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Rorty's Anti-Foundational Self: A House of Mirrors

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The trouble with some self-made men is that they insist on giving everybody their recipe.
-M. Seitter

I. The Overview

- ¶1. There is something missing from Richard Rorty's account of the self. Being an anti-foundational and an anti-essential historicist, Rorty takes a dim view of those who insist that there is some sort of central and ontologically fixed being to an individual person. He holds that those philosophers who assert this view are mistaking a metaphor for an entity. Rorty's confidence on this point stems from his argument that there can be no privileged point of view for any language user. That is, it is impossible for idiom-dependent human beings either to transcend language use in order to discover the ineffable within, in a Buddha-like fashion, or to discover vocabulary that finally gets under appearances to capture in words a bedrock reality. We humans are embedded in our time, place, and culture. We are products of and participants in our society's *language-game*: a use of a vocabulary bound by a specific set of conventional rules that serves a practical purpose of attaining the language users' ends. There can be no escape to or discovery of an objective rationality with its Parmenidean "God's-eye point of view," for such a rationality is but one among many once useful metaphors that had been fabricated to serve a past society's practical purpose but no longer yields any pragmatic utility today. Rooted as it is in the Platonic narrative, Rorty claims the vocabulary of western rationality is simply one voice in the diverse conversation of humankind, and not the touchstone by which all other narratives (such as the poetic or the philosophical) are to be measured.

- ¶2. Where does this leave the self? If Rorty is right and we must localize notions such as a Platonic soul, an Aristotelian substance, or a Kantian ego to the needs and desires of a particular time and culture, then one must question these notions' ability to ground and stabilize just who we are. Rorty maintains that we humans are contingent webs of beliefs and desires, creative poets who weave and reweave their narratives-jumping off from and in reaction to their native culture-in order to get what they want pragmatically. In the past we have mistakenly thought that we were everlasting human souls, abiding selves, or timeless egos that had beliefs, desires, sensations, and so forth. Rorty, in his non-reductive materialist mode, asserts (reminiscent to David Hume's "bundle theory") that this was an unjustified reification of a metaphor for the individual from a particular language-game. There is nothing behind, above, or beneath our idiosyncratic latticework of convictions and drives, just as there is nothing eternal supporting dynamic systems of bodily existence. To maintain the foundationalist line that there is, say, a rational entity at the core of our experience is to project an unsupported epistemological speculation-one that had its origin in the socio-political struggles of classical Greece-and thus to form a circular argument lacking any correspondence to some ontological ground (for example, Kant's argument for the Transcendental Ego). Rorty looks upon this and similar foundational attempts as misconceiving a metaphor for a description of reality; that is, the mistaking of a particular vocabulary or narrative for the final vocabulary or definitive narrative on the subject of the self. For this reason, and for 2500 years of failed attempts to do so, Rorty cannot accept the possibility of the existence of any mind capable of transcending its embeddedness in its time, place, and culture in order to occupy the privileged, universalist vantage point.
- ¶3. So how does Rorty conceive of what has been called the self, and is this an advantage to past models? Or are we saddled with an untenable construct that neither adequately describes the human situation nor pragmatically gets us what we want. Rorty claims that we are nothing but our beliefs, desires, sensations, etc. He writes:

There is no more of a center to the self than there is to the brain. Just as the neural synapses are in continual interaction with one another, constantly weaving a different configuration of electrical charge, so our beliefs and desires are in continual interaction, redistributing truth-values among statements. Just as the brain is not something that "has" such synapses, but is simply the agglomeration of them, so the self is not something which "has" the beliefs and desires, but is simply the network of such beliefs and desires.[\[1\]](#)

