

***Not knowing what the right hand is doing: Rorty “ambidextrous” analytic redescription of 19<sup>th</sup> century Hegelianism***

Paul Redding

It is hardly news that a major reorientation in English-speaking philosophical culture occurred during the first part of the 20th century. Within the first few decades, a set of issues and problems were emerging that would effectively redefine what it would be to do philosophy within the anglophone culture. Along with this, a discontinuity would emerge separating “analytic philosophy” from other ways of philosophising along the axes of time and space. Along the temporal axis it would distinguish the new discipline from philosophy as it had been practiced for much of the nineteenth century, while spatially or geographically, it would mark off philosophy as it for the most part would come to be practiced in England and other parts of the English-speaking world from philosophy as practiced in continental Europe.

Of course philosophy was not the only area of European high culture in which sudden change was occurring during this period. The decades around the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries were witnessing radical changes in a variety of scientific and artistic domains that gave a sense of *newness* to the new century that seems to have exceeded the later transition to the twenty-first century, despite its millennial significance. Understandably, many of the features of analytic philosophy were linked up to the new in those other areas, especially in the formal sciences of logic and mathematics. Importantly, a new approach to logic that was driven by concerns for demonstrating the foundations of mathematical truth came to displace the broadly Aristotelian traditional logic that had seemed closer to everyday patterns of speech, and that had been for the most part informed philosophical thought since classical times. Such innovations were, of course, paralleled by ones in the natural sciences, and particularly physics, but the new feel of the twentieth century was not restricted to the sciences, with radical changes in the arts and literature as well, breaking especially with the conventions of realist representation that had been dominant in the nineteenth. And just as an emerging new creates a corresponding *old*, the burgeoning of new thought was accompanied by a contraction in other parts of European high culture. In particular, something like this accompanying involution seemed to be happening to historical culture and its associated “historical consciousness”.

The thesis that the new century had brought with it a decline of the type of “historical consciousness” that had dominated the nineteenth would be argued in 1940 by

Carlo Antoni,<sup>1</sup> a disciple of the Italian Hegelian philosopher Bernadetto Croce. Antoni's critique was directed to the recently emerged social sciences such as sociology, which following the model of the natural sciences, he claimed, substituted ahistorical laws and ideal types for the type of thought that focussed on historical change. Later, the historian John Lukacs would write of the change that had set in since the later nineteenth century reversing that "deepening of the European consciousness ... a deepening sense of nationality [and a] deepening of historical thinking" that had occurred between 1770 and 1840.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, these changes seemed to be more general than that simply between the natural and historical sciences. While Lukacs pointed to Scott's historical and Balzac's historical-social novels as exemplifying "this evolution of the European historical consciousness", modernist writers of the twentieth century such as Virginia Woolf, Robert Musil, Paul Valéry and James Joyce have been portrayed as giving expression to radically different forms of consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century, this idea of a loss of historical consciousness could be reported as being effectively widespread and complete. Thus historian Eric Hobsbawm would write of the absence of a sense of history as "one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late 20th century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in".<sup>4</sup> But something of this same attitude had also come to be positively evaluated in the second-half of the twentieth century by those who welcomed what Daniel Bell had called the "end of ideology".<sup>5</sup> The horrors of wars and totalitarian political programs carried out in the names of 19th century nationalist or universalist worldviews had provoked a general distaste for "grand historical narratives", particularly those championing some march of "reason" in history. The inverse of this was a corresponding taste for less ambitious, reformist political programs and a faith in technological solutions to problems of the world.

As the post-war decades were the years of the consolidation and institutionalization of analytic philosophy in the English-speaking world, it is not

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<sup>1</sup> *Dallo Storismo alla Sociologia*, translated by Hayden V White as *From History to Sociology*, \*

<sup>2</sup> John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1968), pp. 17–18.

