²¹

Reading this passage together with the one quoted at the beginning of this section, Orwell can be heard making four observations about the novel here: (i) the aim of the novel is to display the intellectual implications of certain ideas, (ii) these ideas have taken root in the minds of intellectuals everywhere, (iii) the novel displays their implications drawing them out to their logical consequences, (iv) the point of doing this is (not to encourage a fatalistic view of history,¹²² but rather) to show that these ideas could triumph anywhere, *if not fought against*.¹²³

As Orwell defines the term, “totalitarianism” refers to the abolition of the freedom of thought in a positive as well as a negative respect: the aim of totalitarian intellectual tactics is not only negatively to constrain but also positively to shape the possibilities of thought available to those to whom they are directed.¹²⁴ It is in his discussions of the positive control that totalitarianism exerts on thought that one particularly encounters Orwell saying things of a sort that Rorty’s Orwell would never want to say:

[Totalitarianism’s] control of thought is not only negative, but positive. It not only forbids you to express – even to think – certain thoughts, but it dictates what you *shall* think, it creates an ideology for you, it tries to govern your emotional life as well as setting up a code of conduct. And as far as possible it isolates you from the outside world, it shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison.¹²⁵

Totalitarianism seeks to isolate you from the outside world. This does not mean that the standards of comparison which totalitarianism isolates you from are those of your community of preferred conversation-partners. On the contrary, the problem with totalitarian ideas, according to Orwell, is that they aim to bring it about that the sole available standards of comparison are precisely those which Rorty’s Orwell urges are the only ones you should ever want: the standards supplied by the community of “comrades” with whom you express your solidarity. The standards of comparison of which you are deprived by totalitarian ideas, according to Orwell, are the sorts of standards which are only available to someone whose thought is answerable to the facts themselves. Orwell, when he says things like “the facts exist and are more or less discoverable,”¹²⁶ is not expressing a commitment to Realism. What other sort of reason could there be for saying things like this?

Orwell’s most proximate aims are to warn of the dangers of totalitarianism and to illuminate the cultural, social and political conditions under which freedom and justice can flourish. But why does the prosecution of such aims lead him to employ vocabulary which triggers Rorty’s philosophical alarms? Why doesn’t he just talk in a sober and sensible fashion about the sorts of freedoms which concentration camps and secret police forces deprive us of? Because he thinks that would be to concentrate only on the most advanced and flagrant symptoms of a malady that is most effectively treated in its less advanced stages. Much of his work is concerned with identifying the early

symptoms of the malady. He identifies these with those practices and institutions in our society which cultivate a hostility to “truthfulness.”¹²⁷ Concentration camps and secret police forces are peripheral to the set of cultural, social, and political phenomena which he wants to identify as totalitarian. What is integral is a kind of “organized lying” which, if the logical consequences of its inherent tendencies were fully drawn out, could be seen to “demand a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth.”¹²⁸ *This* is what Orwell finds really inimical to the ideals of liberalism in totalitarianism. Totalitarian modes of thought do, in Orwell’s view, inevitably lead to the proliferation of atrocities. And still more frightening to Orwell than the forms of cruelty to which they give rise is a further (what Orwell calls) “*intellectual* implication” of totalitarian modes of thought: namely, the undermining of the possibility of your leading a life in which you are free to think your own thoughts – to have your own take on whether, for instance, something is an atrocity or not.¹²⁹ But neither cruelty nor loss of freedom is what Orwell considers to be “the really frightening thing about totalitarianism” – they are, in his view, merely inevitable consequences of it.¹³⁰ “The really frightening thing about totalitarianism is not that it commits ‘atrocities’ but that it attacks the concept of objective truth.”¹³¹

In order to see what Orwell takes “the really frightening thing about totalitarianism” to be, it helps to notice how the central themes of his novel emerge directly from his writings about his experiences as a soldier in the Spanish Civil War:

I have little direct evidence about the atrocities in the Spanish civil war, I know that some were committed by the Republicans, and far more . . . by the Fascists. But what impressed me then, and has impressed me ever since, is that atrocities are believed in or disbelieved in solely on grounds of political predilection. Everyone believes in the atrocities of the enemy and disbelieves in those of his own side, without ever bothering to examine the evidence.¹³²

“The really frightening thing about totalitarianism” is not just that it encourages someone self-consciously to misdescribe an event as, say, an atrocity. (There is nothing remarkable or unprecedented about the phenomenon of willful misdescription. The use of language to tell lies has been with us as long as language itself has.) Nor is it just that it encourages someone unwittingly to misdescribe the facts. (Inaccurate reports of events can be found in any newspaper.) Someone who self-consciously lies about whether something is an X or who inadvertently misdescribes something as an X does not thereby damage or eviscerate his capacity to go on in other contexts and correctly apply the concept on his own. Orwell, however, is precisely concerned to draw attention here to a process of belief-formation which does loosen our hold on certain concepts. The above passage is concerned with a state of affairs in which atrocities are believed in or disbelieved in solely on grounds of political predilection, without ever bothering to examine the evidence.¹³³ But exactly wherein lies the frightening aspect of this? Is it that, if our beliefs about whether an atrocity has been committed are not sensitive to evidence, then the norms for the application of the concept *atrocitiy* cease to guide the application of the concept? But not all cases of this sort are frightening. There are cases, for example, in which we more or less self-consciously desist in our use of a piece of vocabulary because we realize that our use of it is no longer guided by any clear criteria.¹³⁴ In such cases, we realize we are no longer able to express determinately meaningful thoughts employing the vocabulary in question. There are other sorts of cases, in which we continue to employ a piece of vocabulary but fail to

realize that we no longer determinately mean anything by it.¹³⁵ This latter sort of case is admittedly quite unsettling, but it is not of the sort which Orwell finds really frightening.

The really frightening case is one in which you do retain your original grasp of the concepts in question and continue to use them to form perfectly determinate beliefs about happenings in the world, yet the mechanisms by means of which those beliefs are formed are no longer guided by the happenings which form the subjects of those beliefs. Orwell writes:

Early in life I had noticed that no event is ever correctly reported in a newspaper, but in Spain, for the first time, I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie.¹³⁶ I saw great battles reported where there had been no fighting, and complete silence where hundreds of men had been killed. I saw troops who had fought bravely denounced as cowards and traitors, and others who had never seen a shot fired hailed as the heroes of imaginary victories; and I saw newspapers in London retailing these lies and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures over events that had never happened . . . This kind of thing is frightening to me, because it gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world.¹³⁷

During the Spanish Civil War, intellectuals in Britain held certain beliefs about what was happening in Spain and attached great importance to the happenings which formed the subjects of those beliefs. Many acted on those beliefs; some died acting on them. The totalitarian dimension of the situation was a function, on the one hand, of the loyal determination of these intellectuals to believe only accounts accredited by their respective political parties and, on the other hand, of the unwavering determination of their parties to admit only politically expedient accounts of what was happening in Spain. The following situation was therefore in place: the beliefs of these intellectuals were answerable solely to the standards by means of which a prevailing consensus was reached within their party, but the means by which that consensus was reached was not answerable to *what was happening in Spain*. So the beliefs of British intellectuals concerning what was happening in Spain bore no relation to what was happening in Spain, not even the relationship which is implied in an ordinary lie. What's more, by the time the war came to an end, the means by which anyone might be able to discover what had happened in Spain were, in all likelihood, forever lost.¹³⁸

The situation of those intellectuals is the sort of thing Orwell has in mind when he says "the concept of objective truth begins to fade out of the world" – that is, a situation in which belief-formation is subject to the following three conditions: (a) the resulting beliefs are answerable solely to the mechanisms through which consensus is achieved within a certain community, (b) those mechanisms yield beliefs about the facts that do not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship implied in an ordinary lie, (c) systematic means are employed by the community to render access to any other standard unavailable. I will henceforth refer to such a state of affairs – in which the formation of someone's beliefs with respect to some subject matter is subject to these three conditions – as "a totalitarian scenario"; and I will henceforth refer to a state of affairs in which the formation of someone's beliefs about a subject matter is not (systematically insensitive to the subject matter of those beliefs because) subject to these three conditions as a non-totalitarian scenario.¹³⁹ *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an attempt to depict a scenario which is totalitarian with respect to an extraordinarily wide class of beliefs – a world in which the formation of as many of a person's beliefs are

subject to the above three conditions as can possibly be the case.¹⁴⁰ It is about the possibility of a state of affairs in which the concept of objective truth has faded as far out of someone's world as it conceivably can.¹⁴¹ The attempt to depict such a state of affairs is one of the central ways in which Orwell's novel seeks "to draw out the logical consequences" inherent in certain modes of thought – modes of thought which Orwell found to be prevalent among British intellectuals during the 1930s.

The exploration of the existential consequences of trying to embrace the Party's doctrine of the mutability of the past represents *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* most resolute effort to draw out these logical consequences. The Party aims to ensure that the concept of objective truth completely ceases to apply to the way history is recorded or remembered:

The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. "Who controls the past," ran the Party slogan, "controls the future: who controls the present controls the past." And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories of your own memory. "Reality control," they called it.¹⁴²

Numerous passages in the novel characterize the purpose of "reality control" as "the denial of objective reality"; and some equate such a denial with the denial of "objective truth."¹⁴³ Rorty asks us to view all such talk in the novel as pertinent only to an understanding of the methods of torture which allow O'Brien to get his kicks: "[T]he fantasy of endless torture . . . is essential to *1984*, . . . the question about 'the possibility of truth' is a red herring."¹⁴⁴ But Winston speaks for Orwell when he reflects: "If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death."¹⁴⁵ Glimpses into the possibility of such a nightmare scenario figure prominently in Orwell's writings about the Spanish Civil War:

I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history *could* be truthfully written. In the past people deliberately lied, or they unconsciously coloured what they wrote, or they struggled after the truth, well knowing that they must make many mistakes; but in each case they believed that "the facts" existed and were more or less discoverable. And in practice there was always a considerable body of fact which would have been agreed to by almost everyone. If you look up the history of the last war [that is, World War I] in, for instance, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, you will find that a respectable amount of the material is drawn from German sources. A British and a German historian would disagree deeply on many things, even on fundamentals, but there would still be that body of, as it were, neutral fact on which neither would seriously challenge the other. It is just this common basis of agreement . . . that totalitarianism destroys . . . The implied objective of this line of thought is a nightmare world in which the Leader, or some ruling clique, controls not only the future but *the past*. If the Leader says of such and such an event, "It never happened" – well, it never happened. If he says that two and two are five – well, two and two are five. This prospect frightens me much more than bombs – and after our experiences of the last few years that is not a frivolous statement.¹⁴⁶

When Orwell says here that “in practice there was always a considerable body of fact which would have been agreed to by almost everyone,” his point is not that there was some preferred vocabulary upon which all historical investigators are fated to converge. He attributes to the investigators in question nothing more than a shared interest in establishing what actually happened during World War I, a shared set of norms for the employment of concepts for describing what happened, and the shared belief that there was a considerable body of *mundane* facts concerning which near-universal agreement could be attained (even between investigators of radically different political predilections). Yet his point here is not the mere Rortian point that a consensus was attainable; it is the Orwellian point that that consensus was not answerable solely to the demand to achieve consensus within a certain community. The historical research of these investigators did not proceed within the confines of a totalitarian scenario (that is the formation of their beliefs was not subject to the three conditions mentioned above as constitutive of a totalitarian scenario). The formation of their beliefs was sensitive to the demand to achieve consensus with their comrades in arms, but was not so beholden to that demand as to be rendered insensitive to any other. Their beliefs were answerable to a body of fact (records, memories, the existence of graveyards, etc.) which placed constraints on what one could claim: constraints which were equally acknowledged and respected by German and English historians alike. The numerous references in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to the Party’s “denial of objective truth,” its “denial of the validity of experience,” and its “denial of the very existence of external reality” are connected by Orwell in this passage with the loss of “a considerable body of fact which would have been agreed to by almost everyone.” In the world of the novel this loss is reflected not in the absence of a prevailing consensus (about something which even in that world gets called “the facts”) but in the loss of the “considerable body of [actual] fact” to which Orwell here refers and to which that consensus should be answerable. When Orwell says the prospect of this loss frightens him much more than bombs, this is not a testament to his insensitivity to cruelty. This passage was written in London in 1942 after the author had witnessed the cruelty inflicted through the bombing of a defenseless urban civilian population. It was the most devastating example of cruelty which Orwell, in his not uneventful life, had witnessed first-hand. The example is chosen in order to anticipate the charge that the author’s conclusion is a “frivolous statement” – to make it clear that the author means to be taking the full measure of the horror of cruelty in concluding that cruelty is not the worst thing we do.

The above passage concludes with the claim that “the implied objective” of a totalitarian line of thought is “a nightmare world”: a world in which if the Leader says of such and such an event, “It never happened” – well, it never happened; and if he says that two and two is five – well, two and two is five. This passage clearly anticipates the topic (and, to some extent, the exact wording) of the focal passage. The author of the above passage does not intend the truth of “ $2+2=4$ ” to drop out as irrelevant to an understanding of the point of the passage. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an attempt to depict a world which comes as close as any can to being one in which the prospect described in this passage obtains. Two paragraphs before the focal passage in the novel we find this:

It was as though some huge force were pressing down upon you – something that penetrated into your skull, battering against your brain, frightening you out of your beliefs, persuading you almost, to deny the evidence of your senses. In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable

that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it. Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy . . . And what was terrifying was not that they would kill you for thinking otherwise, but that they might be right. For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Or that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable – what then?¹⁴⁷

What does it mean to say “not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by [the Party’s] philosophy”? It means that one is asked to form one’s beliefs about how things are in a manner that is no longer beholden to how things are. There are two sorts of examples of truth-claims which figure centrally in this passage (and in the focal passage and, indeed, throughout the novel): perceptual judgments (claims based on “the evidence of your senses”) and elementary arithmetical judgments (two and two make four). Why do these two sorts of examples recur throughout the novel? Once a member of our linguistic community has become competent in the application of the relevant (perceptual or arithmetic) concepts, these are the sorts of judgments the truth or falsity of which can easily be assessed by the individual *on her own*. Once having acquired the relevant concepts and having fully mastered them, her ability to arrive at a verdict on such questions does not wait upon the development of a consensus within her community on such questions. (It is this ability on the part of the individual – to arrive at a view of the facts which does not depend on a knowledge of the Party’s preferred version of the facts – that the focal passage announces must be undone: “The Party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears. It was their final, most essential, command.”) Indeed, when the verdict concerns, say, something you saw and no one else saw, you have excellent *prima facie* reasons to trust your own view of what happened over, say, a conflicting version which appears in the newspaper.¹⁴⁸ It is this capacity of individuals to assess the truth of claims on their own that threatens the absolute hegemony of the Party over their minds. (If the freedom to exercise this capacity is granted, then – as the focal passage says – all else follows.) The “mind itself” is fully “controllable” only when the Party’s version of the facts (for instance, that such-and-such never happened) is taken as true even in the face of contradictory testimony from one’s own senses (for instance, one’s vivid memory that one saw such-and-such happen) and against the grain of the norms built into the concepts employed in the formulation of the Party’s version of the facts (for instance, norms that prescribe such things as that this is the sort of case we call a case of “such-and-such,” that this is the sort of thing we call “adding” one number to another number, etc.).

Recall now Rorty’s reading of the focal passage: O’Brien’s object is merely to deprive Winston of the freedom to believe what he wants to believe – the truth of what Winston happens to believe drops out as irrelevant; O’Brien forces Winston to believe “two and two make five” because Winston *happens* to believe that “two and two make four” and Winston *happens* to have attached great importance to this belief. But what the novel says (just prior to the focal passage) is: “in the end” the moment would come when “the Party would announce that two and two made five” because “the logic of their position demanded it.” “Two and two make four” figures as a central example of something the truth of which must be denied by the Party because of the kind of claim that it is: one that is true and moreover easily seen to be true by anyone competent in our practices of claim-making.¹⁴⁹ The novel is here working out one of the “intellectual

implications of totalitarianism.” The Party’s practice of wholesale “organized lying” is only sustainable if, in the end, it deprives its members of their ability to autonomously assess the credentials of a claim – any claim: even a straightforward perceptual or arithmetic claim. The reason claims such as “two and two make four” and “I see a photograph before me” figure prominently as examples is (not just because Winston happens to believe them to be true and happens to attach importance to them, but rather) because they are the sorts of claims that can be known to be true by a Winston and, once known to be true, will sometimes inevitably fail to cohere with the rest of the Party’s version of the facts.¹⁵⁰ The criteria for determining the truth-value of such claims do not require that prior to arriving at a judgment on such matters one consult the latest bulletin from the Party – unless, that is, the ground-rules for attaining competence in the community’s practices of claim-making are radically altered from any practices for making such claims with which we are familiar. This raises the question: does the community described in Orwell’s novel have a coherent alternative set of ground-rules for making such claims?

A central point of the novel is to suggest that the ultimate “logic of the Party’s position” demands that the ground-rules for the application of concepts and the formation of beliefs have at least apparently been altered from those with which we are familiar. But it would be a tremendous misunderstanding of Orwell’s novel to think that, in suggesting this, his aim is merely to describe a set of practices of claim-making which happen to differ radically from our own, and that his point in doing so is to urge that, apart from our culturally and historically provincial predilections, there is nothing that entitles us to prefer our practices to these possible future practices – that there is nothing outside these possible future practices that condemns them. Orwell’s point is that “the denial of external reality” demanded by the logic of the Party’s position can only be approximated to the extent that members of a community learn to cultivate a tremendously thorough-going form of self-deception – so thorough-going that they succeed in hiding from themselves that “the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind [their] back[s].”¹⁵¹ If one were to try to formulate the sort of ground-rules which the logic of the Party’s position implicitly demands, one might, on a hasty first try, arrive at something like the following three-part recipe for assessing the truth-values of claims:

- (a) “Such-and-such” is true if and only if such-and-such.
- (b) Whatever the Party says is true is true, and anything the Party has a reason to want to be true is true.
- (c) In all cases in which (a) and (b) yield conflicting judgments, (b) takes priority over (a).

