

# Deconstruction and Pragmatism – is Derrida a Private Ironist or a Public Liberal?

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Is pragmatism deconstructive? Is deconstruction pragmatist? At a superficial level, the response to the first question is clearly affirmative, insofar as pragmatism deconstructs all forms of foundationalism (Platonism, Metaphysical Realism, Analytic Neo-Kantianism, Pre-Heideggerian Phenomenology), and argues for the contingency of language, self and community. The pragmatist deconstructs the epistemological picture of truth as a glassy correspondence or clear and distinct representation between the mind and external reality, and replaces it with the claim that truth is what it is good to believe (James) or whatever one is warranted in asserting (Dewey). With regard to the second question, it can perhaps be said that deconstruction is pragmatist in two senses: firstly, that the deconstruction of texts from the history of philosophy (e.g. Plato, Rousseau or Husserl) in terms of the detection of what Derrida calls 'the metaphysics of presence' can be assimilated to an anti-foundationalist critique of philosophy; secondly, that the deconstructive claim that the ideality of meaning is an effect of the differential constitution of language, what Derrida calls the general text or, more helpfully, context, can be assimilated to a pragmatist conception of meaning as a function of context, i.e. the Wittgensteinian reduction of meaning to use (Rorty 1991b, p. 125).

So, at this superficial level, it would indeed seem that pragmatism is deconstructive and deconstruction is pragmatist. Yet, is this the whole story? In this paper, I would like to disrupt this identification of deconstruction with pragmatism from the perspective of Derrida's work, and raise some critical questions about Rorty's understanding of deconstruction, particularly as this impinges on questions of ethics and politics. Thus, if I admit at the outset that deconstruction is allied to pragmatism, then the question is whether *deconstruction is pragmatist all the way down*? That is to say, is deconstruction consistently anti-foundationalist? Or is there a foundationalist claim in deconstruction which cannot be pragmatized: justice, for example, or responsibility to an other's suffering? As we will see presently, this is the same question as to whether Derrida is *only* a private ironist, calling us to recognize the utter contingency of the philosophical tradition, a tradition that we are now in a position to

circumvent (a favourite verb of Rorty's in his discussions of Derrida), and functioning as an exemplar of the forms of autonomy and individual perfection that might be available to anyone in a utopian liberal society. In texts like the 'Envois' to *La carte postale*, which is Rorty's prime example of what interests him in deconstruction, Derrida is clearly an ironist, in particular he ironises about the validity or univocity of Heidegger's account of the history of Being.<sup>2</sup> But, is Derrida *only* an ironist? That is to say, in Rorty's vocabulary, is it not also possible for Derrida to be a liberal? For Rorty, Derrida can only be understood as a private thinker whose work has no public utility and therefore no interesting ethical or political consequences. Concealed in this claim is, I believe, a normative belief to the effect that Derrida *should* not be considered as a public thinker. The reason for this is that Rorty believes that if Derrida's work were extended into the public realm, then this would produce either useless, pernicious or possibly even *dangerous* ethical and political consequences. When Rorty discusses the question of the public significance of deconstruction, Derrida tends to get tarred with the same brush as Heidegger: namely, that Heidegger, for Rorty, is the most sublime theoretical imagination of his time (Rorty 1989, p. 118), just as Derrida is the most ingenious and imaginative of contemporary philosophers (Rorty, forthcoming, p. 2), and just what one needs if one has felt the power of Heidegger's language but one does not want to describe oneself in terms of that language. However, Heidegger's work – and *a fortiori* Derrida's work – has no public utility; that is, it has no role in the political life of liberal society. Therefore, Derrida is a private ironist. Against this conclusion, I will try to show how, in Rorty's terms, it is possible both for Derrida to be a public liberal and for deconstruction to have overriding ethical and political consequences.

### Rorty's Later Work: Presentation and Critique

To approach this issue, we need to define some terms and establish the general framework for Rorty's pragmatism. As a proviso, let me say that I will be restricting my discussion of Rorty to *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, to the reading of Derrida given therein and in some papers contemporary with and prior to that book.<sup>3</sup>

For Rorty, the liberal (and Rorty always personifies the positions he describes – 'the liberal ironist', 'the pragmatist' – which adds a helpful dramatic quality to the writing, but sometimes has the negative effect of reducing these positions to caricatures) is someone who believes that cruelty is the worst thing that there is. Liberal society, therefore, must encourage the value of tolerance as a way of minimising suffering. The ironist is someone who faces up to the contingency of their most central beliefs and desires – beliefs about the nature of language, the self and community and desires for autonomy and perfection. The heroine (Rorty always uses the feminine gender to describe the position he is

advocating, whereas the liberal metaphysician – let's call him Habermas or the early Rawls – is always gendered male) of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* is the figure of the liberal ironist, someone who is committed to social justice and appalled by cruelty, but who recognizes that there is no metaphysical foundation to her concern for justice.

However, the core of Rorty's analysis – which has been the object of much hostile critical attention – is the distinction between the public and the private. It is important to point out that this distinction is not the Hellenistic or Arendtian demarcation of *oikos* and *polis*, between the domestic hearth and the public forum. The private is defined by Rorty as being concerned 'with idiosyncratic projects of self-overcoming', with self-creation and the pursuit of autonomy. The public is defined as being concerned with those activities 'having to do with the suffering of other human beings', with the attempt to minimize cruelty and work for social justice (Rorty, forthcoming, p. 1). Rorty's central claim in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* – a claim, moreover, that would be devastating to much work in philosophy if taken seriously – is that it is theoretically impossible to unite or reconcile the public and private domains. Such a desire for reconciliation lies at the basis of Platonism, Christianity, Kantianism and Marxism (other examples could be given), insofar as each of these has attempted to fuse the claims of self-interest, self-realization, personal salvation or individual autonomy with the *eidos* of justice, charity and love of one's fellow humans, the universality of the categorical imperative or the proletariat as the universal class and agent of history. The dominant legacy of the Platonist tradition is the attempt to reconcile private, individual autonomy with the public good of the community by erecting both upon a common philosophical foundation.

