The Quest for the Self: Taylor and Rorty

DELFO C. CANCERAN, OP

What is a self? This question appears to be trivial or banal to us since we often presuppose and employ it in our everyday conversation. Due to its ordinariness, we take the self for granted in our verbal exchange and never subject it to critical scrutiny. Thus the self always eludes our intellectual awareness and philosophical reflection.[1] Nonetheless, perusing the history of ideas in philosophy would reveal that the self has been a preoccupation of many philosophers from antiquity,[2] to modernity up to contemporary time.[3] The obvious difference in use between the ordinary conversation and philosophical contemplation lies on its usage, that is, from a reflexive pronoun in our conversation to a substantive noun in philosophy. The contribution of philosophy to the discourse on the self is its explicit thematization or problematization in contemporary thought. As they realized, philosophers have found the question of the self enigmatic since they have to grapple its intricacies. In effect, they have forwarded different theories to explain it.

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[1] David Klemm & Gunther Zoller, eds., *Figuring the Self: Subject, Absolute and Others, Classical German Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), vii.

[2] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, eds. Luther H. Martin, Hugh Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988).

[3] Mark Taylor, ed., *Deconstruction in Context: Philosophy and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

In contemporary time, we speak of the person as self and of people having and being selves. In English grammar, we always use the self as a reflexive pronoun.[4] In philosophical discourse, the self becomes ambiguous because it can stand both as a concrete noun and an abstract substantive. In this paper, the self is employed in its abstract sense. In various literatures, we often encounter synonyms to designate the self such as subject, subjectivity, person, personality, agent and agency, (self-) consciousness and (self-) identity. For the sake of consistency and clarity, throughout this paper, we shall use the expression self, unless we are directly quoting from our sources that use a different name for it.[5]

In contemporary philosophy, the problem of the self "has received considerable attention" in the literature and today "the concert of self-identity is in a state of disarray."[6] The cacophony on the self is indeed understandable considering that nowadays people are clamoring for democracy and pressing on plurality in their struggle for self-assertion or self-representation. Social movements, in one way or another, have an explicit or implicit notion of self that they advocate or avow in their struggles for liberation. Moreover, these movements are moved by various interests and inspired by different ideologies that are competing and conflicting with one another in the political arena. Consequently, the self is sometimes compromised or negotiated in the process in coming to terms with them. We cannot lump these interests or ideologies into an overarching system because they defy any totalization, universalization and harmonization. They are language games, so to speak, that we need to recognize and respect, but equally significant, to critique and deconstruct in our attempt to build a just society.

In these pages, we shall re-problematize self-identity. I have deliberately say re-problematize because the self has been philo-

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[4] Charles Taylor, "The Dialogical Self," in *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture*, eds. David D. Hiley, James F. Bohman & Richard Shusterman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 304.

[5] Admittedly, Anthony Giddens uses self-identity. However, in our particular use, we do not mean to refer the way Giddens peculiarly uses it. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

[6] Ronald Alexander, *The Self, Supervinience and Personal Identity* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1997), 1 & 7.

sophically thought in the history of ideas. However, we shall only concentrate on contemporary theories in the understanding of the self espoused by Charles Taylor and Richard Rorty in their philosophical enterprise. The objective of this paper is to clarify their different notions of the self as they influence our conceptualization. We shall discover that there are many conflicting positions regarding the self and, to a great extent, these claims are reasonably justified. However, we have to recognize that these positions have always been politically interested and they represent a particular ideology. Thus, as we expose these ideas, we need to take a critical lens in reading them.

Taylor and Rorty are well-known philosophers in the west (Canada and North America, respectively). With the blurring of boundaries, they can hardly be categorized clearly. Due to their wide-ranging interests, they overlap any category or boundary. Though generally, Taylor is known in the field of morality, while Rorty is celebrated in the area of epistemology, they converge on their interest in the question of the self. In varying degrees, Taylor and Rorty have criticized the Platonic legacy what Rorty calls mirror-image or spectator-image of knowledge. In this epistemology, human beings are reduced to passivity. They merely reflect or copy the essential or the original reality out there waiting to be represented or mirrored in the mind. Their alternative is what we may call as interpretive turn. To be fair, Rorty is more utterly critical to the Platonic epistemology of representationalism. Politically, Taylor and Rorty cling to opposing political traditions: Taylor is considered as communitarian, while Rorty claims to be liberal. The communitarian and liberal emphasize the community and the individual, respectively. Their political divergence can spell out their difference in conceptualizing the self.

In their exchanges, Taylor and Rorty have criticized each other. Primarily, Taylor believes that "Rorty's pragmatism seems to fit too well into a deplorable tradition."[7] Claiming to be an uncompromising realist, Taylor charges Rorty with what he calls non-realism. Considering Rorty's denial of any 'standards,' Taylor claims that Rorty commits an inconsistent argument. The

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[7] Charles Taylor, "Rorty in Epistemological Tradition," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 258.

"idea that Rorty frequently denounces that some language might prove its superiority by actually fitting the world, e.g. that the final vocabulary of future physics will somehow be Nature's Own, seems really to be stigmatized in his work as something difficult to believe."[8] Rorty hurls his counterargument. Reacting to Taylor's idea of hypergoods, Rorty avers that Taylor is still attached to some forms of representationalism. The community defines or imposes the hypergoods. The notion of hypergoods is grounded on Taylor's idea of strong evaluation that primarily demarcates them.[9] Rorty takes the idea of hypergoods as a form of representationalism. However, Taylor rebuffs this charge. He claims that it is not representationalism, but rather signification that the community attached to such goods. In this sense, signification and representation are not synonymous or identical. Signification does not just confer meaning to the goods, but it involves an emotional experience of the agent n the goods. Thus, signification is both a cognitive and an affective concept.

