

## The Paradoxes of Education in Rorty's Liberal Utopia

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Perhaps it will help to put my remarks in perspective if I begin by saying that I am dubious about the relevance of philosophy to education, for the same reason I am dubious about the relevance of philosophy to politics.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Rorty is a bundle of seeming contradictions. An anti-philosophical philosopher, a profound thinker against systematic theorizing, he signs a death certificate and writes an obituary for professionalized, academic philosophy. Writing breezy but often technical philosophical texts, he endeavors to demonstrate the irrelevance and marginality of his own breed, claiming that philosophers have little importance and a limited function in our present society. Yet despite his insistence upon the irrelevance of philosophy to democratic politics,<sup>2</sup> he nevertheless points us toward and describes in great detail a political utopia, his philosophically informed vision of how Western democracies might look if they adopted his vocabulary and anti-metaphysical, anti-epistemological *Weltanschauung*. Similarly, while insisting that, as a philosopher, he has very little to say about education, and doubting, moreover, whether philosophy in general has anything important to say about education, he pointedly describes and endorses a system of education that would fit his liberal utopia and mesh with his philosophical musings. Paradoxically, while proclaiming the irrelevance of philosophy to education, Rorty's philosophical work, coupled with several of his more popular essays,<sup>3</sup> outlines a distinct philosophy of education.

Rorty's seeming contradictions carry over to his thoughts about education. Rorty tells a story about education with deep roots in his philosophical ideas, but which is at heart incompatible with those ideas. In this essay I argue that Rorty's statements about education contradict the goals and ethos of his liberal utopia — a place intended to provide a safe haven for, and exhort all citizens to become, ironic self-creators. As I see it, there are two specific problems. First, the supposedly liberal Rortyan education is riddled with inequity. Rorty creates a system that affords only a select elite the opportunity of self-edification toward becoming a liberal ironist. Second, I argue that the consequences of fostering a community of self-creating liberal ironists is potentially, even likely, to cause grave conflict among citizens. The public-private distinction so crucial to Rorty's liberal utopia is not sufficient to protect individuals from the unbounded quests for self-creation of other individuals. Rorty needs to supplement his contingent notion of solidarity with a description of how citizens are educated to be liberals; or alternately, he needs to explain how there might be an inner connection between irony and liberalism.

### A RORTYAN EDUCATION: EDIFICATION AND LIBERAL IRONY

The best place to begin an explication of Rorty's ideas of education is with his view of what human beings are. For it is at just this point that we see the absolutely crucial role that education plays in a Rortyan community. Rorty holds a strictly non-essentialist view of human nature. We cannot speak sensibly, Rorty believes, about

illuminating the essence of what is human or locating what is by nature intrinsic to the species. Instead, Rorty holds the view that “human beings are centerless networks of beliefs and desires and that their vocabularies and opinions are determined by historical circumstance.”<sup>4</sup> While there may be, of course, large areas in which our beliefs and desires overlap, Rorty thinks that these commonalities are contingent and not a result of some core essence of *Homo sapiens*. Humans are conditioned not by any deep, fundamental human nature, but rather by the contingent historical circumstances in which they grow up and live. We can appreciate better the educational implications of this non-essentialist view of human beings in the following passage:

There is no such thing as human nature....Nor is there any such thing as alienation from one's essential humanity due to societal repression....There is only the shaping of an animal into a human being by a process of socialization, followed (with luck) by the self-individualization and self-creation of that human being through his or her later revolt against that very process.<sup>5</sup>

If the human being is nothing more than an agglomeration of beliefs and desires which is gradually shaped and self-molded, education broadly conceived plays an enormous role in forming those beliefs and desires, and directing that shaping and molding. For without a notion of “the core essence of man” *humans learn, or are taught, everything*. There is no natural structure to which an education must adhere, no self-germination or teleological actualization of the human seed. What we are is what we have become through historical circumstance, not what we were destined to be due to some innate structure of humanity. Rorty could make no sense, for example, of Rousseau's ideal education as expressed in *Emile*, where the touchstone principle for any educational practice is: “does it accord with nature?” For Rorty, there is no nature; there is only education (broadly construed).

