Moral Progress in Linguistic Pragmatism

On the Rortyan advocacy for greater human solidarity

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ABSTRACT

This work aims to contribute to the contemporary academic debate around the notion of *moral progress* by drawing on the *linguistic pragmatist* account of *Richard Rorty*.

While grounding his views in a generally anti-essentialist, antirealist and antirepresentationalist Deweyan-inspired stance, Rorty is famously sceptical about moral objectivity; simultaneously, he advocates an optimistic perspective about the possibility of moral progress, which he links to an *expansion of human solidarity*. This study intends to shed light on how these two seemingly contrasting positions may be conceptualized and combined. At the same time, it aims to defend a *cautiously optimistic account* emphasizing the significance of a robust notion of moral progress for morally desirable human action and interaction.

The research begins with an analysis of the very idea of moral progress within the Rortyan account by aligning it with a broader pragmatist-leaning picture and suggesting a framework of how to comprehend it. Following Rorty's proposal, it will particularly focus on the role *language* plays, both as a limiting condition and a "tool" in moral change for the better. This angle – the research suggests – is particularly cogent for conceptualizing moral progress in the current context. The study concludes that the Rortyan idea of moral progress can be defended, assuming it is pragmatically conceptualized as an achievable human *potential*. It further concludes that expanding human solidarity is a compelling notion to ground a pragmatist defence of the idea of moral progress, granted that – differently to what Rorty seems to suggest – it takes the notion of the *human* seriously.

Key words: moral progress, solidarity, language, pragmatism, linguistic pragmatism, Richard Rorty, antirealism, anti-essentialism, ethics, conversation, expanding, expansion, hope, change, inclusion, human.

RESUM

Aquest estudi es proposa interrogar-se sobre la noció de *progrés moral* en el marc del *pragmatisme lingüístic* de *Richard Rorty* per tal de contribuir en el debat acadèmic actual a l'entorn d'aquest concepte.

Al temps que recolza les seves aportacions en una perspectiva generalment anti-essencialista, antirealista i antirepresentacional inspirada per Dewey, Rorty és cèlebre pel sever escepticisme sobre l'objectivitat moral. Això no obstant, es mostra optimista quant a la possibilitat del progrés moral, que vincula a una *expansió de la solidaritat humana*. L'estudi prova d'il·lustrar de quina manera aquestes posicions aparentment confrontades es poden conceptualitzar i combinar. Alhora, espera poder defensar una *perspectiva cautelosament optimista* que emfasitzi la rellevància d'una noció robusta de progrés moral per a l'acció i la interacció humanes moralment desitjables.

La recerca comença amb una anàlisi de la pròpia idea de progrés moral dintre la perspectiva rortyana, bo i arrenglerant-la amb una imatge més àmplia de caire pragmatista, per tal de suggerir un marc idoni per comprendre-la. D'acord amb la proposta global de Rorty, l'estudi es concentra particularment en el paper del *llenguatge*, entès com a condició limitant i com a "eina", en el canvi moral adreçat a la millora. Aquest prisma, tal com apunta la investigació, és especialment adient per conceptualitzar el progrés moral en l'actualitat i en la nostra era. L'estudi conclou que es pot defensar la idea rortyana de progrés moral si es conceptualitza de manera pragmàtica com un *potencial* humà assolible. Més enllà, conclou que la solidaritat humana en expansió és una noció convincent sobre la qual recolzar una defensa pragmatista de la idea de progrés moral, sempre que plantegi seriosament la noció d'*humà* —a diferència d'allò que Rorty sembla suggerir.

Paraules clau: progrés moral, solidaritat, llenguatge, pragmatisme, pragmatisme lingüístic, Richard Rorty, antirealisme, anti-essencialisme, ètica, conversa, expansió, esperança, canvi, inclusió, humà.

INTRODUCTION

> "I was taught that the way of progress is neither swift nor easy." (Marie Curie)

General context and main objectives

We live in an era where war has just reached Europe once again, and the nuclear threat, steered by some of the world's most powerful nations, has become critical. We have regularly received news from Iran about people being executed as a response to their chanting for freedom. The Afghan people have again been extradited to the Taliban, and particularly minority groups have repeatedly been victims of persecution and killings. Numerous wars are going on throughout the world – which are not often talked about within the international community – continuing to produce mass movements of refugees in search of safety; masses of displaced human beings, who generally are not very welcome in the wealthier nations around the globe. According to a recent Oxfam report,[1] since 2020, 1% of the people worldwide own almost twice as much as the rest. From the USA, we hear about trends anticipating the withdrawal of some of the civic rights historically disadvantaged groups such as women and the LGBTQIA+ community have gained throughout the last decades. Despite alarming reports emerging from the scientific community, it seems as though humans are not capable of cooperating efficiently enough in order to work against a climate catastrophe that is suspected to affect some sooner and more extensively than others. And, within the new public digital sphere – throughout social media and commentary sections – we largely witness recurring hate speech and stirred aggression towards people and groups different to oneself and one's own.

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[1] https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-bag-nearly-twice-much-wealth-rest-world-put-together-over-past-two-years.

How can it be justified to defend the idea of moral progress in times like these? Is it even appropriate to have a concept of moral progress at all?

While some thinkers like J. Gray argue that the whole idea of progress should be debunked, as he claims that it is not much more than a self-indulging modern myth (cf. Gray 2013), others like M. Moody-Adams believe that the idea of moral progress is a necessary presumption, if we are to believe that continued moral action can have any morally constructive point (cf. Moody-Adams 2016). In very recent years, philosophical researchers, internationally, seem to have found a new interest in the concept of moral progress. A contemporary intercontinental academic dialogue, discussing and possibly defending the notion, has emerged (cf. e.g., Sauer, forthcoming; Sauer et al. 2021; Kitcher 2021; Jaeggi, 2021 & forthcoming; Smyth 2020; Fabiano 2020; Wilson 2019; Cojocaru 2019; Sodoma 2019; Hopster 2019; Kempt 2019, Klement 2019; Reder et al. 2019b; Hermann 2019 & 2017; Buchanan & Powell 2018 & 2016; Pleasants 2018; Marchetti 2016; Anderson 2014).

The assertion that "progress is neither swift nor easy", famously attributed to M. Curie, arguably refers to scientific progress, which, again arguably, implies the element of *human effort*. Scientific – just as technological and economic – progress is something that seems to be driven by human beings (actively) developing certain capacities and tools and/or changing conditions. Though at times involving inspiring ideals (e.g., universal knowledge or the now controversial ideal of eternal economic growth), these types of progress are often thought of as bottom-up processes, where human beings move forward one step at a time – by experimenting, inquiring and/or searching for solutions to problems.

Moral progress – the type of progress I will be exploring within this thesis –, by contrast, is often primarily understood as an approximation of moral beliefs and/or practices to a universal notion of moral truth, i.e., what is morally good or right. This is puzzling from the start if one was to admit that, even if there was a universal (or essential) moral truth, it is quite unlikely that one would ever have access to it – considering, e.g., cultural differences in the understanding of what morally good or bad is – or that one would even know, whether they were any closer to that moral truth (which would make the assessment of moral progress

impossible). On the other hand, different to other types of progress where the idea of human agency is arguably at the centre, diverse accounts about moral progress have explored the notion as a process alimented by changing conditions (and other progresses) throughout history and cultures.

In this work, my aim is to contribute to the ongoing academic debate by putting forward a *cautiously optimistic account* that intends to advocate *the importance of the very notion of moral progress* for social action and interaction. I aim to argue for the underlying view that, rather than being discouraged by timely conditions, we should fortify the notion of moral progress as a guiding principle towards possibly creating it. This involves the claim that, even if progress – i.e., here, *moral* progress – is *slow and difficult*, it is *possible* in principle, and the *effort to create it* must be constant.

In this regard, I will explore the notion of moral progress primarily as a *human resource* (or potential), apt to be implemented through *human action* embedded in social practice. My main preoccupation will thus be: *how* can there be moral progress? And implicitly, *what kind* of moral progress can there be?

In light of this focus, my inquiries will primarily reside within a framework of moral progress, which I understand as *pragmatist*-leaning. I understand pragmatism, with E. Anderson, as a mode of moral theorizing that does not offer any ultimate moral principle but rather inquires ways (i.e., methods and/or *mechanisms*) of improving our moral norms and principles (cf. Anderson 2014).

In this matter, I will specifically inquire into the work of *Richard Rorty* (1931-2007), who relies on what he understands as a primarily Deweyan pragmatism and is optimistic about moral progress while laying out a strong scepticism towards moral objectivity. As I will elaborate below, I will particularly look into his accounts of *language* as both a limiting condition and as a tool for moral progress, and into his linking moral progress to "greater *solidarity*".

Rorty's embracing of pragmatism is indeed mainly inspired by J. Dewey, whom Rorty calls his philosophical hero (e.g., *PSH*,[2] xii). This stance matures alongside the development of the *different phases* of Rorty's philosophical work, starting from (1) his educational background, in the 1940s and 1950s, in analytic philosophy, metaphysics and his approach to the philosophy of the mind; to (2) an appreciation of hermeneutics and continental philosophy, which takes him to extensively criticize the analytic tradition (including the correspondence theory of truth and neat dualist distinctions such as scheme/content, objective/subjective, made/found) culminating in his 1979 work *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (*PMN*); to (3) his latest phase that embraces an *ethical-political project*, starting from his 1989 opus *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (*CIS*), and culminating in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

His advocacy of Deweyianism becomes increasingly explicit, arguably starting from his mid-phase (in the 1970s). What seems to attract Rorty most, regarding Dewey's accounts, is the idea of cultural criticism and, ultimately, of philosophy as a possible instrument of social change, that should aim to provide moral leadership. In fact, Rorty's sceptical position (emerging during his mid-phase) towards philosophy as a discipline capable of giving us a "right method of seeking truth" (*PMN,* 211) increasingly develops into an eagerness to *change the ways* of doing philosophy. In *ORT*, he defines this aim as modulating philosophical debate from a methodologico-ontological key into an ethico-political key. By embracing Dewey, he becomes an increasingly more explicit advocate of pragmatism, claiming that pragmatists – including himself – hope to break with the picture that "holds us captive", i.e., the "Cartesian–Lockean picture of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside itself" (*PSH,* xxii).

Rorty understands his position (which becomes more explicit from his mid-phase on) as both antirepresentationalist and anti-essentialist – two stances that ground his work until his passing in 2007. Furthermore, particularly in his latest phase, he advocates an account of anti-authoritarianism. Rorty, in fact, throughout the years, subscribes to a series of philosophical labels further including "antirealism", "linguistic historicism", and "liberalism". His anti-essentialism, among other things, includes the assumption that no purposes in human practices are

[2] See the list of *Abbreviations* on p. 239.

more "essentially human" than others (concerning, e.g., the idea of finding the "Truth" as a main philosophical goal within moral inquiry). It further extends to Rorty's understanding of the (universal) notion of *human* (towards which he shows himself particularly sceptical) and his criticism of rigid classifications of human beings, e.g., into races. This, further, is linked to an account of naturalism, which, following B. T. Ramberg, Rorty associates with the term "pragmatic naturalism".

Particularly in regard to his account of ethics and morality, central to his mature phase (on which I shall focus in this thesis), his urge to overcome the need to ground justifications outside of social practices – i.e., in a supposed universal moral Objectivity or Truth – becomes crucial.

Besides numerous other labels (including – more or less justifiably – "postmodernist", "anti-foundationalist", "relativist", "constructivist", "anti-epistemic", "pluralist", "humanist", and others), Rorty has, arguably, most generally been associated with what, based on his very output, has been called "neo-pragmatism" or "*linguistic pragmatism*".

I understand linguistic pragmatism (or neo-pragmatism), considering the direct associations made with the Rortyan (mid and late) accounts, in fact, as a distinguished post-Deweyan pragmatism, that puts *language* at the centre and embraces anti-essentialist, antirealist, anti-authoritarianist and antirepresentationalist stances. Among its features lies a criticism towards *rigid distinctions* between perspectives (or methods) that put us in touch with reality and those that are merely therapeutic or what Rorty calls poetic – a view that flourishes, for instance, within what I will below introduce as the Rortyan notion of *conversation*; a notion central to this language-informed account, denoting Rorty's idea of how *moral inquiry* should be thought of, in his later writings.

The centrality of language, in fact, accompanies Rorty throughout his whole career, as it has informed both his early analytic studies and his critique of what he generally categorizes as the metaphysical tradition and his ethical-political focus.

Conceptualizing language, within linguistic pragmatism, implies understanding it as its own sphere, where one specific language (in the broadest possible sense) has no universal privilege over the other and

thus does not correspond *more* to reality – or *represent* reality *better* – than the other. Particularly in his mature phase, Rorty's *critique* of language as a medium of *representation* most strongly develops into an urge to understand (and take seriously) language as a medium of communication, as a tool for *social interaction* and, hence, as the instrument of *collective moral reasoning* and change. By embracing, amongst other things, the later Wittgenstein, Rorty pays close attention to how the *contingency* of every language determines idiosyncratic moral systems, beliefs, and practices, and how *modifications* of and within languages may contribute to changes in those beliefs and practices.

A key term within this account becomes the notion of *redescription*. In his early work, it first emerges as "redefinition", which denotes, according to C. Voparil, the way each system can and does create its own metaphysical criteria (cf. Voparil 2011, 138). While already emerging in *PMN*, "redescription" then becomes crucial for Rorty's ethico-political work, from *CIS* on, as a way to develop the self and society, by offering alternative views on what has been accepted as universal or essential by suggesting that there is nothing essentially inherent and that our relationship with reality depends based on the descriptions we have created for it. Redescriptions, in Rorty's ethico-political project hence become a key instrument for social change, culminating in what he calls *cultural politics*: the practice of suggesting changes in the uses of words and of putting new words into circulation, hoping thereby to break through impasses and to make conversation *more fruitful* (as a *moral inquiry*), by facilitating new reactions. It hence becomes a key instrument within the account of moral progress, as I will explore (particularly in chapters 2 and 3).

While the term "moral progress" comes up already once or twice in *PMN*, the notion becomes more central in *CIS*, where Rorty concludes in his final chapter that "[…] there is such a thing as moral progress [and it is] in the direction of greater human solidarity" (*CIS*, 192). Rorty then spends the rest of his years sustaining that there is indeed moral progress, advocating hopefulness about moral progress and finally stating (a year before his passing) that as agents, we cannot but believe in moral progress. He hence shows himself generally optimistic in regard to the idea of moral progress, despite his – often seemingly radical – scepticism towards (universal) moral objectivity. The issue here, of course (as insinuated above, and as I will explore further in my

work) is: how can anyone, who assumes that there is no moral objectivity claim that there is such a thing as moral progress?

Notwithstanding his clear stance on the idea, Rorty does not offer a comprehensive framework nor an explicit definition of how moral progress can be understood within his account. My aim in this work is hence, first and foremost, to reconstruct and thus offer a framework of how the notion of moral progress in Rorty may be conceptualized. I will start from his most explicit assumption that (1) there is moral progress and (2) that it is in the direction of greater human solidarity. Thus, I will look at both notions of moral progress and solidarity within a framework of linguistic pragmatism that takes language seriously as both a limiting condition for moral progress and as a possible tool to provoke or implement it.

My particular interest in Rorty, considering my aim to understand and possibly defend moral progress in pragmatist terms, grounds, in fact, in the importance given to the notions of language and linguistic practice. Drawing attention to language and to what it does to our moral development seems particularly reasonable today: the rapid progress of communication technologies has been provoking accelerated changes in our (public) communicative behaviour, which are further related to the globalization of the world and the resulting pluralistic communicative communities that develop new languages. Based on what I will explore, it is reasonable to assume that these new communicative practices are deeply interwoven with the contemporary context I outlined above. If we can reasonably assume, as I will argue, that languages impact how a subject both perceives and conceptualizes the world (including the moral realm), it is a key element within ethics and must therefore be embraced within the ongoing debate about moral progress.

My guiding research question(s) in this thesis will hence be: How can the Rortyan notion of moral progress be understood? And, is it cogent to justify moral progress based on the notion of expanding human solidarity?

Line of argument and contributions

To defend or justify the notion of moral progress presumes a series of underlying claims and assumptions about it, which I will explore in the first part of my work. First and foremost, (1) moral progress concerns society (or humanity as a whole) rather than the individual social actor. While the latter is part of that complex process and (both intentionally and unintentionally) contributes to it through their reasoning, action, and institution-building, moral progress is understood not as a favourable development within the individual but as an increasing *degree* of morally favourable change within society. In other words: more and more people adopt morally more desirable beliefs and practices as compared to before. (2) Moral progress must account for changes in both moral belief and practice rather than merely one or the other. I will link this assumption to the notion of moral progress "in a strict sense". (3) The notion of "moral" in this framework refers to (beliefs and/or) practices that possibly *affect others*. While primarily referring to the moral, following Rorty, I will (as I will discuss) consider the line between the moral and the ethical as fluid.

As anticipated, based on the inquiries into the Rortyan framework, I will propose a pragmatist-leaning notion of moral progress, primarily (but not exclusively) conceptualizing it as a *human potential* to be *implemented* through human action. This angle, as I will discuss, implies both the notions of human agency and of motivation and hence evokes a series of questions: how can it be implemented? How can we know that what one does can effectively contribute to moral progress? How do we, in fact, know what is morally desirable? And shall the possible implementation of moral progress be understood as a human responsibility or even duty?

I will suggest comprehending Rorty's take on moral progress as *pragmatic meliorism*, which – as I will discuss – implies the notions of human action, responsibility, and hope that things may be bettered. Based on the Rortyan framework and his advocated Deweyianism, I will lay out the notion of *progress itself* as a moral *telos*, considering that, according to Rorty, the telos of movement and flux is not solely mastery but also stimulation (*PSH*, 34). The latter, for Rorty, must ground, amongst other things, in agents asking: what kind of world could there be in the future? And what steps are useful to possibly approach that future?

Granted that the need for moral progress is constant, the effort for it must not merely be understood as a reaction to moral crises or previous regress (as I will discuss) but rather as a *constant* determination to make things morally better.

I will propose to conceptualize the idea of moral progress, in Rorty, in terms of what, after Singer, has been called an *expanding circle of moral concern* (and of, as I will emphasize, *moral status*). This framework – which grounds in Darwinian naturalism and finally implies human beings (both intentionally and unintentionally) contributing to any moral progress in the future – rather than being preoccupied with the essence or universal truth of and behind moral concepts, ask whom those concepts (e.g., justice, equality, solidarity) are extended to. In other words: to whom we grant moral status; about whom we are morally concerned (in regard to our choices and actions). Granted that the moral question is concerned with thoughts and practices that possibly affect others, the main preoccupation here implies the question of who those others are.

I will argue that Rorty implicitly elaborates his own version of the expanding circle, which one could call an *expanding circle of solidarity*. I will argue that this expansion, which indeed mainly focuses on human solidarity, is to be understood, first and foremost, as an *instance* of the expanding circle (and thus of moral progress), which does not exclude but rather accommodates further expansions of moral concern (towards non-human animals, all sorts of sentient beings and possibly even eco-systems), by always starting from where one currently finds themself.

I will then move to suggest that the notion of the expanding circle is not to be merely understood as an instance or end of moral progress (meaning that if the circle has been extended, moral progress has occurred) but, moreover, as a *mechanism* for moral progress, i.e., a possible motor for further instances of moral progress, including *a greater moral knowledge* (i.e., about, e.g., what is good, what is right, and what one ought to do, in light of how it may possibly affect others).

Starting from Rorty, I will explore the matter of moral knowledge – as much as moral objectivity – within a pragmatist, antirealist, and anti-essentialist framework. This means, rather than aiming at transcendent universal moral truth, to look *within* social – and, here, specifically linguistic – practices, to understand better the implications and

foundations of morality and possible ways of improvement. For Rorty, a possible way to achieve this is what he calls, indeed, *conversation* – a notion I will have a particular look at in the middle part of this work. In fact, in his view, the notion of moral inquiry is to be reduced to conversation.

In light of the expanding-circle framework, I will claim that this conversation must be as inclusive as possible and thought of as ever-expanding. Rorty, in fact, implies that in order to be morally fruitful, the conversation must be *inclusive*, *free*, and *open*. I will argue how the conversation must *further* be *epistemically* informed.

I have mentioned above how language is a central aspect throughout Rorty's philosophical output. In this work, I will presume that language is not the only way to create or provoke moral progress, yet that it may significantly influence it. This goes, in fact, beyond the notion of conversation, which implies all kinds of linguistic exchange, as a socially shared moral inquiry.

I will start from the presumption that numerous research in recent years has suggested reason to assume that a subject's perception and understanding of the world, including morality, is dependent on the language they speak, i.e., particularly, on the vocabulary they use to describe their surrounding, or by means of which it is described to them. Rorty contributes to this premise philosophically by inquiring about language within an, indeed, antirepresentationalist stance, i.e., an account that sustains that there is no one language that can accurately or objectively represent the world; no one language that offers a privileged viewpoint about "what is out there".

I will particularly discuss the significance of a specific language and vocabulary for a subject's *conceptual* or logical space on the one hand and their *perceptual* space on the other. I will hence explore the Rortyan claim that, while a person's language is limiting their moral outlook – their vocabulary is "as far as [they] can go" morally (cf. *CIS*, 73) – new vocabulary or creative use of language can potentially expand the perceptual and/or conceptual space for moral reasoning, deliberation, and conversation. I will hence concentrate on language as a mechanism and (necessary, yet not sufficient) condition of possible moral progress. This will thus involve the matter of responsibility – both on an individual and political-institutional level – not only to take the

significance of language within a moral context seriously but to make an effort to fruitfully develop linguistic practices in view of possible moral progress. Yet, what are the grounds for such an effort? How can we know in what direction to shape our linguistic practices? And, if language limits our conceptual space, how is it even possible to break out of those limits?

Based on Rorty's view on moral progress, which puts the concept of *solidarity* at the centre, I will explore the latter notion both in its regard to moral progress and the expanding-circle framework and as a possible ground for morally desirable language development. As stated above, I will specifically ask whether the notion of solidarity is compelling for comprehending and defending the notion of moral progress (within a pragmatist framework), and why specifically solidarity should be advocated in the effort to create moral progress.

In this regard, similar to my stance on the expanding circle, I will discuss why solidarity should be conceptualized not as a mere moral end but as a *mechanism* of moral progress; as an instance that may lead to other instances of moral progress.

It will be my particular effort to suggest – based on the claim that moral progress is a *moral goal in itself* – that the aim within the context of moral progress (as a human resource to be implemented) must be the *creation of conditions* favourable for further realization of moral progress. These conditions can thus be enhanced, not at last, by morally favourable linguistic action.

I will propose the notion of a *culture of solidarity* to suggest, as a primary aim, the realization – i.e., the constant revision and recreation – of conditions favourable for (the expansion of) solidarity. Helping create such a culture, I will argue, becomes a (constant) moral *responsibility* – both on the *individual* and *political-institutional* level – granted that the social and the political actor have the power to possibly contribute to a moral progress by doing so.

Methodology and structure of the thesis

In order to carry out my work, I will first approach the ongoing academic-philosophical debate about the concept of moral progress

from a mainly European perspective. I will subsequently work on a framework of how a pragmatist version of the notion of moral progress may be conceptualized in contemporary terms. I will then inquire into the extensive work by Rorty: though I will make some references to his earlier (mid-phase) work, including the prominent *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (*PMN*) and the collection of essays *Consequences of Pragmatism* (*CP*), I will mainly concentrate on his later output, starting from *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (*CIS*), as the notions of both moral progress and solidarity mature from there on. Besides *CIS*, which, in fact, serves as an important starting point for both notions, I will pay particular attention to *Truth and Progress* (*TP*), *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* (*PCP*), *Philosophy and Social Hope* (*PSH*), *An Ethics for today* (*EFT*), and his 2006-lecture, one year before his passing, about "Dewey and Posner on Pragmatism and Moral Progress" (Rory 2007b; Rorty 2006). I will hence analyse Rorty's output on the notion of moral progress and propose a framework for conceptualizing it. From there, following the pragmatist (and particularly Rortyan) spirit, I will position myself in the way of asking what is useful – i.e., what is cogent – within his position, for defending a pragmatic-melioristic cautiously optimistic account of moral progress, by particularly looking into the notion of solidarity and the underlying account of language that emerge from Rorty's output. While being sympathetic to the overall picture he puts forward, I will, at times, go beyond Rorty by pointing out a few conceptual shortcomings within his stance and suggesting ways to possibly overcome and/or "redescribe" them.

In *chapter 1*, I will introduce the notion of moral progress and explore the issues it presents for both conceptualizing and defending it. I will then make my proposal of how to understand moral progress within a pragmatist stance and synthetically outline the Rortyan take on it – including an introduction to his view on solidarity. I will subsequently introduce the notion of the expanding circle, departing from P. Singer and moving towards Rorty. This implies introducing the argument of why it is compelling to link an understanding of moral progress with the idea of the expanding circle. I will argue that it is cogent to understand the Rortyan take on moral progress as a version of the notion of the expanding circle (i.e., as what I will call an expanding circle of solidarity). Finally, I will investigate the mechanisms of moral change (and possible moral progress), including changing (moral and extra-moral) conditions and circumstances, and the importance of social actors (or in Rorty, "moral entrepreneurs") for moral progress. I will, moreover, introduce

the matter of linguistic mechanisms and the proposal of the expanding circle as a *mechanism*, other than an instance or end of moral progress.

In *chapter 2*, I will tackle the issue of language as a necessary (yet not sufficient) condition and as a mechanism – or even tool – for possible moral progress, assuming that moral belief and practices are – at least to some extent – dependent on linguistic practice and the particularities of specific languages. I will analyse and discuss the Rortyan stance, which he portrays as Wittgensteinian-Hegelian (cf. *PCP*, ix). This means looking, first, at his take on the contingency of language and the boundary it poses to morality and its development. I will then focus on his notion of language as a "tool", on the consequent possibilities to create and implement moral change, and on the moral and political implications that must be drawn from this approach. My take on the Rortyan stance will include a proposed retrieval of the notion of objectivity in regard to the view on moral progress; an introduction to the question concerning the grounds on which linguistic development (in light of moral progress) shall be pursued; and a specific focus on the Rortyan notion of *redescription*, as a primary tool to incite moral change and, possibly, progress. I will relate this latter view to a brief discussion of some instances of intentional (or motivated) redescriptions within the contemporary European social-political context and language politics.

I will dedicate *chapter 3* to the Rortyan notion of *conversation* and discuss (the extent of) its possible contribution to moral progress. This comprehends a proposal of a twofold notion of conversation, which implies, indeed (see above) an understanding of it as an (active, intentional and/or motivated) moral inquiry, i.e., a proposal of conversation as a condition and, further, a tool for the implementation of instances of moral progress. I will argue that in order to be justified as such, the conversation must fulfil the following conditions: it must be free and open, epistemic, and inclusive. While Rorty is explicit about the first condition and generally implies the third, he largely omits the second. In this chapter, I will, thus, first reconstruct and analyse the framework of conversation within the Rortyan account, i.e., its definitions, functions, and issues. I will then move on to discuss the three conditions I outlined, including their challenges both on a meta-ethical and a normative-practical level.

In *chapter 4*, I will elaborate more extensively on the conceptual foundations of the Rortyan understanding of moral progress and ask whether and how they are compelling for a contemporary (pragmatist) conceptualization of it. While maintaining the image of expanding solidarity as a ground for the Rortyan take, I will depart from a distinction drawn by P. Kitcher between pragmatic understandings of progress versus teleological ones. I will start by analysing the Rortyan account as corresponding to the first by exploring, amongst other things, what Rorty calls his underlying Darwinism and his opposition to Teleology. I will then move to argue, however, how the Rortyan take must moreover be considered teleological; how a teleological take is, in fact, necessary for the framework he puts forward; and how a teleological view on the idea of moral progress is compelling and useful, within a larger context that goes beyond Rorty. I will finally discuss Rorty's take on moral progress as (a social) *hope*. This includes a brief take on his account of "hope instead of knowledge" and the question of whether hope for moral progress both can and must be justified.

Finally, *in chapter 5*, I will deepen the notion of solidarity and explore the questions that surround it in regard to the idea of moral progress. I will first propose a framework for understanding solidarity in contemporary terms and within the work of Rorty. This implies both a particularistic and a universalistic account of the notion. I will discuss whether and how expanding solidarity can be understood not only as an end of moral progress but also as a mechanism. I will ask how solidarity can be created, by taking into consideration the account of language I laid out based on Rorty. I will argue how, contrarily to what Rorty often sustains, the (universal) notion of human (including the notions of human commonality and humanity) is cogent, not only for the framework Rorty advocates but also for a larger account that aims to contribute to an expanding solidarity among social actors, and to an expansion of moral concern in general.

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Pragmatism considers language as the ability to attain higher purposes.

There is such a thing as moral progress and [it] is indeed in the direction of greater human solidarity.

(Richard Rorty)

1. THE NOTION OF MORAL PROGRESS: A PRAGMATIST APPROACH

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the notion of *moral progress* has increasingly been attracting renewed philosophical attention. After traditional versions of the idea of moral progress have largely been viewed with scepticism, in academic literature, during the course of the 20th century (Buchanan & Powell 2018, 4-8), studies about the concept have been thriving since the beginning of the 21st century, based on new theories proposed around the turn of the millennium, which aimed to look at moral progress in a different way (cf. Sauer et al. 2021, 2).

Influential thinkers, such as, e.g., P. Singer, became increasingly more explicit about the concept (cf. Singer 1981/2011): while his 1981 work was called "The Expanding Circle. Ethics and Sociobiology", the revised 2011 version carries the title "The Expanding Circle. Ethics, Evolution and *Moral Progress* [m.e.]". A considerable number of contemporary theorists in normative ethics, meta-ethics, political philosophy, and others have driven their attention (either implicitly or explicitly) to the notion of moral progress in some of their most recent works (cf., e.g., Sauer, forthcoming, Albersmeier 2023, Songhorian et al. 2022; Kitcher 2021; Sauer et al. 2021; Wilson 2019; Hermann 2019; Buchanan & Powell 2018; Jaeggi 2022; Cojocaru 2019; Sodoma 2019; Hopster 2020; Smyth 2020; Pleasants 2018).

The inquiries generally evolve around (1) *understanding* or redefining the notion of moral progress in contemporary terms and/or (2) *defending* the notion, both as (i) a justifiable subject of study and (ii) as a real *possibility* or occurrence (i.e., as a historical *occurrence*, a *hope* for the future and/or a social *project*). A third, currently far less popular endeavour is that of continuing to disprove or argue against (moral) progress (cf. Gray 2013,

Posner 1998a, Lasch 1991) in light of evident problems the concept presents, such as an arguably missing unambiguous standard of what counts as morally *good* or *better*, and historical and timely evidence of moral *regress*.

The arguments concerning moral progress are based on a variety of philosophical – often opposed or conflicting – stances. A notable opposition within the debate about moral progress is the one between moral realists and moral antirealists (cf., e.g., Huemer 2016; Hopster 2020). Moral realists, when addressing the notion from their standpoint, quickly run into the problem of access and/or assessment of moral truth and objectivity. On the other side of the debate, antirealist stances divide, most notably, into non-cognitivist, subjectivist, relativist, and nihilist accounts. Non-cognitivist and subjectivist accounts imply a scepticism towards moral objectivity, which makes not only the assessment of moral progress complex but, moreover, the claim that there can be moral progress other than mere moral change. Relativist and moral nihilist stances, in addition, often end up denying the idea of moral progress altogether.

Another explicit opposition has been drawn between naturalist and non-naturalist accounts, where the former generally refers to Darwinian (or, more generally, evolutionary) stances, and the latter often meets a more general view of mind-independent moral realism (cf. Leffler, *forthcoming*). While naturalist accounts can also be realist in principle, it has been pointed out that, as evolution implies an adaption to contingent circumstances, it seems quite unlikely that it further comprehends a convergence towards moral truths in the realist sense (cf. Street 2006).

Naturalist accounts, then, are generally on the antirealist side of the moral progress debate. While they have generally found a compelling explanation for the emergence and development of morality in human history and evolution as a function for surviving as and within a society (cf. Kitcher 2011; Singer 1981/2011; Buchanan & Powell 2015), they must deal with at least two main issues concerning a possible defence of the idea of moral progress: (1) the possibility of a morality that goes beyond the advantages of one's kin and community (e.g. a more inclusive global justice, or, e.g., the extension of moral concern towards non-human animals); (2) again, the question concerning the possibility of a universal standard (based on which one could measure or assess

moral progress), in a world where contingent historical or geographical circumstances have lead morality to develop differently in different places or ages.

An account, which is – so I shall claim – on the antirealist and often naturalist side of the debate, yet aims to overcome the issues outlined above, is that of *pragmatism*: following in the footsteps of mainly Charles Sanders Peirce, William James or John Dewey (or combinations of their accounts), moral-progress-theorists who proclaim their views to be pragmatist, generally aim to defend the possibility of moral progress (cautiously) in terms that neither require a timeless, absolute or universal account of moral truth or objectivity nor reduce their (often naturalist) views to moral relativism or subjectivism. Moreover, in addition to redefining and defending moral progress, pragmatists often focus on how (potential) moral progress can be *implemented*.

In my work, I will cautiously argue that it is compelling – yet not unproblematic – to conceptualize and promote the idea of moral progress "pragmatically". I will specifically look at the proposals by the "Deweyan" pragmatist Richard Rorty. Rorty, I claim, subscribes to what I will outline as the *pragmatist* goals, despite often being labelled a relativist – a label against which I argue.

His account ascribes a decisive role to the matter of language. Language, I will argue, can be understood as both a limit for moral progress and a tool or mechanism to potentially articulate and implement it. I will argue that the possible impact of language on moral beliefs, practices and institutions must be taken seriously in the ongoing debate about moral progress.

In this chapter, I will have a closer look at the very notion of moral progress, including a brief address of its historical routes and academic approaches in the contemporary age. I will then elaborate on the pragmatist proposal, which, I will claim, amongst other things, aims to understand occurrences and instances of moral progress in order to comprehend better how to potentially *implement* it.

Subsequently, I will move to the defence of a specific *type* of moral progress, i.e., based on the idea of what P. Singer calls the "expanding circle". I will claim that Rorty belongs to the group of philosophers that "routinely portra[y] moral progress as an 'expanding circle' of moral

progress" (cf. Smyth 2020, 25), and I will introduce the features of his version of the expanding circle, in order to prepare for the discussions that follow in the next chapters. Finally, following the pragmatist spirit, I will discuss how instances of moral progress occur in order to understand better how it can be embraced.

1.2 An outline of the notion of moral progress

1.2.1 What is moral progress?

1.2.1.1 A brief look towards the notion of progress in history

The notion of moral progress is implied by and linked to a more general idea of (human) progress, which comprehends diverse forms of progress such as intellectual, social, scientific, technological, economic, and so on. The more general notion implies that humanity "has moved, is moving and will move[3] into a desirable direction" (cf. Bury 1920, 2). (Human) progress hence combines the notions of *change* and *improvement*, and it refers to society, societies, or humanity as a whole rather than the individual (cf. *PSH*, 79; Bury 1920).

The origins of this idea and the increasing confidence about it which followed are often traced back to the 18th-century-Europe and its prevailing optimism (cf. Meek Lange 2019; Wagner 2016, 10).[4] Among

[3] This hence refers, not only to a progress that took place in the past but to the idea – the "chief condition of the idea of progress" (Bury 1920, 4) – that it is destined to advance in the future.

[4] Though, e.g., John B. Bury, in his much referenced (e.g., Moody-Adams 1999; Meek Lange 2019) work (Bury 1920), reaches back to the Greeks in order to understand the historical development that precedes the first doctrines about human progress. He proposes a division into three stages to analyse the development of the idea of progress: (1) the history "up to the French Revolution"; (2) from the French Revolution to Darwinism; and (3) what followed Darwinism. While his account points to traces in Greek philosophy (e.g. Euripides) concerning the idea that the human race ascends from a more primitive to a more "civilized state", he suspects that there were no systematic accounts or doctrines of progress in the first stage, for (i) the Greeks had no far-back reaching documented history, a different (circular) idea about time

the Enlightenment thinkers, a prevalent notion for a conceptualization of human progress, was the idea of "'reason' common to all human beings"[5] (cf. Wagner 2016, 19). For thinkers like Voltaire, for instance, the assumption that all human beings are fundamentally rational beings gave reason to believe in the possibility of infinite progress in civilization.

Yet, as it has been argued, it was mainly the *extension* of rationalism *to the social domain* that ultimately made the idea of a comprehensive "general progress of [human beings]" possible (cf. Bury 1920, 128). This extension put advances in the scientific or intellectual fields at the service of the "needs of [human beings]" (*ivi*, 160), in order to ensure a "*happy* [m.e.] destiny to humanity" (*ivi*, 128).[6] It implied, among other things, a notion of *solidarity*, both among peoples (*ivi*, 44) and among the sciences (*ivi*, 164) or human disciplines and institutions (including economies, political arenas and social practices) in general.[7] It further associated the notion of *equality* more closely with the idea of progress; while formerly they were often understood as antagonistic concepts.[8]
Thinkers like Hume associated the notion of progress with both the notions of cause and of chance (cf., e.g., Hume 1996, 56-60), which pointed to the idea that, even if progress was (partially) dependent on conditions beyond human control (chance and external causes), progress could at least in part be provoked and enhanced through *human action*, and is at least in part dependent on the human will to develop into a certain direction, i.e. prefer some practices over others.

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and an idea of destiny (μοῖρα) as lying in the hand of their Gods; and (ii) the middle ages – at least before the expansions of Alexander the Great – were generally incompatible with some of the fundamental assumption required by the idea of progress. However, geographical expansions, new-born conceptions as the "common pool of civilization" (*ivi*, 24), the "idea of *solidarity* [m.e.] among peoples" (*ivi*, 44), and recognition of an "epistemic progress" (cf. also Wagner 2016, 32), i.e., of steady advances in the art and knowledges increasingly led to a more convinced and dominant idea of human progress throughout history.

[5] Though *sub-groups* of human beings, such as, e.g., women, continued to be viewed with scepticism when it came to their capacities of reason.

[6] Bury suggests further: "to the minds of most people [the desirable outcome of human development would be [a] condition of society in which all the inhabitants of the planet would enjoy a perfectly happy existence" (Bury 1920, 2).

[7] Rorty, at one point, considers moral progress a chief notion, as he states specifically that intellectual progress is a mere subdivision of moral progress, i.e., "progress in finding beliefs which are better and better tools for accomplishing our communal project" (*RC*, 63).

[8] The advance of knowledge and the increase of man's power over nature had virtually profited only a minority (cf. Bury 1920, 182).

Alongside the developments in the English-speaking realms (with, e.g., Hume) and in France (following the spirit of the French Revolution), the idea of progress played an important role in Classic German Philosophy, e.g., in Hegel, where the (human) spirit tends or progresses (*bildet sich*) towards (absolute) knowledge and freedom.[9]

The notion then took a significant turn with the emergence of Darwinism (cf., e.g., Dewey 1910; Bury 1920), which questioned the dogmas and the superiority of the fixed and final, which has reigned philosophy for thousands of years (cf. Dewey 1910, 1-13). This, according to Dewey, implied a transfer of interest from the permanent to the changing:[10] rather than investigating the goals towards which progress tends, it became more interesting (for some) to understand the changes themselves.[11]

Subsequently, during the 20th century, the idea of human progress – particularly concerning the social, ethical, or moral domain[12] – was largely abandoned or debunked, at least in the academic discourse (cf. Buchanan & Powell 2018). It is generally believed that this scepticism or disinterest came about with (1) above all the devastating horrors of

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[9] I, here, mention specifically Hegel, for, so I will show, it is one account that had a particular influence – specifically though Rorty's readings of Dewey – on the Rortyan stance, which I aim to discuss.

[10] According to Dewey, it was the very words of origin and species that provoked this revolt: the scholastics had translated εἶδος with the term "species". "The conception of εἶδος, species, a fixed form and final cause, was the central principle of knowledge as well as of nature. Upon it rested the logic of science" (Dewey 1910, 5-6).

[11] Darwinism further gave rise to a new importance of biology for understanding ethics. In the light of the new discipline of sociobiology, both progress and morality were being conceptualized as something natural, linked to the ideas of natural selection and the elimination of (cultural, social, et cetera) variations that were harmful to the human struggle of existence (cf. Dewey 1910, 11-12).

[12] While there were significant developments concerning the concept of *scientific progress* as well (Kuhn 1962), considering my focus on moral progress, I am concentrating on the social and moral context. However, I will refer to the Kuhnian account later in this work, as Rorty himself explores his stances on *paradigm shifts*, and the *normal* and *abnormal*, when addressing the issue of moral progress. Moreover, I will not particularly consider the ideas and issues concerning *economic progress* that date back to the 20th century. However, I will discuss briefly the entanglement of all kinds of progresses. My aim is to ultimately advocate the significance of the fortification of an independent notion of *moral* progress.

two world wars,[13, 14] and moreover (2) with postmodern[15] intellectual and cultural tendencies that embraced distrust towards notions of (moral) truth and objectivity, i.e., a God's-eye-view of what is morally wrong and right.

As the rise of the concept of human progress had supported a widespread optimism (in academia) about the human fate, and as the decline of the concept was linked to pessimism, we have reason to suspect that a renewed (cautious) defence of the notion may support an enhanced hopefulness about the future. My position within this work (most explicitly in chapter 4) is sympathetic to the argument that hope – a "pragmatic hope" – for moral progress is indeed beneficial for a potential (moral) change for the better. My aim, as outlined in the introduction, is hence to contribute to keeping the very notion of moral progress (as a distinct concept) alive – both in the philosophical and political debate – and to advocate for a hope for moral progress, which is largely based on the potential of expanding solidarity.

1.2.1.2 An attempt to grasp the notion of moral *progress in contemporary terms*

The importance of the notion of *moral* progress for and within the more general concept of human progress becomes evident when one considers, for instance, that the latter was largely debunked primarily as a consequence of the empirical evidence of broad social and political developments, which were, above all, *morally* undesirable. In order to further support this claim, and to continue with my analysis and cautious (pragmatist) defence of the idea of *moral progress*, I shall first and foremost elaborate on how *moral* progress can be defined and understood in contemporary terms.

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[13] This is, for instance, the context in which Horkheimer and Adorno draft their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which challenges the idea of Enlightenment (and reason) necessarily leading to progress and argues that it is instead in a dialectical relation with Myth, and that so are, hence, progress and regress.

[14] Later devastating events, such as the Yugoslavian war and the Rwanda Genocide, further contributed to the pessimism concerning moral progress. They further stirred scepticism towards theories such as Fukuyama's, who had predicted the "End of History" (Fukuyama 1992), and hence the end of (political) progress after the termination of the second world war and the fall of communism.

[15] See, for instance, J.-F. Lyotard, who understands "postmodern" as incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard 1984, xxiv) such as that of a cumulative (Enlightenment-based idea of) progress itself.

I will rely, throughout this work, on P. Kitcher's and (R. Posner's) view that *moral* progress is primarily concerned with practices that *affect others*[16] (Reder et al. 2019a, 151-152; Posner 1998a, 1639-1647). This stance puts, amongst other things, emphasis on the matters of *action and practice*, and supports the idea that, in order to talk about moral progress, improved changes in *moral beliefs are not enough*, they must rather lead to *desirable changes in practices*.

Yet, as I will argue below, improved changes in practices do not suffice either: moral progress must additionally imply a *change in belief or consciousness* (of a growing part of society).

I shall add further that an action or belief is to be considered *moral* if and only if it is not motivated by an *exclusively* selfish ground.[17] Moral progress hence implies the improvement of attitudes, beliefs, (formal and informal) institutions, laws, individual possibilities, and practices within society, for the good of (other) people (or, more broadly, sentient beings).

Rorty, who generally sympathizes – though mostly implicitly – with utilitarianism, aligns this idea of progress recurringly with an increase in human *happiness* (cf. *EFT*, 8; *CIS*, 153). He links greater happiness with an increase in personal freedom, greater equality, and human solidarity.[18] Moral progress, therefore, implies, in this view, very roughly, an increased happiness among human beings – and/or for a greater number of human beings – induced by favourable changes in practices, beliefs and institutions.

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[16] Note that in Kitcher's account, the "moral" differs from the "ethical" inasmuch as the latter primarily focuses on the question about *whom* one wants to be (what kind of individual; what kind of society), while the former puts emphases on the question about *how* to behave, and *what* practices to adopt. To talk about "moral" progress, hence, means to primarily discuss practices and methods. In his view (cf. Kitcher 2021; Kitcher 2011), the moral question precedes the ethical question (also historically – opposite to B. Williams' stance, as Kitcher explicitly lays out). Rorty, who mostly speaks about "moral progress" without drawing a clear distinction between the moral and the ethical, generally implies that "who we are" (i.e. also how a society is organized; how it agrees to function; what institutions, laws and believes it adopts) comprehends "how to behave".

[17] For instance, to do a good deed in order to receive something in exchange does, in principle, not qualify as a moral action – although the lines between selfish and altruistic motivations are arguably blurry (cf. also 1.3).

[18] Though he does not explore the depths of the notion of happiness.

A wider idea of moral progress extends the notion of the "others" further to non-human animals or even all sentient beings (cf., e.g., Posner 1998a, 1639). The matter of happiness is then translated into well-being (or related concepts).[19] Concerning both human and non-human animals, Rorty further aligns his idea of moral progress with *less cruelty* and *less suffering* (*CIS,* 86-88).

In most recent decades, moreover, debates around the rights of ecosystems have been enhanced. This rather extensive expansion of moral status (cf. below) is not debated in the Rortyan output. Yet, as I will argue, it is implied as an inevitable consequence of the expanding circle, which I will discuss below.

Moral progress, in optimistic accounts, is generally considered (both or either) a (historical or real) occurrence and/or a potential (cf., e.g., Hermann 2017, 41). The latter implies that moral progress is possible in principle and that it hence might or might not be implemented. The former searches for evidence for moral progress in history, as a support for the defence of the idea of moral progress. Among the most popular examples, throughout contemporary literature, one can repeatedly find the abolition of slavery, increasing possibilities for women, and LGBTQIA+ rights (cf., e.g., Hermann 2019, 301; Wilson 2019, 30). Rorty cites, in his sole explicit chapter on "moral progress", the examples of feminism and human rights (*TP*, 167-247).

Besides all the above, I will rely, throughout my work, on a few more claims concerning the notion of moral progress:

(1) moral progress generally involves the notion of (moral) *learning*[20] and, therefore, the acquisition of some kind of knowledge.

(2) Moral progress, assuming that it is possible, happens gradually: moral progress does not mean that certain practices and/or beliefs are

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[19] Rorty does not exclude this broader idea from his accounts of morality and moral progress (cf., e.g., PSH, 79), though he does not pursue it particularly.

[20] If one aims to pursue the notion of moral progress (pragmatically), one must assume that humans are capable of moral learning (and unlearning), be it through a look towards the past, through specific kinds of education or training – e.g., education of emotions and imagination (cf. *TP*, Volpi 2002, 546; Hermann 2017, 48) – or through simple social interaction. The idea of moral learning, particularly when conjoint with education, gives hope that morality can potentially improve through the next generations.

abandoned by a whole society (or all humanity) at once, but rather that there is a tendency that fewer people (or groups, or societies) maintain certain practices or believes, which presumingly affect others in an undesirable or harmful way. Moral progress is thus a tendency that generally takes time.[21]

Though thinkers concerned with the notion of "moral revolution"[22] (e.g., Pleasants 2018) suppose that in some cases (i.e., e.g., in abnormal situations linked to social movements and pushes, revolutionary advances in the scientific or technological fields and other paradigm-shifting changes of social circumstances) moral changes occur more rapidly than under "normal"[23] circumstances.

(3) As anticipated above, in regard to changes in practices and/or beliefs, moral progress generally denotes a change in (culture and) consciousness of a major part of the society about a morally wrong or right behaviour – in light of the impact it has on others and on their happiness (or suffering). This means that the notion must not be reduced to mere changes in laws and regulations of a society that control the moral practices and institutions, but the members of a society must themselves believe in the rightfulness of those changes and practices.[24] It is hence not merely about people behaving in a way because the laws or (formal) institutions of a society advise or force them to, but rather because they are convinced about a certain right and wrong. A shift in consciousness implies that, when looking back at past moral practices, one generally asks oneself how one could have been "so blind" not to see the moral wrong in it (cf. Reder et al. 2019a, 153; Wilson 2019, 47; cf. Williams 1993, 124-125).

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[21] The notion of time is a fundamental factor for the concept of progress: the possibility of progress grounds in an immense (linear) time in which to progress in (Bury 1920, 6), and it refers to improvement through a comparison over time (Wagner 2016, 17). The matter of comparison, in order to assess progress, further implies the need for a documented history by means of which one can (1) estimate whether a progress took place and (2) learn from history.

[22] Moral revolutions are generally considered to potentially lead to either moral change for the better or moral change for the worse. Therefore, they do not necessarily translate into moral progress but possibly moral regress.