This says that we should only judge a claim to be true in accordance with (a) in those cases in which (a) and (b) do not conflict; in those cases in which they do conflict, we should not judge in accordance with (a). But now how are we to understand this recipe? Does it articulate (i) a conception of (what Orwell calls) truth or (ii) merely a revision in the rules for the employment of a piece of vocabulary (that is, ‘true’),¹⁵² so that it no longer univocally means what Orwell means by the word when, for instance, he says that “however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind your back”?¹⁵³ Understood either way, the recipe hardly succeeds in capturing

what the Party wants of its members. Let's consider (ii) first. When O'Brien asks Winston how many fingers he is holding up, he would hardly be satisfied with the reply "You are holding up four fingers, but it is not *true* that you are holding up four fingers." He doesn't merely want Winston to *utter the words* "It is true that you are presently holding up five fingers" and (to desist in uttering the words "It is true that you are presently holding up four fingers"), while continuing, all along to believe that O'Brien is holding up four fingers (as could be easily arranged, if, for instance, it was stipulated that the usual meaning of 'true' was to be suspended and that 'true' should here be taken to mean "it is not the case"). O'Brien doesn't just want Winston to acquiesce in the utterance of certain sequences of words; he wants to alter Winston's *beliefs*. This brings us to (i). Rorty might want to object that (i) involves a red herring: namely, the whole idea of what Orwell calls "truth" (when he says things like "however much you deny the truth, the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind your back").¹⁵⁴ In the service of avoiding this philosophically suspicious bit of a vocabulary, one might attempt to reformulate the above three-part recipe as a series of imperatives (about what one should believe when) which dispenses with any explicit mention of the offending vocabulary:

- (a) Believe "such-and-such" when the pre-Ingsoe criteria for believing that such-and-such are satisfied (if, for instance, relying upon the testimony of your senses, you can plainly see that such-and-such, etc.).
- (b) If the Party says or has reason to want you to believe "such-and-such", then believe such-and-such.
- (c) In all cases in which (a) and (b) conflict, (b) takes priority over (a).

But this still fails fully to capture what the Party wants of its members. For the Party is not prepared to acknowledge that there are cases in which (a) and (b) conflict. When O'Brien asks Winston how many fingers he is holding up, he does not want Winston merely to believe that there are five fingers in front of him because the Party happens to want him to believe that there are five fingers in front of him. He doesn't want Winston simply to overrule the testimony of his senses in favor of what the Party tells him. Nor does O'Brien want Winston, in concluding that there are five fingers in front of him, to be adopting a (post-Ingsoe) wholesale revision in our concepts (of "see," "five," "fingers," etc). In his conversations with Winston, O'Brien does not mean to be engaged in a process of teaching him new concepts and hence, in effect, a whole new language. He doesn't merely want Winston to believe something which can be expressed in Newspeak by saying "I see five fingers," but which has a completely different meaning from its homophonic English counterpart; he wants Winston to believe *that there are five fingers* in front of him. O'Brien wants Winston to look at him holding up four fingers and, if the Party wants him to believe that there are five fingers, to *see* five fingers in front of him, and to have the ground of his belief that there are five fingers in front of him be (not that the Party wants him to believe that, but) that he *sees* five fingers. The Party's ambition is therefore neither so modest as merely to want to change the ground-rules for how to use certain philosophically freighted portions of our vocabulary (for instance, "truth," "reality," etc.) nor so ambitious as to want to effect a wholesale revision of the ground-rules which constitute our entire battery of concepts, completely jettisoning our familiar norms for making claims. The

Party wants us to believe that we are retaining our present ground-rules for employing concepts while also always believing that the Party's version of the facts is true. The ways in which the Party wants its members to think and judge cannot be captured in terms of a coherent set of ground-rules for the application of concepts: Party members are supposed simultaneously to abide by our ordinary norms for making claims and not to abide by those norms.

The Party wants its members to be able to think and judge – which requires that they retain their mastery of our familiar norms for the application of concepts – but never to think or judge in a manner which conflicts with what the Party wants them to think or judge; yet, all along, while thinking and judging in accordance with the Party's decrees, to believe that they are never arriving at a judgment about how things are which conflicts with a judgment at which someone who had no knowledge of the Party's decrees, but who simply abided by the norms built into our concepts, might have occasion to arrive. The Party therefore places an incoherent set of demands upon its members, the incoherence of which must be rendered *invisible* if those demands are to serve the Party's purposes.¹⁵⁵ How is this invisibility to be achieved? The rules for the formation of beliefs that Party members are in fact required to follow and the rules that they are asked to *believe* that they are following cannot be the same.¹⁵⁶ How is it possible for Party members successfully to follow a set of rules that they never believe they are following? By practicing “reality control” and “doublethink.” Party members are expected to “adjust” their beliefs about reality in accordance with the Party's decrees but then are asked to believe that the justification for their beliefs lies (not merely in their accord with the Party's decrees, but) in their accord with the facts. Party members are asked, for example, not only to believe that such-and-such happened in the past (if the Party presently decrees that this is what happened), but to adjust their memories of the past so that they now remember such-and-such as having happened in the past and believe that the ground of their present belief that such-and-such happened in the past is (not the Party's present decree to that effect, but rather) their present memory of its having happened in the past.¹⁵⁷ This is why the novel insists that reality control can be successfully practiced only by someone who has become adept in the practice of doublethink. In order to be a Party member, one therefore needs “to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies . . . [O]ne must be able to dislocate the sense of reality.”¹⁵⁸ One must not only adjust one's beliefs about reality, but one must also be proficient in the art of forgetting that one continuously so adjusts them.¹⁵⁹ Rorty occasionally talks as if our practices and the “practices” of the future totalitarian society depicted in Orwell's novel represented a pair of equally viable alternatives (with the interesting difference that, as it happens, talk of “objective reality” is frowned upon in the future “practices” and all that is thereby lost is a proclivity to engage in fruitless metaphysical controversies). But this is not right. There are overwhelming grounds – as Winston's reflections all too clearly illustrate – from *within* their “practices” for preferring our practices to theirs.¹⁶⁰ What Orwell calls “the denial of objective reality” is a denial which can be at most partially sustained and then only within a set of “practices” regulated by what Orwell calls a “schizophrenic system of thought”¹⁶¹ – a system that simultaneously respects and disregards our present norms for making claims: claims which are answerable (not only to our peers, but also) to how things are.¹⁶²

When Rorty says that (for the purposes of understanding Orwell's novel) “the question about ‘the possibility of truth’ is a red herring,”¹⁶³ there are two things to

which one might take “the possibility of truth” to refer: (a) the possibility of the beliefs of the members of a community concerning how things are being answerable to how things are, (b) the possibility of the members of a community being honest and forthright when they communicate their beliefs to one another. Neither is a red herring. The first possibility is the one that reality control aims to subvert; the second is the one that doublethink aims to subvert.¹⁶⁴ What the novel shows is that the two possibilities are interrelated – that (a) and (b) mutually depend upon one another – and thus that the practices of reality control and doublethink presuppose and mutually reinforce each other. If the Party knowingly falsifies every form of evidence and if every Party member with first-hand knowledge of such acts of falsification withholds his knowledge of such acts, then the beliefs of members of the Party will no longer bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship implied in an ordinary lie. But it is impossible completely to insulate a Party member from reality. As the novel illustrates over and over again, reality rears its ideologically uncooperative head (for instance, Big Brother’s predictions turn out to be false, etc.). Hence “reality control” must be practiced: one’s beliefs about reality must be “adjusted.” One can continuously adjust one’s beliefs to reality in the manner the Party requires of its members only if one cultivates the vice of dishonesty to such a degree that dishonesty and self-deception become second nature. We are now in a position to see the extraordinary perversity of Rorty’s claim that Orwell understood himself to be doing the same *kind* of thing as his “opponents” – for instance, the apologists for Stalin – were doing. One of Orwell’s aims is to bring out how the practice of his “opponents” (that is, the producers of what Orwell calls “propaganda,” or, as Rorty prefers to say, “persuasive redescriptions of events”) presupposes the systematic cultivation of reality control and doublethink – arts of deception, conscious and unconscious, practiced on oneself and others. It is a condition of being able to practice the unconscious forms of such arts that one lack the ability to characterize accurately what one is doing while one is doing it. It is therefore a condition of Orwell’s achieving the sort of description of the vices of his “opponents” to which he aspires that he himself, in offering such a description, not exemplify those vices – that he not be doing the same kind of thing as his “opponents.”

Rorty regards the topic of “the individual’s control over her own mind” both as important to Orwell’s novel and as important, and he regards the topic of “the concept of objective truth” both as irrelevant to an understanding of the novel and as irrelevant to anything we should care about. He thinks that only a Realist could imagine that the former topic could somehow depend on (something describable employing the vocabulary of) the latter. But Orwell’s interests are not those of the Realist; he employs the expression “the concept of objective truth” in the context of seeking to distinguish between totalitarian and non-totalitarian scenarios. When Orwell seeks to explore this distinction he draws on forms of words (such as “a neutral body of fact providing a common basis of agreement”) of a sort which Rorty tends either to pounce upon as evidence of a commitment to Realism or (in a misguided attempt at charity to Orwell) to overlook as mere rhetoric. This leaves Rorty unable to read Orwell.¹⁶⁵

VIII. Rortian Totalitarianism

The aim of this section of the paper is to offer a redescription of Rortianism, as it might appear to someone with Orwell’s preoccupations. For Orwell, the distinction

between totalitarian and non-totalitarian scenarios is an important distinction to be able to draw. It is by no means an idle or merely metaphysical distinction. To inhabit one of these scenarios rather than the other is to inhabit one of two very different worlds. The distinction does not trade on a tacit reliance on Realist metaphysics. Yet Rorty's way of rejecting Realism would, I think, strike Orwell as depriving him of his preferred resources for drawing this distinction.

Passages such as the following recur throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

Being in a minority, even a minority of one, did not make you mad. There was truth and untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad . . . [Winston] fell asleep murmuring "Sanity is not statistical," with the feeling that this remark contained in it a profound wisdom.¹⁶⁶

A number of Rortian theses – most notably (1') – do seem to take sanity to be a statistical matter: a matter of the congruence of one's beliefs with those of one's peers. Admittedly, in a non-totalitarian scenario, such congruence is generally a reliable measure of sanity. But Orwell is concerned to depict a world in which it is not a reliable measure:

[Winston] was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage.¹⁶⁷

What Orwell's depiction of a totalitarian scenario brings out is that a statistical gloss on sanity cannot serve as a definition of sanity. Hilary Putnam once asked Rorty – as I imagine Orwell would have wanted to ask Rorty – if he accepted the following two principles:

- (a) In ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not.
- (b) Whether a statement is warranted or not is independent of whether the majority of one's cultural peers would *say* it is warranted or unwarranted.¹⁶⁸

Nineteen Eighty-Four offers numerous illustrations of these principles. In the world of the novel, there is a fact of the matter as to whether Winston's statement that he saw a photograph of Rutherford is warranted. (It is warranted, and remains so even after all the corroborating evidence has been destroyed by the Party.) Moreover, it is important to the narrative of the novel that whether Winston's statement is warranted or not is independent of whether the majority of his cultural peers in the Party would *say* it is warranted or unwarranted. Even though, at the end of the novel, Winston clearly constitutes a minority of one, his statement remains warranted. Rorty not only fails to see that such a state of affairs is envisioned in the novel, he fails to see that it can so much as represent a perfectly coherent possibility. This is how Rorty replies to Putnam's question:

There being a fact of the matter about warranted assertibility must, for Putnam, be something *more* than our ability to figure out whether S is in a good position, given the interests and values of herself and her peers, to assert *p*. But what more . . . can it be? Presumably it is whatever makes it possible for a statement not to be warranted even

though a majority of one's peers say it is. *Is that possible? Is (b) true? Well, maybe a majority can be wrong. But suppose everybody in the community, except for one or two dubious characters notorious for making assertions even stranger than p , thinks S must be a bit crazy. They think this even after patiently sitting through S's defense of p , and after sustained attempts to talk her out of it. Might S still be warranted in asserting p ? Only if there is some way of determining warrant *sub specie aeternitatis*, some natural order of reasons which determines, quite apart from S's ability to justify p to those around her, whether she is really justified in holding p . I do not see how one could reconcile the claim that there is this nonsociological justification with [the rejection of Realism].¹⁶⁹*

Rorty here suggests that a process in which S's peers "patiently sit through S's defense of p and [engage in] sustained attempts to talk her out of it" constitutes the sole possible means of establishing whether p is warranted. But warrant is not simply a function of the capacity of a speaker to convince his conversation-partners of the truth of his claim. The conversation that takes place between O'Brien and Winston at the end of the novel can be described using the terms that Rorty employs in the above passage: "O'Brien patiently sits through Winston's defense of his claims and engages in sustained attempts to talk him out of them." But the outcome of their conversation – in which Winston recants his claims – is hardly a test of whether Winston's claims are warranted or not. O'Brien demands that Winston's beliefs conform to what the Party would have him believe (and O'Brien has the persuasive resources at his disposal to bring it about that Winston accedes to this demand). Such a demand, however, as we saw in section VII, cannot be cashed out in terms of a coherent set of norms for making claims.

Rorty does not see how to allow for a scenario in which both of the following are true: (i) S's willingness to assert p furnishes practically everybody in S's community (except perhaps for one or two dubious characters) with a ground for thinking that S is crazy, and (ii) S is fully warranted in asserting p . *But Winston finds himself in just such a situation.* Orwell, in depicting the conversation between Winston and O'Brien, aims to furnish an example of just the sort of case which Rorty (in the passage quoted above) does not allow for: it is Winston – who is in a minority of one – who adheres to the only coherent norms for making claims that he and O'Brien (and other members of their community) share. Winston's claims are warranted because they are in accord – not with what his peers, in fact say, but – with what his peers should say. Winston's statement that he saw a photograph of Rutherford is warranted (not because he possesses some way of determining warrant *sub specie aeternitatis*, but rather) because he faithfully adheres to the only coherent norms members of his community have for applying concepts (such as the concept *photograph*) and for making claims (such as the claim "I saw such-and-such").¹⁷⁰ A state of rationally warranted intellectual isolation – such as Winston finds himself in – can come about whenever what one's peers *ought* to believe (given the norms inherent in the community's practices for making claims) fails to coincide with what they, as a matter of brute sociological fact, happen to believe. If one inhabits a non-totalitarian scenario, then one is not likely to find oneself in such a situation – a situation in which one's community as a whole goes wrong, leaving one in a minority of one. What *Nineteen Eighty-Four* makes vivid, however, is that, if one has the misfortune to be an inhabitant of a totalitarian scenario, then, unless one is adept in practicing the arts of reality control and doublethink, it is not only possible but *probable* that one will find oneself in such a situation a great deal of the time and with respect to a great many of one's beliefs.¹⁷¹ (The more totalitarian the scenario one

inhabits, the greater the number of beliefs one will have which will be both warranted and unacceptable to one's peers.)

In the above passage, Rorty equates the following two things: (i) there is some way of determining warrant *sub specie aeternitatis*, (ii) there is a way of determining the warrant of *p* quite apart from *S*'s ability to justify *p* to those around her. (i) and (ii) are not equivalent. (ii) does not presuppose any Realist metaphysics. It merely presupposes that there is a distinction between justifying a claim to the satisfaction of other people and a claim's being justified in the light of the facts. (1') precludes the possibility of drawing such a distinction. The distinction is one that it is easier for inhabitants of non-totalitarian scenarios (such as Rorty) to overlook than for inhabitants of totalitarian scenarios (such as Winston). Rorty writes:

[T]he terms 'warranted,' 'rational acceptability,' etc., will always invite the question 'to whom'? This question will always lead us back, it seems to me, to the answer '*Us*, at our best'. So all 'a fact of the matter about whether *p* is a warranted assertion' can mean is "a fact of the matter about our ability to feel solidarity with a community that views *p* as warranted."¹⁷²

The only sense Rorty can make of notions such as warrant or rational acceptability is in terms of the idea of passing muster with our peers. In the world of the novel, Winston knows that the Party did not invent the airplane.¹⁷³ He has clear and vivid memories of airplanes from his childhood, way back before the days of the Party. But his belief will never pass muster with any of his peers. All of the history books and all other forms of documentary evidence have been altered to reflect the Party's version of the facts. Every member of the Party now dutifully believes the official version of the facts (putatively) documented in the history books. Winston's belief to the contrary is an act of thoughtcrime punishable by death.¹⁷⁴ His peers have no interest in entertaining beliefs that might lead to their being vaporized, so they have all internalized the mental habit of crimestop.¹⁷⁵ Under these circumstances, is Winston's belief (that the Party did not invent the airplane) warranted? If the question "Is Winston's belief warranted?" is simply equated with the question "Is it acceptable to his peers?" then the answer clearly is: "No, his belief is not warranted." For Winston, under the totalitarian conditions in which he finds himself, is in no position to bring anyone round to his belief. The only existing "community that views *p* as warranted" in this case is a community of one. There is no larger community with whom Winston can seek solidarity, if to seek solidarity means to seek *de facto* agreement with a present community of peers.¹⁷⁶ What this shows is that there is something missing in Rorty's theory of justification. Implicit in the practices of Winston's community are norms which, if properly abided by, underwrite Winston's belief. Assuming (as the author of the novel clearly intends us to) that Winston's memory does not deceive him (that is, that there were airplanes when he was a child) and given the norms that govern the application of the concept of *invention* (for instance, that it is impossible for *X* to invent *Y* if there were *Y*s before *X* existed), then Winston's belief is warranted; and it remains warranted even if it also remains the case that none of his peers are willing to (engage in an act of thoughtcrime in which they) credit the possibility that his belief is warranted.