With Rorty's non-essentialist conception of the self, however, we must entirely redefine what is meant by education. Education, as Rorty notes, has almost always been associated with the acquisition and transmission of knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Rorty, on the other hand, follows Gadamer and describes a conception of humankind in which the quest for knowledge, and by extension the transmission of knowledge, is no longer in point. For Rorty, the term “knowledge” implies the grasping of essential, timeless truths and an underlying epistemology that seeks to mirror as accurately as possible the world around us. Paraphrasing Gadamer, Rorty substitutes “the notion of *Bildung* (education, self-formation) for that of ‘knowledge’ as the goal of thinking.”<sup>7</sup> Gadamerian hermeneutics replaces Cartesian epistemology.<sup>8</sup> With *Bildung* as the goal of thinking, the words we use and the conversations we have with each other move to the fore of any educational endeavor. “From the educational, as opposed to the epistemological or the technological, point of view, the way things are said is more important than the possession of truths.”<sup>9</sup>

Rorty re-defines education to be the process of self-formation and self-creation forged in the crucible of language rather than the acquisition and transmission of epistemologically founded truths that exist independent of language. In re-defining education, Rorty also renames it: “Since ‘education’ sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use ‘edification’ to stand for the project of finding

new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking.”<sup>10</sup> Edification describes the lifelong project of self-formation and re-creation which is appropriate for the conception of human beings as contingent, centerless networks of beliefs and desires.

A few comments about edification are important to our understanding of how Rorty would conceive of a system of education (or a system of edification) for citizens in his liberal utopia. Edification is parasitic and reactionary. We never create or form ourselves *ex nihilo*; we must always react to or against our extant beliefs and desires.<sup>11</sup> As Rorty bluntly states, “Education has to start from acculturation.”<sup>12</sup> Such acculturation might include, of course, just those epistemological stances and beliefs about knowledge and essential truths that Rorty so dislikes. As Rorty concludes, “the possibility of hermeneutics is always parasitic upon the possibility (and perhaps upon the actuality) of epistemology, and that edification always employs materials provided by the culture of the day.”<sup>13</sup> In order to re-create ourselves, we must first be socialized into the dominant discourse and conventional descriptions of our community. We learn in order that later we may potentially unlearn and redescribe. Not everyone, it is important to note, achieves self-individualization or self-creation. Some are merely socialized, becoming people who unselfconsciously accept the given vocabulary of the day and describe themselves in words that reflect the conventions of the community. Rorty calls these people commonsensicalists.<sup>14</sup>

Rorty’s depiction of edification in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* largely concerns his philosophical beliefs. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* he extends the scope of those philosophical beliefs by describing a society whose citizens largely agree with him and adopt his point of view. Rorty sketches a utopia in which the citizens are “liberal ironists.” They are liberal in that they believe that cruelty is the worst thing humans do. They are ironists in that they “face up to the contingency of [their] own most central beliefs and desires — [people] sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance.”<sup>15</sup> The liberal ironist, who recognizes her own contingency and doubts the ultimacy of the vocabulary she uses to describe herself and the world, matches Rorty’s non-essentialist conception of the self. In Rorty’s liberal utopia, the liberal ironist pursues a private quest for self-creation and individuation; that is to say, she seeks edification, and simultaneously holds the contingent belief that people are publicly bound together in a society by their liberal hope that humiliation and suffering will diminish or cease.

Rorty’s utopia is a society where epistemological and metaphysical questions and attitudes are dropped in favor of the recognition of the historical contingency of each person’s own vocabulary and that of the society they inhabit. The very recognition of our contingency and the hope of self-creation constitute the epoxy — the ties that bind — of his liberal utopia. “The social glue holding together the ideal liberal society...consists in little more than a consensus that the point of social organization is to let everybody have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities.”<sup>16</sup> The public realm exists in order to guarantee the private ironic quest for edifying self-creation.<sup>17</sup> Rorty’s liberal utopia honors, protects, and promotes the

private quest for self-creation and self-description; or phrased differently, it promotes the project of edification as that attempt at individuation and redefinition in reaction to the conventional societal discourse and vocabulary. The goal of private self-creation requires, according to Rorty, peace, relative wealth, and the “standard bourgeois freedoms.” The justification for those bourgeois freedoms is not grounded on a universal truth, but is “based on nothing more profound than the historical facts which suggest that without the protection of something like the institutions of bourgeois liberal society, people will be less able to work out their private salvations, create their private self-images, reweave their webs of belief and desire in the light of whatever new people or books they happen to encounter.”<sup>18</sup> Rorty’s liberal utopia is keyed toward the edifying liberal ironist, the person who engages in a thoroughly contingent life of self-creation.