[23] I will address the notions of the normal and the abnormal later (cf. p. 113).

[24] This supports the need for a distinction between moral progress and progress in the realm of politics and law, even though the latter too concerns actions that affect members of a community or society.

1.2.2 The problem with defending the idea of moral progress

The idea of moral progress presents a series of issues that go beyond the much problematic idea of a global moral progress originating in patterns of social behaviour among our prehuman ancestors[25] and then developing, more or less *steadily*, towards our days.[26] The issues arise even if one considers supposed moral progress within a more recent history, under comparable (social, cultural, and natural) circumstances.
While many, as stated, claim evidence for actual occurrences of moral progress in examples such as the abolition of slavery, increasing possibilities for women, and LGBTQIA+, there is also evidence for instances of what we could judge as moral regress (cf. Wilson 2019, 30; Wagner 2016, 14). For instance, while on the one hand, there is a rather recent development of "animal rights", including an increasing number of declared vegetarians or vegans (i.e., increasing concern with the well-being of non-human sentient beings), on the other hand, intensive mass animal farming too is a rather recent phenomenon which non-human animals of the past did not have to endure. At least in the part of the world where I am writing this thesis, society has been dealing with the ascendency of xenophobic political groups in democracies, hostility towards immigrants, including refugees, and rising inequalities during a global pandemic.[27] Moreover, approaching the idea of moral progress in light of occurring social conflicts clearly is a matter of (geographical and social) perspective: while people blessed with peace or ceasefire on their territories throughout a more significant amount of time may have reason to be optimistic, people in conflict zones most probably see the matter in a quite different light. Thus, if one rests on (local) empirical evidence in order to defend the idea of moral progress, one will quickly have to admit that their considerations are merely valid for a restricted

[25] See, e.g., Singer (1981/2011) and Kitcher (2011) for insights into the origins of morality.

[26] While naturalist and historicist accounts of moral progress are generally concerned with tracing moral developments throughout human history and evolution (and hence with making an effort to defend moral progress in light of historical or evolutionary evidence), efforts to qualitatively compare contemporary moral practices with practices of our distant ancestors often seem pointless and/or are easily debunked.

[27] Cf., e.g., https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/07/covid-19-crisis-boosts-the-fortunes-of-worlds-billionaires.

area and period of time and based on a contingent viewpoint of interpretation.

Independently of the empirical evidence concerning occurring events, defending moral progress is already problematic on the conceptual level. If one talks about moral progress – which, as defined above, combines the notions of *change* and *improvement* – a notion of *what* is morally *good* or desirable is necessary. Accepting and defending the idea of moral progress hence means rejecting moral relativism and moral nihilism. It means to admit that *some* moral beliefs, practices, and institutions are necessarily *better* than *others*.

This often leads to the *prima facie* suspicion (cf. Moody-Adams 1999) that the inquiry about moral progress must be the business of moral realists, who are committed to an ontologically "robust notion" (Kempt 2019, 104) of moral truth.

Moral realists like M. Huemer (Huemer 2016), have argued for instance that humanity has been moving towards a direction that implies, *in most societies*, less violence (*ivi*, 1988 - 1991; cf., on that very matter, also Pinker 2011[28]) as well as less racism, sexism and more democratic and liberal values, because this is indeed the correct moral stance. The moral realist account indeed implies a constant *discovery* of moral truths (throughout human history). Kitcher calls this the "standard view" or the "discovery view" of moral progress.[29]

Antirealists have been challenging this approach by arguing (cf., e.g., Hopster 2019) that historical data concerning shifts in moral values and practices are better explained by a moral antirealist notion of truth.[30] Specifically naturalist thinkers have argued that Darwinian considerations pose a dilemma for realist theories,[31] as evolutionary

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[28] Pinker sustains that thanks to evolutionary psychology, we can be sure about one thing: reduction in violence throughout history.

[29] The "standard view" places "moral progress as what you get when you discover moral truths" (Reder et al. 2019a, 146).

[30] Hopster argues against Huemer that, while moral realism does not always fit historical data well (as., e.g., societies have not universally moved in the same direction), antirealism – favourably – appeals to socialization, technological, scientific and economic conditions and changes and lessons learned from history.

[31] Street claims that the moral realist only has two (both problematic options): they can either claim that there is no relation between evolutionary influences and independent truths or that there is a relation, and that natural selection has favoured

forces have played a decisive role in shaping moral attitudes (Street 2006, Posner 1998a). Yet naturalist or Darwinian accounts have their own set of problems when it comes to the defence of the concept of moral *progress*, as I will argue hereunder.

The paradigm shifts in moral and ethical theories after Darwin (cf. Dewey 1910; Bury 1920), among other things, led to the effort to understand the biological grounds for morality and moral change. This effort persists. Though the mechanisms of *conscience* are (still) considered unclear, within the scientific community (cf. Levi-Montalcini 2004), it is generally agreed upon that it is a product of the mental activity of human beings, among whose essential products are moral judgements and values. If this is the case, then it seems reasonable to argue that they are a natural-scientific matter (*ibid.*). This gave reason to question whether ethics should be handed over, from philosophy to biology, specifically "sociobiology"[32] (Singer 2011, 3-11). However, there was a strong resistance towards this very idea, not (only) because philosophers tried to hang on to a field "[they] thought was safely theirs" (*ivi*, xiii), but rather because ethics is widely regarded as a cultural phenomenon, that has taken radically different forms in different societies (*ivi*, 28). Yet, understanding the biological grounds, according to Singer, certainly has a fundamental value for the discipline of ethics in order to understand how humans' moral deliberate capacities work and hence how to employ them to the fullest.

Other streams of *Darwinism* within the field of morality, while leaving aside the biology-philosophy divergence, have specifically concentrated on the phenomena of cultural or social (including moral) evolution, which refers to cultural, social, or moral adaptations to historical and natural circumstances, conditions, and changes. These streams frequently found a compelling explanation for the *origins* of morality (and ethics), where morality is regarded as a solution or function for the advantageous improvement of cohabitation and collaboration within groups (cf. Buchanan & Powell 2015; Buchanan & Powell 2018; Boehm 2012). Both Kitcher and Singer (Kitcher 2011; Singer 1981/2011) trace

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those who could grasp independent evaluative truths. She argues that, while the first would lead to the problematic conclusion that most of our "evaluative judgements are off track due to the distorting pressure of Darwinian forces", the second is unacceptable on scientific grounds (Street 2006, 109).

[32] Sociobiology concerning human beings, according to Singer, today has largely been replaced by "evolutionary psychology" (Singer 2011, xii).

the origins of morality to the altruistic tendencies of our ancestors, which had proven themselves useful for the survival of human communities and societies. However, adaptational (survival-oriented) explanations of altruistic tendencies pose, *prima facie*, limits to the possibilities of (further) progress, as they restrict the scope of morality to in-groups, which means that the limits of an inclusivist morality have already been reached or will soon be reached[33] (cf. Buchanan & Powell 2015, 42-45).

Moreover, one must ask whether, in this view, one can, in fact, defend the idea of moral *progress*, other than of mere moral *change*, through adaptation (cf. Posner 1998a, 1654) if one accepts that indeed any conception of moral progress needs some normative assumption, which allows them to evaluate whether a given change is for the better or the worse (Sodoma 2019, 51).

Posner argues, for instance, that if the moral code of a particular society changes when (contingent) changes in material, technology, scientific founding, et cetera occur, if morality is hence dependent on its contribution to the survival of a specific society, this means that morality is contingent and local (cf. Posner 1998a, 1640-1641, 1687-1690). Moral codes express what is useful for a particular society (*ivi*, 1639). Posner, therefore, also questions the universal validity of the assertion that "slavery is wrong" (Posner 1998b, 1815), which is one of the few assertions that (optimistic) moral progress theorists often take for granted or at least agree on (cf., e.g., Hermann 2019, 301). He argues: "there are no interesting moral universals. There are tautological ones, such as 'murder is wrong' where murder means 'wrongful killing', and there are a few rudimentary principles of social cooperation" (Posner 1998a, 1640). The point here is: while "murder" is judged to be one thing in one community, it might find variations of interpretations in other cultures, historical moments and circumstances.[34] For Posner, hence, when speaking about moral progress, one must recognize that one always speaks from a particular standpoint (*ivi*, 185). We prefer our codes, for they are ours (*ivi*, 1654). Therefore, "any meaningful moral realism is out, and a form of moral relativism is in", and "no useful

[33] Though, as Buchanan and Powell also suggest, considering the increasing interconnectedness of human communities, a more inclusive morality may actually be a group-beneficial trait (Buchanan & Powell 2015).

[34] One popular example in contemporary thought is, e.g., the debate about the right or wrongfulness of abortion.

meaning can be given to the expression 'moral progress' and [...] no such progress can be demonstrated" (*ivi*, 1641).

In light of both solid theoretical arguments and empirical evidence against moral progress, some pragmatist accounts aim to redefine moral progress in a (cautiously optimistic) way that may not only stand its ground in front of conceptual challenges but can promote the very implementation of it.

1.2.3 The pragmatist proposal for the notion of moral progress

There is, I claim, no comprehensive pragmatist proposal for the notion of moral progress, but rather several moral-progress theorists – amongst them Rorty – who define their understanding of moral progress as "pragmatist" and/or explore it within a "pragmatist" theoretical framework (cf., e.g., Kitcher 2021; Wilson 2019; Anderson 2014; Jaeggi, forthcoming). I shall hence, here, propose a brief framework, of what interlinks diverse declared-pragmatist accounts,[35] in which I am grounding my "pragmatist" understanding within this work.[36] I will rely, amongst other things, on E. Anderson's understanding of pragmatism as "a mode of moral theorizing […] that does not attempt to offer any ultimate moral principle, assumed to apply in all possible worlds, as a way to resolve moral conflicts", but rather as suggesting methods or mechanisms "for improving our moral norms and principles" (Anderson 2014, 5).

(1) Following in the footsteps of either C. S. Peirce, W. James or J. Dewey[37] (or a combination), pragmatist accounts generally seek justification for moral progress in (morally) successful *practices* and/or a

[35] I am here considering exclusively optimistic pragmatist accounts, i.e., pragmatist theories aimed to defend the idea of moral progress rather than debunk it.

[36] This framework constitutes, amongst other things, a base for my inquiries of the Rortyan account. It outlines general tendencies which, I claim, are constitutive for a general pragmatist account of moral progress. This does not mean that all pragmatist moral progress theorists necessarily sustain or promote all the points listed.

[37] I shall consider a remark made by Dewey that pragmatism is "epistemologically nominalism […] metaphysically agnosticism [and] ethically meliorism" (Dewey 1910, iii).

recognition of a notion of "moral truth" (i.e., what is morally right or good) based on what stands its ground in social reality and experiences, i.e., "what works" (cf. *TP*, 78, 299-305) or what is useful.

(2) This implies that the defence of the notion of moral progress, among other things, often grounds in the stance that it is *useful* to *have a notion of moral progress* in our inquiries about the world.[38]

(3) They generally aim to overcome the sets of problems which emerge from moral realism on the one hand and moral relativism or subjectivism on the other, as outlined above (cf. Wilson 2019).

(3a) This means, on the one hand, to rely on a notion of moral truth that does not require metaphysical moral realism. This, further, implies (i), granted that there is *no possible access* to universal or absolute moral truths (which lie outside time and space), they must be inquired within human practices.[39] Moreover (ii), for morality is something that concerns, first and foremost, human beings (who are part of a community or society), moral truths must be found amongst them and based on what works for them. This, hence, further implies a focus on the notion of *inclusion*: in order to understand what "works" for the members of a society, ideally[40] all members must be consulted in an ideally equal matter of concern.

(3b) A rejection of relativism implies refusing that all moral beliefs and practices are equally good or bad – a position at odds with the idea of

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[38] I will argue later how this emerges – though not explicitly – from Rorty's views about moral progress: Rorty claims, for instance: "we could [give up the notion of moral progress], if we never had to make any decision ourselves, if we were just spectators. […] There are no moral relativists in practice. As a practical matter, nobody is a relativist. You can't stand back from a moral decision. You have a moral outlook" (Rorty 2006). This accounts for the idea that, acc. Moody-Adams (Moody-Adams 2016), if we are confident that continued human action can have any morally constructive point, we must believe that moral progress is possible (cf. chapter 4).

[39] P. Kitcher, for instance, proposes an inversion of what he calls the "standard view" or "discovery view": instead of saying that we have made moral progress, whenever we have discovered "moral truths", we shall think of moral truth as what remains stable as we make progress (cf. Reder et al. 2019a, 147). C. Wilson, on the other hand, keeps up the idea of moral progress a "discovering moral truths" by supposing a "pragmatic account of truth" (Wilson 2019).

[40] I.e., at best or to the best of all possibilities. I will discuss in chapter 3 how the notion of "ideal" may be understood in a pragmatist account, such as Rorty's, Dewey's, and Kitcher's.

moral progress, as claimed above. Though Rorty is often associated with the label of relativism, he himself rejects this association on various occasions: his (mature) position, in this regard, is emphasized by assertions like "when Posner [says], 'it is provincial to say that we are right about slavery and the Greeks were wrong', I think Dewey would demur" (Rorty 2007b, 920).

(4) There is, as anticipated, an important focus on moral progress as a *potential.* This implies a focus on the possible *implementation* of moral progress, which then implies an account of *action*.[41] A central pragmatist preoccupation, I claim, is indeed how moral progress can be implemented or enhanced (assuming it is possible). Rather than asking, "is there a moral progress" pragmatists focus on the questions of "what kind of moral progress can there be? And how can it be enhanced?". This implies, not at last, a sympathy towards *experiments*: in order to see "what works", one must be willing to try out different things; however, always with a look towards our past ("What went down well in history?"). In Rorty, as I will show, all this implies a particular focus on language and linguistic practices. According to Dewey, every situation has "its own measure and quality of progress and the need for progress is recurrent, constant" (Dewey 1922, 282).

The focus on implementation opposes positions such as J. Gray's (cf. Gray 2013, Nagel 2013) who, in light of massive evidence against the possibility of human progress, advocates "contemplation", i.e., an attitude that aims not to change the world, but simply "let it be".[42]

(5) In this light, pragmatists generally aim to propose *methods* for improving moral norms and principles (cf. Anderson 2014, 5; Kitcher 2021; Reder et al. 2019a; cf. also Dewey 1930, 239-246).

(6) Pragmatist accounts often combine:

(i) a naturalist stance. This generally concerns the origins and the evolution of morality and sometimes considers it a *function* for the survival of societies.

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[41] For Rorty, indeed, moral progress is, above all, a history of "making rather than finding" (*ORT*, 182; Voparil 2011b, 118).

[42] For Gray, progress is a "modern myth". He claims that in order to grow up, we have to let go of myths. I will pick up this stance again in chapter 4, as I will argue for a "pragmatic hope" for moral progress against the contemplation Gray advocates.

(ii) A historicist stance, which often justifies the idea of moral progress based on past events. It emphasizes the question concerning what has worked in the past and hence should be further implemented in the future based on comparisons. It further justifies potential moral progress based on humans' capacities to learn from the past.

(iii) A pragmatic meliorism,[43] which implies hopefulness, action, and moral progress as a moral end in itself.[44]

(7) Pragmatists are often sceptical towards teleological accounts, although I will argue (cf. chapter 4) that Rorty's view on moral progress ultimately relies on moral teleology. Kitcher, in this regard, makes a neat distinction between what he calls "teleological progress" and "pragmatic progress" (Kitcher 2015, 475 - 478). The former is a "progress towards" and thus implies that (moral) progress is measured based on the increasing proximity to a (moral) goal. "Pragmatic progress", on the other hand, is a "progress from": it grounds in the idea of a bottom-up problem-solving[45] and overcoming moral issues[46] present in human practices and institutions.[47] This implies amongst other things, an idea of the possibility of moral progress that always starts from "where we are" and from what we can do from there.[48]

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[43] My understanding of "meliorism" relies on the compelling analysis made by D. Rondel about meliorism in James, Dewey and Rorty: meliorism is the belief that the world (i.e., specific conditions, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good) may be bettered. This does not mean that the future will conform to a plan but rather that the future will astonish and exhilarate. In this view, human action plays a decisive role. This meliorism can then further be expressed in terms of hope (cf. Rondel 2018, 145).

[44] To consider moral progress a moral end in itself means that the implementation of moral progress can be considered a moral duty or moral responsibility. I will elaborate on this argument below.

[45] For Kitcher, the most pressing problems today stem from inequalities in distribution within societies, across the planet and across generations (Reder et al. 2019a, 153).

[46] Although R. Jaeggi reportedly sustains (cf. Klement 2019, 82) that solving problems already implies a sort of improvement, the question that emerges when justifying moral progress as problem-solving and overcoming issues is, though, how do we know whether a solution is morally good or right (hence and improvement); and, whether the solution has not provoked other (maybe greater) problems.

[47] Kitcher explicitly identifies moral progress as a "pragmatic progress": "Identifying pragmatic progress as a species is important for anyone who hopes to talk of progress in aspects of human life and society [which is where we find the issues of moral progress]. For these domains, teleology is clearly suspect […]. The rejection of teleology [however] doesn't warrant contemporary challenges" (Kitcher 2015, 479).

[48] I will discuss this distinction further in chapter 4.

Pragmatists generally do not make an effort to compare, for instance, the "primitive" ages with today's situation but rather look at instances of moral progress within specific historical a cultural contexts and developments. They thus consider moral progress *local*, though not in the concept-debunking sense, Posner supports.

The Rortyan account fits into this framework. Besides explicitly subscribing to the pragmatist and specifically Deweyan stance, Rorty combines an optimism about moral progress with scepticism about moral objectivity (cf. Moody-Adams 1999, 168, footnote; Moody-Adams 1994, 211-212). He claims that moral progress "is measured by the extent to which we have made ourselves better than we were in the past, rather than by our increased proximity to a goal" (*AOC*, 28) – though, as I will show (cf. chapter 4), he also embraces a teleological stance. And, as I will discuss in chapter 4, he further combines a naturalist stance with both a historicist and a melioristic account.

Though his extensive work does not develop a comprehensive framework of how the very notion of moral progress shall be regarded, he makes a few claims, on which I will further base my considerations of his view on the notion hereinafter. (1) He asserts that there *is* a moral progress (*CIS*, 192). This suggests an evident optimism about the very occurrence of moral progress. (2) He declares himself *hopeful* regarding the occurrence of what he considers instances of moral progress. This concerns the *possibility* of (the further) implementation of moral progress in the future (cf. chapter 4.4). (3) He sustains that we cannot but believe in it:[49] "we have to think of ourselves as making progress. We have to think of the future as being capable of being made morally better than that" (Rorty 2006). (4) He claims that moral progress is *in the direction of a greater solidarity* (*CIS*, 192). This places the notion of increasing solidarity at the heart of the Rortyan understanding of moral progress.

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[49] This, as I will elaborate in chapter 4, supports an attitude towards the idea of moral progress, (1) necessary in order to "keep going" in a favourable direction and which – apparently, in his view, (2) – is an inevitable trait of social agents. A similar view on this matter can be found in M. Moody-Adams (cf. Moody-Adams 2016). J. Gray, too (Gray 2013, 8-9) tackles the question of whether giving up the hope that the future can still be better than anything in the past would lead to despair. Yet, Gray's is a pessimistic account, which considers progress to be a modern delusional self-flattery (cf. also Nagel 2013).

I will rely on this brief outline of both the pragmatist thought and Rorty's assumptions hereinafter, in my attempt to defend the idea of moral progress pragmatically, specifically in relation to the notion of solidarity.

Before I get there, there are a few more things to clarify: in the upcoming section (1.3) I will discuss how the Rortyan account of moral progress can be conceptualized as what has been called, after P. Singer, an "expanding circle". I will argue, starting from here below, that the expanding-circle framework is compelling to construe the Rortyan thought and to defend a (melioristic-pragmatist) understanding of the idea of moral progress in general.

1.3 On the notion of the expanding circle: moral progress and the expansion of the "we"

In the current academic debate, the expanding circle is frequently understood as "one type"[50] of moral progress (Sauer et al. 2021), which, amongst other things, has been associated with a "rational tradition" (Smyth 2020, 25).

An inquiry into moral progress as an expanding circle focuses less on the theoretical foundations and changes of moral concepts themselves (i.e., e.g., "what did 'just' mean in the past as compared to now") and rather on how moral concern for other people has extended (and can potentially further extend) to increasingly more different "kinds" of people, sentient beings and even ecosystems. In other words, rather than aiming at acquiring better moral concepts, implementing moral progress, in this view, is first and foremost about extending persisting moral concepts to human (or sentient) beings that were previously

[50] Other "types" are, for instance, improvement of moral concepts, gains in human welfare, and improvements in moral motivation (cf. Buchanan & Powell 2018; Sauer et al. 2021). To divide moral progress into types implies the acknowledgement that there is no one comprehensive moral progress but rather that diverse moral or social developments can count as moral progress. I will argue that while moral progress as an expanding circle may well be categorized as a type of moral progress, it does not mean that it cannot comprehend – or even accommodate – other types of moral progress.

excluded from one's circle of moral concern (cf., e.g., Walzer 1993, 27; Hermann 2017).

The range of expansion, envisioned and discussed in accounts leaning towards this approach, generally stretches from the next of kin to people outside of one's own family or community, to one's nation, members of more distant geographical areas and nations, and finally – potentially – to all humanity and even non-human animals. Further extensions, indeed (in recent thought), even reach, first, any kind of sentient beings and then ecosystems in the largest sense.

In relation to humanity, it further involves the matter of inclusion of "sub-groups" (different to one's own) such as, e.g., groups of different gender, different ethnicity or "race", different cultural or religious background, different generations or different social "classes".

In recent literature, in accordance with what H. Jonas described as "*Zukunftsethik*" or "*Pflicht zur Zukunft*" (Jonas 1984, 84), more and more theorists consider the possible extension of moral concern towards the group of (distant) "future generations", within a more comprehensive picture of morality and thus moral progress. This trend emerged, among other things, with an increasing preoccupation about climate change and hence possible living conditions for our more distant[51] future relatives.[52]

Above I have suggested adopting the view that the content of moral progress concerns, first and foremost, how moral (or more broadly, social) practices, institutions and beliefs affect "others". The "others" are, in principle, any human (or sentient[53]) beings that diverge from the (first-person) moral subject or, more broadly, from the group of people that has (temporarily) power over the implementation (and/or social adoption) of a social practice, belief or institution. If we accept that

[51] Distant in the sense that it does not only concern one's direct offspring but also the generations that follow, as much as humanity's future generations in the largest sense, thus not necessarily one's kin and kith.
[52] In fact, for instance, the matter of whether to travel by plane, has become a "moral issue" only recently.
[53] I use the term "sentient" in the largest possible sense, as the ability to feel or perceive. It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss who or what (plants, A.I., et cetera) can or actually does have sentient capacities. I rather use the term to insinuate that sentience may well exceed the animal realm, that the expansion of the circle must hence always be in question, and the effort to expand must be constant.

moral progress refers indeed to the beliefs, practices, and institutions of a society rather than to those of the individual, we could say, in other words: the content of moral progress concerns how (a society's) social practices, institutions and common beliefs affect people and, more broadly, sentient beings, both within the same society and outside. This suggests looking at the *receiving end*, i.e., to see whether a society's moral system is beneficial for the people (or sentient beings) affected by it. Kitcher calls "stakeholders" all those affected by a certain moral situation or practice and those who would be affected if that moral situation or practice changed (cf. Kitcher 2021, 37). The expending-circle-theorists, in this regard, are thus primarily concerned with the inclusiveness regarding the stakeholders, i.e., the constant extension of the moral concern of a society towards increasingly more people and beings.

1.3.1 On Singer's utilitarian version of the expanding circle

The notion of the "expanding circle" emerges from Singer's famous work "The expanding circle. Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress" (Singer 2011) – previously "The expanding circle. Ethics and Sociobiology" (Singer 1981) – who again refers with the term to W. E. H. Lecky, who writes in 1869: "[t]he moral unity to be expected in different ages is […] a unity of tendency … At one time the benevolent affections embrace merely the family, soon the circle expanding includes first a class, then a nation […] then all humanity […]" (Singer 2011, vi).

Like other naturalist-evolutionary theorists (cf. Kitcher 2011, Boehm 2012), Singer inquires into the origins of morality by tracing it back to the social in-group-living behaviour of our ancestors and to the development of altruism as a group-favourable human trait. By tracking the evolution of animal altruism to kinship and eventually group altruism, based on (socio-)evolutionary theories from Darwin, he points out diverse tendencies of expanding altruism throughout the history of human beings. On the one hand, the decisive survival drive of the gene (for which extreme individual selfishness is not favourable) supposedly influenced the development of kin-altruism. On the other hand, so Darwin had suspected already (Singer 2011, 11), as humans' *reasoning powers* increased, early humans would learn that if they helped their

fellows, they would receive help in return. This supposedly led to what Singer calls "reciprocal altruism". This thus means that there were at least two different tendencies at play: the *natural drive* of the gene to live on and evolving human *reason*.

Some naturalist-evolutionary theorists – "evoconservatives" as Buchanan and Powell broadly call them (Buchanan & Powell 2015, 48) – leave it with this first part of the story: they explain tendencies of "moral" behaviour (e.g., forms of altruism) as a function of survival within evolution. However, as Buchanan and Powell point out, this leaves unexplained a number of important features of contemporary tendencies, such as cosmopolitanism and other inclusivist moral commitments (animal rights, human rights, and felt moral duty for distant people). Contemporary morality "is strikingly more inclusive than one would expect if selectionist explanations were the whole story" (*ibid.*). Moreover, one must ask – assuming my definition of "moral" above was accurate – whether a supposedly altruistic behaviour can be understood as moral at all if it ultimately satisfies the mere "selfishness" of the gene (biological drive) or the subject's aim to obtain a self-serving result. If it is merely about the adaptation of social practices to the needs of one's own (or one's genes') survival, is it appropriate to talk about morality?[54]

Singer ultimately finds the possibility for moral progress in humans' capacities of moral *reasoning*: moral and ethical principles derive from (moral/ethical) reasoning, which can ultimately lead the individual or the group to *overcome certain biological drives*. Throughout their history and evolution, human beings have learned to potentially control some reptile instincts and reactions (cf. Laurent 2017), concerning, e.g., aggression and instinctive defence. As Singer sustains, discovering that some forms of behaviour have a biological basis does not justify that kind of behaviour. Learning that what we have taken to be a self-evident rule has a biological explanation should rather lead us to question our acceptance of the moral rule (Singer 2011, 150). He asserts, following T. H. Huxley: "the ethical progress of society depends *not on imitating the*

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[54] Though "broader conceptions" of moral progress have argued that any kind of morally desirable change counts as moral progress (Sauer et al. 2021, Sauer 2019a). This means that even if the motor of moral progress is selfish reasoning or action, if the result is a social change that involves improved moral beliefs and practices, it is a moral progress. This again seems like a compelling condition for any pragmatist account, which sustains: "whatever works".

process of evolution, or on running away from it, *but on combating it* [m.e.]" (*ivi*, 168). In order to achieve this, he concludes, it is essential to have the best possible insights into our biological-evolutionary limits and conditions, for "the more you know about your opponent, the better your chances of winning" (*ibid.*).

Singer's expanding circle thus starts out from supposedly traceable expanding tendencies, with naturalist grounds (occurrence), and moves towards the question of *what could be* (i.e., the "potential") – how much further can and might humans' moral concern be extended toward others, based on humans' moral reasoning capacities.[55]

The expanding circle, other than tracing evolutionary tendencies and their effects on social life and morality throughout history, suggests that it is, moreover, a matter of human agency, choice, and ultimately a very question of morality. This Singerian notion, in fact, emerges from a broader utilitarian account and thus responds to the question of how to diminish pain and enhance well-being. To enhance well-being, here, thus means particularly to extend moral concern – i.e., the preoccupation to create well-being (and diminish suffering) in others – to increasingly more beings or kinds of beings.

Moral and ethical reasoning can be provoked and enhanced by various situations and triggers. One of them – particularly in times of globalization and of the new communication technologies that accompanied it – is the confrontation with habits in moral systems different to one's own, and outside perspectives in general. One may be drawn to ask: why should I follow *this* habit, instead of another? (*ivi*, 95). Though, Singer stresses, reasoning in ethics must not be *limited* to the task of confronting and rejecting customs as a source of ethical authority. "We can progress [… by …] justifying one's conduct to society as a whole and extending this into the principle that to be ethical, a decision must *give equal weight to the interest of all affected by it* [m.e.]." (Singer 2011, 100). What Singer thus has in mind is a collective "us", as a moral *basis*, to decide what choices to make and what practices to implement. The notion of the expansion points to the aim of extending the "collective us" to ever more voices in order to consider the well-

[55] According to Buchanan and Powell, also on Darwin's account, sympathy for one's kin and kith may be adaptive, but the expansion of moral sentiments beyond the group to all human beings is a product, not of selection, but of the logical extension. (Buchanan & Powell 2015, 58).

being of ever more people (and sentient beings) within this moral ground.

Singer's "expanding circle", therefore, while being grounded in evolutionary theories as a function of survival of society, ultimately becomes a *responsibility* of the moral subjects: based on human beings' reasoning capacities, they are capable of expanding the circle further than what serves their immediate interests – as individuals and as a group. Expanding the "circle" hence becomes an actual matter of *morality*.

> The only justifiable stopping place for the expansion of altruism is the point at which all whose welfare can be affected by our actions are included within the circle of altruism. This means that all beings with the capacity to feel pleasure or pain should be included; we can improve their welfare by increasing their pleasures and diminishing their pains (Singer 2011, 120).

For the view I am offering in this work, I will consider the notion of expansion in the *moral* sense (i.e., the one that exceeds natural-evolutionary expansion tendencies), in Singer, as twofold:

(1) the expansion of altruism to all sentient beings (and potentially even further, including ecosystems) is an expansion of the moral subject's concern for others in the largest possible sense – as the above quote suggests. (I will refer to it as $expansion_1$). Granted that morality, as Singer suggests, involves exceeding natural tendencies and hence what results as advantageous for the subject and their genes (cf. Dawkins 1989), and granted that it further involves moral reasoning as a key instrument and condition to (intentionally) contribute to potential moral progress, the moral subject must be a being capable of reasoning. Following Singer's indications – and as I will further explore in the upcoming chapters – this largely implies linguistic practices. Though recent accounts (cf. Rowlands 2012) suggest that also some non-human animals, e.g., rats and dogs, can be moral (i.e., they can choose to be good or bad, i.e., by helping others even if it is not to their direct advantage), the capability of (linguistic) moral reasoning extends first and foremost to human animals. The moral concern, following Singer, must not be limited to the moral status of moral subjects – i.e., the limit of the expansion must not be set with the concern for other reasoning

beings – but rather, moral subjects have a moral responsibility[56] to extend the circle of concern further and further.

(2) The expansion of the collective "us" (see above) as a ground for moral standards, on the other hand, also points to an expanding inclusiveness among the moral subjects (hereinafter expansion$_2$). This means – I suggest – increasingly including, in the collective "us", as many beings capable of participating in (collective) moral reasoning practices as possible.

In my work, I will first and foremost concentrate on the second. I will, however, claim that, when envisioning moral progress within a pragmatic melioristic framework (as I ascribe it to Rorty), this must also imply the first.

1.3.2 The expanding circle from a pragmatist point of view

The expanding circle is, I claim, a compelling notion if one wishes to approach the concept of moral progress from a pragmatist angle. One of the most evident reasons I outlined above is the combination of naturalism with what I called a pragmatic meliorism: Singer's account takes into consideration both the natural-evolutionary origins of morality and combines it with an account that makes human beings (partially) responsible for their moral progress – i.e., for a potential further expansion of the circle – based on their choices and actions.[57]

Moreover, considering that I claimed a primary focus of pragmatist theorists to be the *implementation* of a potential moral progress, the expanding-circle framework, among other things, helps set a clear path, orientation and objective: rather than being preoccupied with, say, the

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[56] Assuming that moral subjects have the power to shape moral practices, following H. Jonas, I argue that they have a moral responsibility towards affected beings (stakeholders) that do not share the same power (cf. Jonas 1984, 172-176; cf. also section 2.3.2.2.).

[57] My outline of Singer's expanding circle has been selective and descriptive. It is indeed not my intention to debate the comprehensive work of Singer but rather to give insight into some foundations of a notion, which (1) I believe to be compelling for a pragmatist conceptualization of moral progress (though I do not consider Singer himself a pragmatist), and which (2) helps to comprehend the framework within which Rorty builds his theories on moral progress.

essence or absoluteness of moral truth, it suggests moving into a direction – step by step, or rather, in an expansionary way – that includes more and more needs and standpoints in the process of the creation of moral systems and standards.

In relation to human agency, to which the idea of implementation is linked (cf. section 1.4.3) – leaving aside, for a moment, the considerations of natural-evolutionary tendencies – I thus claim that there are primarily two significant aspects for pragmatist-leaning theorists arising from the expanding-circle framework. One answers to the matter of "what" (what is moral? What is the basis for morality?) by suggesting the notion of a collective "us" as a moral basis (see above), i.e., the "us" that collectively *decides* what is moral (based on human reasoning capacities). The second aspect refers to the matter of "how" (how can it be implemented?) by suggesting to put emphasis on the efforts of acknowledging stakeholders ("who is affected by our moral systems?"), extending our concern to them and possibly including them in the collective "us" of moral deliberation. It is thus a more down-to-earth version of moral progress compared to those that aim, for instance, at a universal moral truth independent of human minds.

Yet, to trust in the idea of moral progress as an expanding circle does not necessarily mean excluding other "types" (cf. Buchanan & Powell 2018, 53-58; cf. also Buchanan & Powell 2016, 987) of moral progress. I rather claim that the expanding-circle view may even be accommodating for a series of individuated types of moral progress, including (cf. *ivi*; Sauer et al. 2019) "better" moral concepts, better moral motivation, better moral reasoning, an improved moral knowledge, greater equality, greater well-being of human (or sentient) beings, and greater liberty.[58] I will argue that by shifting the basis for any kind of moral system to (the collective reasoning and deliberation of) its stakeholders, one may create, in fact, a favourable mechanism (cf. section 1.4) for greater equality, potentially greater liberty for members of previously oppressed groups and for "discovering" moral truths and knowledge, which ultimately emerge from the stakeholders themselves (cf. chapter 3). In fact, other than classifying the expanding-circle view as a "type", I will argue that it is reasonable to conceptualize it as a "mechanism" of moral progress (cf. 1.4.4).

[58] I will come back to this claim within the arguments of the next section and the next chapters.

Though I will be advocating the expanding circle as an appealing notion for pragmatist efforts to defend a notion of moral progress, it is not unproblematic, particularly when it comes to the distinct matter of implementation. (1) Even if one extended their moral concern to increasingly more stakeholders (including non-human sentient beings, ecosystems, and future generations), these supposedly rather diverse concerns may be in conflict with each other. For instance, being *concerned* with the very distant (i.e., with those of the outermost reach of the circle) may not be sufficient if it conflicts with a concern for those who are closer (including the individual subject themself). (2) In regard to the collective us, as a basis for moral deliberation, as anticipated above, there are stakeholders (again, e.g., non-human sentient beings, ecosystems, and future generations) that do not have a voice (or a language) to share their needs, desires and pains. Even if we limit the notion of the collective "us" for moral reasoning and decision-making to human beings (i.e., qua *zôa logon echonta*), it does not necessarily mean that their voices are actually being heard in the noise of an ever-growing society. Moreover, people (including people belonging to the same "oppressed" groups) sometimes want different things and have different views concerning moral choice and action. I will discuss these issues in chapter 3.

1.3.3 On the notions of sameness and diversity

A central notion emerging from the expanding-circle framework is thus the notion of "us" (or "we"). As I will show this notion plays a central role in the Rortyan framework of solidarity and moral progress. Particularly in Rorty, the "us" implies a recognition that what we have in common with others (e.g., our humanness or, specifically in both Singer and Rorty, our ability to feel pain and – in Rorty – humiliation) outweighs what divides us from others. This recognition of commonality, in Rorty, as I will argue, becomes a key for expanding the circle and hence "progressing" morally – particularly in his account of expanding solidarity among human beings. But what about the other side of the coin, i.e., the recognition of differences among human stakeholders, implying the differences in needs, desires and pains?

In a recent account, N. Smyth criticizes "the rational tradition, which has routinely portrayed moral progress as an 'expanding circle'" (Smyth

2020, 25), for advocating the notion of moral concern as being driven by "the cognitive recognition of *sameness*" (*ibid.*). With "sameness", I presume, he refers to the idea of commonality implied in the notion of "us".

Smyth argues that, as "many of the core concepts which actually drive our moral system are those of vulnerability, domination and disproportionate suffering" (*ibid.*), a much more important focus, in the matter of moral progress, could be a consideration (and recognition) of social *differences* and positional facts.

It will be my aim, throughout this work, to argue that an ambition for what Smyth calls sameness does not necessarily exclude a recognition of individual or social differences but, rather, it is implied. The "us", in fact, in the very spirit of the expanding circle, is not an all-time-fixed end but, rather, an ever-evolving and expanding idea concerning our relationship with (and consequently treatment of) others.

Within my take on human solidarity, on which I will focus as a cardinal aspect within the expanding circle and for moral progress, I will specifically argue that an endorsement of the notion of "human" – particularly, a process of "humanization" (as opposed to dehumanization), i.e., an advocacy of our common humanness – implies a recognition of the diversity human beings account for. I will argue that a recognition of *commonality* is fundamental in that very case, but that it must go hand in hand with a recognition of (and a *responsiveness* towards) particular traits of individuals and groups. I will argue that a recognition of social differences does not suffice but rather does necessarily require a concept of comprehensive unity.

The divide between the recognition of sameness and that of diversity recalls another dichotomy in regard to the content of moral progress, i.e. that of inclusion and individualization (Wagner 2016, 70): while inclusion points to the goal advocated by the expanding-circle account, to make people become (equal) members of an "us", individualization is associated with the goal of increasing freedom among the members of a society and with the enhancement of individual traits and particularities. I agree with Wagner that, while they might appear *prima facie* to be at odds with each other, they are both useful notions of understanding and assessing certain aspects of moral progress (cf. *ibid.*).

This introduction to the four notions (commonality, diversity, inclusion, and individualization) will be relevant to my discussions of moral progress in the upcoming sections and chapters.

1.3.4 Rorty's version of the expanding circle

While he does not refer to the Singerian notion of the expanding circle specifically,[59] within his take on moral progress, Rorty advocates his own version, which may justifiably be called an "expanding circle of 'solidarity'" (cf. Nevo 2020, 207; McClean 2014). Moral progress "in the direction of a greater solidarity" (*CIS*, 192) – one of Rorty's most explicit takes on the notion of moral progress – I propose, is, indeed, to be conceptualized as an *expanding circle* in that direction.[60] This, I claim, is to be understood, first and foremost, in terms of $expansion_2$ (see section 1.3.1, p. 26), which implies and is a fundamental base for $expansion_1$. As I will further explore in chapter 5, solidarity here refers first and foremost (yet is not explicitly limited) to *human beings*, as it implies a notion of (potential) collaboration.

To imply $expansion_1$, as anticipated, means that this expanding concern for ever more stakeholders (including any kind of sentient being and even ecosystems) is a moral responsibility of moral subjects and hence depends – on a social level – at least in part (cf. section 1.4.1), on collective reasoning and group decisions. The notion of collaboration is hence linked also to the creation of moral knowledge (cf. section 3.3.2.4) about what/whom to be concerned about and why, and about how to expand the concern. As I will discuss in section 1.4.4, the notion of the expanding circle may thus be understood not merely as a "type" of moral progress but also as its motor or mechanism. I will argue that with Rorty (in the footsteps of J. Dewey), the expansion itself (comprising both $expansion_1$ and $expansion_2$) becomes a moral goal and that the need for expansion is constant.

The expansion always starts from "where we are". In Rorty, as I will elaborate – specifically when it comes to the intentional expansion based on human agency and choice – this is linked to *common vocabulary*

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[59] I.e., Rorty occasionally does reference Singer (cf., e.g., *PCP* 184ff) without explicitly exploring the specific notion of the expanding circle and what it implies.
[60] I will elaborate on and defend this view extensively in chapter 5.

employed in social-linguistic practices (cf. section 5.3.2). Yet, as the comprehensive expanding-circle image suggests, it further extends to pre-linguistic, biological-evolutionary reasons. R. Dawkins puts it appropriately when stating that:

> "[t]he muddle in human ethics over the level at which altruism is desirable – family, nation, race, species, or all living things – is mirrored by a parallel muddle in biology over the level at which altruism is to be expected according to the theory of evolution" (Dawkins 1989, 13).

In other words, a *moral* expansion of the circle is limited and determined by what is (temporally or non-temporally) more urgent and determinant for a subject's (gene's) survival. As D. L. Smith suggests, some killing (e.g., at least the killing of some plants) is "mandatory" for human survival (Smith 2020, 87). This, however, so he argues, – in ethics as much as in biology – must not lead to "[falling] into the trap of hierarchical thinking" (*ibid.*), i.e., *universally* (or essentially) understanding one organism as higher than the other.

To focus on the expansion of moral concern towards and within the human species – within Rorty, based on solidarity – does not mean that any further expansion of moral concern must happen later. It rather is, I claim, a parallel effort, thus linked to the expansion of moral knowledge (cf. section 3.3.2.4) about what to do (and, implicitly, who to be). Expanding solidarity (which is hence linked, first and foremost, to expansion$_2$), I claim, is hence *one* cogent way to conceptualize the expanding circle and moral progress rather than the whole story. It is, thus, I argue, both an exemplification of the notion of the expanding circle and a mechanism of it (cf. section 1.4.4). Hereinafter, I will primarily focus on this part of the coin of expansion – which, however, as I have claimed, must go hand in hand with the moral effort to enlarge the circle beyond the scope of human solidarity; see expansion$_1$.

Expanding solidarity, in Rorty, as I will discuss more elaborately in chapter 5, implies the *expansion of a notion of "we"* (or "us"), i.e., whom one (an individual or a group) considers one of their own. Rorty, in his stance of this "we"/ "us", rather than to Singer, refers to W. Sellars and his consideration of morality (including moral judgements and actions) as "we-intentions" (cf. chapter 5). These intentions, amongst other things, are constitutive of society and, moreover, of moral reasoning (cf. Loeffler 2019, 118). The shape of the circle itself, in this regard, points

to a closed entity which, however, may be increasingly enlarged and whose dimensions, thus, are never fixed but constantly redefined and in flux.

In Rorty, to expand one's sense of the "we" is to think of increasingly more people about whom one thought to be wildly different from oneself, as included in one's range of "us" (*CIS*, 192). This, as I will discuss, in Rorty's view, can be achieved, among other things, through what he calls "redescriptions" (cf. chapter 2). Redescriptions for Rorty, as I will elaborate, among other things (cf. section 2.1.2), imply the aim to change language in a way that our interlocutors – as much as we ourselves – start to perceive other people or groups of people and, consequently, the application of certain (moral) concepts, institutions, and circumstances, differently.

Language, as I will defend throughout this thesis, plays a fundamental role in the Rortyan thought, which, since the linguistic turn in the last century's panorama in philosophy, informed both Rorty's early critique of foundationalism and his subsequent critique of authoritarianism (Koopman 2011). Language, hence, also spills over to his preoccupations about moral progress, which develop within the anti-authoritarianist account of his later writings.

While Rorty recurrently dissociates himself and his understanding of morality from the rationalist tradition – a tradition in which the expanding-circle-theory has been, *de facto*, placed (Smyth 2020, 25), not at last, I believe, due to the role reason plays in it – Rorty does embrace a notion of rationality (cf. chapter 5, pp. 212ff), specifically concerning (and within one of his most explicit stances on) moral progress (cf. *TP*, 186-201). Rorty indeed proposes a pragmatic account of rationality (*ibid.*), where reason is a "social practice" (*PCP*, 107) and rationality refers to "simply [being] able to use a language" (*PSH*, 86).

As reductive as this may appear within a broader and more comprehensive account of reason and rationality (including, first and foremost, individual reason and rationality and their most idiosyncratic neurological and psychological aspects), this angle accommodates one central aspect of the expanding circle theory: for Singer as well, language has been a central aspect within the development of the reasoning capacities, which eventually have led (and are capable of leading) the "circle" to expand further and further:

> We became better able to communicate with our fellows. Our language developed to the point at which it enabled us to refer to indefinitely many events […]. We became more aware of ourselves […]. We could reflect, and we could choose on the basis of our reflections (Singer 2011, 91-21).

Moreover, when it specifically comes to the aim of changing social practices, according to E. Anderson, moral reasoning, to be effective, must be done together (Anderson 2014, 14).

To describe reason and rationality within the context of social practice puts emphasis on the importance of *collective reasoning and knowledge*, other or rather than individual ones. A specific interest of this sort is supported by some rather recent suggested tendencies in contemporary cognitive science, that began to understand the human thinking apparatus less like a computer (which simply, individually, decodes incoming information and effectuates complex calculations) and more like a complex adaptive system that efficiently copes with its environment, makes sense out of it and survives within it (cf. Sloman & Ferbach 2019, 89-103). This means that it depends much more on environmental limits, conditions and on "others" and that it is much more similar to a "bee-hive" system (*ivi*, 107-111) than the Cartesian tradition of philosophy would have probably hoped for.

A central point of this view, which, as discussed, allows us to go beyond the restricted understandings of the natural-evolutionary inquiries on ethics, is that morality – due to human deliberative faculties – can go in any number of directions (Buchanan & Powell 2015, 44). This, on the one hand, supports the hope for moral progress to potentially continue to occur in the future. On the other hand, "any number of directions" also opens up the possibility for potential regress, implying that whether humans make moral progress or regress is at least partially dependent on their reasoning, deliberate activities, and choices.

Other than him being generally optimistic about an actual occurrence of moral progress, what I will primarily discuss about the Rortyan view is the assumption that it is *possible*, in principle, due to the human capacity to make choices and change things around them. The sort of moral progress he has in mind is, indeed, of the pragmatist kind (as I

will further explore in chapter 4) and tightly linked to the concept of increasing solidarity (cf. chapter 5).

Before I get there, I will elaborate on the matter of the mechanisms of moral change and possibly progress, i.e., on the question of how morally desirable changes may be provoked (both consciously and unconsciously). In the Rortyan account, indeed, a key mechanism is language, on which I will elaborate in chapter 2 and chapter 3, after introducing the matter in the next section.

1.4 On the mechanisms of moral change

I claimed above that one of the main focuses of pragmatists, in the matter of moral progress, is to understand *how* to facilitate or enhance it. This implies first understanding how it occurs, i.e., what the *mechanisms of moral changes* are. It means indeed to shift the debate away from questions about absolute evaluations and timeless relationships between concepts (cf. Wilson 2019, 30) and more towards causal relations between changes in social structures in order to then propose "methods" (Anderson 2014, 5; Kitcher 2021; Reder et al. 2019a; cf. Dewey 1930, 239-246) about how to possibly evoke or produce moral progress.

By adopting the expanding circle conception of moral progress as outlined above, one must consider (at least) two cardinal mechanisms which can (potentially) lead to moral change. On the one hand – from, above all, the naturalist-evolutionary view within the expanding-circle-theory – there are (both natural and social) *changing conditions* to which members of a society adapt. This adaptation may be passive (unintentional) or active (intentional). On the other hand, there is, following Singer, (moral) *reasoning* – i.e., a (social) practice (in the pragmatist sense). Reasoning subjects reflect, create, agree upon and change moral concepts, beliefs, practices and institutions, and they make decisions concerning their moral (or more generally social) action.[61] These two cardinal mechanisms are neither exclusive nor

[61] Deweyan pragmatists like Kitcher and Rorty, in this matter, talk about the "conversation" – a notion which I will deepen in chapter 3.

dichotomic. They arguably both accommodate, evoke and comprehend an infinity of mechanisms that potentially evoke moral changes.[62] Questions concerning these mechanisms – i.e., questions of *how* moral change can occur – thus imply both a "what" and a "who":

(1) On the one hand, we have changing conditions and circumstances, which may provoke changes in moral beliefs, practices, and institutions of a society. In order to enhance moral progress, it seems, therefore, important to understand how (extra-moral) conditions can have an impact on moral changes. The question is hence: *what* kind of changes in conditions are there (and what impact can they have on morality)?

(2) On the other hand, we have subjects who actively or passively evoke moral changes. This poses a different set of questions: *Who* changes the conditions? Who changes morality? And subsequently, what does (intentionally) changing morality consist of? How can subjects be motivated? How do they succeed?

1.4.1 Changing conditions and circumstances

Changes in moral beliefs, practices and institutions never stand by themselves but are rather to be understood within a greater context of social dynamics and changes. They are changes within changes. (cf. Jaeggi 2021, 129).

When talking about changing conditions – which might then lead to changes or adaptions of and within the moral systems, institutions, beliefs, and practices of a society – I shall refer to both natural and social conditions in the broadest possible sense. These include but are not limited to socioeconomic factors, epistemic factors, psychological characteristics of human beings, institutions, social practices, habits, codes, laws (cf., e.g., Hermann 2019, 305) and not at last language. The latter grounds itself, as I will discuss in chapter 2, in the process of both active and passive adaptation to both natural and social changes, throughout histories and cultures.

