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Toward a Transcendental Pragmatic Reconciliation of Analytic and Continental Philosophy

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1. Introduction

Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) draws on Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of scientific paradigm shifts in order to portray the history of philosophy as also subject to paradigm shifts. Rorty thinks that modern epistemology as representationalist and foundationalist is now an outmoded paradigm, which has been replaced by the new paradigm of pragmatism, and as part of that new paradigm Rorty presents his own unique philosophical perspective as "neopragmatism." This view of neo-pragmatism has the advantage of taking into account philosophers from outside classical pragmatism in order to show how they too revealed the old representationalist paradigm to be outdated, and how they too surpassed it. Three philosophers especially changed the course of epistemology in the twentieth century, three philosophers not always seen to be doing the same thing, mainly because they appear within three different traditions: John Dewey in American pragmatism, Ludwig Wittgenstein in analytic philosophy, and Martin Heidegger in Continental philosophy. Rorty highlights how each of these thinkers overcame the modern view of the mind as a detached spectator and replaced it with a new view of the individual as practically engaged within the world and the community of inquiry. Rorty's synthesis of these traditions is one of the major achievements of American philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century; and yet, for all of his synthesizing of the analytic, pragmatic, and Conti-

mental traditions in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty is hardly naïve about the philosophical and cultural obstacles facing such a synthesis. Two decades later, in *Truth and Progress*, Rorty even writes that the “two matrices” analytic and Continental philosophy “are very different indeed, and are very unlikely to blend with each other” (1998, p. 9). But, in the spirit of Rorty’s own neopragmatism, and its stated aim to “keep the conversation going” in contemporary philosophy, these divided views may yet be reconciled. In fact, the engagement and disagreement between the traditions reveal at a transcendental and pragmatic level some level of unity expressible in the form of “we-saying.” Not only must either side express its perspective about the other as an intersubjectively unified view, but either side must also recognize the other as always already intersubjectively unified with its own view. A fundamental condition for the possibility of dialogical engagement between Continental and analytic philosophy is an *a priori* recognition of an intersubjective unity between them.

2. The divide

Sometimes the divide between analytic and Continental philosophy is cast as if the two sides had neither a common origin nor a common developmental trajectory, a perception reinforced by their very different styles. But, in fact, the origins of both traditions can be traced more or less back to Kant, and their trajectories seem both to be more or less Hegelian and pragmatist. Many analytic philosophers extend Kant’s project of analyzing propositional forms, like analytic vs. synthetic, and *a posteriori* vs. *a priori*, whereas many Continentals extend Kant’s ideas on aesthetics and spontaneity to language. Analytic philosophers often hold that logical analysis is the best path to the truth, while Continentals tend to employ a more historically informed reconstruction of the development of various discussions. But despite these two diverging Kantian pictures of thought, both seem to follow respective paths toward a quite similar end in a nonrepresentationalist and instrumentalist view of mind, as Rorty rightly points out, as well as a transcendently intersubjective and temporally extended view of the mind.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant advanced the transcendental unity of apperception (or the “I think”) as the ultimate foundation of his philosophy: all thought must be unified for the subject. One can find intersubjective dimensions of Kant’s thought, even in the *Critique*, and certainly in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” but the ma-

major step forward in modern philosophy into intersubjectivity was taken by Hegel, who also thinks of his own philosophy as a logical development of Kant's thought. Analytic and Continental philosophers seem to travel this same path from the subject into the study of the language of thought, to arrive at intersubjectivity as the unity of thought, which results in a new view of the subject as intersubjectively shaped by and emerging within the community of inquiry. Hegel himself in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* highlights this developmental turn to intersubjectivity as central to the development of the mind: "What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses, which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (Hegel, 1977, p. 110). Here Hegel means that Kant's "I" (as the ultimate groundwork of thought) is an important but ultimately illusory stage on the way to humanity seeing itself as "we" and "us," and Hegel uses a version of Kant's own transcendental argument (dialectic) to demonstrate that the "I" cannot even be posited except in the intersubjective social space of the "we." The entire debate over the schism between Continental and analytic philosophy also takes place within this same social space of "we-saying," despite what either side might portray as an irreconcilable difference.