#### EDUCATION IN THE LIBERAL UTOPIA

What would a system of education look like in his liberal utopia? Keeping in mind that the “point of social organization is to let everyone have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her abilities,” Rorty identifies two questions that would dominate public affairs. The first, less relevant for education, involves balancing the sometimes competing needs of peace, wealth, and freedom. The second, and more important for education, is “how to equalize opportunities for self-creation and then leave people alone to use, or neglect, their opportunities.”<sup>19</sup> Since liberal ironists, more than any others (like commonsensicalists, for example), engage in the private quest for self-creation, and since Rorty clearly envisions a society that enables *all* citizens a chance at self-creation, we can legitimately expect Rorty to support a system of education that promotes the development of liberal ironists. After all, if he desires the citizens of his utopia to be liberal ironists, and if humans are not *naturally* liberal or ironic, they must be educated, they must learn to become liberal and ironic.

Now if we make the reasonable assumption that schools must constitute a significant, though by no means all-encompassing, role in education, we can also legitimately expect Rorty to support a system of schooling that aims at the creation of liberal ironists. A conception of schooling as the main vehicle for overall education is in fact consistent with historical circumstance in contemporary western societies. Schools are the major arena in which people are formally educated, and schools are the *only* arena of education in society in which *all* people participate (in varying degrees and length). Thus it makes sense to believe that schools must serve as the proper environment in which everyone in Rorty’s utopia is provided an opportunity at self-creation.<sup>20</sup> Ironically and amazingly, Rorty doesn’t seem to believe this.

#### SOCIALIZATION AND INDIVIDUATION: WHO GETS WHAT EDUCATION?

Rorty divides education into two components: a period of socialization and a subsequent period of individuation. The weak formulation of this division is extremely general:

Education seems to me two quite distinct enterprises: lower education is mostly a matter of socialization, of trying to inculcate a sense of citizenship, and higher education is mostly a matter of individuation, of trying to awaken the individual’s imagination in the hope that she will become able to re-create herself.<sup>21</sup>

Such a distinction is not, on the face of it, objectionable. After all, such a division meshes well with Rorty's description of edification — a parasitic and reactive movement against normal discourse. Individuation describes well the edifying liberal ironist who seeks to redescribe herself in reaction to the conventional vocabularies of the day and in the process create herself anew. But Rorty makes this general division between socialization and individuation unpardonably rigid in a much stronger formulation. He writes that the two processes are “entirely distinct” and goes on to assign pre-collegiate education (kindergarten through high school), the task of socialization and nonvocational higher education (colleges and universities), the task of individuation.

Education up to the age of eighteen or nineteen is mostly a matter of socialization — of getting the students to take over the moral and political common sense of the society as it is....Primary and secondary education will always be a matter of familiarizing the young with what their elders take to be true, whether it is true or not....The point of non-vocational higher education is...to help students realize they can reshape themselves....The proper business of the university is to offer a...provocation to self-creation.<sup>22</sup>

I do not object to the general division between socialization and individuation, but why they must be separate and distinct processes is not clear. Why could they not, for example, proceed simultaneously and co-exist within schools, just as liberalism and irony co-exist within Rorty's utopian community? Rorty unfairly and arbitrarily limits the process of individuation to colleges and universities. In doing so, he undermines the effect and drastically limits the scope of the “provocation to self-creation” so crucial to his liberal utopia.

The strict limitation produces stark inequities. Obviously, not everyone attends college or university. Are those people to be excluded from the opportunity at individuation and self-creation? Are they to be consigned to become only commonsensicalists and creatures of social convention? If it is only at levels of higher education that individuation and provocation to self-creation occur, many people will never have that chance.

Strangely, Rorty concedes this point, which explicitly contradicts his vision of a liberal utopia where there are equal opportunities for self-creation. Rorty writes that, “*with luck*, a lot of the higher students will go on to higher education.”<sup>23</sup> Luck is not a reliable tool for ensuring “equal opportunities” for self-creation. Attending college, at least in the United States, requires a substantial amount of money. Rorty acknowledges that fact. “Around the age of eighteen or nineteen....American students whose parents are affluent enough...send them to reasonably good colleges.”<sup>24</sup> If Rorty intends to maintain the “entirely distinct” divisions of education in his liberal utopia, he cannot expect everyone to have an equal shot at self-creation, and he cannot expect anyone but a select elite to become liberal ironists. Rorty's liberal utopia begins to look like a small island of ironists surrounded by a vast ocean of commonsensicalists.