In non-totalitarian scenarios, the following two tasks generally coincide: the task of seeking to justify a claim to the satisfaction of other people and the task of seeking to establish that a claim is justified in the light of the facts. In totalitarian scenarios, these

two tasks diverge radically. It is manifest to Winston that the question whether it is true that the Party did not invent the airplane and the question whether or not someone will be allowed to get away with saying “The Party did not invent the airplane” are different questions. In our world, as long as the question “Who invented the airplane?” does not become too ideologically fraught, the tasks of seeking an answer to that question and of seeking an answer to the question “What will my peers let me get away with saying about who invented the airplane?” ought to coincide. In Winston’s world they do not coincide. If our world were like Winston’s world in the respect in which Rorty suggests that it already is – if our only aim in inquiry were to remain in step with our peers – then there would be no reason to suppose that our claims had any more bearing on the world than the claims which appear in the newspapers in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have on the “events” which those newspapers report. Yet even the inhabitants of Winston’s world are (at least in principle) able to distinguish the questions “Who invented the airplane?” and “Who does practically everyone *say* invented the airplane?”. Not even the Party goes quite as far as Rorty! It does not aim to deprive its members of the capacity to distinguish between these questions. What members of the Party believe is that the answers to these two clearly distinct questions happily coincide. As we saw in section VII, the Party does not want its members to believe what the Party says on the ground that the Party says it. The Party, of course, does want them to believe that what the Party says is true; but the Party wants them to believe that their ground for believing what the Party says is that it accords with the facts. Not even the Party aims to do away in theory with (what Orwell calls) “the very concept of objective truth” – that is the very idea of the answerability of claims concerning how things are to how things are. Nevertheless, Orwell’s depiction of the world in which Winston lives – a world in which, as Orwell puts it, this concept is on the verge of “fading out” – is perhaps as close as we can come to contemplating in imagination the implications of the adoption of a resolutely Rortian conception of objectivity (that is, a conception in which the concept of objectivity is exhausted by that of solidarity).¹⁷⁷

Rorty often describes the very prospect that Orwell finds so frightening as if it were a prospect only someone with Realist scruples should have any reason to shrink from. Thus, for example, Rorty suggests that only a Realist would want to hold that the claim “There are rocks” is implied by the claim “At the ideal end of inquiry, we shall be justified in asserting there are rocks.” Rorty concludes:

[T]here seems to be no obvious reason why the progress of the language-game we are playing should have anything in particular to do with the way the rest of the world is.¹⁷⁸

It is precisely in scenarios which approximate the conditions of a totalitarian scenario that the progress of our language-games for making claims is sure to have nothing to do “with the way the rest of the world is” – as, for example, the progress of the highly ideological language-game for making claims about what was happening in Spain played by British intellectuals during the Spanish Civil War failed to have anything in particular to do with what was happening in Spain. In the scenario depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, abiding by (some of what pass in that world for) norms of inquiry – such as taking newspaper accounts of events as true – does not improve a person’s chances of having beliefs about the world which are right about the world. Following those “norms” leaves a person with a set of beliefs about the world that (can, indeed, quite properly be said to) have nothing “in particular to do with the way the rest of the

world is.” That is the problem with those (putative) norms of inquiry. In a non-totalitarian scenario – that is, the sort of scenario we generally take ourselves to inhabit – the whole point of abiding by (what Rorty calls) “the rules of language-games” for making claims is that, in abiding by them, we strengthen the probability that the claims we come out with will have something to do with the way the world is. If abiding by those rules did not have this consequence, this would reveal that there was something wrong with those rules. We do occasionally discover that our rules for conducting inquiry do not improve our chances of being right about the world; and when we discover this we modify our rules. In the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the emergence of a felt need for some modification of the prevailing norms of inquiry is forestalled only through a tremendous expenditure of effort – through systematically falsifying the evidence which constantly threatens to accumulate showing that (what pass in that world for) norms of inquiry do not improve one’s chances of being right about the world.

Perhaps the single most perverse feature of Rorty’s reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that, in attributing Rortian doctrines to Orwell, it comes extraordinarily close to attributing to Orwell the very views that Orwell chose to put into O’Brien’s mouth.¹⁷⁹ O’Brien, in the following portion of his dialogue with Winston, opens with an argumentative gambit strikingly reminiscent of some of Rorty’s own tactics:

O’Brien smiled faintly. “You are no metaphysician, Winston,” he said. “Until this moment you had never considered what is meant by existence. I will put it more precisely. Does the past exist concretely, in space? Is there somewhere or other a place, a world of solid objects, where the past is still happening?”

“No.”

“Then where does the past exist, if at all?”

“In records. It is written down.”

“In records. And . . .?”

“In the mind. In human memories.”

“In memory. Very well, then. We, the Party, control all records, and we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?”¹⁸⁰

O’Brien moves here from an affirmation of the hopelessness of a hyper-Realist, hyper-metaphysical construal of the reality of the past (as “a place, a world of solid objects, where the past is still happening”) to an unqualified denial of the idea that (what Orwell calls) “the concept of objective truth” has application to the past. According to O’Brien, the Party controls the past because it controls all mechanisms for achieving an informed consensus about the past. It does not take much of a stretch to formulate O’Brien’s view in Rortian vocabulary. O’Brien would, I think, find the following reformulation of his view perfectly congenial:

There is no past, as it were, “out there” against which to assess the veridicality of memories and records. There is nothing independent of the community’s present practices of making claims about the past against which to assess the truth-values of such claims. The “truth” about the past is simply a matter of how the community’s memories and records as a whole *cohere* and has nothing to do with how well those memories and records “represent the facts.” To seek an answer to the question “What happened at such-and-such a point in the past?” is to seek a *consensus* with one’s peers. If a Winston Smith comes along and challenges the coherence or integrity of the community’s beliefs, the truth is to be arrived at through a process of *conversation* between Winston and his peers. The “true” story will be the one that *prevails* as the outcome of that conversation.

The convergence between O'Brien's and Rorty's views is striking.¹⁸¹ Hence the perversity of Rorty's reading of Orwell. For O'Brien's answers to his own questions (for instance, "Where does the past exist, if at all?") in his dialogue with Winston represent Orwell's most resolute attempt "to draw out the logical consequences of totalitarianism" to their ultimate conclusion.

The reason that the Party's version of the story will prevail, in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is because the Party has the power to make its story prevail. O'Brien is quite blunt about this. Faced with Winston's recalcitrance, his aim – the aim, indeed, of all conversations conducted in the Ministry of Love – is simply to persuade. O'Brien's interest in pursuing his conversation with Winston is not to uphold certain norms of inquiry and see where they might lead. He is not interested in discriminating between the relative epistemic merits of different kinds of persuasion – in discriminating, for example, between brute persuasion (causing someone to change her beliefs through the application of various kinds of force) and rational persuasion (achieved through an appeal to a shared set of norms of inquiry). Rorty equates O'Brien's impatience (with those who might wish to discriminate too finely between kinds of persuasion) with an impatience he attributes to Orwell with readers who demand that he have an answer to O'Brien:

On the view of *1984* I am offering, Orwell has no *answer* to O'Brien, and is not interested in giving one . . . O'Brien regards the whole idea of being "answered," of exchanging ideas, of reasoning together, as a symptom of weakness.¹⁸²

Rorty is certainly right here about O'Brien. But is he right that Orwell has no *answer* to O'Brien and is not interested in giving one? The position O'Brien defends in his dialogue with Winston is very close to the one that Rorty finds in the following passage from Sartre:

Tomorrow, after my death, certain people may decide to establish fascism, and the others may be cowardly or miserable enough to let them get away with it. At that moment, fascism will be the truth of man, and so much the worse for us. In reality, things will be as much as man has decided they are.¹⁸³

Rorty glosses the point of this passage as follows:

This means that when the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is nothing to be said to them of the form "There is something within you which you are betraying. Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society which will endure forever, there is something beyond those practices which condemns you."¹⁸⁴

Orwell's answer to O'Brien could be put using the very form of words that Rorty here claims is of no use.¹⁸⁵ Orwell would be quite happy to say to O'Brien: "Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society which will endure forever, there *is* something beyond those practices which condemns you." Indeed, the whole point of the novel is that a resolutely totalitarian society has to expend an enormous amount of energy to hide from itself the fact that there is a world going on behind its back – beyond its practices – which condemns those practices. As we saw in section VII, Orwell characterizes what it is that lies beyond those practices which condemns those practices – and hence must be "tacitly denied" – as "the very existence of external reality."¹⁸⁶ As we have now seen in this section, this characterization does not

presuppose any commitment to Realist theses. All it presupposes is an appeal to norms internal to our practices of making claims – norms which, as we have seen, the totalitarian society depicted in Orwell's novel can afford neither completely to disregard nor simply to respect.

IX. Politics and Literature

Liberalism and totalitarianism are antonyms in Orwell's vocabulary. What Orwell calls the "liberal habit of mind" is the habit of mind that seeks to make one's beliefs beholden to something outside one's ideological preferences. As the epigraphs to this paper aim to display, Orwell's definition of a liberal comes close to being the opposite of Rorty's definition of a liberal ironist. A liberal, for Orwell, is someone who thinks of truth as something outside himself – as something to be discovered – and not as something he can make up as he goes along.¹⁸⁷ One merit of Orwell's definition of a liberal compared to Rorty's (that is, someone who thinks cruelty is the worst thing we do) is that it builds on the original meaning of the term.¹⁸⁸ and its cognates.¹⁸⁹ For Orwell, a liberal is someone who is free to arrive at his own verdict concerning the facts, someone who possesses "a free intelligence" – "a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls."¹⁹⁰ The assumption underlying Orwell's conception of what it is to be a liberal (as expressed, for instance, in the epigraph to this paper from Orwell) is one which Rorty denies both on his own and on Orwell's behalf: namely, that there is an intimate connection between freedom and truth. According to Rorty's reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as we saw in section VI, the only thing which matters to Orwell is that, if you believe something, you can say it without getting hurt: what matters is not what is in fact true, but that you retain the freedom to be able to talk to other people about what seems to you to be true. According to Rorty's Orwell, if we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself. As we shall see in a moment, this is roughly the opposite of Orwell's view. When "the very concept of objective truth begins to fade out of the world," the conditions not only for truth, but also for freedom, are undermined. The capacity to make true claims and the capacity to exercise freedom of thought and action are, for Orwell, two sides of a single coin. What his novel aims to make manifest is that if reality control and doublethink were ever to be practiced on a systematic scale, the possibility of an individual speaking the truth and the possibility of an individual controlling her own mind would begin simultaneously to fade out of the world. The preservation of freedom and the preservation of truth represent a single indivisible task for Orwell – a task common to literature and politics.

A task common to literature and politics? To Rorty, such a statement is bound to seem to involve a crossing of different kinds of discourse, suited to different purposes, and best able to serve those purposes when kept distinct. He identifies politics with the tasks of responding to the demands of justice and seeking to forge solidarity, thereby preserving and strengthening our traditions and practices. He identifies literature with the tasks of creating new vocabularies and responding to the demands of self-creation, thereby transforming our traditions and practices. In thus understanding each, Rorty understands politics and literature to be responding to incommensurable demands:

[We should] think of the relation between writers on autonomy and writers on justice as being like the relation between two kinds of tools – as little in need of synthesis as are

paintbrushes and crowbars . . . The demands of self-creation and human solidarity [are] equally valid, yet forever incommensurable.¹⁹¹

Rorty takes any claim to the effect that the tasks of literature and politics might in some way not be incommensurable to involve a tacit commitment to Realism.¹⁹² Rorty approaches Orwell's writings with the assumption that Orwell, too, sees the concerns of literature as incommensurable with those of politics. He assumes that for Orwell, as for himself, each of the following pairs is as little in need of synthesis as are paintbrushes and crowbars: autonomy and justice, the creation of new vocabularies and the maintenance of solidarity, the private activity of saying what you like and the public activity of discovering what others will let you get away with saying.

At the beginning of his diary, Winston inscribes the following greetings to his (presently non-existent) potential readers:

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:

From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!¹⁹³

Three central concepts of the novel are linked here: freedom, community, and truth. You have freedom of thought only when you are free to arrive at your own verdict concerning the facts (that is, when you are not held captive by an overriding demand to achieve consensus). Such freedom can be exercised only where there is genuine community (that is, a shared set of coherent norms regulating the practices of most members of the community most of the time).¹⁹⁴ As we saw in the last section, such community can be sustained only where the norms that regulate inquiry are guided not only by a demand to remain in step with one's peers but by a demand to make one's claims concerning how things are answerable to how things are. The point of Winston's complex description of his potential readership is that the possibility of freedom, the possibility of community and the possibility of truth are seen by him to stand or fall together. This contrasts starkly with how Rorty sees the relationship between these three concepts. Rorty takes freedom to be the central theme of Orwell's novel; he takes community to be something anyone can get for free (as long as one lives with other people and does things a sociologist might want to study); and, at least as far as the novel is concerned, Rorty declares truth to be a red herring. This misses not only the point of the above passage, but the point of much of Orwell's writing: you have freedom only if you have genuine community, and you have such community only where disagreements concerning how things are can be resolved in a fashion that takes account of how things are. Rorty is certainly right that the novel seeks to "sensitize" its readers to some of the ways in which "cruelty is a bad thing"; but most of the point of the novel is missed if one misses the internal relation between its concern with cruelty and with the possibilities of freedom, genuine community and truth. The novel seeks to exhibit to how cruelty becomes commonplace in a world in which these three concepts no longer have a secure foothold.¹⁹⁵

In failing to grasp the connection between these three concepts, Rorty misunderstands what freedom, community, and truth are for Orwell. In the latter half of the above passage, Winston employs three other concepts, equally central to the novel, to specify what prevails in the absence of freedom, community, and truth: uniformity, solitude, and doublethink. Freedom of thought is not – as Rorty suggests – merely the

freedom to say or think whatever you happen to feel like saying or thinking at a given moment; it is the freedom fully to exercise one's intellectual resources, to make the most of one's capacity for thought. The fundamental deprivation of freedom suffered by a Party member lies not in the prohibitions on what he is allowed to say, but in the undermining of the conditions which would enable him to develop his capacity to arrive at something worth saying. Once such conditions are undermined, you can say whatever you like, but it will hardly differ from what anyone else says. What Orwell dreads most is not just the abolition of our negative liberty to say and think what we like without fear of interference or harm, but the systematic erosion of our positive liberty – our capacity to do or think or want anything other than what those in control want us to do or think or want.¹⁹⁶ The aim of the Party is to bring about a state of affairs in which everyone is free to do and say what they like and yet perfect harmony and consensus reigns.¹⁹⁷ Hence uniformity. A community of genuinely free people is not simply one in which a high level of *de facto* consensus has been achieved and will be sustained, but one in which vigorous disagreement is welcomed as a spur to refining a shared set of norms for adjudicating and resolving present and future disagreements. In the absence of such practices for resolving disagreement, regardless of how much one talks to others, one will always find oneself sealed off by one's heterodox convictions. Hence solitude. Truth is not simply a compliment we pay to those of our assertions which, as it happens, our peers will let us get away with. Regardless of what our peers say, "The Party invented the airplane" is true if and only if the Party invented the airplane. If you know that the Party did not invent the airplane, but in order to survive (in a world controlled by the Party) you have to believe otherwise, then you must believe to be true what you know to be false.¹⁹⁸ Hence doublethink.

One can be of the view that these three inextricably linked capacities – the capacity to exercise one's freedom, the capacity to participate in a community, and the capacity to distinguish between truth and falsity – are characteristically (perhaps even uniquely) *human* capacities, without thereby subscribing to any Realist theses. In Orwell's vocabulary – and not only Orwell's – fully to possess such capacities is to be fully "human," to exercise them is to express one's "humanity," and to engage in acts that aim to undermine their exercise is to engage in acts of "inhumanity." Rorty does not see how there could be anything worth caring about which is at issue in such talk. But, in failing to see this, he fails to see a central topic of Orwell's novel. One can slant the point in a Rortian direction: one of the things that "our capacity for freedom is essential to our humanity" or "our capacity to distinguish truth from falsity is essential to our humanity" means is that we can form a community with other members of the species *Homo sapiens* only to the extent that those members of our biological species can and do exercise these capacities. (This does not involve any denial of contingency: it is not to say either that there always will or that there must be members of the species which are, in this sense of the term, "human.") The normative notion of humanity implicit in such ways of talking is neither a merely biological nor a mysteriously metaphysical one.¹⁹⁹ Yet it is a notion for which Rorty's reading of Orwell leaves no room. Such a notion is in play in Hynes's and Trilling's talk of Orwell's concern with the preservation of humanity. It is in play in the passage from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (quoted earlier) in which Winston reflects that, in his world, it is simply by staying sane that one carries on the human heritage.²⁰⁰ Orwell's original title for *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was *The Last Man in Europe*, meaning the last man capable of free thought, conscious of the absence of community, and able to feel horror at the disregard for truth – that is *the last human being*. O'Brien says to Winston:

If you are a man, Winston, you are the last man. Your kind is extinct: we are the inheritors. Do you understand that you are *alone*? . . . You are the last man. You are the guardian of the human spirit.²⁰¹

If Winston is the last guardian of the human spirit, then that means the human spirit is something that can die out. Orwell is afraid, and writes his novel to awaken us to the fear, that (something he is willing to call) our “humanity” can be allowed to wither away. Such an employment of the vocabulary of “humanity” does not trade – as Rorty fears – on a tacit appeal to the idea that there is something deep inside each of us, some indestructible common human nature, some built-in guarantee of human solidarity that will be with us forever.²⁰² On the contrary, there is nothing built-in or guaranteed about it. That is precisely what worries Orwell. Precisely because it is fragile, he wants us to appreciate that it is also precious.

Rorty is certainly right that Orwell is not interested in constructing some sort of grand philosophical synthesis of literature and politics. But one can reject the possibility of such a synthesis without drawing the Rortian conclusion that all demands pertinent to the one must be incommensurable with those pertinent to the other. In Orwell’s vocabulary, the term “totalitarianism” refers to a set of cultural and intellectual tendencies that render genuine literary and genuine political discourse equally impossible. Orwell sees the possibility of either kind of discourse as tied to the very thing Rorty claims Orwell doesn’t care about: “the possibility of truth.”²⁰³ Almost as if in reply to Rorty, Orwell writes:

The enemies of intellectual liberty always try to present their case as a plea for discipline versus individualism. The issue truth-versus-untruth is as far as possible kept in the background . . . [T]he controversy over freedom of speech . . . is at the bottom a controversy over the desirability of telling lies. What is really at issue is the right to . . . [speak] as truthfully as is consistent with the ignorance, bias and self-deception from which every observer necessarily suffers . . . [A]ny writer who finds excuses for the persecution [of others] or the falsification of reality, thereby destroys himself as a writer.²⁰⁴

Orwell does not understand literature to be concerned, in the first instance, with the task of creating new vocabularies, but rather with the task of *reclaiming our present vocabulary*; and he understands that task to be simultaneously a literary and a political one.²⁰⁵ Rorty, as we saw in section VI, has difficulty seeing how Orwell’s own characterizations of the sort of prose he seeks to write could be anything but mischaracterizations, because Rorty associates the vocabulary Orwell thus employs with a Realist conception of “transparency.” Rorty concludes that Orwell’s characterizations are mere rhetoric which Orwell himself would be happy to drop. Such characterizations, in fact, are tied to a central concern running throughout the whole of Orwell’s work: to articulate a (metaphysically innocuous) conception of the moral and political obligations of the writer – the essayist, the poet and the novelist. The task of literature is to undo the corruption of language. The corruption of language corrupts thought.²⁰⁶ Combating ugliness, inaccuracy and slovenliness in the use of language constitutes, for Orwell, the “first step towards political regeneration.”²⁰⁷ A speaker or writer who does not inhabit his language thoughtfully – who fails to explore and rejuvenate its potential for the vivid yet precise expression of thought – ends up being carried along by forms of expression that mask the unclarity and untruthfulness of his thought both from himself and from others. To the extent that a speaker or writer only parrots hackneyed phraseology, he fails to be in full control of his own mind. “[H]e has gone some

distance towards turning himself into a machine.”²⁰⁸ To the extent that his relation to language is one in which pre-existing phrases remain master of his thought, his mind is one that is easily enslaved and, to some extent, one that already is enslaved:

A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: What am I trying to say? What words will express it? What image or idiom will make it clearer? Is this image fresh enough to have an effect? . . . But you are not obliged to go to all this trouble. You can shirk it by simply throwing your mind open and letting the ready-made phrases come crowding in. They will construct your sentences for you, to a certain extent – and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself. It is at this point that the special connection between politics and the debasement of language becomes clear.²⁰⁹

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party has not failed to grasp the special connection between politics and the debasement of language. Hence all novels are written by novel-writing machines, the ultimate crime against the state is to keep a private diary, and the most pressing item on the Party’s political agenda is the perfection and implementation of Newspeak.