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[62] Not at last, e.g., what I will broadly refer to as "social struggle" (cf. Walzer 1993).

(1) Socioeconomic factors involve conditions such as wealth, stability, well-being, and others that facilitate a morally favourable attitude and behaviour towards others. Buchanan & Powell, for instance, call inclusivist morality a "luxury good" (Buchanan & Powell 2016, 996), for it is only likely to spread in favourable conditions such as sufficiently available resources and the existence of institutions that facilitate cooperation. On the contrary, as they point out, "periods of severe economic downturn correlate with increases in xenophobic and racist behaviour" (*ivi*, 1004) and generally in exclusivist tendencies. It further appears that it is already sufficient for people to believe in favourable tendencies in order to adopt inclusivist shifts (cf. Hermann 2019, 309). This implies that, on the contrary, pessimistic beliefs or convictions about socioeconomic tendencies may likely lead to the abandonment of inclusivist moral action.

(2) Psychological factors, therefore, are intertwined with socioeconomic factors. Their impact on moral judgements – both of individual subjects and of groups – has largely been recognized throughout psychology and empirical ethics (cf. Sauer 2019b). It has been demonstrated and discussed, for example, that incidental disgust, for example, provoked by a bad smell, has an impact on the outcome of a moral judgement (cf. Landy & Goodwin 2015, 532). Another example showed that a series of juridical rulings were harsher when the judges in question had empty stomachs (cf. Sapolsky 2017, 555). Examples like these point to the complexity of psychologically relevant mechanisms that are at play in the business of morality, and to moral reasoning – which has, as I argued, a central function in the Singerian expanding circle view – sometimes being destined to fail; not only in moments of harsh, social, political, and economic conditions (cf. Sauer 2019a) but sometimes, even because of subtle extra-moral influences.

(3) Epistemic factors as a condition means that if members of a society receive new information about the world, they might have to reconsider some of their moral preoccupations in regard to the new insights. It is broadly sustained that there are (causal) connections between moral progress and other types of progress (cf., e.g., Wagner 2016, 23-26; Jaeggi 2021), as, e.g., advancements in the most diverse areas and disciplines can indeed lead to moral change.[63] The progress of

[63] What one has to be aware of, though, when considering the impacts all kinds of progress may have on morality, is the matter of time, as "moral transformation seems

technology of communication, for instance, has required people to rethink the notion of distance and of who is in proximity to them. This implies potential changes in people's conceptions concerning social affiliation, loyalty and social responsibility. One might, for example, feel a stronger connection and sense of belonging with and towards a person that lives on the other side of the world but is part of the same virtual community and/or has similar interests, convictions and moral or political beliefs, than to people coming from their actual neighbourhood or family.[64] (The "circle", here, hence may extend to some, but pull away from others.)

Other examples, among many, are the invention of the birth control pill, developments in genetic engineering, and A.I., which all raised numerous new questions in the field of morality which could not have been considered before. Likewise, awareness about the Anthropocene and climate change made, for example, the matter of taking an aeroplane a moral matter: if one's moral concern is extended even to more distant future generations (of sentient beings), then actions that enhance or decelerate climate change become issues of morality and moral action.

Inversely, moral developments sometimes also have an impact on other (scientific, intellectual, social or technological) progresses. One example is the recognition (or consideration) of the equality of women leading to an increasing consciousness of the importance of including data of female test subjects in studies within the medical and pharmaceutical field (cf. Liu & Dipietro Mager 2016).

(4) The significance of institutional changes in the broadest possible sense, is for example, well illustrated by a negative example Wilson cites: the institutional and legal subordination of women actually produced fallacies enshrined in textbooks about women's nature, which then again influenced moral beliefs and practices (Wilson 2019, 36). In this example, hence, an institutional base led to biased beliefs within the intellectual and scientific field (epistemic conditions), which then influenced moral beliefs and practices and further alimented discriminating institutions and laws.

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to occur much more slowly and less decisively than transformations in science and technology" (Walzer 1993, 27).

[64] Tendencies like these are not exclusively caused by a strictly technological progress but rather accompanied, amongst others, by the complex phenomenon of globalization.

I have claimed above that moral progress (at least in a strict sense[65]) requires, among other things, a (favourable) change of moral convictions and beliefs of a growing proportion of a society, i.e., moral progress implies changes in both belief and practices (two intertwined mechanisms). I hence argued that the sole change of moral practices – for instance, because they are enforced by law – does not suffice to talk about moral progress. This stance supports that if, for instance, laws constrain members of a society not to discriminate against a certain group of people, but the same members, while obeying, keep (or even enhance) their previous convictions about the rightfulness of their discriminations, one shall not consider this moral progress but, if any, a progress of a different kind (e.g., progress of law, political progress, et cetera). However, as Wilson's example suggests, changes in law and political structures can (possibly) lead to a change in moral beliefs and practices in society.

(5) Moral beliefs and moral practices are intertwined and often causally connected.[66] If we accept this claim (which I will briefly broach hereunder), then we may consider moral beliefs on the one side and moral practices on the other, as well as *conditions* (in the largest sense), which potentially have an impact one on the other.

Moody-Adams, in her often-cited work on moral progress (Moody-Adams 1999), draws a distinct line between the notions of moral progress in practices and moral progress in belief. This distinction, in moral progress debates, has sometimes created a sort of chicken-and-egg problem concerning the question of which one comes first. From Moody-Adams' work emerges the idea that moral progress in beliefs precedes moral progress in practices (Hermann 2019, 301). Moody-Adams asserts that moral progress in practices "results when some newly deepened moral understanding [i.e., a pattern of belief] is

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[65] By moral progress in a strict sense, I understand, as outlined in section 1.2.1.2, one that necessarily implies a change in both moral beliefs (or consciousness) and practices. This differs from a "broader conception" (cf. Sauer et al. 2021, Sauer 2019a) according to which any kind of morally favourable change in social practices and institutions counts as moral progress, even if, for instance, it was enforced by a legislature or if the motors of its implementation were of an exclusively selfish nature. As I laid out, in this work, I will be preoccupied with (and defend) the strict understanding of the notion.

[66] A newfound moral belief or conviction can lead to a change in practices (though not necessarily), and a moral practice – over time – can lead to social actors changing their beliefs (though not necessarily).

concretely realized in individual behaviour or social intuitions" (Moody-Adams 1999, 169). In Wilson's view, in contrast, a change in moral beliefs comes from a previous change in practices: "[w]hen people are said to come to know something new [(moral belief)], we can always point to a specific abandoned practice or a newly adapted one" (Wilson 2019, 38).

However, there is no guarantee that a change in moral beliefs leads to a modification of practices and that, on the contrary, a change in moral practices leads to an adjustment in moral beliefs (cf. Posner 1998a, 1664).

(6) Finally, language is, as I anticipated, the one condition on which I will, with Rorty, primarily focus throughout this work. In contemporary research, numerous studies have suggested reason to assume that a subject's perception and understanding of the world, *including morality*, is dependent on the language they speak (cf. Costa et al. 2014; Boroditsky 2011; Fausey et al. 2010; Fuhrman et al. 2011). As I will discuss in chapter 2, if this is the case, then there is reason to believe that shifts in linguistic practices can potentially evoke new moral beliefs (and consequentially, potentially) practices.

On the other hand, as I will further argue, changes in moral beliefs and practices (provoked, for instance, by changes in other conditions or by conscious decisions following moral reasoning) often lead to their speakers' adjusting the language in order to fit the new beliefs and practices better. This thus suggests that, ultimately, language influences morality, and morality influences language.

Shifts or adjustments in linguistic practices can be understood as a *changing condition* when they (as I will inquire about in chapter 2) expand the conceptual and/or perceptual space of the (reasoning) moral subject. Rorty, as I will show, generally speaks about "*redescription*" as a direct action to change the linguistic conditions that form or influence moral beliefs and systems. It could thus be argued that one of the "methods" (following Kitcher, Anderson, Dewey, cf. above) that Rorty[67] proposes in order to achieve moral progress is that of linguistic change, or linguistic "redescriptions".

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[67] Though Rorty himself is critical of the term "method", specifically with reference to Dewey's work, as he does not find it "useful" (cf. Hildebrand 2020, 347).

1.4.2 On linguistic mechanisms

Singer, in the *Expanding Circle* (see above), underlines that language is a constitutive part of subjects' reasoning processes and capacities themselves – particularly of collective reasoning. This emphasizes that language, in the matter of moral progress, is *not merely* to be considered a *condition* that simply influences moral perceptions and beliefs, but it is also an *action* implemented by the linguistic-moral subjects.

Even though, as sceptical accounts have pointed out, these reasoning capacities may also fail (first and foremost in unfavourable conditions), they are a fundamental mechanism for the assimilation of moral ideas and concepts, or rather of, as Moody-Adams puts it, "deepening our grasps of moral concepts" (Moody-Adams 1999, 168).

As it has been repeatedly argued (*ibid.*; Walzer 1993; Wilson 2019) – specifically by pragmatist-leaning philosophers – moral progress must not be thought of so much as a matter of "discovery" of new moral concepts, but it rather involves a deepening of existing moral concepts, and – specifically in the expending-circle view – an extension of those concepts to people (or sentient beings), about whom the subjects were not previously concerned (cf. Walzer 1993, 27). This implies, in Moody-Adams' words, to come to "appreciate more fully the richness and the range of applications of a particular moral concept" (Moody-Adams 1999, 169) or of linked sets of concepts. She borrows M. Platt's term of "semantic depth" to express the complexity of moral concepts, which "no single conception […] can adequately capture" (Moody-Adams 1999, 173).

The notion of "semantic depth" is indeed a useful notion to approach moral concepts as notions that find different applications and interpretations throughout history and cultures but remain rather "stable" (cf. Kitcher 2021, Reder et al. 2019a) in their abstract form. For instance, the concept of "justice" has survived throughout the centuries as a moral (and arguably political) ideal but has been applied differently, in different societies, in relation to different groups of people. This is analogous to Posner's example above, who argued that the wrongfulness of murder is accepted throughout societies, though it finds different interpretations and applications everywhere. The

primary scope of moral reasoning, as a mechanism for assimilating and "deepening" moral concepts in light of possible moral progress in pragmatist terms,[68] hence concerns first and foremost an attempt to question and develop their conceptualizations and applications in one's society, rather than aiming to grasp an absolute, timeless meaning of the concept.

While for Posner, the presumingly local character of morality was a reason to debunk the idea of moral progress altogether, according to the views Moody-Adams and Rorty (cf. Rorty 2007b, 920) offer, local processes are rather constitutive of any moral development as they help clarify the content and the plausible application of a moral concept. One always has to start from where they are; one always has to start reasoning with the vocabulary one has available (cf. *CIS*, 197) – yet one should look out for different "descriptions", different interpretations, and different applications,[69] Rorty claims. Progress is something that has to happen step by step: if one aims to throw away the ladder at the end, they first have to climb up all the steps to get there.

I shall illustrate this with an example from recent history: at the *Academy Awards* in 2012, the motion picture "The Help" received praise for having portrayed a history of African Americans, and the Awards for generally becoming more "inclusive" in regard to the stories they promoted. Years later, in 2020, audiences suddenly found it disturbing that the same film was written by "white" authors, featured a white hero, and generally spoke to a white spectator. A highlight of this debate was the actor V. Davis' outspoken public regret about having participated in the film as she said she felt she "betrayed herself and her people".[70] What changed in these few years was the view of a significant proportion of people who globally (actively or passively) assisted a

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[68] Moody-Adams, who considers herself a moral realist, may not precisely fit the pragmatist picture I outlined above; however, her work has often been considered as pragmatist-leaning and as, e.g., by Elizabeth Anderson as an important contribution to pragmatist philosophy (cf. Anderson's review of Moody-Adams' work "Making space for justice" (Moody-Adams, 2022), e.g., https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7312/mood20136/html.

[69] Look out for what, e.g., justice means in different historical times and cultures in order to grasp the complexity of the notion and develop the "local" conception further. "Widely accepted ways of describing a phenomenon may fail to make clear what the moral relevance of that phenomenon really is[, and] commonly accepted descriptions may mask or fundamentally mischaracterise" (Moody-Adams 2016, 158).

[70] https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53416196.

growing "conversation" about what "inclusive" meant in that context. In 2012 it seemed like an important instance of progress that a film about Afro-American stories was among the winners of the arguably most prestigious award in the film industry. In 2020, the moral standards on which the assessment had grounded eight years earlier seemed outdated to many, all of a sudden. Needless to say, in order to reach the depth of the idea of inclusiveness concerning this specific case, in 2020, people had to first pass through the development of previous standards, which made a more deepened reasoning possible in the first place.

What steers the social practice of moral reasoning thus includes, besides changing conditions in general, social actors – like in the above case, Davis – pointing to potential misconceptions and making alternative views possible. These new insights made it *indispensable* for morally engaged actors to not question the older standard and inquire into possible shortcomings.

Besides arguments and discussions about moral practices – as anticipated above when broaching the issue of "language as a condition" – new (or modified) vocabularies can further be fruitful within these reasoning or conversational processes and/or social movements as a motor for thinking differently (or provoking different thinking) about morality. As Moody-Adams pointed out, for example, the term "workplace sexual harassment" helped shape social movements for gender equality[71] (Moody-Adams 2016). In the case of the debate around "The Help" and its social context, the ironic-provocative concept of the "white saviour" challenged some conceptions of how certain stories – both in mainstream pop culture and in history books – are generally perceived.

Language, hence, I argue, plays a fundamental role both in the assimilation and the dissemination of moral insights within a society, both as a condition that contains or expands the perceptual and conceptual moral space for assimilation and as the subjects' tool to disseminate, debate and agree on moral ideas and concepts (cf. chapter 2).

[71] The same goes for terms such as "sexual harassment" in general and other terms such as "date rape" (Calhoun 1987, 397).

1.4.3 Social actors, "moral entrepreneurs", and the subjects of moral change

In the expanding circle picture, as I laid it out, we had both a more passive side of moral adaptation (i.e., the natural-evolutionary adaptation to changing circumstances) and a more active side, driven by the social actors, through their moral reasoning and subsequent action and moral adjustments. By concentrating on the moral subject and their reasoning capacities, capable of enhancing moral change and eventually progress, the focus shifts to the more active side of the expanding circle, which implies will, intentions and agency.[72]

There is, however, a more and less active part on this side of the coin as well. On the more active side, we have what Moody-Adams calls "engaged moral inquirers" (Moody-Adams 2016) and Rorty "moral entrepreneurs" (Rorty 2007b), i.e., social actors that are actively engaged in dynamics of moral change: through their elevated and/or provocative voices in discussions, through their protest, through their leading-by-example and taking on moral responsibilities and through their intentional action to achieve moral progress.

On the other hand, social actors can gain new moral insights by simply participating in social life and hence by being exposed to changing conditions, discussions, movements, struggles and so on. Social actors, on this more passive side, may hence not be out for moral change, but social activities in their surroundings will still stimulate their moral reasoning capacities and their idiosyncratic (as well as shared) moral outlook (cf. Rorty 2006). In Moody-Adams' view, this involves, in any case, the elements of agency and choice: "one cannot assimilate a newly deepened grasp of a moral concept unless one is first willing to see oneself and one's place in the world in a new light" (Moody-Adams 1999, 180). The main obstacle to moral progress, in her account, is what she calls "affected ignorance", i.e., the idea that one chooses not to know what one could already know.

To proceed in the direction of moral progress thus implies both favourable conditions (including the abundance of the available

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[72] I understand agency, with Davidson, as the capacity for intentional action, i.e., "a capacity to act for the reasons furnished by intentional states […] mental states with propositional content" (Paez 2021, 9).

language) that allow social actors to gain new moral insights and people's will to give up their affected ignorance (*ivi*, 171, 180).

On the more active side – among the "moral entrepreneurs" (cf. Rorty 2007b) – we have agents who provoke shifts in moral reasoning among social actors and thus stimulate others to give up their affected ignorance. These agents within the moral progress debate today, in my view, are often conceptually divided into two groups: (1) people who stimulate primarily with their "linguistic" tools (e.g., within moral debates) and (2) people who stimulate with their actions (e.g., socio-political activists; people who lead by example).

(1) Under the first falls whom Rorty calls the "occasional imaginative genius [that] puts a new interpretation on familiar facts" (Rorty 2007b, 923). There is an ongoing debate about how many of those "geniuses" are to be found among the academics or, rather, whether moral philosophers – whose business is morality (cf. chapter 3, p. 132) – have any significant impact on moral developments in society, for their "conversations" arguably take place in closed circles, are difficult to grasp and are hardly motivating (cf. chapter 3, p. 133; Posner 1998a, 1641; Moody-Adams 2016, 166[73]; Hermann 2019, 303-305). I will argue, in chapter 3, that while the academic is not the sole contributor to new insights into morality, it is not useful – in the pragmatist sense – to exclude possible academic expertise when considering the potential impacts of this first group. Subjects belonging to this group can, in fact, be any sort of social actor. And, contrarily to what Rorty's term may suggest, we shall not consider the "occasional imaginative genius" a sort of *Wunderkind*, but rather – based on what I discussed above echoing Singer and Sloman & Ferbach – a consciousness emerging from a social dynamic which brings to light new moral ideas and horizons.

(2) The second group denotes, above all, social movements, moral struggles, and the action that is linked to them. The importance of social struggles and movements – i.e., actors who fight and sometimes sacrifice themselves for shifts in moral practices, institutions, and laws – has been extensively recognized throughout the debate on moral progress (Moody-Adams 2016; Srinivasan 2021; Walzer 1993; Smyth 2020). Social movements are often but not exclusively linked to a social

[73] Moody-Adams also acknowledges how, e.g., John Rawls' moral and political philosophy has stimulated moral imagination (cf. Moody-Adams 2016, 166).

crisis[74] (i.e., again, a shift in the conditions). Crises often involve periods of moral regresses, from which societies then may re-emerge with "deeper understandings of justice and compassion, a richer appreciation of the need for human solidarity" (Moody-Adams 2016, 155).[75]

What unites both groups on "the active side" (i.e., both the linguistic-argumentative-conversational and the struggling-movement corner), as many pragmatist-leaning philosophers have implied (cf. Rorty 2007b; *AC*; *EFT*; *ABAO*; Wilson 2019; Moody-Adams 1999, *ivi* 2016; Anderson 2014) is, in fact, their moral *engagement*.

"Moral engagement" can be understood as an opposed concept to what A. Bandura called moral "disengagement" (Wilson 2019, 42). The latter, in Bandura's and Wilson's view, is exemplified by the following stance:

> If responsibility is shifted to an authoritative figure; if aversive practices are redescribed [...]; if 'training' effectively dehumanizes the 'enemy', people will be induced to perform actions that later observers who were not subject to these manipulations regard with horror and that the actors themselves may regret (*ivi*, 42-43).

Moral engagement, on the other hand, does not mean the simple removal of these manipulations and return to "baseline morality" (*ivi*, 43), but rather the extension of the baseline (*ibid.*). This implies taking

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[74] In relation to the notion of moral progress as "problem-solving", which is at the heart of the pragmatist view on moral progress (cf. section 1.2.3), R. Jaeggi points out that "moments of [social] dysfunction and crisis" are defined as such when problems arise and are perceived as such, by the larger or more dominant part of society (cf. Jaeggi 2021,122-126). A crisis is hence to be understood, amongst others, as perceived problems on a larger social scale. A question in relation to the need for problem-solving is, in fact, who has the problem? A problem of some may be the advantage of others. Slavery may have worked out fine for slaveholders. Jaeggi sees a compelling account in Dewey's going "back and forth" between the objective and subjective side in regard to the identification of the "problem" (*ivi*, 122). (Rorty, in this matter, argues that "progresses" result from "the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need" (CIS, 37)). In Jaeggi's view, the fact that one group is excluded already points to a problem within a society as a whole. She stresses that in the matter of moral progress as problem-solving, rather than talking about mere "problems" or "conflicts" (which, in her account, are subjective), one must talk about these dysfunctions, dissonances and inner contradictions (which are objective), (cf. *ivi*, 124).

[75] Moody-Adams adds elsewhere: "There is a terrible irony in the fact that some of the most important instances of moral progress have emerged in response to the worst examples of regress"(Moody-Adams 2016, 166).

personal responsibility, remaining sensitive to the suffering of others and seeing human commonalities rather than distancing differences (Bandura 1999, 204; Wilson 2019, 43). It means, more specifically, the "reframing of practices and conditions formerly seen as normal and natural" (Wilson 2019, 44). This may happen both through argument or redescriptions on the one hand,[76] and through leading by example, (non-violent) protest, new images of the world, works of art et cetera (cf. Hermann 2019, 303-305) on the other. An important factor for both the motivation and the success of any morally engaged actor is their hope and confidence that things can actually be transformed for the better (Wagner 2016, Moody-Adams 2016).[77]

The view that I am defending (cf. chapter 3) supports that both groups of subjects play their part on the more active side of the expanding circle. Both groups potentially complement each other: even though, as it has been argued numerous times, moral arguments and conversations are not enough (Anderson 2014; Srinivasan 2021; *CIS*), what I called moral "struggles", activism and leading examples may lead to extended and deepened debates and conversations about certain moral aspects. And the other way around, extended, and deepened conversations, linguistic exchange, and reflections may help people come together, form groups and unions, and march for their moral convictions. Specific innovative linguistic tools, which (cf. chapter 2 and chapter 3) emerge within what Rorty broadly calls conversations, are furthermore useful and largely employed in social movements: "social movements often rely on moral pioneers to be linguistic visionaries who can recognize when some way of redescribing the world is an obstacle to revealing and eventually correcting deficiencies" (Moody-Adams 2016, 161). I will deepen this discussion in chapter 3.

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[76] Wilson argues, for example, that "the anti-slavery movement brought out the point that if slavery were 'natural' [...] people wouldn't need to be captured, transported, and flogged to get them to serve. [...] If women were uninterested in learning and incapable of abstract thought, they wouldn't have to be barred from attending universities" (Wilson 2019, 43-44).

[77] This supports, in a pragmatist view, as I will argue (cf. chapter 4), the justification of a hopeful defence of the idea of moral progress itself. If the engagement of moral actors is essential for the potential occurrence of moral progress, and if their motivation and success depend on their confidence and hopefulness in and of moral progress, then the creation of a (pragmatic) hopefulness (cf. chapter 4) for moral progress is intertwined with the tasks of the morally engaged actors and becomes itself a morally favourable action.

1.4.4 The expanding circle as a mechanism

I have introduced the expanding circle as a "type" of moral progress, following a range of contemporary thinkers (see above), and argued that this type does not exclude but rather goes hand in hand with other "types", i.e., e.g., an improved moral knowledge, greater equality, better moral reasoning, better moral motivation and ultimately better moral concepts.

The view I am offering, yet, suggests further that conceiving the expanding circle as a kind of moral progress is just one aspect to be drawn from it. I propose, thus, to further and particularly explore it as a mechanism of moral progress; in a sense that the expanding progress is not understood as (one version of) moral progress but rather as a complex process that possibly *leads* to moral progress. Again, moral progress, here, is to be understood, as I defined it, as a morally desirable development on a social (rather than individual) scale, which implies favourable changes in both moral belief and practices within a significant part of a society and social practices.

In the pragmatist view, I am inquiring, as I will further discuss in chapter 3, moral truths lie within inclusive social practices (including moral reasoning, as outlined above) rather than outside. *Inclusive*, according to the expanding-circle framework, implies the effort to *keep extending* moral status and concern to previously excluded stakeholders. As I will discuss (cf. section 3.3) inclusion, here, indeed, is not merely an end in itself but, following the pragmatist view, is favourable for improved moral reasoning, improved moral concepts, greater equality and so on (which are all aspects that are elsewhere categorized as other types of moral progress).

In this light, pragmatists do not have to necessarily debunk the idea of moral progress as a "discovery of moral truths" (pace Kitcher) altogether, but they may, in fact, rather shift the task of exploring or recognizing "moral truths" (more modestly), as Wilson suggests (Wilson 2019), towards social practices, collective moral reasoning (i.e., in this work, particularly, on the grounds of "conversation" and

linguistic exchange[78]) and social movements, struggles and challenges, which are local and contingent (i.e, dependent on their time and community).

In this respect, an expanding-circle picture of moral progress embraces all the claims and requirements I draw about moral progress in section 1.2.1.2, including that moral progress generally involves the notion of (moral) "learning" and, therefore, the acquisition of some kind of knowledge (cf. chapter 3). The *function* of an initiated ever more expanding circle (i.e., processes of inclusion into one's moral concern), in this view, is hence also to *create* a greater equality, have better moral knowledge (by taking into consideration the needs of more and more stakeholders), better (collective) moral reasoning (as it takes more views into account) and so on (cf. chapter 3).

Rorty, as outlined above, specifically speaks of greater *solidarity*. I suggested indeed that his view on moral progress can be understood as an "expanding circle of solidarity".

The compelling angel of the notion of solidarity, in light of an understanding of moral progress as a *potential* (i.e. something that can and/or ought to be *implemented*) rather than a simple (natural-evolutionary) occurrence, is that it implies – as I will argue (see chapter 5) – the notions of both *commonality* and potential *collaboration* rather than mere *compassion*: expanding the moral concern can indeed mean, on the one hand, being concerned with the well-being of people (or other beings), whom one was previously not concerned about; i.e. more and more human (or sentient) beings hence become the objects of a person's or a group's moral concern (see expansion$_1$, cf. p. 25). However, on the other hand, by particularly adding the notions of commonality and potential collaboration to the aims of the expanding circle, more and more (newly included human) stakeholders become themselves subjects of moral change ("who"): they become an active part in the implementation of moral progress (see expansion$_2$, cf. p. 26). As I will explore in chapter 5, it, therefore, means not merely the extension of concern, but there must be an *emphasis* on the notion of status. It means an expansion (or redistribution) of power or collective authority, from the less to the more, to having a say about what is morally right and wrong, what practices to support, and what institutions to maintain (see also chapter 3).

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[78] I will explore these terms in chapter 3 (section 3.2).

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I suggested a framework of how moral progress can be conceptualized in contemporary "pragmatist" terms, based on the assumption that there is, in fact, no comprehensive pragmatist proposal for moral progress in current academic debate but rather a number of moral-progress theorists – amongst them Richard Rorty – who define their understanding of moral progress "pragmatist" and/or explore it within their pragmatist-leaning work.

I argued that the conception of moral progress as an "expanding circle" (echoing P. Singer) is compelling from a pragmatist point of view. I claimed that this view is (implicitly) embraced by Rorty. And I claimed further that the Rortyan version of the expanding circle is in the direction of a "greater solidarity".

Within the pragmatist framework I outlined, I particularly emphasized the focus on the *implementation* of moral progress. I claimed that a primary preoccupation of (Deweyan) pragmatist philosophers is indeed how to *evoke* moral progress (i.e., further, what "kinds" of moral progress can be implemented, and how).

If this is also true for Rorty, and if his idea of moral progress indeed corresponds to an increasing solidarity, then a prevailing question emerging from the Rortyan framework is *how to provoke, create or enhance solidarity* (among increasingly more people).

I claimed that the mechanism Rorty focuses on – as will I in this work – is particularly *language* development and change, as both a condition and tool for the possible implementation or enhancement of moral progress. In the next chapter, I will particularly concentrate on the causal links between linguistic practices and morality based on Rorty's mature philosophical output.

2. LANGUAGE AS A BOUNDARY AND TOOL FOR MORAL CHANGE

2.1 Introduction

> Language [...] distinguishes us from other intelligent animals [...]. Pragmatism considers language as the ability to attain higher purposes (Rorty 1992).[79]
>
> Leaps over [the boundaries of the language one speaks] lead to the creation of new language. And the creation of new language leads to intellectual and moral progress. (*EFT*, 18)

2.1.1 Premise and general presentation of arguments

In chapter 1, I claimed that when approaching the notion of moral progress, as I laid it out, the element of language must be taken seriously both as a *condition* for moral change and as a *mechanism* of it. I claimed that the Rortyan account offers a framework of moral progress, within which language plays a decisive role in both regards.

Drawing attention to language and to what it does to our moral development seems particularly reasonable today. The rapid progress of communication technologies has been provoking accelerated changes in our (public) communicative behaviour, which are further related to the globalization[80] of the world and the resulting pluralistic communicative communities that develop new languages (cf. Wright

[79] *The Guardian*, 13 March 1992 (Geras 1995, 54).

[80] I understand globalization, here, with Korab-Karpowicz, as a "compression of the world" that implies not only the idea and realization of one single market but rapid transportation and communication and the development of a global consciousness (Korab-Karpowicz 2009, 306).

2015, 113). If we accept that moral beliefs (and practices) are – at least to some extent – dependent on linguistic practices and thus – consequently – on the particularities of any specific language, then we must consider the possibility that any kind of linguistic change can potentially provoke some changes in those moral believes (and consequently, potentially, practices).

In the last century – particularly in recent years – numerous research throughout diverse disciplines has indeed suggested reason to assume that a subject's perception and understanding of the world, *including morality*, is dependent on the language they speak, i.e., particularly, on the vocabulary they use to describe their surroundings, or by means of which it is described to them (cf., e.g., Costa et al. 2014; Boroditsky 2011; Fausey et al. 2010; Fuhrman et al. 2011).

Rorty contributes to this premise philosophically by inquiring about language within an antirepresentationalist stance, i.e., an account that sustains, as I will argue, that there is no one language that can accurately or "objectively" represent the world; no one language that offers a privileged viewpoint of "what is out there". In Rorty's words (echoing H. Putnam's), "what we call language" penetrates so deeply into "what we call reality" that the very project of mapping something language-independent is "fatally compromising from the start" (*TP*, 67-68). This view implies, in regard to morality, that it makes little sense to look for something that lies outside of language (and outside of historical and geographical contingencies) in order to justify moral beliefs, practices and changes. Rather, in order to understand the implications of morality and what we can make of it, we should focus on what lies *within* social and, specifically, linguistic practices.

In this chapter, I will look at Rorty's understanding of language as a "*boundary*" for morality and moral change on the one hand, and as a "*tool*" for it, on the other. Language as a boundary is linked to what, in chapter 1, I called "condition" (of language): language determines both what I called with Moody-Adams, the *conceptual* and the *perceptual* space necessary for moral deliberation, belief, judgment, action, et cetera (cf. further section 2.2.4). As these spaces are limited due to the narrowness

of one's language(s), so are the possibilities for both moral belief, reasoning[81], deliberation[82], conversation[83] and, consequently, progress.

Language as a *tool* connects with what concerns human agency in regard to the possibility of moral progress, as outlined in chapter 1: by means of their language – both due to its descriptive and deliberative character – social actors can (intentionally or unintentionally) provoke and enhance moral change, within the context of their social surrounding. This, in Rorty, is embedded in an anti-authoritarian[84] account of ethics and morality, which implies "humans taking full rational responsibility for [their] own doings and claimings" (cf. *PAA*, vii). As I will argue, this view on language and morality brings with itself both moral and political implications, which ought to be taken seriously by language users within the public sphere – both on an individual and on an institutional level.

Rorty himself, at one point (within his more mature output), describes his approach to language as both Hegelian-historian and Wittgensteinian; two accounts that "complement and reinforce one another" (*PCP*, ix). I aim to show, starting with this chapter and continuing with chapter 3, how this can be understood. I will further show, throughout the next chapters, how his Hegelian-Wittgensteinian approach to language fits into his more general expending-circle-conception of moral progress, where on the one hand, both language and morality change through adaptation to contingent (natural and social) circumstances, and on the other hand they are (intentionally) modified by speakers, based on their deliberative faculties and their needs. Speakers indeed may (rationally) agree to not use certain terms anymore when they find them outdated and/or harmful (i.e., not

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81 The notion of moral reasoning here is intended in the largest possible sense, including theoretical and practical reasoning (cf. Wallace 2020), though throughout this work, in the light of the expanding circle framework, my focus will lie on collective reason as a social practice (cf. section 1.3.2). Collective reasoning is implied in what I will call, with Rorty, the "conversation" (cf. section 3.2).

82 The notion of moral deliberation is intended, here, in a rather broad sense, as (collectively) answering and/or deciding on the question of what to do (within a spectrum of moral problems) and finding justification for it (cf. Daniels 2020, based on the human capacity of practical reason (cf. Wallace 2020), and relying on argumentative practices (cf. Papastephanou 2010, 41; cf. Dutilh Novaes 2022).

83 I will extensively discuss this notion in chapter 3.

84 The only moral authority in Rorty is the moral actors themselves. Morality shall not be searched for outside but within timely social practices.

"*useful*").[85] Both linguistic and moral changes (and, potentially, progresses) are hence determined by both chance and cause.

In this chapter, I will hence look more closely at the link between language and morality within the Rortyan output. I will first look at his take on the contingency of language and the *boundary* it poses to morality and its development. Subsequently, I will focus on the notion of language as a *tool*, its possibility to create and implement moral change – the *ability*, indeed, to "*leap over boundaries*" and "*attain higher purposes*" – and both the moral and political implications that must be drawn from this pragmatic "Wittgensteinian-Hegelian" approach.

This will not, at last, imply (1) a retrieval of a notion of objectivity in the Rortyan framework (first and foremost in regard to the matter of employing "better languages") and (2) the introduction of the question concerning the *grounds* on which linguistic development (in view of moral progress) shall be pursued.

My take on the latter, which I shall defend particularly in chapter 5, is that the concept of *solidarity* is a compelling notion as a ground for one's effort for linguistic changes in view of moral progress.

Before I get there, I will briefly address the lexicon Rorty employs to address these matters. I will briefly outline three dominating notions of his output: *vocabulary*, *redescription* and *conversation*.

2.1.2 Introductory notes on the Rortyan *lexicon* for the inquiry into language

2.1.2.1 Vocabulary

One considerable take on the Rortyan notion of vocabulary comes from his arguably most famous student, R. Brandom, who describes it as central to Rorty's thought. In his view, the notion stems from Quine's critique (which Rorty echoes) of the positivists' attempts to divide "the

[85] When addressing the matter of moral progress, Rorty refers, among other things, to the abandonment of moral practices and beliefs, not because they are revealed as "wrong" or "false", but rather as outdated, harmful or simply not useful (for overcoming moral problems, and in view of the achievement of certain moral goals).

explanatory [labour] addressed to linguistic practice between meaning and belief" (*RC*, 156). This means, in other words, a division of linguistic practices into the activity of instituting conceptual norms and fixing *meanings* on the one hand and the activity of forming and expressing *belief* on the other. "Vocabulary" is thus a "successor notion" (*ivi*, 157) employed by Rorty to overcome the division of (and encompassing both) meaning and belief.

A self-declared "antirepresentationalist" and explicit adversary of the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty hence refers to the notion of "vocabulary" as what we use to *describe* things.[86] This description implies both the meaning and the belief in regard to those very things.

In linguistic practices, according to Rorty, the question of which (agreed-upon) vocabulary to use is always at play: potential changes of meaning arise from within those practices. Brandom, amongst other things, compares the Rortyan view to a Hegelian account which, as a response to the Kantian-positivist structure, insisted that "all our discursive activity can be construed both as the application of previously constituted conceptual norms […] and as the institution of new ones" (*ivi*, 156-157).

Social (linguistic) actors, in Rorty's view, all have vocabularies that explain and give cause for their actions, beliefs and their lives – a "set of words we employ to justify and narrate ourselves" (cf. Santelli 2020, 1-4). To a small part, it is made of thin and flexible terms such as "true", "good", "right", and "beautiful", and to a larger part of thick and more rigid terms ("Christ", "England"); the latter do "most of the work" (*CIS*, 73).

In *CIS*, Rorty briefly introduces the specific notion of "final vocabulary", which, amongst other things, more explicitly points to a sort of *limit* in regard to a subject's vocabulary: "those words are as far as [they] can go with language" (*CIS*, 73). This means that a subject cannot make sense of the world in a particular way if they do not possess the vocabulary necessary to do so. The boundary posed by one's (final) vocabulary is, however, as I will argue, neither fixed nor absolute but rather applies to a specific moment within one's social (linguistic) practices.

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[86] Brandom points out, however, that Rorty is not to be understood as a descriptionist, as linguistic practices, in his view, ultimately exceed the activity of "describing".

2.1.2.2 Redescriptions

The notion of redescription means to move to a different vocabulary. A different vocabulary will make it possible to state new facts and point out different angles and perspectives.

If this is accurate, then it is favourable to aim for a greater variety or diversity of vocabulary when evaluating a situation. In Brandom's view, it is, for instance, one purpose of (the Rortyan) pragmatism to comprise diverse vocabularies (e.g., from both naturalism and historicism) rather than restricting oneself to one or the other (*RC*, 171).

A strategy within this practice is to constantly ask oneself, "what descriptions are more useful for human purposes" (Rorty 2007b, 917). This also translates to what Rorty repeatedly calls "saying things *better*" (in view of possibly achieving moral progress). "Better", in this sense, does not relate to a form of realism[87] but rather to the possibly positive impact of the vocabulary on society and its development. Redescription has hence, not at last, as I will argue, political implications (cf. *RC*, 172). It means, amongst other things, to facilitate "new reactions" (*TP*, 204). As with any other form of social practice, according to Rorty, the practice of redescription is a matter of intersubjective (or social) *agreement*. It is, not at last, the individual social actor and language user who decides to employ either one or the other vocabulary to describe the world to others and to themself. However, meanings of vocabularies and of how they are employed are ultimately and constantly agreed upon and fixated within social practices.[88]

[87] I.e., it does not mean to find a vocabulary that represents reality "better".

[88] Rorty's understanding of language seems to echo, in many ways, the Saussurean account, i.e., as something that emerges and exists only within the community (Wright 2015, 116). However, his notion of vocabulary exceeds the explicit difference between the Saussurean notions of *parole* and *langue*, that is, the idiosyncratic performance of the individual speaker and the system that pre-exists the individual user. He appears to unite, moreover, echoing the Romantics (Sanders 2004, 150), the notions of ἐνέργεια and ἔργον often associated with parole and langue, respectively). Vocabulary and language, in Rorty's understanding, appear to be both ἔργον and ἐνέργεια at the same time (cf. Ritter & Gründer 1995, 1521-1522).

2.1.2.3 Conversation

When Rorty talks about the social practice, within which redescriptions are made, and hence language is being changed and developed, he generally refers to the notion of "humanity's ongoing *conversation* [(about what to do with itself)] [m.e.; m.b.]" (*PCP* ix). It is within this activity that the issues of which vocabularies to use or to replace are decided. "A progress of this conversation [engenders] new social practices and changes in the vocabulary deployed in moral and political deliberation" (*ibid.*).

I will discuss the notion of conversation extensively in chapter 3, where I will argue that Rorty, while ascribing it to his "philosophical hero" J. Dewey, puts it at the heart of his melioristic program, i.e., not at last, of his take on moral progress. As I will show, this implies both reducing *moral inquiry* to conversation (Voparil 2014, 382) and the *pragmatic aim* to make conversations more "fruitful" (*PCP*, 124).

2.2 The boundaries of language and hence morality

The understanding of the nature of language, in philosophical scholarship, can arguably be divided into two divergent positions (cf. Wright 2015, 115): one understands language as describing a "real world out there", the other one as framing reality, where language is created by individuals according to their experiences and needs. If we accept this division, Rorty counts without a doubt as a defender of the latter – antirealist – position, which rejects the idea that language exists apart from its speakers without undermining the important role language has for moral development and, ultimately, progress. He is aware that language – and particularly moral language – exceeds indeed the mere activity of describing[89] (cf. Hare 1952, 2-3; Wittgenstein 1958, 5), and he states, "even if we agree that languages are not media of representation or expression, they will remain media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings" (*CIS*, 41). Language is what constitutes what he calls

[89] Despite letting revolve a central part of his philosophy around the notion of description (and redescription).

conversation; hence the realm where morality is discussed, decided, and not at last created.

As I will show shortly, on the one hand, this account of language is largely influenced by the Wittgensteinian account, as Rorty himself declared. On the other hand, Rorty's take on redescription points to an underlying Hegelian stance, where the introduction of a new vocabulary can be viewed as a process of separation from a habitual language, followed by a synthesis, where new vocabulary ultimately merges with it. Coincidently, the notion of the Hegelian Objective Spirit has sometimes been described or interpreted as a "conversation" (cf. Westphal 1992, 106), not at last within an exchange between G. Vattimo and Rorty, where the latter echoes Brandom (cf. *FOR*, 68 - 70). Rorty indeed claimed, as shown above, that his approach to language is "Hegelian"; though in his output, he first and foremost associates himself with the historicist Hegelian stance by referring to another great Hegelian, i.e., Dewey.

2.2.1 The contingency of language

The notion of the *contingency of language* is central to both Rorty's 1989 work "Contingency, Irony and Solidarity" (*CIS*), his overall mature output, and, I argue, his understanding of moral progress. H. Dreyfus and H. Hall (1992) called the notion of contingency "the connecting thread running throughout Rorty's narrative [...] the idea that things and events might have been otherwise" (Topper 1995, 958). This implies, among other things, unpredictable and uncontrollable forces or events that shape our lives (*ivi*, 959).

Language, from this angle, is something that has been determined primarily by *chance*. It is bound to the historical and cultural contingencies of a society or community. Languages are thus "historical contingencies, rather than attempts to capture the true shape of the world or the self" (*CIS*, 60). This implies, moreover, that language has developed according to communities' needs. Common vocabulary (and common hopes), Rorty argues further, is what binds societies together (*ivi*, 86); vocabulary is constitutive of them (cf. Višňovský 2020, 5).

The link between morality and language in the Rortyan view is, I argue, twofold. First and foremost, moral beliefs are shaped through linguistic action (and changing morals possibly leads to linguistic change). Secondly, Rorty describes moral systems themselves as languages (cf. *CIS*, 58). He echoes both Oakeshott (*ibid.*) and Sellars (*ivi*, 60). The latter defines morality as a matter of "we-intentions" (*ivi*, 59): both morality and language are expressions of the needs and the identification of a society. The demands of morality are hence the demands of the language that served as a function of one's upbringing (cf. *ivi*, 60; cf. Santelli 2020, 15). Thus, Rorty concludes, if language is a historical contingency, to have a moral conviction is to identify oneself with such a contingency (*CIS*, 60).

An understanding of morality of this kind, once again, clearly distances itself from moral realism and, as I have argued in chapter 1, accounts for the problem of objectively justifying moral beliefs and systems: how can we justify at all a moral standard and defend a "moral fact" (and consequently assess moral progress) if we admit that they are simply "local concoctions" (Taylor 1999, 158).

Rorty, while always aiming to overcome old "authoritative" concepts, does not aim at any form of moral nihilism. His stance rather sustains the importance of understanding the *underlying mechanisms of the creation* of moral concepts, beliefs, and systems in order to work on making them *better*. He appears, in this sense, close to B. Williams who suggests that, in order to understand how ethical concepts work and change, we have to have some insight into the forms of social organization within which they work, as ethical concepts are, so Williams sustains as well, local convergences (cf. Williams 2006, 142-147). Williams too, suggests drawing our attention to (ethical) language, as it helps us understand that ethical understanding needs a dimension of social explanation (cf. Williams 2006, 131). Confronting an explanatory with a reflective account, Williams suggests that, while the explanatory account is not enough to deal with the problems of objectivity raised by the local ethical concepts, a *wider objectivity* could come, if at all, from a reflective account. The latter would then raise questions such as "is this a good way of living compared with others?"; or "is this the best kind of social world?" (*ivi*, 150-151).

While the matter of aiming at objectivity is central to William's account, Rorty makes numerous explicit proposals to abolish the notion of

objectivity altogether. This effort of his is one of his most criticized takes (cf., e.g., *RC*, chapters by Habermas, Bouveresse and Williams).

I suggest interpreting this apparent "abolishment" rather as an "*aufheben*" of the notion: I will argue below how, despite Rorty's radical antirealism, antirepresentationalism and explicit proposals for the contrary, there is still a remaining notion of objectivity – still a need for it – in his account in regard to moral progress (as an expanding circle). This notion is, however, combined with his advocacy to stop looking for it outside of time and space and start inquiring into (a form of) it, indeed, within society and its conversation.

2.2.2 Objectivity, social facts and language: some clarifications concerning the Rortyan antirepresentationalism

It is not my aim to extensively discuss the scope of the controversial Rortyan take on objectivity, which stretches throughout his whole output.[90] I believe, however, it is important to attempt some clarifications before going any further. As I am inquiring into the link between language and moral change, I will briefly address the matter of objectivity in regard to this issue. This means, here, to particularly address the issues of (social and moral) *facts* and their *dependence on language* on the one hand and the matter of *privileged statuses of vocabularies* on the other. The former concerns the question of whether there is such as thing as social and consequently moral facts (assuming, with Rorty, that morality stems from social practices) within the Rortyan view, and hence how objectivity can be understood in this matter. The latter is concerned with an objectivity regarding language – specifically vocabulary – itself. This second issue is hence about asking whether there is such a thing as (objectively) better and hence favourable vocabulary as compared to others.

[90] Rorty's aim to apparently debunk or substitute notions such as Truth and Objectivity has indeed been at the heart of criticism of Rorty's philosophy, and the literature about it is infinite.

2.2.2.1 The description dependence of (social and moral) facts

Rorty's philosophy is often described as encompassing a vision of constructivism. P. Boghossian, for instance, even describes him as one of the "most important and influential fact-constructivists" (Boghossian 2006, 27). Boghossian, here, particularly refers to an excerpt of *TP*, where Rorty states, "[I] think there is no description-independent way the world is, no way it is under no description" (*TP*, 90). If we now accept that (fact-)constructivism can be understood as a position which supports the claim that if language is a social construction, so are the facts (Wikforss 2020, 7), and considering Rorty's assertion in *TP*, then the label of the constructivist seems accurate.

Description-dependence challenges, indeed, the status of objectivity of a fact, if we assume that both mind-independence and universality are important notions of objectivity (Boghossian 2006, 13). This seems in itself contradictory if we accept a Wittgensteinian definition of fact (*Tatsache*) as something that is not part of language but is rather the *fundament* of truth (Ritter & Gründer 1998, 914). Rorty indeed agrees with Wittgenstein that the world (and facts) are not made of language but, he argues, that language is rather something we use to describe the world, or rather "cope with the world". What he does not support, in the early Wittgenstein, is the supposed isomorphism between language and the world (cf. *ibid.*). Indeed, as I will show shortly, when Rorty urges us to be Wittgensteinian (*CIS*, 21) he mostly refers to the mature Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PU*).

Rorty states that he has "never doubted that most things in the universe are causally independent of us" (*TP*, 86). What he questions, is whether they are "representationally independent of us" (*ibid.*). His *antirepresentationalism* is indeed one of the central themes of his philosophy, which he elaborates on in *PMN* and *CP*, and is finally outlined as the heart of his position in *ORT*, pp. 1-18. This position implies a scepticism towards the correspondence theory of truth, the scheme-content distinction, as well as any possible clear distinction between made and found, i.e., what is mere appearance and what is reality. It is an account "which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality" (*ORT*, 1).

It is this antirepresentationalist account that grounds Rorty's assertion that there is no description-independent way the world is (*TP*, 90). "[I am] tempted to say that there were no objects before language shaped the raw material", he admits, suggesting that there is indeed a mind-society- and language-independent world, but that it is language that *conceptualized* this world (raw material) and shaped it into objects (cf. e.g. *CIS*, 27; *PSH*, 59). He goes on to say that as soon as he says anything like that, he finds himself "accused (plausibly) of making the false *causal* [m.e.] claim that the invention of 'dinosaur' caused dinosaurs to come into existence – of being what our opponents call 'linguistic idealists'" (*TP*, 90).

Rorty has indeed been charged with the label of the linguistic idealist (Farell 1996, 123). However, if, as it has been argued (Tartaglia, 2010), linguistic idealism is defined as a position that implies that the *contents* of experiences (facts) are a function of language (cf. Fisher 1984), that suggests "that there was really nothing to be talked about before people began talking" (*PSH*, 58) then this label, I claim, is not accurate. Rorty indeed states, "[I have] no doubt that there were trees and stars long before there were statements about trees and stars. But the fact of antecedent existence is of *no use* [m.e.] in giving sense to the question, 'What are trees and stars apart from their relation to other things – apart from our statements about them?'" (*PSH*, 58).[91]

These few last paragraphs have been concerned with the Rortyan position about *facts in general*. My aim, in light of the scope of this work, is to particularly investigate the question of *moral* facts, as an extension of *social* facts.