Rorty anticipates an objection of elitism. First, he intimates in an odd passage that ironism is indeed only for a select few. He writes that “in the ideal liberal society, the intellectuals would be ironists although the non-intellectuals would not.”<sup>25</sup> While this accords with his conception of education, it contradicts his explicit hope that all

citizens will be ironists and that each should get an equal chance at ironic self-creation. Second, Rorty claims that the very process of socialization received by all people in primary and secondary schools, at least in America, includes a narrative of social criticism in which students learn a habit of social critique and doubt about the public vocabulary and rhetoric, which may later become a spur to social action or private redescription and invention. Rorty writes that “lower education in America can still be, and often is, a matter of suggesting that the student think of the narrative of his or her own life as of a piece with the narrative of our national life, where the latter narrative is read as one of successful social criticism.”<sup>26</sup> A narrative of social criticism, Rorty must hope, will suffice to promote irony.

Even if we were to accept Rorty’s reply, which is sensible only within the context of America (and therefore not necessarily applicable to an idealized liberal utopia), there are still good reasons not to limit individuation to colleges and universities. If individuation is primarily a process, as he says, “of trying to awaken the individual’s imagination in the hope that she will become able to re-create herself,” we must not consider the imagination to be a faculty of the mind which lays dormant for years only to be stirred to life during college. Individuation understood as the provocation of the imagination may be fruitfully included at any level of education.<sup>27</sup> Younger children, in fact, appear to have quite potent powers of imagination, perhaps because they have not yet been snuffed and stamped out by a powerful socialization process. Their great propensity to ask questions and explore both the natural and social world is well documented by psychologists and philosophers alike.<sup>28</sup> It seems that young children are in some sense in the best position to exercise their imagination.

Moreover, a large proportion of the initial process of socialization so important to Rorty will be accomplished quite naturally through forces and influences outside of school. Television, mass media, parents and others all provide a basic socialization. One might conceive of schools, as does Dewey for example, not as the place where everyone gets socialized, but where *reflection upon* socializing influences begins. Schools, in Dewey’s famous formulation, start with the experiences the children bring into the classroom and seek to inspire new ways of thinking, leading to an unremitting process of growth to which there is no end.<sup>29</sup> In such a way, socialization and individuation could proceed simultaneously.

#### UTOPIAN STRIFE: CONFLICT AMONG LIBERAL IRONISTS

Whereas the previous objection questioned the coherence of Rorty’s ideas — whether Rorty’s description of educational divisions violate the liberal utopian ideal of equal opportunity for self-creation — my second objection grants their coherence and questions their consequences. Rorty’s description of a liberal utopia — that exists primarily to safeguard and enable the private quest of ironists at self-creation — may cause serious conflict among citizens. Once citizens learn to redescribe themselves and their societies, once they begin the arduous task of individuation against prior socialization, the private, ironic, edifying quest for self-creation may infect the public arena and interfere with others’ quests for self-creation. Rorty suggests that private ironism is compatible with public liberalism because of our

thoroughly contingent but common susceptibility to humiliation and pain. “[The liberal ironist] thinks that what unites her with the rest of the species is not a common language but *just* susceptibility to pain and in particular to that special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans — humiliation.”<sup>30</sup> Yet Rorty never accounts for how a common susceptibility to pain leads all citizens to be liberals.

I begin by explaining why the private quest for self-creation may infect the public arena. As a person learns to become ironic and thereby doubt the conventional descriptions of herself and the society — that is to say, as she comes to see the vocabulary she uses to describe herself and society as contingent — nothing prevents her from exercising that very same ironic attitude on the vocabularies and descriptions of other individuals. Nothing restricts her from redescribing other individuals, and even public institutions. Such redescription, Rorty admits, potentially causes pain and humiliation.<sup>31</sup> Redescription of other people may be a form of cruelty, precisely what the Rortyan liberal is most desirous of avoiding. So long as this redescription is truly private, it is safe and causes no suffering. But when the ironist makes public redescriptions, he must stay constantly attuned to the potential humiliation he might cause. The public expression of individual irony is dangerous. Even more dangerous is *imperialistic irony*. What prevents the ironist from making her redescriptions public and then forcing them upon others, believing that they too should adopt her vocabulary?