Among the ironies in Rorty’s attempt to find an apologia for his own doctrines in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the most wonderful lies in the fact that the novel – under the topic of Newspeak – contains perhaps the most searching meditation ever written on the potential intellectual implications of replacing one vocabulary with another. (Remarkably, Rorty never comments on this topic in the novel.) One purpose of Newspeak is, of course, the production of vocabulary for new concepts – concepts such as *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, and *crimestop* – whose daily employment, as we have seen, is essential to maintaining the practices and beliefs of members of the Party. But the most important purpose of Newspeak is the destruction of concepts. It is, above all, this destructive and purportedly liberating potential of Newspeak that is most emphasized in *The Principles of Newspeak*²¹⁰ (the appendix to the novel) and which should most interest Rorty. For what appeals to Rorty about vocabulary replacement as a method of dissolving philosophical problems is that it holds open the promise of making it impossible to formulate old useless problems. The underlying premise is that a problem which can no longer be formulated is a problem that no longer exists.²¹¹ Now such a method, no doubt, can sometimes be liberating. A change of vocabulary usually entails a change in the sorts of things we can talk about. If there are no such things as phlogiston or witches, and if the only purpose formerly served by the vocabulary of “phlogiston” and “witches” was to make talk about such things possible, then nothing would be lost and something gained by junking the vocabulary. Moreover, in changing vocabularies, we can also sometimes effect a change in the sorts of things we want. We may discover more interesting things to care about and divert our attention away from less rewarding inquiries. All of these features of vocabulary replacement appeal to Rorty. But the point of the discussion of Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that all of these features of vocabulary replacement cut both ways. A change in vocabulary can also deprive us of the ability to talk about some things we might still want to talk about, if only we still could. A sufficiently radical change in the discursive resources available to us might also change *us* so radically that we become no longer able even to want to talk about those things which formerly most occupied our thoughts; and it can deprive us of the discursive resources necessary to explore – and thus reopen – the question whether we are now better off in our present condition, in which we are unable to imagine our previous wants and ineluctably stuck wanting

what we now want. The feature of vocabulary replacement that most appeals to Rorty is just the one that most appeals to the Party: it renders certain “modes of thought impossible.”²¹² Winston’s colleague in the Ministry of Truth, who is busy at work on the eleventh and definitive edition of *The Newspeak Dictionary*, explains the chief objective of Newspeak to Winston:

[O]ur chief job is . . . destroying words . . . It’s a beautiful thing, the destruction of words . . . [T]he whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought. In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it . . . The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect . . . Even the literature of the Party will change. Even the slogans will change . . . The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think.²¹³

Some of the concepts which Newspeak aims to abolish – such as the concept of freedom – are ones for which Rorty himself expresses considerable fondness. But, as we have seen, a good many of the forms of words that Newspeak aims to “destroy” are ones that Rorty’s own proposals for vocabulary replacement earmark for destruction, like “objective truth,” “objective reality,” “essential to humanity,” etc. One of the intended consequences of the implementation of Newspeak is to render most of the literature of the past utterly incomprehensible. An unintended consequence of Rorty’s proposals, were they to be embraced, would be to render some of the literature of the past – notably Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – equally incomprehensible.²¹⁴

Notes

- 1 *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) [henceforth *CIS*], pp. xv, 183.
- 2 *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, edited by Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) [henceforth *CEJL*], II, pp. 258–9; III, pp. 88–89.
- 3 In speaking here of “the *consequences* of [Rorty’s] views for the things he thinks we should care about,” I am permitting myself to pass quickly over the tricky matter of Rorty’s own understanding of the relationship between philosophy and politics. The matter is tricky because, on the one hand, given some of what he himself says, one could be forgiven for thinking that Rorty is committed to the view that his own epistemological doctrines are without political import; on the other hand, it often seems to be crucial to Rorty’s manner of advertising the merits of his “liberal ironism” that it not merely involve a conjunction of a politics (liberalism) with a philosophical standpoint (ironism) but that there is some sort of internal relation between the former and the latter – that if you are concerned, above all, with promoting the ends of liberalism, then you have good reason to embrace Rorty’s ironism. One could therefore be forgiven for concluding that there is a tension in Rorty’s understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics: a tension between his willingness to recommend his own philosophical views on political grounds and his willingness to insist that philosophical controversy about the nature of truth and knowledge is a fruitless activity which can have no significant political consequences. Rorty can often be found saying the following sort of thing:

I do not think that any large view of the form . . . “truth is really . . .” – any large philosophical claim – *could* discredit political beliefs and aspirations . . . I do not think it

is psychologically possible to give up on political liberalism on the basis of a philosophical view about the nature of man or truth or history . . . One would have to be very odd to change one's politics because one had become convinced, for example, that a coherence theory of truth was preferable to a correspondence theory. (*CIS*, pp. 182–3)

How can this be squared with Rorty's equally frequent urging that his own brand of anti-representationalist ironism best suits the needs and aims of the friends of liberal democracy? Rorty's most careful answer to this question runs as follows:

Although I do not think that there is an inferential path that leads from . . . antirepresentationalist views of truth and knowledge . . . [such as those common to Nietzsche, James and Dewey] either to democracy or antidemocracy, I do think there is a plausible inference from democratic convictions to such a view. [If] your devotion to democracy is . . . wholehearted, then you will welcome the utilitarian and pragmatist claim that we have no will to truth distinct from the will to happiness. ("Pragmatism as Romantic Polytheism", in *The Revival of Pragmatism*, edited by Morris Dickstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); p. 27)

Rorty's understanding of the relation between philosophy and politics allows that – even though no sensible person would change his politics because of the outcome of a metaphysical discussion, and even though there are no strict entailment relations between this or that particular metaphysical doctrine about the nature of truth and knowledge and this or that particular brand of politics – there are particular philosophical views that make for a more *congenial fit* with this brand of politics over that one. Thus, for example, if you believe that "we can have a knowledge of an 'objective' ranking of human needs" then you are at risk of believing that you might be justified in overruling the result of democratic consensus (see *ibid.*, p. 27); and, conversely, if you believe that there is no way things are independently of what your peers will let you get away with saying about how things are, then you are less likely to be led politically astray by your metaphysical convictions. Rorty is thus able to hold without contradiction that, although his own philosophical views do not entail a justification of liberal democracy, they do make the world marginally safer for liberal democracy.

(This way of reconciling the apparent tension in Rorty's writings with regard to the relation between politics and philosophy is tendentious in that it assumes that Rorty's own "views" amount to substantial philosophical views – something that Rorty himself is sometimes at pains to deny. It is the burden of section III of this paper to justify this assumption.) Do Rorty's views make the world safer for democracy? Three central aims of this paper are (1) to challenge Rorty's claim that "antirepresentationalist views of truth and knowledge" make for a congenial fit with a liberal democratic politics, (2) to show that (contrary to Rorty's reading of Orwell) Orwell thought that views such as Rorty's made for a *very* congenial fit with a totalitarian politics, and (3) to argue that seeing why Orwell thought this helps one to see what is misguided in Rorty's own views of truth and knowledge.

- 4 Dr. Freud tells us that one of the most characteristic features of obsessives is that they passionately and repeatedly insist that they are free of the particular form of obsession from which they suffer. Thus, for a given subject S and subject matter X, the psychoanalytic measure of S's obsession with X lies not in the extent to which S is prepared to disavow an interest in X, but in the extent to which S is actually capable of ceasing to think about X and capable of getting on with thinking about other things. The classical obsessive is someone who, despite his protestations to the contrary, is unable to cease viewing everything in terms of certain ideas which he insists are of no interest to him. Hence Freud remarks: "Obsessional neurosis is shown in the patient's being occupied with thoughts in which he is in fact not interested . . . The thoughts may be senseless in themselves, or merely a matter of indifference to the subject [yet] . . . he is obliged to

brood and speculate as though it were a question of his most important and vital problems” (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, New York: Norton, 1966; p. 258).

- 5 To claim that someone suffers from epistemologism, so defined, is not yet to attribute a commitment to any particular doctrine(s) to him. Individuals with very different first-order philosophical commitments may equally suffer from epistemologism.
- 6 See, e.g., *CIS*, p. 9.
- 7 *CIS*, p. 9.
- 8 I find the term ‘vocabulary’ to be one of the slipperier terms in Rorty’s vocabulary. Sometimes it seems to mean (nothing more than) *vocabulary* – i.e. words or sequences of words. Sometimes it seems to mean (something more like) *language* or *linguistic framework* – a terminology plus a set of constraints on its employment which involve doxastic and inferential commitments. Sometimes it seems to mean (something more like) *theory* or *doctrine* – so that more than one of them can be formulated within a single vocabulary in either the first or second sense of ‘vocabulary.’ And sometimes it seems to mean (something much more comprehensive like) *world view* or *form of life* – a closed system of thought or practice for which no non-circular form of justification is available. Henceforth, when the term occurs in scarequotes it is meant to echo Rorty’s own equivocal usage; and when it occurs without scarequotes it should be understood in the first, least committal sense. Thus in some contexts in which Rorty speaks of vocabularies, I will prefer to speak of *doctrines*, partly to avoid equivocation between the first and third senses of the term ‘vocabulary’ and partly to facilitate the isolation of cases in which two individuals (e.g. Orwell and the Realist) might share a vocabulary without having any metaphysical commitments in common.
- 9 See “Solidarity or Objectivity” (in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [henceforth *ORT*]), *passim*, but especially p. 31, for a good example of a very broad construal of Realism.
- 10 I am indebted here to the account of genre elaborated by Stanley Cavell in *Pursuits of Happiness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); see especially pp. 27–30.
- 11 I will place ‘Realism’ in capital letters throughout to indicate that, as employed here, it signifies a genre of *metaphysical doctrine*. It is thus not to be equated with the use of the term ‘realism’ by philosophers (such as Cora Diamond, John McDowell, Hilary Putnam, Ludwig Wittgenstein) who wish to refer to the possibility of a perspective on our practices that is neither Realist nor anti-Realist. For further discussion of these two contrasting uses of the term, see my “On Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of Mathematics”, *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (Fall, 1996).
- 12 A “doctrine,” as I shall use the term in this paper, consists of a combination of philosophical theses.
- 13 A much trickier question is whether any of (1)–(8), each taken simply as a paragraph-long series of statements, is by itself *sufficient* to constitute an expression of Realism. Rorty, I think, would view a willingness to come out with anything that sounded at all like any of these eight sequences of words as a sufficient basis on which not only to charge but to convict someone of Realism. I would certainly agree that a speaker who is inclined to call on any one of these eight paragraph-long sequences of words is *very likely* to be guilty as charged. But, on my view, the assessment of such a charge must await an examination of the wider context in which the sentences occur. As I do not agree with Rorty that Realism is helpfully thought of as a matter of employing certain vocabulary, I do not take the occurrence of certain forms of words in a statement ever to constitute a sufficient condition for categorizing a statement as an expression of Realism. What makes someone a Realist, on my view, is not merely a proclivity to call upon certain words or phrases or sentences but rather what he wants to (be able to) mean by the words or phrases or sentences which he calls upon.
- 14 For that purpose, many more than eight theses would be required (and several of the ones distinguished here would, in principle, be dispensable since they are limiting cases of more

general theses). But my partial reconstruction of Rorty's employment of the term 'Realism' fails, by design, to capture a further aspect of Rorty's employment of the term. Rorty, as indicated in the previous note, sometimes talks as if 'Realism' denoted a category of doctrines which could be individuated by the vocabulary used to formulate them. This way of construing Realism encourages Rorty to view most everyday talk about "truth," "objectivity," or "reality" as itself caught up in Realist metaphysics. Since such a construal begs most of the questions with which this paper will be concerned, I shall construe 'Realism', for the purposes of this paper, as a label for a genre of metaphysical *theses*.

- 15 In formulating (1), I have tried to stay as close as possible to locutions that Rorty himself employs when characterizing the thesis in question. Hence the (putatively) Kantian terminology. Rorty is, no doubt, right in thinking that a great many philosophers who discuss (1), whether they applaud or deplore it, assume that (1) is a Kantian thesis. Rorty himself shares this view. I do not. Kant himself rarely speaks of "things *as they are in themselves*" (though Kemp Smith's translation regrettably sometimes does where Kant does not), but rather usually only of things-in-themselves *simpliciter*. The most generic distinction which this terminology marks in Kant is between the "thing-in-itself" and the "thing-in-its-relation-to-other-things." The distinction between appearance and reality is a special case of this more general distinction. In each case, the "thing-in-itself" is *one and the same thing* as the "thing-in-its-relation-to-other-things," only considered under an abstraction. The nature and severity of the abstraction varies depending upon the issue under discussion. Even when the terminology marks a distinction between the "thing-in-itself" and the thing *as it appears to a knower*, Kant will, depending upon the issue at hand, abstract more or less severely from the conditions under which the thing is known. In some contexts in *The Critique of Pure Reason* the contrast is one that is drawn within our present experience (e.g., the contrast between the rain and the rainbow in A45–6), in other contexts the contrast is between our present and our possible future knowledge of objects (e.g., between the objects of scientific investigation as they are presently known to us and as they might someday, in principle, be knowable to us), and in yet other contexts, notoriously, the abstraction is yet more severe. But when the abstraction is of the severest possible sort – i.e., when the thing-in-itself is identified with the object of knowledge considered utterly apart from any possible conditions of knowledge – then Kant's point is precisely that the thing, so considered, "is nothing to us," that such a notion of a "thing" is (as he puts it) "without *Sinn* or *Bedeutung*." Kant thus, in effect, rejects (1). He denies that we can assign sense or reference to the notion of a reality which is utterly screened off from us by the conditions of knowledge. Kant was admittedly not always resolutely clear about this issue in the A edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*; but his B edition revisions of the chapter on "The Ground of the Distinction of All Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena" are directed precisely at resolutely redressing this unclarity. He there refers to the notion of the thing-in-itself considered utterly apart from our faculty of knowledge as "the negative concept of the noumenon" in order to distinguish it from "the positive concept of the noumenon." And he insists that the former of these notions is the only notion of a noumenon which has any role to play within his theoretical philosophy. (It is only in the context of characterizing the content of the positive concept of the noumenon – whose content derives entirely from the doctrines of Kant's *practical* philosophy B that it remains permissible, in the light of the B edition revisions, to employ the locution "things *as they are in themselves*.") Within the theoretical philosophy, the only role that the notion of a noumenon has to play is to signal the emptiness of such a notion and to warn against the philosophical confusion of thinking that such a notion can be put to work in theoretical philosophy. It is, as Kant puts it, an "entirely *indeterminate* concept," and the confusion results when one "is misled into treating this entirely *indeterminate* concept . . . as if it were a *determinate* concept of an entity that allows of being known in a certain [purely intelligible – i.e., humanly impossible] manner" (B307).

All subsequent employments of (apparently) Kantian terminology in this paper are

- consequently to be understood as echoing Rortian terminology for referring to (1), and should not be taken to represent an endorsement of Rorty's reading of Kant.
- 16 (1) and (2) represent two different ways of attempting to satisfy the philosophical desire to give content to an idea of *the way the world is from no particular point of view*. (1) and (2) are, however, mutually inconsistent. (1) affirms that the ultimate nature of reality is inherently unknowable; (2) that it is, at least in principle, knowable. (2) proceeds from the assumption that the idea – which is central to (1) – of *the way the world is apart from any description* makes no sense. (2) identifies the overcoming of the subjectivity of human knowledge with the attainment of the minimally perspectival point of view afforded by a metaphysically preferred description of the way the world is. Rorty often weaves back and forth between (1) and (2) as if they were equivalent. This is forgivable, in as much as the writings of Realists often hover indeterminately between these two theses. I take the trouble to distinguish (1) from (2) here because I think Rorty recoils from each in an apparently distinct direction – see (1') and (2') below – directions which can be usefully thought of as movements away from (1) and (2) respectively.
- 17 Thus far, what we have is a version of (2) formulated as a thesis about *moral* reality. I have formulated (4) in this way because it figures in Rorty's writing largely as an application of (2) – an application made available by the assumption that there is such a thing as an “independent moral reality.” The remainder of (4) – the claim that there are no hard cases – could, in principle, be treated as an independent thesis (and motivated on other sorts of grounds). I have treated it here as part of a single complex thesis concerning the objects of moral knowledge because this complex thesis figures prominently as a unitary target in Rorty's writing.
- 18 (3) and (4) are both versions of (2). They are mutually inconsistent. (3) affirms that a metaphysically privileged description of reality will not require moral concepts; (4) affirms that it will.
- 19 Unlike the preceding seven, thesis (8) figures in Rorty's thought largely as an implicit target. My reconstruction here of what Rorty takes a Realist theory of literature to be is somewhat speculative. Nevertheless, it is clear from Rorty's writings that he takes Realists to be committed to a theory of literature which vastly underrates the potential contribution of poets and novelists to furthering the ends of inquiry, and that he takes his own ironist theory of literature to be a consequence of its rejection.
- 20 The phrase “philosophy gone wrong” fudges over a disagreement, in so far as it is Rorty's view that these theses should be rejected on the ground that they have failed to prove *useful*, whereas it is my view that a proper ground for a rejection of these “theses” involves coming to recognize each of them as only an *apparent* thesis. (For a brief overview of my differences with Rorty on this point, see my introduction to Hilary Putnam's *Words and Life*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994; pp. xxiv–xxxii.) But this dimension of my differences with Rorty will not play a weight-bearing role in the argument of this paper.
- 21 I am assuming here that there is a distinction worth drawing between *showing why* certain apparently compulsory philosophical problems are not compulsory and merely *declaring that* they are not compulsory.
- 22 I am assuming here that there is a distinction worth drawing between helping someone come to see what is wrong with a question that he thinks both perfectly intelligible and intellectually compulsory and merely encouraging him to stop thinking about the question and advertising the relative advantages of changing the subject of conversation. (I explore this distinction, in the context of contrasting Rorty's and Putnam's respective readings of later Wittgenstein, in my introduction to Hilary Putnam's *Realism With a Human Face*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990; pp. xxxiv–lvii.)
- 23 Rorty defines the “the desire for objectivity” as the desire to describe oneself “as standing in immediate relation to a nonhuman reality” (*ORT*, p. 21).
- 24 “Insofar as a person is seeking solidarity, she does not ask about the relation between

the practices of the chosen community and something outside that community" (*ORT*, p. 21).