<sup>3</sup> Hayden White, "The Burden of History", in *Tropics of Discourse*, p. 31. And the picture was further complicated by the presence of an argument which saw nineteenth-century academic history itself as implicit in the killing of "historical consciousness"—a claim that had been incisively made by Nietzsche in the 1870s. C.f., Nietzsche

<sup>4</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914- 1991* (1994), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962).

surprising to find such “end of ideology” style of political philosophy establishing itself as a major philosophical analytic approach to politics during this time.<sup>6</sup> However the dominance of analysis within philosophy, including these technocratic and reformist outlooks, was soon again to be contested in the 1960’s and 70’s with revivals within the universities of big nineteenth-century narratives, especially that of Marxism. Against such a background it is then hardly surprising that the emergent critics of analytic philosophy tended to target a science-shaped naturalistic self-image that was seen as associated with a technocratic attitude to the natural world on the one hand, and an associated lack of historical consciousness on the other. Such a lack of historical interest in particular has been regarded as stretching to an indifference to the history of philosophy itself, and to an apparent resistance to any reflection upon philosophy as a cultural activity in relation to society in general.<sup>7</sup>

From within the world of analytic philosophy, perhaps no one more than Richard Rorty brought the significance of these changes to widespread attention—pointing to the philosophical shortcomings that such a combination of a scientific self-image and indifference to history were likely to bring in their wake. And yet neither has any figure been as complex and ambiguous in their own relating to the philosophical tradition as has Rorty. In the following I want to attempt to unravel some of the complex ways in which Rorty’s turn against analytic philosophy and to inherit something of relevance from nineteenth-century Hegelianism might nevertheless reflect the analytic philosophical in which he was trained.

### ***The Emergence of the “Ambidextrous” Analyst***

Prior to 1979, a reader familiar with Rorty’s work might have been likely to think of him as a typical analytic philosopher, indeed, one from perhaps the most analytic of philosophy departments—that at Princeton, where he worked from 1961 to 1982. Thus his brand of “eliminative materialist” philosophy of mind, which had appeared in anthologies of analytic work in this area,<sup>8</sup> surely exemplifies the naturalistic scientific

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, David Archer’s summary of these years in “Political and Social Philosophy” in N. Bunnin and E. P. Tsui James (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 257–8.

<sup>7</sup> This is a not-uncommon criticism among historians of philosophy who not particularly identified with the “continental” side of the purported continental-analytic divide. See, for example, the various contributions to Tom Sorell and G.A.J. Rogers (eds), *Analytic Philosophy and the History of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Richard Rorty, “Mind-Brain Identity, Privacy and Categories”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 19 (1965), 24–54 and “In Defense of Eliminative Materialism”, *Review of Metaphysics*, 24 (1970), pp. 112–21, both reprinted in David M. Rosenthal

stance within philosophy that had come to define analytic philosophy. Then, in the late 60s and early 70s, Rorty came to broader attention as editor of an anthology on the “linguistic turn” that had been important in giving shape to the emerging analytic way of doing philosophy in the first part of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> However, an anthology can also function as raw material for a history, and from his work on the linguistic turn Rorty, from his own account, had started to draw consequences for analytic philosophy itself from its own internal history.<sup>10</sup> His move here was to extend the debunking attitude towards traditional metaphysics found in Wittgenstein and the logical positivists to what was becoming institutionalized as mainstream analytic philosophy itself. The fruits of this activity appeared in 1979 as *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.<sup>11</sup>

For some, this book marked Rorty as a turncoat analyst who had gone over to the side of sixties radicalism; for others it marked him as the prototype of what was coming to be described as a “post-analytic” philosopher,<sup>12</sup> or of what Rorty *himself* would later describe as an “ambidextrous” philosopher—a philosopher who could take part in debates conducted in the mainstream analytic journals and yet “discourse learnedly on ... the adequacy of Habermas’ account of the motives for Heidegger’s ‘turn’” or “turn from Rawls to Carl Schmitt, or from Derrida to Wittgenstein, or from Foucault to Christine Korsgaard”.<sup>13</sup> It was in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that Rorty also introduced the idea of an alternative to philosophy practiced as strict science. This was the conception of philosophy as a “conversation of mankind”, an idea also used in the essay “Analytic and conversational philosophy” to reposition the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy onto a “metaphilosophical” plane that opposes two self-images of philosophy. Thus while Rorty himself clearly embraced the self-image of the conversational philosopher, he nevertheless never abandoned his engagement with developments in analytic philosophy, seeking out those that he thought were taking the discipline in the anti-Platonic and historicist directions of the “conversational” philosophy he favoured. But we might ask if ambidexterity is the appropriate metaphor