Unlike facts such as the number of moons of Jupiter (Boghossian 2006, 11-13) or how many legs a chair has (*RC*, 163) or that 2 x 2 equals 4 (Wittgenstein 1958), *social* facts *can* be mind-, judgement-, and/or society-dependent. A social fact can concern, for instance, the issue of how much something costs, whether a certain state is a democracy (Wikforss 2020), and whether a human being is of one gender or another (Lugones 2016) or belongs to a certain race (Smith 2020, 55). They are, in a larger sense, dependent on human agreement and

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[91] Rorty has, however, elsewhere shown himself sympathetic with the notion of linguistic idealism when he understood it as "the idea that the essence of an object is determined by the sorts of things we say about it" (*PCP*, 164).

descriptions that may vary from one society to the other.[92] It is, however, still accurate to call them "facts": if the price tag of a carton of milk shows a certain price and I end up paying that very price, it is a *fact* that the milk (in the time and place where I buy it) costs that specific price. (If I later asserted that the price was different, I would be untruthful, as the facts – the *content* of my assertion – were different.) This fact is description-dependent, as nothing could be money without the description of it (Boghossian 2006, 28).

Rorty ascribes it to Foucault to have shown that the issue particularly also concerns *self-descriptions*, which are again dependent on the linguistic resources available in one's environment (*PSH*, 236): for instance, Rorty echoes Foucault, prior to the concept "homosexual" to describe certain people, there were no "homosexuals" but only people who preferred to have sex with other people of the same sex.

My consideration of moral facts as an extension of social facts comes as a consequence of the acceptance that moral systems, beliefs, and practices have developed socially. Moral facts, I would argue, are however more complicated to define and justify as such, as the notion of the moral *fact* generally suggests that they are beyond local preferences and tastes (cf. Shweder 2003, 36). As I have argued in chapter 1, even advocates of (contemporary, secularized) accounts of moral realism are often reluctant to defend a moral conviction or belief as a moral *fact*, as they are aware of local limitations when judging its objectivity. One must, in fact, be moreover aware that, what counts as wrong and as right, changes not only from one society to the other but often also from one member of the society to the other, and under consideration of one condition or the other. Among those conditions are (description-dependent) social facts.

[92] Analogously, G. Hellman suggests that when accepting that only by drawing (linguistic) distinctions we can make sense of the world, we must differentiate the object of the natural sciences from that of the social sciences: in contrast to the former, the latter are concerned with a (social) world already constituted by human-made concepts, rules, and established practices of describing them. "We are necessarily engaging in redescription because we are dealing with a terrain that is already constituted and developed by means of human language and, thus, conceptually autonomous from our ways of sense-making as the natural world is not" (Hellmann 2020, 49). He notes that both disciplines are concerned with how "things in the broadest sense of the term hang together […] linguistically" (*ivi*, 47). He thus claims, echoing Peirce, that we consider knowledge in this sense, not for what we can claim a special status of truth but for what we are willing to act upon. This again echoes what Wittgenstein means by "knowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement" (*ivi*, 53).

When Rorty now suggests replacing objectivity with something else[93], specifically in the field of ethics and morality, I argue that this does not mean ultimately abolishing the notion of objectivity altogether. Rorty indeed explicitly defends himself against that accusation (cf. *RC*, 151). What he attempts to do is to make it fit with his antirepresentationalism. For whatever is "out there" in terms of mind-independent, universal, and hence "objective" facts, our interpretations or representations of it are part of a different sphere: language, which describes the world, is something different from the world itself. Hence, there is no access to that transcendent, mind-independent objectivity – not through language or any other tool.

Rorty is aware of the power of the notion of objectivity, as it implies a matter of answerability to the world (*RC*, xi). Objectivity, in this sense, is at least *pragmatically* justifiable as it is ultimately "useful" to have it for the whole field (and/or project) of morality and moral progress: when it comes, for instance, to the issue of moral duty, as opposed to actions based on mere individual (or shared) desire and preferences, the matter of answerability to something greater than the individual self or one's kin (and community) comes into play.

What Rorty hence proposes is to transfer all inquiry about what is morally right and wrong to the social sphere rather than attempting to find answers from something that lies beyond human and social action. "We need to restate our intellectual ambitions in terms of our relations to other human beings, rather than in terms of our relation to non-human reality" (*RC*, 25); "for [us] pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to escape the limitations of one's community, but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible" (*ORT*, 23). This inter-subjectiveness, as I will debate in chapter 3, while it is necessarily grounded in one's own community,[94] is not limited to it but is to be understood as open, inclusive, and extended in the largest possible sense.

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[93] He suggests, on the one hand, *solidarity* in terms of a goal of moral inquiry; and, on the other hand, *intersubjectivity* in terms of justification.

[94] See also Rorty's account of "ethnocentrism" (chapter 5, pp. 213ff).

One could boldly say that Rorty gives the notion of objectivity a Hegelian[95] sense by comprehending it as Objective *Geist*, and thus as the developing social and historical sphere (*Moralität*, *Sittlichkeit*, law, state) rather than the ahistorical, transcendent sphere.[96] This would support the assumption that the notion of objectivity, rather than being rejected or abolished, in Rorty is indeed *aufgehoben* within the idea of a constantly developing world that is shaped based on chance and historical contingency on the one hand and human agency embedded in a social practice (which again is tightly linked to cause and contingency) on the other.

2.2.2.2 Privileged status of vocabulary

Another Rortyan preoccupation regarding the notion of objectivity concerns language itself – specifically vocabulary. According to his general view, no vocabulary has a privileged status compared to the other. In other words, there is no *objective* reason to justify the accuracy of one vocabulary over the other. This comes as a consequence of both Rorty's scepticism towards the correspondence theory of truth, his advocated antirepresentationalism, and his consideration of language and "the world out there" as two different spheres. His position, in regard to privileging one vocabulary over the other, I claim, however, is at least twofold.

On the one hand, he indeed refuses to accord any vocabulary a privileged status (cf. Tartaglia 2010) by advocating that we should resist the temptation to privilege one among the many languages in which we habitually describe the world or ourselves (*CIS*, 6-7). This is analogous to Rorty's warning to resist the temptation to look for criteria outside of language itself. "The world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors[97] [...] we can only compare

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[95] I particularly refer, here, also to the view I briefly laid out above, that the objective *Geist* has sometimes been comprehended as (or linked to the notion of) "conversation" (cf. p. 58).

[96] I want to remind, at this point, that Rorty's consideration of Hegel is consistently "de-absolutized".

[97] Rorty uses the Davidsonian term "metaphor" to oppose it to "literal" linguistic elements, where the metaphorical denotes the unfamiliar, uncategorized and thus rule-less (cf. Calder 2003). Metaphors, in this sense, can also be political tools, as they can evoke new reactions when referring to the world and thus illustrate the need for new vocabulary and linguistic re-evaluations.

languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called 'fact'" (*ivi*, 20; cf. also *PCP*, 22-23). This however, Rorty underlines, does not mean that the idea of an "objective criteria for [the] choice of vocabulary [is] to be replaced with subjective criteria [and] reason with will or feeling" (*CIS*, 6).

On the other hand, however, as I will make more explicit later, Rorty, within some of his proposed processes of redescription, does, in fact, privilege some vocabularies over others. He privileges what he considers to be more *useful* and helpful (for a possible progress). The Rortyan account indeed does *not* support the idea that when it comes to language games "morally and politically anything goes" (cf. Geras 1995, 142). The Rortyan thought rather promotes a scepticism towards the idea that one specific vocabulary to describe an object (of morality) could be privileged from a God's eye view, or by an intrinsic nature of the object itself. The commensurability of the vocabularies and languages rather lies within language and the conversation. It further promotes being constantly on the lookout for "better" descriptions. A comparison with other descriptions (and languages) – which can be done within (an ever broader) and inclusive conversation – helps find or invent better descriptions.

2.2.3 A "Wittgensteinian" approach: on the boundaries of language and of morality

To drop the idea of language as representation, for Rorty, must lead to being "thoroughly Wittgensteinian" (*CIS*, 21). As P. Horwich pointed out, different from other Wittgensteinians, for the pragmatist Rorty, it was not about understanding what Wittgenstein fundamentally meant, but rather "which of his writings have proven most useful, which strands of putatively Wittgensteinian thought have pointed us in worthwhile directions" (Horwich 2010, 145). Rorty is expressly sympathetic to the core ideas of the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PU*) and the latter Wittgenstein, who "triumphed over his younger […] self, by no longer feeling the need to […] set himself over against the world as 'the unsayable limit of the world'" (*EHO*, 50). However, as I aim to show, some of the notions of the *Tractatus* (*TLP*) are also implicitly conserved within the Rortyan accounts concerning language and

morality. Among the latter is the notion of language as a limit or *boundary* (for moral systems and thought).[98]

"On the view common to […] Wittgenstein, to possess a concept is to be familiar with the use of a linguistic expression", Rorty writes (*PCP*, 113). This familiarity is linked to the (contingent) cultural and historical surroundings, as pointed out above, which determine the language with which human beings program themselves (*CIS*, 6; *RC*, xiv). Rorty understands this "programming" in Darwinian terms and thus sees "changes in vocabulary as adaptations to the causal pressures exerted by the world, with language bearing no more of a representational relation to an intrinsic nature[99] of things than does the anteater's snout or the bowerbird's skill at weaving" (Tartaglia 2010, 616). In this view, changes in vocabularies are to be considered mainly "gradually [losing] the habit of using certain words and gradually [acquiring] others" (*CIS*, 6). However, changes in vocabulary, as claimed and as I will deepen later, further occur as a consequence of rational decisions within communicative action and through the conduct of discourse and conversation (cf. also Ramberg 2002, 30-32).

Human beings are "existentially committed to any vocabulary they adopt" (Bella 2020, 1). What Rorty calls final vocabulary is characterized in relation to moral communities (Santelli 2020, 11); words mean what they mean because people use them in certain institutionalized ways and not in others (*ivi*, 3). Meaning, as I have argued above, changes from *within* communicative and conversational social practices (cf. *PCP*, 108). For this reason, Wittgenstein, so Rorty claims, "wants [philosophers] to study language [rather than reality, and rather than thought, as Kant did]" (*PCP*, 161). Wittgenstein's maxim, so Rorty interprets it,[100] is: "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use"[101] (*ivi*, 172).

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[98] While the notion of the limit is also implicit in the "language games" central to *PU*, a part of the "Wittgensteinian vocabulary" he uses, as I will discuss, is moreover in accordance with *TLP*.
[99] Rorty, in fact, claims that, in order to keep faith with Darwin (which is what he aims to do), "we should think of […] 'language' not as naming a thing with an intrinsic nature of its own, but as a way of abbreviating the kinds of complicated interaction with the rest of the world that are unique to the higher anthropoids" (*PSH*, 64).
[100] Wittgenstein, in his own words, writes, "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (*PU*, 20).
[101] In *PU*, Wittgenstein notes that language is far too dynamic and inexact, to understand it based on the mere rules of logic. What we must do, he claims, is to take everyday language as it is and look at how words are used. The meaning of a word is its use in a language (*PU*, 20).

In *PCP*, Rorty suggests a distinction between "Wittgensteinian therapists" and "Pragmatic Wittgensteinians"[102] (*ivi*, 162 - 173). Rorty himself subscribes to the latter while putting emphasis on the notion of the use. The pragmatists, so Rorty, find support in Wittgenstein's writings – specifically in *PU* – in regard to pragmatist views of truth and knowledge, of "having got rid of the dualistic, Fregean ways of thinking which dominated the Tractatus and early analytic philosophy" (*DP*, 16) and agree that there is nothing useful to be said about the relation between two large entities called "language" and "world". It is not useful, as "there is no way, as Wittgenstein has said, to come between language and its object, to divide the giraffe in itself from our ways of talking about giraffes" (*PSH*, xxvii). This is evidently the view Rorty himself supports in regard to Wittgenstein's output.

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world [m.t.]", writes Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (*TLP*, 86). In *Vortrag über Ethik*, he adds that "attacking those walls of our cages [m.t.]" is absolutely unwinnable (Wittgenstein 1989, 19). What we cannot think, we cannot say, and on the contrary, what we cannot say, we cannot think. The subject is hence too to be considered a limit of the world (*TLP*, 86-87; cf. also *PSH*, 50). What Rorty regards with scepticism in the younger Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* (as compared to the mature Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*) is the *rigidity* of the limits of language. While Rorty takes the boundaries of language (specifically as constitutive for moral thought, reasoning, and conversation) seriously, his primary ambition is, ultimately, to "leap" over those very boundaries. The element of the boundary has particularly emerged in Rorty's take on "final vocabulary": "those words are as far as [we] can go with language" (*CIS*, 73).

As it can be drawn from the antirepresentationalist stance I have laid out by referring to Rorty, language is a fundamental element for and within a subject's relation with the world: by talking about giraffes, the subject conceptualizes the giraffe and hence constructs an understanding of the giraffe. The language they use to conceptualize the

[102] As P. Horwich points out (Horwich 2010, 145-146), this distinction means, for Rorty, a positioning in regard to what one finds valuable in Wittgenstein's work. While, in his view, those who are "Wittgensteinian therapists" identify philosophical problems with diseases and thus call for a sort of "therapy", the "pragmatic Wittgensteinians" favour Wittgenstein's view of languages as instrumental social practices.

world hence has an impact on how they understand and relate to it. It appears flawed and hence faulty to entirely reduce one's relation to the world to language, as this would erroneously mean, amongst other things, that non-linguistic beings, as non-human animals or even children before they acquire a language, were missing the essential tool to interpret[103] and relate at all to what surrounds them.[104] However, as pointed out above, there is reason to assume that the specific language(s) we acquire (with which "we programme ourselves") – particularly the thick concepts of a certain language – still affect the boundaries Wittgenstein talks about (as compared to other presumed boundaries alternative languages would have caused).

It is not only the single term (i.e., a thicker or thinner concept a subject learns and with which they relate to their surrounding and themself) that has an impact on how subjects understand the world. It is further the *sentences* that reconstruct the world with the help of a logical structure (*TLP*, 33). Within a sentence, so Wittgenstein puts it, the world is arranged tentatively (*probeweise zusammengestellt*; Wittgenstein 1961/1979, 7). A sentence is an image and a model of actuality, as we conceptualize it (*wie wir sie uns denken*, *TLP*, 30): a sentence only expresses something if it expresses an *image* (*als er [der Satz] ein Bild ist* (*ivi*, 34). The language disguises (*verkleidet*) the thought: from the form of the disguise, one cannot infer the disguised thought (*ivi*, 30). The logic of sentences and hence of languages depends on their *application* (*Anwendung*) and can hence not be understood *a priori* (cf. *ivi*, 86).

The dependence on the application or use of language connects with the Rortyan emphasis on contingency. In the *Tractatus*, we read further: "no single part of our experience is a priori. Everything we see could be different. Everything we can describe, could be different [m.t.]" (*ivi*, 88). Wittgenstein, moreover, states, "the whole modern worldview is based on the misconception that the so-called laws of nature are the illustration of the phenomena [m.t.]" (*ivi*, 106).

[103] Cf. also *PU*, 107.

[104] In recent years, it has been theorized that the acquisition of a language is based on statistical learning (Breitenstein & Knecht 2003). According to this view, the human brain identifies regularities within the sensory data which it receives. This data includes linguistic terms, which the subjects then statistically learn to bring in direct relation with other non-linguistic data. Once the language-acquiring subject has associated the non-linguistic data with a term, this relation is rather stable and long-lasting.

It is the specific conclusions about ethics – "the final passages of the Tractatus" (*PCP*, 164) – that Rorty explicitly dismisses from the early Wittgensteinian output. Among these final passages is the famous (and concluding) "*Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen*". It is particularly ethics about which Wittgenstein suggests that it cannot be spoken about (*TLP*, 108 - 111). This, contrarily to Rorty, is due to the fact that the early Wittgenstein considers ethics to refer to something "higher", insofar as it emerges from the aim to say something about the ultimate Good, the "ultimate sense of life" (Wittgenstein 1989, 19). As sentences can express nothing "higher" or transcendent, and as all "sense" (of the world) necessarily lies outside accidental (or contingent) sentences, there cannot be any sentences in ethics: ethics cannot be "pronounced [m.t.]" (*TLP*, 108).

Rorty ultimately makes the opposite case. He advocates that precisely because we cannot access anything outside our social practices, we must understand ethics (from) within those practices and be aware of the role language plays within them. Ethics, in the *Tractatus*, hence lies outside of the limits posed by the subject and language. In Rorty, ethics is a shared practice – or rather something that emerges from a shared practice – and it lies hence inside of the intersubjective limits.

2.2.4 On the conceptual and the perceptual space

In order to better comprehend the matter regarding the boundaries of morality, I propose to differentiate between the limits of what Moody-Adams calls (1) the *conceptual* and (2) the *perceptual* (moral) space (Moody-Adams 2016).

The *conceptual space* corresponds to what Rorty also calls the "logical space necessary for […] moral deliberation". This refers to the (linguistic) possibilities available to describe our (moral) practices, the aim of our practices as well as ourselves (cf. Salis 2003, 274). The conceptual space is limited by the amount and sort of vocabulary and descriptions with which, according to Rorty, we have "programmed ourselves". New vocabulary hence changes or enlarges the conceptual space, as it gives us new possibilities to describe and conceptualize the world. For Moody-Adams, this conceptual space concerns mainly moral debate and hence has to do, among other things, with discursive reason-

giving and argument. In a broader sense, it has to do with the scope of resources to describe (and justify) moral phenomena, practices and beliefs. It is, in Moody-Adams' stance, specifically this enlargement of the conceptual space (and hence the "leaps" over linguistic boundaries) that is "a critical mechanism of moral progress" (Moody-Adams 2016, 154). However, Moody-Adams goes on, sometimes, changing discursive practices is not powerful enough to provoke a moral change, so we must instead "produce […] transformations in how human beings *perceive* [m.e.] the world" (*ivi*, 163).

When I talk about boundaries of the *perceptual space*, in regard to language, it concerns the limit a vocabulary poses to the possibilities of how a subject perceives the world. This sphere is without a doubt more subtle and it implies difficulties to point to particular moral limits. It implies what underlies moral beliefs (or moral *knowledge*, cf. chapter 3), as well as (quasi-)intuitive responses to the world (Pleasants 2018, 570). The definition of the perceptual space does not exclusively concern the linguistic but rather also the visual and any other sensorial spheres. However, as I am discussing the implications of language on morality, I will stick to the first.

Moral perceptions ground both beliefs and attitudes about and towards other people. N. Pleasants sustains that the contents of moral perceptions (just as scientific ones) are rooted in socially shared "paradigms" in the Kuhnian sense (*ivi*, 569). The beliefs and attitudes towards people thus mean an attitude towards a category of a being's fundamental moral status. These may be linked to a person's skin colour, geographical origin, social class or any other way of *categorizing* them. The subject of moral perception experiences their beliefs about the other as a direct apprehension of their inherent moral status (*ivi*, 571).

If linguistic ascriptions or descriptions contribute to this direct apprehension, it then means how we describe and talk about groups or individuals has an impact on how they are morally perceived. On a larger level, this does not only concern direct descriptions of individuals (or generally beings), but also descriptions of the world and circumstances linked to those individuals. It thus means the very words we employ to describe an individual or given circumstances and realities have a direct impact on how we perceive them and further limit the possibilities of how we could (alternatively) perceive them.

2.2.5 Language as a tool to cope

"Languages are not attempts to copy what is out there, but rather *tools* [m.e.] for dealing with what is out there" (*PSH*, xxvi) is another way of Rorty claiming that language is not a medium of representation but rather of interaction, communication, and creation (cf. *CIS*, 41).

Rorty does inherit the notion of the tool from Wittgenstein, but more explicitly from Dewey (*CP*, xix). Language for Dewey is "the tool of tools" (Garrison 1995, 90). Echoing Dewey, Rorty explains that languages are among the many tools that human beings have developed; like any other tool, they serve humans to interact with their environment and to deal or "cope" with it (*PSH*, xxiii). This stance is another explicit expression of Rorty's pragmatic antirepresentationalism, as he states:

> To see the employment of words as the use of tools to deal with the environment, rather than as the attempt to represent the intrinsic nature of that environment, is to repudiate the question of whether human minds are in touch with reality […]. No organism, human or non-human, is ever more or less in touch with reality than any other organism. The very idea of "being out of touch" with reality presupposes the un-Darwinian, Cartesian picture of a mind which somehow swings free of the causal forces exerted on the body. […] We need to stop thinking of words as representations and to start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment (*ibid.*).

On a pragmatist, antirepresentationalist level, the notion of the tool is hence thought to help pursue our different purposes. Language is not thought to represent something "objectively" but to work something in terms of usefulness. So, Rorty argues, "the relation of tools to what they manipulate is simply a matter of utility for a particular purpose", not of "'correspondence'. [...] For it becomes hard to take seriously the idea that one description of A can be more 'objective' or 'closer to the intrinsic nature of A' than another" (*PSH*, 65).

Brandom criticizes the notion of the tool, calling it a fundamental mistake to think of language as such. In his view, the problem lies with

the fact that we apply a distinctive intelligibility to tools: a tool is a means to an end, so it is indispensable that you can specify what the goal is. Within linguistic practice, however, so Brandom claims, the very intelligibility of the ends depends on our linguistic capacities. "They are precisely not goals we can make sense of first so that later, language can be brought into the picture playing the role of a possible tool for achieving them" (Brandom 2002, 57). Understanding language as a tool preserves the idea of interests prior to language (Bacon 2012, 183).

Rorty, however, cautions to consider that this specific kind of tool is not separable from its user because that would indeed suggest the possibility of breaking out of language (*CP*, xix). If we accept the notion of language as a tool, I propose to conclude that it is hence not, as Brandom suggests, that we think of a specific end and then choose the tool according to what we accomplish, but rather that we are restricted to a certain kind (and amount) of tools that are connected to us, which we employ in certain ways, based on what appears the most useful. Rorty indeed argues in this regard:

> The person who designs a new tool can usually explain what it will be useful for – why she wants it – in advance; by contrast, the creation of a new […] vocabulary will have its utility explained only retrospectively. […] Once we figure out how to use [the vocabularies], we can tell a story of progress (*CIS*, 55).

Wittgenstein talks about establishing or creating an *order* when using language: "one out of many possible orders; not 'the' order" (*PU*, 51). The words of this language, he writes, are like the tools of a toolbox: we have many different tools available; they all have different functions, and sometimes there are similarities, i.e., sometimes we could use either one or the other tool for similar purposes (*ivi*, 6-8). The meaning of the word is established within its practice.

Rorty welcomes this kind of attitude towards the use of language, as opposed to "traditional pre-Wittgensteinian accounts [which] have taken for granted […] questions like 'is the language we are presently using the «right» language – is it adequate to its task as a medium of expression or representation?'" (*CIS*, 13). For Rorty, accounts of those kinds are in support of the correspondence theory of truth and representationalism: they assume that there is one correct way to linguistically represent something non-linguistic.

Rorty suggests that we actually choose our words (i.e. our tools) and hence create the order Wittgenstein talks about, according to their expected usefulness for our interests and needs.[105] His specific suggestion is to replace distinctions such as appearances and reality, with more pragmatic distinctions as "more [and less] useful descriptions of the world": "our linguistic practices are so bound up with our social practices that our descriptions of nature, as well as of ourselves,[106] will always be a function of our social needs" (*PSH*, xxvi). *Communication*, in this view, requires agreement to use the same tools (cf. *PAA*, 96).

What is important to consider, within his position, is that the tools are always limited. Wittgenstein's toolbox contains only a certain range of tools from which one can choose. One can hence only, in the Rortyan view, work with the tools one has available. This does not exclude, though, as argued, that new tools can be acquired or created. Yet, one must always start with the tools one possesses. A pragmatist understanding of one's linguistic boundaries, following Rorty, requires one to comprehend that they are *presently* inadequate to implement certain projects; however, there is hope that the "future may be better than the past in this respect" (*PSH*, 52), which implies that in the future we may be better equipped.[107]

2.3 Language and moral change

A linguistic pragmatist view on moral progress, hence, implies being aware of the limits language poses to both our conceptual and perceptual (moral) space and to the possibilities to describe and create

[105] If moral progress is a desired goal or interest, then this can be specifically extended to "useful for moral progress" or useful for the emergence of beliefs or practices that support or evoke moral progress.

[106] This pragmatic account of language as tools does, in fact, not only relate to our relationship with (and description or creation of) the world, but further to the description of ourselves, and hence the making of ourselves. Rorty points out that by describing ourselves, we create ourselves: "the process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language" (cf. *CIS*, 27).

[107] There are takes on the idea of a "progress" of language, in Rorty, that sustains that language has been historically enlarged and "rendered more flexible" (*PCP*, 108).

moral concepts. It implies further, however, according to Rorty, a hopefulness that this can change. [108] In chapter 4, I will present an account of how the concept of hope, in Rorty's pragmatist account, comprehends the notion of action. For now, I will base any further inquiries in this regard on the mere claim that, when Rorty talks about hopefulness, he does not refer to a fantastical idea or merely wishful thinking about the future but rather on human beings actually having the capacity to actively change certain conditions: i.e., in the specific account I am inquiring, through linguistic action.

In the previous section, I aimed to show, amongst other things, how the Rortyan account contributes to a framework that demonstrates how particular languages "hold us captive". In this section, I will elaborate on how there is, in the Rortyan view, hope that we can break through certain linguistic boundaries and hence expand our moral perceptions and conceptions by means of the acquisition of new vocabulary (or the abandonment or transformation of the old one). The hope implies that those expansions lead to changes in moral beliefs (or knowledge) and practices.
This hope is, among other things, a Rortyan view on language that explains why he prefers the mature Wittgenstein (*PU*) to the younger version of the *Tractatus*. While the captivity linked to language was at the centre of (and concluded the) *Tractatus*, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein explores the manifoldness and the dynamics of language.[109]

In *PU*, the mature Wittgenstein departs from the observation that in everyday life, language is used in a much more comprehensive way rather than simply describing circumstances: language expresses desires, orders, announcements and so on. Wittgenstein refers to these different employments of language as the manifoldness of language games

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[108] The idea of moral progress must not be limited to looking at the impact language has on (moral) perceptions and conceptions (be it in terms of limits or of what expands those limits). Rather, it suggests one particular focus within a specific understanding of moral progress, as outlined in chapter 1: to focus on language means to better understand (the impact) of a specific contingent *condition* – one among many; and to explore a powerful tool to successfully provoke a social development, that is morally desirable.
[109] In the brief prologue of the *Philosophical Investigations* (*PU*), Wittgenstein admits that he had committed "grave mistakes" in the *Tractatus*. This, to an important extent, concerns the rigidity which he ascribed to the limits of language.

(*Sprachspiele*).[110] These language games are to be understood as to be constantly developing (within our evolutionary process): just as human beings lose the habit of using some vocabulary and adopt some other, some language games are lost in the process, and others are added.

Though Rorty uses the notion himself, he states at one point that the term "language game" may have been an unfortunate choice by Wittgenstein, as it suggests "a rule-governed procedure" (*FOR*, 59). He goes on to say that "Wittgenstein at his best rejected the notion of rules in [favour] of the notions of practices, traditions, the kind of things that people pick up by participating without learning any rules but just by 'know-how'" (*ibid.*). However if, for instance, we look at the notion of "language game" within the account of H.-G. Gadamer (who too looks critically at the notion of rule as being reductive in front of the complexity of language), it is precisely the notion of the game that suggests an idea of "*Mitspielen*" (to play with) and a "*mit-einander-einspielen*" (to practice with each other), which finally merges with passivity or routine (cf. Di Cesare 2007, 193). Rules, in the mature Wittgenstein, have, in fact, a social or institutional character emerging from within the particular language games and are hence never transcendental (cf. Salis 2003, 281). A change of rules, therefore, can only come from within the language games of a particular era and social context.

2.3.1 Speaking differently: on agency and imagination

The core conclusion I want to suggest drawing from Rorty's fundamental take on language is that if we start from the premise that the vocabulary, which a subject or a community has acquired, restricts them to a certain conception (and perception) of the (moral) world (and consequently moral beliefs and practices), then a change (or extension) of the vocabulary potentially leads to a change (or extension) of this conceptual or perceptual space. Rorty specifically puts it as follows: "Speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument of cultural change" (*CIS*, 7). Changing languages, just as other social practices, has an impact on human beliefs, practices and hence what humans are themselves (cf. *CIS*, 7; 20).

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[110] Wittgenstein also calls the whole of language and the actions into which it is woven a "language game" (*PU*, 5).

2.3.1.1 "Coping" versus intentional action

When inquiring into the matter of linguistic (and consequently moral) change, Rorty hence combines (1) a naturalized-evolutionary process of losing older, less useful habits over new ones (as pointed out above) with (2) an account of (social and political) action related to moral responsibility (and duty).

The latter implies that linguistic actors have (i) the capacity to look out for different and enriching vocabulary and (ii) to go "metalinguistic" (cf. *PCP*, 114), i.e., to be able to discuss which words (better or) best describe a given situation (*ibid.*). It implies that, other than being natural and thus part of human evolution, processes of linguistic change can be affected by human agency. I understand agency, with Davidson, as the capacity for *intentional* action, i.e., "a capacity to act for the reasons furnished by intentional states […] mental states with propositional content" (Paez 2021, 9).

While I would claim that a significant part of the Rortyan stance concerning morality and moral progress can be primarily understood as a matter of metaethics, when it comes to the specific matter of *redescriptions*, his output further adopts a normative take. It is indeed the second of the two combined accounts – the account of action – that implies not only a descriptive part concerned with changing morality by means of language action but also a prescriptive and normative part that calls on social actors to look out for better vocabulary to provoke social change. Rorty incites language users to constantly ask themselves whether there are ways of describing and relating to things in a more adequate way. Whether they can make their future better? (*PSH*, 72; cf. *CIS*, 9; cf. Voparil 2004, 229). He hence incites them to take *action* and enlarge, improve and change their vocabulary, not at last, as a matter of possible moral improvement.

While it has also been pointed out that language *is* indeed action (Huette-Almerigi 2020, 8), the notion of the *tool* (i.e., language as a tool) emphasizes an account of action even more explicitly. What Rorty generally describes as a "tool to cope" implies, amongst other things, a coping mechanism with the world in an interpretative sense: language helps us conceive a chess board either as one or as sixty-four pieces or

as both (cf. *PSH*, 58), depending on our social necessities and historical contingencies. It helps us make sense of the world.

On the other hand, within the account of linguistic action, the tool may further specifically be described as a tool to *create* (or change). Other than the mere acquisition of new and improved vocabulary, Rorty specifically promotes a strategy to experiment with new descriptions in order to (help) see things differently and provoke new (moral) questions as well as new (morality-related) conversations. When it comes to the choice of the vocabularies to create something new, Rorty suggests, "whatever works. [Some people talk] Christian; other people talk Marxist; I talk pragmatist" (*ABAO*, 58).

Language thus does not only let us cope with a moral world, but it actually *creates one* (cf. *TP*, 132). I shall add that the Rortyan notion of "coping", in this context, does not at all exclude the creative power of language; it rather implies it.[111] My specific proposal to further describe it as a "tool to create or change", is simply thought to emphasize the matters of creation and agency within the account of linguistic change. One might consider this a redescription on my side of (a part of) the Rortyan notion of the "tool to cope": a redescription with the aim to shed light on a different (or particular) angle.

Moreover, as pointed out above, the tool "language" is itself a human creation, and some of its sub-tools (vocabularies) may and can be intentionally created. Rorty, in fact, calls "progress" (amongst other things) "developing better and better tools for better and better purposes – better, of course, by our lights" (*TP*, 134).

2.3.1.2 Imagination and the matter of usefulness

A key element within the account of experimentation to create a "better vocabulary" and hence a "better world" is the notion of imagination, which Rorty describes as "the source of language" (*PCP*, 114): "no imagination, no language. No linguistic change, no moral or intellectual progress." (*ivi*, 115). It means more concretely that, in order to subject one's language to critique or to invent better vocabulary, one must imagine "a community whose linguistic and other practices are different

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[111] Cf. *CIS*, 53: "All vocabularies [are] tools for the creation of such other human artefacts as poems, utopian societies, scientific theories and future generations."

from our own" (*TP*, 214). This is hence linked to the idea of imagining what kind of humans and societies we want to be and therefore imagining how our languages (and practices) have to change in order to become those human beings and societies. In terms of the idea of moral progress, to ground it all in the will of human beings to become better and hence invent better vocabulary presupposes a confidence that human beings (and societies) actually want to become better. It further describes the process in (partially) *teleological* terms, as it means to envision a certain social goal and work towards it. On the other hand, when it comes to redescriptions to provoke moral change, Rorty puts a large emphasis on the notion of "usefulness", which is, in fact, further tightly connected with what Kitcher calls a "*pragmatic*", bottom-up problem-solving conception of progress (cf. chapter 1): Rorty advocates to substitute less useful descriptions of the world with more useful ones (*PSH*, 48). The question here is and remains: useful for whom? And useful in order to achieve what exactly?

As argued in chapter 1, Rorty claims that "helping one another satisfy our desires, thus achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness" is the only moral obligation (what we owe each other), and he further sustains that something is socially *desirable* if it conduces to human happiness (cf. Smith 2005, 80). If we agree to understand moral progress, with Rorty and Singer, as an expanding circle, we may, whenever we ask ourselves the question "useful to achieve *what*?" answer: useful for provoking an expansion of the circle. Therefore, whenever we ask, "useful for whom?", our answer must be a "we" that is as increasingly inclusive as possible. Moreover, if we accept that the generally desirable outcome of our social (and political) actions is a greater happiness[112] (for an extended amount of people), we must further be preoccupied with the question of what sort of descriptions are useful for achieving precisely that. If we are, in fact, genuinely preoccupied with the happiness of people, we must be preoccupied with what potentially leads to *their* happiness.[113] Rorty's tool to get answers to the latter is an inclusive *conversation* which, so I have claimed, is a core condition for a moral progress in his account. As anticipated, I will dedicate the following chapter, chapter 3, specifically to this notion: conversation as the sphere where redescriptions are implemented and applied. I will dedicate the remaining part of this section to the specific

112 And/or less cruelty.
113 And/or their suffering.

notion of redescription and the moral and political implications that follow.

2.3.2 *Redescriptions*: moral change and political implications

2.3.2.1 Pragmatic processes of redescription and the expansion of the conceptual and perceptual space

Redescriptions,[114] in the Rortyan view, hence, concern both the world and "ourselves": it is thought to be a tool to transform the self (cf. Bacon 2017, 960) – ourselves as individuals and as societies –, and to expand the view we have on the world (and on others). It is, therefore, a tool for both social and individual change (*PSH*, 220).

The line between a "genuine validity-seeking argument" and rhetorical manipulation, here, becomes blurry (cf. Voparil 2004, 232): on the one hand, the proposed pragmatic method implies trying alternative idioms to see what fits better and to ask whether the use of certain words "get in the way" of other (fitting) words (*CIS*, 12), and on the other to show how "attractive"[115] things can look (Voparil 2004, 226).

P. Engel points out, in accordance with Rorty, that the main problem to address (in the account of ethics and morality) is not the accuracy of descriptions as such but rather the kind of *impact* they may have (*WUT*). Rorty considers redescriptions a method for potentially creating (moral) progress, in the sense that it might have a long-lasting impact on where individuals and societies move successively: the pattern of linguistic behaviour, which is created by "[redescribing] lots and lots of things in new ways" (*CIS*, 9), can lead to future generations adopting it and understanding it as their new final vocabulary. It is a process that takes much after the Hegelian *Bildung* where, as I would indeed argue, new

114 With "redescriptions", Rorty means explicitly a "pragmatic" process of redescription that is different from the metaphysician's method of redescription. The latter, Rorty claims, is reduced to (individual) reason rather than implying imagination (*CIS*, 90).

115 The matter of making things look more attractive, which is linked to Rorty's advocacy of persuasion as opposed to argument, has been criticized by many (cf. Geras 1995, 122). I will discuss this matter in chapter 3.

vocabularies build an antithesis to the final vocabulary of an older generation and merge into a synthesis, i.e., become the vocabulary of the following one(s). This method, so Rorty describes it, is what we can identify in utopian politics and revolutionary science as opposed to parliamentary politics or normal science (*ibid.*; Topper 1995, 954).

> Revolutionary achievements in the arts, in the sciences and in moral and political thought typically occur when somebody realizes that two or more of our vocabularies are interfering with each other, and proceeds to invent a new vocabulary to replace both. [It is hence] a gradual trial-and-error creation of a new, third vocabulary (*CIS*, 12).

In order to realize that a vocabulary is obsolete, that it gets in the way of another vocabulary and that maybe "a third vocabulary" is needed, prior sets of redescriptions may have been necessary (cf. *CIS*, 13): comparing descriptions of different situations and circumstances (within the conversation) may lead the interlocutors starting to employ new words. To get there, though, one needs to start with the vocabulary available while constantly being on the outlook for new ones (cf. *CIS*, 197).

Indeed, the matter of redescription may be divided into (1) the replacement or substitution of particular vocabularies (i.e., terms, words, concepts, or even phrases) and (2) the redescription of situations or circumstances (descriptions by means of the employment of vocabularies, i.e., words that are brought into a new "order" as Wittgenstein would put it). However, the lines between one and the other mechanism are not always exact and clear. In either case, the aim is to expand the conceptual and/or perceptual space for moral thought, reasoning, deliberation, and conversation. Rorty refers to these processes also as providing "new language" in order to change "instinctive emotional reactions" (i.e., to change the perceptual space) on the one hand and to "extend [the] logical space" (or the conceptual space) on the other (cf. *TP*, 204). If we accept to look at moral progress, with Rorty and Singer, as a matter of an expanding circle, this has, to a large extent, to do with how we describe our fellow human beings to whom our moral concern shall be extended. To call an individual a "refugee" may create one emotional reaction (or order within a conceptual logic), to call them an "exiled artist" another. To talk about certain professionals as "doctors" may facilitate one reaction or conception, to divide them into "doctors and doctresses" (cf. Kaiser

1984, 231) may facilitate others. The same goes for descriptions of certain social (ethically relevant) practices. Rorty draws an example of different descriptions of different times:

> Once, for example, it would have sounded crazy to describe homosexual sodomy as a touching expression of devotion [...]. At most times, it sounds crazy to describe the degradation and extirpation of helpless minorities as a purification of the moral and spiritual life of Europe. But in certain periods and places [...] it did not (*TP*, 104).

2.3.2.2 Political and moral implications of redescriptions: the individual and the institutional

To "*move to a different vocabulary*" (cf. section 2.1.2.2), besides the epistemic and moral question, also bears political implications. In fact, there are some Rortyan thinkers who appreciate precisely that aspect of the notion of redescription (Voparil 2004, Voparil 2011b, Dieleman 2014, Volpi 2002). Voparil, for instance, argues that the *political thrust* of Rorty's antirepresentationalism lies precisely in his idea of *redescriptions*: redescriptions are the work of a political theory, insofar as the perspectives are designed to *spark change* rather than to illuminate truths (cf. Voparil 2004, 227).

As I will further explore in the upcoming section and chapters, I agree with Voparil that redescriptions, according to Rorty's framework about moral progress, must also become a political tool in order to positively contribute to social conditions in favour of a further expanding circle of moral concern and solidarity. To spark change rather than to illuminate truth, however, must not refer to distorting or ignoring truths (or facts) in order to provoke change (e.g., for the personal advantage of a redescribing subject.) Rather, the aim behind redescriptions as a political tool means to offer different viewpoints on social elements and circumstances in order to favour a continuance of what Rorty calls the conversation about the social and moral life, beliefs, practices, and choices and to make that conversation more inclusive and morally fruitful.

I have argued that looking at the linguistic aspect of morality is particularly significant in the *communication* and/or *information age*, as our current era has recurrently been described. In fact, particularly within

the contemporary political sphere – specifically during and after the US-American presidency of D. Trump, and the arguable impact it had on political communities and social practices around the globe – alternative (i.e., "untruthful", cf. section 3.3.2.3) descriptions of reality have shown to have a major impact on both political and moral widespread beliefs. While I will make a few more arguments in this regard in chapter 3, I am not here to debate empirical evidence for shifts in political thought. Rather, while remaining on the theoretical side of the debate, and by looking more closely at the Rortyan framework, I will discuss the implications redescriptions (in the Rortyan sense) may indeed have on moral progress. In this sense, while promoting awareness of the complexity of redescriptions (not at last, related to individual and political power, and in regard to their potential to provoke moral regress, e.g., by linguistic means of dehumanization), I am focusing on the Rortyan notion of redescription as a tool to *improve* social practices and beliefs in a way that is morally (and politically) desirable. This, hence, means not to look at redescriptions as a tool that individuals (or groups) may use to favour their own socio-political goals but rather as a tool employed within the social practice to provoke morally desirable changes, i.e., changes that benefit members or stakeholders of society, in an inclusive sense.

Voparil claims, at one point, that Rorty's account contends itself with changes in vocabularies rather than changes in the world (*ibid.*): the political value of redescription is a way of generating new perspectives on the world (Voparil 2004, 227), by "playing off scenarios against contrasting scenarios" (*ivi*, 230). However, inspired by Dewey (cf. section 3.2.2), Rorty contends that philosophy must be an instrument of social change (cf. Morgan 2016, 3), which ultimately implies changes in the world.[116] Changes of vocabulary, hence, must have the ultimate purpose to provoke social changes (for the better, rather than the worse). Voparil, later in fact, appears to agree with this view inasmuch as he states that Rorty conceives linguistic innovation (in collective, political terms) as "paving the way for broad-scale social movements" (Voparil 2011b, 122). Though social movements (in a broad and general sense), as I have claimed and as I will discuss further in chapters 3 and 5, are just one of the conditions that might lead to changes in both moral belief, practice, and institutions.

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[116] Rorty, hence, fits S. Wolin's description of a "political theorist": compared to scientific theorists who seek to change only people's views of the world, political theorists aim to change the world itself (cf. Voparil 2004, 238).

The political question of redescriptions, in Rorty, is particularly connected to what he calls a *public* (as opposed to a private) final vocabulary. While private final vocabulary is deployed to answer questions like "What shall I be?", the public final vocabulary concerns, among other things, questions like "What sort of things about what sorts of people do I need to notice" (*CIS*, 91). Rorty separates the private vocabulary from the public one *theoretically* in order to explore (again, theoretically) what impact vocabulary – as much as, more specifically, changes in vocabulary – may have on two different spheres: the private sphere of self-realization (linked to the both political and moral notion of individual freedom) and the public sphere of shared social practices (connected to the notion of social justice). Hence, while in the private sphere, redescriptions concern primarily individual self-creation, in the public sphere, redescriptions concern the community (or society) and its members (cf. *CIS*, xiv; Voparil & Bernstein 2010, 41).

As I have defined moral progress as a *social* matter, i.e., (with Rorty) as a matter concerning society (or humanity) rather than the individual,[117] I will largely refer to the public sphere and thus *public vocabulary* when referring to redescriptions. However, as I will be arguing, I agree with L. Erez that the public-private divide, in Rorty's political philosophy, is far less rigid than many of his critics have claimed (cf. Bacon 2017, 956; Hogan 2017, 357; Topper 1995, 961), but rather fluid (Erez 2013), not at last because the (linguistic) individual is necessarily part of a larger moral community (cf. Topper 1995, 957). Rorty's hope to possibly reconcile private and public goals – i.e., both implying and by means of private and public redescriptions – is, in fact, expressed in his account of solidarity, as I will explore later.

The element of politics, in Rorty, becomes particularly explicit with the "sudden emergence" (Voparil 2011b, 116) of the notion of *cultural politics*. Cultural politics, for Rorty, means a practice that "[suggests] changes in the uses of words and by putting new words into circulation

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[117] While the notion of moral progress, for Rorty, refers to the social sphere or the human species, the term he uses when referring to the individual is "moral development" (cf. *PSH*, 79). To link the idea of moral progress to a larger social tendency or resource (rather than an individual occurrence) is in line with the current academic trend (cf. section 1.2.1.2). Certainly, social-moral changes imply individual moral developments.

– hoping thereby to break through impasses and to make conversation more fruitful" (*PCP*, 124). To break through impasses implies overcoming and solving problems, i.e., it involves the approach to moral progress, which Kitcher calls "pragmatic" (cf. chapter 1).

On the other hand, cultural politics for Rorty further implies envisaging socio-political goals and the use of linguistic practices to promote them ("teleological" approach, i.e., progress "towards", cf. chapter 1 and chapter 4). For Rorty, socio-political (or public) goals must include (in the view of moral progress) the increase of the degree of tolerance that certain groups of people have for each other (*PCP*, 3). By remaking meanings and expanding imaginations, cultural politics, amongst other things, aims to "[combat] inequality" (Livingston 2019, 329).

> The term "cultural politics" covers, among other things, arguments about what words to use. When we say […] that white people should stop referring to black people as "niggers," we are [practising] cultural politics. For our sociopolitical goals […] will be promoted by abandoning these linguistic practices. Cultural politics is not confined to debates about hate speech. It includes projects for getting rid of whole topics of discourse. (*PCP*, 3-4)

The question that persists is: on what grounds these redescriptions ought to be pursued. What justifies – in the long run – the use of one vocabulary rather than of the other, or to get rid of whole "topics of discourse" (or whole "conversations")? How do we know, what topics of discourse or vocabulary to better get rid of?

On the one hand, as I have argued, Rorty proposes to *experiment*: as we can never know what is ultimately "right" or "better", we should move forward by progressively testing which vocabulary works better or best (bottom-up, "pragmatic"). On the other hand, he admits that there is indeed a "better" vocabulary out there, that when it comes to language and morality, not "anything goes". He increasingly suggests that one should envision, as a goal, a greater solidarity ("teleological" approach). As anticipated, I will inquire (specifically and conclusively in chapter 5), whether the notion of solidarity can indeed be a compelling notion in this matter, i.e., whether the potential creation of (a greater) solidarity shall serve as a ground over decisions concerning language development, improvement, and change.

Redescriptions are, in fact, not a mere matter of "political correctness", i.e., a matter of mere courtesy and manners (Santelli 2020, 16). It rather concerns the constitution of moral identities. Linguistic innovation serves specifically to identify unchecked biases, prejudices and our social relations (*ibid.*). A goal of the practice of getting rid of "whole topics of discourse" means, for example, to "*stop dividing the human community* [m.e.]" (*ivi*, 3) *into certain categories*. Rorty, within the passage quoted, specifically talks about a political (rather than scientific or philosophical) division of people into "races". It has been argued extensively, in recent times, that race is indeed a (Eurocentric) social-political concept (cf. Mills 1997, cf. Smith 2020, 37-62), which has historically served as a ground for justified oppression, racism – which "will be with us, as long as the notion of race remains intact" (Smith 2020, 43) – and instances of dehumanization (see also chapter 5).[118] Echoing Rory's concern, this sort of categorization feeds into a vision of essentialism (here, racial essentialism, cf. *ivi*, 37) that ascribes certain traits to particular groups (or categories of people) as something fixed, inherently natural and ultimately irrepressible (cf. also *ivi*, 68). Rorty thus stresses that instead of talking about race, we should, if necessary, talk about different genes (*PCP*, 3). This suggests supporting a vision that understands human beings as representing infinite diversities and variations instead of fitting specific (fixed) boxes and subdivisions.[119] I argue that this anti-essentialist Rortyan critique of a certain categorization implicitly extends to other fixed (social-political) categories such as gender. I will address this latter issue shortly.

When we talk about redescription as a political instrument, the question of the subject of redescriptions re-emerges, i.e., who ought to redescribe, who is responsible for redescriptions, in what way and for what purpose. The very notion of the instrument or tool suggests that

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[118] D. L. Smith (Smith 2020) argues that race is a social invention for justifying oppression (*ivi*, 188) which, by dividing human beings into "our kind" and "their kind", is a first step on the road to dehumanization (*ivi*, 41). Smith makes the case that using the term "race" when discussing genetic diversity is both unnecessary and dangerously misleading. He claims that – at least in the USA of today – a person can look white but still be categorized as black, arguing that, rather than a reasonable classification based on natural-biological traits, race is a more or less arbitrary division which though forcefully supports a racial-essentialist picture among communities and social practices (cf. *ivi*, 37-69).

[119] This, again, supports an openness and possibly broader horizon both for the individual's self-understanding and consequentially self-realization, and for the subject's perception and conceptualization of the other (or others).

whoever has the power to use it, i.e., whoever controls it, has the capacity to use it for their very own (individual or collective) political purposes. As it has been argued, redescriptions can also go in the wrong direction; they can hurt (Smith 2014, 161). The matter hence touches the issues of both individual, collective, and particularly political responsibility.