Rorty cuts the Gordian knot in which philosophy has long been entangled, between moral optimists like Kant, who claim that self-realization coincides with a commitment to human solidarity (the tie that binds individual autonomy, the moral law and the kingdom of ends), and moral sceptics like Nietzsche and Freud who would claim that the desire for human solidarity dissimulates either the will-to-power or libidinal drives. After Hegel – that is to say, for Rorty, after the historical turn in philosophy which coincides with a recognition of contingency, the idea that truth is something created rather than discovered – this contest between moral optimists and moral sceptics becomes a conflict between two forms of historicism. On the one hand, there are historicists for whom the desire for self-creation and autonomy dominates (for Rorty: Foucault and Heidegger), and on the other hand there are historicists for whom the desire for community dominates and who see the emphasis on self-creation as 'aestheticism' or 'irrationalism' (for Rorty: Dewey and Habermas). Rorty insists that there is no way of reconciling theoretically these two forms of historicism, 'there is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory' (Rorty 1989, p. xiv). We must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we have two irreconcilable final vocabularies, which function well in two different language games: the public and the private. To confuse the field of application for each of

these two vocabularies would be to engage in a form of category mistake: on the one hand, to judge the public by the standards of the private gives rise to the kind of dangerous errors of which Heidegger was guilty in 1933; on the other hand, to judge the private by the standards of the public produces the kind of myopic readings of Heidegger and Derrida to be found in Habermas' *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

For Rorty, the best that can be hoped for is a person – she, the liberal ironist – who would be able to discriminate public questions from private concerns, questions about cruelty and social justice from concerns about the significance of human life and the quest for autonomy. The liberal ironist would be the sort of person who would be able to distinguish properly the public from the private. Does such a person or community of persons exist? This question allows us to introduce the *utopian* or *critical* element in Rorty's account. Most of the citizens of 'the rich North Atlantic democracies', for reasons of either religious belief or a vague, residual attachment to the humanistic values of the Enlightenment, are liberal metaphysicians. Such people are genuinely concerned with social justice, and they believe that there is one, final moral vocabulary – Christian love, classical liberalism, liberties underwritten by tradition – for deciding political questions, a vocabulary in touch with our essential humanity, our nature. On the other hand, although clearly outnumbered by the metaphysicians, there are non-liberal ironists who are concerned with their self-realization, and perhaps the realization of a small group, but who have no concern for traditional liberal questions of social justice. The critical, utopian function of *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* is to persuade liberal metaphysicians to become ironists (or at least common-sensical nominalists and historicists – Rorty 1989, p. 87) and non-liberal ironists to become liberals. It is important to point out that Rorty believes that such persuasion will take place not through argument (as in philosophy) but through the *redescriptions* of metaphysics as irony, and of irony as consistent with liberalism. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* does not therefore belong to the genre of philosophy, but rather to literary criticism, which, for Rorty, is the only form of discourse that could be of moral relevance in our post-philosophical culture (Rorty 1982, p. 82) – liberal democracy needs literature not philosophy.

Rorty's utopia is the vision of a society of liberal ironists and progress towards such a utopia will be achieved by the *universalization* (Rorty 1989, p. xv) of liberal society. The obvious (if banal) question to be raised here is how such a commitment to universality can be consistent with Rorty's anti-foundational 'relativism' (between quotation marks, for I take it that relativism would be the name of a pseudo-problem for Rorty). To respond to this, it has to be understood that progress towards this liberal ironic utopia itself depends upon Wilfrid Sellars' analysis of moral obligation, where the universality of a moral vocabulary – that of the liberal in this case – is dependent upon it being shared by a certain community with a similar set of moral intentions: 'we-intentions' (Rorty 1989, p. 194–98). Thus, our moral vocabulary – that of 'we liberals' – is valid for us, for a community that sees the world the way that we do, as 'we Americans' or 'we citizens of the rich North Atlantic democracies'. Thus,

progress towards Rorty's utopia will be achieved by the progressive expansion of the frontiers of liberal democracies, a globalization of Western liberalism.

Of course, it would perhaps be too easy, but nonetheless still justified, to point towards the evidence of imperialism, racism and colonialism that has always accompanied – or perhaps has always been the reality behind the cynical veneer of a legitimating discourse – the expansionism of Western liberal democracy. Rorty's definition of liberalism is ethico/political and pays no attention to the *economic* liberalism – freedom defined in terms of free markets – which is indeed in the process of rapidly and violently globalizing itself, more often than not without an accompanying commitment to tolerance and the abhorrence of cruelty (for example, China is successfully establishing itself as an economically liberal and politically non-liberal state). Following C. B. Macpherson's classic analysis, it is evident that the historical basis for the development of liberal democracy was a liberal state committed to both a competitive party political system and a competitive market economy, onto which was eventually grafted, after much struggle and bloodshed, a universal democratic franchise.<sup>4</sup> The important point to grasp here is that liberalism denotes an economic as well as a political form of society and there is nothing *necessarily* democratic about the economically liberal state.

But, perhaps we are all liberals now. Perhaps the best we can hope for politically speaking is a gradualist, reformist approach to politics that will perhaps (and only perhaps) bring about a beautiful liberal society; all sublime dreams of revolutionary transformation seem either hopelessly inadequate or merely quaint. Perhaps Rorty is right to insist that the only response to objective political stagnation is the privatization of the sublimity that radicals had come to expect from politics between 1789 and 1968. Perhaps Rorty is also right to call for a banalization of leftist political language and a subordination of the claims of radical social theory to the facticity of democratic politics, which would entail less *Ideologie-Kritik* and more social criticism of the kind that Rorty finds in Orwell and which can be seen in the best investigative journalism. Perhaps philosophy should be only an underlabourer to democracy, criticizing any drift towards reactionary political movements, intolerance and cruelty and attempting to hegemonize the radical potentialities within liberalism. Nonetheless, I am much less happy about the *tone* of Rorty's statement that 'the rich democracies of the present day already contain the sorts of institutions necessary to their reform' (Rorty 1991, p. 21). Such remarks risk political complacency and can be read as a (re)descriptive apologetics for the inequality, intolerance, exploitation and disenfranchisement within actually existing liberal democracies. As Hilary Putnam has recently pointed out in a spirited defence of Dewey's radical democratic politics, '... the democracy that we have is not something to be spurned, but also not something to be satisfied with'.<sup>5</sup> The problem that is caught sight of here, as pointed out by Mark Warren,<sup>6</sup> is that Rorty's purportedly post-philosophical reconstruction of liberalism risks repeating the exhausted abstractions of classical liberalism, against which the left-Hegelian and socialist critiques of liberalism are still largely valid.

