

ON NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR



ORWELL AND OUR FUTURE

Edited by
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Jack Goldsmith, and
Martha C. Nussbaum

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For Robert Kirschner (1940–2002)

Rorty and Orwell on Truth

JAMES CONANT

I AM GOING TO discuss the political upshot of Richard Rorty's epistemological doctrines. I shall do this by comparing Rorty's and George Orwell's respective conceptions of what it means to be a liberal—that is, their respective conceptions of the relation among preservation of freedom, prevention of cruelty, and regard for truth. In a chapter of his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Rorty reads Orwell as espousing the variety of liberalism that Rorty himself seeks to champion.¹ The aim of this paper is to suggest, not only that what is offered in that chapter is a misreading of Orwell, but that it is an instructive misreading—one that illuminates the shortcomings of some of Rorty's central doctrines.

If you look at Rorty's replies to his critics, you'll notice that they tend to be quite similar in content. What they end up saying could often 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: "Yeah, yeah, 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*; but don't you see that that sort of criticism is effective only against someone who *cares* about philosophical correctness, metaphysical insight, common sense, being in touch with reality, and so on; 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 just how well one can get on without caring about them."

This paper is a slightly revised excerpt from a much longer paper titled "Freedom, Cruelty and Truth: Rorty versus Orwell" [henceforth FCT], in *Richard Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). For Rorty's reply to the criticisms advanced in this paper, see his "Response to Conant" in the same volume.

¹ *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) [henceforth CIS], chap. 8, *passim*.

Thus Rorty and those who sympathize with his doctrines tend to experience criticisms to the effect that their views are philosophically unsound as point-missing. So what sort of criticism might strike home? What sort of criticism has a hope of eliciting something other than the verbal equivalent of a shrug of the shoulders? Rorty himself likes to recommend his epistemological doctrines on *political* grounds—that is, on the ground that his doctrines cohere more comfortably with the sort of politics that we (i.e., citizens of our sort of liberal democracy) cannot help wanting. One sort of criticism therefore which has a hope of striking home is one that could demonstrate that the political upshot of Rortian doctrines is not only not what those who enthusiastically embrace such doctrines presume it to be, but roughly the opposite of what they presume it to be. So what I shall try to show is that Rorty's epistemological doctrines not only fail to cohere comfortably with his liberal politics, but that they cohere far more comfortably with a radically illiberal politics.

I am concerned here, above all, with two Rortian doctrines:

1. *The doctrine that solidarity should replace objectivity*—which I will summarize as the doctrine that justification is a purely sociological matter, a matter of seeing whether something is acceptable to my peers.²
2. *The doctrine of Rortian liberalism*—which I will summarize as the doctrine that *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.³

Rorty takes Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be concerned, above all, with championing these two doctrines. Rorty is aware that certain admirers of Orwell's novel have advanced what he calls a "Realist reading" of the novel—one that attributes to Orwell an attachment to the very conception of objectivity that Rorty wishes to credit Orwell with having put behind him. Rorty concedes that there are passages which, when taken out of context, appear to support this reading—especially, he thinks, the following passage:

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 [Winston] was in the right! . . . The obvious, the silly, and the true had got to be defended. Truisms are true, hold on to that! The solid world exists, its laws do not change. Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall toward the earth's

² For a more detailed statement of the Rortian thesis in question here, see FCT.

³ For a more detailed statement of the Rortian thesis in question here, see FCT.

center. With the feeling 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. (69)⁴

Rorty takes this passage to be the main support of the Realist reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Since this passage occupies a central place in the quarrel Rorty takes himself to have with other readers of Orwell, and since we will have occasion to recur to it, I refer to it as "the focal passage."

Rorty offers the following gloss on where Orwell's concerns as an author lie: Orwell's main concern is to "sensitize an audience to cases of cruelty and humiliation which they had not noticed." According to Rorty, Orwell is to be read, above all, as a good "liberal ironist": someone whose aim is to "to give us an alternative perspective, from which we liberals . . . could describe the political history of our century."⁵ 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. . . .⁶

In his better moments, Orwell himself . . . recognized that he was doing the same *kind* of thing as his opponents, the apologists for Stalin, were doing.⁷

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 that they describe. According to Rorty's Orwell, some descriptions just happen to be more *useful* than others.