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(ed.), *Materialism and the Mind-Body Problem* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Rorty (ed.) *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>10</sup> Richard Rorty, “Autobiography” in Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn (eds.), *the Library of Living Philosophers volume 32: The Philosophy of Richard Rorty* (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), pp. 12–13.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, John Rajchman and Cornel West (eds), *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Rorty, “Analytic and conversational philosophy”, in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, volume 4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 120–130.

for Rorty himself, as the *truly* ambidextrous is supposed to operate *even-handedly*, that is, favouring *neither hand*, while clearly Rorty self-consciously favoured one, that representing the “conversational” and “historicist” approach.<sup>14</sup>

Given the orthodoxy of the broadly analytic approach that has continued into the early twenty-first century, we might call it the “right-handed” way of doing philosophy, and say that Rorty, in the latter decades of the twentieth, had come to favour using the left hand, retaining an enviable overall capacity to work with the right. But we might also see things the other way, and regard Rorty’s early days within the orthodoxy as having shaped him as a practitioner who, while later gaining great facility with the left, nevertheless retained an underlying right-handed dominance. It is this latter interpretation that I want to explore here—we might say, that of Rorty as an “ambidextrous *analyst*”, whose sympathy for an historicist, conversational account of philosophy was in tension with the deeply engrained dispositions that had come courtesy of the analytic orientation from which his professional career started in the 1960s. But according to Rorty’s own historicist lights, this is perhaps what we should expect. Rorty’s avowed “neo-Hegelian” historicism is succinctly summed-up in Hegel’s dictum of philosophy being “its time held in thought”, and Rorty would surely be the last person to portray himself as a thinker able to “jump over Rhodes”—that is, entirely transcend the intellectual habits and dispositions of his time. Thus I will be suggesting that in the case of Rorty—and in this way consistent with his own thought—that sometimes the *left* hand with which he had learned to practice an alternative “conversational” and historicist philosophy may not have known what his *right*, analytically trained, hand was up to when he was articulating and expressing his philosophical alternative. If historical consciousness counts for anything in philosophy, becoming aware of this might help us to further release the emancipatory dimension of Rorty’s philosophical thought from the contingencies of its historical context.

### ***Rorty’s Neo-Hegelian Philosophy as Conversation***

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, in introducing the idea of philosophy as working within what Michael Oakeshott had described as the “Conversation of Mankind”, Rorty states that “if we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing *conversation* as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the objects of their inquiry to the relation between alternative standards of justification, and from there

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<sup>14</sup> Perhaps a more accurate metaphor here would be to appeal to the idea of “cross-dominance”, in which a person retains a basic underlying handedness and yet has facility in the use of both hands.

to the actual changes in those standards which make up intellectual history”.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere in that work, Rorty appeals to another conception of philosophy to counter the orthodox analytic view of philosophy to which he is opposed—that of the “hermeneutics” of Hans-Georg Gadamer,<sup>16</sup> a philosopher also concerned to extract Hegel from the type of Platonic metaphysics with which he had been associated.<sup>17</sup> And yet while Gadamer had also appealed to a “conversational” or “dialogical” framework for his hermeneutically conceived and historically inflected approach to philosophy, Rorty strangely never seems to link explicitly link Gadamer’s use of the image of “conversation” to his own. This could be a mere artefact of the way Rorty deploys the various thinkers whose aid he calls upon for presenting his own meta-philosophical ideas. However, it might also have a deeper significance and point to an underlying distinction between the differing ways in which both Gadamer and Rorty think of the relation of their contemporary philosophy to that of the nineteenth century, and in particular, the philosophy of Hegel.