I would like to conclude this section with four critical questions connected to the above remarks. First, the question of irony and the public realm. As William Connolly points out,<sup>7</sup> by restricting irony and ironists to the private sphere, Rorty might be said to refuse the possibility of a critique of liberal society that would use the strategy of public irony to uncover the violence that liberalism does so much to try and dissimulate. A recent example of this would be some of the post-Nietzschean readings of the Gulf War, in terms of exposing liberalism's Janus face: one side turned towards legitimacy and universality, i.e. the mechanisms of the United Nations, and the other side turned towards the particularity of violence and war motivated by economic self-interest.<sup>8</sup> Rorty refuses the rich critical potential of seeing thinkers like Nietzsche and Foucault as public ironists, as critical both of the liberal democratic social and political formations that privatize autonomy, and of the slippery slope that allows the affirmation of the self's contingency to slide into a behaviouristic – and potentially barbaric (as in the case of psychiatry) – disciplining of the subject.

Second, although Rorty's liberalism does not presuppose the conception of the person *qua* possessive individual that one finds in classical liberalism, and although the liberal ironist has a Nietzschean awareness of themselves as a tissue of contingencies, the Rortian ironical self is just as private as the possessive individual and its conception of liberty is just as negative. Thus, although Rorty weakens the liberal conception of personhood, it does the same work as the possessive individual in underpinning liberalism, where freedom is defined negatively, that is to say, one is free insofar as one can distance oneself from social institutions.<sup>9</sup> Political freedom, for Rorty, is simply 'being left alone' (Rorty, forthcoming, p. 17); or, more polemically, he writes, 'My private purposes . . . are none of your business' (Rorty 1989, p. 91). Against this negative conception of freedom, it is important to emphasize a positive conception of freedom, where liberty would not be found in the absence of normative constraint, but rather – the more Hegelian thought – that freedom would be precisely a product of such normative constraints (i.e. social practices), that is to say, freedom would be social and public and not a-social and private.<sup>10</sup>

Third, with regard to the public/private distinction; it seems strange that the fact that we become ironists in the private realm seems to have few implications for our relation to the public realm. It would appear that the public realm continues for 'we Rortians' in the same way as it did before we were transformed from metaphysicians into ironists. My question is a psychological one: namely, how can one be a Nietzschean ironist in the private sphere, which would mean understanding liberal principles of tolerance and abhorrence of cruelty as symptoms of *ressentiment*, and a liberal in the public sphere where one would respect and act on those principles? Does not the public/private distinction of the self into ironist and liberal yield an impossible psychological *bi-cameralism*, which would be a recipe for political cynicism (Nietzsche lurking behind a Millian mask)? To cite one of Rorty's own discussions, if one believes, with Freud, in the narcissistic origin of compassion, or that conscience is an ego-ideal for those unwilling to forgo the perfection of childhood (Rorty 1989, p. 31), then doesn't

this alter one's practical, public relation to acts of compassion and the fact of conscience? The question of the psychological impossibility of being both a liberal and an ironist is compellingly raised in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989, p. 85), but is not convincingly dealt with in the ensuing discussion; Rorty raises the question extremely sharply and then proceeds to evade the issue. After having given no compelling reasons as to why a liberal should also be an ironist, Rorty goes on to claim, 'There is no reason the ironist cannot be a liberal'. This is true, but as it stands it still begs the psychological question of what it would feel like and what sort of psychological conflict would be produced by being a liberal ironist. Rorty just adds the caveat that an ironist 'Cannot be a "progressive" and "dynamic" liberal' (Rorty 1989, p. 91) and cannot display the same degree of social hope as the liberal metaphysician. But isn't this just to suggest that the liberal ironist is regressive, sedentary and hopeless – and what good is *that* sort of liberal?

Fourth, there is a large issue about Rorty's definition of the liberal: if a liberal is a person for whom cruelty is the worst thing that there is, then what is the status of the implied appeal to minimise cruelty? Is this a universal principle or foundation for moral obligation? If it is, then how would this be consistent with Rorty's anti-foundationalism, and if it is not then what sort of binding power is it meant to have on members of liberal societies? Rorty goes on to qualify the abhorrence of cruelty by claiming that the recognition of a susceptibility to humiliation is the *only* social bond that is needed, and furthermore that this susceptibility to pain is pre-linguistic; suffering takes place outside of language (Rorty 1989, p. 91 & 94). To my mind, this would seem to ground Rorty's definition of the liberal in a universal fact about human nature. Thus, is not Rorty's definition of liberalism an attempt to ground the moral legitimacy of the political order in a claim about the pre-political state of nature, in a way that is strategically similar to Rousseau's appeal to *pitié* in the Second Discourse, which is defined as a pre-social, pre-rational sentient disposition that provokes compassion in the face of the other's suffering?<sup>11</sup> Are we not here being offered a redescription of a criterion for moral obligation grounded not in reason but in the response to suffering, a criterion which can also be found in Bentham's argument for the extension of moral obligations towards animals, 'The question is not, Can they Reason? nor Can they *talk*? but *Can they suffer*?'<sup>12</sup> Let me say that I do not disagree with either Rousseau or Bentham (or Rorty, if this is what he is claiming). I will argue below for a criterion of ethical obligation located in the sensible or sentient disposition of the self towards the other's suffering, which is to be found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. It will be claimed that such a criterion for ethical obligation yields a concept of justice that is taken up by Derrida and which establishes the public significance of deconstruction. Of course, this will mean reading Levinas as more of a secular pragmatist (what Derrida would call an empiricist<sup>13</sup>) and less of a religious metaphysician. But – and this is the present point – is not this recognition of cruelty or suffering as the ethical basis for Rorty's liberalism an appeal to an essentialist, foundationalist fact about human nature; and does this not sit rather uneasily with the general

drift of Rorty's intentions? Despite Rorty's claims to irony and the ubiquity of contingency, is he not in fact attempting to base moral obligation and political practice upon a foundational claim about human susceptibility to humiliation, upon a recognition of the other's suffering? And even if one were to relativize this claim and argue that only 'we liberals' recognize the avoidance of cruelty as the basis for morals and politics and that such recognition is a product of a particular – and therefore contingent – social and political history, does it not nevertheless remain true that the claim has the status of a non-relativizable universal for 'we liberals', with our set of 'we intentions'? Is cruelty something about which liberals can be ironic?<sup>14</sup>

### Rorty's Reading of Derrida

Having sketched the general picture of Rorty's position in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, it is possible to see how the pragmatist critique of philosophy so powerfully articulated in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* extends into moral and political concerns to produce a purportedly anti-foundationalist reformulation of liberalism. In the remainder of this paper I want address two questions: how does Derrida's work fit into this picture, and is Rorty's picture of Derrida justified?