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.⁸ That thought is, no doubt, scary. But, 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. Rorty knows that some of Orwell's other admirers manage to be frightened by the idea of living in a society in which our leaders have the power to deprive us of (something they call) "our hold on the concept of objective truth." But only a raving metaphysical Realist,

⁴ Quoted in CIS, 172.

⁵ CIS, 173.

⁶ CIS, 173.

⁷ CIS, 173–74.

⁸ See CIS, 183.

Rorty thinks, could find *that* prospect frightening. What such readers of Orwell fear losing, Rorty regards as well lost. According to Rorty, loss of contact with truth or the world or reality can be frightening only to 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 giving content to talk of "answerability to something non-human" is through an appeal to dubious metaphysical 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."⁹ 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 that would underwrite practices of which he approves and condemn practices of which he disapproves. Rorty cannot see how such a person could, in speaking in these sorts of ways, possibly be speaking for Orwell.

Rorty takes Orwell to be sympathetic to his own preferred 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 metaphysical theses about "matters of fact," "truth," or "objective reality."¹⁰ 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!" But this strategy for dissolving philosophical problems is a wise one only if the sole function within our linguistic community of the vocabulary in question is to enable dubious theses to be formulated. If there are other discursive possibilities—apart from the formulation of such theses—whose availability depends upon the availability of that vocabulary,¹¹ then a pragmatist (of all people) has no business enjoining us to jettison that vocabulary unless he can first demonstrate that the loss of

⁹ The last six sentences are largely a paraphrase of CIS, 21.

¹⁰ Though he no longer *requires* such vocabulary, a Rortian may continue to employ it in either of two ways: (a) 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"); (b) he may interpolate a revisionist account of its meaning that 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").

¹¹ Or more precisely: whose availability depends upon the availability of concepts traditionally expressed by means of that vocabulary.

those other discursive possibilities is vastly outweighed by the gain of rendering ourselves immune to the temptations of (putatively) bad philosophy.¹² The ultimate aim of this paper is to suggest that one effect of the adoption of Rorty's favorite method of dissolving philosophical problems—namely, the elimination of vocabulary such as “objective reality” and so on—would be to render Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as unreadable to us as, I believe, it presently is to Rorty.

The real point of the novel, according to Rorty, lies in its defense of the idea that cruelty is the worst thing we do. Now Rorty is certainly right that cruelty figures 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, “ $2 + 2 = 5$ ” (206–15, 228). Rorty insists that on a proper understanding of this scene, it does not matter that “two plus two is four” happens to be true or that the answer “O'Brien is holding up four fingers” happens at the time to be true. All that matters for the scene, according to Rorty, is that Winston believes what he says (when, e.g., 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, according to Rorty, 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.

Rorty offers two options for how to think about what matters in this scene: either (a) what matters is *truth* (i.e., that what you say is answerable to something beyond what your community holds to be true), or (b) what matters is *freedom* (i.e., 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 alternatives for reading Orwell as requiring a forced choice here between these options 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 the 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 fruitless metaphysical issues. Winston's real loss in the novel is his loss of freedom. 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:

¹² 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.

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.¹³

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 Rorty 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 an unprofitable metaphysics could be of the view that O'Brien's beliefs remain open to some further criticism (e.g., that his beliefs are out of touch with reality), 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.

So much by way of a brief summary of Rorty's reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Now I am going to say a few things about Orwell's own understanding of what he was trying to do in the novel.

In an essay about the novel, Orwell sums up what he “really meant to do” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by saying that his aim was to display “the intellectual implications of *totalitarianism*.”¹⁴ As Orwell defines the term, “totalitarianism” refers to the abolition of the freedom of thought in a positive as well as a negative respect. Orwell writes:

[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. . . . 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.¹⁵

Totalitarianism seeks to isolate you from the outside world. The aim of totalitarian tactics, according to Orwell, is to bring it about that the sole standards of comparison available to you are precisely those which Rorty urges are the only ones you should ever want: the standards supplied by

¹³ CIS, 178.