Furthermore, criticizing Taylor's uncompromising realism, Rorty argues that the affirmation that all true beliefs are accurate because things are as they really are is uninteresting because it makes only a causal relation between the language-user and the world-out-there. Rorty says that he "never doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us."[10] He merely questions whether these things are representationally independent of us. To understand this, we need to bear in mind his distinction between 'the world is out there,' which he accepts and the 'truth is out there,' which he rejects. Rorty elaborates that to affirm that "the world is out there is only to say that the world is not our creation; but to say that the truth is not out there is to say that there are no sentences out there."[11] Thus, sentences are not out there in the world because they are human descriptions of reality.

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34-42.

[10] Richard Rorty, "Taylor on Truth," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism,* ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 20-33.

[11] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* 4-5.

[12] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth,* 192.

Rorty's view of knowledge is that it is not "a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of habits of action for coping with reality."[12] Being a pragmatist, he has abandoned or, better, dropped, the 'spectator' account of knowledge in favor of practical results.[13]

1.   Taylor's Philosophical Project

Taylor has devoted much time on what he recognizes as the conflict in modernity. In his well-acclaimed book, *Sources of the Self*, Taylor singles out the conflicting sources of the self, namely, modernism and romanticism. In the concluding part of the book, he says: "I have examined modernism in the context of the conflict in our culture over the disengaged and instrumental modes of thought and action, which have steadily increased their hold on modern life. Modernism succeeds Romantic expressivism both in protest against these and in the search for sources which can restore depth, richness, and meaning of life."[14] Thus, rationalism overtakes romanticism in the arena of ideas in modernity.

1.1.   Theories of Modernity

In an article, Taylor elaborates further his two theories of modernity, namely, the cultural and the acultural. A cultural theory is one that attributes the transformations of modernity to intrinsically compelling characteristics of a new culture. By contrast, an acultural theory is one that describes these transformations in terms of some culture-neutral operation. He elaborates this distinction by explaining modernity which is not just a matter of saying that it is brought about by some demographic changes; but rather, "a movement from one constellation to another, which repositions the self in relation to others and the good."[15] Thus, three factors interrelate in this transformation: the self, the community and the good. Moreover, his version of a cultural theory relies on some background that characterizes modernity. This back-

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[13] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism," in *Pragmatism: From Pierce to Davidson,* ed. John P. Murphy (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 2.

[14] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 495.

[15] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," in *Hastings Center Report* 25, no. 2 (1995), 24.

ground makes people capable of grasping, understanding and articulating it thereby making experiences intelligible.[16] Transformation towards modernity makes crucial reference to a relationship to a particular community bound together with the goods. "We cannot be without some sense of our moral situation, some sense of our connectedness to others."[17] In short, the community confers an identity to the self.

1.2. Self Defined

To begin with, we need to put in context Taylor's notion of the self. Taylor has been reacting to what he has perceived as the dominant understanding of morality. In his assessment, morality has been concerned with what is right, rather than with what is good in human action. This notion of 'what is right' makes morality purely prescriptive in guiding human action. On the contrary, when morality is conceived as 'what is good,' the task of morality shifts from defining "the content of obligation" to "the nature of the good life."[18] In other words, morality is concerned with what we ought to do. The good that we ought to do becomes relevant to ethical life.

1.2.1. Historical Sources

In his historical analysis of the sources of the self, Taylor claims that various views on the self are mere historical constructs of some dominant thought of the time. "What we need ideally is a theory of the subject which can allow us to understand these various views; how different views can be dominant at different times, and how ours could become dominant, and perhaps irreversibly so, with the development of modern civilization."[19] Taylor identifies two historical forces that significantly shape the self in the western world. The first is what he referred to as the collapse of social hierarchies. During the pre-modern period, the notion of honor became the basis of the self. In the ancient regime, "honor

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[16] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* 69.

[17] Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity," 32.

[18] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 79.

[19] Charles Taylor, "The Person", 258.

is intrinsically linked to inequality."[20] He explains that in "those earlier societies, what we would call identity [is] largely fixed by one's social position."[21] Social position within the social hierarchy determines "their place in society, and whatever roles or activities attached to this position."[22] This hierarchy is considered divinely willed or determined. In modernity, this social hierarchy was dislodged or crushed by a series of revolution. With its collapse, "the original unity of the theistic horizon has been shattered, and the sources can now be found on diverse frontiers, including our own powers and nature."[23]

In modern period, honor is replaced by the notion of human dignity inherent in human beings. In the eighteenth century, there emerges what Taylor calls individualized identity epitomized by the solipsistic Cartesian ego. This modern self is "particular to me, and that I discover in myself."[24] Thus, this self is defined by its propriety and inwardness. Moreover, this self is related to the notion of authenticity whereby the self is obliged to be true to itself. Thus, this "notion arises along with an ideal, that of being true to myself and my own particular way of being."[25] Like the notion of dignity, authenticity is an offshoot of the decline of hierarchical society because of the shift from the outside to the inside that pins down the self. Thus, modernity has ushered in the politics of recognition of the inherent dignity of the self in the western world.[26] According to Taylor, the sources of the self are derived from three large domains which include the original theistic grounding in religion (God); the naturalist disengaged reason (inwardness); and lastly, romantic expressivism (imagination).[27] These sources are given and provided a horizon for evaluation of a good life.

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[20] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition,* ed. Amy Gutman (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 26.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 27.

[23] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 495-496.

[24] Ibid., 495.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 24-31.

[27] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 495.