Michel Foucault once said that Hegel with his dialectical philosophy circumscribed philosophy within a sphere which no future philosophy could ever go beyond: "We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his [Hegel's] tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us" (Foucault, 1972, p. 235). The same might be said of the discussion over respective traditions today, for despite so many efforts to draw one tradition's bounds against the others, the major figures of either tradition all too often seem to be talking about the same Hegelian (and pragmatist) themes. And the point seems to be true even of Rorty who has done so much to bring the traditions together, for Rorty rightly highlights the unexpected commonality between Heidegger and Wittgenstein about nonrepresentationalism, only later to reaffirm their irreconcilable differences. But perhaps Rorty does not take the antirepresentationalism of the traditions far enough to see that each of the three major thinkers he examines already operates within the same logical and universal space of language which Hegel identifies as the very groundwork for any apparent division between traditions. Rorty is right that Heidegger, Dewey, and Wittgenstein shift paradigms from representationalism to instrumentalism, and from the subject to language, but

that turn to language also contains a transcendental dimension of intersubjectivity which cannot be avoided by any rational creature, and which Heidegger lays bare, and which Dewey and Wittgenstein also approach in their respective philosophical projects. Heidegger in *Being and Time* emphasizes that “the world is always already the one that I share with others” (Heidegger, 1996, pp. 111–12), so that the “I” is always already within an intersubjective community of beings, while Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* articulates a dialogical view of mind constantly using the first person plural pronoun “we.” Of course, this “we” in Wittgenstein is not, strictly speaking, a Kantian transcendental unity (in the sense of an “I think”), but some contemporary philosophers like Jonathan Lear (1999) and Sebastian Gardner argue that Wittgenstein’s “we” plays the intersubjective role of Kant’s apperception insofar as it unifies the various forms of life (Gardner, 1999, p. 346).

Donald Davidson also follows through on this Wittgensteinian point in his essay “The Second Person,” where he interprets Wittgenstein’s claim that “meaning is like going up to someone” in specifically transcendental terms (Davidson, 2001, pp. 115, 121). All thought, Davidson argues, is necessarily directed from a first person (speaker) about an objective world toward a second person (hearer). Davidson calls this activity “triangulation,” and finds it to be unified by a we-perspective. To communicate, *we* must know how to “go on” (in time) within the conversation (using the principle of charity). There is much here that resembles Hegel’s view, but Davidson seems to resist the parallel, and instead seems to see his inquiry as moving more or less within a self-contained tradition, not free of the history of philosophy, but not exactly in contact with the Continent either. This approach is common to both sides of the divide: if one is working within a specified tradition, then other traditions need not be taken into account. Alternatively, sometimes a philosopher simply caricatures the other tradition, as in the case of John Searle’s (almost Hegelian) view of “we-intentions” (Searle, 1998, pp. 119–120). Searle in *Mind, Language, and Society* argues that collective intentionality is “the foundation of all social activities” (Searle, 1998, p. 120), which would appear to be very Hegelian, except that Searle flatly rejects the relation, and even warns against philosophy’s embrace of “some sort of overarching Hegelian World Spirit, some ‘we’ that floats around mysteriously above us individuals and of which we as individuals are just expressions” (Searle, 1998, p. 118). In point of fact, however, Searle’s view is precisely Hegel’s view, as is Davidson’s, as is much of analytic philosophy today. But until recently, such acknowledgement has been thin at best.

So, a welcome contribution to the discussion has been Robert Brandom's book, *Making It Explicit*, which recognizes debts to Wittgenstein, pragmatism, and Hegel. In fact, Brandom even begins and ends his book with Hegelian analyses of we-saying. This we-saying begins, for all human beings, at a very local level, but ultimately points beyond locality to universality (Brandom, 1994, p. 643). Brandom writes:

This thought suggests that we think of ourselves in broadest terms as the ones who say 'we.' It points to the one great Community comprising members of all particular communities – the Community of those who say 'we' with and to someone, whether the members of those different particular communities recognize each other or not.