¹⁴ *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) [henceforth CEJL], 4:460. My emphases.

¹⁵ CEJL, 3:88.

the aspiration to remain in agreement with a community of "comrades" with whom you presently express your solidarity. Concentration camps and secret police forces are peripheral to the set of cultural, social, and political phenomena that Orwell wants to identify as totalitarian. What is integral is a kind of "organized lying" that, if the logical consequences of its inherent tendencies were fully drawn out, could be seen (as Orwell puts it) "to demand a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth."¹⁶

Orwell thinks that one of the consequences of totalitarianism is that it undermines the possibility of your leading a life in which you are free to think your own thoughts. Another of its consequences, he thinks, is that it leads to the proliferation of great cruelty. But neither of these is what he calls "the really frightening thing about totalitarianism"—they are rather, in his view, merely consequences of it. "The really frightening thing about totalitarianism," Orwell says, "is not that it commits 'atrocities' but that it attacks the concept of objective truth."¹⁷

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 out of his writings about his experiences as a soldier in the Spanish civil war:

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

The really frightening case, for Orwell, is one in which you continue to form perfectly determinate beliefs about happenings in the world, yet the

¹⁶ See CEJL, 4:64, see also CEJL, 3:149.

¹⁷ CEJL, 3:88.

¹⁸ 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" (37).

¹⁹ CEJL, 2:256–58. 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.

mechanisms by means of which those beliefs are formed are no longer guided by the happenings that form the subjects of those beliefs. During the Spanish civil war, intellectuals in Britain held certain beliefs about what was happening in Spain and attached great importance to the happenings that formed the subjects of those beliefs. Many acted on those beliefs; some died acting on them. The totalitarian dimension of the situation, according to Orwell, 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 the political 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 that is implied in an ordinary lie.

The situation Orwell has in mind when he says "the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world" 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 standards yield beliefs about the facts that do not bear any relation to the facts, not even the relationship implied in an ordinary lie, and (c) systematic means are employed by the community to render access to any other standard impossible. 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."²⁰ *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an attempt to depict a scenario that 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

²⁰ 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 inhabit 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 is happening at any given time in their vegetable garden is unable to be appropriately sensitive 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 *maximally global* totalitarian scenario—though *Nineteen Eighty-Four* offers what I take to be a depiction of the most global version of a totalitarian scenario of which one can form an at least minimally coherent conception.) When I use the term "nontotalitarian scenario," I mean to refer to a scenario that is not even locally totalitarian.

as can possibly be the case.²¹ The novel is about the possibility of a state of affairs in which the concept of objective truth has faded as far out of the world as it conceivably can.²² 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 that Orwell found were suddenly beginning to become prevalent among certain British intellectuals during the 1930s.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party aims to ensure that the concept of objective truth ceases to apply, for example, 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 over your own memory. "Reality control," they called it. (32)

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" (e.g., 68–69, 129, 205, 219). 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,

²¹ "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 literally every word in the history books, even the 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" (36–37, 64, 79, 129).

²² 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's losing her mindedness—her ability to direct her thought at reality—altogether.

was more terrifying than mere torture and death" (32). Glimpses into the possibility of just such a nightmare scenario figure prominently in Orwell's writings about the Spanish civil war:

If you look up the history of the last war [i.e., World War I] in, for instance, the *Encyclopaedia 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.²³

This last sentence is a reference to the fact that these lines were written in London in 1942 just after Orwell had witnessed the cruelty inflicted through the bombing of a defenseless urban civilian population. It was the most devastating example of cruelty that Orwell, in his not uneventful life, had witnessed firsthand. The example is chosen 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.