1.2.2. Moral Space

From its moral context, Taylor goes on to posit the moral space (or, in other works, he calls it public space) that situates our understanding of the self. He defines moral space as primarily a "space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what [is] not, what has meaning and import-ance for you and what is trivial and secondary."[28] The self as an agent of human action is located in a moral space composed by a community of interlocutors which interrogates the self. It is within this moral space that the community as a whole can make deci-sions with regard to what is counted or considered as good. According to Taylor, a "human being exists inescapably in a space of ethical questions; she or he cannot avoid assessing himself or herself in relation to some standards."[29] The self should abide to these standards that gauge its behavior and that confer security to itself. To "escape all standards would not be a liberation, but a terrifying lapse into total disorientation" and ultimately into a "crisis of identity."[30] Taylor clarifies that "the goods which define our spiritual orientation are the ones by which we will measure the worth of our lives."[31] Thus, the self and moral space are linked together "because they relate to the same core" regarding the "worth, or the weight, or substance of my life, as a question of how I am 'placed' or 'situated' in relation to the good, or whether I am in 'contact' with it."[32]

1.2.3. Dialogical Engagement

Recently, Taylor further elaborates his notion of the self in his other works. In these works, he adds the notion of dialogical character of the self. He believes that it is not enough that the self possesses inwardness that equips it with reflexivity; the self needs to have what he calls as engaged agency which is related to the self essentially as embodied agent which considers the whole

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[28] Ibid., 28.

[29] Charles Taylor, "The Dialogical Self," 305.

[30] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 42.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

experience of the self in its engagement with the world.[33] In this engagement, the self makes use of language that expresses itself. Thus, we "become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. We define our identity always in dialogue with [...] others."[34] Thus, the dialogical self is contrasted with the Cartesian self in the context of the community. Alluding to the solipsistic legacy of the Cartesian ego, he avers that "we cannot understand human life merely in terms of individual subjects, who frame representations about and respond to others, because a great deal of human action happens only insofar as the agent understands and constitutes himself or herself as integrally part of the 'we'."[35]

1.2.4. Radical Reflexivity

Moreover, Taylor states that what defines agency is not just its purpose or consciousness; rather it is radical reflexivity that differentiates human agency from animal creature. This radical reflexivity is related to the heritage of the Augustinian and the Cartesian inwardness. Taylor explains: "By radical reflexivity I mean not only the focus on oneself, but on one's own subjective experience. When I examine my own experience, or scrutinize my own thinking, reflexivity takes a radical turn."[36] Thus, in reflexivity, the ego becomes conscious of itself or is objectified in the mind. Through reflexivity, the self becomes knowledgeable to itself. In effect, "person is an agent who has an understanding of a self as an agent, and can make plans for his/her own life."[37] From this reflexivity, the person is aware of "standards which only apply to a being who is self-aware, and moreover who shares this awareness of his/her personhood with others."[38]

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[33] Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 22.

[34] Ibid., 32-33.

[35] Charles Taylor, "The Dialogical Self," 311.

[36] Ibid., 304-305.

[37] Charles Taylor, "The Person," 263.

[38] Ibid., 264.

Reflexivity discovers what matters to the agent which Taylor calls hierarchy of privilege.[39] The self can discriminate the choices that it makes and matters to it. The hierarchy of privilege is related to his discussion of the good. According to Taylor, the good, in a general sense, designates "anything considered valuable, worthy, admirable of whatever kind of category."[40] Furthermore, the good is "whatever is marked out as higher by a qualitative distinction."[41] In fact, the good is primary to right, not because it offers more basic reasons, but because, in its articulation, "it gives the point of the rules, which define the right."[42] In this sense, ethics is defined in terms of the good that we ought to do.[43]

1.2.5. Strong Evaluation

The goods are judged according to strong evaluation, as opposed to weak evaluation. Taylor differentiates these two types of evaluation. "In weak evaluation, for something to be judged good it is sufficient that it be desired, whereas strong evaluation deploys a language of evaluative distinctions, in which different desires are described."[44] He elaborates: "By strong evaluation, I mean the recognition of goods which are seen to be intrinsically worthy, that is, goods or ends which are seen to be intrinsically worthy, that is goods or ends which are not valued in so far as they are objects of choice or desire, but are rather seen as ends we should seek. They are ends such that our not choosing them reflects on us rather than undermining their status as ends."[45] Furthermore, the goods "are the objects of interpretations, which can be judged as adequate or inadequate, distorting or true, superficial or profound. These significances which involve strong evaluation are the object of assessments, where we try to get clear what is really

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 92.

[41] Ibid., 89.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Charles Taylor, "Leading a Life," in *Incommensurability, Incompatibility and Practical Reason,* ed. Ruth Chang (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 180.

[44] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 18-19.

[45] Charles Taylor, "The Person," 266.

shameful, what one should really be guilty about, in what consists [this] real dignity, what is truly admirable, what [is] contemptible, and so on."[46] Thus, the self decides on the basis of the worth and significance of the goods presented to it.

Through reflexivity, the self can reflect on the merits of the good. Reflection can lead people to articulate those goods so that they "could recognize the diversity of goods" and "try to make a unity of [their] lives."[47] Although the self can recognize the diversity of these goods, still it should decide on the preferred goods that endow itself with benefits. With strong evaluation, we can arrive at what Taylor refers to as hypergoods which are "the most important ones which are most widely adhered to in our civilization", and which "have arisen through a historical supersession."[48] Taylor recognizes that the hypergoods "are generally a source of conflict" in the society because "higher good is not only ranked above the other recognized goods of the society; it can in some cases challenge and reject them."[49]

1.2.6. Signification

Taylor says that to "know who am I is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or propose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand."[50] One's stand hinges on some commitments and identifications with goods which confer identity to the self through a recourse to strong evaluation. On the surface, the inescapable framework seems to properly define the self, but upon closer look, we discover that what is definitive in the self is Taylor's notion of strong evaluation.[51] To understand the link between the inescapable framework with strong evaluation, we need to return to his notion of the self.