Rorty's concern with Derrida goes back to the late 1970's and in particular to an influential essay, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing' (Rorty 1982, pp. 90–109). In this essay, Rorty sees Derrida as an ally in his more general critique of Neo-Kantian analytic philosophy and representationalism. It is claimed that Derrida's work is best understood as the latest development in a non-Kantian tradition of dialectical thinking that begins with Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where narrative is substituted for veridicality and world-disclosure for argument. Derrida recalls philosophy to its written status by the use of multi-lingual puns, allusions, typographical gimmicks, jokes and sexual innuendoes. In this way, Derrida shows that philosophy (with a lower case 'p' rather than Philosophy) is best described as a kind of writing or as a sector of culture devoted to the discussion of a particular tradition and not as the master discourse by which all other disciplines are to be judged. Deconstruction lets us imagine the way things might look if we did not have the Kantian representationalist model of Philosophy built into our culture. This theme is continued in the 1984 essay 'Deconstruction and Circumvention' (Rorty 1991b, pp. 85–106), where Rorty agrees with Habermas *avant la lettre* (and for quite un-Habermasian reasons), that deconstruction allows us to blur the distinction between philosophy and literature and to promote the idea of a 'seamless, undifferentiated general text' (Rorty 1991b, p. 85). In a nutshell, deconstruction does not engage us in an indeterminate task of deconstructing the tradition with the permanent risk of falling back within its limit, but rather allows us to *circumvent* the tradition, to go around it. Rorty claims that the Heidegger-inspired problematic of overcoming

the tradition, or metaphysics, is a pseudo-problem that ought to be replaced by lots of little pragmatic questions.

Yet, from the very beginning of his encounter with deconstruction, Rorty inserts a note of caution with respect to both Derrida and, more particularly, Derrida's interpreters in the English-speaking world. For Rorty, Derrida's less interesting, less pragmatist side is revealed in his early work through his invocation of certain master-words like 'trace' and '*différance*'; words with a seemingly transcendental function in Derrida's discourse, which would risk deconstruction slipping back into the onto-theo-logical tradition it sought to undermine. Although Derrida, Rorty insists, always ultimately pulls back from this temptation to transcendentalize, unconditionalize or divinize words like 'trace', and where Derrida is careful to point out that *différance* is not a metaphysical name,<sup>15</sup> the same caution is not shown by many of Derrida's interpreters.

Is Derrida a transcendental philosopher? Rorty raises this question in a 1989 essay which responds directly to the publication of Rodolphe Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* (Rorty 1991b, pp. 119–28). The appearance of Gasché's book allows Rorty to focus many of the objections he had to previous interpretations of Derrida, notably those of Jonathan Culler and Christopher Norris, each of which attempted to block Rorty's identification of deconstruction with pragmatism by claiming that Derrida's work was full of rigorous arguments and had to be judged by traditional philosophical standards. Rorty's main problem with these interpreters is that they tend to treat Derrida as a quasi-metaphysician and not as an ironist; they want, 'to make Derrida into a man with a great big theory about a great big subject' (Rorty, forthcoming, p. 8) and they show the kind of reverence for philosophy that Rorty believes is ridiculed in a text like *La carte postale*.

Everything turns here on the question of whether Derrida has arguments or not, that is to say, whether he can be admitted as a public thinker (and argumentation would be the criterion for admission) whose work has serious moral and political consequences. Gasché attempts to claim Derrida's work for serious philosophical consideration by showing that it forms what he calls 'a system beyond Being', that is a say, a series of infrastructures (*trace, différence, supplement, iterability, remark*) that are rigorously deduced from particular texts and which have a (quasi)-transcendental status, insofar as they make a claim to the conditions of possibility and impossibility for the particular text, conceptual structure or institution under consideration.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Gasché's defence of Derrida as a rigorous philosopher turns on whether one can locate something akin to transcendental arguments in his work. If Derrida is a transcendental philosopher then, it is claimed, this will prevent deconstruction being caricatured as a mere private fantasy (although, for Rorty, to call Derrida a private fantasist is to pay him a much higher compliment than calling him a transcendental philosopher – Rorty 1991b, p. 121).

What, then, is an argument for Rorty? He follows Ernst Tugendhat (and, incidentally, the vast majority of philosophers in the European tradition) in claiming that argumentation has to be propositional, that is, argument can only

be about the truth or meaning of propositions and therefore philosophical discourse must be propositional if it is properly to be called argumentative (Rorty 1991b, p. 124–25).<sup>17</sup> There are two directions one can follow on the basis of such a definition: either the language of argumentation (deductive or inductive) is antecedently given and stable, like the language of logic or what Rorty calls ‘normal’ science; or it is a disposable ladder-language of the kind employed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, a language that is to be left behind when *aufgehoben*. For Rorty, Derrida – like Wittgenstein and Hegel – is a master of *Aufhebung*. Thus, the claim that is central to Gasché’s depiction of transcendental argumentation in Derrida, namely that one can move from the propositional to some pre-propositional level (i.e. *différance*) which would provide the conditions of possibility and impossibility for the propositional and, moreover, that one can claim some sort of cognitive status for such a procedure, is a *misunderstanding* of the nature of argumentation. For Rorty, argumentation requires that the same language be employed in one’s premises and conclusions. Such a definition of argumentation would not disqualify traditional, Kantian forms of transcendental argument (which were concerned with resolving sceptical doubts about the existence of the self and the external world), but it does disqualify Derridian forms of (quasi)-transcendental argumentation which would attempt to locate the conditions of possibility and impossibility for propositional language in some pre-propositional ‘word’ or ‘concept’. Thus, Gasché’s attempt to claim Derrida for serious philosophical attention by arguing that he employs (quasi)-transcendental arguments is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of argumentation. Hence, Rorty concludes, Gasché’s project collapses.<sup>18</sup>

For Rorty, deconstruction is not (quasi)-transcendental philosophy, but must be understood as part of a tradition of philosophy as world-disclosure, a tradition that includes Plato, Hegel and Heidegger, where our old vocabularies of self- and world-description are challenged, redescribed and replaced by new vocabularies. Thus, the crucial distinction to draw is that between an argumentative form of language which addresses the problems of social justice – what we called ‘the public’ – and a non-argumentative, often oracular, form of language that is world-disclosive and concerned with the quest for individual autonomy – what we called ‘the private’. Failure to draw the distinction between the public and the private will lead, on the one hand, to the sort of reading that Carnap gives of Heidegger, and Habermas gives of Derrida, and, on the other hand, to the reading that Gasché gives of Derrida and – perhaps – that Derrida gives of Austin.