This 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 are five—well, two and two are five. This passage clearly anticipates the topic (and, to some extent, the exact wording) of the focal passage. The author of these passages does not intend the truth of " $2 + 2 = 4$ " to drop out as irrelevant to an understanding of the point of the passage. Two paragraphs before the focal passage in the novel we find this:

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. . . . the mind itself is controllable. (69)

²³ CEJL, 2:258–59.

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 that 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 (such as 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 an individual *on her own*. Her ability to assess the truth of such judgments does not wait upon the development of a consensus within her community. (It is this ability on the part of the individual—to arrive at a view of the facts that 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 judgment 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 that, say, appears in the newspaper.²⁴ It is this capacity of individuals to assess the truth of claims on their own that threatens the 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 is taken as true even in the face of contradictory testimony from one’s own senses and against the grain of the norms built into the concepts employed in the formulation of the Party’s version of the facts.

Recall now Rorty’s reading of the focal passage: O’Brien’s object, Rorty says, is merely to deprive Winston of the freedom to believe what he wants to believe—the truth of what Winston believes 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 because Winston *happens* to have attached great importance to this belief.²⁵ But what

²⁴ Winston reflects: “[The photograph] was concrete evidence; it was 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” (67–68).

²⁵ 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

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.” Claims such as “two and two make four” and “O’Brien is now holding up four fingers” figure as central examples of claims the truth of which in the end must be denied by the Party because of the kind of claims they are: ones that are true and moreover easily seen to be true by anyone competent in our practices of claim making. The novel is here working out one of the “intellectual implications of totalitarianism.” The Party’s practice of wholesale “organized lying” is sustainable only 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 in the novel is this: it makes no sense

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:

“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?” (205–6)

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 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 to what Winston wrote and latches onto the word “freedom,” thus ignoring the entire context of the novel’s discussion of the question of what is involved in the “freedom

to suppose that the criteria for determining the truth-value of such claims could require that prior to arriving at a judgment on such matters one first had to consult the latest bulletin from the Party. They are the sorts of claims that can be known to be true by someone like Winston without reference to higher authority and, once known to be true, will sometimes inevitably fail to cohere with the rest of the Party's version of the facts.²⁶

Rorty thinks that Orwell's novel describes a set of practices of claim making which happen to differ radically from our own, and that its 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. Is *that* Orwell's view of the Party's practices?

When O'Brien asks Winston how many fingers he is holding up, he doesn't merely want Winston 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 revision in our concepts (of "see," "five," "fingers," etc.). He doesn't merely want Winston to believe something that can be expressed in Newspeak by the statement "I see five fingers," but that 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—as Rorty suggests—so modest as merely to want to change the ground rules for how to use certain philosophically freighted portions of our vocabulary (e.g., "truth," "reality") nor so ambitious as to want to effect a wholesale revision in the norms for applying our entire present battery of concepts, completely jettisoning our familiar norms for making claims. 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 to abide by our ordinary norms for making claims and not to abide by these norms.

to say that two plus two make four."

²⁶ 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 of 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.

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 that 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 that 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 itself be rendered *invisible* if those demands are to serve the Party's purposes.²⁷ 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.²⁸ How is it possible for Party members successfully to follow a set of rules that they never believe they are following? By engaging in the practices of "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 to 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.²⁹ This is why the novel insists that reality control can be successfully practiced only by someone who has also become adept in the practice of doublethink. In order to be a Party member, Orwell says, one 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" (177). One must not only adjust one's beliefs about reality, but one must

²⁷ "A Party member is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the beliefs and attitudes demanded of him are never plainly stated, and could not be stated without laying bare the contradictions inherent in Ingsoc" (174).

²⁸ "[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" (176–77).

²⁹ "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" (176).

also be proficient in the art of forgetting that one continuously so adjusts them.³⁰ "The denial of external reality" demanded by the logic of the Party's position can be approximated only to the extent that members of a community learn to cultivate a tremendously thoroughgoing form of self-deception—so thoroughgoing that they succeed in hiding from themselves that (as Orwell puts it) "the truth goes on existing, as it were, behind [their] back[s]."³¹

Rorty 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, according to Rorty, is a proclivity to engage in fruitless metaphysical controversies).³² But this isn't right. There are overwhelming grounds from *within* their "practices" for preferring our practices to theirs. What Orwell calls "the denial of objective reality" is a denial that can be at most partially sustained and then only within a set of "practices" regulated by what Orwell calls a "schizophrenic system of thought"³³—a system that simultaneously respects and disregards our present norms for making claims.³⁴

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. (179)

³⁰ "[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 cancelled 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" (32–33).