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[46] Ibid., 267.

[47] Charles Taylor, "Leading a Life," 175.

[48] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 64.

[49] Ibid., 65.

[50] Ibid., 27.

[51] Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language,* 35.

Differentiating human beings from other animals, Taylor believes that what strikingly distinguishes humans from the animals is not simply their consciousness, but rather the "consciousness [that] goes along with a transformation of the significances."[52] This understanding "leads to a view of the self as a self-interpreting animal."[53] Taylor underscores that the self is first and foremost a signifying being. As a signifying being, the self confers meaning to its situation. "I can define my identity only against the background of things that matter."[54] To bracket our background would be to eliminate this significance. This background is a requirement for authenticity. We become authentic only when we are faithful to our background which is indissolubly linked with significance. Moreover, significance is intrinsically specific to the person or group of persons.[55]

Considering his notion of significance, Taylor claims to have transcended the charge of representationalism. According to Taylor, the understanding we have of ourselves is not identified with representation because it is not an arbitrary construal. The understanding reflects what seems to us to be the truth about what we feel. In his conceptualization, understanding and feeling blend together. "Thus, the view which sees consciousness as purely representative cannot explain how awareness can be constitutive of how we feel. The very notion of representation requires that of an independent object."[56] He justifies it by saying "that I can describe my emotions by describing my situation" and "very often [I] must do so really to give the flavor of what I feel. We would say that for these emotions, our understanding of them or the interpretations we accept are constitutive of the emotion. The understanding helps shape the emotion."[57]

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[52] Ibid., 261.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 40.

[55] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 22.

[56] Ibid., 22-23.

[57] Charles Taylor, *Social Theory as Practice* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 52.

2. Rorty's Philosophical Project

Rorty is considered as a postmodern philosopher. He accepts such label, however, with a qualification. He says that modernity's charge that the project of enlightenment has failed should be nuanced. Rorty differentiates between two senses of enlightenment project, namely, political enlightenment and philosophical enlightenment. He argues that what has failed is the philosophical enlightenment and not political enlightenment. Although it has failed, this philosophical project is still being pursued and rectified. Accepting only the sense of political enlightenment, he asserts that this particular project of enlightenment is geared towards maximal freedom and minimal humiliation of individuals. He observes that while the political project is proceeding very slowly, it now seems clear that the reformist, gradualist, social democratic changes in laws and institutions provide the only way towards enlightenment.[58]

2.1. New Linguistic Turn

In his classic book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Rorty has laid down his critique on the Platonic mirror-image epistemology that has dominated the whole history of western philosophy. His alternative to this Platonic epistemology is his version of pragmatism. Rorty envisions his brand of pragmatism as an anti-representationalist epistemology. Breaking from this dominant epistemology, he insists on the conversation metaphor. For him, the aim of philosophy is not to look for predetermined essence and foundation, but rather to accept the contingency and idiosyncrasy of human existence in the world. Moreover, Rorty differentiates between idealizations of our practices and foundations of those practices. Accepting the former, he says that to "be antifoundationalist about a social practice is to urge that criticism or commendation of it be confined to comparison with other 'actual and possible social practices."[59] Unlike foundation, idealization does

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[58] Richard Rorty, *Truth, Politics and Postmodernism* (Dan Gorcum: Postbus, Assen, 1997), 35-52.

[59] Richard Rorty, "Idealizations, Foundations, and Social Practices," in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political,* ed. Seyla Benhabib (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 333.

not ground social practice to something independent or external
to it, but rather from the resources of social practice itself.[60]

Consequently, the task of philosophy is to "keep conversation
going on, to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a
conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descrip-
tions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accu-
rately."[61] Considering this sort of pragmatic epistemology, human
beings are invested with creative powers, part of which is the
creative use of language. Rorty has advocated a new linguistic
turn where language does not mirror reality, but rather creates
vocabulary of descriptions. The various descriptions of the world
that human beings create are not mirrors of the world's real
essences, but only tools which help them to cope with the contin-
gency of human existence. Rorty links conversation with contin-
gency of human existence. "To accept contingency is to accept our
inheritance from, and our conversation with, our fellow-humans.
In the end pragmatists tell us, what matters is our loyalty to other
human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope for
getting things right."[62] In this sense, knowledge and truth have
no ontological ground, but only a matter of social practice.

2.2. Self Defined

With the influence of representationalism, the traditional way
of conceiving a person has been in an essentialistic way. This
traditional view affirms that there is a core self as a guiding and
controlling center of beliefs and desires. In this essentialistic view,
we "have a picture of the essential core of the self on one side of
this network of beliefs and desires, and reality on the other side. In
this picture, the network is the product of an interaction between
the two, alternately expressing the one and representing the
other."[63]

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (New Jersey: Princeton
University Press, 1979), 378.

[62] Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980* (Sussex:
Harvester Press, 1982), 166.

[63] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 10.

To explain his centerless and contingent self, Rorty employs two analogies taken from the neurological science and computer science. For him, the self is likened to the working of the human brain. "Just as the neural synapses are in continual interaction with one another, constantly weaving a different configuration of electric charges", the self is also "in continual interaction."[64] "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 simply the network of such beliefs and desires."[65] Furthermore, the self is also compared with the functioning of computer technology. The vocabulary of beliefs and desires is analogous to the mechanism of the software. "Nobody knows or cares whether a given piece of computer software represents reality accurately. All we care about is whether it is the software which, among programs currently available, will most efficiently accomplish a certain task."[66]

Rorty's alternative to the essentialist notion of the self is what he referred to as contingent and centerless self. In his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* Rorty argues that the self is a "tissue of contingencies rather than, an, at least, potentially well-ordered system of faculties."[67] Moreover, the self is "centerless networks of beliefs and desires and that their vocabularies and opinions are determined by historical circumstances. The self is a centerless and contingent web."[68] If the self is devoid of a center that holds it together in an ordered way, then it is spread out in our beliefs and desires like tissues.