Rorty concludes ‘Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher’ with the rhetorical question: should one read Derrida with Gasché as a transcendental latter-day Hegel, or with Rorty as a kind of French Wittgenstein? (Rorty 1991b, p. 128) Rorty adds that the response to this question is not straightforward because ‘Derrida makes noises of both sorts’ (Rorty 1989, p. 128). However, in order to persuade the reader to choose Rorty’s interpretation over Gasché’s, he offers what one might call a developmental thesis based on a distinction between

Derrida's earlier and later work. Rorty divides Derrida's work into an earlier, professional and scholarly period and a latter eccentric, personal, original period. Derrida's early work, especially *De la grammatologie* is, for Rorty (and I think he is right) continuous with Heidegger's problematic of the overcoming of metaphysics and attempts to locate the conditions of possibility and impossibility for logocentrism in certain infrastructures, like 'trace' and 'différance'. Thus, in his early work, Derrida is indeed depolying forms of (quasi)-transcendental argumentation and therefore Gasche's reading is valid for Derrida's early work (which also entails that Derrida himself was subject to the misunderstanding about the meaning of argumentation that Rorty raised against Gasche above). However, if Derrida's early work is engaged in a form of what Rorty calls 'ironist theorizing', then the crucial moment in Derrida's development occurs, for Rorty, in the move from grandiose theory to more minimal and private forms of writing.

This developmental thesis is intimated in the title of Rorty's discussion of Derrida in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*: 'From Ironist Theorizing to Private Allusions' (Rorty points out that he had originally wanted to entitle the discussion 'From Ironist Theorizing to Private Jokes' – Rorty 1991b, p. 120). For Rorty, the texts that best show this move from theory to privacy are *Glas* and, especially, *La carte postale*; neither of which are discussed by Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror*. Thus, for Rorty, Derrida's early theoretical work is a 'false start' in the same way, he claims, that *Sein und Zeit* is a false start in the development of Heidegger's work and the *Tractatus* was a false start for Wittgenstein. Rorty argues for 'the superiority of later to earlier Derrida' (Rorty 1991b, p. 124), and claims that this superiority lies in the move away from quasi-transcendental forms of theorizing and towards new forms of writing, that give expression to privacy, fantasy and humour. The later Derrida privatizes his philosophical thinking, drops theory and gives free rein to fantasy. In an intriguing formulation, Rorty writes, that Derrida, 'privatizes the sublime, having learnt from the fate of his predecessors (i.e. Heidegger, s.c.) that the public can never be more than beautiful' (1989, p. 125). Thus, on this view, in a text like *La carte postale*, Derrida does not resemble Heidegger so much as Proust, insofar as he is concerned less with the sublime ineffability of the word and more with the proliferation of beauty and the rearrangement of his memories. For Rorty, Derrida, 'has done for the history of philosophy what Proust did for his life story': he has achieved autonomy through art. The consequence of this developmental thesis is that Derrida's work has no ethical, political or public significance insofar as it has given up on the attempt to reconcile theoretically the public and the private. It is this claim that I want to challenge.

### Is Rorty's Reading of Derrida Justified?

I want to direct two questions to Rorty's reading of Derrida, first as to the validity of the developmental thesis, and second as to whether deconstruction

can be said to have no public utility. Let me say, however, that I think Rorty's reading of Derrida, especially his interpretation of *La carte postale* in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, is an extremely strong reading that brings an honesty, humour and lightness of touch that are all too infrequent in discussions of Derrida, and which also offers a plausible approach to Derrida's more 'autobiographical' texts, like the recent *Circonfession*.<sup>19</sup> Also, and this is where I would part company with Gasché, I do not want to be drawn into a transcendental defence of Derrida against Rorty's pragmatized deconstruction. I think this strategy is too 'reactive' (in Nietzsche's sense), where a transcendental-philosophical defence of Derrida is itself a reaction to either a 'literary' assimilation of deconstruction (in the work of Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man and the Yale School) or to a Critical Theory inspired critique of Derrida (in the work of Habermas or Manfred Frank). Also, it sets up an unhelpful opposition between the transcendental and the pragmatic, where philosophy becomes identified solely with the former against the latter.

As we saw above, much of the force of Rorty's understanding of deconstruction turns on his developmental account of Derrida's work. The question here is whether Derrida's early work is a false start and to what extent Rorty is justified in classifying Derrida's work into early and late periods, particularly when the difference between early and late is only the matter of a few years or so and when Derrida is, to say the least, still going strong.<sup>20</sup> Can one really, with any plausibility, speak of a 'Derrida I' and a 'Derrida II', in the same way as William Richardson interpreted Heidegger (a distinction that Heidegger himself sought to complicate<sup>21</sup>)? On the contrary, I would claim that the difference between a text like *La voix et le phénomène* and a text like *Glas* does not consist in any move from the public to the private, but rather suggests a change in the mode of presentation of Derrida's work, from a constative form of theorizing to a performative mode of writing, or, in other terms, from meta-language to language.<sup>22</sup> Unlike some (but by no means all) of Derrida's work from the 1960's, for example the opening chapters of *De la grammatologie*, much of his work in the 1970's is concerned less with formulating a theoretico-historico-interpretative grid (a 'science' of grammatology) and more with deconstruction(s) as a form of textual enactment, an event or series of events. Thus, the development of Derrida's work, if there is one,<sup>23</sup> would not be found in any move from the public to the private, but from metalanguage to language, from constative to performative utterance, allowing the performative constantly to overflow the constative.<sup>24</sup>

And yet, writing now, nearly twenty years after the publication of *Glas* and thirteen years after the publication of *La carte postale*, there is also a large issue as to how one is to understand Derrida's more recent work, where the performative experiments of the 1970's have not been continued at such length (there are some examples, see Derrida [1987]) and where Derrida's work has, in my view, become dominated by the overwhelmingly public issue of responsibility, whether ethical, political, sexual, textual, legal or institutional. In order to address these issues, I would suggest – contentiously – that Derrida's style has

become neither theoretical nor performative, but *quasi-phenomenological*. By this I mean that much of Derrida's recent work – his analyses of mourning, of the promise and the secret, of eating and sacrifice, of friendship and confession, of the gift and testimony – is concerned with the careful description and analysis of particular phenomena, in order to elucidate their deeply aporetic or undecidable structures. My contention here is that Derrida's work is moving towards a practice of deconstruction as a series of quasi-phenomenological micrologies that are concerned with the particular *qua* particular, that is to say, with the grain and enigmatic detail of everyday life.