Hegel is traditionally taken to exemplify not only the type of luxuriant metaphysics with which early analytic philosophy had so self-consciously broken in the name of true science, but also the conception of philosophy as telling some theologically based macro-historical story about the growth of “reason” and “freedom” in the history of the West of the sort that the “end of ideology” advocates had wanted to stamp out. But Rorty entirely abstracts from this side of Hegel as systematising metaphysician and visionary of the historically developing modern nation-state as revealing the “march of God in the world”,<sup>18</sup> and portrays him as a philosopher who marked by two characteristics: the historicist idea of philosophy as “its time held in thought” and the method of “redescription”—that is, of addressing philosophical problems by redescribing them in new vocabularies rather than attempting to solve them in their own terms. Thus, for example, he describes Hegel as a philosopher who had become *impatient* with “the vocabulary used by philosophers who, like Kant, insisted on the irreducibility of the subject–object distinction” and who “in order to persuade people to stop talking in Cartesian and Kantian ways ... offered a wholesale redescription of knowledge, of moral and intellectual progress, and of many other things”.<sup>19</sup> In Rorty’s deflationary account of him, Hegel was in no way interested in getting something—such as “reality or knowledge or meaning”, or, indeed, history—*right*. Rather, he was concerned “to entrench a new

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<sup>15</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, pp. 389–90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 357–65.

<sup>17</sup> Gadamer’s retrieval of Hegel from any type of pre-Kantian metaphysics is a major theme of monumental *Truth and Method*. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second, Revised Edition, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald g. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §258 add.

<sup>19</sup> Rorty, “Analytic and conversational philosophy”, pp. 125–6.

vocabulary, one which uses old words in new ways”, out of impatience with the old ways.<sup>20</sup>

This deflationary reading is clearly a strategy that is meant to extract Hegel from the nineteenth-century historical projects with which he was commonly associated and make him into a philosopher who will be useful in Rorty’s task of urging intellectuals to rid themselves of the pretence that “they know, or ought to know, something about deep, underlying forces—forces that determine the fates of human communities”, claims that “we intellectuals have been making ... ever since we set up shop”—a type of knowledge, of course, for which Hegel’s philosophy was meant to give a blueprint.<sup>21</sup> In particular, for Rorty this must mean that any attempts to unify theoretical and practical reason be abandoned, as is clear in an autobiographical account in which he describes himself as having come to the idea that “the whole idea of holding reality and justice in a single vision had been a mistake – that a pursuit of such a vision had been precisely what led Plato astray”.<sup>22</sup>

Such an attitude, despite his “left-handed” critique of analysis, is clearly expressive of something like the “end of ideology” of the post-war period,<sup>23</sup> leading to a view of him as dressing up “an old-fashioned version of Cold War liberalism ... in fashionable ‘post-modern’ discourse”—a view of himself that Rorty attributes to his friend Richard Bernstein.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, such would not be a position entirely out of synchrony with his own personal history. Rorty indeed had been a child of leftist parents who first quite the Communist Party in the 1930s to identify themselves first as followers of Trotsky, and later moved to a more anti-communist albeit left-wing stance in the nineteen fifties and sixties.<sup>25</sup> We will not be surprised, then, that the aspects of Hegel he is willing

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, “The End of Leninism, Havel, and Social Hope”, in Arthur M. Melzer, et al (eds), *History and the Idea of Progress* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), republished in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 228–43.

<sup>22</sup> Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”, in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Thus Rorty quotes Richard Bernstein’s critique of his own views as “little more than an ideological *apologia* for an old-fashioned version of Cold War liberalism dressed up in fashionable ‘post-modern’ discourse”. Quoted in Richard Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”, in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> On Rorty’s family background, see Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), chs. 1 & 2. Rorty’s own family history might then be seen as reflecting typical changes in attitudes that marked the changes from the nineteenth to the end of ideology movement in the mid-twentieth.

to give include many that made Hegel idealist account of history susceptible to a materialist “inversion” at the hands of Marx. But regardless of the political sympathies of his readers, for many otherwise broadly sympathetic to Rorty’s attempts to give Hegel a relevance for our own time, one stumbling block has been his purported rejection of any aspiration to “get it right” in philosophy—for Rorty, a consequence of the rejection of the attempt to hold reality and justice “in a single vision”. In the following section I will argue that Rorty’s radically deflated Hegel is a consequence of the way that he understands the nature of the “conversation of mankind” and the only possible role for philosophy within it.