2.2.1. Strong Poet Metaphor

Rorty wants to defend the idiosyncrasy of the self. Using the analogy of poetry, the self is a product of self-creation. This self-creation is effectuated by the invention of vocabulary consisting

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[64] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth,* 123.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Richard Rorty, "The Challenge of Relativism," in *Debating the State of Philosophy: Habermas, Rorty & Kolakowsky,* eds. Jref Niznik & John T. Sanders (London: Praeger, 1996), 39.

[67] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* 32.

[68] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 191-192.

of descriptions people use which suit their pragmatic purpose.[69] These descriptions are continent because people can throw them away once they confront different situations and, if effect, they create new set of vocabulary to describe them.[70] Thus, people should always invent relevant vocabulary for describing the present situations and not be contented with the old vocabulary or merely rely on the old description. In metaphor the old and the new are enmeshed in describing the new situation. Inventing a new set of vocabulary requires using some new metaphors. Metaphors interweave the old and the new in order to cope with the exigency of the situation which necessitates a creative use of language. "Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are possible only against the background of the other old words being used in old familiar way."[71]

For him, the use of literal description, that is, the use of "an inherited language-game [...] will necessarily fail." This failure is attributed to the inability of the old description to catch up with the new situation, thereby creating a gap between them. To invoke an old language for the new situation is therefore a mere reiteration. Using a literal description is "a specimen reiterating a type, a copy or replica of something which has already been identified." In fact, to copy the vocabularies of the past is to "fail as a poet" and so "to fail as a human being." Thus, the old language lags behind the new situation. Utilizing a literal description is tantamount to accepting "somebody else's description of oneself, to execute a previously written poems." In this case, the idiosyncrasy of the self is concealed or hidden in the past description. As Rorty argues, "self creation is our ability to break free from an idiosyncratic past."[72] The only way to become a poet is to "tell a story about one's causes in a new language."[73] This language is base on its relevance and appropriateness to the new situation.

Rorty does not only attribute the essentialist conception of the self to the epistemology of representationalism, but also to the

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[69] Richard Rorty, "The Challenge of Relativism," 31-66.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* 41.

[72] Ibid., 33.

[73] Ibid., 27-28.

separation between philosophy and poetry. Rorty recognizes that there "is a quarrel of poetry and philosophy." Their quarrel is derived from "a tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency."[74] Traditionally, philosophy precedes poetry because the former is linked with truth and reality while the latter is identified with imagination and fantasy. Rorty inverts this hierarchy by privileging poetry over philosophy because the latter exemplifies self-creation while the former epitomizes the mirror. "Like in poetry, the poet expresses his/her idiosyncrasies in his/her particular work." Furthermore, only "poets can truly appreciate contingency." The non-poets "are doomed to remain philosophers." The philosophers insist that there is only one true description of the universal essence of humanity. Thus, the philosophers "are doomed to spend the conscious lives trying to escape from contingency rather than, like the strong poet, acknowledging and appropriating contingency."[75] Thus, the strong poet uses the creative potential of language in ever describing her/his world.

Rorty insists that to be a strong poet, we need to break from the grips of our tradition that keeps us fastened to our past which immobilizes us and our ancestors who have described the world for us. We need to redescribe the world for us today. Self-creation is a project or a task of inventing new language, new vocabulary and new metaphor of the world. Thus, self-creation is the goal of the act of weaving and reweaving, description and redescription. We "need to return to the particular – to see particular present situations and options as similar to or different from particular past actions or events." When we "catch hold of some crucial idiosyncratic contingencies in our past shall we be able to make something worthwhile out of ourselves, to create present selves whom we can respect." Thus, Rorty "suggests that we praise ourselves by weaving idiosyncratic narratives."[76]

The difference that will make is that we continuously weave and make ourselves. Once we do not like what we have made, we

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[74] Ibid., 25.

[75] Ibid., 24.

[76] Ibid.

can still reweave it and reinvent another. By reweaving the self, we can redescribe ourselves the way we want it to be. Our "success in self-creation [is] our ability to break free from an idiosyncratic past."[77] We need then to rearrange our vocabularies so that we can redescribe the world in a fresh and novel way. With this attitude, it "[becomes] possible to juggle several descriptions of the same event without asking which one [is] right." We shall "see redescription as a tool rather than a claim to have discovered essence. It thereby [becomes] possible to see new vocabularies, something which was supposed to replace all other vocabularies, something which [claims] to represent reality, but simply as one more vocabulary, one more human project, one person's chosen metaphor."[78] The use of "metaphor is an essential instrument in the process of reweaving our beliefs and desires; without it, there would be no such thing as a scientific revolution or cultural break-through."[79] We condemn ourselves once we make use of universalist and essentialist language of the past in place of our redescription of ourselves.[80] Redescription will never be finished because there is nothing to finish, there is only a web of relations to be rewoven and a web which time lengthens every day. However, only death can interrupt it.[81]

2.2.2. Quasi-Person Analogues

Looking from its advantage, Rorty's particular conception of the self spares us from the grip of the old problem of mind-body dualism. The reason is that we are no longer viewing the self from the inside, where we are trying to discover its intrinsic nature and essential property. We are rather viewing the self from the outside by means of its continuous creation. "All there is to the self is just that web." With this reasoning, "there is no self distinct from this self-weaving web." From this angle, "there is no distinction between mind and body."[82] In his discussion of the self as a web

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[77] Ibid., 33.

[78] Ibid., 39.

[79] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 124.

[80] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 33.