This leads me to my second and more far reaching question to Rorty's reading of Derrida, which arises as a consequence of his developmental thesis: namely, is it justified to claim that deconstruction has (or should have) no public significance, and can therefore have no ethical or political utility? In *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*,<sup>25</sup> I argued that Derridian deconstruction can and indeed should be understood as an ethical demand, provided one understands ethics in the particular and novel sense given to that word in the work of Emmanuel Levinas. Crudely stated, ethics for Levinas is defined as the calling into question of my freedom and spontaneity, that is to say, my subjectivity, by the other person (*autrui*). Ethics is here conceived, in the wake of Buber's I-thou relation (although Levinas is ultimately critical of Buber), in terms of an ethical *relation* between persons. What distinguishes an ethical relation from other relations (to oneself or to objects) is, Levinas claims, that it is a relation with that which cannot be comprehended or subsumed under the categories of the understanding. In Stanley Cavell's terms, it is the very unknowability of the other, the irrefutability of scepticism, that initiates a relation to the other based on acknowledgement and respect.<sup>26</sup> The other person stands in a relation to me that exceeds my cognitive powers, placing me in question and calling me to justify myself. Levinas's philosophical ambition is to subordinate claims to knowledge to claims to justice, or, in Kantian terms, to establish the primacy of practical reason (although, for Levinas, the ethical is the pre-rational foundation of the rational rather than the exemplification of reason). As Levinas is often given to write, *ethics is first philosophy*.

Although severely critical of Heidegger's philosophy after *Sein und Zeit* and his political myopia, Levinas shares his early critique of the theoreticism or intellectualism of Husserlian intentionality, where, it is claimed, the subject maintains an objectifying relation to the world mediated through representation: the worldly object is the *noema* of a *noesis*. Levinas follows Heidegger's ontological undermining of the theoretical comportment towards the world (*Vorhandenheit*) and of the subject/object distinction that supports epistemology, by tracing intentionality back to a more fundamental stratum, namely, sentience or sensibility. Simply stated, Levinas shows how intentional consciousness is conditioned by *life*, by the material conditions of existence. His work offers, I believe, a *material phenomenology of subjective life*, where the conscious subject of representation and intentionality is reduced to the sentient subject of sensibility. Levinas' phenomenological claim – and by 'phenomenology' Levinas means a

methodological adherence to the spirit rather than the letter of Husserlian intentional analysis, that is to say, the description of the constitutive structures of naïve conscious life – is that the deep structure of subjective experience is always already engaged in a relation of responsibility or, better, responsivity to the other. The ethical relation takes place at the level of sensibility, not at the level of consciousness, and thus, in a way that recalls both Bentham's and Rousseau's criteria for ethical obligation mentioned above, it is in my pre-reflective sentient disposition towards the other's suffering that a basis for ethics and responsibility can be found.<sup>27</sup>

What is the relation of this Levinasian account of ethics to the debate between Derrida and Rorty? First, with regard to Rorty, although he would doubtless criticize Levinas' claim that ethics is first philosophy as a Neo-Kantian philosophical foundationalism, and although Levinas' qualified endorsement of Husserlian phenomenological method would sit rather uneasily with Rorty's pragmatism, there is room to ask how far apart Rorty and Levinas really are from each other. Are not Rorty's definition of liberalism and Levinas' definition of ethics essentially doing the same work, that is, attempting to locate a source for moral and political obligation in a sentient disposition towards the other's suffering? Do they both not agree that cruelty is the worst thing that there is, and that, furthermore, this is the only social bond that we need?

Second, with regard to Derrida, I would like to make good a *rapprochement* between Levinas and Derrida by looking at one recent example from Derrida's work. My argument here can be more formally stated along the following lines: First, let us recall that Rorty defines the private as being concerned with 'idiosyncratic projects of self-overcoming', whereas the public is defined as 'having to do with the suffering of other human beings'. If I can make good the claim that deconstruction is ethical in the peculiarly Levinasian sense identified above, then deconstruction would be concerned with the suffering of other human beings and would therefore qualify as public by Rorty's own criteria. Deconstruction could then have significant ethical and political consequences. If Rorty is a liberal, then, I would claim, Levinas and Derrida are also liberals – which perhaps begs the question as to the adequacy of Rorty's definition of liberalism.

The example I have in mind is the first half of Derrida's remarkable text on the question of justice, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"'.<sup>28</sup> Derrida makes some remarkably provocative statements in this text. He writes, 'Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice' (p. 14–15). Derrida's discussion proceeds from the distinction between law, which is deconstructable, and which, it is claimed, *must* be deconstructable if political progress is to be possible, and justice, which is not deconstructable, but is that in virtue of which deconstruction takes place. In a quasi-transcendental register, Derrida claims that justice is the undeconstructable condition of possibility for deconstruction, that 'nothing is more just than what I today call deconstruction' (p. 21). On the basis of references to Montaigne and

Pascal (and even a rare allusion to Wittgenstein – p. 14), Derrida paradoxically defines justice as an experience of that which we are not able to experience, which is qualified as ‘the mystical’, ‘the impossible’ or ‘aporia’. In Derrida’s more habitual vocabulary, justice is an ‘experience’ of the undecidable. However, and this is crucial, such an undecidable experience of justice does not arise in some intellectual intuition or theoretical deduction, rather it always arises in relation to a particular entity, to the singularity of the other (p. 20). It is at this point (or, to be precise, at two points: p. 22 & p. 27) in the discussion that Derrida cites Levinas and employs the latter’s conception of justice to illuminate his own account. In *Totality and Infinity*,<sup>29</sup> justice defines and is defined by the ethical relation to the Other, ‘la relation avec autrui – c’est à dire la justice (p. 22); that is to say, justice arises in the particular and non-subsumptive relation to the Other, as a response to suffering that demands an infinite responsibility. Thus it can be seen that when Derrida is provoked into offering an illustration of the public significance of deconstruction by showing how it presupposes a conception of justice, he draws heavily from Levinas.