Rorty believes that a firm distinction between the public and the private realm suffices for such prevention. In fact, he concedes that the viability of his utopia “turns on making a firm distinction between the public and the private.”<sup>32</sup> That redescription which is entirely private is allowed; that redescription which publicly humiliates others is forbidden.

[W]e need to distinguish between redescription for private and for public purposes. For my private purposes, I may redescribe you and everybody else in terms which have nothing to do with my attitude toward your actual or possible suffering. . . . But as I am a liberal, the part of my final vocabulary which is relevant to [my public] actions requires me to become aware of all the various ways in which other human beings whom I might act upon can be humiliated.<sup>33</sup>

Insofar as a citizen is an ironist, she is free to redescribe privately at will; insofar as a citizen is a liberal, she must be aware of how public redescriptions may humiliate.

But why should the liberal ironist care if her redescriptions humiliate and cause pain to others? If such redescriptions cause no pain to her and do not interfere with her own project of edifying self-creation, for what reason would the ironist bother to worry about humiliating others? If she does not care, do we simply not define her as a liberal? Rorty’s answer seems to me insufficient. He writes that the liberal ironist cannot “produce a *reason to care* about suffering. What matters for the liberal ironist is not finding such a reason but making sure that she *notices* suffering when it occurs.”<sup>34</sup> But “noticing suffering” does not mean that a person will refrain from inflicting it. Some people, whose actions are much more drastic and destructive than simple “redescription,” appear to *enjoy* inflicting pain. For such persons, the perception of others’ suffering is their very motivation in acting; they are persons who in fact *desire* to take note of how they humiliate and cause pain.

For Rorty, human solidarity is a matter “of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one’s world — the little things around which one has woven into one’s final vocabulary — will not be destroyed.”<sup>35</sup> But that tenuous solidarity seems unlikely to restrict all ironists from pursuing a public path of self-creation that invades the private space of others. Imperialistic clashes of redescription between ironist and ironist, and ironist and commonsensicalist seem inevitable. As one Rortyan critic notes, if the ironist recognizes his own contingency as well as that of his society, why would that make him tolerant of others? “Why could he not draw the contrary lesson just as reasonably — that as all truth is someone’s truth, let’s have mine.”<sup>36</sup>

Rorty may claim that when the liberal ironist exercises public irony which humiliates, he is no longer being a liberal. Therefore, as a non-liberal, the liberal utopia is wholly justified in intervening and taking action against him. Of course Rorty could say that there will ironists who are illiberal. It is precisely the duty of the liberal state to uphold the liberal value of avoiding cruelty. But Rorty cannot assume that all citizens will be liberal. When he writes that human solidarity is a matter of “sharing a common selfish hope,” he betrays a general optimism about humankind. Ironists are expected to refrain from the humiliating redescription of others and quests for self-creation that infringe upon others simply because they notice the suffering they incur. Awareness of suffering does not necessarily imply or lead to refraining from inflicting it. It depends on liberal attitudes.

How do citizens acquire liberal attitudes? With a non-essentialist view of human nature, Rorty cannot claim that the common hope to avoid pain will be innate to all people. Liberalism, like all else, must be taught and socialized. What might such an education look like? Rorty fails not only to give us a description, but fails to see the necessity of the enterprise. If the utopia is to be a liberal one, as Rorty desires, and if the conception of human beings is such that there is no such thing as human nature, then liberalism must be taught just as much as ironism.

One possible explanation for Rorty would be to claim that there is an inner connection between irony and liberalism, that ironic attitudes engender liberal ones. Rorty could argue that private irony must ultimately be turned back upon itself and thereby continually call into question the ultimacy of one’s vocabulary. In short, ironists must be ironic about their own quests of self-creation.

Rorty writes that John Dewey is his intellectual hero, the thinker in whose footsteps he follows. Yet Dewey, the quintessential promoter of excellence and equity in education, could never accept the educational ideas set forth by Rorty. Constructing oversimplified dualisms like socialization/individuation and public realm/private realm, a philosophical method that Dewey despised, Rorty describes an education in which rampant inequities plague his liberal utopia and where the private pursuit of self-creation may cause antagonistic clashes among edifying liberal ironists.