- ¶4. What is more, Rorty holds that human organisms are replete with diverse, and at times conflicting webs of belief (or in Donald Davidson's terminology "persons"). Connecting this claim to the ground-breaking psychological work of Sigmund Freud, as I will later, Rorty maintains that the self is the dynamic balance among competing Davidsonian persons or webs of belief. We are nothing more than the weave of narratives that we inherit from societal and family traditions, as well as those story-lines which we invent for ourselves, if and when we do. And if they are incommensurate so be it. Freud's study of parapraxes (slips of the tongue) clearly shows such internal conflicts to be an integral part of the human condition. For Rorty, the urge to search for, or worse, to posit a unifying agency to mediate and to resolve these conflicts in vocabulary choices is a desire akin to those associated with superstitious projections. It is a failure of will not to accept the ultimate contingency of our alleged selfhood.
- ¶5. On the positive side, this leaves Rorty the ability to fashion a philosophy which allows for a plurality of vocabularies. This is important to what I call his "Jeffersonian strategy" of dividing the individual between her public narrative (the language of a shared tolerance spoken in a liberal society) and her private vocabulary (possibly an intolerant, elitist idiosyncratic invention) without the charge of incoherence being made to stick. It is Jeffersonian in that it is inspired by the Roger William/Thomas Jefferson model for the separation or privatization of personal religious beliefs, set apart from the realm of secular public discourse. Thus, by extension to all creative acts, humans are at least bilingual in the sense that we speak in different language-games, one public, one private, when we engage others in culturally embedded conversation (normal language) or when we independently and furtively reinvent ourselves (abnormal language). Nevertheless, precocious poets, such as Rorty's "heroes" Dewey, Nietzsche, Proust, etc., in a Kuhnian paradigm shift, challenge and alter the culture when radically recasting their own selves by applying new metaphors to the physical marks and sounds that compose the formal structure of the language at hand. The dead metaphors of the past are continually replaced by the abnormal idioms of poetic genius when such novel language use resonates with the community causing a solidarity (a temporary grouping of like-minded individuals) to form around the fresh metaphor. For Rorty this is an unending process of private invention and cultural renewal.

- ¶6. While Rorty's narrative seem plausible, a closer look reveals that it is incoherent in its bilingualism. When a conflict develops between the normal and abnormal use of language in a cultural environment denuded of mediating foundational supports (a Cartesian God, a common human nature, scientific essences, transcendental egos) with a corresponding elimination of convergent rationality, there can be only an intolerant Mendelic competition for semantic space among poets and their solidarities (like the Darwinian struggle for survival among organisms). The unavoidable pain and humiliation of forced redescription of one individual by another individual or solidarity cannot be avoided, and yet cannot be allowed in Rorty's liberal society. Therefore, to escape the unsavory and incoherent result that coercion or force girds liberal democracy, Rorty must insist, despite his protest to the contrary, that all citizens be tolerant of an entire set of incommensurate positions, and not just the ones their society endorses. Then the question of how it is possible to coherently maintain a multitude of values, some of which are incompatible with each other, is transferred from politics at the societal level to the psychology of multiple persons within the individual. In short, for Rorty's political solidarity to work, he must rely on a solidarity of the mind. Rorty suggests this when he writes:

I do not see this [unity of the self] as a matter of ontology, but merely as a way of putting the familiar point that the same human being can contain different coherent sets of beliefs and desires—different roles, different personalities, etc.—correlated with the different groups to which he or she belongs or whose power he or she must acknowledge.[\[2\]](#)

- ¶7. Yet something seems missing in Rorty's account of the self. I will argue that Rorty does not go far enough in his claim that we are not selves that have beliefs and desires but simply are our beliefs and desires, and by falling short, ironically Rorty undermines the very freedom for the idiosyncratic poet/narrator he champions, and misses the central experience of being human, one's own first-person agency.

II. The Babel of Freudian Voices

- ¶8. In Rorty's pragmatism, the clash between individual and society can be reduced to at least a conflict between an individual's two manners of expression, as a creative self which functions discursively, and as an individual who participates causally as a member of a liberal society. The multiplicity of language-games within one individual can be tied to Rorty's abandonment of the hope for an ontologically grounded unified self.