Brandom, 1994, p. 4

For Brandom, particular communities say "we," but the activity of we-saying is intrinsically expansive and inclusive, and as communities that say we develop over time, the individuals within those communities also develop a richer understanding of the unity of the "I" and the "we." Ultimately, according to Brandom (who here sounds very much like Peirce), the community of inquiry possesses no absolute boundaries, and indeed contains within it an impulse toward one great community inclusive of all individuals who can say we.

3. Toward a reconciliation: Peirce's "we"

Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* also advances this idea of an expanding view of the cosmopolitan community unified through we-saying, which includes potentially all philosophical traditions and all cultures. But his view operates more or less at the social and political level of cosmopolitan liberalism. Rorty explains what he means with his own view of we-saying in just this political and cosmopolitan light: "It will mean something like 'we twentieth-century liberals' or 'we heirs to the historical contingencies which have created more and more cosmopolitan, more and more democratic institutions' " (Rorty, 1995, p. 196). The problem with this view is that intersubjective unity and recognition of a common social space seem to arise only contingently. Different traditions and social groups arise contingently through history and unify themselves according to their own respective narratives, but apparently nothing requires of them an ultimate recognition of a universal social space. But the structure of we-saying and the recognition of a universal social space unified by we-saying

are not contingent dimensions of language. They are transcendental presuppositions of discourse, and therefore are also necessarily presupposed by analytic and Continental philosophers in any engagement over their apparent division.

Peirce throughout the development of his philosophy emphasizes this point about the logical priority of the potentially unlimited community of inquiry to any apparent social and cultural division. Already in his early essay "On a New List of Categories" (1867) Peirce follows Hegel in the *Phenomenology* by developing an intersubjective version of Kant's unity of apperception. Like Hegel, Peirce does not dissolve the "I" in favor of the "we," but instead recognizes that because all thought is in language (or in signs), the unity of experience must always already be intersubjective. Ultimately Peirce identifies this unity of experience and thought with the community of inquiry, which he also identifies as potentially unlimited in space and time, and therefore radically inclusive. But the community of inquiry which includes the various individuals who can say "I" must ultimately be unified through the intersubjective, first person plural "we," which extends across cultures to all those who can participate within the evolving community of inquiry. Inquirers do not so much unify experience for the "I think," in Kant's sense, but instead unify experience with one another within the community of inquiry, presupposing (prior to subjectivity) a unity with one another, which Peirce in the "New List" calls the "unity of consistency in interpretation," and which is expressed with the "constant use of the word 'we' " ("The Grounds of the Validity of Logic," EP 1:81 [1869]). This "we" is not a ghostly form hovering over language, as Searle portrays that idea in Hegel. Rather, for Peirce, following Hegel, one always already finds oneself and cannot find oneself anywhere but within this social space. According to Peirce (1865), this unity of consistency with one another within the community is simply what humanity is: "This consistent unity since it belongs to all our judgments may be said to belong to us. Or rather since it belongs to the judgments of all mankind, we may be said to belong to it" ("On the Logic of Science," Harvard Lecture 1, W 1:167). Peirce in "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" (1868) even claims that the way in which we view language must be reversed: "Accordingly, just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body, we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us" (EP 1:42, asterisk footnote). Furthermore, the "we" is necessarily extended in time, as Peirce writes in "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities".

When we think, to what thought does that thought-sign which is ourself address itself? It may, through the medium of outward expression, which it reaches perhaps only after considerable internal development, come to address itself to the thought of another person. But whether this happens or not, it is always interpreted by a subsequent thought of our own. EP 1:38–9

Peirce again connects the unity of intersubjectivity with temporality in “What Pragmatism Is” (1905).