- 25 On the grounds that the only alternative is to opt for some version of (1) or (2). See "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth", *ORT*, pp. 126–150, for Rorty's most developed version of this argument.
- 26 "[T]he terms 'warranted', 'rational acceptability', etc., will always invite the question 'to whom'? This question will always lead us back, it seems to me, to the answer 'Us, at our best'" ("Putnam and the Relativist Menace", *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XC, No. 9, September 1993 [henceforth *PRM*], p. 453). I will return to this passage in section VIII of this paper.
- 27 See, e.g., *PRM*, p. 449.
- 28 Here are some samples of how Rorty puts this point:

For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is . . . simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of "us" as far as we can. (*ORT*, p. 23)

[We pragmatists] deny that the search for objective truth is a search for correspondence to reality, and urge that it be seen instead as a search for the widest possible intersubjective agreement. ("Does Academic Freedom have Philosophical Presuppositions?", *Academe*, November–December 1994 [henceforth *DAFHPP*], p. 52)

"Truth" only sounds like the name of a goal if . . . progress towards truth is explicated by reference to a metaphysical picture . . . Without that picture, to say that truth is our goal is merely to say something like "we hope to justify our belief to as many and as large audiences as possible". ("Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?: Davidson vs. Wright", *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 180 [henceforth *ITGE*], p. 298)

- 29 See, e.g., *ORT*, p. 23. I am attempting, under the heading of (1'), both to parrot various things Rorty himself says (about why we should substitute solidarity for objectivity) and to formulate something that has the appearance of being a single thesis. But, it should be noted, the following are distinct theses:

- (a) There are only causal – and no normative – word–world relations.
- (b) Justification is a matter of acceptability to my peers.
- (c) Justification is a sociological matter.

Rorty sometimes moves between these theses as if (a) entailed (b) and (b) entailed (c). But one can affirm (a) and deny (b) (as do, e.g., certain reliabilists); and one can affirm (b) and deny (c) (by insisting that justification is a matter of what my peers *ought* to accept rather than what they, as a matter of sociological fact, do accept). The latter of these two slides will be taken up in section VIII of this paper.

- 30 The preceding sentences are largely a paraphrase of *CIS*, pp. 4–5. The gist of (2') is succinctly summarized by Rorty somewhat later on in *CIS* as follows: "[S]ince truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths" (*CIS*, p. 21). I have presented (1') and (2') as if they were distinct theses. I do not believe this is the case – they are, as section VIII aims to show, different expressions of a single confusion.
- 31 This last way of formulating Rorty's view I owe to Robert Brandom's contribution to this volume. It should be noted, in this connection, that it is crucial to (3'), as formulated here, that it deny that the success of a vocabulary is ever due to its *representational adequacy*. Brandom, in his contribution, suggests that Rorty's attack on representationalism is much

more limited in scope. In a footnote, Brandom says that it is *not* to Rorty's purpose to claim . . .

that there is no point in coming up with some more limited theoretical notion of representation of things that applies to some vocabularies but not others, specifying a more specific purpose to which some but not all can be turned . . . [S]uch a notion is not Rorty's target, for it does not aspire to being a metavocabulary – a vocabulary for talking about all vocabularies, the essence of what being a vocabulary is. (p. 29n)

Rorty's target, Brandom suggests, is not the very notion of representation – as my formulation of (3') would have it – but rather the more ambitious philosophical idea that the representational idiom constitutes an appropriate *metavocabulary* – a vocabulary which enables us to assess the adequacy of all other vocabularies (apart from any consideration of the purposes those vocabularies are intended to serve). Thus, according to Brandom, Rorty objects to representation serving as a philosophical master-concept, but not to its serving, if rendered appropriately hygienic, as a means of articulating *one dimension* along which the adequacy of a vocabulary, relative to certain purposes, might be assessed.

Brandom, it seems to me, underestimates Rorty's hostility to the very idea of representation. (See, e.g., all of Part II of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and, in particular, Rorty's prospective and retrospective summaries on p. 11 and pp. 371–2 of the moral of Part II.) But even if one dismisses his numerous hostile remarks about the very idea of representation as an overstatement of his position, Rorty, as far as I can see, is in no position to make room for a “more limited notion of representation,” along the lines that Brandom proposes, as long as he remains committed to theses such as (1') and (2').

Brandom is certainly right that a representationalist metavocabulary is one of Rorty's targets. Indeed, Rorty, in *CIS*, occasionally seems to suggest that *the very idea of a metavocabulary* – a vocabulary which furnishes criteria for assessing the adequacy of all other vocabularies – is something which every good ironist, if she is to remain faithful to her credo, must oppose. It seems to me, though, that one might be forgiven if Rorty's frequent hyper-pragmatist invocations of concepts such as *coping* or *satisfaction* led one to conclude that Rorty's aim, contrary to his own ironist strictures, was precisely to substitute one metavocabulary for another – an instrumentalist for a representationalist one.

- 32 If Rorty were allowed to speak for himself, in formulating this thesis, he would, no doubt, along the way, work in remarks such as the following:

Different vocabularies allow us to formulate different truths. Our needs and interests are extremely diverse in nature and vary over time and with circumstances. Which vocabulary we should adopt depends upon which needs and interests we seek to address. Since some vocabularies are better adapted to one purpose than another, we should be linguistic pluralists, alternating back and forth, inventing and discarding vocabularies as best suits our purposes.

I have omitted such remarks from my summary of (3') because (under a suitable interpretation) I have no quarrel with them. Indeed, I think they are largely truisms which can easily be separated from the features (of this region) of Rorty's thought that I take to be a philosophical overreaction to the failure of Realism.

- 33 This claim figures in Rorty's writings, for the most part, simply as an application of (1'). It will prove useful in what follows, however, to isolate it as an independent thesis.
- 34 I note in passing – to avoid unnecessary confusion – that someone like Karl Popper meant something close to the opposite (of what Rorty does) by the term ‘historicism’: i.e. the thesis that historical processes are governed by laws and cannot be influenced by human agency. I will henceforth only employ the term in Rorty's sense.
- 35 I take what I have said so far (under a suitable interpretation) to be virtually platitudinous. It is the subsequent glosses on what it means to say such stories are “situated” and “constructed” that render (5') metaphysically contentious.

- 36 This final sentence is simply an application of the doctrines of (1') and (4') to the case of history. I have attempted here to characterize what I understand Rorty to mean by the expression "historicism." There is a less committal use of the term, in which people (e.g., Quentin Skinner or Charles Taylor) seek to employ the term, as Rorty does, to signify a thesis opposed to (5), but without intending thereby to commit themselves to theses such as (1') or (4').
- 37 This paragraph is largely a paraphrase of *CIS*, pp. xiv–xv.
- 38 The two components of this definition of a liberal are quite independent: (i) a liberal is someone who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing we can do and (ii) a liberal is someone who thinks that 'morality' should not be taken to denote anything other than our abilities to notice, identify with, and alleviate pain and humiliation. I use the complex term 'Rortian liberalism' to refer to the conjunction of (i) and (ii). But one can affirm (i) and deny (ii). Indeed, as far as I can see, (i) is in principle compatible with militantly Realist versions of theses such as (4) and (6). Moreover, Rorty himself often suggests that it suffices for someone to hold (i) to count as a liberal by his lights. Thus, whenever I speak in the paper of "Rorty's definition of a liberal" I mean only to refer to (i).
- 39 This paragraph is, in large part, a paraphrase of remarks from *CIS*, pp. xv, 189, 193, 195.
- 40 This paragraph has been constructed by paraphrasing remarks from *CIS*, pp. xv, 73–4, 174.
- 41 I do not mean hereby to suggest that Rorty himself anywhere explicitly claims that the rejection of the Realist member of any such pair entails the affirmation of its Rortian counterpart, but only that his arguments often implicitly presuppose such an entailment.
- 42 (1') is implicitly motivated by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "objective truth," "objective reality," etc.; (2') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "the way the world is," "independent facts," etc.; (3') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "value neutrality," "freedom from bias," etc.; (4') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "moral facts," "moral reality," etc.; (5') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "the immutability of history"; (6') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of a "unifying vision," "grand philosophical synthesis," etc.; (7') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of what is "essential to humanity," talk of "rights," and other sorts of talk indulged in by proponents of (7); (8') by a proposal for jettisoning talk of "transparency to fact," "representational verisimilitude," etc.
- 43 Though he no longer *requires* such vocabulary, a Rortian may continue to employ it in either of two ways: (i) he may continue to employ it as a means of warding off the enemy (e.g., by saying things like "We should replace objectivity with solidarity"), (ii) he may interpolate a revisionist account of its meaning which enables him to continue to speak with the vulgar (by declaring things like "For the pragmatist, 'knowledge' and 'truth' are simply compliments paid to beliefs we think well justified.").
- 44 Or more precisely: whose availability depends upon the availability of concepts traditionally expressed by means of that vocabulary.
- 45 Of course, if there are less drastic and yet equally effective ways of disarming Realism, then there are *no* good reasons to jettison the vocabulary. This is in fact my view. But since my aim in this paper is not to disarm Realism, I shall not argue the point here.
- 46 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. xx.
- 47 Such as the encounter between A. J. Ayer and Orwell which led Ayer to conclude that Orwell "had no interest whatsoever in philosophy" and Orwell to conclude that Ayer ought to "interest himself a bit more in the future of humanity" (*Ibid*, p. 325).
- 48 *CIS*, p. 173n.
- 49 "[Orwell] had no more taste for [philosophical] arguments, or skill at constructing them, than did Nabokov" (*CIS*, p. 173).
- 50 Orwell kept himself alive for most of his life by furiously writing weekly newspaper columns, editorials, and book reviews, often lifting prose from one piece into another. This led to an extraordinary amount of (often *verbatim*) repetition in his corpus of those thoughts he cared most about. Versions of (1'')–(8'') occur repeatedly in his journalism and – since

he rewrote the journalism into polished meditative essays and transposed whole passages from the essays into the novels – they all recur in his essays and novels.

- 51 In Wittgenstein's sense of "ordinary" – where *ordinary* contrasts (not with *literary* or *metaphorical* or *scientific* or *technical*, but) with *metaphysical*. In this sense of "ordinary," the uses to which poetry and science put language are as much part of ordinary language as calling your cat or asking someone to pass the butter.
- 52 One way of putting the topic of this paper would be to say that it is about Rorty's inability – his professed allegiance to the thought of later Wittgenstein notwithstanding – to exercise the sort of discernment that Wittgenstein's later work is centrally concerned to impart: an ability to discern between ordinary and metaphysical *uses* of language, between uses of language in which words are at work in their context of use (expressing a thought) and ones in which language is on holiday (only apparently expressing a thought). Oblivious to the discriminations of use which such discernment discloses – oblivious to how one possibly could do what Wittgenstein says he seeks to do ("bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use") for *these* words – Rorty's anti-metaphysical response bears the characteristic earmark of an *anti-metaphysical metaphysics* (be it Berkeley's, Hume's, Carnap's, or Derrida's): a recoil from the ordinary. In attacking (not the *use* that a philosopher makes of his words, but) *the words*, urging us to throw the words themselves away, Rorty would have us destroy (not only metaphysical houses of cards, but) precious everyday discursive resources and along with them the concepts (and hence the availability of the thoughts) which they enable us to express.
- 53 I would be happy to characterize some of these remarks – e.g. (2") – as *grammatical remarks*. But that is a story that must await another occasion.
- 54 Rorty contrasts Orwell's two major novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and *Pale Fire*. He claims that Nabokov's – unlike Orwell's – novels "will survive as long as there are gifted, obsessive readers who identify themselves with" the respective protagonists of each of the novels. Rorty, in this connection, also quotes with approval Irving Howe's remark that Orwell is one of those writers "who live most significantly for their own age" (*CIS*, p. 169). Rorty's point in contrasting Orwell with Nabokov is that as certain historical events recede into the past, readers of Orwell's novels will be comparatively less able to identify themselves with Winston Smith et al. Similarly, Rorty's point in adducing Howe's remark is that Orwell's work is not primarily concerned with "enduring problems." Both of these points are tied to Rorty's assumption that the major aim – or at least one of the major aims – of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is to redescribe Soviet Russia. This assumption will be taken up in the later section on Orwell on Totalitarianism.
- 55 *CIS*, p. 171.
- 56 Quoted by Rorty in *CIS*, p. 172. Trilling's passage in context runs as follows:

George Orwell's . . . *Nineteen Eighty-Four* confirms its author in the special, honorable place he holds in our intellectual life. Orwell's native gifts are perhaps not of the transcendent kind; they have their roots in a quality of mind that is as frequent as it is modest. This quality may be described as a sort of moral centrality, a directness of relation to moral – and political – fact, and it is so far from being frequent in our time that Orwell's possession of it seems nearly unique. Orwell is an intellectual to his fingertips, but he is far removed from both the Continental and the American type of intellectual . . . He is indifferent to the allurements of elaborate theory . . . The medium of his thought is common sense, and his commitment to intellect is fortified by an old-fashioned faith that the truth can be got at, that we can, if we actually want to, see the object as it really is. ("Orwell on the Future", in *Speaking of Literature and Society*; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich [henceforth *SLS*]; p. 249)

Trilling says two things here which hardly cohere with Rorty's Realist construal of this passage. Notice, first, that Rorty has cut the passage off in mid-sentence. What Trilling

goes on to say in that sentence about the quality of “directness of relation to moral – and political – fact” which Orwell’s writing possesses is that “in our time . . . Orwell’s possession of it seems nearly unique.” This hardly accords with Rorty’s hypothesis that the phrase “directness of relation to moral – and political – fact” denotes the kind of relation to fact that, on a Realist account, all veridical instances of moral and political thought possess. Notice, second, that Trilling goes on to make the very point which Rorty himself adduces as a ground for thinking that Orwell is not a Realist: “[H]e is far removed from both the Continental and the American type of intellectual . . . He is indifferent to the allurements of elaborate theory.” The feature of Orwell’s sensibility that Trilling is struggling to characterize in the above passage is beautifully captured in the following remark by Timothy Garton Ash:

The unmistakable Orwell voice is one of defiant unvarnished honesty, of the plain man bluntly telling things as they are . . . Orwell was an inveterate diarist, note-taker and list-maker . . . He loved what the English poet Craig Raine memorably calls “the beauty of facts.” If Orwell had a God, it was Kipling’s “the God of Things as They are”. (*New York Review of Books*, October 22, 1998)

Notice: Garton Ash, in seeking to characterize “this quality Orwell’s writing possesses” is led (as was Trilling) to call upon forms of words, in this case borrowed from the poetry of Raine and Kipling, that Rorty surely would be unable to hear as anything other than frothing endorsements of a Realist metaphysics.

- 57 Rorty passes over in silence Trilling’s remarks later in the same essay (e.g., “to read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an attack on Soviet communism . . . and as nothing else would be to misunderstand the book’s aim”; *SLS*, p. 253) which clearly indicate that he does not share Rorty’s assumptions concerning what the novel aims to “redescribe.” For some indication of what might be moving Trilling in these remarks, see notes 116, 120 and 133.
- 58 Specifically, a conception which involves a commitment to some version of (4).
- 59 *CIS*, p. 172.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 The occurrences of these remarks which Rorty cites are from *CEJL*, I, p. 7. These themes are sounded repeatedly throughout Orwell’s corpus.
- 62 Quoted on *CIS*, p. 172.
- 63 Though, as we shall see, Rorty does not take the passage to be as pivotal as he imagines someone who favors the “realist” reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* must.
- 64 In particular, (2) and (4).
- 65 Quoted by Rorty, *CIS*, p. 173n. The passage is from Hynes’s “Introduction” to *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 1984*, edited by Samuel Hynes (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 19. Rorty, I surmise, takes the final two sentences of the passage to rest on theses (5) and (7).
- 66 Such vocabulary also occurs in the article by Trilling that Rorty cites. Trilling says that the citizens of Orwell’s dystopia “might actually gain a life of security, adjustment, and fun, but only at the cost of their spiritual freedom, which is to say, of their humanity” (*SLS*, p. 251).
- 67 *CIS*, p. 187.
- 68 *CIS*, p. 173.
- 69 Such as (2), (4) and (8).
- 70 Rorty embellishes, however, on what these commentators actually say. Thus, for example, in the above passage, Rorty speaks of “plain epistemological and metaphysical facts,” assuming that commentators on Orwell, such as Trilling, when speaking of “plain facts” must have *epistemological* or *metaphysical* facts in mind. This seems to me an extraordinary assumption. (Indeed, the notion of a “plain metaphysical fact” strikes me as an oxymoron.)
- 71 Consider the following six examples drawn from the above passage: (a) that one can distinguish between transparent and untransparent prose, (b) that a fondness for the latter

sort of prose can be a function of clouded vision, (c) that such clouding can be caused by one's personality, (d) that people try to evade the plain facts, (e) that truth is independent of human minds and languages, (f) that gravitation is not relative to any human mode of thought. Rorty is certainly right that most admirers of Orwell – including Trilling and Hynes – say things, on Orwell's behalf, which sound very much like (a)–(f). Must the motivation to (a)–(f) be understood in terms of a commitment to some subset of (1)–(8)? From the rest of Rorty's discussion, it is plain that he takes the motivation on the part of commentators such as Trilling and Hynes to (a) and (b) to be a commitment to some version of (8), the motivation to (c) to be a commitment to some version of (3), and the motivation to (d), (e) and (f) to be a commitment to some version of (1) or (2).

- 72 “I do not think there are any plain moral facts out there in the world, nor any truths independent of language . . . So I want to offer a different reading of Orwell” (*CIS*, p. 173).
- 73 I take it that, in advancing their readings of Orwell, Trilling and Hynes are not concerned with philosophical controversies such as the one (in which Rorty himself is embroiled) between Realism and Rortianism, and are hence untroubled by the worry that their formulations of Orwellian thoughts could be construed (by someone with epistemologicist obsessions) as enunciations of Realist theses. But this presupposes the claim argued for in sections VII–IX: that the vocabulary which the Realist likes to employ is put by Orwell (and, following him, by his admirers) to other discursive ends.
- 74 Peter Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993), pp. 56, 59, 69.
- 75 Rorty never claims in so many words that, in the focal passage, Winston's thoughts reflect his commitment to Realist theses. But what Rorty does say about the focal passage would appear to commit him to such a view. Rorty says that if one identifies the sentiments expressed in the focal passage with those of the author one will inevitably be led to conclude, mistakenly, that Orwell is a Realist. It is very hard to see how to reconcile this commitment with Rorty's assertion that he believes Orwell's work to be free of metaphysical concerns. The only apparent route open to Rorty to effect such a reconciliation would be for him to claim that the focal passage appears to support a Realist construal *only when considered apart from the context of the novel as a whole*. But this route is blocked: Rorty cannot afford to make room for an innocent construal of Winston's remarks. Rorty's entire discussion of “Orwell's admirers” turns on the premise that one can identify Realist commitments by attending to the vocabulary a speaker employs. If one affirms that Winston is not here giving voice to Realist theses, then this leaves the door wide open to a reading of Trilling and Hynes according to which, in echoing Winston, they are not either. Indeed, the argument of sections VII and IX of this paper could easily be adapted to mount an argument to the effect that the remarks of Trilling and Hynes about Orwell's novel appear to support a Realist construal only when considered apart from the context of the reading of the novel that each of them seeks to offer.
- 76 In this respect, as readers of Orwell, Van Inwagen and Rorty are much closer to each other than either is to Trilling or Hynes. My own (Wittgensteinian) view of the structure of this controversy – for which I will not argue in this paper – is nicely summed up by *Philosophical Investigations*, 402:

[W]e are tempted to say that our way of speaking does not describe the facts as they really are . . . As if the form of expression were saying something false even when the proposition *faute de mieux* asserted something true.