³¹ CEJL, 2:259.

³² I place "practices" here (and in the next two sentences) in scare quotes to signal that—in contrast to the expression when it occurs here (and in the next two sentences) without scare quotes—it does not refer to a coherent set of norms for making claims.

³³ "A totalitarian society which succeeded in perpetuating itself would set up a schizophrenic system of thought" (CEJL, 4:64).

³⁴ "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" (159, 164).

Rorty's doctrines presuppose that sanity is a statistical matter: a matter of the congruence of one's beliefs with those of one's peers. Admittedly, in a nontotalitarian 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. (26)

What Orwell's depiction of a totalitarian scenario brings out is that a statistical gloss on sanity cannot serve as a definition of sanity.

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. Even though Winston 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:

There being a fact of the matter about warranted assertibility must, for [philosophers like] 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?* . . . 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*.³⁵

Rorty does not see how to allow for a scenario in which both of the following are true: (a) S's willingness to assert *p* furnishes practically everybody in S's community (except perhaps for one or two dubious charac-

³⁵ "Putnam and the Relativist Menace" [henceforth PRM], *Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 9 (September 1993): 450.

ters) with a ground for thinking that S is crazy, and (b) S is, nonetheless, fully warranted in asserting *p*. But—in Orwell's novel—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 that Rorty (in the passage quoted above) does not allow for: 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").³⁶ Such a situation 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 nontotalitarian 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.³⁷ (The more totalitarian the scenario one inhabits, the greater the number of beliefs one will have that are likely to be both warranted and unacceptable to one's peers.)

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."³⁸

³⁶ The norms that Winston follows in making his claims are internal to a worldview, just as Putnam urges norms must be. If we plug "Winston" in for S, it should be easy to see that there is no tension—as Rorty claims—between Putnam's rejection of Realism and his 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*.

³⁷ 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" (CEJL, 2:185).

³⁸ PRM, 453.

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 (33). 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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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" is in this case a community of one. There is no larger community with whom Winston can seek solidarity, if to seek solidarity means—as Rorty thinks it does—to seek *de facto* agreement with a presently available community of peers.⁴¹ 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 that, 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 (i.e., that there were airplanes when he was a child) and given the norms that govern the application of the concept *invention* (e.g., that it is impossible for X to invent Y if there were Ys before X existed), then Winston's belief (that the Party did not invent the airplane) *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.

³⁹ "[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" (19).

⁴⁰ "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" (174–75).

⁴¹ "For whom, it suddenly occurred to [Winston] to wonder, was he writing his diary? For the future, for the unborn" (10).

In nontotalitarian 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 more or less 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 that 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. The Party wants its members 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 altogether in theory with (what Orwell calls) "the very concept of objective truth"—i.e., 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 (i.e., a conception in which the concept of objectivity is exhausted by that of solidarity).⁴²

⁴² 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.

Rorty writes:

[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.⁴³

It is precisely in scenarios which approximate the conditions of a totalitarian scenario that the progress of our language-games for making claims are 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 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 that are right about the world. Following those "norms" leaves a person with a set of beliefs about the world that (can 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 nontotalitarian scenario—i.e., the sort of scenario we generally take ourselves to inhabit—part of the 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 these rules did not have this consequence, this would reveal that there was something wrong with these 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 a systematic falsification of the evidence (which constantly threatens to accumulate) showing that some of 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, Rorty comes extraordinarily close to attributing to Orwell the very views that Orwell chose to put into O'Brien's mouth.⁴⁴ O'Brien, in the following

⁴³ *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 129.