Two things here are all-important to assure oneself of and to remember. The first is that a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is “saying to himself,” that is, saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood) is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. EP 2:338

This temporal dimension of the intersubjective community is thus extendable into the future, without limits.

4. Apel’s pragmatic “we” and the reconciliation of the divide

The German pragmatist Karl-Otto Apel develops a Kantian and pragmatist project which he calls transcendental semiotics, and identifies apperception and the intersubjective “we” with Peirce’s final opinion of inquiry in the long run. The final opinion of inquiry in the long run is a subjunctive conditional such that if free and open inquiry were to go on forever, then what inquirers *would* agree to in the long run would be the truth. Apel sees Peirce as replacing Kant’s subjective unity of apperception with an intersubjective unity of the community of inquiry grounded in the long run. Apel writes that Peirce “has to replace Kant’s ultimate presupposition and ‘highest point,’ namely, *the transcendental synthesis of apperception, by the postulate of an ‘ultimate opinion’*” (Apel, 1980, p. 104). The ultimate “we,” then, is the “we” at the end of the long run (for Apel).

There are, however, two basic problems with Apel’s view. First, it is circular: the unity of thought in the present depends on the long run, which, in turn, depends on the unity of thought in present. Second, the long run as an epistemic ideal is problematic, as W.V.O. Quine points out in *Word and*

Object: "There is a faulty use of numerical analogy in speaking of a limit of theories, since the notion of limit depends on that of 'nearer than,' which is defined for numbers and not for theories." Quine adds that even if inquiry were to go on forever, science provides no reason why one theory might be the "the ideal result." Rather, "[i]t seems likelier, if only on account of symmetries or dualities, that countless alternative theories would be tied for first place" (Quine, 1960, p. 23). Rorty also rejects the long run for its lack of clarity: "The Peircian redefinition, however, uses a term – 'ideal' – which is just as fishy as 'corresponds.' To make it less fishy Peirce would have to answer the question 'How would we know that we were at the end of inquiry, as opposed to merely having gotten tired or unimaginative?' " (Rorty, 1982, p. 131).

Despite these problems, Apel's view may be reworked and Peirce's transcendental and future-oriented "we" may be maintained without dependence on the long run. This view may also be defended using Apel's concept of the performative contradiction, partly derived from Jaakko Hintikka's concept of an existential inconsistency: "The inconsistency (absurdity) of an existentially inconsistent statement can in a sense be said to be of *performatory* (performative) character. It depends on an act or 'performance,' namely on a certain person's act of uttering a sentence (or of otherwise making a statement)" (Hintikka, 1962, p. 12). For example, one says "I am not speaking," or writes "I am not writing," or says "We are not together in this dialogue." One's claim and the action of the claim stand in a contradictory relation.

Three performative dimensions of we-saying unavoidably appear in any discursive engagement, for example, that between analytic and Continental philosophers who stand in opposition. First, any individual must always already presuppose the unity of the intersubjective space of discourse as encompassing potentially all other speakers and hearers, and which is unified through the first person plural perspective of we-saying. Any attempt to exempt oneself from this space or exclude another speaker from this space within dialogue remains mired in a performative contradiction insofar as that individual must presuppose an underlying unity of intersubjectivity while attempting to divide it along social or cultural lines.

Second, anyone must presuppose the triadic logical relative structure of discourse and thought, as Peirce developed it, following August De Morgan's view of the logic of relations. Peirce finds thought to operate especially according to the triadic logical relative, such as "A gives B to C" (a logical relative with three subjects). Murray Murphey highlights the

change from Peirce's early to his later non-relative logic, but perhaps overdraws the implications for the general Kantian project of the "New List." "Thus the 'New List' collapses entirely once the new logic is admitted" (Murphey, 1993, p. 153). Peirce's Aristotelian logic gives way to relative logic, but this new logic by no means forces a rejection of the Kantian and Hegelian idea of a transcendental "we" (see Abrams, 2004). All thoughts ultimately presuppose this performative structure: *A* says *B* to *C*, and to attempt to refute this presupposition is, again, to performatively contradict oneself. For that negation must also be uttered using the same form it seeks to undermine, namely, *A* says *B* to *C*, and in saying *B* to *C*, *A* also acknowledges the intersubjective unity of *A* and *C* as "we." One cannot refute the necessity of using a triadic logical relative except by using a triadic logical relative. As a note, this form is also the logical form of Davidson's structure of triangulation.