¶9. Therefore, as suggested above, one might seek a possible escape route from a paradox of clashing vocabulary between the public, tolerant liberal and the radically idiosyncratic private poet by posing multiple "persons" for any one organism. One might adopt the Davidson-Rorty position of a mind as a solidarity comprised of a manifold of narratives, that is, multiple descriptive story-lines of the various "persons" or characters which comprise the novel entity. In this way, Rorty believes he can avoid the theistic-inspired traditional view of divine/animal-rational/passionate bifurcation of human life, and the assumption that there literally exists some absolute criterion of truth, by limiting "the opposition between rational and irrational forms of persuasion to the interior of a language game, rather than to try to apply it to interesting and important shifts in linguistic behavior. Such a restricted notion of rationality is all we can allow ourselves if we accept the central claim. . . that what matters in the end are changes in the vocabulary rather than changes in belief."[\[3\]](#) Thus the metaphor of a self as an epic poem might allow for the possibility of incommensurable vocabularies to exist side-by-side within an organism capable of continual redefinition without the risk of incoherence.[\[4\]](#) The exemplar of this sort of composition would be Freud's psychoanalytic model. Rorty advances this notion:

On my account of Freud, his work enables us to construct richer and more plausible narratives of (an) ad hoc sort-more plausible because they will cover all the actions one performs in the course of one's life, even the silly, cruel, and self-destructive actions. . . . He thought that the traditional oppositions between reason, will, and emotion. . . should be discarded in favor of distinctions between various regions of a homogeneous mechanism, regions that embody a plurality of persons (that is, of incompatible systems of belief and desire).[\[5\]](#)

¶10. For Freud, as is true for Rorty, there is no overarching, rational element in which the objective decisions are made.[\[6\]](#) This is made clear in Freud's later writings, with the development of the three homunculi-the Id, the Superego, and the Ego, an outgrowth, from his earlier system of dynamic equilibrium (the constancy principle) among the pleasure principle and the reality principle.[\[7\]](#) Freud appeals to Rorty's sensibilities in that Freud's theory abandons any reference to the ontologically grounded mental faculties in favor of alternative modes of psychological adaptation that are the contingent adjustments by the organism to insure survival and the satisfaction of needs. Nevertheless, Freud runs into a difficulty concerning the place of science in human thought and the role of the ego that reflect adversely on Rorty's position.

¶11. Science prizes objectivity, a valuation which Rorty challenges in his anti-scientism stance for the obvious anti-foundational reason that the self is forever language-bound, so there can be no possibility of a transcendental objectivity. In the Freudian psychoanalytic model the closest element in the mind to self-consciousness as independent and objective arbiter is the ego. Apparently, it falls to the ego to dispassionately stand back in its effort to moderate or refuse the unconscious gratification-seeking instincts of the id (the archetype for the pleasure principle). The ultimate achievement for the ego, and the stated purpose of Freudian psychoanalysis, is the gradual conquest of the id through the raising of the unconscious impulses to the level of consciousness.[\[8\]](#) For the scientist, this would be manifested in the overcoming of prejudice and superstition in order to embrace reality as it truly stands. However, Freud also contended that the ego is not a master in its own house; it is strictly a result of "the necessity to mediate between the regressive strivings of the pleasure principle operating within the id on the one hand, and the demands of reality and the reality principle on the other."[\[9\]](#) The ego is responsible for the repression of the wishes and desires which conflict with its stated ideals, values, etc. absorbed from its culture, and their transformation into socially acceptable forms (via sublimation). This repression by the ego is said to be the unconscious function of the ego-ideal or the super-ego.[\[10\]](#) Therefore, there are regulating elements of the unconscious within the ego. In this function the ego is not performing as an independent rational being but acts more as a thermostatic agent in a closed system dedicated to the discharge of tensions so as to achieve homeostasis of the organism. So even when the ego is sublimating instinctual drives into socially acceptable forms, the underlying purpose is to achieve a state of pleasure (i.e., a lack of tension). This seems to make the ego part of the id, and not a distinct arbiter, as far as the id and the super-ego intertwine as drives structured to get what they want. Thus, the ego seems to be both the leading edge of and dependent upon the id. If this is so, the ego's service to the reality principle is both in the regulation of and in service to the pleasure principle. Then it would follow that the independence of the ego is possible but only at the indulgence of the pleasure principle, that is the id.[\[11\]](#) This seems like an untenable situation, especially for the scientist (a role Freud suggested for the analyst), since the independence of rational endeavor would never materialize in the atmosphere of this closed psychological system.