Before even getting to the question of "on what grounds" one should engage in redescriptions as a tool for potential moral progress, a fundamental normative question within this framework, I would argue, is whether we (individually or collectively) *ought to redescribe at all*; or more specifically: whether engaging in redescriptions is a moral and/or political responsibility, while a central meta-ethical question (as anticipated above) in this regard, is whether and how we can know if our redescriptions improve people's lives or whether they create harm. In regard to the latter, Rorty would answer that (*a priori*) we can indeed not know at all; however, we can *envision* a scenario of how we would like the future to be, from where we stand today (with the vocabulary we have available) and imagine whether a new or improved vocabulary could work better to achieve that scenario. His pragmatic recommendation is indeed a trial-and-error-based process within which the redescribing subjects ought to be constantly attentive to what works and what does not. In order to understand what works (for [all] the members of a society), the conversation about that progress must be an inclusive one.[120]

Concerning the first (normative) question: if one wished to defend the view that it is a subject's responsibility or even duty to engage in redescriptions, one would first have to assume that redescriptions *can*, indeed, lead to a sort of moral improvement. I argued above that redescriptions can potentially have a positive impact on the moral status of individuals and groups, i.e., a subject's moral concern for them. This would mean a possible positive impact on a potential moral progress (as an expanding circle of moral concern). If we accept this and further agree that redescriptions do not require an extensive amount of effort from the redescribing subject(s), then, in consideration of the Singerian scenario of the drowning child (Singer 2016), we may (*prima facie*) defend

[120] This refers to a scenario of moral progress as a slow (and difficult) process for which there is constant need (cf. Dewey 1922, 282) rather than to responses to social emergencies, to which public replies are (and must be) quicker and (often) more radical.

the engagement in redescription processes as a moral duty or obligation.[121] I will rely on Singer's proposal as a moral principle when further discussing the question of moral duty. Rorty himself did not (explicitly) present the matter of (intentional) redescription as a moral duty. In his view, the only moral obligation we have is to "[help] one another satisfy our desires, thus achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness" (*EFT*, 8). Yet, if we accept, as I will further be exploring, that redescriptions are, among other things, a *tool* to possibly achieve moral progress – which, in Rorty, implies a greater happiness for a greater amount of people – then the moral obligation Rorty talks about may extend to the application of the tool, with the goal of a greater human happiness in view.

This extends to the political sphere, I would argue, if we agree that the political is concerned with (the sum of) the members of a society (cf. Ritter & Gründer 1995a, 1038) and thus argumentatively with the moral statuses of all. To be concerned with the moral statuses of the individuals and, implicitly, with the interests of (the sum of) all is arguably different from the (ethical) concern for the interest of a society as a whole (cf. Einhorn & Logue 2003, 136), though it does not necessarily exclude it.

If these arguments are accurate, in regard to the *agent* of redescription, I must conclude that the effort of redescriptions *ought* to be made both on an individual and political level. It refers, thus, on the one hand, to an effort made by the individual language user to (re-)describe the moral world, society and its members in a way that is morally *useful*: i.e., e.g., provoking inclusiveness, equality, and a greater happiness for all. On the other hand, redescriptions, in this view, refer to a political tool that is employed to overcome and solve social problems or to get closer to an envisioned scenario. This may include accounts of "language management" and "language standardization" (Wright 2015; Ramberg 2016). Both terms refer to accounts of creating or revising both oral and written standards for a language, on an institutional level.

A famous historical example of language standardization, to a large and comprehensive extent, is the one related to the development of nation-states, for example, post-revolutionary France (Lane et al. 2018, pp. 6, 24 & 225). The example of France and other European states (and colonized territories) around the eighteenth century shows what an

[121] I am employing the notions of duty and obligations as synonyms.

impact political intervention can have on written and spoken language practices and development. Yet, as Ramberg points out, language standardization development, such as the nationalization of languages, has often enough been driven by principles of (epistemic and social) authority rather than by principles of democratic participation (Ramberg 2016, 73). An authoritarian approach to language development is precisely what Rorty aims to move away from.

Ramberg specifically distinguishes between two approaches in the historical shaping of language: (1) the platonic view of language, which is associated with the idea that some languages are better suited than others to express clear thought of rational argument, and (2) the dialogical view, where ontological priority is given to the dynamics of linguistic negotiation. Needless to underline, at this point, the Rortyan account wants to move away from the former in order to embrace the latter. Ramberg further points out that the "dialogist[s]" may moreover be preoccupied with the question of whether standardization is a "good thing" at all (*ivi*, 79).

Rorty does not talk about standardization in his output but rather about *agreement* about what kind of vocabulary is the most useful. As I have claimed above, in his view, it is a common vocabulary that holds societies – other than nations – together.[122] It is thus not a matter of whether language standards are in themselves good or bad, but rather of how these standards are agreed upon: what is envisioned? By whom? What impact can a certain language standard (or agreed vocabulary) have on our moral development? And who has a say in it?

For and within democratic processes of language management or standardization, institutions can have an impact on the linguistic behaviour of the members of a society, for instance, through directives and education. Yet there are few coercive methods that may be imposed against a public that refuses to comply (Ramberg 2016, 68). Rorty, who wants to move societies away from coercion and rather work with persuasion (cf. chapter 3), advocates an attitude that promotes, within the ongoing conversation, images of a more inclusive and egalitarian

[122] This does not mean that the vocabulary of one member of society must be identical to the next one's, but rather that there must be a minimum set of common tools and concepts to make that society or community function as such. The "common vocabulary" is also linked to the notion of we-intentions Rorty takes from Sellars (cf. section 5.2.2). We-intentions are expressed by means of a common vocabulary.

society, and hence discusses (among all the interlocutors) what kind of vocabulary (and generally linguistic behaviour) may be useful to approach those images. The individual interlocutor then plays a decisive role in redescriptions as they are as much responsible for the creation and, above all, the implementation of new vocabulary.

Certainly, as Rorty claimed, there is no way to know *a priori* whether implemented vocabulary is favourable or not. However, if Williams is right to claim that ethics is a matter of decisions and that we must face the *responsibility* and take up the burden (Williams 2006, 170), then this does not preclude the members of the conversation from participating, in principle, in the vocabulary-changing and -creating activity. Yet, this ongoing process of renewal and *revision* (cf. Ramberg 2016, 81), within the conversation must be inclusive, open, and informed (as I will argue in chapter 3).

Responsibility comes first and foremost with the *power* (cf. Jonas 1984, 172-176) interlocutors actually have over influencing the development of certain moral beliefs and practices through linguistic practices (assuming that the previous arguments were accurate). It further comes with the *awareness* of this power: an understanding of the possibilities of intervention in "a fundamental human practice" (Ramberg 2016, 79) and its possible consequences.

Before I move on to the last part of this section, I would like to briefly point out that Rorty is very attentive with the words he employs in his works (although, as I am pointing out throughout my work, his choices of terms, in retrospective, do not always appear advantageous). This actual attentiveness is in line with his expressed advocacy to create a pattern of linguistic behaviour rather than arguing for one (cf. Tartaglia 2010, 625). In fact, he states, "I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favour look more attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics" (*CIS*, 9). This means giving up certain notions altogether, for instance, "intrinsic nature", for he claims that it has caused much more trouble than it has been worth (*CIS*, 8). Rorty, in regard to this example, refers to the risk that the notion may evoke the idea that there is something universal or absolute that transcends time, space and the possibility of the actual change that things undergo. His strategies also include what he calls to "banalize" certain vocabulary in order to make it more accessible (cf. *TP*, 229).

A specific example of his own redescriptions, which is particularly considerable for the times in which he published some of the texts, is the employment of the "she" (rather than "he") whenever he refers to non-gender-specific figures (e.g., his hero-figure, the "ironist", cf. *CIS*) or individuals in general. Compared to texts by other theorists during Rorty's (mid-life) era or before, in which nouns referring to human beings were generally presented as masculine, Rorty extends the perceptual space of the reader to potentially imagining (also) a woman in the role of the ironist, of the social revolutionist or of the philosopher. Decades later, I myself prefer the gender-neutral "they".

2.3.3 Contemporary takes on redescription: the example of language and gender, and its implications

In the current age and day, there are numerous attempts to change language standards that appear indeed to go beyond what Santelli (see above) labelled "political correctness", i.e., a matter of mere courtesy and manners. They rather aim to systematically include previously excluded groups in the conceptual space made available by language; they try to redescribe moral practices in a way, more different (possibly previously oppressed) people or groups would agree with and to redescribe history in a way that brings to light stories other than those (told through the eyes) of the most powerful. I particularly refer to very recent (and current) tendencies happening in the English-speaking realm and within some European countries. The examples are endless, and there is no space here to explore the details and controversies of all of them. Examples include the rising popularity of new vocabularies in some communities of the global English-speaking realm, such as the term "white saviour", which, as argued in chapter 1, helped change the perceptual space of specific figures in certain stories and allowed new perspectives. They further include revisions of definitions of terms in dictionaries, in which language standards are defined (cf. De Saussure 1967, 18-30). One recent revision is, for example, that of the term "racism" in the Merriam-Webster dictionary after the latter was urged to change it.[123] Another revision was undertaken by Oxford Dictionaries

[123] cf. C. Hauser, "Merriam-Webster Revises 'Racism' Entry After Missouri Woman Asks for Changes", in: *The New York Times*, 10 June 2020, (n.p.), www.nytimes.com/2020/06/10/us/merriam-webster-racism-definition.html.

following a petition concerning the definition of the word "woman", its synonyms (such as "bitch") and examples, which, according to the petition's campaigners, presented "woman" as a subordinate or "an irritation".[124]

One larger and more comprehensive attempt at making language standards more inclusive is the recent, ever more widespread tendencies and politics to make language more gender-equal (in some cases gender-neutral) and (or rather) to promote gender equality through linguistic practices.

Within feminist movements, so Rorty points out,[125] redescriptions have been an important strategy since, as C. MacKinnon had sustained, *logical (or conceptual) space may need to be expanded before justice can be envisaged* (*TP*, 204). Some feminist thinkers went so far as to envisage the unpacking of all the ways in which linguistics have been gendered, including all the symbols that have been identified as male and female (Roeckle 2007). Rorty, however, is more interested in linguistic strategies that gradually extend our (perceptual and) conceptual or logical space into crediting female human beings with being "full persons". He starts from a presumption made by M. Frye that historically men have assigned themselves the status of "full persons" (*TP*, 224-226), and by MacKinnon that the term "woman", within the cultural-historical context, has generally implied a disability (*ivi*, 205). In the last twenty-five to thirty years, theorists have been pointing out repeatedly that historically, full personhood, from a Eurocentric perspective, was granted only to adult "white" men (with a specific social background), while other human beings, whose physical characteristics (and/or socio-cultural origins) did not (completely) conform to that category, were considered "sub-persons" or "sub-human" (Mills 1997; Lugones 2016; Smith 2020). It seems reasonable to assume that this status (of whether people are considered "full persons" – or fully human – or not) can have an impact on their moral status. Not having granted non-white-males full personhood, is indeed an explanation of why female human beings, amongst others, have been systematically excluded from

[124] Cf. A. Walawalkar, "Oxford Dictionaries amends 'sexist' definitions of the word 'woman'", in *The Guardian*, 7 November 2020, www.theguardian.com/books /2020/nov/07/oxford-university-press-update-definitions-word-woman.

[125] Though Rorty has been criticized for his "narrow" account of pragmatist feminism (cf. Dieleman 2014, 110), his brief take on it offers a particularly interesting insight into his idea of redescriptions and how they can serve social movements and change.

decision-making concerning life and structures within societies (Pateman 1988). Considering the Rortyan view, language games – which, according to Rorty's account, have been largely arranged by "men" (*TP*, 221) – have a decisive impact on an individual's status as a "full person". He argues that an easy and effective way to "exclud[e] women from humanity" (*TP*, 169) was to use the term "man" as a synonym for human.

Efforts made by (progressive) social movements and language politics in the English-speaking realm appear to aim precisely at gradually reducing certain sub-categories. There have been a few efforts, in particular areas and realms, to substitute the terms "woman" and "man" with (a non-discriminatory[126]) "people" or other gender-neutral terms.[127] The hope that grounds this language action is (echoing Rorty and Moody-Adams), to enlarge the conceptual and perceptual space in a way that, if we refer to human beings within those areas, we would (gradually) get rid of the need to categorize them (in a binary way) and consequently to assign them differing notions and thus values. This need grounds, not at last, in the assumption that the rigid binary conception of gender is a social construction with partially traceable historical and cultural roots (cf. Lugones 2016), which formally excludes *variations* of the two exclusive categories and narrows the understanding of the characteristics of human beings to either one or another set of norms. Rorty, when arguing over and over again against the idea of an intrinsic nature of human beings, I would argue, also implicitly refers to that kind of categorization, as he echoes MacKinnon (*TP*, 202 ff.). If we indeed accept that there is nothing *entirely* natural about this rigid binary categorization, we must further agree that, as it has been largely argued, there is nothing that necessarily binds all "women" together (*ibid.*; Roeckle 2007; Butler 1990; Foucault 1978).

The efforts of linguistic change in regard to binary categorizations within progressive English-speaking realms were moreover concerned

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[126] I understand the term "discriminatory", in this section, not necessarily as penalizing but as signalizing or creating a difference.

[127] Cf. for example, the very recent move to abolish the greeting phrase "dear ladies and gentlemen", cf., e.g., www.businessinsider.com/japan-airlines-stops-using-gendered-terms-like-ladies-and-gentlemen-2020-9?international=true&r=US&IR=T, or the notion of "people who menstruate" to substitute "women who menstruate", e.g., www.theguardian.com/society/2020/sep/29/pantone-launches-new-shade-of-red-toend-menstruation-stigma; www.edition.cnn.com/2021/09/07/politics/aoc-texas-abortion-law-greg-abbottcnntv/index.html.

with more specific areas, such as the professional sphere. A recent example is the broad abolishment of the term "actress", which has been increasingly substituted with the generic "actor". To identify people in this profession with the generic term (rather than with either one or another gendered category) means that they do not necessarily have to enter a category based on their physical or physiological properties and manifestations. As much as Rorty advocated to stop dividing the human community up by the concept of race and instead, if necessary, talk about different genes (*PCP*, 3), I would argue he might as well eventually have said to stop talking about gender and, if necessary, talk about specific physiological differences.[128]

Another advantage of agreeing on one gender-neutral professional designation, other than avoiding the binary narrowness and discrimination, is related to evidence that female versions of professional titles historically originated from women not being granted the "full title". When women could finally formally become "doctors" of medicine, for instance, they were merely granted the inferior title (or sub-category) of the "doctress", to emphasize their diverse status (cf. Kaiser 1984, 231). Based on these grounds, it seems reasonable to argue that different from being a possibly "more accurate" linguistic representation of the female workforce, gendered professional titles rather originated from the need to preclude female professionals from the "full" professional titles.

If by moral progress we understand a sort of expansion of ideally equal moral status to more and more individuals and groups, if this means with Rorty to extend our sense of the "we" (i.e., a sense of commonality with others, as a base for solidarity and moral concern, cf. chapter 5), and if our vocabulary has an impact on how we conceptualize and perceive the "we", then it seems moreover reasonable to gradually eliminate sub-categories of that kind. This, though, I would argue, must go hand in hand with a transformation of the image that is represented by a certain category. It means to associate a gender-neutral term increasingly with people of different genders: I would argue that the fact

[128] Both refer to how to conceptualize different human beings and hence understand their difference as part of what being a human is all about – without the need to categorize and hence, consequently, discriminate among them. It does not exclude the matter of referring to those (socially constructed) notions to discuss them within the social context, in which they were created, and operate, in order to address, for instance, certain disadvantages which certain (socially defined and categorized) groups of people suffer.

that we have gotten used to seeing more and more political key figures that are not merely male and “white” has helped us change our idea of what a “politician” is. In Wittgensteinian and Rortyan terms: our use of the term has changed the meaning of the term. It has hence not been necessary to introduce a female form of the term “politician” in order to underline that politicians are not necessarily male; we simply had to gradually change the use of the word and thus the image associated with it.

Certainly, the English language disposes of far less gendered forms than other European languages, which have undergone efforts and processes to be more gender inclusive. Some of them have gone so far as to create gender-neutral pronouns: while the Swedish “*hen*” was added to the dictionary years ago,[129] the inclusion of the proposed French gender-neutral “*iel*” (as a combination of the male “*il*” and the female “*elle*”) is still facing vigorous pushbacks.[130]

A large range of European languages is not (yet) preoccupied with gender-neutral pronouns but is primarily (still) debating the meaning and integration of gendered professional titles and other descriptions of identities. German-language-speaking areas, for instance, where theorists and decision makers throughout various fields started working on linguistic gender norms on an institutional level as early as the 1990s, had been largely preoccupied with *integrating* the female version of descriptions of people into language practices. This concerned mainly the *plural* forms of the “*Generisches Maskulinum*” and of the “*Femininum*”. While the former can refer to both a male and “mixed” group of people, the second refers to an exclusively female group. For instance (to reach back to the example above), traditionally, in order to refer to a group of politicians that is either entirely male or mixed, one would say “*Politiker*” (which is the German generic-masculine plural form). In order to refer to an entirely female group of politicians, one would say “*Politikerinnen*” (the feminine plural form). Recent language norms which, since the late 1990s were increasingly taught in schools and implemented in public discourses, have led to a rising inclusion of the feminine plural form

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129 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/24/sweden-adds-gender-neutral-pronoun-to-dictionary.

130 https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/28/world/europe/france-nonbinary-pronoun.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&fbclid=IwAR2kL6I1pjo4BBp5ueMV19ae6uwuXO5FBmkcBpt528xSlzzSUiBVdgzCb5Y; https://theconversation.com/no-need-to-iel-why-france-is-so-angry-about-a-gender-neutral-pronoun-173304.

when addressing mixed groups. In the public sphere, when addressing, for example, "mixed" groups of politicians, it is not only common but rather institutionally required to refer to them as "*Politiker und Politikerinnen*" rather than simply "*Politiker*". An alternative to this extended form of address is, among others, the shorter written form "*PolitikerInnen*".[131]

The concern of movements pushing for this language transformation is grounded in evidence that the general audience or interlocutor, did rarely associate the general-masculine form with a woman, groups of women or, in male-dominated fields, even with mixed groups (cf., e.g., Klann-Delius 2005, 49ff). Adding the female form to the generic-masculine form as a linguistic *norm* was hence a strategy to extend the perceptual space of the audience or interlocutors to the degree that makes them think of – to stick with the example of before – (also) female politicians. Though being largely criticized, by the general public, as cumbersome, many assumed it to be a reasonable move in the direction of a more gender-inclusive society, presuming that language had, in fact, that kind of impact on social practices and structures.

There are, however, various problems arising from the German solution (compared to the English one). Some of them, I would argue, are more evident today, as some social and moral issues have emerged within the "conversation" that were largely invisible to the mainstream twenty-five years ago.

(1) While tendencies in the English-speaking realm have aimed to reduce discriminating categorizations, the German solution has intensified them. If we accept that different terms assign (even slightly different) values, then the German version has opted to maintain systematically two categories for every professional title as well as for almost every other category and identification, including nationalities, affiliations, and others ("citizens", "interlocutors", "friends", "booklovers", et cetera). This means that both the conceptual and the perceptual spaces have arguably been shaped in a way, that any group of people, at least when being addressed, is categorically separated into two. If it is our aim to use language to create an idea of equality among people, it seems odd and rather unhelpful to maintain and strengthen a system that would sustain the contrary, above all, if one of the two

[131] And more recently Politiker*innen, Politiker:innen (which aim to consider "space" for non-binary forms), as I will discuss shortly.

categories supposedly originated from an inferior version of the other. As argued above, this does not mean not talking about differences connected to those categories altogether. Differences (of any kind – be they gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, origins, class, learning disabilities et cetera) certainly need to be addressed within conversations, particularly when some groups experience disadvantages compared to others. I am arguing, however, that it is not helpful and rather counterproductive to ground the understanding of who human beings are in a systematic binary categorization.

(2) To normalize a language system in which the exclusively feminine form *necessarily* has to be added to the generic-masculine form in order to include females means to logically exclude females from the generic form altogether. This means that over time, the *Generische Maskulinum* will lose the generic meaning and become an exclusively male category.[132] Rather than reinforcing them, the German language will, over time, lose its generic plural forms and will be discriminatory all the way down. In order to recover, German speakers might, when the time comes, start to invent completely new gender-neutral plurals. However, if language is also a gradually (naturally or socially) developing practice that is deeply entangled with other human practices and already existing images of the world (including self-descriptions), then the project to eventually revolutionize[133] existing language structures might be destined to fail from the beginning. If Rorty's claims are accurate, working with the vocabulary we have and (decisively but patiently) pushing through the boundaries it sets is the most promising move we can undertake in order to develop in a (morally) more useful direction. Therefore, however, we must find agreement on what the direction is.[134]

(3) Another major issue (particularly in regard to the aim of making language more inclusive and extending both the perceptual and conceptual space) is the exclusion of anyone who does not identify as either male or female. When we refer to "*Politiker*" (intended as exclusively male) and "*Politikerinnen*" (as exclusively female), we exclude any politician that does not find themself within either one or the other

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[132] There have been signs confirming this possible outcome already: a leading German dictionary has proposed the elimination of the general-masculine form (cf. e.g., https://www.ndr.de/kultur/Gendern-Online-Duden-aendert-Personenbezeichnungen,duden132.html).

[133] With "revolution", I refer, with Pleasants, to extensive changes in a short amount of time (Pleasants 2018, 568).

[134] Rorty indeed implies a greater solidarity (cf. chapter 4 and chapter 5).

category. As *LGBTQIA+* has become a recurring notion in (progressively oriented) mainstream conversations, German-speaking movements have found some solutions. It is gradually turning into a normal practice, in written language within the public sphere, to add a "*" or a ":" between the male and the female part of a combined plural form (*Politiker*innen*; *Politiker:innen*). There are two arguably evident problems with this solution: (i) it reduces people, who identify as neither (entirely) male or (entirely) female to a silent symbol, (again) cramped between two categories. (ii) This solution, in fact, only works in the written language. In the spoken language, people reduced to these silent symbols will vanish again.

Compared to the English language, where (binary) gendered singular forms are being gradually abolished, the German language arguably presents a very different case. Still, it is useful to look at the developments of diverse languages, and to evaluate their possible consequences and benefits, in order to decide on directions for innovations of one's own language practices. It is, in fact, as I have argued above, what Rorty implicitly recommends language users to do. German language speakers, just as little as the Italian, French or Spanish, presumably will not (be able to) reinvent their languages (on a large scale) so radically as to eliminate gendered forms altogether and at once. It seems reasonable to assume this if we consider not only the difficulties of implementing very extensive linguistic changes in a relatively short amount of time but also if we accept that language is (also) made by speakers and not exclusively by norms – they are made by the many rather than the few – at least in generally democratic circumstances. Languages are part of who individuals and societies are. Changes can then only be implemented a few steps at a time if they aim to be constructive (and accepted or implemented by the speakers) rather than destructive (and refused).

The above examples show, on the one hand, that there have been real efforts on an institutional level to create a more inclusive and equal society through language action, for which one can find arguments in the Rortyan pragmatism. A pragmatic linguistic development for moral change and improvement, as I have insinuated, means to identify social (and moral) issues within an (inclusive, informed and open) conversation, imagine better scenarios, and work with the vocabulary we have available to approach the latter and overcome the former.

The Wittgensteinian-Hegelian vision Rorty puts forward supports the view that language is both a (naturally) evolving practice that adapts to changing circumstances and a tool that can be used to (intentionally) achieve "greater purposes". It means, specifically with Rorty, to be on the lookout for new vocabulary, new emerging issues and new ideas of how "a better world" could look like and to constantly adapt the process of linguistic innovation based on emerging and changing social needs and on an inclusive evaluation of the direction we want to go, starting from where we are.

2.4 Conclusion

It is reasonable to assume that language has an effect on how we perceive and conceptualize the world, including morality. Thus, language (including matters of linguistic action and development) must be embraced as a subject of ethics – both meta-ethically and normatively – and therefore taken seriously within the ongoing debate about moral progress.

The Rortyan account inquires into the matters of language development both as unintentionally implemented by language users – i.e., within a natural-evolutionary account, where language is deeply entangled with historical and cultural contingencies – and as intentionally implemented. This means a view on language development as not only catching up with changes in circumstances (including the moral world); it further comprehends the awareness that moral changes can possibly be provoked by (intentional or unintentional) changes in linguistic practices. Changes in linguistic practices can be the consequence of a (natural) process of adaptation to other changes in the world, or they can be rational decisions by language users (individually or institutionally) to not use a certain vocabulary anymore and/or to adopt a new one.

The pragmatist account Rorty puts forward hence advocates an awareness of the boundaries of a subject's perceptual and conceptual spaces, which both depend on the specific language they have available and use. This awareness is, on the one hand, fundamental for the understanding of the contingency of one's own morality and hence for

a motivation to constantly revise it (based on a confrontation with other languages and vocabulary and within "the conversation" with other language users). It is further important to comprehend that, in order to enlarge one's own perceptual and conceptual spaces – to thus "leap" over the boundaries – trying out new language practices, speaking differently and confronting different languages can be important tools to potentially expand moral limitations, and possibly make moral progress.

Rorty's account moreover embraces the notion of imagination. It is, from this pragmatist angle, an important element, to not only overcome immediate problems by hastily solving what seems to be going "wrong" (e.g., what blocks a development towards greater happiness and/or less suffering of ideally all) but rather look into the future and imagine a moral situation that appears worthwhile to achieve (e.g., the achievement of greater happiness for all). The account further implies, so I claim, that those language users in the public realm ought to take up the (moral) responsibility regarding the vocabulary they employ in light of the power language has over moral conceptions and perceptions.

To be "Wittgensteinian-Hegelian", in this matter, I claim, thus implies both to be aware of the historical contingencies that ground the boundaries of both language and morality and see language as something dynamic that can change within the intersubjective socio-linguistic practice – where the "redescribing" subject is part of an objective *Geist*, from which they can never escape entirely.

In the next chapter, I will, as anticipated, address the specific notion of "conversation", which, I claim, in the Rortyan account, is a central condition for moral progress, based on the assumption that linguistic development can indeed have a fundamental impact on a possible moral change and potential progress. My claim will be that this conversation, in which – so I argue – Rorty grounds his melioristic program, must be open, epistemic, and inclusive. The issue of inclusiveness concerns both the (potential) subjects and objects of redescription (see also expansion_1 and expansion_2, p. 26). The matter of openness implies, among other things, a subject's willingness to provoke change in the world and in themselves.

3. FROM MORAL CHANGE TO POTENTIAL PROGRESS: THE CONDITIONS OF THE MELIORISTIC CONVERSATION

3.1 Introduction

> [The progress of] *humanity's ongoing conversation about what to do with itself* [m.e.] … has engendered new social practices and changes in the vocabularies deployed in moral and political deliberation (*PCP*, ix).
>
> The ongoing conversation of mankind [is] always subject to the contingencies that afflict finite existence (*ivi*, 17).

In chapter 2, I have argued that, given that we can reasonably assume that language has an impact on how a subject both perceives and conceptualizes the world (including morality), it is a key element within ethics and must therefore be embraced in the ongoing debate about moral progress. I have outlined how the Rortyan account addresses these issues by inquiring into both the limits language poses to one's moral thought, belief and deliberations, and the potential of what Rorty calls *redescriptions* to extend those very boundaries. I have anticipated that, in the Rortyan account, these redescriptions are "tried out", agreed-upon and implemented within an extended social (linguistic) practice which he refers to as the "ongoing [human] conversation".

In this chapter, I will explore the concept of *conversation* and its meaning for the Rortyan stance on moral progress. I will base my inquiries on the following claims:

(1) Rorty's advocacy of conversation as a potential motor for moral progress, grounds in an overall *melioristic*[135] programme embedded in his philosophy. In other words: this conversation largely implies a melioristic character.[136]

(2) One of the central functions of the conversation about "what to do with [ourselves]" – i.e., who to be, how to behave, in a social context, as social beings – is that of *moral inquiry*.[137]

(3) The conversation is a *necessary yet not sufficient condition for moral progress*. It is insufficient, as I will elaborate, based on at least two assumptions:

(i) As argued in chapter 2, morality must not be reduced to an *exclusively* linguistic matter. (However, as Rorty claims, "once we programmed ourselves with a language", this very language will be constitutive of the moral thought, belief and practice we develop.)

(ii) Besides all the diverse conditions and mechanisms outlined in section 1.4.1 that may have an influence on moral changes, it has further been pointed out (cf., e.g., Srinivasan 2021) that a conversation does not suffice to *provoke* significant moral change (and potentially progress): historically, progressive changes in moral and social structures were largely provoked by social and political *struggles* concerning shifts in power, rather than by a mere linguistic exchange about how to morally move forward. I will, however, argue that "struggles" and successful

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[135] My understanding of "meliorism", as suggested, relies on the analysis made by D. Rondel about meliorism in James, Dewey and Rorty: meliorism is the belief that the world (i.e., specific conditions, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good) may be bettered. This does not mean that the future will conform to a plan, but rather that the future will "astonish and exhilarate". In this view, human *action* plays a decisive role. This meliorism can then further be expressed in terms of hope (cf. Rondel 2018, 145). Dewey, as pointed out before, understands pragmatism, in ethical terms, as meliorism (Dewey 1910, iii).

[136] This does not exclude potential moral regress following the conversation. It rather puts emphasis on the potential that human beings have to make the world possibly better through their actions; here specifically through their linguistic-conversational actions and what they imply.

[137] The "ongoing human conversation" is about all kinds of human affairs and activity. In light of my inquiry about the notion of progress, I will concentrate on the conversation as a tool and method of moral inquiry. If Kitcher is right (cf. Kitcher 2021, 62), moral inquiry reaches back as far as to what we could call the conversation itself, i.e., to a very primitive or early stage of conversation within communities. In his view, moral questions (what to do and how to behave among and towards others) even precede the larger ethical project (and thus questions concerning "who to be").

social movements have been largely entangled with what Rorty calls the conversation.

While in chapter 2, I have addressed the issue of how linguistic development and change are linked to moral *development and change*, my aim in this chapter is to specifically inquire into the matter of moral *progress* as a *potential outcome* of this conversation. I will claim that in order to qualify as melioristic – i.e., as a mechanism (or tool) of potential moral progress – the conversation must fulfil three conditions: it must be (1) *free and open*, (2) *epistemic*, and (3) *inclusive*. With this claim, I rely, amongst other things, on P. Kitcher's view about *conversation as a method of moral inquiry*. Kitcher, in fact, argues that for moral inquiry to be *properly pursued*, the conversation has to be of a particular kind (Kitcher 2021, 37). Being a "Deweyan" himself, for Kitcher, the "ideal"[138] conversation must, first of all, be democratic, which implies the notions of open and free and further equality among the subjects involved. He moreover claims that this conversation must be inclusive in the sense of "including all the perspectives adopted by the stakeholders[139]" and that it must be epistemic or rely on the available set of justified information. He further notes that in the ideal conversation, the participants must be mutually engaged: they must attempt to understand the perspective of each other and seek a solution acceptable to all. I shall suggest that this last condition Kitcher outlines must meet all three conditions I outlined above as necessary for the *melioristic* conversation which Rorty envisages.

I will proceed as follows: I will first inquire into the notion of conversation in the Rortyan account, i.e., its definitions, functions, and issues (section 3.2). I will then discuss the three conditions I outlined, including their challenges both on a meta-ethical and normative-practical level (section 3.3).

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[138] Within this pragmatist framework, "ideal" does not refer to the Platonic kind but rather refers to its best possible form and actualization and/or having the best possible outcome.

[139] By stakeholders, he means all those affected by a certain moral situation or practice (i.e., the object of a certain conversation) and all those who would be affected if that moral situation or practice changed (cf. Kitcher 2021, 37).

3.2 The notion of conversation: definitions, clarifications, and challenges

3.2.1 Approaching the notion of conversation

Though the notion of conversation emerges in different philosophical doctrines and accounts, its specificity (i.e., different to related notions such as, for instance, discourse) remains largely fuzzy. Contemporary researchers such as M. Prange and M. Knoll have recently expressed the need to inquire into (the ethics of) conversation through the notion of *listening*, thus proposing an ethics of *listening and disagreement*.[140] Others, like B. Williams (Williams 2002, 111) have emphasized the notion of *trust* as a central feature of conversation. Kitcher, on the other hand, on whose pragmatist account I partially lean to analyse and extend the Rortyan position, does not appear so much interested in the foundations of conversation as in its function: the latter, in his view, is to implement moral progress, (even in the absence of evident challenges) through periodical revision and assessment of moral ideals and justifications (cf. Kitcher 2021, 67).

Similar to Rorty, Kitcher puts the notion of conversation at the heart of moral progress. Yet, as A. Srinivasan points out, by doing so, an important part of what can lead to moral progress is omitted: actions and movements of protests, violence, great personal sacrifice and material struggle (Srinivasan 2021, 109). While both Rorty and Kitcher do understand struggles and protests of marginalized groups as "triggering moral conversations" (cf. *ibid.*), Srinivasan suggests that:

> Seeing the history of moral progress through the lens of ideal conversation risks obscuring […] a long history of resistance among the powerful toward such conversations – and with it, the various strategies that the relatively powerless have developed to force change in the absence of such conversations. Kitcher's model of moral progress also risks suggesting, falsely, that all marginalized people need to do today is speak up. In our highly non-Deweyan world, the

[140] Cf. www.manuelknoll.com/resources/CFA%20-%20Initial%20online%20workshop%20on%20the%20Ethics%20of%20Conversation%20and%20Disagreement.pdf.

> ability for some people to speak, and to be truly heard, is an ability that itself presupposes a radical shift in power. (Srinivasan 2021, 109).

I will elaborate and respond to this critique, concerning the insufficiency of "conversation" for moral progress, in section 3.3.3.2.

As I anticipated, Rorty's view on the notion of (humanity's ongoing) conversation is that its progress "has engendered new social practices, and changes in the vocabularies deployed in moral and political deliberation" (*PCP*, ix). A conversation about "what to do with [ourselves]" means to converse,[141] among other things, about what is just (for us), what is right (for us), how we should behave (as both a society and as individuals), how we want to imagine ourselves in the future, and so on. The *change of vocabulary*, which is decided and implemented within this conversation, is hence only one – though arguably *essential* – (by-)product of a larger practice of intersubjective (linguistic) confrontation and exchange. It is a conversation that consists of an *infinity of conversations* about different (moral) topics and dilemmas; some of them are conscious debates based on the goal to solve specific idiosyncratic problems; others do not have a particular goal and are rather spread throughout time, communities, and cultures.

I suggest that, considering Rorty's overall proposal, conversation in his account is twofold. On the one hand, supported by his naturalist stance, it is something humanity has simply been doing. On the other hand, precisely supporting his pragmatist-melioristic angle, (free and open, epistemic, and inclusive) conversation is further a *method* or mechanism of moral inquiry – i.e., one that moral agents would do well to pursue. Some have further (accurately) pointed out that this conversation (i.e.,

[141] The notion of the "conversation" emerges already in *PMN*, as a core method of what Rorty calls edifying philosophy. A main aspect of this stance is to "keep the conversation going" and "[listen] to what is truly genuinely other" (cf. Caputo 1983, 680). When Rorty talks about "the conversation Plato started" (*PMN*, 391), he does not refer to one single steadily progressing conversation throughout history but rather to an infinite amount of intertwined linguistic practices in human history that have been a constituent of the direction human beings have been taking, particularly in regard to their moral belief, practices and deliberations. Conversation hence implies that "saying something" (*ivi*, 371), including the particular vocabulary one chooses to say it, can be pivotal for (the development) of social practices. "Conversation about what to do" is not limited to the idea of a closed conversation about specific moral issues but rather to an extended linguistic practice among social actors, within which moral issues emerge either implicitly or explicitly.

the pragmatist-melioristic kind) in Rorty can, moreover, be understood as a *virtue* or an ethos (cf. Geras 1995; cf. Rondel 2009); i.e., again, something both society and the philosophical discipline should aspire to. I will, hereinafter, mainly concentrate on this second understanding of conversation, i.e., the kind that exceeds a naturalized practice, which may – if at all – *accidentally* produce (or lead to) what, *a posteriori*, may be considered morally desirable conditions.

For Rorty, the advocacy of conversation regards both his normative and his meta-ethical stance. Particularly the latter embraces his vision to liberate philosophy from the (impossible) aim to reach absoluteness, purity and timelessness and rather concentrate on the multitudinousness of views, experiences, and imaginations – particularly in the field of ethics. It could be argued, in other words, that he aspires to a reduction of moral inquiry to conversation (Voparil 2014, 382).

3.2.2 On the Deweyan influence on the notion of conversation

In chapter 2, I discussed Rorty's advocacy of being "Wittgensteinian-Hegelian" when addressing the issue of language. Throughout most of his work, when Rorty reveals himself as a (de-absolutized) Hegelian, he refers to the latter mostly through the words of his "hero", Dewey. These are moments that embrace a vision common to Dewey (to use Kitcher's words) "of a world that is always incomplete, coming into being through collective human decisions and actions" (Kitcher 2021, 79).

Similar to his attitude towards Wittgenstein (cf. chapter 2), Rorty has been accused of being conveniently selective and even "creatively" re-interpretative with Dewey's writings (cf. Voparil 2014, Bacon 2011, Campbell 1984). This selectiveness was, as Rorty himself admitted, a convenient move to connect all his favourite philosophers in a way to make them fit the bigger picture he wanted to advocate (cf. Campbell 1984, 182). The particular emphases he chooses to make while omitting other aspects could, in fact, be understood as fitting his strategy of "taking sides" (*PCP*, x; Voparil 2014, 373), always with the possibility in view to make a difference in the world: a difference concerning "social hopes, programs of action [and] prophecies of a better future" (*PCP*, x).

In this thesis, I will not discuss Rorty's omissions of the Deweyan philosophy (e.g., arguably, the emphasis on education, the centrality of the specific notion of democracy and the concern regarding the explicit importance of institution building). I will rather focus on what he promotes from Dewey's observations, advocacies and Hegelian grounds as supporting his very own advocacy of the notion of conversation – a term he, in fact, implicitly ascribes to Dewey's philosophy (*PCP*, ix). Interestingly, I have to note that the notion of conversation does not appear as a specific central term in Dewey's general writings. In Rorty's work, there is no specific evidence about where in Dewey he might have inherited it from. I, however, agree with C. Voparil when he points out that reading Rorty and Dewey side by side without polemics makes it possible to see what Rorty particularly embraces from Dewey's philosophy (cf. Voparil 2014, 393): an attention to the cultural context in which intellectual inquiry is embedded; an engagement with the pressing (social, moral and political) issues of the day; and a foregrounding of the socio-political character of philosophical work.

To start with the latter, Dewey appears to have had an important influence on how Rorty understands the purpose of philosophy: as an *instrument of social change*; not to discover the essential Truth of a matter, but rather "meet the temporary demands of the problem" (Morgan 2016, 3). This interest of Rorty's can be traced back to as early as his 1975 essay "Dewey's Metaphysics" (Voparil 2011a, 117). It is expressed, I would claim, in two complementary takes: a descriptive stance on how philosophy should be understood in order to be most useful, and a prescriptive stance on how philosophy, as a discipline, shall be transformed and thus make progress. J. Campbell (1984) expressed in his comparative work that the "wisdom" (comprehended by the term "philosophy") in Dewey is a moral term: philosophy is the search for wisdom that shall be a guide for life. The chief role of philosophy is hence "to bring to consciousness […] the most important shocks and coherent troubles of complex and changing societies since these have to do with conflicts of value" (Campbell 1984, 178). This, according to Dewey, can be achieved through criticism. Criticism (of culture) hence played an important role in both the Deweyan and the Rortyan projects to transform or reconstruct philosophy in order to make it more responsive to timely issues (Voparil 2014, 375).

Specifically, when it comes to the attention to the cultural context and "issues of the day", Rorty follows Dewey's footsteps by embracing his need for the *many-views* within the conversation. The aim for the many-views rather than the God's eye view indeed addresses the matter of inclusiveness which may be understood as both an *end* and as a *means to an end*. Inclusiveness here means, on the one hand, the creation of an experience that all humans share and to which they all contribute (Voparil 2014, 383). Inclusiveness, in this sense, appears as an *end*, as something the moral and philosophical human effort shall aspire to. On the other hand, Dewey understood that all kinds of knowledge mattered in order to open up new perspectives and inspire new tasks (cf. ivi, 390). In this sense, inclusiveness appears to, further, be a *method* (or mechanism): the inclusion of more voices is a function of the expansion of a community's (moral) horizon (see also expansion$_1$ and expansion$_2$, cf. pp. 25-26).

For Rorty, it is here where (moral) *objectivity* can be found in the Deweyan stance: Rorty claims, in fact, that precisely for Dewey, there "is nothing to the notion of objectivity save that of intersubjective agreement – agreement reached by free and open discussions of all available hypotheses and policies" (*TP*, 6-7). It is in this sense that Rorty understands Dewey as having rejected moral inquiry as aiming for something timeless, ahistorical and absolute and rather as searching for answers within the human conversation. The key notion here is *agreement*: agreement, for Rorty, is the source for moral truths and objectivity, or rather a timely (and provisional) end of moral inquiry.

The aim not only for moral change but also for moral improvement is at the heart of the Deweyan picture Rorty embraces – again, not only as an idea of what philosophy ought to aim at but as an ideal for society (or societies) as a whole. This implies an account of meliorism and action, where members of the society are *aware* of the possibilities of moral progress and *act* accordingly in order to possibly achieve it. Kitcher calls a society of this kind "Deweyan society" (Kitcher 2021, 97-98): a society, which goes the extra mile as compared to "haphazardly progressive societies" (and certainly to "rigidly conservative societies"). The Deweyan society, which for him is implicitly the "ideal" society in view of moral progress, Kitcher explains, "takes its current moral practices seriously. Nevertheless, it encourages some of its members to think about alternatives" (*ivi*, 97). By recognizing that progressive reforms are possibly always incomplete

and by going beyond small, superficial modifications of moral belief, the Deweyan society, Kitcher confirms, encourages, above all, *constant social critique*. The latter then must be nourished, acted upon, revised and renewed, again, within and through the conversation. This is supported by the moral and political significance of *fallibilism* to which Rorty subscribes: Rorty claims, in fact, that being too sure about one's values and oneselves, and not paying attention to (outsiders') objections has been proven problematic in "many previous communities" (Voparil 2014, 392).

3.2.3 Conversation as a public matter

I have anticipated, in chapter 2, that in light of the notion of moral progress – which I understand as the moral improvement of a society, societies or humanity as a whole, rather than individual moral development (cf. chapter 1) – I will concentrate on the "public" side of the public-private split within Rorty's work. While the private (final) vocabulary and (re-)descriptions, in Rorty, concern the development of the (individual) self, the public (final) vocabulary, (re-)description, and related notions are related to public or social projects and hence specifically the conversation as a shared social practice. The *ultimate public project*, as I will deepen later, for Rorty is the implementation of an ever-greater solidarity (*CIS*).

The notion of (increasing) solidarity emerges, in fact, as I will argue, from both Rorty's meta-ethical and normative accounts. As I will discuss (cf. chapter 5), increasing solidarity is not only one way of understanding moral progress, but it is also the specific normative goal, Rorty suggests, for the overall moral project of societies or humanity as a whole, and hence an *end*, which we shall have in view when envisioning (and working towards a) moral progress.

If now, (1) we shall accept that solidarity is a goal to be embraced within the social-moral practice, and if (2) we indeed assume that what Rorty calls conversation is the realm within which moral values, beliefs and practices are discussed, renewed and changed, then we must agree that both the goal and the function of (the ideal, melioristic) conversation may be understood as creating a greater solidarity. To define solidarity as a goal of (a melioristic) conversation means that the (conscious)

revisions and changes of vocabulary, as discussed in chapter 2, must be implemented in view (and as a function) of the creation of solidarity amongst (actual and potential) stakeholders. For the sake of argument, I will accept these assumptions for now. I will elaborate on them later, specifically in chapter 5.

The public realm, other than concerning society and morality in the large sense, for Rorty, is further a matter of politics (cf. *CIS*, 120; *ABAO*; Topper 1995; Volpi 2002). It follows that also the conversation becomes a political preoccupation. Rorty's grounds for separating the private from the public realm, when discussing the matter of moral progress and, implicitly, conversation, is an attempt to keep "private ideas" – idiosyncratic notions of the meaning of life, private goals and needs for self-realization – from getting into the way of politics (cf. *ABAO*). The ideal society, for Rorty, is famously a liberal one. This (ideal) liberal society, for Rorty, must aim to ensure that no cruel policies are willingly and knowingly implemented (Volpi 2002, 544); it embraces one's responsibilities to one's fellow citizens; citizens are free to create autonomous lives for themselves (cf. Bacon 2011, 206-209) and public rhetoric is "nominalist and historicist" (*CIS*, 87), rather than tentatively backed by metaphysical explanations. The need to separate the private from the public is justified by the "frailty and ignorance of most people, most of the time" (Volpi 2002, 545), which could get in the way of the (ultimate) shared social project (e.g., a greater solidarity or moral progress itself).

As it has been pointed out numerous times (e.g., Bacon 2017; Topper 1995; Hogan 2017), a *rigid* separation between the two realms (including their goals and the understanding of them) is neither attainable nor desirable (cf. Erez 2013). Theorists preoccupied with feminism, religion, and liberal commitment (cf. *ibid.*; Ungureanu & Monti 2018) find it undesirable as they worry, among other things, about reduced space of interaction between the two spheres, complete abandonment of the individual within their private sphere (e.g., the role of women in their homes), and of private spheres taking over most significantly. Besides the matter of desirability, a rigid separation neither seems possible as both spheres inevitably spill over and causally intermix with one another (Topper 1995, 961). Private projects are sustained, alimented, and inspired by public forces; public projects are defined by individuals who also have private desires and goals.

As I argued before, with Erez, in Rorty's work, the line between the two spheres ultimately is much more fluid than some of his output (e.g., in *CIS*) might suggest. To focus on either one or the other of the two sides, rather helps, at times, to discuss the particular aims and the practices and vocabulary employed. As I have anticipated, in this work about moral progress, which is embedded first and foremost in what Rorty defined as the public sphere, I am primarily preoccupied with the public side of the coin, as separate from the many individual ones which the Rortyan liberal society ultimately aims to accommodate within a more global, social project. The public project, which necessarily consists of an infinity of concrete projects, is decided (i.e., agreed upon) within the conversation.

In both what Rorty describes as the (ideal) liberal society and Kitcher as the (ideal) Deweyan society, so I understand it, the interlocutors of the conversation are *aware* (or at least hopeful) of the possibilities of moral progress. In order to not let private needs prevail over the public ones, but rather let them co-exist without endangering the ones by the others, the importance of both (particularly the latter) must be *advocated* and *nourished* within the conversation. All this not only implies agreements about moral practices, policies and vocabulary change, but agreements concerning the very goals – based on moral belief – towards where the society wants to move.

3.2.4 Towards (moral) agreement

> During the Q&A that followed, Rorty casually mentioned that it was "true" that "we are using too many of the world's resources too quickly and irresponsibly." Someone shot up their hand to ask him what exactly he meant by the word "true" in that sentence. He responded: "In a *free and open* [m.e.] forum, everyone would agree we're using too many resources." "But not everyone does agree!" someone shouted from the audience in exasperation. "I know," Rorty responded dryly. "I'm still trying to figure that out." (Hayes 2007, n.p.).

The end – or at least a milestone – of conversation, in Rorty, is agreement. As Kitcher has pointed out (above), members of the ideal "Deweyan" society are aware that even what they have agreed upon,

needs to be constantly challenged and revised. In a liberal and pragmatic world such as the one Rorty advocates, where all ahistorical and God-like moral authorities are deflated, the only available source for moral truth and knowledge is the (ideal, melioristic) conversation itself. Again, he states: "there is nothing to the notion of objectivity save that of intersubjective agreement – agreement reached by free and open discussion of all available hypotheses and policies." (*TP*, 6-7)

This stance of his, once again, does not only support his position concerning meta-ethics but rather extends to – and grounds his – political project: in his view, we only need to cultivate an inclusive and compassionate intersubjective agreement that favours the "convergence of sentiments in the community– and political issues can take care of themselves" (Volpi 2002, 547).

The problem is, however, that Rorty himself is aware that (universal) agreement generally remains utopian. This does not only concern the matter of practical application, as the example about the world's resources above shows. It further remains a conundrum within his meta-ethics, as, while sustaining that the goal of the conversations is, in fact, intersubjective agreement, he is at the same time sceptical of universalism as an outcome of communication or conversation, as the contingent cultural context limits the very quests for it (cf. Salis 2003, 268). He admits further that even if interlocutors can agree on an issue, there is no automatic privilege over the issues about which there is disagreement (*PSH*, 14). However, he claims, "we can work toward intersubjective agreement without being lured by the promise of universal validity. We can introduce and recommend new startling ideas without attributing them to a privileged source" (*PCP*, 85-86).

As I argued in chapter 2, this position appears rather critical: even in a pragmatic post-metaphysical world, in which objectivity is stripped of its ahistorical status and reduced to an idea of intersubjective agreement (intersubjective, in the sense that it extends to *all* possible viewpoints), the *ambition* to reach *objectivity* (or ever-extended agreement for that matter), is advantageous in order to have interlocutors dig deeper, be sceptical and look for new answers. I will further elaborate on this matter in section 3.3.2.

What Rorty suggests, in place of a search for (moral) Truth within moral inquiry, is a *progressive overcoming of objections* within the conversation (Salis

2003, 270). With this, he appears to ascribe, first and foremost, to an idea of moral progress such as the "pragmatic" one proposed by Kitcher (cf. chapter 1), which, different to "teleological progress", according to the Kitcherian definition, is not a progress "towards" but rather a progress "from". The latter does hence not move towards an envisioned *telos* but rather overcomes and solves (and thus moves away) from timely issues. (I will discuss this further in chapter 4).