Third, anyone must presuppose a transcendental determination in time forward into the future. Any attempt to reject this presupposition must also simultaneously presuppose that one and another are going on in time even as the refutation against temporality is uttered. This triangular and temporal first person plural perspective is also potentially unlimited in space and time. If one attempts to draw a perimeter around the dialogue, one simultaneously and performatively says to those members beyond that presumed perimeter that they are not participants. Yet, in making that claim to them, a speaker is, yet again, including them at a fundamental level, as those who can understand the utterance of exclusion. The structure of we-saying is fundamentally unbounded in space and time.

This view may now be applied to the division between analytic and Continental philosophy. As Rorty rightly acknowledges, a strong cultural division exists and has existed for some time, so much so that some like even Rorty suggest that analytic and Continental philosophy are unlikely ever to be reconciled. Perhaps, culturally speaking, the two traditions will remain opposed for many years, but there is no reason for that, especially considering what Rorty already lays bare as their common antirepresentationalism and instrumentalism, but, more importantly, their common view of the intersubjective unity of thought. While either side may attempt to draw a rational perimeter around its tradition or its practice or its form of life, against the other side, that very act itself presupposes an underlying intersubjective, triadic relative, and temporally extended unity between the two traditions. In sum, each is implicitly and transcendently committed to the same basic philosophical groundwork, and any fundamental division, or claim to incommensurability, may be ruled out of hand.

5. Colapietro's pragmatic "we"

Once the unity of we-saying is established, the next step in developing the project of a transcendental "we" is to develop the *transcendent* dimension of the "we." Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* distinguishes the "transcendental" as *a priori* (e.g., the pure concepts of the understanding) from the "transcendent" as beyond all possible experience (e.g., the noumena), but here transcendent may also be understood as referring to a projected future which transcends the present state of the community of inquiry. Peirce rejected Kant's view of the transcendent noumena, but he also developed a view of the community as intrinsically transcendent, and conceived that transcendence itself to be transcendental insofar as all thought transcendently flows forward into the future: the community of inquiry, unified through we-saying, transcendently (unavoidably) projects itself into the future. Peirce placed this view of the community as projected into the potentially unlimited future at the center of his pragmatism, and emphasized as well that the community evolves over time.

More recently, Vincent Colapietro who draws extensively on Peirce has also advanced this view of the transcendent structure of the "we" in his essay "Testing Our Intuitions: Pragmatist Deconstruction of Our Cartesian Inheritance":

Such a position does not commit us to doing what we have always done; nor does it collapse into an insular 'we,' an unwitting relativism. What we are *doing* commits us to what we have not yet done. Who we are, though rooted in who we have been, commits us to who we are not yet now. Such transcendence of what we are doing and who we have been is, while finite, real and potentially ennobling.

Against any relativistic picture of the intersubjective "we" such as may be found in Rorty's neopragmatism, Colapietro articulates the "we" in its more (originally) pragmatic spirit, as the "we" that not only unifies the community of inquiry, but also unifies the past of that community with what it is becoming in the future. As evolutionary creatures, human beings within the unlimited community of inquiry evolve always with some historical understanding and possess the means to direct the future of that community. Human beings are changing beings with a self-understanding grounded in an evolutionary past, which is unavoidably pointed forward toward potentially even greater changes. But even as the community transcends itself into the future, this transcendence will simultaneously be "our" transcendence. All future evolutionary self-transfor-

mation will be always already apperceptively and intersubjectively “ours,” and “we” will be the ones who understand ourselves as having undertaken great changes to the community, whatever they may be.¹

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