¶12. Now the digression into Freud's psychoanalytic model bears fruit. As noted above, only if the ego is an independent entity, capable of standing back, so to speak, and dispassionately assessing the pulls of the id and the pushes of the super ego, then objectivity in science is possible and the only means to achieve the requisite objectivity (i.e., the basis for scientism).[\[12\]](#) But the foundational claims of scientism is a main target of attack by Rorty in several of his works. If we accept Rorty's stated position on scientism, and if we blend in Freud's views just discussed about the id, the superego, and the ego, then it follows that the ego must be reducible to the id's instincts and the correlative ego-ideals of the superego to avoid an establishment of a rational, transcendental, ego-driven "skyhook." There seems to be an obvious difficulty looming for Rorty's position, however. If the ego merely is an extension of the web of desires and rationales that is the id as it struggles to engage sundry outside (causal) influences, then the combination of the mechanistic impulses and the deterministic traditional structures of society would overwhelm the creative impetus, or reduce such a structure to a figurehead, and hence a sham. Organic reflex would completely submerge poetic re-creation, eliminating the constructive anarchy whose reign is the engine of novel metaphor, and whose loss would effectively reduce personal activity to a determined repetition of frozen patterns, resulting in the wholesale absorption of the discursive language of aesthetic choice into the causal vocabulary of historical determinism. This result cannot be taken too far for Rorty, however, if he wishes to maintain his Jeffersonian strategy for a wall of separation between poetic creativity and political solidarity, as well as his advocacy for a truly free, discursive voice for the ironist, which is at the core of his anti-foundational polemic. If I have been correct in my argument, then there is only one option left for Rorty to escape this unsavory situation. That is, to continue to avoid the foundationalist's advocacy for a strong, central, and transcendental voice where, in Rorty's view, the dogmatism of science, religion or philosophy will dominate, he must opt for a multiplicity of voices, associated in a loose and centerless confederation or solidarity within the ironic poet to consolidate the disjunction of disparate narrative components into a cohesive constituency of webs of belief compatible with political tolerance. Rorty states:

For persons who are capable of the full glory of humanity are capable of seeing themselves steadily and whole. Rather than feel that splits are tearing them apart, they can see tensions between their alternative self-descriptions as, at worst, necessary elements in a harmonious variety-in-unity.[\[13\]](#)

¶13. Rorty cannot hesitate in upholding this "variety-in-unity" if the individual is to be in healthy equilibrium, avoiding the detrimental renting which would place her in a state of split-personality-psychosis. Thus for there to be this variety-in-unity, there must be a mirror-image on the psychological level of *the solidarity of purpose* (tolerance, non-cruelty, etc.) Rorty has claimed is essential for a liberal society.

¶14. ***III. The Rortyan "Self:" A Distorted Mirror***

¶15. It then seems to follow that the language-games in conflict at the poetic-societal level must be brought into harmony by some overarching psychological principle (or "person?") under pain of mental illness if one fails. But this foundationalist option already has been rejected by Rorty. Therefore, what would such a suggestion look like at the personal level? How could there be a Jeffersonian privatization among our Freudian "voices" or "persons" required in such a psychological solidarity? The poet, the philosopher, the scientist, the skeptic, the thief, and so on; each one of these "persons" would be you, but no one of them is wholly you. In fact, there is no "you" outside this confederation of "persons." According to Rorty the unique assemblage is that to which the label "I" is attached by you. This is my understanding of what an advocate for a psychological solidarity must envision as the mindscape of a human organism. What is interesting, however, is not the composition of the participants, but their interrelation and interaction. If, as Rorty claims,^[14] convergent rationality is not a possibility in the justification of political actions, perhaps we should rule it out in the microcosmic "society" of the individual as well. This poses a daunting problem. Which voice(s) is (are) to rise up to a leadership role? Order, in the form of an idiosyncratic hierarchy of values, must be sought to insure mental health.^[15] This allows for the avoidance of the mental anarchy of neurosis and psychosis. Even if there are two or three incommensurate systems in rotation at one time (as is pictured in a "good angel-bad angel" polemic), a repression of an assortment of other systems of beliefs has been already accomplished, leaving competition among the remaining, dominant vocabularies to be undemocratic in form. Conceivably this outcome could be avoided if the language of the narrative poet in us could become the spokesperson for the cerebral assembly. This may even be accomplished by some (unconscious?) internal form of the Hobbesian Social Contract. The question is why, on what grounds, should the ascension of this voice be the preferred choice from among the other voices? This question is asked to stress the point that there is no grounded reason for this, or any other, preference in a Rortyan narrative. The choice endorsed by Rorty (i.e., the poet) is an arbitrary and difficult one in that it allows the strong, oft-times cruel and intolerant, attitude to dominate the choruses of beliefs and desires. Elitism, which is not to be tolerated in the Rortyan political sphere, is apparently allowable and encouraged by Rorty in the mindscape of an organism. This may be safely inferred when Rorty says:

. . . the final victory of metaphors of self-creation over metaphors of discovery-would consist in our becoming reconciled to the thought that this is the only

sort of power over the world which we can hope to have. For that would be the final abjuration of the notion that truth, and not just power and pain, is to be found 'out there.'[\[16\]](#)

- ¶16. How else could the poetic element be given full throttle if not by means of repression and sublimation of the rival language systems, among which are, according to Rorty, the superstitions of religious dogma, the glorification of rational thought in foundational philosophy, and the reification of the world in scientism? For the usual option to coercion and intolerant action, educational dialogue in search of convergent consensus, in Rorty's narrative would take the form of sophistic persuasion either to a cultural norm (and conformity to the ego-ideal of the superego) or to an intuitive insight (and surrender to the instinctual demands of the id), with the intention of altering and controlling behavior for the benefit of one's group and ultimately oneself therein. Neither alternative allows for the sense of liberty implied in Rorty's Jeffersonian strategy. Nowhere in the selection of language-games open to individuals can an actual choice be called free. In a de-centered pragmatic solidarity such as Rorty's, whether of the political or psychological variety, there must be involved a paternalistic coercion of such a magnitude that the usual sense of freedom of choice is obliterated. And with its elimination we return to a mechanical materialism, with its inherent reification of the self as a third-person object of investigation-as was hinted at in the psychological investigations of Freud. In fact, Rorty states:

If one takes Freud's advice, one finds psychological narratives without heroes or heroines. For neither Sartrean freedom, not the will, nor the instincts, nor the internalization of a culture, nor anything else will play the role of "the true self." Instead, one tells the story of the whole machine as machine, without choosing a particular set of springs and wheels as protagonist.[\[17\]](#)

- ¶17. It is with this critical admission that the revelations of the internal contradictions of Freud conspire to severely compromise Rorty's theory.

- ¶18. There seems to be an imperfect mirror working here, reflecting an image of the possibility of solidarity in society distortedly upon the concept of the self as a centerless community in microcosm. Consciously or not, Rorty's ambition to extend the language of democracy as far as possible leads him to mimic the structure of Plato's Republic in that the state and the individual are seen to be of the same character, only differing in scope. And with this parallel cited, Rorty seems compelled to take on all the drawbacks inherent in Plato's position, not the least of which is the reduction of the organism to a neat package which may accord with the promoted social theory but may sacrifice as unruly important elements which do not quite fit the package, that is, the very ones Rorty wishes to defend—self assertion and autonomous creativity. For either there is an independent first-person agent—say a carpenter on Rorty's Neurathian boat of the self-changing the planks of belief consciously—or as Rorty seems to want it, the boat is completely automated—a Freudian self-regulating system where consciousness is but one, albeit a key, element of a contingent web of beliefs. Yet to appreciate the self in this fashion deprives Rorty the very freedom to gain the critical distance from instinctual drives of the id and cultural impositions of the superego to poetically create novel ways of being.
- ¶19. Consider the following allegory:

Imagine a hall of mirrors. You have never experienced anything other than the hall. On every mirror, no two of which are alike, is reflected your image in a unique fashion. For a long while you entertain doubt, you are not sure which of those images really represents you. But suddenly you realize that while some reflections are contrasting in their appearance they are all of you. Soon thereafter you begin to believe that there is nothing more to yourself than those reflections in the contingently arranged hall, for this is all you have ever encountered. Moreover, the hall turns out to be nothing more than the sequence of these mirrors. With this realization it seems that the distinctions between the sequenced reflectors and the multifarious reflections of yourself on them fade. As this happens, you believe that at your pleasure you can play with the images, thinking now that they are part of the mirrors and alternatively that they are more independent of them, and that, perhaps, collectively they are you and that the mirrors are defined by the play of your dancing images. You are liberated by the thought that there is no outer and no inner, only the creative play of images looked at this way or taken that way according to the dictates of your fancy and desires.

- ¶20. There is a problem within this allegory. How were you sure that the image in the mirror was you? What made the image stand out as a self-image and not merely an integral part of the looking glass? Furthermore, if somehow an ad hoc distinction was made between image and object, how could you be sure that the quasi-independent image was you, and not an epiphenomenon of the system of mirrors, or some outside presence altogether? Again, how could you ever be sure you were ever seeing yourself (-selves) and not someone else's projection which you mislabeled, or, for that matter, even a cardboard cutout caricature of you placed between you and the mirror by someone out to redefine you?
- ¶21. If we take the system of mirrors to be alternatively the "world" or one's home culture, and the collective images to be the Rortyan self as a centerless web of beliefs, and furthermore, the substitute projection and the caricature of you as society's initial contributions to "self-image," then as the allegory plays out, it ought to become obvious what is missing from this network-you as the focal ground of the images and as the wellspring of the creative play of mind and word. Without you in the sense of your first-person (perhaps mysterious) origin of self-awareness, there could never be self-assertion nor self-creation. Our identities would be hopelessly embedded in the language, absorbed by the mirrors of culture, and locked in instinctual reflex as surely as when, in total oblivion, a lower primate peers at its image unaware that the reflection in the looking-glass is its own. Therefore, I conclude that Rorty, despite considerable effort, has missed his mark. Upon close inspection, the basis for his anti-foundational narrative is undercut, at least concerning the self, by his inadvertent underscoring of the expectation of its centeredness when his insistence to the contrary is played out to its own logical conclusions.

END NOTES

1. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Realism, and Truth, Vol. 1* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1993), 123.
2. Richard Rorty, *Feminism and Pragmatism* in R. B. Goodman (Ed.), *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader* New York: Rutledge (1995), 144, fn 22.
3. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 47.

4. In support of his view of liberal polity, Rorty endorses Isaiah Berlin's defense of "negative liberty" as that which accounts for individual dynamic, better than the traditional "telic conceptions of human nature." As Rorty writes in his article, "The contingency of a liberal community": "In his *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Berlin says, as I did. . . that we need to give up the jigsaw puzzle approach to vocabularies, practices and values. In Berlin's words, we need to give up 'the conviction that all positive values in which men have believed must, in the end, be compatible, and perhaps even entail each other.' My emphasis on Freud's claim that we should think of ourselves as just one more of Nature's experiments, not as the culmination of Nature's design, echoes Berlin's use of J. S. Mill's phrase 'experiments in living' (as well as echoing Jefferson's and Dewey's use of the term 'experiment' to describe American democracy)." (ibid., 45)

5. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991), vol. 2, 161-2 (Quotation originally italicized.)