### *Conversation or Redescription*

In Rorty’s eyes, any aspiration to “get it right” could only be meaningful “when everybody interested in the topics draws pretty much the same inferences from the same assertions”,<sup>26</sup> but the task of the neo-Hegelian philosopher in the conversation of mankind is to *change* the terms in which the conversation is conducted. According to one account he gives of his early attraction to Hegel, Rorty seems to have taken the task of redescription as consistent with Hegel’s idea of a type of dialectical development of “reason”: “My starting point” he writes, “was the discovery of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a book which I read as saying: granted that philosophy is just a matter of out-describing the last philosopher, the cunning of reason can make use even of this sort of competition. It can use it to weave the conceptual fabric of a freer, better, more just society”.<sup>27</sup> Here the “cunning of reason” looks suspiciously like the liberal’s “hidden hand”, and it is not surprising that Rorty would have come to see through any such attempt to find something “metaphysical” behind his liberal proclivities. Thus when Rorty goes on to describe himself, after his early discovery of Hegel, as being led back to Dewey who had *himself* learned from Hegel, but who had also “immuniz[ed] himself against pantheism by taking Darwin seriously”,<sup>28</sup> I take this signal Rorty’s *discarding* of any earlier remnants of the “cunning of reason” thesis. Dewey’s naturalism here is meant to counter any idea of something operating *within* the series of philosophical redescriptions producing something from which “the conceptual fabric of a freer, better, more just society” might be woven. Significantly, it is the naturalistic appeal to Darwin here that fills the void of any work of reason through history.

Rorty has not been alone in deflating Hegel of traditional “metaphysical” features and looking to him as a prototypically modern philosopher who had broken with the Platonic project of traditional metaphysics and had come up with a way of philosophizing

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<sup>26</sup> Rorty, “Analytic and conversational philosophy”, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

adequate to the modern age. Moreover, there seems to be something right in Rorty's characterization of Hegel as an "anti-representationalist" as well as a "redescriber". Hegel had been a harsh critic of approaches to philosophy that saw philosophical inquiry as continuous with the inquiries of both common sense and natural science, that operated in terms of "the mere understanding [*der blosse Verstand*]" and that worked at the level of "representation" [*Vorstellung*]" for which "truth" was reduced to a matter of mere conventionally grounded "correctness [*Richtigkeit*]" . Philosophy aspired to something different—"reason [*die Vernunft*]"—that, as suggested in Rorty's *early* attraction to Hegel, that was immanent to historical society, somehow working itself out "behind the backs" of its members. This was Hegel's thesis of the "cunning of reason". Nevertheless, Hegel's critical attitude to the activity of "the understanding" clearly could *not* entail Rorty's dismissive attitude to "getting it right" as for Hegel, the rigorous pursuit of the understanding *itself* necessarily produced contradictions, that were, in turn, intolerable *to that same* understanding, and this, in turn, created the *rational need* for "redescription". That is, in the Hegelian "dialectic", it was this, rather than mere "impatience" or "boredom" with the old "vocabulary", that forced reasoning to find ways beyond the fixed categorical determinations within which it had been working.

Having abandoned anything resembling the "cunning of reason" thesis, Rorty draws on others to describe the discontinuous changes of the "vocabulary" within which the conversation of mankind is carried out—in particular, the philosopher of *science*, Thomas Kuhn.<sup>29</sup> Thus Rorty's "getting it right" becomes the sort of attitude a scientist has when working within the constraints of a commonly accepted "paradigm" or "disciplinary matrix", and so within the constraints of "normal science". In contrast, revolutionary scientist's attempt to "change the vocabulary" without a concern to "get things right" for Rorty always seems to have the connotation of the "incommensurability" of vocabularies—an idea with which even Kuhn himself seemed to have become unhappy after initially espousing it. In short, Rorty is happy to leave "truth" and "reason", now understood with lowercase "t"s and "r"s, to those labouring within the paradigm, trying to get things "right" in terms of its contingent normative structure, and willing to tolerate the boredom of doing so. In contrast, is not the revolutionary scientist *qua scientist* that now fills out the image of the redescriber, especially when redescription is conceived in relation to something more than the escape from boredom—the realization of *freedom*. Here the paradigmatic redescriber is the romantic artist involved

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<sup>29</sup> In doing so, Rorty neatly reduces the historicity of philosophy to that of science, despite his resistance to the "philosophy of science" stance of orthodox analytic philosophy.

in the project of self-creation,<sup>30</sup> and the paradigm of the activity of self-creation by redescription is that of Marcel Proust.