This allusion to Levinas seems unproblematic until one realizes that there are *two* conceptions of justice in Levinas. As Levinas points out in the 1987 Preface to the German translation of *Totalité et infini*, justice functions as a synonym for the ethical in the latter work, in just the way discussed by Derrida.<sup>30</sup> However, in Levinas’s later work, particularly *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*,<sup>31</sup> justice is distinguished from the ethical relation, where Levinas argues that the question of justice arises when a third party arrives on the scene, obliging one to choose between competing ethical claims and reminding one that the ethical relation is always already situated in a specific socio-political context.<sup>32</sup> The fact that Derrida adopts an *ethical* and not a *political* concept of justice from Levinas does not mean, however, that the deconstructive account of justice is a-political. Derrida claims that it is linked to what he calls ‘*politicization*’ (p. 28), and as examples of this process he cites the Declarations of the Rights of Man and the abolition of slavery, that is to say, the emancipatory gains of classical liberalism. In a staggeringly blunt statement, Derrida writes, ‘Nothing seems to me less outdated than the classical emancipatory ideal’ (although we might want to ask: is Derrida’s commitment to this emancipatory ideal necessarily a commitment to liberalism, or might it not entail a more radical version of this ideal that one can find, for example, in the socialist tradition?). Thus, the ethical conception of justice that drives the deconstructive enterprise and which is defined in terms of responsibility to the other would (Derrida, characteristically, adds ‘perhaps’ – p. 27) seem to be essentially connected to the possibility of political reformation, transformation and progress, opening up a future of political possibilities.

To summarize, Derrida’s claim here is that deconstruction is justice and justice is an ‘experience’ of the undecidable; that is to say, according to my interpretation, to be just is to recognize one’s infinite responsibility before the singular other as something over which one cannot ultimately decide, as something that exceeds my cognitive powers. It is this ‘experience’ of justice that propels one forward into politics, that is to say, from undecidability to the

decision, to what Derrida calls, following Kierkegaard, the madness of the decision (p. 26).<sup>33</sup> Politics is the realm of the decision, of the organization and administration of the public realm, of the institution of law and policy. As I see it, the central aporia of deconstruction – an aporia that must not be avoided if any responsible political activity is to be undertaken – concerns the nature of this passage from undecidability to the decision, from the ethical ‘experience’ of justice to political action, to what we might call the moment of judgement. But how does this deconstructive, ethical conception of justice translate into political judgement? Derrida insists that judgements have to be made and decisions have to be taken, provided it is understood that to be responsible they must pass through an experience of the undecidable. But my question to Derrida would be: *what* decisions are taken, *which* judgements are made?<sup>34</sup>

For Derrida, no political form can or should attempt to embody justice, and the undecidability of justice must always lie outside the public realm, guiding, criticizing and deconstructing that realm, but never being instantiated within it. From a deconstructive perspective, the greatest danger in politics is the threat of totalitarianism, or what Jean-Luc Nancy calls ‘immanentism’,<sup>35</sup> in all of its most recent and terrifying disguises: neo-fascism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, theocracy. Totalitarianism is premised upon the identification of the political and the social and would claim that a particular political form and hence a particular state, community or territory embodies justice, that justice is immanent to the body politic. A deconstructive approach to politics, based upon the radical separation of justice from law, and the non-instantiability of the former within the latter, leads to what one might call the dis-embodiment of justice, where no state, community or territory could be said to embody justice. One might say that the ‘experience’ of justice is that of an absolute alterity or transcendence that guides politics without being fully present in the public realm. If we look back to Derrida’s first published work on Husserl, we might say that justice is an ‘Idea in the Kantian sense’, an infinitely deferred ethico-teleological postulate that continually escapes the horizon of presence and the very idea of a horizon.<sup>36</sup>

If it is now asked what political form best maintains this dis-embodiment of justice, then I take it that Derrida’s response would be *democracy*: not a democracy that claims to instantiate justice here and now, not an apologetics for actually existing liberal democracy (but neither a dismissal of the latter), but a democracy guided by the *futural* or *projective* transcendence of justice – what Derrida calls *une démocratie à venir*.<sup>37</sup> To my mind, this would seem to commit Derrida to a utopian and critical politics that does not differ substantially from the Deweyan tradition that seeks to link pragmatism to radical democracy – the very political tradition in whose lineage Rorty claims to stand. However, if my argument is not entirely aberrant, if Rorty and Derrida share similar public and political aspirations (even though they are quite differently articulated), then why is Rorty unable to see in Derrida a powerful political ally?

## Conclusion

I hope to have shown that Derrida both conceives of himself as a public thinker, whose work has serious ethical commitments and political consequences, and that he can only be so understood on the basis of Rorty's own criteria for distinguishing the public from the private and liberalism from irony. The undeconstructable condition of possibility for deconstruction is a commitment to justice, defined in terms of an ethical relation to the other, a response to suffering that provokes an infinite responsibility and the attempt to minimize cruelty. Such an ethical conception of justice can never be fully instantiated in the public realm, nor can it be divorced from the latter, rather justice regulates public space, making politics critical, utopian and radically democratic.

In terms of the theme of this paper, deconstruction and pragmatism, it has hopefully been established that Rorty's picture of Derrida as only a private ironist falls rather short of the truth. Although, as I admitted at the outset, it might be valid to interpret concepts like '*différance*' in terms of a pragmatist notion of context, thereby showing the contingency of language, self and world, it is by now hopefully clear that what motivates the practice of deconstruction is an ethical conception of justice that is, by Rorty's criteria, public and liberal. Thus, deconstruction is pragmatist, *but it is not pragmatist all the way down*. At the basis of deconstruction is a non-pragmatist (or at least non-Rortian) foundational commitment to justice as something that cannot be relativized, or at least cannot be relativized for 'we liberals'. Of course, the consequence of my conclusion is that Derrida is still seeking to fulfil the classical philosophical project of reconciling the public and the private, believed by Rorty to be redundant. If deconstruction is justice, then this commitment to justice *goes all the way down*: in private self-creation as well as public responsibility.

However, the intriguing counter-balancing question that this paper has thrown up is whether Rorty's pragmatism is in fact pragmatist *all the way down*; or whether its commitment to liberalism – in terms of a non-relativizable claim about the susceptibility of human beings to suffering and the need to minimise cruelty – transgresses the limits of Rorty's pragmatism. Can pragmatism maintain a genuine and non-cynical commitment to liberalism and still remain pragmatist *all the way down*?