[81] Ibid., 42-43.

[82] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 93.

of beliefs and desires that is continuously woven, to be intelligible we have to ascribe some certain inherently coherent web of beliefs and desires to the self. Considering that sometimes human being acts irrationally or incoherently, Rorty further clarifies his notion of the self. To accommodate the irrational or the incoherent, Rorty comes up with the notion of quasi-selves or person-analogues.

According to Rorty, human being is populated or crowded by person-analogues. The "analogues of persons [are] internally coherent clusters of belief and desire." Every person-analogue "is a part of a single unified causal network, [...] but not of a single person." Rorty believes that each of the person-analogue is a part of the very particular and idiosyncratic contingencies of the person's socialization or acculturation. In individual's socialization, "several coherent but mutually incompatible webs of beliefs and desires are formed" by learning. They inhabit the self but only "one of which is normally available for introspection at any given time." Moreover, these person-analogues are related to the distinction between the psychoanalytic conscious and the unconscious. The unconscious can be viewed as an alternative set, which is inconsistent with the conscious, "yet sufficiently coherent internally to count as a person." With this notion, "the same human body can lay host to two or more persons." He elaborates that "these persons enter into causal relations with each other, but they do not normally have conversational relations."[83] Rorty believes that the unconscious beliefs and desires are not reasons for a change in the conscious beliefs and desires. However, they may cause changes in the latter beliefs and desires.[84]

2.2.3. Private-Public Divide

Faced with the choice between self-creation (autonomy) and politics (engagement), Rorty resorts to another distinction of the self. He distinguishes between private and the public self. The private and the public divide is derived from his understanding of philosophical activity. He believes that philosophy should disengage itself from politics because it is a separate activity. Philosophy is a private affair; while politics is a public engagement.

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[83] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others,* 147.

[84] Ibid., 147-153.

Philosophy should inhibit itself from the task of political emanci-
pation in the public sphere. Rorty wants philosophy's autonomy
which is not "an actualization of a common human potentiality but
as self-creation."[85]

Appealing to the liberals, Rorty argues that the liberals
should reconcile themselves to this private-public split. Liberals
should realize that the resolution about the final vocabulary is not
particularly related to their responsibility "to save other people
from pain and humiliation."[86] He admonishes the liberals that
they should stop trying to combine self-creation and political
action. They should be set apart. "The part of the liberals' final
vocabulary, which has to do with public action, is never going to
get subsumed the rest of her final vocabulary."[87] However, Rorty
recognizes that this private and public divide is, at times, com-
peting or conflicting. However, the "responsibilities to others
constitute only the public side of our lives" and "has no automatic
priority over such private motives." For Rorty, we should distinguish
"the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary
from the question of whether you are in pain and in humiliation."[88]
By distinguishing these questions, it makes possible to separate the
public from the private questions, and, at the same time, it makes
possible for a single person to be both a liberal and a poet.[89]

2.2.4. Local Solidarity

Rorty believes that relationship in the community is ever
expanding. He rejects a global solidarity in the abstract, but accepts
local solidarity which he calls as ethnocentrism. He asserts
that "solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is
expressed are thought of as 'one of us,' where 'us' means some-
thing smaller and more local than the human race. The feelings
of solidarity are necessarily a matter of which similarities and
dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such salience is a

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[85] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Function of Philosophy," 454.

[86] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 120.

[87] Ibid., 121.

[88] Ibid., 194.

[89] Ibid., 198.

function of a historically contingent final vocabulary."[90] Rorty accepts moral progress. He says "that this progress is indeed in the direction of a greater human solidarity." However, he warns that this "solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional difference as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'."[91]

As a liberal ironist, Rorty advocates a liberal society where autonomy is recognized and respected. "The ideal liberal community will be in which respect for such particularity and idiosyncrasy is widespread." The only sort of human liberty, which is hoped by liberal ironist, is our "being left alone" for self-creation.[92] "Autonomy is not something embodied in social institutions" and "something which all human beings have within them." Some societies do not allow such autonomy for self-creation for they are repressive. Only when societies cease to be repressive that they will release self-creation. For some, this kind of autonomy "is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain, and which a few actually do." Rorty insists that this self-creation be on account of the private self. "The desire to be autonomous is not relevant to the liberal's desire to avoid cruelty and pain."[93]

Rorty differentiates the person from society. "Societies are not quasi-persons. They are compromises between persons." He continues that the "point of a liberal society is not to invent or create anything, but simply to make it as easy as possible for people to achieve their wildly different private ends without hurting each other."[94] To settle these compromises, people resort to conversation. "Publicly discussible compromises require discourses in a common vocabulary, and such a vocabulary is required to describe the moral identities of a liberal society."[95] The "citizens

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[90] Ibid., 191.

[91] Ibid., 192.

[92] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Function of Philosophy," in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 49, part I, no. 191 (1995), 454.

[93] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 65.

[94] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, 196.

[95] Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy," in *Michel Foucault*, ed. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 331.

are asked to have this moral identity for public purposes and to have it irrespective of whatever other private identities they may also have."[96] The only requirement is the recognition of contingency. Self-creation should suit with the ideal liberal society. Liberals should think of their founders and preservers as poets, who are engaged in self-creation, rather than as representationalists, who are discovering the truth about the world and humanity.[97]

Conclusion

The notion of agency is the recurring theme in our analysis of the self. Although it is only Taylor who explicitly uses it, Rorty uses a different word for a similar thing — self-creation as an activity of the self. Agency acts to make a difference by making her/his choices and realizing them in the world. Thus, agency belongs to the self.