For *this* is what disputes between Idealists, Solipsists and Realists look like. The one party attack the normal form of expression as if they were attacking a statement; the others defend, as if they were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953)

Rorty fully yields to the temptation “to say that our way of speaking does not describe the facts as they really are.” For he, like Van Inwagen, thinks that in order for our ordinary

ways of speaking to be on to “the facts as they really are” they would require a metaphysical underpinning. Rorty, in seeking to deny the need for such an underpinning, feels obliged to *attack* our normal modes of expression as if they themselves embodied metaphysical claims; he “attacks the normal form of expression as if he were attacking a statement”; and Van Inwagen, while retaining Rorty’s picture of the sort of (super-)facts which would be required to vindicate the normal mode of expression, defends what Rorty attacks, as if he “were stating facts recognized by every reasonable human being.” Trilling, Hynes and Orwell simply call upon our normal modes of expression without the least intention of taking sides in such a debate between the Realist and the anti-Realist; Rorty and Van Inwagen are unable to view such a willingness to acquiesce in the normal mode of expression as anything other than an implicit endorsement of a Realist metaphysics.

- 77 Rorty denies that he wants so to enlist Orwell: “I want to offer a different reading of Orwell. This is not a matter of wanting to have him on my side of a philosophical argument. He had no . . . taste for such arguments” (*CIS*, p. 173). But, given the reading that Rorty goes on to offer, I cannot see how to take this disclaimer seriously.
- 78 *CIS*, p. 173.
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 Rorty, in short, represents the issue here as if our options were exhausted by (5) and (5’).
- 81 *CIS*, pp. 173–4.
- 82 *CIS*, p. 174.
- 83 We are not allowed the option of concluding that Orwell’s success is a function of both. The argument here depends on the assumption that the theories of literature implicit in (8) and (8’) represent exhaustive alternatives for understanding Orwell’s accomplishment as an author. Rorty identifies (i) with (4) and (ii) with (8’) and sees (4) as belonging with the anti-ironist conception of literature of (8). This allows him to see (i) and (ii) as incompatible and to move swiftly from a rejection of (i) to an endorsement of (ii).
- 84 *CIS*, pp. 173–4.
- 85 *CIS*, p. 171.
- 86 *CIS*, p. 176. It is the burden of the section on Rortian Totalitarianism of this paper to argue not only that Orwell does view O’Brien as “seduced by mistaken theory” but also that the theory by which he is seduced is in important respects indistinguishable from the central tenets of Rortianism.
- 87 From what one gathers elsewhere about how Rorty reads Plato, it seems safe to conclude that for Rorty what it means to view O’Brien “as a modern counterpart to Thrasymachus” is to view him as “a dialectical foil” for the elaboration of Realist theses – in particular, (4) and (6). In skirting past this issue, I should not be understood to be endorsing Rorty’s reading of Plato.
- 88 See *CIS*, p. 183.
- 89 The last six sentences are largely a paraphrase of *CIS*, p. 21.
- 90 This leaves it open that the connection here (between the repudiation of the Realist longing for something transhuman which would underwrite our practices and Orwell’s particular way of illustrating the contingency of those practices) is not one that Orwell sees, but one that only Rorty sees. It is, however, difficult to avoid the impression that, according to Rorty, Orwell’s whole point in illustrating the possibility of practices that differ from ours in just these respects is to oppose Realist theses such as (1) and (2). But, given Rorty’s claim that Orwell’s work is free of metaphysical concerns, Rorty is perhaps most charitably read here as maintaining only that Orwell’s particular way of illustrating the contingency of our practices can serve as a useful instrument in the arsenal of someone – like Rorty – who (unlike Orwell) is concerned to disenchant us with Realism.
- 91 *CIS*, p. 185.
- 92 This elision on Rorty’s part of Orwell’s political motivations – and, with them, the novel’s implicit call for political vigilance – is rather puzzling, given the distance of Rorty’s usual views about politics from any form of fatalism.

- 93 *CEJL*, III, p. 133.
- 94 Orwell agrees with Rorty that in order to continue to think, you need to be able to share your thoughts with others; and in order to do that you need to possess the freedom to be able to *say* to others what you think. But this by itself hardly amounts to an endorsement of either (4') or (7'), as Rorty goes on to suggest.
- 95 "I take Orwell's claim that there is no such thing as *inner* freedom, no such thing as an 'autonomous individual', to be the one made by historicist . . . critics of 'liberal individualism'" (*CIS*, p. 177). Orwell's view, however, as we shall see, is not that there is no such thing as inner freedom or an autonomous individual. His point in the sorts of passages in his work to which Rorty (through his use of demonizing scarequotes) here alludes (see, e.g. *CEJL*, II, p. 135) is simply that *under certain political conditions* the sort of freedom or autonomy in question – which Orwell identifies with freedom of thought – ceases to be possible.
- 96 The slide in Rorty's way of rejecting (7) – so that such a rejection leads immediately into an affirmation of (7') – comes out nicely in the following remark:

I take Orwell's claim . . . to be the one made by historicist . . . critics of 'liberal individualism'. This is that there is nothing deep inside each of us, no common human nature, no built-in human solidarity, to use as a moral reference point. There is nothing to people except what has been socialized into them . . . Simply by being human we do not have a common bond. (*CIS*, p. 177).

- Orwell, as we shall see, agrees with Rorty that there is "nothing deep inside each of us" which guarantees that the political future will resemble the present. Nevertheless, as we shall also see, Orwell's worst fear could aptly be expressed by saying that in the future – unlike the present – there will be nothing to people except what has been socialized into them. We shall also see that Orwell would be quite happy to say that simply by being human we do have a common bond; but what he would mean in saying this does not rest on a metaphysical notion of "our essential humanity" of the sort which figures in (7).
- 97 The only way Rorty is able to hear any of these three ideas is as a version of a Realist thesis – specifically as versions of (2), (4) and (7) respectively.
- 98 The quotation is from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949 [henceforth *N*]), p. 270; it is cited by Rorty on *CIS*, p. 177.
- 99 More importantly, for my purposes, it begs the question against any non-Realist reader of Orwell who thinks that a project (which can be described as one) of "undermining Winston's hold on the concept of objective truth" is integral to O'Brien's purpose in seeking to tear Winston's mind apart.
- 100 *CIS*, pp. 177–8.
- 101 *CIS*, pp. 176–7. Rorty manages, on the strength of these two passages from Orwell, to attribute to Orwell (1'), (2'), (3') and (8') – and by implication (4'). As noted above, Rorty construes Orwell's views about the contingency of history in terms of (5'); and he takes the 1944 passage by itself to support the attribution of (7') to Orwell.
- 102 *CIS*, pp. 178.
- 103 *CIS*, pp. 178–9.
- 104 *CIS*, pp. 179–180.
- 105 Equally peculiarly, on Rorty's reading, the last third of novel seems to have almost nothing to do with the narrative of the first two-thirds of the novel (in which Winston repeatedly frames his indictments of the society in which he lives by employing this vocabulary).
- 106 *CIS*, p. 182. Rorty credits Judith Shklar with formulating the conception of what it is to be a liberal that he himself favors. ("I borrow my definition of 'liberal' from Judith Shklar, who says that liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do;" *CIS*, p. xv). Rorty takes his own reading of Orwell's novel – which foregrounds the theme of cruelty and disparages the theme of "the possibility of truth" (as an interpretative red herring) – to be a reading which makes Orwell out to be "a good liberal." It is thus worth

- noting that when Shklar herself writes an essay on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, she feels no compulsion to choose between a reading of the novel which places the theme of the horror of cruelty at the center of the novel and one which places that of the denial of reality at its center. She sums up her own reading of the novel as follows: “Cruelty *and* especially the denial of reality . . . were what made up the political order of 1984” [my emphasis] (“*Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Should Political Theory Care?” in *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (edited by Stanley Hoffmann, University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, 1998)); p. 344.
- 107 *CEJL*, IV, p. 460 [my emphases]. This, again, is something that Judith Shklar appreciates: “[W]hat sort of book is it? It is not a prophecy at all, in fact. Orwell meant to draw out the logical implications of the thinking of his fellow intellectuals . . . What would a world in which all thinking was really ruling-class ideology involve? After all many theorists claim that this is so always. What would writing about the past and present really amount to if that were indeed the case? It takes real imagination to cope with such propositions and 1984 in fact does that” (*op. cit.*, pp. 341–3).
- 108 *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is about a community in which that possibility has become so vanishingly small that its absence can not even be experienced (by most people) as a loss: “A person growing up with Newspeak as his sole language would no more know that . . . *free* had once meant “intellectually free,” than, for instance, a person who had never heard of chess would be aware of the secondary meanings attaching to *queen* and *rook*” (*N*, pp. 312–3).
- 109 Rorty sees Realists as concerned to argue that our social practices have philosophical, as well as empirical, presuppositions. This leads Rorty to claim that the only sorts of presuppositions our practices have are *empirical* ones. Rorty often argues as if the Realist is shown to be wrong if it can be shown that the alleged presuppositions are contingent. The putative presuppositions are shown not to be *philosophical* presuppositions, if they can be shown to be merely “optional” – i.e. dispensable. (See, e.g., *DAFHPP*, pp. 52–3.) On this conception of what makes something a philosophical presupposition of a practice, the sorts of “presuppositions” (on, e.g., the possibility of free thought and free speech) with which Orwell is concerned evidently do not count as “philosophical”: for Orwell’s whole point is that they are “optional” – they can be wiped out (though only at the cost of wiping out many of our current practices along with them). But does this mean (as Rorty seems to suppose) that they are therefore “merely empirical” presuppositions of our practices?
- 110 Thus institutions such as the mandatory telescreen, the thought police, and the two minutes hate would not be able to wreak anything like the harm they do in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, if they did not afford an effective means of monitoring, enforcing, and reinforcing allegiance to certain ideas – in particular, the three “sacred principles of Ingsoc”: the principles underlying Newspeak, doublethink, and the doctrine of the mutability of the past (*N*, p. 27).
- 111 *CIS*, p. 183.
- 112 Lest I be misunderstood, let me be clear that I agree with Rorty that our social practices do not rest on metaphysical presuppositions. I also agree with Rorty that within professional academic circles most of the debates concerning some version of a thesis such as (7) tend to be pretty sterile and fruitless. But it does not follow that such debate is necessarily harmless. It depends, as said, upon the cultural, institutional and political context within which such debate proceeds: within the American political context, debate about a version of (7) currently underway between activists on both sides of the abortion controversy is not always harmless in its effects. In the hands of the Nazis, a fanatical commitment to a version of (7) was anything but harmless in its effects.
- 113 This is not to say that Orwell would disagree with Rorty about (i) and (ii). Nor is it to say – presuming one could hold Orwell’s interest long enough to get him to understand what the parties to the debates about Realism now taking place in philosophy departments take

- themselves to be debating – that Orwell would disagree with Rorty about (iii). It is only to say that Orwell has other fish to fry.
- 114 The point (in the last note but one) about (7) might seem to turn on a peculiarity of (7); namely, that any version of (7) is an explicitly moral thesis, and therefore, at least in principle, the sort of doctrine which has potential practical implications. This might appear to suggest that the target of Orwell's critique is restricted to certain forms of moral or political theorizing. But what *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is concerned to bring out is that philosophical doctrines of a sort which appear, on the surface, to involve "purely theoretical" questions – such as doctrines regarding the mutability of the past – can, when put to certain uses in certain political contexts, have practical effects which are at least as far-reaching and devastating as those of any explicitly moral doctrine.
- 115 On an alternative broader construal of 'totalitarian' common among many American commentators on Orwell, the assumption yields the following (only slightly less confining) gloss: the aim of the novel is to say something about the form of government common to, say, Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia.
- 116 Rorty's interpretative assumption that (at the least the first two-thirds of) the novel is primarily concerned to offer a description of Soviet Russia chimes with the reading of the novel put forward in American right wing circles at the inception of the Cold War. (It is a reading which Orwell found extremely disheartening and went out of his way to disown in interviews, letters, and press-releases; all reprinted in *CEJL*, IV; see also Crick, *op. cit.*, pp. 393–398.) Rorty's interpretative assumption finds its mirror-image in the equally valid and equally partial reading of the novel championed by the Soviet press in the 1980s: "George Orwell with his prophetic gift diagnosed the syndrome of present-day capitalism with which we must co-exist today for lack of something better" (quoted by John Rodden in *The Politics of Literary Reputation*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; p. 208). As we shall see, when we turn to Orwell's writings on the Spanish Civil War, Judith Shklar comes much closer to the truth (than either Rorty or the Soviet press) when she writes: "[A]buses of language were in Orwell's view the way in which dishonesty worked. No one, moreover, was in his view more reprehensible in this respect than the English fellow-traveling intellectual establishment . . . The intellectual who cannot abide intellectuals is not an uncommon type, of course, but what sets Orwell apart is that he translated this contempt into a vision of a society governed by the objects of his scorn. The totalitarian state he projected was neither Stalin's nor Hitler's entirely. The Inner Party that dispenses Ingsoc and rules Airstrip One in *1984* is made up of radical Anglo-American intellectuals" (*op. cit.*, pp. 342–3).
- 117 *CEJL*, III; p. 88.
- 118 In *Homage to Catalonia*, for example, Orwell discusses in this connection "the seemingly trivial matter" of the sorts of "habits of mind" which render certain sorts of libels and press-campaigns possible with their resulting capacity to do "the most deadly damage" (*Homage to Catalonia*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1952; pp. 177–8).
- 119 "To be corrupted by totalitarianism one does not have to live in a totalitarian country. The mere prevalence of certain ideas can spread a kind of poison" (*CEJL*, IV, p. 67).
- 120 Aside from the obvious fact that it is set in Britain, numerous aspects of the world depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* clearly indicate that it is envisioned as a future development of Capitalist Britain (as Orwell portrays it in his non-fiction of the 1930s and 1940s) and not as a future development of Stalinist Russia. To mention just one such example, in Stalinist Russia, the primary target of indoctrination and consumer of propaganda was "the Russian worker." This is not the state of affairs depicted in Orwell's novel. In the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, though the proles make up eighty-five percent of the population, nobody much cares what the proles do or say or think as long as they show up at the factory:

Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer, and above all, gambling filled up the horizon of the minds [of the

proles] . . . There was a vast amount of criminality in London, a whole world-within-a-world of thieves, bandits, prostitutes, drug-peddlers and racketeers of every description; but since it all happened among the proles themselves, it was of no importance . . . The sexual puritanism of the Party was not imposed upon them. Promiscuity went unpunished, divorce was permitted. For that matter, even religious worship would have been permitted if the proles had shown any sign of needing or wanting it. (N, pp. 71–2)

In the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the life of the English prole still in many respects closely resembles the life of the “English common people” of 1944 (at least as characterized by Orwell in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, *CEJL*, II, pp. 56–108). The prole is more or less free to do as he likes as long as he remains politically apathetic, serves as a cogwheel in the economy, and is imbued with enough patriotic fervor to serve effectively as fodder for the war-machine. The primary targets of intellectual enslavement in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are the members of the Party, a minority of the population. As we shall see, the tendencies which are depicted in the novel (as having evolved into the practices of “reality control” and the monitoring of “thoughtcrime”) are ones which Orwell saw as underway already in the 1930s within (both the left and right wing of) the English intellectual elite class.

- 121 *CEJL*, IV, p. 502.
- 122 Orwell repeatedly emphasizes that “if one . . . doesn’t point to the sinister symptoms” then one is oneself “merely helping to bring totalitarianism nearer” (*CEJL*, III, p. 150).
- 123 Thus Orwell summarizes “the moral” of the novel as follows: “The moral to be drawn from this dangerous nightmare situation is a simple one: *Don’t let it happen. It depends on you*” (quoted by Crick, *op. cit.*, p. 395).
- 124 “[O]rthodoxy in the full sense demands a control over one’s mental processes as complete as that of a contortionist over his body” (N, p. 213).
- 125 *CEJL*, III; p. 88. This passage echoes countless passages in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (which detail the ways in which the Party “shuts you up in an artificial universe in which you have no standards of comparison”) such as the following: “[T]he claim of the Party to have improved the conditions of human life had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and never again could exist, any standard against which it could be tested” (N, p. 93).
- 126 *CEJL*, II, p. 258.
- 127 See, for instance, *CEJL*, IV, p. 64.
- 128 See *CEJL*, IV, p. 64, see also *CEJL*, III, p. 149.
- 129 The proliferation of atrocities constitutes, for Orwell, one of the many genuinely deplorable consequences of totalitarianism. It is, however, as Orwell sees the problem, itself a consequence of (what he calls) “the denial of the existence of objective truth.” If your only standard for assessing whether acts of cruelty have been committed is whether your comrades say they have been committed, then you are unable to identify and prevent acts which your comrades refuse to countenance as ones of cruelty. This leads to a set of conditions under which atrocities become commonplace and undetectable.
- 130 Thus Rorty is certainly right (a) that Orwell abhors cruelty, (b) that he cherishes freedom, and (c) that he associates the proliferation of the one and the eradication of the other with totalitarianism. But Rorty is mistaken to suppose that (a)–(c) suffice to warrant the attribution of the distinctive doctrines of Rortian liberal ironism to Orwell.
- 131 *CEJL*, III; p. 88.
- 132 *CEJL*, II, p. 252.
- 133 We are now in a position to see why readers of Orwell such as Trilling might want to say things such as the following in characterizing the themes of the novel:

- There is such a thing as reminding someone of some plain truths (whose obviousness is on a par with “two plus two is four”).

- In certain extraordinary (i.e. totalitarian) contexts, the furnishing of such reminders can be an act of moral and political courage.
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an attempt to depict a world in which such acts of courage are (or shall soon be) no longer possible.