6. While Freud has the ego representing reason, and that reason was important in the "analysis of the resistance," nevertheless, it was not a concept which was identical with the Enlightenment-that which can be separated from the natural order, from causes. Rather, reasons are underlain and shaped by bodily processes. As such, they are a construct, a working model of the world, that is driven by the impulses of the id, under the influence of the pleasure principle-the endeavor to fulfill all of one's desires, and modified by the reality principle-the force of realization that one cannot always fulfill one's wishes. Thus, the ego is the dynamic equilibrium that forms in response to the bodily drives and their frustrations. A dispositional state, rather than a bracket around the abstract contents of propositional attitudes, the ego, impacted by the natural order, organizes around conscious narratives, as well as unconscious phantasies (as represented in dreams) to fulfill wishes while screening-out painful feelings and desires (e.g., through the process of projection). One might say that the ego, as Freud conceived it to be (and the reasons generated by its operation), is an epiphenomenal outcome of the relevant causal forces at play.

7. In particular, *the ego, id* and superego are discussed in detail in Freud's *The Ego and the Id*.

8. Of the ego's relation to the id, Freud writes "Thus in its relation to the id it is like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces." — Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, translated by James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1960), 19).
9. Erwin Singer, *Key Concepts in Psychotherapy*, New York: Random House (1965), 46. Freud continues the analogy of the ego as horseman immediately above in footnote 8, saying: The analogy may be carried a little further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from the horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego is in the habit of transforming the id's will into action as if it were its own. (Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, translated by James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1960), 19)
10. Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, translated by James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1960), 32 After a lengthy explanation in *The Ego and the Id* of the origin of the superego, Freud makes this significant observation: The ego ideal is therefore the heir of the Oedipus complex, and thus it is also the expression of the most powerful impulses and most libidinal vicissitudes of the id. By setting up this ego ideal, the ego has mastered the Oedipus complex and at the same time placed itself in subjection to the id.
11. As Freud states in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: "Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of the unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure." Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, translated by James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1960), 7.

12. As Jeremy Leeds, [Problems of Relativism in Psychoanalysis](#), *The Philosophical Forum*, 24(4) 1993, 349-362, 354 underscores, a lack of some sort of common point of reference makes hermeneutic arguments relative and at times, logically fallacious, and hence, unscientific, devoid of objectivity: Once its own assumptions are made clear, the hermeneutic argument collapses back in on itself. This is the age-old problem of relativism: a theory without reference points cannot, by any objective standard, establish its validity or superiority over other theory. A prime example of this for hermeneutics is the trap of the "genetic fallacy"-the confusion of origins with validity-into which relativists in psychoanalysis consistently fall. It is not enough to refer to the period in which a thinker lived, or to his/her life experiences, in order to discredit his/her views. The fact that Freud lived some years before us and was influenced by something global or specific about the "nineteenth century" provides at best very partial insight into the validity of his theories. To make something substantive of this argument requires a foundation on which to justify comparative claims of truth or falsity, and it is precisely this field that relativism abdicates.
13. [Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader](#) New York: Routledge (1995), 136.
14. Rorty states: "As a partisan of solidarity (the pragmatist's) account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one. Richard Rorty, [Essays on Heidegger and Others](#), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991), vol. 1, 24.
15. The point is supported by Freud in his discussion about the ego's object-identifications (and the ego's relation to the id through the superego), and the dangers of a gross multiplication of them, to the point of a multiple personality disorder. Consider the implications this comment has upon the Rortyan mindscape of incompatible voices: " If they obtain the upper hand and become too numerous, unduly powerful and incompatible with one another, a pathological outcome will not be far off. It may come to a disruption of the ego in consequence of the different identifications becoming cut off from one another by resistances; perhaps the secret of the cases of what is described as 'multiple personality' is that the different identifications seize hold of consciousness in turn. Even when things do not go so far as this, there remains the question of conflicts between the various identifications into which the ego comes apart, conflicts which cannot after all be described as entirely pathological. " Sigmund Freud, [The Ego and the Id](#), translated by James Strachey, New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (1960), 25.

16. [Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader](#) New York: Rutledge (1995), 136
Rorty drives home the point about individuality, genius and importance of uniqueness as follows: Presumably it would be to have figured out what was distinctive about oneself-the difference between one's own lading-list and other people's. If one could get this recognition down on paper (or canvas or film)-if one could find distinctive words or forms for one's own distinctiveness-then one would have demonstrated that one was not a copy or a replica. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1989), 24.
17. Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidgger and Others*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1991), vol. 2, 161.

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