Agreements are not only *goals* of a collaborating society, but societies and communities are further held together by agreements. I argue that Rorty supports this claim, which aligns with his statement that it is common hopes and common vocabularies that bind societies together. In chapter 2, I briefly mentioned Kuhn's distinction between "normal" and "revolutionary" science, on which Rorty leans. Rorty, in fact, uses the distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" discourse to describe the difference between what members of a community generally agree upon (normal) and new perspectives, i.e., new insights that challenge currently widely accepted ideas (abnormal).[142] It is the openness towards the abnormal, where Rorty sees the possibility for potential progress. In other words: we move from an agreement or from the "normal" (thesis) to the "abnormal", which implies disagreement (antithesis) and, possibly, finally, to a new "normal", a new agreement or consensus (synthesis).

Rorty does not deny that consensus can also change things for the worse. Being the (de-absolutized) Hegelian he claims to be, every consensus is just one more step on the historicist ladder. What he denies, is that we can judge whether we are progressing or regressing by "assuming an Archimedean position outside the contingency of history" (Rorty 2006). He stresses that we can indeed never infer from success to rightness (*ibid.*). All we can do in our moral inquiry towards agreement, is to extend the conversation as far as possible.

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142 As M. Nyírő points out (Nyírő 2013), the distinction between "normal" and "abnormal" can moreover be understood in terms of "commensurable" and "noncommensurable": "This distinction corresponds in philosophy to the epistemological and hermeneutical discourses", where "'epistemology proceeds on the assumption that all contributions to a given discourse are commensurable, [whereas] hermeneutics is largely a struggle against this assumption' […] two types of discoursing correspond to two different types of community, one concerned with inquiry, the other with peaceful coexistences. Epistemology views the participants [of discussion] as united in […] an universitas […] Hermeneutics views them as united in […] a societas".

3.2.4.1 On Disagreement

Our hope for agreement – or rather agreements – must further imply the acceptance that not all "positive values in which [humans] have believed must, in the end, be compatible and perhaps even entail each other" (*CIS*, 45). One might go even further and suggest, with B. Williams, that precisely in ethics (as compared to scientific inquiry), there is no need at all for convergence on different issues (cf. Williams 2006, 136). Williams sustains, in fact, that disagreement does not have to be necessarily overcome; it may remain an important and constitutive feature of our relations to others (*ivi*, 134).

It has moreover been argued that there is no *prima facie* reason to assume that improvement must lead to uniformity (Sodoma 2019, 62). Convergences are indeed rather *unlikely* to occur if we assume that the theory of value-pluralism is accurate (Shweder 2003, 54). And while many prominent conceptions of moral progress indeed assume that progress must lead to convergence, others make it possible to understand progress in a pluralistic way (Sodoma 2019, 50; cf. also Kitcher 2021, 80). Again, other pragmatist-leaning accounts, like Posner's, understand the matter of disagreement as *insoluble*. Posner stresses using this recognition as one pragmatic base for moral debate and judgements and for (political) decisions (cf. Posner 1998b, 1799).

Posner argues elsewhere that disagreement is, moreover, an *important element* in moral debates: "it is not safe to have a morally uniform population" (Posner 1998a, 1681). Posner's point here is that there would not be any challenge in uniformity. We can find support for this claim, again, in Williams who argues that discussions of objectivity often start from the matter of disagreement.

These latter stances (the second Posner and Williams) ascribe to the notion of disagreement the role of what, between brackets above, I called "antithesis". The former, on the other hand (the first Posner, Sodoma and Shweder) argue that a possible "synthesis" (agreement, convergences) is unlikely to occur at all and that ethics, and the conversation in which it grounds, necessarily consist of contrasting values that co-exist and challenge each other.

Rorty, I argue, would agree with both. Still, he grounds his understanding of both moral progress and (conversation-based) moral objectivity in moral agreement or convergence, as discussed above. He thus defends an account in which moral agreement (and hence a specific sort of moral objectivity and moral progress) is possible.

With this, I infer, he aims to advocate that, despite it all, social-linguistic actors must *strive* for agreement. That is, however, not an agreement specifically concerning all kinds of moral values, but one about how to accommodate those different values and practices in a pluralistic context that aims for the happiness of more and more people. One might put it differently: if some (moral) agreements ought to be sought within the melioristic conversations, then at least *some moral agreements* must be a formally possible goal.

3.2.4.2 Basic agreement: common ground

Thinkers like Srinivasan (Srinivasan 2021) and again Williams (Williams 2006, 27-29; Williams 2002, 252) have pointed out the importance of basic agreements (thesis) for any moral conversation or progress to occur. This again refers to the sorts of fundamental agreements that "bind societies together" and on which they build their conversations. Rorty, considering this matter, speaks about the need for "enough overlap". He expresses this position once again as a linguistic matter: as the need to share enough moral vocabulary so that a conversation can take place (cf. *CIS*, 92-93). If there is no common ground, as Srinivasan expects for "white nationalists and their nonwhite immigrant neighbours" to be the case (Kitcher 2021, 147), a possible conversation and, furthermore, agreement are rather difficult to pass. Rorty himself states in this regard:

> It is [correct to say] that there is no neutral, common ground to which an experienced Nazi philosopher and I can repair in order to argue out our differences. That Nazi and I will always strike one another as begging all the crucial questions, arguing in circles (*PSH*, 15).

3.3 Conditions of a melioristic conversation: free and open, epistemic, inclusive

I have claimed above that, for the conversation,[143] as Rorty imagines it, to potentially lead to moral progress, it has to be *free and open*, *epistemic,* and *inclusive*.

In fact, Rorty claims numerous times, throughout his work, that the conversation – which implies the notions of "debates", "encounters", and "dialogues" – must be *free and open* (*CIS*, 67-68; *ORT*, 13, 39-42; *RC*, 152; cf. Hayes 2007; Dann 2006). The need for conversations to be *inclusive* is often a more *implicit* claim of his. The need for conversations to be *epistemic* is not properly addressed.

In the following three sections, I will first address the notions of "open" and "free". I will then explore the benefits and issues of the notion of the "epistemic" and argue why Rorty would have done well to explicitly include this condition in his framework of conversation. Finally, I will address the condition of "inclusiveness" and the challenges it poses to both ethics and politics. I will claim that all three conditions are necessary for the conversation to potentially lead to moral progress.

3.3.1 Free and open

I dare to consider these two notions as one condition of the conversation, as Rorty himself barely keeps them apart when discussing the matter.

3.3.1.1 Free

His notion of "free" refers, among other things, to a Millian kind of marketplace of ideas as well as to the overall democratic Deweyan

[143] The melioristic-ethical kind, which implies agency and has, as I argued against Rorty's scepticism towards the term, a "methodical" and, further, instrumental nature, rather than the one that "humanity has simply been doing" and might have. Accidentally produced morally desirable social developments. The function of this conversation is moral inquiry (cf. section 3.2.1).

position, where "nothing is sacred because everything is up for discussion" (*EFT*, 12). With "free", Rorty means, so he clarifies, not "free from ideology, but simply the sort which goes on when the press the judiciary, the elections and the universities are free, social mobility is frequent and rapid, literacy is universal, higher education is common." (*CIS*, 84).

As Bacon points out (accurately, I believe), when Rorty, following Dewey's footsteps, employs the notion of "free", he refers to what Berlin called "negative liberty", i.e., a matter of the absence of obstacles that interfere with one's actions (Bacon 2011, 210). Rorty's statement (*CIS*, 84), indeed, refers to the implicit (Deweyan) need to create and maintain institutions that do not interfere with the stakeholders' participation in the conversation. What I, here, call institutions comprises formal institutions, educational action and further (a systematic) encouragement of people to speak up, as well as cultural or social conditions that favour a greater inclusiveness (cf. section 3.3.3). In Rorty, all this is, in fact, implied in his notion of ideal "liberal societies",[144] as outlined above, where freedom of speech also implies a concern for one's responsibilities to their fellow citizens (Bacon 2011, 209). In this regard, Rorty states further:

> I think that the idea of a society in which everyone loves everyone else equally […] is an impossible ideal. The ideal of a society in which everyone has enough respect for other people not to presume that one of their desires is intrinsically evil is a possible ideal. […] If human beings can freely discuss how to make each other happier, it will still be an ideal society (*EFT*, 20).

As argued above, the members of this liberal society then need to constantly revise their beliefs and practices, including the arrangements of *rights and freedom* and of what *kind of impact* they have on people (cf. Bacon 2011, 210).

[144] In contrast to Dewey, I would argue he does not specifically emphasize and explore different institutions, such as e.g. education, but rather implies them in an embracing idea and advocacy of liberal culture and politics.

3.3.1.2 Open

The notion of openness may be understood twofold: (1) as a property of the conversation itself; (2) as a quality or attitude of the interlocutors or stakeholders.

The first interpretation is very much linked to the notion of freedom – which is also why it makes sense to keep the two notions close. When a conversation is "open", it means that (potential) interlocutors are *free to join in*. It concerns an openness towards the topics, and it implies that it *can go in any number of directions* (cf. *RC*, 152).

The second can again be subdivided into two understandings: (i) the interlocutors *talk openly*; (ii) the interlocutors are open to other points of view; they are open for the conversation to go in any number of directions, and they are *open to change themselves*. Again, the first of the two is linked to the notion of interlocutors talking freely and to their "courage" to do so (cf. Pleasants 2018, 571). The second one is closely connected with what Kitcher called (above) the condition of mutual engagement. Interlocutors must open up to the views of others and therefore be willing to be "astonished by [a] 'thick description' of an alternative way of life or a different way of comprehending the world" (Voparil 2011b, 125). This implies, with Rorty, also that we must be first of all willing to join the conversations of others, rather than asking them to join ours and to keep our ears actively open (as I discussed in chapter 2) for hints about how our (final) vocabulary may be extended. If the function of this conversation is, as I assumed above, moral inquiry, then, with Rorty, this openness specifically refers to the willingness of interlocutors to consider all suggestions about what might increase human happiness (*EFT*).

The arguments for and about the notions of "free and open" already partially imply the condition of inclusiveness. The same is not necessarily true for the notion of "epistemic": while, for Rorty, as pointed out, "open and free" conversations about moral belief and practices are a source for moral objectivity, we must consider, as Williams points out, that they are not necessarily helpful to spread truths. He argues: "we cannot take for granted Mill's optimistic conclusion that maximal freedom of speech must assist the emergence of truth in what has come to be called 'a marketplace of ideas'. […] to appeal to liberty […] suggests that anyone can say or ask anything"

(Williams 2002, 212-213). He goes on, "what is essential is not that everyone shall speak, but that everything worth saying shall be said [...] that one requirement for orderly and fruitful democratic debate is accurate information" (*ivi*, 218). Williams' objection to limiting our ambitions for the conversation to openness and freedom is crucial, I believe, if we understand that false, untruthful or uninformed assertions within the conversation may indeed be (morally) harmful to possible agreements, decisions, beliefs and practices that follow. Before I elaborate on this in section 3.3.2, I want to briefly address a recurring position of Rorty's, which I would consider an issue for both conditions of the "open and free" and the "epistemic" (and, ultimately, also elements about inclusion).

3.3.1.3 Persuasion versus coercion; persuasion versus argument

Throughout his mature work, Rorty advocates for persuasion as a tool within conversation. Persuasion, in his view, can be achieved, again, through *redescriptions*: by redescribing circumstances and using different (new) vocabulary, as I have discussed in chapter 2, situations, people, and possible changes in society and culture can be made more attractive. Rorty does not hesitate to call it a manipulation of sentiments (*TP*, 179), as a redescription might directly affect one's perceptual space concerning a given matter (cf. chapter 2).

On the one hand, Rorty opposes persuasion to "coercion". In his view, it is indeed another trait of liberal societies to use persuasion instead of force (*CIS*, 60), which is in any case favourable. In light of my inquiry about moral progress, I have no intention of arguing against it.

On the other hand, however, Rorty opposes and favours persuasion to and over "argument". Here things become more complicated. First of all, it remains quite fuzzy what he precisely means by "argument" – as a method he promises to abandon in favour of redescriptions or persuasions (Voparil 2004, 222) – given that he himself does continue to *argue* (in a broad sense) throughout his mature work.[145]

Considering Rorty's general ambitions and methods, I am assuming that his aim to abandon argument in favour of persuasion can be thought of

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[145] Ramberg describes the "argument", in which Rorty engages, as an attempt to "rationally persuade" (Ramberg 2001, 29).

in terms of usefulness. Usefulness in the matter of moral progress, as I have argued, means useful indeed for a potential moral improvement, for creating greater human happiness, less suffering, and increasing human solidarity. Thus, it further means to make the (melioristic) conversation more fruitful. What Rorty fears is that argument is not always helpful in creating and implementing certain vocabulary (in light of those aims) as compared to making this vocabulary look more attractive (cf. *PSH*, 62; *CIS*, 9). Posner would be supportive of this claim, as he argues:

> If you want to turn a meat-eater, especially a nonacademic meat-eater, into a vegetarian, you must get [them] to love the animals that we raise for food, and you cannot argue a person into love. […] don't read [them] an essay on moral theory. An academic argument is unlikely to stir the conscience, incite a sense of indignation, or engender feelings of love or guilt (Posner 1998a, 1674).

Posner's opposition, as I have shown in chapter 1, is, of course, primarily directed at academic argument, which often takes place in elitist or isolated contexts, does not have an immediate practical need to deliberate and is often mere speculations (cf. also Anderson 2014, 9). Still, Rorty has a point if his scepticism of "argument" implies a critique of ignorance concerning the affective aspect in moral deliberations. This, more than his meta-ethical inquiries, would regard his political project which is in line with the affective-turn tendencies of his time (cf. Ramberg 2016, 66). The latter take seriously what Ramberg calls "the affective and cognitive particularity and distinctiveness of the various discourses and perspectives we hope to draw into deliberating interaction" (*ivi*, 75). Ramberg argues that "a key condition of deliberative[146] success is the engagement of political emotion – hope, anxiety, solidarity, sympathy, hostility, identification – in the right sort of way. Political reason, as it comes to expression in deliberative engagement is passion saturated" (*ibid*.). A tactic of persuasion (or

[146] While (above all in a political context) the notions of deliberation and conversation may be opposed (as methods, and in terms of inclusion or expansion, c.f., e.g., Browning 1995, 175), here, deliberation is rather implied in the conversation. On the one hand, conversation, in Rorty, is supposed to provide new vocabulary for deliberations (*PCP*, ix) and has thus an impact on them. On the other hand, an extended version of conversation that includes any kind of linguistic exchange between social actors, as much as debates, encounters and dialogues (cf. introductory paragraph of this section), must also accommodate deliberation in its broad sense.

redescription) that knows its way around the manipulation of feelings and how a person may perceive another person, or a social circumstance may then be more effective than argumentation which, as Rorty fears, may indeed never lead to agreement – except to the agreement to differ (cf. *PSH*, 62).

This, however, presents a problem that goes both against the conditions of inclusiveness, freedom, and openness and, finally, that of the epistemic. Whoever possesses the power, the wit, or the (semantic) authority to persuade others into having or thinking it their way might then not make an effort to encounter the others' viewpoints. As Ramberg points out (Ramberg 2001, 35-36), it is indeed argument that is what one says or believes situated in relation to alternative thoughts: "it is a matter of working one's way into better – that is, a larger, more nuanced and detailed and imaginatively elaborated – space of discourse options", instead of simply producing "in the interlocutor a sincere assent to the claim in support of which we are advancing our considerations." Ramberg goes on, "argument and counterargument stand mutually illuminated in just this way. This […] is the essence of Platonic dialectic; it aims for just this illumination" (*ivi*, 36). Analogously to Ramberg's words, we may say that argument embraces disagreement or abnormal discourses (antitheses) – as argued above, a necessary element for the course and advancement of the conversation.

3.3.2 Epistemic

Above, I cited B. Williams' statement that "what is essential is not that everyone shall speak, but that everything worth saying shall be said […] that one requirement for orderly and fruitful democratic debate is accurate information" (p. 119).

I claimed, with Kitcher, that for a conversation to potentially lead to moral progress, it must be epistemic. Yet, what can this mean in an account where one is sceptical of moral objectivity and truth, or at least of the possibility of accessing them? I shall first (briefly) address the Rortyan notions of truth and justification before going any further.

3.3.2.1 Truth

My attitude towards the Rortyan notion of truth, in this work, is similar to how I addressed the notion of "objectivity" in chapter 2: it is not my ambition to discuss it in a comprehensive way, for it stretches from Rorty's early days to his critique of analytical philosophy, to his mature political stances, in a rather complex way (and it has been criticized by many, throughout the last decades). There is, in fact, no space in this this work to do so. However, I believe it is necessary to at least briefly address it, considering this argument about the "epistemic" condition of a conversation that aims at moral progress.

As stated, in *CIS*, Rorty claims that "truth will always win in a free and open encounter" and that a liberal society is one which is content to call "true" whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be (*CIS*, 52). For all that has been said until now, it is evident that this claim may be interpreted as rather problematic.

Rorty has, in fact, been criticized extensively for not taking the notion of truth seriously and as rather having a *blind spot* about the normative role of truth: "if we do not recognize a truth that transcends us, then what could motivate us to improve our commitments?" (Macarthur 2020).

In his synthetic framework about the Rortyan "deflationist"[147] or "minimalist" theory about truth, P. Engel (*WUT*, 6-9) claims that for Rorty, there is nothing more to truth [in the matter of conversation] than (1) the "*endorsing* use" of the word true (to make a statement), (2) the "*cautionary* use" (e.g., "your belief that P is justified but it is not true")[148] and (3) the "*disquotational* use" (i.e. it cannot be a norm, because it is unknowable, and it cannot be an ultimate goal). The deflated position hence supports that "true" is no more than a device of assertion that makes it possible to quote or disquote an utterance and makes it possible to show approval.

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[147] What D. Grover has defined as a "deflationary [or deflationist] account of truth" is contrasted with a substantive theory of truth (Wray 1999, 275), which is among the other things preoccupied with ontology.

[148] "Cautionary" means to caution people that no matter how well justified they are, it is possible that this justification may not hold for a better informed, more critically sophisticated audience (Macarthur 2020, 5). This supports Rorty's account of fallibilism (cf. section 3.2.2).

To say that Rorty rejects the notion of truth (or at least does not take it seriously), would hence and however be a mistake: there is indeed an idea of an ahistorical truth in his account, yet, ahistorical not because they are made by ahistorical entities (cf. *TP*, 226) or because there is such a thing as a totality of true sentences or an absolute truth. As D. Nystrom and K. Puckett put it: Rorty does not claim that there is no such thing as truth or, for that matter, that there is no such thing as the outside world but only that the question "does this description of the world accurately correspond to what it describes?" is one which we may want to stop asking (cf. *ABAO*, viii). If they are right, Rorty's (deflationist) stance about truth does not concern the ontological status of truth but rather the interlocutor's attitude within the conversation. Rorty in fact states that while the capacity to wield the concept of "true belief" is "a necessary condition for being a language-user and thus for being a rational agent" (*PCP*, 89), questions such as "does truth exist?" seem pointless (*ibid.*). He does indeed further sustain that everybody knows what "true" means, as it means the same in all cultures (cf. Wray 1999, 275-276); yet, granted that "true" is an absolute term, its conditions of application, throughout the cultures and ages, will always be relative (cf. Macarthur 2020).

"True belief", as a necessary condition, for Rorty, refers to the notion that, following Davidson, "true" and "belief" always come as a package deal[149] (cf. *ibid.*). Truth *has* indeed a normative notion, precisely in the sense that it is a "standard according to which beliefs are assessed" (*ibid.*). However, in his view, it is not a distinctive norm, and we must determine what is true or not through *justification*.

Yet, Rorty acknowledges that only because we cannot determine truth without relying on justification, this does not mean that they are indeed the same:

> Truth is what is supposed to distinguish knowledge from well-grounded opinion – from justified belief […] Pragmatists are often said to confuse truth, which is absolute and eternal, with justification, which is transitory because relative to the audience. (*PSH*, 32)

[149] "Package-deal" implies a series of fundamental concepts, including reason, meaning and belief, no one of which can be explained without invoking the other (Macarthur 2020, 8).

Rorty thus is not denying that there is truth but rather that there is a "truth out there waiting to be discovered", a "traditional notion of truth" (*CIS*, 27). He affirms: "truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there" (*CIS*, 5). This does not mean, as argued in chapter 2, that the world is not out there. The notion of truth in Rorty must therefore have to do, in any case, with a relation between our sentences and the world out there, though our sentences do not *correspond* to the world out there. Rorty clarifies: "since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths" (*CIS*, 21).

What we are dealing with is hence a notion of truth as an absolute, ahistorical concept, which, as such, is and has been understood as ahistorical and absolute in every culture. Yet, given that truth is further a property of sentences (i.e., assertions about the world), its application differs from audience to audience – depending, among other things, on their languages – and so are the conclusions that are drawn about its content.

Assuming, hence, that truth is dependent on languages and that all language-users can do is approach truth through their justifications (in open and inclusive conversations), Rorty does argue for "truth as justification", i.e., what he calls, again following Dewey, "warranted assertibility" (*PSH*, 32), or: "what our peers [eventually] let us get away with" (cf. Reason 2003). Progress, in this sense, means that our norms and standards of warranted assertibility evolve (*TP*, 50).

However, as it has been claimed, Rorty is careful not to reduce the concept of truth to that of justification or even verification (Macarthur 2020, 5). This becomes apparent when Rorty, for instance, defends the "cautionary use" of truth (see above): "your belief is fully justified, but it may not be true." Rorty, in fact, affirms, "I do not believe, contrary to what Engel suggests, that warranted assertibility and truth are the same thing" (*WUT*, 42). As Macarthur puts it (accurately, I would claim), "on Rorty's view, while truth cannot be reduced to justification, justification [obtained within an inclusive, open and epistemic conversation (m.a.)] is our best criterion for truth" (Macarthur 2020, 4).

3.3.2.2 Justification

In Kitcher's view, something is *justified* when it would be endorsed by participants in an ideal (open, epistemic, and inclusive) conversation (cf. Kitcher 2021, 89). Rorty, I claim, would agree.[150] For him, the community of the conversation (as a whole) – and what it lets "you get away with" (*PCP*, ii) – indeed ought to be the only "authority" in that matter.

There is, so I propose, a distinction to be made, in the Rortyan thought, between (1) a rather utopian notion of justification that transcends timely and cultural contingencies and (2) a still "ideal" yet potentially feasible justification (which concerns specific topics, in specific contexts or communities and specific moments or periods in history).

The former (justification_1) is as close to accessing (moral) truth as it can get. It is connected to Kitcher's take on moral truths: as what sticks (i.e., is justified) throughout historical and cultural changes.[151] This justification is made by an ideal community, which includes all possible generations, cultures, experiences and viewpoints. This ideal community is thus "better informed, more demandingly critical or richly imaginative than ours" (cf. Macarthur 2020, 3). It has hence learned from the mistakes we have yet to make, it is aware of what our current "future generations" would think, and it would include voices in the conversation, which we currently do not even think of. This utopian justification is envisioned at the end of (a) moral progress.

The second notion of justification (justification_2), on the other hand, while still based on the idea of a rather ideal (i.e., open, epistemic, *and*

150 Yet, as others have clarified further (Tartaglia 2010), Rorty is not making the philosophical claim that vocabularies can only be justified socially, but rather the practical suggestion that we adopt the practice of justifying our vocabularies pragmatically rather than in terms of their proximity to (a supposed absolute, ahistorical) truth.

151 Kitcher (cf. chapter 1) suggests inverting the concepts of moral truths and moral progress as opposed to what the "discovery view" proposes: in Kitcher's view, it is not the discovery of a moral truth that defines moral progress; but it is the moral belief that remains stable throughout moral change, which qualifies as a moral truth.

inclusive) conversation, is limited (yet conscious of those limits) by its historical, cultural, and linguistic contingencies and thus boundaries.[152]

What makes justification$_2$ still "ideal" is that, given both its open, epistemic and inclusive qualities and the awareness about its limits, it strives for a justification$_1$: while participants in a justification$_2$ cannot actually include voices of, say, future generations (as much as their experiences and knowledge), they try to *imagine* – to their best abilities[153] – different scenarios and outcomes: hence how, for instance, future generations would justify certain moral judgments, decisions and practices.

The problem of justification$_2$ (the one kind of justification applicable in practice) is that, while Rorty is keen about his optimism concerning the powers of imagination, our tools to justify moral right and wrong, as he himself has outlined extensively (cf. chapter 2), are in fact limited.

As Kitcher points out, what seems morally wrong today ("slavery, limited roles for women, and the unnaturalness of homosexual relations", Kitcher 2021, 28) was largely justified in the past. Moreover, current habits (*normal* discourses) are very weakly justified,[154] as consolidating the moral achievements of the past (cf. *ivi*, 89), without letting emerge that one should dig deeper and be more imaginative. He stresses that what is needed is some account of when reactions are justified – as, so he claims, behind the talk of "rightness" is "not an illicit appeal to truth but [a] yet unexplicated notion of justification" (*ibid.*).

One may claim that this exactly is what Rorty's advocacy of the notion of justification$_2$ (which then implies the striving towards justification$_1$) is all about: the claim that certain justifications (e.g., those concerning slavery) were indeed not (ideally) justified, for they at least excluded a

[152] A look at shared justifications can be useful also as an analytical instrument if we accept Wittgenstein's suggestion that "what human beings accept as justifiably, shows how they think and live" (Wittgenstein 1958, 106).

[153] As Rorty constantly stresses, this can only happen by means of the vocabulary we have available – by "our lights" – but we should still put in the work and try to push through these boundaries as far as we can.

[154] What I shall further consider from the Rortyan notion of justification is the angle that "truth is what is good for us to believe". This stance suggests that our justifications are simply based on (and limited by) our desires and needs, i.e., what we need to know and inquire, in order to cope with our environment (cf. Wray 1999, 275-276).

large portion of voices. However, as we might understand from envisioning justification$_1$, any sort of justification$_2$ will always be insufficient, as it will always be affected by the limiting views of a group's historical and cultural contingencies. There is, however, hope that societies can learn over time based on their experiences, and above all, based on different reactions and social consequences throughout time and history (cf. *EFT*, xx).

An appeal for a justification$_2$ (which implies justification$_1$) within an ideal conversation seems to be also Kitcher's only methodical solution. Human judgements are fallible, he stresses (Kitcher 2021, 38). So, he appends to what he asserted in regard to "moral truth": "moral progress happens when justification sticks" (*ivi*, 39).

I shall note, conclusively, that when it comes to the uses of truth outlined above, as it has been pointed out (Macarthur 2020, 5), both the *cautionary* and the *endorsing* uses can be interpreted in terms of norms of justification: "in the first case, one expresses solidarity with the norms of justification to one's interlocutor(s); and in the second one imagines a contrast between conforming to the norms of one's actual community and those of a better one" (*ibid.*).

3.3.2.3 The epistemic condition: on getting things right, information and truthfulness

Epistemic, in both the Kitcherian and the Rortyan sense, I argue, hence implies not to rest on one's "weak" and "normal" justifications but rather to tend towards an ideal end (or outcome) of the conversation that includes the abnormal (i.e., challenges of current understandings and interpretations): to tend towards a justification that "sticks".
In this matter, B. Williams, in his critique of Rorty (Williams 2002), stresses the importance to indeed keep the notion of truth as an independent notion, above all, when it comes to the recognition of what he calls "everyday truths" (*ivi*, 10). He argues: "the unconditional *will* [m.e.] to truth […] does mean that we want to understand who we are, correct error, to avoid deceiving ourselves, to get beyond comfortable falsehood […]" (*ivi*, 15). In this matter, he goes on (in agreement with Rorty, I claim), "the so-called value of truth must be entirely instrumental", concerning its connection with beliefs and assertions (*ivi*, 65).

What Williams implies is that even if Truth (as an absolute and ahistorical concept), as Rorty suggests, is unattainable and therefore, arguably, unworthy of inquiry, it does not mean that truth should not be searched for in everyday assertions, beliefs, and habits, in order to make progress and do better.

For Rorty, the epistemic matter is also expressed in the question of "success" – a matter connected to action. Since his exchange with Ramberg in 2000 (*RC*, 351 - 377), Rorty became persuaded to start employing Ramberg's notion of "getting things right", as opposed to his previous position, where he sustained that this notion should be abandoned (*ivi*, 375). To always be in touch with the world, he explains, does not mean that we can just make *any claim*. We have to get things right, in order to have success with our actions. We cannot freely decide "what gets things right" (Huette-Almerigi 2020, 9).

This connects the notion of *langue* ("making claims") to action and to the (moral) *responsibilities* that come with it. In our linguistic action, we ought to be committed to getting things right. Though, a notion of right, I would argue, always implies some notion of truth – not only as a condition to make a statement about what is right but further concerning our possible "success" in relation to that statement. A commitment to "getting things right", so I claim, involves *at least* a commitment to (1) information (all the information available) and (2) to truthfulness, when being involved in a justification; both of which embrace and imply a notion of truth:

A commitment to *information* is very much what Kitcher appears to have in mind, as he sometimes calls the condition of the "epistemic conversation" the *informed conversation*. Kitcher notes that it is, in fact, a feature of humans that "our lives also depend on exchanging information [which implies a presumption in favour of truthfulness]" (Kitcher 2021, 74). Accurate information again relies on "effective investigation" (Williams 2002, 127), which concerns what Williams (see above) has called *everyday truths*.

Williams famously noted that it is incidentally a feature of today's thought or culture that people are suspicious about the notion of truth and, on the other side, particularly devoted to truthfulness (Williams

2002, 1).[155] *Truthfulness*, first and foremost, refers to the sincerity of assertions, on which, again, the conversation itself builds. "A person is sincere when she says what she thinks she is justified in believing", claims Rorty (*WUT*, 42). As Williams points out, "sincere assertions do not necessarily have the aim of informing the hearer; but insincere assertions do have the aim of misinforming the hearer. In the primary case they aim to misinform the hearer about the state of things, the truth of what the speaker asserts" (Williams 2002, 74).

Williams argues further that truthfulness – as much as truth as well – is connected to trust.[156] He points out that trust is a necessary condition of any cooperative activity, such as, for instance, (the ideal) conversation. Trustworthiness, he goes on, involves speech, for it requires fitting action to words: "if he says, [if his assertion is] 'I will do it', and he is trustworthy, he does it, and *he makes what he says true* [m.e.]" (*ivi*, 94).

3.3.2.4 Moral knowledge and moral expertise

> It has been claimed that the norm attached to assertion is knowledge, in the sense that in asserting that P one represents oneself as knowing that P [...] A message can be reliably transmitted from one person to another through a chain of people who pass on a sentence without understanding it themselves […] knowledge can travel through utterances (Williams 2002, 76- 84).

According to the standard definition, the notion of knowledge fulfils three conditions: it is a *true* [1] and *justified* [2] *belief* [3](cf. e.g., Boghossian 2006; Wikforss 2020, Ichikawa et al. 2018). However, if, as discussed in the sections above, we cannot assess (moral) truth (or even achieve "ideal" justification for that matter), is it justifiable to maintain the notion of moral knowledge along the way?[157]

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155 He notes that these two tendencies are connected to each other and that they have consequences for politics and intellectual activity.

156 Truthfulness is a form of trustworthiness which relates in a particular way to speech. "Truthfulness", in fact, like the German *Wahrhaftigkeit*, can refer to both Sincerity and Accuracy" (Williams 2002, 94).

157 Here, I do not consider philosophical problems such as the "Gettier Problem" (Gettier 1963), which challenges the question of whether – the other way around – a justified true belief necessarily is knowledge.

I claim that the notion of moral knowledge still must be taken seriously in the matter of moral progress – that it is, in fact, compelling to understand moral progress, amongst other things, as the gain of moral knowledge (cf. chapter 1) – even if we accept all the Rortyan views above. For moral knowledge is a necessary notion if we are right to assume that the conversation (as a moral inquiry) must be epistemic. Or the other way around: the conversation (as moral inquiry) must be epistemic if moral progress is about gaining moral knowledge. But what can moral knowledge mean in a pragmatist account, such as Rorty's?

In her pragmatist-leaning paper (Wilson 2019), C. Wilson calls "a powerful line of thought" the one that "argues that the existence of identifiable moral progress entails the acquisition of moral knowledge [about what is right/good/just (for us), how we should behave (towards the others) et cetera]" (Wilson 2019, 31). Wilson argues, as debated in chapter 1, that there is, in fact, a pragmatist alternative to both moral realism and moral subjectivism, in that matter. Wilson, different to Kitcher and Rorty (who follow the Jamesian and Deweyan line of pragmatism), refers to Peirce, who claimed that (moral) truth "lies at the end of inquiry" (*ibid.*). For the sake of argument, I will treat both the Peircean (with Wilson) and the Jamesian-Deweyan (with Rorty and Kitcher) under the same label of "pragmatism", thus overlook, for instance, the notion of "expedience" that arguably characterizes the latter as compared to the former (cf. Kitcher 2021, 73).

Wilson argues that the "end of inquiry" (which implies the process(es) of justification) can be either taken to be an "ideal condition" (which we will never achieve) or as a "non-ideal condition". The latter refers to a moment when we "decide" that a particular case is closed, that we have "gained knowledge" because it demonstrates itself to be verifiable (given particular cases and conditions), (cf. Wilson 2019, 34-35). To decide that a case is closed,[158] (ideally) implies that the participants in the conversation have reason to do so: they have taken into consideration all the available information, all the experiences assessed

[158] Remember that in the Rortyan "Hegelian" picture (as outlined above), a case is never eternally "closed". To close it means to reach a certain synthesis which, during the course of *Bildung*, however, continues to evolve. It is important to agree on conclusions as a matter of orientation and assessment of progress, however, as Rorty sustains, in an ideal society, social actors are aware that they must constantly review and revise their concepts.

throughout history (what has changed and how?) and all the voices relevant for the evaluation of the case. There is particular knowledge or "everyday knowledge"[159] at play. This comprehends, once again, that the conversation must be *inclusive*, that the members must be *open* to input that could change their concepts, their knowledge (or what they believe to know) of the world and themselves, and that the nature of the conversation is epistemic, i.e., that the interlocutors actually *want* to gain knowledge. It implies, indeed, that the gain of moral knowledge is an end of this moral inquiry called conversation.

It has been argued and shown, though, throughout a variety of accounts (see hereunder) that interlocutors tend not to be open to beliefs which menace their own worldviews, concepts, and self-descriptions (as Rorty would call it). On the contrary, a variety of studies have suggested that people often do not change their beliefs, even when they are presented with hard evidence based on verifiable facts (cf. chapter 2). A powerful example, which has often been employed in recent years, is that concerning the crowd present at the inauguration of D. Trump's presidency:[160] supporters of Trump continued to sustain he was right to claim that there were more people present at his inauguration compared to that of his predecessor, even after they were presented with the evidence supporting the contrary (cf. Strong 2017).

It has further been argued that evidence, in some cases, not only does not convince sceptics of hard facts, but it sometimes achieves the contrary (cf. Nyhan & Reifler 2010): people who are presented with proof of the contrary, sometimes even strengthen their belief (by telling themselves that the evidence must be fake or that something else must be wrong with it).

These phenomena have been studied and described with different notions: "knowledge resistance" (Wikforss 2020; cf. also Kitcher 2021, 81), "motivated belief" (Williams 2002, 135), "cognitive dissonance"

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[159] I here refer to Williams' notion of "everyday truths" above (cf. also Williams 2002, 10).

[160] From this and other timely examples, concerning specifically Trump's view of the world, emerged the term "alternative facts", ascribable to Trump's then counsellor K. Conway, who claimed that Trump was never lying but simply presenting "alternative facts". This description has preoccupied thinkers ever since; it is closely connected with the notions of "fake news", "post-truth", and "post-factual", all of which support Williams' thesis (see above) that this is an epoch in which people are particularly sceptical of a presented truth and the idea of truth in general.

(Gray 2013, 46). All of them deal with the issue of human beings not dealing with conflicting beliefs and perceptions "by testing them against facts" (*ibid.*) but rather by reinterpreting facts in a way that favours beliefs to which they are most attached.

It seems reasonable to assume that the scepticism towards truth, as Williams argued, may be supported by these (possibly intrinsic or evolutionary acquired) tendencies. Understanding this issue as a contemporary matter, may be supported further by the apparent widespread resistance to expert opinion. Kitcher argues, for example, that the "reality of anthropogenic global warming became accepted by the community of climate scientists … four decades ago" (Kitcher 2021, 81). Yet, it continues to be contested within the conversation of the broad public, as it presents a "highly varied distribution of psychological states among individual people" (*ibid.*). This is certainly problematic if we can agree that, arguably, experts of any kind are important to maintain the epistemic ambition and drive of the conversation.

In the light of social, moral and political progress, in *AOC*, Rorty explicitly defends the need for expertise (*AOC*, 104). In this matter, Rorty further sustains, it is important for an expert to be considered as such by the interlocutors of a specific conversation (cf. Voparil 2011a, 137).
A first issue here is that, while in scientific theory, so-called experts have a certain authority in the conversation (leaving aside the problems of the knowledge-resisting tendencies), in conversations about moral issues, "experts" are rarely recognized as such (cf. Posner 1998a, 1678). A second issue concerns the question of what it actually means to be a moral expert.

Moral expertise is widely recognized as a "business of moral philosophers" (Marchetti 2016, 348), other than (previously but also consistently) of spiritual leaders and "prophets". This picture has been attacked within philosophy itself, not at last by Wittgenstein, Posner and extensively Rorty.[161] Philosophers have asked what kind of special training in moral philosophy would enable privileged access to right and wrong (cf. *ivi*, 355; Posner 1998a, 1658; Srinivasan 2021, 104).

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[161] Though, while in earlier years, Rorty shows himself sceptical of the discipline of philosophy (and its future) altogether, his later writings suggest an eagerness to change the ways of doing philosophy.

While Posner claims not to question the existence of morality (as an academic discipline) in itself, he is mainly worried about the weak effect it has on moral practices (Posner 1998a, 1639): according to Posner, moral philosophy lacks emotional power, does not furnish motivation, and its (analytic) tools are feeble (cf. *ivi*, 1638-1642, 1664-1668, 1682). Based on these arguments, I would claim that Poser is not denying the moral philosopher's expertise but rather their authority within the conversation. However, Posner further points out that old or ancient philosophers (who often have authority in moral theories) cannot solve modern problems (*ivi*, 1671-73), and he claims that there is much disagreement among academic moralists and that sometimes moral philosophy may even lead people to behave less morally by making them more adept at rationalization (*ivi*, 1641-1642).

When Rorty is sceptical of moral philosophers as being moral experts, he generally refers to "traditional ways" of "doing philosophy", including the primacy of rationality (as an individual or subjective quality) as a possible access to ahistorical moral concepts. He does, however, recognize a certain kind of expertise in moral philosophers, or rather "specialists in ideas" (*PSH*, 19), as they generally read more (Marchetti 2016, 354) and thus, among other things, have a greater familiarity with the intellectual tradition and, arguably, a stimulated capacity to imagine different possible moral worlds. Artists and intellectuals (among them also philosophers) are needed, so Rorty claims, to create images and tell stories about the past and about how the future could look like (cf. *AOC*, 4).

Differently from how it was often argued (cf. Ramberg 2001, 18), Rorty's hopes and intentions are not to bring philosophy (as a discipline) to an end but rather to help reform and reconstruct it (Voparil 2014, 379). His hope is, following Dewey, to transform it eventually into – and use it as – an instrument of moral and political change (Topper 1995, 964). This is, amongst other things, based on an idea of philosophy as "Bildung or edification" (cf. Voparil 2005, 123), which aims at helping society to break free from outworn vocabulary.[162]

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[162] Rorty's advocacy for a reform of philosophy may be a reply to M.-D. Cojocaru's recent question about whether philosophy itself has made sufficient progress in order to talk about moral progress. Based on the controversy around the very notion of progress of philosophy, and Deweyan worries about how philosophy should be, Cojocaru concludes – implicitly supporting Rorty – that maybe philosophy should, first and foremost, be thought of as the edification (m.i.) of a consciousness for the moral shaping of the world and life through language: by aiming for "more humble

This, in Rorty's view, means specifically, for philosophy, to be a *mediator* between old and new ways of speaking (*PSH*, 66) – between the conflicts of the language of the past and the needs of the future (Rorty 1995, 199) –, to help recognize new connections, how things hang together in the broadest possible way (Hellmann 2020, 46), among various large areas of human activity (*PSH*, 175). It means for Rorty to, yes, continue "the conversation Plato began" but without discussing the very same topics (*PMN*, 391). Again in the footsteps of Wittgenstein, for whom philosophy as "linguistic critique" means a clarification and exemplification of thought (*TLP*, 30-38), it should aim, indeed, for descriptions that facilitate various social projects (Voparil 2011a, 139). Philosophy must hence be based on ordinary life and problems (cf. Marchetti 2016, 358) and promote the "ontological priority of the social" (Chin 2014, 62), aware of its (and all our) *responsibility*, not at last intellectual responsibility (cf. Salis 2003, 270). It must be invested in helping to change the course of conversation (Voparil 2011b, 115) by being in *constant interaction with other disciplines* (cf. *PCP*, x; *PSH*, 175; Maddalena 2020, 7).

The interaction with other disciplines (in an extended and inclusive sense) is a key point when it comes to the matter of moral expertise and the role of philosophy. In fact, when Rorty sustains the need for expertise in the conversation, he debunks the role of (authoritarian) prophets and puts emphasis on the need for *information* (cf. *AOC*, 126). Information is provided by figures who do profound research about (and are thus deeply invested in) specific aspects and elements of the *content* of conversation. (cf. Hermann 2017, 49).

I conclude that it would be disadvantageous to debunk the notion of the moral expert and that, in light of an epistemically oriented conversation (with the capacity to provoke moral progress), it is indispensable to give the word to people who have a more extended knowledge concerning particular areas that are connected to the moral issue at question. Moral expertise is hence not to be understood as one individual able to give us single answers about right and wrong,[163] but it should rather be understood as a more extended (social) notion,

utopias" (m.t.) in a morally complex world, instead of aiming for "faraway islands" (m.t.) (Cojocaru 2019, 19-25).

[163] As Kitcher points out, it would be an error to suppose that a few individuals should have the last word when it comes to an area that concerns mostly the problem of a "limited capacity for responding to others" (Kitcher 2021, 55 -56).

connecting different discourses from different times and areas. The moral philosopher may understand themself indeed as a mediator[164] between those different languages, as bringing different discourses together, thus evoking new connecting questions, balancing radicalizations of thoughts and helping foresee what certain tendencies may bring in the future.

The (epistemic) ambition to create connections between the possibly largest extent of human activities also implies human *experiences* (linked to moral issues) in general (Hermann 2017, 50). When Moody-Adams claims that an important dimension of moral truth derives from non-philosophical sources (Moody-Adams 2016, 11), she means that it refers to all kinds of human beings experiencing the moral dimension of social life in different ways.

A powerful notion in pragmatist moral philosophy derives again from W. James: the *cries of the wounded*. It has been argued that Rorty, though implicitly, extensively uses and proposes his own version of it (cf., e.g., Pihlström 2020, 57; Voparil 2022, 121; Voparil 2016, 2016). The notion suggests that morality advances by listening and reacting to the cries of the wounded – to those oppressed, hurt, and overlooked by timely social and moral arrangements.

When we talk about the matter of including more and more experiences into the broader moral vision and of creating *new connections*, we must precisely take the Jamesian notion into consideration and extend the conversation, particularly to those who have been wounded by timely moral systems.

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164 An interesting account concerning moral expertise is undertaken, for instance, by H. Kempt (Kempt 2019, 113-124), who explores what AI can potentially contribute to moral progress. His inquiry evolves around making chatbots into potential moral experts by feeding them all sorts of text (information) deriving from philosophical, moral theory. Kempt soon understands that (besides other problems linked to this ambition) due to the complexity of morality itself, the machines will fail to understand and reproduce more than just the linguistic structure, namely the deliberative structure of a moral sentence too. What AI could be used for, though, so Kempt proposes, is as an interactive instrument to help them deliberate. He claims: "moral progress … happens when people engage in moral discourse and attempt to improve their actions from a moral perspective. A 'digital Socrates' can help this dimension by engaging users in debates about their own convictions […] Just like Socrates' main point in debating the people of Athens was not to present them with a certain set of conceptual truths (including moral ones), but to poke them to improve and rethink their preconceived notions" (ivi, 121-122).

It has been argued indeed that the wounded are generally the ones that (first) "cry out" about what is morally wrong or unjust and what thus requires change — in order to make progress and hence give insight into a "moral truth" (cf. Srinivasan 2021, 106-107). However – as I will further explore in section 3.3.3.2 – sometimes the "wounded do not even cry" (Kitcher 2021, 30). And even if they do, they are easily ignored, overheard or disappear in the general noise. This is due to at least two reasons. (1) As I claimed above, conversations are generally not as democratic as the Kitcherian ideal "Deweyan-society"-model suggests: private needs spill over and taint a possible common public project, and more powerful stakeholders suppress voices which are not in their own personal favour. To paraphrase Srinivasan (cf. Srinivasan 2021, 109), the powerful have been preventing certain (ideal) conversations from happening altogether, by shutting out voices unfavourable to their private projects. (2) As pointed out, it needs the courage to speak out – considering, not at last, the unbalanced power relations within the "conversation" and society in general. The wounded's pain often – at least initially (cf. Kitcher 2021, 33) – remains private. Speaking out often has negative consequences (e.g., social punishment): "the speakers are vilified and sometimes pay for their temerity with their lives", Kitcher claims (*ivi*, 34). However, he goes on, "when it goes well, the conversation attracts more dissident voices and a wider circle of sympathetic listeners" (*ibid.*).

3.3.3 Inclusive

As argued in chapter 1, the Rortyan notion of moral progress is largely expressed in terms of inclusion (i.e., particularly in terms of the expansion of the "we", cf. chapter 1). If we accept that what he calls conversation is a primary tool to potentially achieve moral progress, then conversation must, in fact, be thought, first and foremost, in terms of inclusion or inclusiveness. I will elaborate, hereinafter, on how the inclusion in the conversation should be thought of as both a mechanism (or method) and as an end.

3.3.3.1 Inclusion as a mechanism or method: towards a potential moral progress

If conversation is a tool to (potentially) achieve moral progress, and if it is accurate to say that this conversation must be inclusive in order to achieve moral progress, then inclusion can, first of all, be itself understood as a tool (or method) to ultimately achieve moral progress. The same, consequently, could also be argued for the other "conditions of conversations" I outlined.

I claim that in the Rortyan view, it is specifically the *expansion* of conversation (that goes hand in hand with the idea of the expansion of the "we", which I link to the notion of inclusion – cf. chapter 1 and chapter 5) that potentially leads to moral progress. The expansion of a conversation can both mean (1) the inclusion of other subjects (potential interlocutors) into one's conversation, (2) a subject joining new conversations and (3) the connection of different (potentially conflicting) conversations into a larger one.

As argued above, it can be drawn from the Rortyan account that pluralism in conversations is a necessary tool to let the conversation (and morality) advance epistemically, i.e., to "discover" moral truths (in the pragmatic sense). The increasing inclusion of all kinds of people into the conversation is consequently a mechanism to make conversations ever more pluralistic and therefore (morally) advancing.

Granted that the inclusive conversation is a tool to provoke or implement moral progress, and assuming the ultimate goal of moral progress is – with Rorty (cf. previous chapters) – a (greater) happiness (and/or less suffering) for a greater amount of people – then the function of this conversation must ultimately be understood as aiming for a greater happiness (and/or less suffering). Moral truths are then to be ultimately understood in the context of human happiness and, if we enlarge the circle of moral concern even further, the realm of well-being of any sentient being (cf. chapter 1). The aim of the inclusion into the conversation is then expressed in giving all kinds of people the possibility to make their voices heard, express their concerns and desires, and put forward "self-descriptions" which support self-determination and their own finding (or creation) of happiness. If we accept that, indeed, the goal of morality is a greater happiness for a greater amount of people (and well-being for non-human beings), then we must make the conversation about what makes (or would make)

them happy, well, and/or suffer less. If this all is accurate, then we must further understand inclusion as a moral end in itself.

3.3.3.2 Inclusion as an end

To recognize and do justice to excluded individuals and groups becomes, throughout the years, an increasingly important dimension of Rorty's political project (cf. Voparil 2011b, 119) and hence a key *goal* of both the political and moral effort, which he both pursues and recommends. In *CIS*, Rorty claims that we should constantly stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of as "they" rather than "us" (*CIS*, 196).

The goal of inclusion in the conversation formally divides, so I suggest, into (1*) including increasingly more people in the conversation* to make their concerns heard and taken seriously, and thus move towards a greater potential happiness (i.e. primarily a goal of morality), and (2) enable and create an *inclusive* (pluralist and liberal*) society or culture* (i.e., a primarily *political goal*) favourable of giving ever more people the opportunity to "pursue projects of self-creation and personal redemption" (Smith 2005, 84). As it has been argued (Shweder 2003, 31), "it is the ideal of liberal pluralism that multiple and diverse groups should be able to live together or co-exist in a safe and morally decent society".