In “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids” Rorty describes a phase of his intellectual life in which he regarded as “the two greatest achievements of the species to which I belonged”, Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*. Both were achievements a redescription that was in the service of freedom rather than truth—freedom conceived as freedom from the descriptions of others. Elsewhere, Rorty’s account of Proust vividly conveys what he has in mind by the virtues of redescription. Proust wanted

to free himself from the descriptions of himself offered by the people he had met. He wanted not to be merely the person these other people thought they knew him to be, not to be frozen in the frame of a photograph shot from another person’s perspective. He dreaded being, in Sartre’s phrase, turned into a thing by the eye of the other ... His method of freeing himself from those people – of becoming autonomous – was to redescribe the people who had described him. He drew sketches of them from lots of different perspectives – and in particular from lots of different positions in time – and thus made clear that not of these people occupied a privileged standpoint; Proust became autonomous by explaining to himself why the others were not authorities, but simply fellow contingencies. He redescribed them as being as much a product of others’ attitudes toward them as Proust himself was a product of their attitudes toward him.<sup>31</sup>

The reference to Sartre here provides the link to Hegel, and in particular, to the famous dialectic of “master and slave” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Sartre had read Hegel in the light of Kojève’s questionable account of the “struggle for recognition”, a struggle motivated by a purported “desire for recognition” meant to be fundamental to the human species.<sup>32</sup> In Rorty’s hands the struggle becomes attempts to impose a vocabulary on the other—to become the creator of the framework within which claims to “getting it right” will be assessed. Proust’s redescrptions of his interlocutors is then equated with Hegel’s method in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a matter of “out-redescribing the last philosopher” who themselves had been redescribing their predecessor.<sup>33</sup> As an account of Hegel’s method it is sure to have its objectors, and as a model of “conversation” we

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<sup>30</sup> On the self-creating artist see, Richard Rorty, “The Contingency of Language”, in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, pp. 3-5.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Rorty, “Proust, Nietzsche, and Heidegger”, in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> I have attempted such a critique of Kojève’s reduction of Hegel’s account of recognition in *Hegel’s Hermeneutics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Rorty, “Trotsky and the Wild Orchids”, p. 11.

might have concerns as well. But it does seem to capture one purported philosophical revolution very well: Russell's attempt to redescribe everything that had hitherto been expressed in the vocabulary of the Aristotelian syllogistic in the new vocabulary of Fregean predicate calculus. Here we might again see Rorty's right-handed dispositions operating against the intentions governing his left.

A contrast to Rorty's use of the metaphor of conversation can be found in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, in which he portrays a conversation in which either conversationalist is not "open" to the point of view, or we might say, vocabulary, of the interlocutor, as something less than proper conversation—a view he draws from a different reading of the lessons of Hegel's account of recognition. Like Rorty, Gadamer is a deeply historicist thinker who rejects the idea of philosophy as a Platonic search for eternal truths, but he does not draw from this the idea of the philosopher as single-minded redescrber of existing ways of making sense of the world. Philosophy must strive for a form of "historical consciousness" that he calls "historically effected consciousness":<sup>34</sup> rather than seeking answers to eternal questions, the philosopher is concerned to become *conscious* of the way that cultural history has shaped the questions that inquiry seeks to answer. And while this may have the consequence of attempting to free philosophical thought from that influence, this is not the only possible outcome. Becoming conscious of those influences may also work in the service of their now conscious acceptance, and, of a deepening of appreciation of what questions may be worth asking.

This, as I read him, is the sense in which the conversation or dialogue metaphor is employed by Gadamer to provide a picture of a contemporary philosopher's relation to her past—the achievement of "historically effected consciousness" of one's past may equally entail a self-conscious and thoughtful embrace of ways of doing things from the past—ways that might otherwise have been uncritically disavowed by a fetishism of the new. In this sense Gadamer's "conversational" conception of philosophy might be taken as providing something closer to an alternative to modern analytic philosophy that Rorty is looking for than that *offered* by Rorty. That is, it might be taken as providing a conception of conversational philosophy that is less in the grip of the contingencies of present day philosophy.

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Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Part II, ch 4, section 3.