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This paper was initially prepared for a round table discussion on the topic of 'Deconstruction and Pragmatism', held at the Collège International de Philosophie, Paris, May 29th 1993. The session was organised by Chantal Mouffe and the other participants

were Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau and Richard Rorty, all of whom I would like to thank for the generosity of their comments. A full transcription of the proceedings of the discussion will subsequently appear in French and English.

<sup>2</sup> Might not Derrida also ironize about Rorty's conception of the history of philosophy, what Rorty calls 'the Plato-Kant succession': a vision of the history of philosophy that is just as totalizing, unilateral and univocal as Heidegger's, and which reads irony out of the pre-Kantian tradition (but what about Socrates? And can we always take Descartes at his word?) From what vantage point does Rorty view history? If history is a series of successive metaphors and displaced final vocabularies, a history whose metaphoricity is now grasped fully for the first time, then it must be asked, from where and from what final vocabulary do we view that history? Is Rorty's not a God's eye-view on the impossibility of any God's eye-view?

<sup>3</sup> With regard to Rorty's earlier work, particularly *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, let me venture a couple of professions of mixed faith: firstly, I agree with Rorty's critique of the mind as the mirror of nature and hence with his critique of representationalism, epistemology and hence philosophy itself, if the latter is conceived in narrowly epistemological terms. My only caveat here is that I would arrive at the same conclusion as Rorty through Heidegger's critique of epistemology and Neo-Kantianism in *Sein und Zeit*. In my view, however, this would still leave open the possibility of a form of philosophizing, exemplified in the phenomenology of the early Heidegger, the later Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, that would be critical of the slide in Rorty's work from the critique of epistemology into naturalism (on this point, see Bernstein [1992]). Secondly, I am very sympathetic to Rorty's attempted de-divinization of the world, where a Davidsonian account of language, a Nietzschean/Freudian account of the self and culture, and a Darwinian account of nature all conspire to produce a relation to the world conceived as a web or tissue of contingencies. Yet, it seems to me that the outcome of the recognition of contingency might not be a move towards naturalism, but rather towards *romanticism*, namely the romantic victory of poetry over philosophy announced in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Rorty 1989, p. 40), where the triumph of metaphor and self-creation over literalness and discovery leads to a romantic demand for a poeticization of the world, a re-enchantment of the world as a web of contingencies.

<sup>4</sup> See Macpherson (1966), esp. pp. 1–11.

<sup>5</sup> Putnam (1992), p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> Ball, T. et al (1990), pp. 118–20.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 104–8.

<sup>8</sup> See, Virilio (1991) & Shapiro (1993).

<sup>9</sup> For a related line of criticism, with reference to Rorty's conception of autonomy, see Caputo (1993), esp. pp. 165–66.

<sup>10</sup> This view is argued for in Brandom (1979). In this connection, see Rorty's discussion of Brandom in 'Representation, Social Practise and Truth' in Rorty (1991a), pp. 151–61.

<sup>11</sup> Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inegalite parmi les hommes* (Garnier, Paris, 1962, p. 37).

<sup>12</sup> Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, eds. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (Athlone, London, 1970), p. 283.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Violence et métaphysique', in Derrida (1967), p. 224.

<sup>14</sup> A similar line of argument is proposed with respect to Rorty in Wolf (1993), see esp. p. 63–64.

<sup>15</sup> Rorty repeatedly cites sentences from the closing paragraphs of Derrida's 1968 paper

'La différence' (in Derrida 1972a, pp. 28–29), where he claims that there is no unique name or name for Being, and that this must be thought without Heideggerian nostalgia or hope (See Rorty 1982, p. 103; 1989, p. 122; & 1991b, p. 95).

<sup>16</sup> See Gasché (1986).

<sup>17</sup> See Tugendhat (1979). For example, Tugendhat writes, '... alles intentionale Bewusstsein überhaupt ist propositional.' (p. 20)

<sup>18</sup> For Gasché's critique of Tugendhat's position, where he argues that to restrict oneself to propositional truth is to deprive oneself of the possibility of thinking the foundations of the propositional, see Gasché (1986) p. 76–77.

<sup>19</sup> In Bennington & Derrida (1991).

<sup>20</sup> It would not be difficult, on the basis of textual evidence, to make the distinction between earlier and later Derrida begin to look absurd. For example, I take it that most of the essays from *Marges* (1972) would be judged by Rorty to belong to the style of the early Derrida, whilst portions of *Dissemination* (also, 1972) and *Glas* (only two years later in 1974) would be classified as later Derrida.

<sup>21</sup> See Heidegger's *Vorwort* to Richardson's (1963), p. xxii–xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> I owe this thought to conversations with Gasché.

<sup>23</sup> This development would have to be plotted in some detail – and in my experience of reading Derrida, the closer one looks the harder it is to find any substantial difference between earlier and later work; I am always astonished by the extraordinary thematic continuity of Derrida's work and the persistence of his central concerns.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, this transition from metalanguage to language may well prove to be impossible; but, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Critchley [1988]), it is this very impossibility that is being explored in *Glas*. In this connection, see Geoffrey Bennington's extremely insightful discussion in Bennington & Derrida (1991).

<sup>25</sup> See Critchley (1992), Ch. 1, pp. 1–58.

<sup>26</sup> See 'Scepticism and the Problem of Others' in Cavell (1979), pp. 327–496.

<sup>27</sup> See Levinas (1984).

<sup>28</sup> See Derrida (1992), pp. 3–67. All subsequent page references in the text are to this publication, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>29</sup> Levinas (1990).

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. II.

<sup>31</sup> Levinas (1974)

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 199–207.

<sup>33</sup> A quote which also provided the epigraph to Derrida's celebrated essay on Foucault, see Derrida (1967), p. 51.

<sup>34</sup> Such a question opens the large and difficult issue of specifying the precise relation between undecidability and the decision, justice and judgement, and ethics and politics in Derrida's work; which is, to say the least, a problem of which he is acutely aware, and which might be said to dominate much of his recent work. In this connection, see Critchley (1992), pp. 188–247; & see also Laclau & Mouffe (1985) & Laclau (1990), where the problem of the relation of deconstruction and politics is theorized in terms of an expanded concept of hegemony.

<sup>35</sup> See Nancy (1990).

<sup>36</sup> See Derrida (1962).

<sup>37</sup> See Derrida (1991).

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