⁴⁴ Rorty himself takes some time over the question whether O'Brien should be counted as an ironist, 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

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?" (205)

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.

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, 187). What Rorty misses is that, on Orwell's view, O'Brien's ironist "denial of objective reality" can be put into practice only by someone who has perfected the art of doublethink.

The convergence between O'Brien's and Rorty's views is striking.⁴⁵ Hence the perversity of Rorty's reading of Orwell. For O'Brien's answers to his own questions in his dialogue with Winston represent Orwell's most resolute attempt "to draw the logical consequences of totalitarianism" out to their ultimate conclusion.

At the beginning of his forbidden diary, Winston inscribes the following greetings to his 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! (26–27)

Three central concepts of the novel are linked here: freedom, community, and truth. Orwell, as I read him, seeks to show that you have freedom of thought only when you are free to arrive at your own verdict concerning the facts; and that such freedom can be exercised only where there is genuine community.⁴⁶ 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 among 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, truth, Rorty declares, is a red herring. 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

⁴⁵ See also *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 219: " '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 229: "What knowledge have we of anything, save through our own minds? . . . Whatever happens in all minds, truly happens."

⁴⁶ This is not quite right, insofar as it appears to assert that if I 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) insofar 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).

internal relation between its concern with cruelty and its concern with the interrelated concepts of freedom, genuine community, and truth. The novel seeks to exhibit how cruelty becomes commonplace in a world in which these three concepts no longer have secure foothold.⁴⁷

In failing to grasp the connection among 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 that 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.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁷ 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” (220) 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.”

⁴⁸ 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*. 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. 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 slogans) is true: Freedom is slavery.

aim of the Party is to bring about a state of affairs in which all people are free to say what they like and yet perfect consensus reigns.⁴⁹ 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 can 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, for Orwell, is not simply a compliment we pay to those of our assertions that, 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.⁵⁰ Hence doublethink.

I want to conclude by returning to the topic of Rorty's favorite method of dissolving philosophical problems—that of “vocabulary replacement.”

⁴⁹ 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 with 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.” (210)

The above remarks constitute O'Brien's answer to Winston's question (if “nothing will remain of” him, not even “a name in a register” or “a memory in a living brain”) “why bother to torture me?” (210). 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.

⁵⁰ 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, “[y]ou remember[] huge events which [you have good reason to think] had quite probably never happened” and most of your memory of the past is simply filled with “long blank periods to which you [can] assign nothing” (30). 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.”

Among the many ironies in Rorty's attempt to find an apologia for his own doctrines in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, perhaps the most wonderful lies in the fact that the novel—in its discussion of Newspeak—contains one of the most searching meditations ever written on the potential intellectual implications of replacing one vocabulary with another. One purpose of Newspeak in the novel is, of course, the production of vocabulary for new concepts—concepts such as *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, and *crimestop*—vocabulary whose daily employment 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.

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 putatively useless problems. The underlying premise is that a problem which can no longer be formulated is a problem that no longer exists.⁵¹ 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 the only purpose formerly served by the vocabulary of “phlogiston” and “witches” was to make talk about such things possible, then nothing is lost and something is 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. Thus 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” (246). 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 as follows:

⁵¹ I think that with respect to most philosophical problems the premise is false, but I shall not argue the point here.

[O]ur chief job is . . . destroying 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. (45, 46–47)

Some of the concepts that Newspeak aims to abolish—such as the concept of freedom—are ones for which Rorty himself expresses considerable fondness. But 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, forms of words such as “objective truth” and “objective reality.” In the novel, 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 own proposals for vocabulary replacement, were they to be embraced, would be to render a work such as Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* equally incomprehensible.⁵²

⁵² This paper is indebted to conversations about Rorty over the past decade with Stanley Cavell, John Haugeland, and Hilary Putnam and to comments on earlier drafts of this paper 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*, ed. Leona Tokor [New York: Garland, 1994]), to McDowell's paper “Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity” (in *Richard Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom [Oxford: Blackwell, 2000]), and to conversations with each of them about Rorty.