In the matter of making the conversation about what makes people ultimately happy, Rorty leans on Foucault's assumption that only those directly concerned can speak in a practical way on their own behalf (cf. Voparil 2011b, 121). However, it appears rather naïf or at least insufficient to let one's moral efforts rest on the pretence that our (unhappy, unwell, or harmed) fellow human beings would always tell what moral practices are harmful to them and what would make them happier, and that they would simply pursue it, even if we asked them ("sometimes the wounded do not cry").

Besides the above-mentioned issues related to unbalanced power, I shall consider what Kitcher described as "false consciousness" (Kitcher 2021, 42-72). With this notion, Kitcher refers to a phenomenon entangled with the problem of "moral deafness", where cultural and historical contingencies have shaped the minds of people – including the "wounded" – in a way that they accept situations against which they

would protest in other circumstances. Differently said: if, for instance, a woman in a conservative context is convinced that her (natural, exclusive and/or God-wanted) place in society is as a mother and housewife, she will possibly not protest her limited possibilities in that very society. Under false consciousness, people would not consider a possibly increased happiness in alternative (conflicting) circumstances. Furthermore, people that are oppressed by and within certain systems and contexts, even if they realize that different circumstances would make them happier, might be made to believe that it is morally (or at least socially) wrong to even desire alternatives and change.

For people to speak up, they must, therefore, (1) be made aware of (formal or real) alternatives; (2) they must reach what Rorty calls with M. Frye, "semantic authority" (Frye 1983, 106, 166), and (3), as anticipated above, develop courage.

(1) To be made aware of alternatives is linked to what, in chapter 2, I discussed as the conceptual (or, often in Rorty, "logical") space necessary to embrace certain concepts and ideas. In Voparil's view, it is one of Rorty's key insights, the

> […] recognition of the obstacle faced […] by a voice saying something never heard before. Unless […] the logical space necessary for moral deliberation is expanded, these claims will fail to register in the dominant discourse, even if victims of oppression are able to give voice to their suffering (Voparil 2011b, 122).

As discussed in chapter 2, this space can potentially be expanded by misuses of language, redescriptions in the broadest sense, art, literature, metaphors, and the diffusion of humans' stories and narratives through all kinds of channels (e.g., journalism, and all the New Media Rorty could not have foreseen), i.e., a (default) inclusion of stories and voices into the conversation in the broadest possible sense.

(2) Semantic authority refers (as anticipated in chapter 1), with Rorty, to the power or faculty to *effectively* create (re-)descriptions, particularly also self-descriptions, within the conversation (cf. *TP*, 222-223). As argued in chapter 2, language changes only as a result of social agreement: if someone (an individual or an insufficiently big enough group) suggests a (re-)description, however, it is not largely adopted within the conversation, there will be no long-term linguistic change and hence

arguably no impact on moral change. Rorty takes from Frye, from whom he inherits the term "semantic authority", that this concerns both "semantic authority with [or over] others" (cf. *ivi*, 222) and "semantic authority over [oneself]" (cf. *ivi*, 223).

The first has to do with having an impact on others within the conversation. Even if people are formally included in the conversation, semantic authority (over others) is generally unevenly distributed among the interlocutors. However great the effort may be, some people's voices will always have more authority than the voice of others. This may, in some cases, be justified (e.g., by their "expertise"); in other cases, it may have to do with bias, culturally contingent agreements about who has authority in the discussion and, moreover, condition(ing)s such as the eloquence of the speaker or their self-confidence. As pointed out in section 3.3.1.3, this has the (problematic) consequence that some may have more success in potentially *persuading* their conversation partners than others.

The second form of semantic authority (semantic authority over oneself), on the other hand, has to do with gaining awareness of one's own possibilities and alternatives. This is linked to what Rorty means when he asserts that (sometimes) there is no such thing as the voice of the oppressed (*CIS*, 94), i.e., they sometimes first have to acquire a language in which to articulate their sense of exclusion (Gascoigne 2008, 195), even to themselves.

As can be drawn from Kitcher, sometimes certain people do not have semantic authority over others and maybe not even over themselves because they are currently *described* – by the more *powerful* in the conversation – in a way that depicts them as not worthy of being listened to:

> Critics of "radical feminism" have used their observations to denounce a movement of bitter, frustrated, negligent, irresponsible, unhappy half-women […] The women who clamour for the chance to do things currently forbidden to them are dismissed as unwomanly, defective, embittered, even monstrous […] Defenders of the status quo place great weight on the fact that "most women" or "normal women"[165] do not complain but enjoy the roles tradition has

[165] Arguments like these rely on essentialism (cf. also Smith 2020), against which Rorty's whole philosophical output stands.

> assigned them. Most of the wounded do not even cry. Thus, it is easy to marginalize them (Kitcher 2021, 59).

P. Reason cites another example that refers to semantic authorities of both kinds: "[when] women in a co-operative inquiry group … examined their experience […] they were able to stop seeing what was happening to them in terms of *their own inadequacies* [m.e.] and 'redescribe' [it] as '*bullying*' [m.e.] on the part of senior managers" (Reason 2003, 107). The brief excerpt of this specific example supports that (1) in some cases, redescriptions can lead to new self-awareness; (2) the redescription may be recognized and/or embraced by others (within a conversation); (3) as it has often been emphasized (e.g. Rorty, Kitcher 2021, Srinivasan 2021, Voparil 2011b,), semantic authority is generally reached when more (similar-minded) people come together and show mutual support for the effort to redescribe (cf. *TP*, 223). Voparil concludes:

> […] once the members of such groups build their moral strength by increasing semantic authority over their members and thus making it easier for members to find their moral identities in their membership of those groups, the next step in this picture of social change is the gradual weaving of "the new language" (Voparil 2011b, 122).

Other than semantic authority being necessary for speaking up, it appears, furthermore (on the contrary), that in the first place, to "acquire a language" and speak up is necessary in order to create semantic authority. The latter might happen first in a safer space (among newfound confidants) and only later within more extended conversations that include possibly unresponsive or even hostile interlocutors.

I borrow Kitcher's terms to conclude that the act of speaking up (i.e. of potentially starting a conversation) and the ability to create semantic authority (two notions which, if what I have just said is accurate, go hand in hand) depend on a variety of things: "the conversation starters and the conversation renewers" must be of a sufficient number, they must be eloquent, persistent, both be able to persuade and (counter-) argue well, be willing to make a sacrifice for their cause and be, all in all [3] courageous (cf. Kitcher 2021, 47).

I have claimed, at the beginning of this chapter, that the conversation, as Rorty imagines it, is a necessary yet not sufficient condition for moral progress to occur. One of the arguments for its insufficiency has been, following Srinivasan, that we indeed do not live in a "Deweyian"[166] world and that progress through "conversation" would require previous shifts in power (obtained, e.g., through social movements and political struggle). I further claimed that conversation, in Rorty, may be understood as twofold. On the one hand, within the naturalist-evolutionary Rortyan angle, conversation is something that human beings simply have been doing throughout their development as *zôa politika logon echonta*. On the other hand, conversation, as a *pragmatist-melioristic method or aim*, refers to a specific (free, open, inclusive and, I claimed, epistemic) type of conversation, with moral progress as an ideal outcome. While within the first, moral progress might be a product of – first and foremost – chance (due to the contingent conditions of and around the conversation), within the second moral progress is envisioned, desired and intentionally pursued. While the course of the first type of conversation may be changed due to the influence and outcome of social and political movements and struggles, the second type (actively) embraces the voices of these struggles.

In both cases, struggles for social and political power (as much as other natural and social conditions and events, including outcries of individuals or groups, social revolutions, changes and political structures and institutions) become, therefore, a constitutive part of the conversation, or rather of its course. To say that conversation is insufficient hence means that it would be naïf to pretend that linguistic exchange alone could lead to moral progress – assuming that moral progress is understood as an expanding circle of moral status and concern, i.e., an expansion of inclusiveness (both as an end, and as a mechanism to increase happiness and well-being among human and non-human beings respectively).

Conversation, if we are to embrace the Rortyan stance, remains, however, a necessary condition. If language as a social practice is constitutive of moral thought, reasoning and not at last practice, then it is necessary for the *comprehension* and implementation of the content and meaning of struggles and shifts in social and political power. This seems reasonable to accept, above all, if we presume that, as argued in chapter

[166] The one that "encourages social critique" to be nourished, acted upon, and revised in the conversation (cf. section 3.2, pp. 108-109).

1, moral progress can be understood as such only if there is (also) a shift in belief and/or consciousness within the greater portion of members of a society (not only in practices, laws and/or institutions).

The three conditions for people to speak up, outlined above – (1) sufficient conceptual space, (2) acquisition of semantic authority, and (3) courage – and the role movements and struggles (for shifts in socio-political power) seem to suggest, though, that a great responsibility falls to the excluded (i.e., those who have currently either no semantic authority or are not heard at all, within the conversation). Statements by Rorty like, "if you find yourself a slave, do not accept your masters' descriptions of the real" (*TP*, 216), seem to further support this suggestion. It suggests that, in a way, moral actors must wait for the "cries of the wounded" to appear.

However, we have numerous hints throughout Rorty's work that it is the *responsibility* – and arguably even moral duty – of every social actor to make "the conversation" more inclusive and to always be on "the lookout for marginalized people" (*CIS*, 196). This is strengthened by his prescription (see above) to join the conversation of others rather than expect them to join – and consequently achieve semantic authority within – "ours".

All this goes hand in hand with the (political) goal to create a *culture* that enables *courage* (by guaranteeing freedom of speech, social security et cetera) [3], semantic authority (by actively making an effort to implement inclusion and equality) [2] and is favourable of *an expending conceptual space* (be stimulating the conversation and therefore enhance redescriptions) [1].

Another issue is that supposedly even in an inclusive and liberal culture, there will always be excluded voices. Even if most people find the courage and gain semantic authority, there will always be what E. Paez called "mute agents" (Paez 2020), i.e., stakeholders who cannot talk about their interests (*ibid.*; Wilson 2019, 47). Mute agents are, for instance, infants, animals and future generations. The latter are to be considered if we take the notions of the "ideal conversation" and the "ideal justification" ($justification_1$) seriously.

With the issue of mute agents, the "problem of speaking for others" (Voparil 2011b, 120) emerges: to speak for mute agents or even for

silenced victims[167] reinforces (again) existing hierarchies and privileges. Ideally, if the above claims are accurate, we might consider it a moral duty to enable people to speak for themselves rather than speak for them (or "redescribe them"[168]). However, if this is not possible, i.e., if some people cannot speak for themselves, both Rorty and Kitcher agree, there is no other way than doing it for them (cf. *CIS*, 94; Reder et al. 2019a, 150-151). Kitcher conclusively claims that "the best we can do is to recruit advocates for [silent voices]" (Reder et al. 2019a, 150). If he is right, then, I claim, what has to be in place is, again, the effort to enable the role of "expertise": enable the voices of people, who can arguably speak most accurately for the silenced and the mute – because they have done extensive epistemic research, because they have a special relationship with the mute stakeholders or because they have made the relevant experience that allows them to make the most accurate estimates about what the voice-less would say. This does, however (just as I argued regarding moral expertise in general), not concern exclusive, individual voices. To speak for mute agents, if needed, rather concerns an effort to be made within the *conversation*. Kitcher, in implicit support of one of Rorty's central notions – imagination – sustains that, in this matter, we must "open our imaginations and try to listen for [the reproaches of the potentially wounded]" (Kitcher 2021, 100). When it comes to mute agents particularly, the best we can do is to imagine how it would be to be "in their shoes".

If the wounded do not always cry, an effort must be made to detect "moral wrongness" without their explicit indications. It is, therefore, not the sole role of the oppressed to stand up, cry and march for their rights, but above all, a moral duty, I would argue, of those who are (currently and contingently) not wounded, to support the elevation of

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[167] Rorty argues, in fact, that "victims of cruelty, people who are suffering, do not have much in the way of language. That is why there is no such thing as the 'voice of the oppressed' or the 'language of the victims'. The language the victims once used is not working anymore, and they are suffering too much to put new words together" (CIS, 94).

[168] Whoever engages in redescriptions may possibly "hurt" others (Kitcher 2021, 69; Smith 2014, 163). Rorty himself admits: "the redescribing ironist [which is the heroine of redescription in Rorty's imagination], by threatening one's final vocabulary and thus one's ability to make sense of oneself in one's own terms rather than hers, suggests that one's self and one's world are futile, obsolete and powerless. Redescription often humiliates" (Voparil & Bernstein 2010, 292). This is why redescriptions must ideally happen within an equally oriented liberal, open, epistemic and inclusive conversation - where semantic authority lies with the (democratic) group of agents involved in the conversation, rather than with a (historical, political, cultural or epistemic) elite.

the oppressed, the healing of the wounded, the inclusion of the excluded.

To speak, cry out and fight with and for others, to put oneself in the shoes of others and to be able to imagine what the voiceless or mute would say requires a certain identification with the other. I will argue in chapter 5 how the notion of *solidarity* – and the relevance of its creation – helps make sense of these issues.

In fact, conversation for Rorty, as I have discussed, is not limited to argument, moral reasoning, and deliberation about what is right and wrong and about which moral practices and institutions to create and implement. Rather, a fundamental part of the pragmatic-melioristic conversation is, in fact, what Rorty calls redescriptions: the creative misuse of languages, speaking "differently", and inventing new words to expand the conceptual and perceptual space necessary for moral thought and reasoning. For Rorty, so I argue, this ought to ideally occur, with (an increase in) solidarity in view. In other words: redescriptions ought to create (or increase) solidarity. This, again, does not exclude that solidarity shall as well be a leading notion in the matter of moral argument and reasoning within the conversation. Moral conversations and redescriptions that envision the implementation of greater solidarity are rather to go hand in hand.

I will debate, in chapter 5, why solidarity is indeed a compelling notion in which to ground the effort of "redescriptions" (and of a pragmatist-melioristic conversation, in the large sense) in light of moral progress, and how it shall be – pragmatically – understood, in this regard.

3.4 Conclusion

I have started this chapter by claiming that, amongst other things, conversation in the Rortyan account is a necessary (yet not sufficient) condition (and tool) for moral progress to potentially occur, as conversation is the realm where language is developed and changed (cf. chapter 2) and where moral beliefs and practices are discussed, decided upon, provoked and enhanced. I claimed that if we are right to assume that language has a fundamental impact on morality and moral change,

and if language (as a social practice) is developed within the conversation, then the form and content of the conversation must consequently have an impact on morality and moral change.

I then claimed that, in order for the conversation to be of a melioristic kind and thus potentially lead to moral progress, it must fulfil three conditions: it must be (1) free and open, (2) epistemic and (3) inclusive.

(1) I have shown that Rorty explicitly and repeatedly supports the requirement for the (melioristic) conversation to be free and open.

(2) I have further argued that, while he *implicitly* aims for an epistemic conversation – by aspiring for a pragmatic sort of moral objectivity and truth, through the maximum possible extension of the conversation to all kinds of human disciplines, experiences and vocabularies – he fails to make the need for the conversation to be epistemic explicit. For this reason, amongst others, it seems to me, Rorty is repeatedly identified as a (moral) "relativist". In my view (cf. chapter 2), this label is not accurate, as in his vision, in fact, not all moral beliefs have the same weight in light of moral progress and within the conversation. Rather than advocating a relativist or a subjectivist sort of linguistic exchange, Rorty puts forward a pragmatic conversation that emphasizes the importance of information, expertise, the effort of "getting things right", and above all, the effort of trying to understand and listen to others, be open for new ways of looking at the world, for changing one's own opinion and for changing oneself. He puts indeed forward an account of (a pragmatic kind) of moral knowledge, which is not being searched for in ahistorical or eternal entities, but rather in (the imaginatively most extended version of) one's human community.

(3) All this must comprehend, so I have argued, the third condition – a notion that plays a decisive role in Rorty's overall philosophy: inclusion or inclusiveness. I have argued that inclusion (which implies the notion of expansion) is both a means and an end in the matter of both conversation and potential moral progress. This, I have argued further, implies (i) the inclusion of increasingly more stakeholders (even "mute" ones) into the conversation and, if applicable, help them acquire semantic authority. It moreover implies (ii) creating (or working towards) an inclusive or inclusivist *culture*, institutions and conditions which favour an ever-greater expansion of an open, epistemic and inclusive conversation; in which interlocutors or stakeholders are free

and encouraged to speak up yet are committed to information, truthfulness and aware of the responsibilities (their speaking and participation in general) bears.

Before moving to my final debate, about the notion of solidarity and about how it can be understood as a grounding notion for both a pragmatist version of moral progress and for the issues of an ideally open and inclusive conversation, including "redescriptions", I will discuss in chapter 4, how moral *progress* can be ultimately understood in the Rortyan pragmatist picture. I will claim that the Rortyan idea of progress is both "pragmatic" (in the Kitcherian sense) and "teleological" – supported by an underlying hopeful political project.

4. UNDERSTANDING RORTY'S MELIORISM: PRAGMATIC VERSUS TELEOLOGICAL PROGRESS, AND ON THE NOTION OF HOPE

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, I suggested that Rorty's (mature) thought – including his specific account of moral progress – is grounded in an overall *melioristic* stance. Rorty's philosophy has indeed been interpreted also as an account of meliorism (or a contribution to it) within the more recent academic debate around him (cf. Voparil 2014; Voparil 2011a; Bella 2020; Chin 2014). As I have stated in chapter 3, my understanding of meliorism relies on the analysis made by D. Rondel (Rondel 2018, 145): Rondel claims, in regard to meliorism in James, Dewey and Rorty, that it is the belief that the world (i.e., specific conditions, be they comparatively bad or comparatively good) may be bettered. This does not mean that the future will conform to a plan. In this view, moreover, *human action* plays a decisive role, and meliorism can be further expressed in terms of *hope*. Furthermore, I shall consider that Dewey understands pragmatism, in ethical terms, as meliorism (cf. Dewey 1910, iii).

The notion of hope receives attention, *particularly* in Rorty's later output. In the last decade of his life, his focus largely rests on the question of how philosophy could contribute to social and political change and improvement in a fruitful way. Once again inspired by his "philosophical hero", in the year before his death, Rorty claims that, according to Dewey, philosophy is not "'whatever a form of knowledge.' It is, instead, 'a social hope reduced to a working program of action, a prophecy of the future.'" (Rorty 2007b, 917).

It is in this mature phase that Rorty increasingly expresses the idea of moral progress in terms of hope and further explicitly outlines his personal "social hopes", also as (so I claim) envisioned *ends* of moral progress. He states:

> Most of what I have written in the last decade consists of attempts to tie in my social hopes – hopes for a global, cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society – with my antagonism towards Platonism.[169] […] The same hopes, and the same antagonism, lay behind many of the writings of my principal hero, John Dewey (*PSH*, xii).

Rorty, who has his own moral and political outlook (which evolves, to an extensive part, around an idea of liberalism), is eager to promote a series of goals (concerning the social, political and moral arena) that he considers favourable. This often happens in rather absolutist terms; an attitude which (the generally anti-absolutist) Rorty justifies by asserting that "everyone with a moral conviction", supposedly including himself, "is as absolutistic as everybody else" (*EFT*, 19). I claim that what he calls his "social hopes" can be implicitly understood as what he (sometimes more explicitly) prescribes as goals of social developments. By increasingly referring to these notions as "hopes", (1) his fairly optimistic stance in regard to the very possibility of moral progress is emphasized, yet (2) Rorty is rather prudent when/about speaking in absolutist terms by substituting the same "absolutistic" moral goals with a notion of hope. I will elaborate in section 4.4 on how this notion can be understood (pragmatically). I will further discuss (cf. also chapter 1) how hopefulness about the possibility of moral progress is supportive of the *achievement* of moral progress. I will claim that it is, therefore, compelling for any pragmatist framework.

Before elaborating on the notion of hope, though, I will discuss how Rorty's idea of moral progress, embedded in an overall melioristic program, is both "teleological" (section 4.3) and "pragmatic" (section 4.2).

As I have shown, Kitcher proposes two opposing understandings of the concept of progress: (1) *teleological* progress is future-oriented and hence

[169] By antagonism towards Platonism – specifically in regard to moral progress – he means the ambition to overcome the need to ground morality in something that lies outside of social practices and transcends historical and cultural contingencies: it means to overcome, in fact, "the childish hope of escaping time and chance" (*AOC*, 18). As I discussed in the previous chapters, Rorty's "de-absolutized" (largely meta-ethical) account, amongst other things, puts emphasis on the matter of human responsibility: human beings, in this view, must be aware that a possible moral progress is (at least partially) dependent on their action – including their linguistic action.

understood as the advancement to specific goals. (2) *Pragmatic* progress is understood as a matter of (bottom-up) local adjustments and problem-solving.

In chapter 1, I claimed that pragmatist accounts – including Rorty's – are generally sceptical towards teleological approaches to the notion of moral progress.[170] As I outlined, pragmatists like Kitcher and Jaeggi have emphasized the benefit of understanding moral progress as a bottom-up development, rather than as the approximation of a moral *telos*.

To *assess* moral progress, in "pragmatic" terms, means hence to look at the past and evaluate whether there have been morally favourable developments (based on what stakeholders judge as favourable in the present).

To *enhance* moral progress, within this angle, points to providing solutions for what is socially identified as a problem or crisis (cf. chapter 3) and, hence, overcoming timely moral issues. Kitcher stresses that *moral* progress must indeed be understood as a *pragmatic* kind of progress.

Rorty appears to entirely agree with Kitcher when he claims that "moral progress is not a matter of getting closer to an antecedent goal, but of surpassing the past" (*PCP*, 108), and further:

> Instead of seeing progress as a matter of getting closer to something specifiable in advance, we see it as a matter of solving more problems. Progress is […] measured by the

[170] This is, amongst other things, due to the pragmatists' general assumption that there is no (fixed, universal) moral end towards which human beings either will or ought to progress. And that, therefore, there is no (universal) point of orientation based on which one might be able to comprehend whether society is moving in a desirable direction or not.
One might argue, in this regard, that even if we assume that morality, including moral ends and standards, are matters of human agreement, there still can be moral ends – albeit socially-agreed-upon ends – based on which human beings may understand whether they made progress or not.
However, it might be counter-argued, there is no way of knowing whether the moral standards stakeholders agree on today will not be debunked or dissolved in the future. Therefore, a proximity to supposed moral ends is no guarantee for moral progress in the long run, and moral decisions – when one is pursuing moral progress – must hence not be (exclusively) based on them.

> extent to which we have made ourselves better than we were in the past rather than by our increased proximity to a goal (*AOC*, 28).

My aim in this chapter is to show, however – considering particularly his take on social hopes (and hence goals) – that in addition to a "pragmatic" base, a teleological approach is equally constitutive of the Rortyan account of moral progress. I will argue that there is, in fact, a teleological ground in Rorty's conceptualization of the notion of moral progress. And I will further sustain that a kind of teleological outlook is not only supportive but rather necessary for the angle in Rorty's framework, which involves the notion of *hope* (cf. section 4.4).

4.2 The pragmatic approach to moral progress: from the naturalist base to problem-solving human action

Moral progress in *pragmatic* terms, in the Kitcherian sense, thus means to (1) understand progress as a matter of solving persisting moral problems, (2) assess moral progress by looking to past developments and evaluate whether and in what sense society (or human beings) have advanced morally, (3) comprehend the implementation of moral progress as a bottom-up achievement.

Rorty's (pragmatic) understanding of moral progress – like that of other (though not all) pragmatist-leaning philosophers, as I have introduced in chapter 1, is grounded in a *naturalist* stance. Rorty refers to it as "Darwinian naturalism" or "Darwinism" and explicitly ascribes it directly to pragmatism:

> "Pragmatism starts out from Darwinian naturalism – from a picture of human beings as chance products of evolution. This starting point leads pragmatists to be suspicious of the great binary opposition of Western metaphysics" (*DP*, 15).

This position implies that, as proposed in chapter 1, if human beings are chance products of evolution, so are human "products" such as language and morality. The contingency of morality (and language) is hence grounded in evolutionary processes. However, as the pragmatist

expanding-circle picture – which I have ascribed to the Rortyan view – suggests, moral progress is not left *exclusively* to evolutionary chance. Rather, human action, including collective moral reasoning, judgements, and decisions, are part of what drives moral progress.

While in regard to his approach to language, Rorty advocates combining (a "de-absolutized") Hegel with Wittgenstein, here he further promotes the combination of the historicist Hegelian account with Darwinism (cf. *TP*, 191). "Darwin provides a useful vocabulary, in which to formulate the position I share" (*TP*, 47) is one of Rorty's explicit takes on Darwin. To combine it with other philosophical "vocabulary" means that Darwinism is not the one and only image that explains morality and the world, but rather "one more description of the world to be placed alongside others" (Saatkamp 1995, 4).

4.2.1 On the Darwinian "vocabulary"

In order to better understand which vocabulary Rorty refers to, I shall make a brief excursion through Darwin's output in the *Origin of Species* (Darwin 2003). I will be selective in the sense that I will specifically consider the elements which, based on Rorty's own vocabulary, arguably have had a particular impact on his conceptualization of the naturalized-evolutionary side of moral progress, within the expanding-circle-framework, which he (implicitly) sustains (as I have argued).

When Darwin published his *magnum opus*, the "great principle of evolution" – i.e., the process of formation and modification of species and varieties (cf. Darwin 2003, 104 - 114) – had already largely been recognized within the natural sciences (cf. *ivi*, 501). The revolutionary thought that came along with the *Origin of Species* was what he called "natural selection",[171] as the principal motor of evolution (c.f. *ivi*, 7). While some of Darwin's peers objected to the term, arguing that "selection" misleadingly implied a conscious choice (*ibid.*), Darwin's

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[171] The definition of this term, which generally comprehends the natural process of organisms better adapting to their environment in order to survive, today varies across the fields of biology and philosophy (cf. Gildenhuys 2019). In Darwin's own words, it is the "principle by which each slight [individual difference and] variation, if useful, is preserved" (Darwin 2003, 61) and "those which are injurious" are destroyed (ivi, 77). Variations neither useful nor injurious would not be affected by natural selection.

intention was further to "mark its relation to man's power of selection" (*ivi*, 61). Indeed, in his work, he also partially explores the history of the conscious human impact on the evolutionary process.

The father of *Social Darwinism*, H. Spencer, in this regard, analogically introduced the term "survival of the fittest", which Darwin himself found even "more accurate" to describe the same process (*ivi*, 62): the result of the process is that "each creature *tends* [m.e.] to become more and more improved in relation to its conditions. This improvement inevitably leads to the gradual advancement of the organization of the greater number of living beings throughout the world" (*ivi*, 118).

There is hence a notion of *improvement* in Darwin's output, as according to his work, "old forms having been supplanted by new and improved forms of life" (*ivi*, 374). However, this improvement is always "*in relation to the conditions of life* [m.e.]" (*ivi*, xii).

The "tendency" Darwin talks about refers to an increasing *diversification* and *complexity*. He regards diversification both within groups and within the individual as beneficial. He states:

> The advantage of diversification of structure in the inhabitants of the same region is, in fact, the same as that of the physiological division of labour in the organs of the same individual body – […] the more widely and perfectly the animals and plants are diversified for different habits of life, so will a greater number of individuals be capable of their supporting themselves (*ivi*, 108 - 109).

Within the same scope, with diversification, in Darwin, comes specialization. He states further:

> If we take as the standard of high organization the amount of differentiation and specialization of the several organs in each being when adult (and this will include the advancement of the brain for intellectual purposes), natural selection clearly leads towards this standard […] the accumulation of variations tending towards specialization is within the scope of natural selection (*ivi*, 119).

The notion of *variation*, in Darwin (cf. *ivi*, 105; 142; 157) is a moment within the process towards a new or more developed species; a sort of step on the ladder towards something new and improved (in relation to

timely condition). According to the *Origin of Species*, it is precisely the accumulation of innumerable slight variations – each of them "good" for the individual possessor – that has "perfected" the "more complex organs and instincts" (cf. *ivi*, 478).

These tendencies are driven indeed by a *struggle* for existence, in which, pace Spencer, the fittest (organism) survives. It was certainly only Darwin's heirs who, rather than talking about the struggle of organisms, conceptualized the idea of the struggle of the *gene* (cf. Dawkins 1989) – a notion to which Rorty refers (cf. also chapter 1), amongst other things.

In those processes, extinction is inevitable and rather plays an important part. What (or who) will ultimately prevail or survive cannot be predicted (cf. *ivi*, 118). It is indeed a gradual, bottom-up process based, amongst others, on the element of *chance*.

4.2.2 Rorty's reading of Darwin: on human nature, culture, and the roots of morality

I propose that an understanding of Rorty's "Darwinian" stance in relation to the notion of moral progress must be comprehended as at least twofold. On the one hand, it concerns Rorty's view on *human nature*, i.e. (the contingency of) what – or who – humans are, and hence of what they are (capable of) doing and of what they will do in the future. As I briefly claimed in chapter 1, in Rorty's output, both questions of what humans are and what they do are tightly entangled and linked to the question of morality.[172]

Secondly, Rorty uses the Darwinian vocabulary to understand the evolution of morality itself in a more general sense. I will explore this claim subsequently.

What Rorty calls Darwinian vocabulary is supportive of his scepticism towards the essentialist idea of an *intrinsic nature* of humans (and in general). Rorty's readings of Darwin imply, so D. Rondel, that human

[172] Differently, Kitcher distinguishes the two issues more neatly: morality mainly concerns the question of what to do, while ethics concerns the issue of who to be. In Rorty, a clear separation of ethics and morality (and of their constitutive questions) is not prevailing.

history is simply "biological evolution continued by other means"; therefore, there is no human nature apart from accidents of history – human nature is contingent (Rondell 2009, 62). Rorty ascribes this position again to pragmatism in general, as he claims:

> Pragmatists [...] start with a Darwinian account of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment – doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain. Words are among [those] tools (*PSH*, xxii – xxiii).

This quote shows that his position thus emphasizes that (1) while humans' developments root in the natural-evolutionary adaptations to their environment, they eventually have managed to not only cope but create their environment by means of the tools they have invented (including language).

(2) What was originally (exclusively) about their survival (and the survival of their genes), became increasingly about their pleasure, i.e. (arguably) about their happiness. In other words – as Rorty claims elsewhere – they were "gradually taking control of [their] own evolution" (*PSH*, 129; cf. also *TP*, 174).

(3) By further ascribing this view to pragmatism, and hence by seeking support from Dewey and others, I assume, he (once again) aims to strengthen his own antagonism to what he calls Platonism (see above). The latter, Rorty claims, implies a *closure* in regard to the notion of human nature, while "post-Darwinian, Deweyan" accounts understand human nature as something *open* (cf. *PSH*, 88).

Yet, instead of exploring the notion of human nature as something open, Rorty generally rather rejects the notion of human nature altogether (assuming it to be necessarily "closed" and stable, as the dominant "metaphysical"-philosophical tradition he challenges arguably suggests). I will argue in chapter 5 that, above all, when it comes to the ambition to create or enhance solidarity, this rejection does not always play in his favour.

According to Rorty, "Darwin argued most intellectuals out of the view that human beings contained a special added ingredient" (*TP*, 174). Darwinism, so he argues, rather "requires that we think of what we do and are as continuous with what amoebas, spiders and squirrels do and

are" (*ivi*, 295). He stresses, "we differ from other animals simply in the *complexity* [m.e.] of our behaviour" (*PSH*, 72). Human beings are hence considered as beings "in progress", as processes of adaptions to external conditions (that comprehends, not at last, resulting in ever more complex organizations of social life and practices).

These considerations lead Rorty to argue, ultimately, that "nothing relevant to moral choice separates human beings from animals, except historically contingent facts of the world, cultural facts" (*TP*, 170). Incidentally, Darwin himself argued, in *The Decent of Man* (Darwin 1981) that, of all the differences between human beings and what he called "lower animals", the moral sense or conscience is by far the most important (*ivi*, 70).[173]

As I will lay out in chapter 5, Rorty himself cites neat differences between human beings and other animals: besides the capacity to learn a (complex) language (cf. Geras 1995, 54; cf. p. 51) Rorty emphasizes that the faculty of feeling *humiliated* is a distinctively human trait (cf. chapter 5).

The matter of distinction between human beings and other animals aside, what Rorty aims to stress with this position is:

(1) as human beings are "in progress", they are not to be understood as something fixed and stable.

(2) Human beings are what they are due to their not only natural but cultural circumstances; cultural circumstances themselves evolve, amongst other things, based on chance.

(3) Again, as anticipated above, in Rorty's view, what humans *are* and what they *do* (e.g., in terms of their moral choices) is tightly entangled and co-dependent. To illustrate this point, Rorty claims further: "we are not yet in a position to know what human beings are, since we do not yet know what practices human beings may start sharing" (*TP*, 205).

(4) Within the process of adaptation and adjustment, there is no intrinsic nature nor anything "evolution has in view" (cf. Voparil & Bernstein

[173] Though recent accounts (cf. Rowlands 2012) suggest that also some non-human animals, e.g., rats and dogs, can be moral (i.e., they can choose to be good or bad, i.e., by helping others even if it is not to their direct advantage)

2010, 423); there is simply the gradual development throughout time that is largely based on the elements of chance and ultimately "luck" (cf., e.g., *PSH*, 118; *TP*, 304).

As anticipated, besides the evolution of the human and the issue with the notion of human nature, Rorty uses the Darwinian vocabulary further to "formulate his position" about – and inquire into – morality itself: morality (as much as language, human culture, social practices and habits in the broad sense) is a product of evolution, for it has adapted to (and alongside) human evolution and contingent conditions and circumstances. Rorty relies again significantly on Dewey, who claimed, for instance, that "knowledge and [...] habits have to be modified to meet the new conditions that have arisen" (Dewey 1963, 50). In *PSH*, Rorty states that specifically, "moral struggle is continuous with the struggle for existence" (*PSH*, xxix).

While in regard to the evolution of human beings, Rorty adopts the framework about the "struggle of the gene", he suggests a different framework for inquiring into the evolution of culture, habits, social practices, and morality analogously. He identifies "the meme" as the cultural counterpart of the gene (*TP*, 191), hence echoing R. Dawkins[174] (cf. Dawkins 1989, 245-251). Memes (in Rorty) imply any cultural phenomena such as turns of speech, moral praise, political slogan, proverbs and the like (cf. Voparil & Bernstein 2010, 333). Based on timely external conditions, some of these phenomena will survive (or adopt more promisingly), while others will be extinct. It is hence stressed, in this stance, that morality-related phenomena evolve, survive, or die out based on the usefulness to survive in a specific (historical, cultural, natural) context, as both an individual and as a group. Rorty claims:

> For Dewey, to speak of the "survival of the fittest" is merely to say, tautologously, that what survives, survives. It is not to suggest that there is something outside the struggles of genes and memes that provides a criterion by which to sort out good outcomes from bad outcomes. The process of evolution has nothing to do with evaluative hierarchies, nor, pace Hegel, do the factors that determine the survival of memes (*TP*, 191).

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174 Dawkins draws parallels between cultural transmission and genetic transmission; where the "meme" (which derives and/or is linked from/to *mimeme*, *même* and memory), denotes a unit, replicator or "living structure" of cultural evolution.

This stance describes a tendency without a (fixed) *telos* towards which it is directed. Moral progress is hence, expressedly, not to be understood as a tendency towards something universally good.

This view does, however, I claim, indeed not exclude the matter of a possible conscious choice about what practices to maintain or transform and which ones to abolish. The phenomena above are ultimately dependent on humans and their practices. Agency and agreements hence (can) play a role – as the expanding-circle framework has suggested (cf. chapter 1) – when it comes to the evolution of cultural, social and moral phenomena and practice.

If the definition of the Rortyan meme, according to Voparil & Bernstein, is accurate, we must acknowledge that memes have largely linguistic grounds. This underlines once again the influential part language plays in all of it, as the Rortyan view suggests. Language, as I have argued, is itself to be considered a process of adaptation, which implies both unintentional and intentional action that embraces, develops, or abolishes certain vocabulary. Changes in vocabulary are hence, as J. Tartaglia accurately puts it in "Darwinian terms", "adaptations to the causal pressures exerted by the world, with language bearing no more of a representational relation to an intrinsic nature of things, than does the anteater's snout or the bowerbird's skill at weaving" (Tartaglia 2010, 15). Rorty himself claims in a statement that ultimately defines *moral progress* in naturalist-Darwinian terms:

> Societies evolve into other societies by finding that the moral language they have been using brings with it consequences they do not like – just as species evolve into other species by finding that some of the habits their ancestors developed for coping with one environment have become liabilities in coping with a changed environment. To say that moral progress occurs is to say that later societies are more complex, more developed, more articulate and above all, more flexible than their predecessors. It is to say that later societies have more varied and interesting needs than earlier ones, just as squirrels have more varied and interesting needs than amoebas. (*TP*, 303 - 304).

4.2.3 On the notion of improvement

Echoing Darwin (see above), Rorty understands the notion of improvement in relation to present circumstances. To say that something is good or better is what he calls an *ethnocentric* claim. As I will further explore in chapter 5 (cf. pp. 213ff), "ethnocentric" in Rorty means related to a group of people who share a common vocabulary, i.e., a vocabulary grounded in specific cultural and historical conditions. He claims:

> On a Deweyan view, […] the enslavement of one human tribe or race by another or of human females by human males is not an intrinsic evil. The latter is a rejected good, rejected on the basis of [a] greater [imagined] good[.] The claim that this good is greater is like the claim that mammals are preferable to reptiles [...], is an ethnocentric claim made from the point of view of a given cluster of genes or memes. There is no larger entity which stands behind that cluster (*TP*, 207).

His stance, hence, once again, fits the "pragmatic" approach, as it considers moral progress a matter of identifying problems (or crises) and overcoming them. The notions of good and better are thus embedded in this very context and identified by means of the tools a community has available. As argued in chapter 3, this identification process (which in Rorty arguably falls under "conversation") must be open, free, epistemic, and inclusive in order to have a notion of good, on which any assessment of moral progress can be justifiably based.

To "solve problems ethnocentrically" (cf. chapter 5, pp. 213ff), to use Rorty's term, thus means that there is no (external) guarantee that a society (or humanity) moves in the right direction (cf. *TP*, 304). Yet, to progress from the bottom up also implies the notion of the experiment, which is recurring in Rorty's work: one must try and see what works. This thought is arguably oriented, amongst other things, on the Darwinian notion of "variation" – the infinite moments of the process, towards a new and improved form.

All of this – including the progress of the vocabulary based on which the notions of good are developed – must happen *gradually* (cf. *CIS*, 6). No one can take two steps (of the ladder) at a time. Any kind of progress

must be grounded in specific, timely, historical, cultural (and, for that matter, linguistic) conditions and circumstances.[175]

This, again, further involves what Rorty intends by the look towards the past. Looking back, indeed, does not only serve as a possibility to assess past occurrences of progress. It is further a constant reminder of the human faculty to change and adjust.

This for Rorty implies (1) that there is reason to believe that moral progress can be implemented further (based on evidence of specific local instances of progress, humans have – arguably – already achieved); (2) that there is hence hope for moral progress to occur in the future; (3) that "we do not need to dig behind [historical facts] to nonhistorical facts about what we really are" (*TP*, 175). With the latter, Rorty once again stresses giving up the search for an intrinsic human nature and rather understanding humans within a framework of change.

4.2.4 Opposing teleology

Rorty's naturalist-evolutionary account, as I have claimed, implies, amongst other things, an expressed scepticism towards teleology. This becomes explicit, for instance, when he claims that he favours Dewey over Spencer, for the latter "tried to hold on to the idea of an immanent teleology, one that provided a universalistic criterion of 'health' or 'goodness' of an evolutionary or cultural development" (*TP*, 191-192) and believed in "nature as a mighty force, and in reason as having only to cooperate with nature" (*ivi*, 192). For Dewey, in contrast, so Rorty sustains, "nature was the name not of a force but simply of the results of a series of changes" (*ibid.*). According to Rorty, in fact, "Dewey wanted us to secularize nature by seeing it as nonteleological, as having no evaluative hierarchies of its own" (*ivi*, 196).

175 On that note, Rorty is convinced that even the Darwinian theories were able to serve as a stepping stone in scientific and intellectual progress only because the "ground" had already been prepared for them (cf. *PSH*, 264). "The historicism that dominated the intellectual world of the early nineteenth century had [already] created an anti-essentialist mood. So, when Darwin came along, he fit into the evolutionary niche that Herder and Hegel had begun to colonize" (*TP*, 174).

Rorty's opposition towards teleology implies hence a scepticism towards the idea of an immanent (morally good) end, towards which moral progress tends. It is, therefore, not only about having access to knowledge about that end but rather about opposing the idea that there is such an end altogether. What is morally good is therefore (cf. also chapter 3), decided and agreed upon socially, in a contingent bottom-up process, and there is not much more – no transcendental authority and no immanent leading force – to it.

However, in light of actually creating moral progress – i.e., actualizing a potential moral progress – I claimed, Rorty further embraces a framework of progress in, with Kitcher, "teleological" terms (i.e., a "progress towards", in addition to a "progress from"). In fact, I claim that what Rorty calls a "genuine marriage of Darwin with a de-absolutized Hegel" (cf. *TP*, 304) designates a synthesis of a naturalized evolutionary account of morality (as a process of adaptation to contingent circumstances) and a historicist-Hegelian account of *Bildung*. The latter implies a dynamic, deliberative, mediated human action and exchange within a historicist context, as well as the notion of a *Bild* (though a "de-absolutized" one) to which aspire to.

4.3 The teleological approach to moral progress: *towards* greater solidarity

4.3.1 What kind of teleology?

Rorty's one explicit chapter (i.e., a series of four papers) on the notion of moral progress, within the third volume of his *Philosophical Papers*, "Truth and Progress", carries the title "Moral progress: Toward more inclusive communities" (*TP*, 167-245). The choice of this title points out that Rorty conceptualizes moral progress (at least in part) as a "progress towards", other than a "progress from" (as Kitcher suggests, and as Rorty argued elsewhere).

The inclusive communities he envisions are linked to what he called his social hopes: the implementation of a "global, cosmopolitan,

democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society" (*PSH*, xii). These hopes, I claimed, are again implicit goals towards which Rorty recommends us to work. The central notion within this prescriptive account, as I have been claiming, is that of solidarity, i.e., the creation of solidarity as a mechanism to get closer to these goals and the envisioning of solidarity as a goal in itself (cf. chapter 5). If it has been accurate to claim that the Rortyan notion of moral progress can be understood as an "expanding circle of solidarity", then within the (anti-essentialist) *teleological* view, the circle expands not (only) as a reaction to problems and crises but also because solidarity is something that is actively envisioned and pursued. This, within the prescriptive account Rorty lays out, must happen even if no actual problems are detected. For, in the light of potential progress, according to Dewey, there is always room for moral improvement and growth.

There is hence a teleological notion in Rorty's concept of moral progress. This notion does, however, indeed, not refer to an immanent teleology but rather to what Rorty calls a "relativist and materialist version of teleology rather than an absolute one" (*TP*, 305). "Relativist and materialist" denote, in this view, an opposition to timeless moral *teloi*. It should not suggest, as pointed out in the previous chapters, that Rorty subscribes to a moral relativism (cf. pp. 16-17).

Rorty is indeed careful not to put too much weight on the concept of teleology – based on the notion of immanency it broadly implies – and rather favours the term "*goal*". A goal, he claims, is "something you can know that you are getting closer to, or farther away from." (*TP*, 3).

While – as he argues – the closeness to any *telos* that is independent of time and human practices, is impossible for human beings to grasp, Rorty hence advocates the importance of human-dependent "moral goals" as a point of orientation for moral action, choices, and deliberations.

Knowing whether one is closer or farther away implicates an element of measurability, and it implicates – first and foremost – knowing what exactly the moral goal is in the first place: social actors can know what moral goals are because moral goals are pronounced (and ideally agreed upon) within social practices (i.e., conversation). Moral goals, in Rorty, are indeed products of linguistic practices which both create and promote them (cf. *PCP*, 3). Measurability here means to look at current

developments, compare them with the envisioned goal and evaluate whether a society is moving in a favourable or unfavourable direction. For instance, if the moral goal is the creation of a society in which same-sex couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples, then tendencies in most countries over the last twenty years may be assessed as progress. If the creation of a society in which people have the autonomy to decide over "their own bodies" by themselves, then the recent decision by the U.S. supreme court[176] may be understood as regress.[177]

4.3.2 Idealism, "*Bild*", and imagination

With this "relativist and materialist" teleology, Rorty appears to continue an advocacy of a down-to-earth conception of morality. He does, however, embrace a form of "moral idealism", for which he finds, again, inspiration in Dewey's philosophy (cf. Rorty 2007b, 924). This moral idealism must, however, again he claims, not depend on moral universalism (cf. *AOC*, 35). Human beings should rather give up the idea that moral ideals must be grounded in something larger than themselves (cf. *EFT*, 8). The latter would mean to cease to "ask both metaphysical questions about the ground or the source of our ideals, and epistemological questions about how one can be certain that one has chosen the correct ideal" (*ivi*, 9). In Rorty's view, questions of this sort are a waste of time. A time one should rather spend creating and achieving social goals, such as, e.g., that of a greater solidarity.[178]

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[176] Cf., e.g., https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/06/supreme-court-decision-overturn-roe-wade/.

[177] Yet, if we assume that what I argued in chapter 1 is accurate, this case (if anything) would, first and foremost, have to be judged as a "political" or "institutional" regress rather than moral regress, as the latter would also imply a change in moral consciousness in a significant part of society (cf. chapter 1, pp. 9-10). In the case cited above, it appears that not much has changed in the moral belief of the population, but rather that a few actors in power managed to overturn previously established rules.

[178] As I will address in chapter 5, one of Rorty's most famous and controversial papers, "Solidarity or Objectivity?", opposes two main intellectual and social efforts: that of pursuing objectivity and that of pursuing solidarity. While, so Rorty claims, the realists prefer the former, the pragmatists prefer the latter. The realists look for something beyond time and social practices, while the pragmatists (e.g., Dewey) aim to create a society in which solidarity prevails, and hence intersubjective agreement about morality is aimed to be expanded in the greatest possible way.

All this, Rorty stresses, does not mean that we should let go of the idea of *greatness* (cf. *AOC*, 136). The idea of greatness serves as a source of *inspiration* (cf. *PSH*, 202) and *hope* for each new generation. Moral ideals must hence not be reduced to current practices and beliefs, but rather extend to what may be possible in the future. The source for these ideals – just as for new language – for Rorty is the human imagination (*EFT*, 8). Imagination (cf. chapter 3) can leap over boundaries. Imagined ideals must then be embraced within the conversation.

The notion of imagination contains the notion of *image* ("Bild"). Rorty shows a preference for the notion of image over "myth" or "ideology" (cf. *AOC*, 11). As I have claimed above, this fits well into an account where one aims to embrace a (de-absolutized) historicist Hegelianism and implicitly a notion of *Bild*ung.

As early as in *PMN* (1979), Rorty shows an explicit interest in the concept of *Bildung*; specifically, when it comes to philosophical inquiry. In *PMN*, the concept links an understanding of progress with a hermeneutic version of "edification", i.e., a mediated bottom-up construction, which replaces transcendent and absolute goals, with *a constant exploration and recreation of concepts, ideas and images*. Interestingly – considering his advocacy of Hegelianism – when discussing the notion of *Bildung* in *PMN*, Rorty does not refer to Hegel but rather to H.-G. Gadamer (and Dewey).

Differently, when it comes to the notion of *imagination*, he describes *Hegelianism* as "perhaps the most imaginative and original achievement of the Western philosophical tradition" (*PCP*, 116). It is, so Rorty, the Romantic strain, that should be preserved from Hegel rather than the rational one (*TP*, 200). He describes Romanticism elsewhere as "a thesis about the nature of human progress" (cf. *PCP*, 108), where speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument for cultural change (cf. *CIS*, 7).

Imagination does hence not mean to be merely fantastical, i.e., merely generating mental images, but indeed, first and foremost, as the ability to change social practices (*PCP*, 107). There is thus a difference to be made, which I. Murdoch for instance, within her own account, describes as the distinction between *imagination* and *fantasy*: while the latter means an escape from the world, the former means to *creatively explore the world* (cf. Murdoch 1970/2014, 370). A fruitful imagination,

as an instrument for social change – and furthermore intellectual and scientific progress –, in Rorty, is therefore always grounded in the *Wirklichkeit* (to paraphrase Rorty in Hegelian terms), rather than in the attempt to completely escape it.

> We [pragmatists] see imagination as the cutting edge of cultural evolution, the power which – given peace and prosperity – constantly operates so as to make the human future richer than the human past. Imagination is the source both of new scientific pictures of the physical universe and of new conceptions of possible communities (*PSH*, 87).