Rorty is certainly right when he says: “To admirers like Trilling, Orwell provided a fresh glimpse of obvious moral realities” (*CIS*, p. 174). So what? Some moral cases are not hard cases. As Orwell repeatedly says: it is possible to see the unspeakable wrongness of an act. (See, e.g., *CEJL*, I, p. 45.) I don’t see how Rorty, without reneging on his ethnocentrism, can deny that, judging by the lights of our community, certain acts count as plainly wrong. I also don’t see how Rorty, without again reneging on his ethnocentrism, can deny that, judging by the lights of our community, it is sometimes a plain fact that an act of this sort has been committed – that, e.g., the deniers of the Holocaust have got the facts wrong. One doesn’t need to be a Realist to think that it is sometimes worth reminding people (e.g., whose view of the facts are clouded by totalitarian ideas) of such facts. Rorty, in his eagerness to convict readers such as Trilling of Realism, fails to locate wherein the pertinence of furnishing such reminders lies in their view. What Rorty claims is that such readers think that the descriptions offered in *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are accomplished simply by doing something akin to asserting “two plus two is four.” (Surely, no one who is not a lunatic would attempt to summarize the literary means employed in these tremendously imaginative works of fiction in this way.) Eager to oppose this (lunatic) view of Orwell’s novels, Rorty moves from the unobjectionable observation that these novels are *novels* (i.e., employ imaginative literary resources) to the objectionable conclusion that Orwell understands himself to be doing the same kind of thing as his opponents (*CIS*, pp. 173–4).

- 134 Along the lines, e.g., of the account Thomas Kuhn gives for the abandonment of certain scientific concepts in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- 135 Along the lines, e.g., of the account Kierkegaard gives of our present use of the term ‘Christian’; see my “Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Anscombe on Moral Unintelligibility” (in *Morality and Religion*, edited by D.Z. Phillips, St. Martins Press, NY: 1996).
- 136 Compare: “[A]ctually, [Winston] thought as he readjusted the Ministry of Plenty’s figures, it was not even forgery . . . Most of the material that you were dealing with had no connection with anything in the real world, not even the kind of connection that is contained in a direct lie” (N, p. 41).
- 137 *CEJL*, II, pp. 256–258. Caleb Thompson, in his article “Philosophy and Corruption of Language” (*Philosophy*, January 1992), adduces this passage in the context of an illuminating discussion of the importance to Orwell of the contrast between telling lies and those uses of language which impede or erode our attaining the sort of relation to truth implicit even in a direct lie.
- 138 Winston, early in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, reflects: “The past . . . had not merely been altered, it had been actually destroyed. For how could you establish even the most obvious fact when there existed no record outside your own memory?” (N, p. 36). The Party’s aim in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in promulgating the doctrine of the mutability of the past and in destroying all reliable records, is to achieve with respect to the entire history of the past what Orwell claimed would in all likelihood turn out to have been achieved in fact in the case of the history of the Spanish Civil War:

[T]he chances are that those lies, or at any rate similar lies, will pass into history . . . [A]fter all, *some* kind of history will be written, and after those who actually remember the war are dead, it will be universally accepted. So for all practical purposes the lie will have become truth. (*CEJL*, II, p. 258)

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston concludes: “The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth” (*N*, p. 75).

- 139 As I use the term, a ‘totalitarian scenario’ is always relative to a set of beliefs and the subject-matter of those beliefs. The British intellectuals discussed by Orwell inhabited a totalitarian scenario with regard to the formation of their beliefs about the Spanish Civil War (and no doubt certain other matters); but there is no reason to suppose that the formation of their beliefs about what was happening at any given time, say, in their vegetable gardens was equally insensitive to the subject-matter of those beliefs. Thus by a “totalitarian scenario” I always mean only to refer to a *locally* totalitarian scenario. I don’t think any sense is to be made of a *fully global* totalitarian scenario – though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* offers what I take to be a depiction of as global a totalitarian scenario as one can form an at least minimally coherent conception of. (This is perfectly compatible with its being, along a different dimension, quite local in a quite different sense of “local” – i.e., not with respect to the range of beliefs, but rather with respect to the range of the population of believers; so in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the beliefs of only 15% of the population of Oceania fall within the maximally global totalitarian scenario the novel depicts.) Conversely, when I use the term ‘non-totalitarian scenario,’ I mean to refer to a scenario which is not even locally totalitarian. Notice: there is nothing about the concept *totalitarian*, so defined, that specifies the sorts of beliefs which are at issue (e.g., only beliefs of an overtly *political* nature) or the source of the totalitarian pressure on their formation (e.g., a political party or a government). Thus, in Orwell’s sense of the word, George Cukor’s (depiction of the marriage of Gregory and Paula Anton in the film) *Gaslight* is no less in-depth a study of totalitarianism than Arthur Koestler’s (depiction of the Moscow Trials in) *Darkness at Noon*.
- 140 “The process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound tracks, cartoons, photographs – to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance . . . [E]very prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary evidence to have been correct; nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place . . . It might very well be that every word in the history books, even things that one accepted without question, was pure fantasy . . . [T]he claim of the Party . . . had got to be accepted, because there did not exist, and never again could exist any standard against which it could be tested . . . [Members of the Party] could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality” (*N*, pp. 40–41, 74, 93, 157).
- 141 For reasons that we will come to, this is not to say that the concept of objective truth has altogether faded out of the world of a Party member. When I say here it “has faded as far out of someone’s world as it conceivably can” that means as far out of someone’s world as it conceivably can without that person losing her mindedness – her ability to direct her thought at reality – altogether.
- 142 *N*, pp. 35–36.
- 143 See, e.g., *N*, pp. 80, 157, 198, 200, 216, 252. See also *CEJL*, p. 149.
- 144 *CIS*, p. 182.
- 145 *N*, p. 35.
- 146 *CEJL*, II, pp. 258–259.
- 147 *N*, p. 80. I have omitted from this passage the following sentence: “The heresy of heresies was common sense.” The sentence raises an important topic (which this paper largely neglects): Rortian Ironism and the Party have a common enemy. Both are *opposed to common sense* (and the ways of employing the vocabulary of ‘reality’, ‘truth’, ‘fact’, etc. that common sense licenses).

- 148 In connection with the photograph of Rutherford (which contradicted the Party's official version of Rutherford's biography), Winston reflects: "[The photograph] was concrete evidence; it was like a fragment of the abolished past . . . [T]he fact of having held [the photograph] in his fingers seemed to him to make a difference even now, when the photograph itself, as well as the event it recorded, was only memory" (pp. 78–79).
- 149 Rorty's reading of the novel leaves it generally mysterious why words such as 'truth' and 'objective reality' should figure in the manner in which they do throughout the discussions between O'Brien and Winston, but especially so with respect to that moment of the novel for which one would have expected Rorty to be most concerned to have a textually plausible reading: namely, the moment in the pivotal torture scene in which O'Brien refers back to the convictions to which Winston gives voice in the focal passage and begins to undertake to strip him of those convictions:

"Winston, you believe that reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right . . . But I tell you, Winston, reality is not external. Reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else. Not in the individual mind, which can make mistakes, and in any case soon perishes; only in the mind of the Party, which is collective and immortal. Whatever the Party holds to be the truth *is* the truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party. That is the fact that you have got to relearn, Winston. It needs an act of self-destruction, an effort of the will. You must humble yourself before you can become sane."

[O'Brien] paused for a few moments, as though to allow what he had been saying to sink in.

"Do you remember", he went on, "writing in your diary, 'Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four?'"

"Yes", said Winston.

O'Brien held up his left hand, its back toward Winston, with the thumb hidden and the four fingers extended.

"How many fingers am I holding up, Winston?"

"Four."

"And if the Party says that it is not four but five – then how many?" (*N*, p. 252)

Notice: O'Brien undertakes to destroy Winston's conviction that " $2+2=4$ " only (and immediately) after charging him with clinging to the belief that "reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right" and failing to acquiesce in the belief that "whatever the Party holds to be the truth *is* the truth." Before going on to remind Winston of what he wrote in his diary and undertaking to make him believe otherwise, O'Brien *pauses* for a few moments, in order to allow what he here says to sink in (so that Winston will keep in view why he is being tortured while he is being tortured). Rorty does not pause; he skips over O'Brien's remarks, moves straight to the topic of what Winston wrote in his diary, and then fixates on the word 'freedom,' thus ignoring the entire context of the novel's exploration of the question of what is involved in the "freedom to say that two plus two make four," and thus missing the internal relation (which the novel seeks to highlight) between appreciating that "reality is something objective, external, existing in its own right" and having the "freedom to say that two plus two make four."

- 150 This may seem less obvious with respect to arithmetical claims. It is for just this reason that Orwell goes out of his way to include scenes such as the scene in which Winston is asked to alter the figures of the Ministry of Plenty, the scene in which the quantity of the chocolate ration is altered, etc. These scenes require a certain plasticity in a Party member's conviction in the need for arithmetical results to tally: in all of these scenes alterations of quantitative fact are made by the Party, but Party members are required to believe both that no alteration of quantity has taken place and that the figures tally.
- 151 *CEJL*, II, p. 259.
- 152 I take a *conception* of *X* to be a proposal for how to flesh out our pre-theoretical intuitions about (our concept of) *X*. If the arbiter of truth appealed to in (b) is fallible, then (i) is

incoherent. The only way to interpret the conjunction of (a), (b) & (c) as forming a coherent proposal about anything is if they are interpreted – in accordance with (ii) – as a bizarre set of norms for how to use a piece of vocabulary (i.e., ‘true’). The recipe can be interpreted in accordance with (i) only on the supposition that the Party is infallible – so that (a) and (b) will never conflict – thus rendering (c) idle. (Admittedly, with the exception of Winston and Julia and a few other heretics, every member of the Party does take the Party to be infallible. But if there were ever a case in which a Rortian will want to shrink from regarding community consensus as a reliable measure of truth, this is it! Rortianism, with its relentless emphasis on human finitude must reject the supposition that the Party is *actually* infallible.) If one allows that the Party is fallible, then one must also allow that there will be cases in which (b) conflicts with (a). But that is to concede that (i) leaves us with a set of criteria which, whatever else they might be taken to articulate, do not articulate a coherent conception of truth. In “Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth” (see, especially *ORT*, p. 128), Rorty distinguishes between an endorsing use of ‘true’ and a disquotational use (as well as a third, cautionary, use which need not concern us here) and asserts that these two uses are equally legitimate but completely *distinct* ways of using the word. This is just what *Nineteen Eighty-Four* goes to great lengths to contest. According to Rorty, of course, – see (1’) above – community-wide consensus is the ultimate arbiter of warrant and hence of which propositions one should endorse. But the supposition that such a criterion of “truth” will not conflict with the norm constituted by the disquotational principle only makes sense on the supposition that the community is infallible on matters on which community-wide consensus has been attained. (It might appear that there is wiggle-room for Rorty on this issue because he can claim that the appropriate criterion of “truth” is not *de facto* consensus but what we *at our best* would agree to. On this, see note 172.) As I will suggest in section VIII, it only makes sense to suppose that community-wide consensus is a reliable touchstone of truth if one assumes that the norms of inquiry which guide the community are internally related to the norm constituted by the disquotational principle. Pace Rorty, the endorsing and disquotational uses of ‘true’ are not two distinct uses of a homonymous term.

153 *CEJL*, II, p. 259.

154 This way of putting the objection presupposes that Rorty, if faced with the texts, would be prepared to acknowledge what his essay on Orwell implicitly denies: namely, that Orwell does indeed want to call upon the word ‘truth’ in this and similar ways.

155 “A Party member is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the belief and attitudes demanded of him are never plainly stated, and could not be stated without laying bare the contradictions inherent in Ingsoc” (*N*, p. 212).

156 “[T]he 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” (*N*, p. 215).

157 “To make sure that all written records agree with the orthodoxy of the moment is a merely mechanical act. But it is also necessary to *remember* that events happened in the desired manner. And if it is necessary to rearrange one’s memories or to tamper with written records, then it is necessary to *forget* that one has done so” (*N*, p. 215).

158 *N*, p. 216.

159 “[T]he labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancel out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, . . . to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again, and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself – that was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word ‘doublethink’ involved the use of doublethink” (*N*, p. 36).

160 I place “practices” here (and in the next two sentences) in scarequotes to signal that the expression when it so occurs – in contrast to when it occurs without scarequotes – does not refer to an alternative coherent set of norms for making claims. In charging Rorty with mistaking (what he calls) “practices” for practices, I am, of course, raising questions which I cannot afford to address here – questions such as: what is a practice?, and: how does one individuate practices? Rorty often talks as if these belonged to a kind of question that philosophy can afford to pass on to the social sciences without risk of confusion. This social-scientistic strain in Rorty’s thinking is in tension with his enthusiasm for the work of Putnam and Davidson (in particular, with their theories of meaning and their insistence on the role of the constitutive ideal of rationality in licensing attributions of meaning). Rorty would readily assent that Putnam, in “The Meaning of Meaning” (in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Volume II*, Cambridge University Press, 1975; pp. 215–271,) shows that what a speaker must mean by, e.g., “gold” is constituted at least in part by her physical and social environment. But how should we understand the qualifier ‘social’ in “social environment” here? Many of Rorty’s remarks presuppose a very *thin* – essentially non-normative – understanding of the environing social “practices” (which are putatively partially constitutive of what a speaker can mean by her words). If all it takes to distinguish two different “practices” is that there is some systematic difference in the noises that members of two respective communities make (e.g., the members of one make a noise that sounds like our word ‘gold’ when confronted with fool’s gold, the members of the other do not), then differences in “practices” come cheap. But such an understanding of “practice” is too thin to enable one to get into view what it would be to *misuse* a linguistic expression, and thus what it could mean to be using an expression *in accord* with a practice. What Putnam teaches (see especially “Dreaming and ‘Depth Grammar’”, *ibid.*, pp. 304–321) is that it is the beginning of wisdom, when individuating meanings, not to conclude that a linguistic expression (e.g., one which is pronounced as our word “gold” is) has a different meaning when used by each of two distinct communities, if one’s only ground for so concluding is that, alongside significant overlap in circumstances of use in the same physical environment (e.g., in nine out of ten cases both communities call what we call gold “gold”), the communities happen to differ with respect to a limited range of circumstances of use (e.g., one of them refers to fool’s gold as “gold” and the other doesn’t). In order to make its bearing on the present context of discussion explicit, Putnam’s conclusion about what is going on in the sorts of examples he discusses could be reformulated as follows: the right thing to say is that the two (allegedly alien) linguistic communities have *the same practice* of employing the relevant word (e.g., they both have the same practice of employing the word “gold”, but one of the communities is far better than the other at discriminating fake gold from genuine gold). The same holds, with regard to their respective employments of Oldspeak vocabulary, for the two linguistic communities constituted by members of the Party and present-day speakers of English: between the two communities, there is *only one set of linguistic practices* for employing expressions such as “five,” “fingers,” “photograph,” etc. The evidence of frequent and flagrant disregard on the part of Party members of our present-day norms for employing Oldspeak expressions is not sufficient to license the attribution to them of an alternative set of linguistic practices. For the only coherent norms for employing such expressions Party members have are the ones which *we* have. Admittedly, under the pressure of the totalitarian demands of the Party, a pervasive incoherence is introduced into their employment of such expressions; and, to that extent, their linguistic behavior involves an overall pattern of use which is no longer characterized by the sort of *unity* which is constitutive of a practice. However, such apparent departures from our practice do not in and of themselves suffice to constitute an alternative practice (any more than two chess players who each try to get away with cheating as much as possible can be said to be “playing chess according to different rules”); they merely represent a highly degenerate form of our practice. (For a searching discussion of the sort of “unity” at issue here, see Michael Thompson’s *Practice and Disposition*; in

Preferences, Principles, and Practices, A. Ripstein and C. Morris, eds., Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.)

- 161 “A totalitarian society which succeeded in perpetuating itself would set up a schizophrenic system of thought” (*CEJL*, IV, p. 64).
- 162 Orwell’s use of the term “schizophrenic” here is not merely a literary flourish. Totalitarian modes of thought, such as those enjoined by “The principles of Ingsoc,” can usefully be thought of as literally inducing schizophrenia. Consider the following description of one of the characteristic features of clinically schizophrenic patients:

A [characteristic] feature of schizophrenic patients is what has been called their “double bookkeeping.” It is remarkable to what extent even the most disturbed schizophrenics may retain, even at the height of their psychotic periods, a quite accurate sense of what would generally be considered to be their objective or actual circumstances. Rather than mistaking the imaginary for the real, they often seem to live in two parallel but separate worlds: consensual reality and the realm of their hallucinations and delusions. A patient who claims that the doctors and nurses are trying to torture and poison her may nevertheless happily consume the food they give her; a patient who asserts that the people around him are phantoms or automatons still interacts with them as if they were real. (Louis A. Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY, 1994)

In matters of vital importance, which require the acknowledgment of such things as the nutritive value of food and the reality of other people, schizophrenics act with “a quite accurate sense” of what a non-schizophrenic would “consider to be their objective or actual circumstances.” Such “double bookkeeping” is an equally characteristic feature of the lives of Party members. Methods of thought to which we non-Party members explicitly adhere, and which are opposed to the most fundamental avowed principles of the Party, tacitly inform the lives of Party members. Through his actions, a Party member continuously tacitly acknowledges the reality of that which he officially repudiates.

One might, however, think that at least those who belong to the higher echelons of the Party are quite unlike schizophrenics in at least the following respect: someone like O’Brien is able to attain a certain degree of self-consciousness with respect to his practice of double bookkeeping, so that he is able to know of himself that he is continually unconsciously engaged in double bookkeeping and such double bookkeeping and can even, on occasion, become fully self-conscious. Thus temporary local suspensions of the principles of Ingsoc are condoned whenever such a suspension conduces to the ends of the Party with regard to certain matters of vital importance: “The empirical method of thought, on which all the scientific achievements of the past were founded, is opposed to the most fundamental principles of Ingsoc . . . But in matters of vital importance . . . the empirical approach is still encouraged or at least tolerated . . . [B]ut once that minimum is achieved, [members of the Party] can twist reality into whatever shape they choose” (*N*, pp. 194, 200). But the capacity intermittently to indulge in doublethink self-consciously – and the sort of self-knowledge involved in knowing that one otherwise practices it unconsciously – hardly distinguishes Party members from schizophrenics. What Orwell has Emmanuel Goldstein say about members of the Inner Party, in the above extract from *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, strikingly resembles much of what Schreber has to say, in his more self-conscious moments, about his own relation to reality (Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1988)).

- 163 *CIS*, p. 182.

- 164 “Honesty” here refers to a *virtue* not an occurrent psychological state. An individual’s honesty is not measured by the degree to which she is capable of remaining unconscious of lying while lying. If the cultivation of such forms of unconsciousness is itself consciously practiced – as the principles of doublethink enjoin – then what is cultivated is the vice of

dishonesty. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an attempt to envision a world in which the variety of dishonesty which the principles of doublethink enjoin has become second nature. It is because Judith Shklar sees this – and Rorty misses this – that she is able to offer a summary of the point of the novel which is almost a precise inverse of Rorty’s summary: “In *1984* the possibility of saying $2 + 2 = 4$ because one knows it to be true is lost. The plot is largely the story of how this last impulse to speak the truth is destroyed . . . *1984* is . . . a cognitive nightmare” (*op. cit.*, pp. 344–5).