Taylor links the self with agency defined essentially as reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to the ability of the person as agent to monitor human action and the capacity to impute significance on this action. The goal of reflexivity is the autonomy of the self in making a decision and implement it in accordance with her/his own accord. This reflexivity echoes the modernist notion of the 'subject' which is fully conscious of its action and self-legislating in its will. The subject is autonomous in the sense that it has achieved self-determination in its action as an agent.[98] In modernity, the concept of the self "describes an entity who is the integrated center of certain powers: one who is aware, who feels, who thinks, judges and acts."[99] Generally, Taylor follows this modernist notion of this rational self. He remains optimistic to this portrait of the modern self and wants to retrieve it in contemporary world in spite of the danger and risk that it may entail.[100] He avers that we "are bound to accept that our inherited values and way of life

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[96] Ibid.

[97] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity,* 61.

[98] Madam Sarup, *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 1.

[99] Edward E. Sampson, "The Deconstruction of the Self," in *Text of Identity,* eds. John Shotter & Kenneth J. Gergen (London: Sage Publications, 1989), 3.

[100] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 347 & 520.

are good, and constitute 'something that we have to embrace'."[101] The good that we have inherited and embrace from modernity should be retrieved and reaffirmed. Thus, he echoes the intertwining of the notion of the good and the understanding of life project of modernity as an unfolding story.[102]

Moreover, the strong evaluation presupposes a community of interlocutors where the self finds himself/herself inserted into a moral space or public space. It is the community that ultimately defines the 'hierarchy of privilege' of the various significances of the goods offered to the self within the matrix of the community.[103] The standards of evaluation are independent on the individual because they are anchored on the community that defines the goods. However, Taylor fails to specify the common criteria of evaluations of these goods.[104] These goods that the community values and cherish are objectively provided to the self for its acceptance and conformity. Having internalized these goods, the self can recognize the values and articulate their significance. In effect, the goods adhered to by the self consequently constitute it. Hence, objectivity attributed by the community is a necessary feature of the modern self.[105] In effect, Taylor is susceptible to the

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[101] Quentine Skinner, "Modernity and Disenchantment: Some Historical Reflections," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism,* ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43.

[102] Stephen Mulhall & Adam Swift, *Liberals & Communitarians,* 114. The concept of orientation towards the good and the narrative unity of a life are mutually implicated and internally related. Thus, the narratives of the self are the unifying element of human biographies. However, as pointed by Beck, though biographies are becoming reflexive, they are sites of frictions, disharmonies and contradictions in society. Different institutions shape human biographies by impinging on them. They directly intermesh with various phases in human biographies. Since they interplay, institutional determinations and interventions are, at the same time, determinations and interventions in human biographies. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity,* trans. Mark Ritter (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 127-137.

[103] Stephen Mulhall & Adam Swift, *Liberals & Communitarians* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 103.

[104] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Critical Remarks on The Sources of the Self by Charles Taylor," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* vol. LIV, no. 1, March (1994), 188.

[105] Michael Morgan, "Religion, History and Moral Discourse," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism,* ed. James Tully (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46-66.

charge of representationalism because he considers the self as a
natural thing out there in real history. Moreover, he sets an
ideal assumption of a self-evident human nature which unable to
account for concrete human difference.[106] The understanding of the
self is derived from the presupposition of modernity. Taylor pre-
supposes the ontological ground of the self provided by the com-
munity which confers identity to it. However, Taylor recognizes also
the conflict inherent in modernity. The conflict arises from the
ambivalence of its sources, namely: modernism and romanticism
which corresponds to the reason-passion dichotomy.

Rorty emphasizes self-creation. His antifoundationalist stand
has equipped the self with a creative power without a ground that
constraints it.[107] Agency is precisely located in this on-going self-
creation which relies on some contingent vocabularies used in
descriptions and redescriptions of the self. Though Rorty rejects
the argument of an intrinsic nature or essence of the self, he relies
on vocabularies for self-creation that point to an implied essence
or nature. In this sense, conversation is the essence of human
being. This conversation employs discourse or language in every-
day exchange or interaction.[108] The self undergoes a continuous
making and remaking, weaving and reweaving, describing and
redescribing the world using these vocabularies according to its
purposes. The poet exemplifies this self-creation. Rorty's silence
regarding common criteria of self-creation can be ambivalent or
even pernicious. This apprehension can be gleaned from his
adherence to liberalism which relates with his self-creation.
Liberalism "demands permission not only of tolerance, but also
praise and respect, for these idiosyncratic acts of self-creation."[109]
However, "the poet's effort to achieve self-creation by the recog-
nition of contingency will fail without active spinners of the web

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[106] Charles Lemert, "Dark Thought about the Self," in *Social Theory and the
Politics of Identity,* ed. Craig Calhoun (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), 100-121.

[107] Ronald Kuipers, *Solidarity and the Stranger: Themes in the Social Philo-
sophy of Richard Rorty* (Lanha, New York, Oxford: Institute of Christian Studies
& University Press of America, Inc., 1997), 85-88.

[108] Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality* (London: Verso, 1989), 169.