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1. Richard Rorty, “The Dangers of Over-Philosophication — Reply to Arcilla and Nicholson,” *Educational Theory* 40, no. 1 (1990): 41.



2. See "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 175-96. In this essay, Rorty denies that philosophy is useful in justifying the institutions of a liberal democracy.
3. I will draw primarily upon Rorty's review of Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, "That Old-Time Philosophy," *The New Republic* (April 4, 1988): 28-33; "Education Without Dogma: Truth, Freedom, and Our Universities," *Dissent* (Spring 1989): 198-204; "Intellectuals in Politics," *Dissent* (Fall 1991): 483-90.
4. Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," 191.
5. Rorty, "Education Without Dogma," 200.
6. The idea that "education" refers to the transmission of knowledge dates back to Plato. In this day, note the first sentence of a book by Israel Scheffler: "The development and transmission of knowledge are fundamental tasks of education." Scheffler, *The Conditions of Knowledge: Epistemology and Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 1.
7. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 359.
8. Rorty does not adopt hermeneutics as just a different framework, another epistemological stance, as it were. Hermeneutics, he writes, "is what we get when we are no longer epistemological" (*Philosophy and Mirror of Nature*, 325). It denotes a way of coping with the world rather than another way of "knowing" the world.
9. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 359.
10. *Ibid.*, 360.
11. Rorty writes, "no project of redescribing the world, no project of self-creation through imposition of one's own idiosyncratic metaphoric, can avoid being marginal and parasitic. Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are possible only against the background of other old words beings used in old familiar ways." *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41.
12. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 365.
13. *Ibid.*, 366.
14. Rorty contrasts, as we will later see, the "commonsensicalist" with the "ironist." See *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 74.
15. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xv.
16. *Ibid.*, 84.
17. Note Rorty's comment that, "J.S. Mill's suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and preventing suffering seems to me pretty much the last word" (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 63).
18. *Ibid.*, 84-85.
19. *Ibid.*, 85.
20. I do not want to claim that schools are the only environment in which education occurs; nor do I want to claim that schools are the only places in which people can learn to be liberal ironists. Society and books and friendships, for example, may also play a role in fostering liberalism and irony. I claim only that schools must play (as they traditionally have played in contemporary western societies) a major role in education and therefore in any Rortyan attempt at self-creation.
21. Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication," 41.
22. Rorty, "Education Without Dogma," 200.
23. Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication," 42.
24. Rorty, "Education Without Dogma," 199.
25. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 87. Strangely, Rorty believes that those nonintellectuals would be "commonsensically nominalist and historicist" and still recognize their contingency, though they would not feel "any particular doubt about the contingencies they happened to be" (87). It is unclear to me how a person could recognize the contingency of both his own beliefs and the institutions of liberal democracy, yet not doubt those same contingencies. In short, how can the commonsensicalist also believe in thorough contingency?

26. Rorty, "The Dangers of Over-Philosophication," 43.
27. Stuart Hampshire's *Innocence and Experience* stresses the role of the imagination in our public deliberations about justice and private quests for defining a good life for ourselves. "There are always open possibilities of improving human life in indefinitely many ways, and among the possibilities is the elimination of gross poverty and of at least some of the risks of war. But practical possibilities exist as such only as long as they are vividly imagined and actively explored." Stuart Hampshire, *Innocence and Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 185. Rorty would agree.
28. See, among others, Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1960); Gareth Mathews, *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Hans-Ludwig Freese, *Kinder sind Philosophen* (Berlin: Quadriga Verlag, 1989).
29. See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916).
30. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 92.
31. "Redescription often Humiliates," in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 90.
32. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 83. There can be, it is important to note, no such thing as a literal or natural distinction between the public and private realm. Rorty has been roundly criticized for the distinction. See, for example, Rene Arcilla, *For the Love of Perfection* (London: Routledge, 1995), 123-26; or Ernesto Laclau, "Community and its Paradoxes: Richard Rorty's Liberal Utopia," in *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. The Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
33. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 91-92.
34. *Ibid.*, 93.
35. *Ibid.*, 92.
36. Harvey C. Mansfield, "Democracy and the Great Books," *The New Republic* (April 4, 1988): 35.