- 165 I can imagine Rorty responding at this point: “OK, so it turns out that Orwell does talk a lot about ‘objective truth’ and ‘objective reality’ and does think that he is saying something worth saying when he talks that way. But I want to distinguish between the good Orwell (who cares about freedom and cruelty) and the bad Orwell (who cares about objective truth and objective reality). Orwell is split between a de-divinizing and a divinizing self. I admit that both these Orwells exist, but I am only interested in the former. In my reading of Orwell, I am trying to make Orwell more faithful to his own better self.” (One often finds Rorty thus carving philosophers up into their “good” and “bad” sides when confronted with aspects of their thought that don’t fit into his reading of them. His writings on Cavell, Dewey, Heidegger, Putnam and Wittgenstein all furnish cases in point.) But such a separation of a writer’s thought into distinct components can only be effected if the (purportedly) “good” region of his thought can be partitioned off from the “bad” and still remain the region of his thought that it is. If the relevant regions of a writer’s thought are internally related to one another, then one will misunderstand both in so far as one takes each to raise a set of concerns that can be formulated and grasped in complete independence from the other. In the case of Orwell, this boils down to the question whether Orwell’s views on prevention of cruelty, preservation of freedom and regard for truth are only externally related to one another. It is the burden of the final section of this paper to argue that these three regions of Orwell’s thought are internally related. (I have already touched a bit – see, e.g., notes 129 & 133 – on Orwell’s view that a totalitarian disregard for truth leads to the proliferation of cruelty.) Orwell is every bit as much of a de-divinizer as Rorty claims he is; but Rorty’s equation of the idea of the answerability of empirical claims to empirical reality with the idea of the answerability of mere mortals to a Deity would constitute, for Orwell, a step backwards in the project of de-divinization. It is just such a step (in which the very idea of the answerability of empirical claims to empirical reality comes to be viewed as a bit of antiquated superstition) which is required in order to effect the “total” enslavement of the mind of a Party member which is the *conditio sine qua non* of the possibility of the sort of divinization (of Big Brother) depicted in Orwell’s novel.
- 166 *N*, p. 219
- 167 *N*, pp. 28–9.
- 168 Hilary Putnam, *Realism With a Human Face* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 21.
- 169 *PRM*, p. 450.
- 170 The norms that Winston follows in making his claims are internal to a world view, just as Putnam urges norms must be. If we plug “Winston” in for S in Rorty’s schema, it should be easy to see that there is no tension – as Rorty claims – between Putnam’s rejection of Realism and his willingness to endorse the claim that S can be completely out of step with the beliefs of other members of his community and yet be warranted in asserting *p*.
- 171 I do not mean to suggest that Orwell thinks that one finds oneself in the situation in which Winston here finds himself – i.e. in which, e.g., one believes a statement to be unwarranted even though the majority of one’s cultural peers believe it to be true – only if one inhabits a totalitarian scenario. Orwell is perfectly happy to say about this or that belief of his contemporaries: “I am not saying that it is a true belief, merely that it is a belief which all modern men do actually hold” (*CE7L*, II, p. 185).
- 172 *PRM*, p. 453. Rorty invokes the notion of “us, at our best” here. I agree that “us, at our best,” appropriately understood, could do the work that Rorty wants it to do, but that

- would require unpacking what is involved in “us, at our best” in a very unRortian way. The relevant notion of our *best* is a normative one (not a merely sociological one). Rorty in his subsequent gloss on the notion in this very passage already begins to drain it of the relevant normative content. A robustly normative conception of what “we, at our best” *ought* to say about X could fund the very distinction which Rorty, in the passages surrounding this quotation, insists he wants – and is able – to do without: namely, the distinction (which Putnam insists upon) between what everyone agrees to be the case with regard to X and what is in fact the case with regard to X. But in order to be entitled to invoke such a robustly normative notion of “us, at our best,” one must respect the internal relation, which Rorty seeks to sever, between the endorsing and disquotational uses of ‘true’ – that is, one must take what we ought to say about X to be constrained not merely by what others in fact let us get away with saying about X, but by what they ought to let us get away with saying about X in the light of how things manifestly are with regard to X. This is just what the Party seeks to prevent. The Party wants you to disregard how things manifestly are with regard to X, if how things manifestly are with regard to X conflicts with what the Party wants to let you get away with saying about X.
- 173 *N*, p. 37.
- 174 “[Winston] had committed – would still have committed, even if he never set pen to paper – the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it. Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed forever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you.” (*N*, p. 20)
- 175 “*Crimestop* means the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought. It includes the power of not grasping analogies, of failing to perceive logical errors, of misunderstanding the simplest arguments if they are inimical to Ingsoc, and of being bored and repelled by any train of thought which is capable of leading in a heretical direction” (*N*, p. 213).
- 176 “For whom, it suddenly occurred to [Winston] to wonder, was he writing his diary? For the future, for the unborn” (*N*, p. 9).
- 177 I say this is “*as close as we can come* to contemplating in imagination the implications of the adoption of a resolutely Rortian conception of objectivity” because I do not think that Rorty’s conception is sufficiently coherent actually to permit of such contemplation. Even the inhabitants of a totalitarian scenario are still able to make claims. Rorty’s conception, I would argue, deprives us of the resources for being able to understand those who engage in the practices Rorty describes as even so much as making claims. Since such an argument is out of place in this section of the paper – which is concerned with how Rorty would look to Orwell – I leave it for another occasion.
- 178 *ORT*, p. 129.
- 179 Rorty himself takes some time over the question whether O’Brien should be counted as an ironist – i.e., a proponent of (8’) – and expresses only one reservation about declaring O’Brien to be one: O’Brien has mastered doublethink, and therefore is not troubled by doubts about himself or the Party. Rorty concludes “[O’Brien] still has the *gifts* which, in a time when doublethink had not yet been invented, would have made him an ironist . . . In this qualified sense, we can think of O’Brien as the last ironist in Europe” (*CIS*, p. 187). What Rorty misses is that, on Orwell’s view, O’Brien’s ironist “denial of objective reality” can – as we saw in the section on Orwell and Totalitarianism – only be put into practice by someone who has perfected the art of doublethink.
- 180 *N*, pp. 251–2.
- 181 See also *N*, p. 269: “‘I told you Winston’, [O’Brien] said, ‘that metaphysics is not your strong point. The word you are trying to think of is solipsism. But you are mistaken. This is not solipsism. Collective solipsism, if you like. But that is a different thing; in fact, the opposite thing.’” And *N*, p. 281: “What knowledge have we of anything, save through our own minds? . . . Whatever happens in all minds, truly happens.”

- 182 *CIS*, p. 176.
- 183 Sartre, as quoted by Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p. xlii). The passage is from Sartre's essay *Is Existentialism a Humanism?*, reprinted in *Essays in Existentialism* (New York, NY: Citadel, 1993), p. 47. I feel obliged to remark that I think Rorty misreads this passage. In saying that fascism may become the human reality, Sartre is not urging that an inhabitant of such a future fascist community would have no criteria available from within that community for rejecting fascism. Sartre, admittedly, does make things difficult for himself in this essay by paring his normative ethics down to a single austere norm: authenticity. Nevertheless, it is clear that Sartre thinks that this norm can be shown, by the end of the day, to have considerable clout built into it. The essay is meant to be a prolegomena to a treatise on ethics. In Sartre's ethics, an "authentic fascist" is to be revealed as a contradictory description on grounds (i.e., fascism presupposes bad faith) not unlike those Orwell's novel adduces for why there is no such thing as an "honest Party member" (i.e., the triumph of totalitarianism presupposes the cultivation of doublethink).
- 184 *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xlii.
- 185 When Rorty says "there is nothing to be said" using words of this form, he is, as usual, concerned to reject a particular (Realist) understanding of what those words might mean. In particular, Rorty takes the bit about "there is something within you which you are betraying" to rest on an implicit appeal to thesis (7).
- 186 See, e.g., *N*, p. 80. For reasons reviewed above, the denial must remain tacit, if the Party is not to deprive its members of the capacity to judge altogether.
- 187 *CEJL*, III, pp. 88–89.
- 188 To wit: pertaining to a free man.
- 189 Virtually all of the established senses of the word bear some trace of the original Latin meaning of the word. A liberal person is one who is free in bestowing – i.e. generous. A liberal point of view is one that is free of prejudice and hence tolerant of dissenting opinions. A liberal construction of someone's meaning is one that is free – i.e. not literal. The liberal arts and sciences were originally so-called because they were considered worthy of a free man – i.e. becoming to a gentleman, unlike the servile occupations of a workman. And so on.
- 190 *CEJL*, I, p. 460.
- 191 *CIS*, pp. xiv–xv.
- 192 Specifically with thesis (6). See (6') for a fuller specification of what Rorty thinks the rejection of (6) entails.
- 193 *N*, p. 29.
- 194 This is not quite right, in so far as it appears to assert that I if were to become stranded on an uninhabited island I would suddenly cease to be able to arrive at a free verdict concerning what transpires in my environment. To put the point more carefully: (a) initiation into a genuine community is a condition of the acquisition of the capacity to arrive at such verdicts, and (b) in so far as one continues to live in the society of one's fellow human beings, one can fully exercise freedom of judgment in their company only to the extent that they are not devoted to undermining one's capacity to do so (i.e., only to the extent that the "community" one forms with them is not a totalitarian one).
- 195 A central theme of all of Orwell's writing – especially his writings on the relative strengths and shortcomings of English versus other kinds of imperialism – is that once all forms of answerability are effaced except accountability to the demands of those who happen to have power, then the lives of those who are not in power are flooded with cruelty. Rorty, of course, might be perfectly willing to concede that the fact that the Party possesses virtually limitless power (a power "more absolute than had previously been imagined possible") over its members and the fact that the most apt image of the life of a Party member is an image of "a boot stamping on a human face" (*N*, p. 271) are not, for Orwell, externally related facts about the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. But the fact that the Party

has such complete power over the minds of its members is, as we have seen, a function of the inability of its members to arrive at an independent verdict concerning how things are (of “the dislocation of their sense of reality”). Thus there obtains, for Orwell, an internal relation between the fact that the life of a Party member is “a boot stamping on a human face” and the fact that the world in which a Party member lives is one in which “the very concept of objective truth is on the verge of fading out.”

- 196 Thus Orwell’s notion of freedom is considerably weightier than Rorty’s. Officially, there are no prohibitions on what a Party member is allowed to say, for there are no laws that prohibit anything in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. (“[N]othing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws”; *N*, p. 8) A Party member is simply expected to act, speak and think in the appropriate fashion. The average “well-adjusted” Party member – unlike Winston – is not conscious of any deprivation of freedom. According to Rorty’s purely negative concept of freedom, he is free (he can say anything he likes and no one will hurt him); and Winston is comparatively lacking in freedom (there is much that he wants to say but cannot). But, on the positive concept of freedom central to the novel, the average Party member is, in comparison to Winston, utterly lacking in freedom. (He lacks what in Newspeak is called *ownlife*; see *N*, pp. 81–2) The following point is central to Orwell’s concept of freedom: the more completely captive a mind is, the less conscious it is of its lack of freedom. If one identifies freedom with the freedom from juridical constraint accorded to the well-adjusted Party member, then there is a reading of the Party’s slogan about freedom on which, in the world of the novel, it (like all of the Party’s slogan’s) is true: Freedom *is* slavery.
- 197 For reasons given in the previous note, it would be more precise to say: the aim of the Party is to bring about a state of affairs in which everyone is juridically free to say what they like. Hence O’Brien explains to Winston:

We are not content with negative obedience, nor even the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us: so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul. (*N*, p. 258).

The above remarks constitute O’Brien’s answer to Winston’s question (if “nothing will remain of me”, not even “a name in a register” or “a memory in a living brain”) “why bother to torture me?” (*N*, pp. 257–8). Rorty’s answer to this question (O’Brien tortures people solely for the pleasure it affords him) obliges him to overlook O’Brien’s own answer to the question.

- 198 Orwell takes one of the things Rorty claims really matter to Orwell – namely, a preservation of the sense of the coherence of one’s own identity – to depend on the thing Rorty views as a red herring. The novel makes vivid how the answerability of your beliefs concerning how things are to how things are is a condition of maintaining your sense of self. Without such answerability – in the absence of any “external records that you can refer to” – even the “narrative outline of your own life loses its sharpness.” You no longer fully have an identity – your identity is on the verge of “crumbling” – if, when you try to remember who you are and what you have done, “you remember huge events which [you have good reason to think] quite probably never happened to you” and most of your memory of the past is simply filled with “long blank periods to which you can assign nothing” (*N*, p. 33). Under such conditions, only someone who is a master of self-deception can retain the impression that she is able to “justify herself to herself.”
- 199 Rorty’s inability to construe talk of “humanity” in any terms other than the biological or the metaphysical are partially responsible for his inability to understand the views of Cavell, Conant, and Putnam discussed in *PRM*, pp. 445–446. For a discussion of Rorty’s blindness to the relevant ethical notion of humanity, see Cora Diamond’s “The Importance

of Being Human” (in *Human Beings*, edited by David Cockburn; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

200 *N*, p. 29.

201 *N*, 273. This theme – of what it is to be human, and of Winston being the last human – recurs throughout the novel, perhaps most poignantly in the following thoughts of Winston’s:

If you can *feel* that staying human is worth while, even when it can’t have any result whatever, you’ve beaten them . . . One did not know what happened inside the Ministry of Love, but it was possible to guess: tortures, drugs, delicate instruments that registered your nervous reactions, gradual wearing down by sleeplessness and solitude and persistent questioning . . . But if the object was not to stay alive but to stay human, what difference did it ultimately make? (*N*, pp. 167–8)

The idea that staying human is worth while, *even when it can’t have any result whatever*, and *even at the expense of enduring great cruelty* (tortures, drugs, etc.) is hardly the expression of a Rortian ideal. In this respect, it difficult to imagine two sensibilities more perfectly opposed than those of Orwell and Rorty.

202 Indeed, there are passages in Orwell’s work that express Orwell’s antipathy for the idea that there is such a thing as a timeless and indestructible “human nature” much more forcefully than any Rorty cites; such as, for example, the following:

In the past every tyranny was sooner or later overthrown, or at least resisted, because of “human nature,” which as a matter of course desired liberty. But we cannot be at all certain that “human nature” is constant. It may be just as possible to produce a breed of men who do not wish for liberty as it is to produce a breed of hornless cows. The Inquisition failed, but then the Inquisition had not the resources of the modern state. The radio, press-censorship, standardized education and the secret police have altered everything. Mass-suggestion is a science of the last twenty years, and we do not yet know how successful it will be. (*CEJL*, I, pp. 381–382)

203 “The whole of modern European literature – I am speaking of the literature of the past four hundred years – is built on the concept of intellectual honesty, or, if you like to put it that way, on Shakespeare’s maxim, ‘To thine own self be true’. The first thing that we ask of a writer is that he not tell lies, that he shall say what he really thinks, what he really feels. The worst thing we can say about a work of art is that it is insincere . . . Modern literature is essentially an individual thing. It is either the truthful expression of what one man thinks and feels, or it is nothing” (*CEJL*, II, p. 135).

204 *CEJL*, IV, pp. 61, 71.

205 Rorty’s claim that Orwell understands himself to be doing the same kind of thing as his opponents fails to discriminate between the complex varieties of relation (or absence of relation) to truth – so important to Orwell – possessed by different varieties of (what Rorty likes to call) “persuasive redescription”. In particular, it fails to distinguish between the sort of totalitarian “redescription” which characterizes (what Orwell calls) “propaganda” and the sort of imaginative “redescription” which characterizes (what, in the passage quoted in the last note but one, he calls) “literature.”

206 *CEJL*, IV, p. 137. The centrality of the topic of the corruption of language in Orwell’s work is a main theme of Caleb Thompson’s “Philosophy and Corruption of Language,” *op. cit.*

207 *CEJL*, IV, p. 128.

208 *CEJL*, IV, p. 136.

209 *CEJL*, IV, p. 135.

210 *N*, pp. 303–314.

- 211 I think that with respect to most philosophical problems the premise is false, but I shall not argue the point here.
- 212 N, p. 303. Thus in *The Principles of Newspeak* we find:

Take for example the well-known passage from the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of those ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government . . ." It would have been quite impossible to render this passage into Newspeak while keeping to the sense of the original. The nearest one could come to doing so would be to swallow the whole passage up into the single word *crimethink*. (N, pp. 313–314)

If Rorty's brave new "post-philosophical culture" were ever to be realized and his proposals for a "replacement vocabulary" adopted, then – as far as I can see – the term 'Realism' would function just the way the term 'crimethink' is supposed to in Newspeak. It would serve as a linguistic device which simultaneously fulfills two purposes: (i) that of ostending a stretch of thought that cannot be rendered into the new vocabulary, and (ii) that of indicating that the stretch of thought in question is precisely of the sort that the new vocabulary has been adopted in order to render inexpressible.

- 213 N, pp. 51, 52, 53–54.
- 214 This paper is indebted to conversations about Rorty over the past decade with Stanley Cavell, John Haugeland and Hilary Putnam and to comments on drafts by David Finkelstein and Lisa Van Alstyne. Its two largest debts are to Cora Diamond and John McDowell: to Diamond's article "Truth: Defenders, Debunkers, Despisers" (in *Commitment in Reflection*, edited by Leona Toker; New York, NY: Garland, 1994), to McDowell's contribution to this volume, and to conversations with each of them about Rorty.

RESPONSE TO JAMES CONANT

James Conant says that "in non-totalitarian societies, the following two tasks generally coincide: the task of seeking to justify a claim to the satisfaction of other people and the task of seeking to establish that a claim is justified in the light of the facts" (p. 306). Rather than distinguishing two tasks, I would say: in non-totalitarian societies, we take the facts to be established when we have conciliated our opinion with those of others whose opinions are relevant (our fellow-citizens, our fellow-jurypersons, our fellow-experts, etc.). Conant goes on to say that these two tasks "diverge radically" in totalitarian societies. I would say: in such societies it becomes very difficult, and often impossible, for anyone to find out what the facts are, because agreement is no longer a good sign of truth.

The difference between Conant and myself is that he thinks that someone like Winston, trapped in such a society, can turn to the light of facts. I think that there is nowhere for Winston to turn. People in such societies are in the same position as people with real or purported psychotic delusions. They may never be able to reconcile their memories with what the people around them are saying. They may never know whether they are crazy or whether the people around them are liars or dupes. There is no procedure called "turning to the facts" which will help them. The lack of such a procedure is my reason for saying that all we can do to increase our chances of finding