[109] Steven Kautz, "The Postmodern Self and the Politics of Liberal Education,"
in *The Communitarian Challenge to Liberalism,* eds. Ellen Frankelpaul, Fred D.
Miller, Jr. & Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 187.

and will end in tyranny of suffocation without rules to direct the communal conversation of [humankind] aright."[110]

Furthermore, Rorty has an implicit ontology, which rests on the avoidance of inflicting pain and humiliation of others. As Critchley aptly puts it: "If liberal is a person for whom cruelty is the worst thing that there is, then what is the status of the implied appeal to minimize cruelty? Is this not a universal principle or foundation for moral obligation?"[111] Self-creation is allowed as long as it does not injure or debase others but this idea lacks self-critique and social critique that puts on check on these vocabularies that can undermine others. In self-creation, the self determines the allowable words and acts that suit its whims and caprices that may be detrimental or injurious to others. The social injustice can be inflicted on and committed against others who are eventually victimized by the self. This injustice wreaked on others demands not just poetic redescriptions of the situation, but a real emancipation of others from this onslaught.[112] The self in its self-creation cannot be isolated from others because they are enmeshed in a power relation. We need to subject this power relation into a critique. "It is a matter of finding and disentangling webs of relations in social life, and engaging explanatory critiques of the practices, which sustain them."[113] Thus, commitment to justice goes all the way down from private self-creation as well as from public social relations as a responsibility imposed by the victims.[114]

Rorty favors a "'poeticized' culture, in which there is a split between a privatized Nietzchean self-inventing and a public world characterized by the liberal institutions of the modern west. But that split between private and public worlds is again a staple

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[110] Hollis, Martin, "The Poetics of Personhood," in *Reading Rorty,* ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 256.

[111] Simon Critchley, "Deconstruction and Pragmatism – Is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal," in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism: Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau & Richard Rorty,* ed. Chantal Mouffe, (London: Routledge, 1996), 37.

[112] Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality,* 147.

[113] Ibid., 175.

[114] Ibid.

of modern thought."[115] The liberal person is essentially divided between the private and the public self, having to consign the private into self-creation and to devalue the public in political engagement.[116] The bifurcation of the private and the public is an unwarranted ego-splitting which privileges the private from the public self because the latter is restricted to a philosophical thinking. The private self is elevated by protecting itself from the intrusion or infringement of public life. Thus, this ego-splitting makes Rorty's notion of the self as 'centerless web' mere academic intellectualism. "Real political life involves issues of life and death where concepts of self, even if only implicitly employed, determine the frame of discussion even in liberal democracy."[117] The self cannot be confined to mere private self-creation because its activity has a consequentiality and repercussion to others. Moreover, Rorty's pragmatism where tools are made to cater to basic needs is an implicit avowal of naturalism or objectivism. Hence, unknowingly, he "falls back on a naturalist description of human beings as organisms that develop tools in order to adapt themselves optimally to their environment with the aim of satisfying their needs."[118] Habermas argues that "in replacing the correct description of facts with successful adaptation to the environment he merely exchanges one kind of objectivism for another: the objectivism of 'represented' reality for the objectivism of instrumentally 'mastered' reality."[119]

We have to bear in mind that the notion of the private sphere is equally a political issue. As feminists would say, the private is political. Limiting the private self to purely philosophical self-creation is counterproductive to women who have been contesting this restrictive notion of the private self because they have been

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[115] Frank Farnell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 145.

[116] H.O. Mounce, *The Two Pragmatists: From Pierce to Rorty* (London: Routledge, 1997), 205.

[117] James Hoopes, *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 183.

[118] Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication,* ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 376.

[119] Ibid.

unjustly confined to the domestic chores in the household and dis-
allowed from participating in public affairs of social life that can
chart their own history and alter the landscape of their life. The
self implicates the public as well as the private self; this divide
cannot be neatly separated. "We are holistic webs of beliefs and
desires engaged in an interminable process of reweaving, yet it
is also up to us 'to invent a use for ourselves' or 'giving birth to
ourselves' by inventing new metaphors and self-descriptions."[120]
Although Rorty privileges the private life, he des no empower
women because he merely glorifies the private life and returns
women to the private life in perpetuity. Feminists privilege the
private sphere as a contested zone of political struggle of women
so that they can move out from the confines of the private life and
can take part in the transformation of the world. Strategically,
they want to shift the marginalized private life to the center of
public discourse. Thus, feminists would like to reverse the
hierarchy between the public and private and make the private
life a public issue. We are social selves who cannot help but feel
loyal to our group, yet we always have the ability to step back and
decide what that social identity means to us.[121]

The point of contention between Taylor and Rorty regarding
the self is that the former underscores the importance of strong
evaluation that defines the self; while the latter denies such over-
arching criteria of evaluation that confer identity to the self. Rorty
rather emphasizes self-creation that underlies the making of the
self. Taylor's strong evaluation is clearly conscious of the articu-
lation of some communally-valued standards. Rorty rejects any
reference to a supreme ethical principle that gauges human action.
The only rule to human action is the pragmatic reason that best
serves somebody's purpose at certain time and place.[122] Thus,

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[120] Charles Guingon & David Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and
Public Morality," in *Reading Rorty,* ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge: Basil
Blackwell, 1990), 359.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Richard Rorty, "Response to Simon Critchley," in *Deconstruction and
Pragmatism: Simon Critchley, Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau & Richard Rorty,*
ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge: 1996), 43.

Rorty evades any reference to metanarrative standards that may dampen idiosyncratic self-creation. He prefers small narratives that are pragmatic and contingent to the self. However, there is a looming danger in this argument. The absence of standard criteria would evade the question of social critique and self-critique that can lead to social change and social justice. For instance, according to Rorty, what distinguishes the rich North from the poor South is simply attributed to the North having more money and power.[123] From a critical standpoint, this assertion is a simplistic way of presenting and analyzing the situation of social injustice in its global scale. Furthermore, his notion of quasi-selves is unsatisfactory. As expressed by Smith, through psychoanalytic treatment of the patient, the unconscious will emerge and surface in the conscious level so that it can liberate itself from repression. Through psychoanalysis, the conscious comes to recognize itself in the unconscious and identifies with it. "This passion for critique is a passion for change for the better."[124] ❑

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[123] Anindita Niyogi Balsleu, *Cultural Otherness: Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1991), 77.

[124] Nicholas Smith, "Contingency and Self-identity, Taylor's Hermeneutics vs. Rorty's," in *Theory, Culture and Society,* vol. 13, no. 2 (1995), 114-115.