Moral progress, in this view, can hence be understood – and is, at some point, explicitly described by Rorty – as an "increase of imaginative power" (*PSH*, 87). This does not mean that the latter is a mere end of moral progress, but rather a method or mechanism to achieve moral progress (cf. Rorty 2006). Rorty declares this method to be, once again, Deweyan, as Dewey "just wanted us to be imaginative enough to create a better future" (*ibid.*).

4.3.3 Towards solidarity: on Rorty's utopian approach

Rorty imagined (and described) an *ideal* liberal society: his "liberal utopia". In this utopia, public and private needs are united. It is a society that manages to combine altruism and individual joy. Or rather: there is no more difference between one and the other (cf. *CIS*, 153). It is both self-critical and devoted to human equality and happiness. More concretely, in this society, private needs are not separate from the idea of solidarity anymore, for solidarity rather embraces the former.[179] Moral progress, as Rorty *imagines* it, hence *ends* with this liberal utopia, and therefore with a solidarity, that is maximally increased (within that society).

The *image* of the liberal utopia is supposed to serve, first and foremost, as an *inspiration*. By describing it as *οὐ-τόπος,* Rorty is aware that this society most likely will not come into reality (cf. also Višňovský 2020, 15). The function of this image is rather to provide, whoever manages to envision it, with hopes and ideas of better possibilities (cf. *ibid.*). It

[179] Cf. chapter 5.

suggests a direction towards which social actors shall tend, in their effort to achieve and implement moral progress. And, it suggests, indeed, that things can always be made better.

Rorty repeatedly embraces, throughout his work, the Deweyan dictum that "growth itself is the only moral end". This suggests that, ultimately, the only universal moral telos to aspire to is that moral progress must be infinite and constant – that things ought to be bettered continuously. This is again in line with the Hegelian picture, in which progress – within the *Wirklichkeit*, i.e., within time and space – is necessarily continuous and implies that the end is never reached (cf. Ritter, Gründer 1995a, 1447). A continuity of progress hence *requires* an unreachable telos, or: a constant production of new moral goals towards which to aspire, embedded in a larger picture of how a morally "good" world would look like.

As long as there is progress (understood in teleological terms), there must hence be a telos in place to be envisioned, but not to be reached. Or the other way around: as long as there is a telos to be implemented, there is a possibility of progress to occur. Indeed, when Rorty argues that "the essential thing is to dream of a better world" (*ABAO*, 57), he suggests that it is more important to continue to have such dreams rather than have them come true (Voparil 2004, 235). For once members of a society stop dreaming of a better world, they will lose the inspiration and motivation that drives them to possibly work for a better world, i.e., act in accordance with those dreams.

Rorty states:

> Moral development in the individual and moral progress in the human species as a whole, is a matter of re-making human selves so as to enlarge the variety of relationships which constitute those selves [...] Should this progress ever be completed, the term morality would drop out of the language. For there would no longer be any way, nor any need to contrast doing what comes naturally with doing what is moral (*PSH*, 79).

What Rorty describes in the first part of this quote, is implicit and in accordance with his idea of "greater solidarity". I will elaborate on this insight in chapter 5.

The second part of this passage affirms that morality itself is necessarily in progress, i.e., that morality is incomplete until his utopian picture – in which public and private needs merge, solidarity prevails, and everyone (to paraphrase Rorty) has an equal opportunity to self-realization and ultimately happiness – is not fully realized.

The "liberal utopia" is hence a world that is absolutely[180] moral, and therefore there is no need for morality (as an institution, doctrine or even as a term) anymore.[181] Morality would be something that comes *naturally* to human beings. If morality once had to be invented by humans, to keep socially harmful private needs in check (cf. chapter 1), in a world where everyone is naturally as concerned with the other as much as with themself (or their next of kin), there would be no need for it anymore.

Thus, there is a need for a concept of the moral (and hence of moral progress) if and only if morality and moral progress is something that still concerns the social-linguistic actors: if what comes naturally to them and what is moral were the same, there would be no need to talk about morality anymore. This means, vice-versa, that as long as there is a need for moral improvement – and *further* a social desire to improve the world morally – there is a need for the concepts of both morality and moral progress.

This means further: independently of whether moral progress can ultimately be *defended* as an actual *occurrence* or potential, if we accept with Rorty that moral progress is a moral end in itself, and if progress into a certain direction is supported by inspiring images in which one grounds their actions and decisions, then the idea of moral progress is needed, *at least* as a source of inspiration and motivation.

I pointed out above, how Rorty is suspicious of a form of teleology that implies an absolute telos, or rather a telos that lies beyond time and contingencies. Rorty, I showed, rather opts for a "relativist and

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[180] Though Rorty, has made a continuous effort to distance himself from the concept of absolute, I claim that the idea of the absolute resides at least within his utopian thought – the unachievable, not-realizable – as an absolute (completed) solidarity. The concept of the absolute is, in this sense, *aufgehoben*.

[181] This notion may be interpreted as a Rortyan alternative to the Kantian *summum bonum:* social actors behave morally, not because they understand it as their duty, but rather because it coincides with their own personal needs and/or happiness.

materialist" moral goal to lead, and orient moral action, decisions, and deliberations.

However, now one might argue that by relying on a *utopian* goal, and by promoting it in rather "absolutist terms" (cf. *EFT*, 19), Rorty in fact *does* aim for something transcendental.

If the inspiration of an envisioned absolute morality – which then implies an absolute solidarity – helps moral entrepreneurs to imagine a world that exceeds what they know from their past, i.e., if it hence "works" as one motor for moral progress, then there is a pragmatist reason to support utopian images of that kind.

I argue indeed that Rorty's ultimate effort, in this regard, is to oppose the philosophical (and social) aim to *justify* moral teloi on the grounds of unreachable timeless, transcendental truths: to ask questions, such as "how do we know that the goal of a 'liberal utopia' or of an absolute utopia is indeed 'good'?". Rorty imagines his utopia based on the deficiencies and shortcomings of his own times[182] (i.e., private needs overlapping with public needs, inequalities in distribution, possibilities and participation, exclusion et cetera): there is no pretence, in his account, that there is an absolute or immanent moral truth to this utopia. This image is rather *as far* as Rorty himself could imagine, what "morally good" (or absolutely moral, for that matter) meant; as far as he could imagine it, based on the vocabulary he shared with his peers.

The whole idea of moral progress in Rorty, in terms of becoming more "imaginative" (see above; cf. *PSH*, 87), means that, what one is able to imagine as a moral goal or utopia today, might be exceeded by their imaginative powers of tomorrow. In the same way, Rorty claims that "Dewey's utopia" was one in which "human brotherhood was realized in ways we can now barely imagine" (*TP*, 194).

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[182] Cf. also with Kitcher, according to whom ideals are "diagnostic instruments", which show de deficiencies of the current state and indicate directions for making progress (cf. Reder et al. 2019a, 154-155).

4.3.4 Moral goals and the morality-creating process

To imagine a moral goal, other than simply overcoming timely contingent problems, is hence an essential part of Rorty's take on moral progress, particularly if we understand it within the context of a Deweyan philosophy of "social hope, reduced to a working program of action, a prophecy of the future" (see above).

While a utopian picture of moral greatness supports a larger moral ideal, which helps orient and assess moral deliberations, actions, and developments of a society, it must further produce a series of *realizable* moral goals towards which moral actors are willing to work. While the implementation of an absolute solidarity is rather utopian, working towards *increasing* solidarity – step by step – seems more realistic. The point is, that while utopian pictures may inspire more concrete moral goals, moral actors generally must be hopeful of the realizability of those goals, in order to work towards their implementation.

Rorty states:

> If we adopt […] Dewey's account of moral progress, we shall think of Martin Luther King, Betty Friedan, and the leaders of the gay rights movement as helping to create […] a changed environment. […] They incited social hope by proposing programs of action, and by prophesying a better future. […] Posner's notion of "adaptation" seems to me of no use when we try to explain why they worked. (Rorty 2007b, 924)

This assertion shows once more, about the Rortyan view, that while morality may have started out as a chance product of human evolution, it is not the whole picture. Moral progress – within the expanding-circle framework – is, as I have been arguing, also (at least in part) dependent on humans' reasoning capacities, choices, and actions.

I have been arguing that instances of moral progress can be implemented both intentionally and unintentionally. Intentional action in this regard, requires a will, to change in a certain direction. This will may be reduced to the mere wish to overcome specific problems (by trying out *different* things, as Rorty suggests), but it is ultimately always

accompanied by the agents' imagination of how a changed situation may look like, i.e., *in what direction* to move.

The role successful moral entrepreneurs have played, as Rorty suggests, was thus to help imagine how a different future could look like; and more: help believe – or rather, be hopeful – in or about this alternative future. There is indeed reason to assume that moral entrepreneurs need to be hopeful that certain moral change can occur, in order for them to act accordingly, keep working or struggling for it and hence contribute to implementing it (cf. Moody-Adams 2016, 155-156). Hopelessness, on the other hand, may rather lead to social actors giving up on certain matters.

4.4 Moral progress as a social hope

Assuming thus that moral progress is something that depends (at least in part) on human action and choice and assuming that hope serves, amongst other things, as a motivator for moral actors to struggle for something to actually occur (cf. Moody-Adams 2016, 155-156; Roser 2019, 206-207), there is a pragmatist reason to advocate (and thus enhance) hope for moral progress among social actors and throughout society.[183]

To advocate hope for moral progress refers, within the Rortyan account, so I claim, to both the hope for specific social developments (e.g., a greater solidarity among people and peoples) and the hope for the possibility of moral progress itself. In this remaining section of the chapter, I will further elaborate on how creating and defending hope for moral progress (within the conversation), based on the Rortyan

[183] Though Jonas, in his opus about the notion of responsibility (Jonas 1979), argues that also *fear* (e.g., in our days, about the approaching consequences of climate change) is often a motivator for human beings to start acting in light of improving social and moral conditions. This notion of fear, in Jonas, is, however, merely pointed out as a counterpart to hope, considering that, in his view, fear (as a means) fails us towards the more *distant* prospects (cf. *ivi*, 57), e.g., living conditions for more distant future generations. Moreover, I shall suggest that even if one acts upon fear (by exceeding, with this action, a merely instinctive reaction to an immediate danger), it generally presupposes a hope that one can escape the actualization of what one fears.

account, is not only a justifiable action but – at least to some extent – also a moral responsibility. I will ask, moreover, whether, or to what extent, the advocated hope(s) must be justified themselves, inasmuch as Rorty argues that *hope needs no justification* (cf. *ABAO*, 58).

4.4.1 Creating hope

Rorty understands hope, once again inspired by Dewey, as (1) "the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifically different from […] the past",[184] which is (2) "the *condition* [m. e.] of growth" (*PSH*, 120), which, again, is the "only moral end" (cf. *TP*, 305; *PSH*, 28; Voparil & Bernstein 2010, 303; Malachowski 2020, 154).

Hope is here, hence, first of all, a *belief* about the future.[185] Belief, in turn – as embraced in the Rortyan account – *can regulate action* (cf. *CIS*, 189).

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[184] This implies an evaluation of the future, which must not solely be based on the assessment of present conditions, but rather on the possibilities of overcoming those conditions; in other words: as human beings as a possibility (cf. also Bloch 1968), and the world and humankind, as unfinished.

[185] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a comprehensive insight into the notion of hope, which would do justice to the large philosophical tradition reaching from the Greek ἐλπίς (and thus not necessarily positive belief about the future, cf. Ritter 1974, 1157-1166) towards the Christian *virtue*, to finally emerge in modern continental-European philosophy prevalently with I. Kant, and in the last century, primarily, with E. Bloch. Notwithstanding, I shall take notice of the same tradition, for Rorty's notion of hope arguably grounds in it – despite his recurring effort to, e.g., oppose Kant and (to my knowledge) not tackling the Kantian notion of hope. His resonance with Bloch, on the other hand, has been pointed out; for instance (cf. Miyazaki 2004) in regard to the efforts of both philosophers to anchor their critique of philosophy in the problem of the temporal direction of knowledge; and to their sustaining that (in Bloch's words) we live surrounded by possibility and not mere presence (Bloch 1968). Another evident connection between the two thinkers is that Rorty, too, emphasizes the notion of utopia, which in Bloch's famous account implies the *noch-nicht Seiende*, the *noch-nicht Bewusste* and the *noch-nicht Gewordene* – notions that may be useful to further lay out the Rortyan idea of utopia within an account of (in Bloch's words) "*Selbsterweiterung nach Vorwärts*" (cf. Ritter 1974; Zimmermann 2017). Moreover, just like Bloch's, Rorty's idea of hope – I claim – differs from mere optimism as something passive and rather implies action and *human agency*. Rorty, however, does not explicitly refer to Bloch (or to the modern continental-philosophical framework of the notion for that matter), but rather continues to link his visions with that of Dewey's. Based on his readings of Dewey's view on philosophy as diagnosis and prognosis, Rorty combines awareness about present conditions with an imagination of (and thus openness towards) what could be.

To be hopeful of moral progress is hence, first and foremost, to "take an *attitude* [m.e.]" towards moral progress (cf. Rorty 2006a): an attitude through which interlocutors express both their commitment[186] to certain forms of future interaction and their belief in its *possibility* (cf. Bloeser & Stahl 2017).

In chapter 1, I indicated that one of Rorty's attitudes towards moral progress is that "we cannot but believe in moral progress" (Rorty 2006). I argue that this assertion may be understood in two ways:

(1) Echoing M. Moody-Adams, the assertion supports that the idea of moral progress is a necessary presumption if we are to believe that continued moral action can have any morally constructive point (Moody-Adams 2016). This angle, however, presupposes an actual *interest* in a morally better world from the side of social actors. Yet, one may argue that not all social actors are indeed interested in moral progress if their own private needs are satisfied. The "we" in Rorty's assertion, in this case, is therefore not necessarily universally justified.

(2) The second (in my view, more compelling) understanding of the assertion implies that we cannot *allow* ourselves to not believe in moral progress if we accept that a belief in the success of an action has an influence on that same action being actually successful (cf. Roser 2019, 2016; *PSH*, 120; *CIS*, 189). If moral progress is hence understood as a *potential* (to be implemented), and if a belief (or, specifically, hope) in moral progress has a positive impact on its implementation, then – pragmatically, if believing in it *works* – "we cannot but believe in it".

I have been indeed arguing that if instances of moral progress are dependent on human action (e.g., linguistic action), and if moral progress is – as I have been assuming – a moral end in itself, then engaging in moral-progress-provoking action becomes a moral responsibility and, arguably, duty. For we do not live in the best possible world, following S. Žižek (Morgan 2016, 13), we are rather obliged to think about alternatives.

[186] It frequently emerges, from Rorty's historicist views, that generally, when there was a (philosophical or social) action, *hope* to achieve something through that action preceded. When describing events in human history, he uses sentences like "Hegel has hoped to..." or "intellectuals of the west hoped to", et cetera.

Assuming that hope for moral progress is, with Rorty, indeed a regulative condition – or at least supportive of the creation – of moral progress, then the moral responsibility (or duty) further extends to the creation of that hope. If we assume that the creation of hope is a moral responsibility, and if we further extend our moral concern towards future generations (cf. chapter 1), then we shall further consider it a moral responsibility to create the conditions for a "culture of hope" (see below: Roser 2019), which favours the creation of hope also in the future (cf. Jonas 1979, 214).

This responsibility, it may hence be argued, extends to philosophy specifically, if philosophy, following Rorty, is at the service of society; if it is about evoking change in the world rather than merely describing it. As shown in chapter 3, Rorty advocates a philosophy that is an instrument of moral and political change within the conversation (Topper 1995, 964). This means, concretely, to practice what he calls (cf. chapter 3, pp. 84ff) *cultural politics*: take an active part in the conversation (cf. Voparil 2011a, 133), suggest changes in the uses of words and put new words into circulation (*PCP*, 124).

If a hope for moral progress is favourable for the creation of moral progress, then *one goal of cultural politics* becomes the *creation of that hope* itself.

It appears that Rorty is indeed trying to create hope for moral progress. He gives examples of how some things have changed for the better (e.g., the development of a human rights culture and the increasing inclusion of women). He puts images into circulation about how the future may look better than the past, and he promotes the human capacity to both learn from the past and create the future. He declares himself generally optimistic about the very possibility of moral progress, which may (amongst other things) have the function to indeed create hopefulness for moral progress within the conversation in which Rorty takes part.

4.4.2 Social hopes

In the previous section (4.3), I argued how, in the Rortyan framework, the advocacy of more concrete moral goals is supportive of larger, abstract moral goals (such as moral progress inasmuch as it is a moral

goal in itself). The latter are more difficult to imagine, and so is the path to follow in order to achieve them.

I claim that this is analogous to the creation of hope. To be hopeful of moral progress is fundamentally supported and made possible by the hopefulness of more specific hopes. Rorty hence advocates, within his account, a series of such hopes, whose implementation he understands as exemplifications or instances of moral progress. As I have shown, among those hopes, Rorty lists a global, cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society (*PSH*, xii). He further states to hope that suffering will be diminished and that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease (cf. *CIS*, xv), and that the human race as a whole should gradually come together in a global community (*PSH*, xxxii).

Just as private and public (needs or) goals tend to get in the way of each other, so do private and public *hopes*. Rorty thus distinguishes the two (cf. Smith 2005, 84). His notion of *social hopes*, which echoes the notion of social or *public responsibilities* (cf. Bacon 2011, 198), implies both hopes that *concern* (the future of a) society and hopes that are *shared* by members of a society:

> What binds societies together is common vocabulary and common hopes [...] the hope that life will eventually be freer, less cruel [...] richer in goods and experiences. [...] To retain social hope, members of such a society need to be able to tell themselves a story about how things might get better and see no insuperable obstacles to this story's coming true (*CIS*, 86).

Though Rorty never explicitly defines it as such, I claim that moral progress itself may also be considered a *social hope* in his framework.
(1) When it comes to the possibility of moral progress in the future, Rorty, in fact, talks in terms of hope to replace the notion of certainty (cf., e.g., *PSH*, 32).

(2) For moral progress is, as established previously, a matter of the public (or social) rather than the private (or individual) side of the public-private split, this hope is first and foremost *social*: it regards the moral developments of a society rather than those of the individual (cf. chapter 1), and it generally translates into social or shared action, beliefs and institutions. It further, in fact, accommodates other more concrete social hopes with morality-related content.

4.4.3 Hope instead of knowledge?

In the fourth paper of the one explicit chapter on Moral Progress (*TP*, 228-243), Rorty explores his advocacy of hope, *instead* of knowledge, within the very context of the discussion of the notion of moral progress. His stance about "replacing" knowledge with hope becomes more elaborate later, in the series of papers entitled "Hope in Place of knowledge" (*PSH*, 23-90). There he states:

> To say that one should replace knowledge by hope is to say [...] that one should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs. [...] the telos of movement and flux is not solely mastery but also stimulation (*PSH*, 34).

In the matter of moral progress, this position looks towards the future. The focus, here, is not the look towards the past, and hence an assessment of whether there has been progress and of how problems may be overcome – it is thus not about being "retrospective rather than prospective" (cf. *RC*, xv). It is not about *knowing* whether there is an actual occurrence of moral progress but rather about *hoping* that there is one. If there is no way of knowing whether we are moving in the right direction, one can still be hopeful about it (cf. Smith 2005, 89). Rorty sustains that we are in fact with nothing left other than hope, once we abandon "Plato's attempt to escape from time to eternity" (Rorty 2007b, 927), yet he claims that this shall be enough (for us to have an optimistic attitude towards moral progress). To say that the telos of movement and flux is not solely mastery but stimulation is thus to say, here, that even if there is no evidence of actualization of moral progress, the hope that there might be one must persist. This, again, is justified if we accept that the stimulation hope provides for social actors is a regulative condition to actually move in a certain direction, i.e., to work towards implementing moral progress.

Hope in place of knowledge further means to liberate oneself from some limits, which one's "knowledge" about one's "nature" and past poses to possibly favourable developments. In *AOC*, Rorty writes, "it

is a matter of replacing shared knowledge of what is already real, with social hope for what might become real".

I have argued above that the naturalist base, in which Rorty grounds his framework, provides him with a ground on which to base his ideas and hopes for possible developments. I have argued, in fact, that knowledge – mind, e.g., the epistemic condition of the ideal conversation – plays an important part in fruitful moral developments within society. Hope in place of knowledge, different to what some of Rorty's output may suggest, hence must *not* mean a complete abandonment of epistemic efforts concerning a society's past or human "nature" or the dynamics of social practices. In the context of moral progress, it must rather mean that justifications for moral progress must not be solely based on one's knowledge about past developments and present developments. A prognosis of what the world could be in the future must not be limited to arguments such as: "well, it has always been like this"; "there has always been war; war is hence something natural and therefore (arguably) justified"; "there has always been inequality and cruelty; inequality and cruelty are hence something naturally human". A prognosis, in the Deweyan sense (according to Rorty's readings), must rather be based on a *hope* that things *can* change. It is for that very reason, as I will further elaborate in chapter 5, why Rorty is sceptical of the notion of human nature, for in his view, this notion implies something "closed", that is eternal and fundamentally unchangeable. *Hope* that things can change, is, in fact (in the Rortyan framework, as I have been claiming), assumed to be a regulative condition of things to actually change. For change depends – at least in part – on human action, and human action is – at least in part – inspired and driven by hope.

4.4.4 Justifying hope

To say that if we do not *know* about the future, we can still be *hopeful*, for Rorty is justified for, as he states, "hope doesn't require justification, cognitive status, foundations, or anything else" (*ABAO*, 58.) Whereas I claimed that within any pragmatist-leaning conversation, hope *does*, in fact, need justification, at least to some extent (cf. chapter 3).

In a framework in which any fruitful (or "working") imagination is distinct from mere "fantasy", as it is always built on the consciousness

of actuality and of what Williams called everyday truths (cf. chapter 3, p. 127), a fruitful hope too must not be mere wishful thinking but be grounded in the contingent world one lives in (cf. also Newheiser 2019, 14). Rorty's utopian liberal society is, for instance, made by people who are both self-critical (about what *is*) and imaginative (of what *could* be). Moreover, if hope shall serve as a motivator, then this implies that social actors must believe (at least in part) in its implementation. Therefore, entirely unjustified "hopes" (i.e., unjustified *fantasies*) will arguably not suffice.

Hope, within a pragmatist framework, must hence be a "pragmatic" form of hope (cf. Morgan 2016), which implies, with Dewey, projections of a better life, based upon a life already lived (Dewey 1910, 47), and hence upon the knowledge about the past (and present), i.e., what one has learned from it. It is not an absolute or transcendent kind of hope, but rather a hope with a particular object (cf. Roser 2019, 204), e.g., a greater solidarity. This hope is "made" rather than found (Morgan 2016, 3) within social practice. It is an optimistic, forward-looking point of orientation (cf. Voparil 2004, 226); a desire combined with reasonable expectation (cf. Moody-Adams 1994, 224) – a look forward (to possibly better moral beliefs, practices and judgments) rather than upward (toward God, Truth and the Absolute), (cf. *AOC*, 19).

To "make" this hope within the conversation, based on the assessment of actuality and thus on reasonable expectation, ultimately means to justify it in front of one's peers and oneself. To create hope for moral progress (or, more concretely, e.g., for a greater solidarity) means to either successfully argue for it or to persuade one's audience (in some other way) to be hopeful of it (cf. chapter 3). One of Rorty's strategies, in this regard, is, in fact, to advocate hope based on the presumed human *capacity* to make things better.

> Nowadays, to say that we are clever animals is [to say] something political and hopeful – namely, if we work together, we can make ourselves into whatever we are clever and courageous enough to imagine ourselves becoming (*TP*, 175).

Knowing that we live in "an age in which human beings can make things better for [themselves]" (*ibid.*), should be enough, without wanting to reach out for unreachable, transcendent guarantees. Furthermore, by arguing that there have been favourable developments in the past, he

predicts that there might be further favourable developments in the future *if* we act accordingly.

Besides the issues concerning the (necessity of) justification of (social) hopes, there is also the question of whether hope itself is indeed a justified notion. This question indeed challenges what I presumed at the beginning of this section, i.e., that it is reasonable to advocate hope if we assume that it serves, amongst other things, as a motivator for moral actors to struggle for something to actually occur.

There are indeed arguments against the advocacy of hope, as some hopes may be associated with the temptation of wishful thinking, which may open the doors for *false hopes*. (Roser 2019, 212-215). Incalculating hopes may distract from facing tough facts, which "require action rather than lulling visions of a bright future" (*ivi*, 203). The hope that human beings can eventually solve the challenges of climate change,[187] for example, may motivate people not to give up and keep looking for solutions. On the other hand, if people keep telling themselves that there is (persisting) hope that the issue will be resolved decisive action may be delayed further and further. In other words: if we keep being hopeful about certain issues being resolved, without actually acting on them (i.e., creating solutions), not only can this hope not be formally justified, but it might further be a temptation not to act on those issues. In this view, I claim not only does hope trigger action, but action may create and support new hopes.

In support of Rorty, what can be inferred from these assumptions, is that hope is notwithstanding justifiable; however: a certain (indeed "pragmatic") kind of hope.

I shall here consider the example brought by D. Roser in his debate of whether the hope for the achievement of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*[188] is justified or justifiable (Roser 2019). Roser presumes, indeed, that instead of asking whether we should hope to achieve the "SDGs", we should rather ask whether we should cultivate a hope to do so (Roser 2019, 203). He suggests a "moral cost-benefit analysis", from which he

[187] As argued in chapter 1, the issue of climate change can also be considered a moral problem (cf. also Jonas 1984, 36).

[188] The achievement (or approach) of the "SDG" may be considered a contemporary example of moral progress, as it is something we generally appear to agree that they present something morally better than our current state of affairs.

concludes that some of the disadvantages and dangers hope brings with itself only materialize, in case we do not practice the art of "hoping well" (*ivi*, 212). Not "hoping well", I infer from his work, refers to both the temptation of "wishful thinking", to an easy defeat through disappointment, and to a state where hope takes up too much "mental space [and] functions as an opium which lulls us into dreaming" (*ivi*, 215).

Among the preponderant advantages of hope that he outlines – and which, in his view, outweigh the disadvantages – is that it arguably affects, indeed, the probability of success. He quotes the psychologist of hope C. R. Snyder, who presents evidence that higher hope is consistently related to better outcomes, among others, in academia, athletes and psychotherapy (*ivi*, 216). (Secondly, Roser also refers to the hedonistic benefits hope brings with itself.)

For Roser, spreading hope means, amongst other things, choosing a different tone in politics, just like a *rhetoric of hope* accompanies the UN Sustainable Development Goals. If Roser is right, a cultivation of hope – comparable to what Rorty pursues – has indeed practical bearings and is favourable for the outcome of what is hoped for.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored whether the Rortyan framework presents a teleological approach to moral progress (progress "towards"), other than what Kitcher calls pragmatic progress (progress "from"), based on Rorty's assertions that (1) "moral progress is not a matter of getting closer to an antecedent goal, but of surpassing the past" (*PCP*, 108) and (2) that it is "measured by the extent to which we have made ourselves better […] rather than by our increased proximity to a goal" (*AOC*, 28).

I started with an analysis of the pragmatic dimension, which, so I discussed, is grounded in a Darwinian naturalism, based on which Rorty identifies the roots of (the development of) morality. I argued that Rorty understands both human nature (from which morality was created) and morality itself in terms of evolution, i.e., as something "in progress" that has emerged from contingent circumstances.

Moral progress, within this stance, is *assessed* by looking at past developments and by determining whether (by a community's own lights and terms) certain social developments have been favourable or not.

I have further been claiming – in support of the expanding-circle framework generally and the Rortyan melioristic account specifically – that moral progress is further dependent on human agency, i.e., on where human beings decide to move morally and on all the practices that follow.

To *enhance* moral progress, within the pragmatic dimension is hence understood as overcoming problems and crises, based on an evaluation of what does not currently "work" morally.

I have hence, however, argued that the Rortyan concept of moral progress further implies a teleological dimension. I have claimed that this dimension is, in fact, *necessary* if one accepts with Rorty that a primary tool for enhancing moral progress is *imagination*. Rorty, in fact, sustains that timely (contingent) images of how the world is and works, may hold one "captive" in the process of overcoming moral problems and creating moral progress, and that social actors must attempt to leap over those boundaries by imagining, how a morally better world could look like. It means not entirely resting on naturalist justifications of morality but rather creating a morality for the future.
Imagination implies an image ("*Bild*") – or rather images – *towards* which moral agents tend. In the Rortyan framework, there is the advocacy of both utopian images (that shall inspire, maintain an idea of greatness and transmit that the world is permanently in need to be bettered) and of more down-to-earth images, which insinuate achievability and hence motivate agents, and suggest clearer paths.

To say that Rory's view on moral progress is also teleological is hence not to say that there is an immanent or timeless *telos* – an ultimate Good – toward which the world or morality tends. It rather means that an envisioned end – imagined based on timely conditions – is necessary for any progress that ultimately (also) depends on human action. It is specifically necessary as a ground on which to base one's "redescriptions" within the process of creating a morally better world. It is hence not sufficient to understand that certain practices, beliefs and vocabulary "do not work anymore" – i.e. that they are understood as

flawed or harmful – but it is moreover necessary, in light of moral progress, to envision how alternatives could look like.

I have further argued that these *teloi*, in Rorty, are expressed in terms of hope. For Rorty, to be hopeful of moral progress is to take an attitude towards it, which implies both the belief in its possibility and a commitment to future interactions.

All this, I claimed, resides well within Rorty's overall account of meliorism, if we understand meliorism as attributing importance to both the notions of hope and human action (where the latter, amongst other things, perpetuates and grounds the former).

The benefits of expressing his optimism about moral progress in terms of "hope" for moral progress are at least three:

(1) Rorty does not have to necessarily commit to a kind of *absolutistic* telos and hence risk challenging his own pragmatist antirealist and anti-essentialist position while still being able to advocate optimism about moral progress.

(2) He needs to justify his hope, in fact, (different than any possible claims about certainties) *only to a certain point.* A certain justification of hope is, in any case, needed when it is a "pragmatic" kind of hope which, according to Dewey, is based on awareness (or knowledge) about one's past and present world. Hope must further be justified (in front of moral actors) when hope is supposed to be a motivator for action that is aimed to enhance moral progress.

I have, in fact, argued that (3) hope for (instances of) moral progress, indeed, serves moreover as a motivator: for agents to believe that moral progress is possible may incentive them to actually act on and fight for the implementation of that progress.

Finally, I have argued that if, as I had assumed, the implementation of moral progress (a "moral end in itself") can be understood as a moral responsibility, and if hope for moral progress is a regulative condition (i.e., favourable) for the implementation of moral progress, then the creation of hope for moral progress becomes itself a moral responsibility – not at last within the field of ethics and moral philosophy, assuming that Rorty is right to ascribe it the task of

positively contributing to society and social change. I have suspected hence, further, that Rorty might indeed have been aiming to create hope for moral progress whenever he was outspokenly optimistic about the possibility of its (both past and future) occurrence. One might even say that, instead of *arguing* for the possibility of moral progress, Rorty aimed to *persuade* his readers to believe in it (cf. chapter 3, pp. 119ff).

In chapter 5, I will finally discuss why the notion of solidarity is compelling to accompany this pragmatic-teleological expanding-circle account of moral progress. I will hence discuss whether an increased solidarity is a justified hope and a justifiable "*Bild*" in which to ground one's processes of redescriptions when aiming at creating moral progress.

5. SOLIDARITY AS A GROUNDING NOTION FOR A LINGUISTIC PRAGMATIST UNDERSTANDING OF MORAL PROGRESS

5.1 Introduction

> The view that I am offering says that there is such a thing as moral progress and that this progress is indeed in the direction of greater *human solidarity* [m.e.]. But that solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences [...] as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation — the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us". (*CIS* 192)

Rorty's assertion that *there is moral progress* and that it is *in the direction of a greater human solidarity*[189] implies, I argue, multiple claims:

(1) an increase in human solidarity can be understood as (an instance of) moral progress.

(2) There is indeed a tendency of increase (or expansion) in human solidarity.

(3) It is justifiable to defend the idea of moral progress based on (the evidence of) an increase in solidarity.

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[189] As anticipated, for Rorty to talk about solidarity is to explicitly talk about human solidarity. This take implies, as argued (cf. chapter 1) that an increasing solidarity is to be understood as one possible form of moral progress, rather than an identification of moral progress. As an exemplification of the expanding circle, and specifically of expansion$_2$, it may be understood as one "step of the ladder" in the direction of a further expansion (comprising both expansion$_1$ and expansion$_2$).

(4) A possibility of moral progress can be expressed in the possibility of increased solidarity.

(5) To create human solidarity means to create moral progress.

It does, however, I claim further, *not* imply that moral progress *identifies* with increased solidarity. Rather: a greater solidarity is an instance of moral progress, yet moral progress (cf. chapter 1) is not restricted to the notion of an increase in solidarity.
To ask whether and how Rorty's assertion above is justified means to ask, more concretely, at this point, whether solidarity is a compelling notion in which to ground a pragmatist understanding of moral progress.

Within the Rortyan framework, so I claimed, an understanding of moral progress can be aligned with the expanding-circle theory, which starts from a Darwinian-naturalist base and ultimately understands moral progress as a "potential": due to humans' capacity to act and possibly change conditions of their environment as much as themselves, potential moral progress can be pursued and (further) implemented. Or, as D. L. Smith puts it (Smith 2020, 190), "Martin Luther King Jr. once said, 'the arc of history is long, but it bends towards justice.' That's only half of the story because it only bends towards justice if we push it very hard to bend it that way."

I have claimed (cf. chapter 1, p. 30) that the Rortyan version of the expanding circle can be understood as, in accordance with Nevo and McClean, *an expanding circle of solidarity*. To pursue and implement moral progress can hence be explicated in the pursuit and implementation of (a greater) solidarity. Solidarity, for Rorty, is "made rather than found [i.e.] produced in the course of history rather than recognized as an ahistorical fact" (cf. *CIS*, 195). In this sense, I claim that the assertion that moral progress is in the direction of a greater solidarity further assumes a *prescriptive* notion within the Rortyan framework. In other words: Rorty advocates the implementation of solidarity as a possible exemplification of moral progress rather than merely describing moral progress (or the expanding circle, for that matter) as an increase in solidarity.

In chapter 4, I argued, in regard to Rorty's framework, that the process of (an intentional) implementation of (any instance of) moral progress requires an image ("*Bild*") towards which to tend. This image, I claimed, is necessary for the moral agent as a point of orientation (standard or measurement) in which to ground their actions – e.g., specifically (cf. chapter 3) their redescriptions. Redescriptions, in the Rortyan sense, serve to enlarge the perceptual and conceptual (moral) space. The act of redescribing, I insinuated, can proceed, following Rorty, in two different ways: (1) by simply "talking differently" (cf. *CIS*, 7), i.e., experimenting with new ways of describing (and hence understanding or seeing) the world; (2) by using redescriptions to *persuade* others, i.e., showing them new ways of how the world can or could be perceived and conceptualized. I argued that, in the second case, agents need indeed a standard or "image" in which to ground their redescriptions – otherwise they would be restricted to the first way. If solidarity serves as an image of this kind, one's redescriptions may be (intentionally) initiated to create (a greater) solidarity.

Images towards which to tend are themselves created and enforced through linguistic practices – at least when they are shared socially. Socially shared images – including social hopes – are necessary for shared efforts to implement instances of moral progress. As moral progress relates to a society (or humanity as a whole) rather than the individual, the (intentional) implementation generally happens on a shared (group-)level. Even if we grant that individual actors can propose and contribute to (redescriptions and hence) changes, as I have discussed in chapter 3, redescriptions must be accepted within the conversation to have an effect on social change. Moral progress is ultimately realized on a social level.

To have a "greater solidarity" as a *Bild* towards which to tend means, I claim, to have a less abstract image than that of moral progress. To have something less abstract – something admittedly achievable – means that the path of implementation is (more easily) distinguishable. In other words: if we know that a greater solidarity is the goal, we may find reasonable solutions (within our redescriptions and social actions) to approach it and/or ultimately achieve it. To have moral progress – in itself – as a goal requires having some explication of what moral progress can mean (concretely) in order to (intentionally) proceed in its direction. My argument is, following Rorty, that a greater solidarity is indeed a compelling notion of understanding moral progress in this

regard. Hence, as I will elaborate, in the Rortyan framework, solidarity is not only an advocated image toward which to tend; it is further conceptualized as a mechanism to *contribute* to moral progress (in a broader sense).

To ask whether (greater) solidarity is a compelling notion in which to ground a pragmatist understanding of moral progress and on which to base redescriptions implies asking (1) whether the notion is compelling as an advocated social hope, and (2) whether it is a justified hope. It further means (3) asking whether it is a reasonable notion to exemplify the expanding-circle framework in pragmatist terms. (4) It moreover implies the question of whether conceptualizing moral progress as increasing solidarity is justifiable in pragmatist terms.

I will discuss these questions in this chapter based on the following claims, which I will defend hereinafter:

(1) To increase solidarity not only means to expand responsiveness (i.e., expand moral *concern*) but also expand the sense of commonality and potential collaboration (i.e., consequently, strengthening particularly moral *status*). In terms of "inclusion" or "inclusiveness" (cf. chapter 3), this means, further, to not only put emphases on the inclusion of concerns of others in the conversation (e.g., speak for the voiceless; see expansion$_1$, cf. p. 25) but moreover on the aim to make "the others" – if possible – equal conversation partners and to acknowledge them as such (see expansion$_2$, cf. p. 26).[190]

(2) To move towards solidarity implies not only a tendency towards an (envisioned) *sameness* (see critique of the expanding-circle philosophers by N. Smyth, chapter 1, pp. 28-29) but also an increase of responsiveness towards the *diversity* of others. It must be understood, I claim, as a move towards the acknowledgement of diversities and *variations* (cf. also sections 4.2.1 – 4.2.2, and 2.3.2.2), as part of a greater unity.

(3) To advocate solidarity implies working against instances of *moral disengagement*. In chapter 1, I briefly conceptualized moral disengagement, with Wilson and Bandura, not only as a moral-progress stopper but further as a mechanism of moral regress. A powerful

[190] Especially if we grant that inclusion is a mechanism for increased moral knowledge in the pragmatist sense (cf. chapter 3).

exemplification of moral disengagement is (cf. Wilson 2020) processes of dehumanization.[191] With this in mind, I will argue, in this chapter, that the notion of "human" has a crucial function for the creation of solidarity, and that Rorty's rejection of the notion of "human nature" gets in the way of his pragmatist project to create solidarity and, consequently, achieve moral progress.

Rorty, as anticipated, rejects this notion, for he assumes that it broadly implies something closed and fixed: i.e., a metaphysical essence that unites all humans of all times, independent of their historical and cultural contingencies. However, he expressly admits that within a post-Darwinian, Deweyan framework, human nature is "something open" (cf. *PSH*, 88). To consider human nature as something open means to ultimately *keep* (or *aufheben*, cf. chapter 4) the very notion. I hence argue that Rorty would do better to make an effort to *redescribe* "human nature", in pragmatist terms (avoiding hence a retrieval of essentialism) rather than rejecting the notion altogether.

5.2 Conceptualizing solidarity

5.2.1 Solidarity in the contemporary debate: compassion, commonality, and collaboration

There has been an increase of interest in the notion of solidarity both in the political arena and in the recent philosophical literature (Principe 2000, 139; Jaeggi 2001; Brunkhorst 2002; cf. Bartl 2019; cf. Wallaschek 2019; cf. Guidikova 2019). Yet the term appears to be "ambiguous" (Jaeggi 2001, 287), undertheorized, hence lacks a comprehensive

[191] While moral disengagement is often understood as a consequence of dehumanization, D. L. Smith, for instance, claims that it is the other way around: i.e., that the "desire to harm others" leads to social actors (or communities) engaging in practices of dehumanization (Smith 2020, 91). I argue that the two are rather intertwined (particularly when we take into account the assumption concerning the role redescriptions, in the Rortyan sense, may play): descriptions promoting dehumanization may lead to moral disengagement; on the other hand, moral disengagement may then lead to descriptions promoting dehumanization.

definition and "has often been employed in inexact and also suggestive ways" (Derpmann 2008, 304).

From the historical[192] understandings of solidarity emerge notions such as (1) cohesion, social ties, and a sense of *togetherness*; (2) the willingness to *invest oneself* in shared goals or the goals of others, particularly when their implementation is threatened; and (3) both *practical and emotional engagement* for common and cooperative goals, e.g., in the fight against injustice (cf. Wildt 1999; Derpmann 2008; Ritter & Gründer 1995b, 1004).

A. Wildt, for instance, describes solidarity – in contemporary terms, with a look towards history – as an *engaged action or disposition*, which fulfils, amongst other things, the following conditions: (1) the subject (solidarity-giver) and the recipient (addressee) are bound to one another by *feelings of belonging* together or sympathy; (2) the motivation of the subject is at least *in part altruistic*; (3) the recipient is motivated to remedy their distress themself (cf. Wildt 1999, 217).[193]

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[192] *Solidaritas*, which derives from "solidus" (Ritter & Gründer 1995b, 1004), is generally traced back to Roman law. Even the origins of the French *solidarité* had the Roman legal meaning of the liability of a joint debtor (Wildt 1999, 210), although it assumed a more general meaning of *connection and cohesion* soon afterwards. Another line of development of the notion is traced back to the Greek and Roman tradition of republican civic friendship and the Christian ideal of charity, which in France led up to the notion of *fraternité*, which then developed into the younger notion of solidarity (Brunkhorst 2002; Derpmann 2008, 305). Particularly during the French Revolution, it increasingly developed from a moral into a political concept. In the 19th century, the term extended throughout various disciplines (cf. Wildt 1999, 212): it was used by Catholic theologians and liberal economists and became increasingly politicized in relation to the division of labour, as well as labour and students' movements. Pierre Leroux conceptualized the notion of *solidarité mutuelle des hommes* as a property of human nature, which is based, among other things, on the identity of man (*homme*) with *humanité* (Leroux 1840, 248-250). It hence *differed* from the grounds of Christian love, i.e., the sentiments of pity, mercy and duty (cf. Wildt, 212). During the 20th century, the term became ever more popular within different disciplines (cf. Ritter & Gründer 1995, 1009), e.g., theology, the social sciences, psychology (where it implies an intention of equal cooperation) and law (with the attempts to make solidarity a basic principle of the international right).

[193] H. Brunkhorst – another exponent of present-day theory about solidarity – on the other hand, focuses on a broader political (rather than merely intersubjective) level and aligns his contemporary understanding of solidarity, first and foremost, tightly with the notion of democracy (Brunkhorst 2002). By potentially contributing to inclusion (both socially and politically), acc. Brunkhorst, solidarity supports the democratic realization of individual freedom. (Brunkhorst notes that even in Hegel, in the rare occasion in which the latter used the term solidarity, the notion is linked with

Solidarity is recurringly described – both in academia and on a colloquial level, not at last by Rorty himself (cf. *CIS*, 146) – as a *feeling*: a feeling of *compassion* and *commonality* (cf. Jaeggi 2001; cf. also Principe 2000, 139). *Both* notions of compassion and commonality are constitutive of the feeling or sense of solidarity. As R. Jaeggi points out: a sense of commonality (or, consequently, belonging) is not enough to constitute solidarity, as even small communities can lack it (*ivi*, 290). On the other hand, compassion (and consequently, possibly, readiness to help) is not always an expression precisely of solidarity (*ivi*, 291). Solidarity must, therefore, not be reduced to a feeling of either compassion or commonality but must comprehend both.

Moreover, if Wildt's take is accurate, solidarity *exceeds* the mere notion of feeling. It rather implies a willingness to act,[194] i.e., it denotes a resource (or potential) that potentially leads to action (Puget 2006, 110).

Granted that solidarity involves both the subject's willingness to act and the solidarity-recipient's motivation to do so, evokes the question of hierarchy. In fact, already the notions of solidarity-giver and receiver imply a certain hierarchy – i.e., different levels of power between the generally better-off and worse-off; between the in-group members and the outsiders; between the ones who have a voice within the

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the possible and realized freedom of the individual within society (*ivi*, 12).) This stance is noteworthy to keep in mind for this work, insofar as, for Rorty (who, different from Dewey, does not extensively explore the notion of democracy but rather implies it in what he understands as a liberal society and in his approach to conversation about what to do and who to be, as human beings and as a society), individual *freedom* (which includes individual *self-realization*) is tightly connected to human happiness, and thus to the cardinal goal of morality. (This is also expressed in his understanding of pragmatism as a "theory and practice of enlarging human freedom in a precarious and tragic world" (*CP*, 69).) However, while Brunkhorst seems to understand "democratic solidarity" primarily as a *political* notion possibly providing a bond between equal (and free) citizens and thus as a possible ground for positive inclusivist developments in the global legal community, Rorty departs from solidarity as a *human resource*, which grounds in the sentiment and understandings of the individual actor, and has the capacity of being enhanced and extended, to the point that it may enhance favourable social conditions (such as a greater equality among social actors and a more inclusive conversation). The political dimension, I argue, in Rorty, hence primarily lies within the collective effort to create conditions favourable for the increase of solidarity – for Rorty, amongst other things, by means of what he calls cultural politics and redescriptions.

[194] As M. A. Principe points out: "if one wants to be in solidarity with the colonized, one must do something" (Principe 2000, 14).

conversation and the voiceless. In contemporary debate exists, in fact, a discrepancy about whether solidarity can be hierarchical or not.
The notions of giver and receiver furthermore suggest unidirectionality. Yet, it has been pointed out that solidarity can or even must be reciprocal (cf. Gould 2007; Davies & Savulescu 2019). This would mean that a solidarity-giver can also become the receiver and vice-versa.

Stances in favour of understanding solidarity on the grounds of reciprocity often defend it on the base of *cooperation* – considering it a constitutive notion of solidarity. This notion makes the idea of a possible solidarity towards, e.g., non-human animals or future generations problematic. If cooperation is a grounding notion of solidarity, then there cannot be solidarity with or towards them, only responsibility (cf. Ritter & Gründer 1995, 1009).

The notion of cooperation is indeed recurring throughout the contemporary debates about solidarity. Jaeggi, for instance (Jaeggi 2001), understands solidarity as a kind of non-hierarchical (symmetrical) cooperation. In her view, cooperation can be related to the Hegelian concept of *Sittlichkeit*, where solidaristic motivations are an expression of *common goals*, shared projects, or a common fate. This specific understanding of cooperation hence contrasts with an instrumental conception of it, which can be found in cases of commonality of interest (*ivi*, 193). Jaeggi explicitly contrasts her notion of solidarity with mere reciprocity, as it goes beyond a narrow self-interest, and rather includes others in a "*we*". In other accounts, such as Wildt's, solidarity is not defined by implying a notion of cooperation (i.e., a direct engagement). However, according to Wildt, it must *anticipate* or at least *imagine* such *cooperation* (or reciprocity). Solidarity, here, hence implies the *possibility* of cooperation, i.e., cooperation as a *potential consequence* of solidarity.

In the matter of the relationship between inclusion and solidarity – considering that I have previously advocated inclusion as both a mechanism and end of moral progress (cf. chapter 3) – it has been both argued that inclusion is a possible consequence – or at least "accommodated" by – solidarity (Derpmann 2008, 313), and that inclusion possibly leads to solidarity (Jaeggi 2001, 291).

The first stance ascribes a functional or instrumental value (cf. Derpmann 2008, 306) to the notion of solidarity, as it assumes that an increased sense (or feeling) of solidarity towards "outsiders" or the

"worse-off", leads to including them in a new "we" and/or into one's circle of moral concern. To create solidarity, here, hence would have the function of enhancing inclusion.

The second understands solidarity as relying on inclusion. In Rortyan terms (cf. chapter 3 and see further below): when previously excluded stakeholders (outsiders) are included in the conversation, it can follow that stakeholders (insiders) recognize a sort of commonality and thus potentially develop a sense of solidarity. Inclusion (into one's moral concern) here is hence prior to solidarity, or rather a condition of solidarity.

There is, in both cases, an alignment of solidarity with a notion of "we". This "we", as insinuated before, implies common goals, interests, or – in Rorty's words – common vocabulary and common hopes. Within this "we", interests of the self and the other are ideally not in contrast. In J. Habermas' words: solidarity includes one's own well-being (Habermas 2015, 23). It hence must be understood as "an engagement that is related not only to the other but to the preservation of [a] common form of life. In this regard, it is neither egoistic nor altruistic" (Jaeggi 2001, 295).

In what I called Rorty's version of "absolute solidarity" (cf. pp. 169-170) – in his ideal liberal utopia – private and public (or social) needs are, in fact, not separate anymore. Morality is complete (and hence no longer needed in our vocabulary or social life) not before we reach at least this point of union. In the morally incomplete world, however, in contrast to Rorty's utopian image, private and public needs – as much as different needs among larger entities, e.g., different communities or nations – generally *do* contrast. While in Rorty's utopia, (absolute) solidarity exceeds moral duties and becomes that *natural* status quo – i.e., the natural way for social actors to perceive, conceptualize and act within the world – in the actuality, solidarity must still be understood in *moral* terms (cf. chapter 1, pp. 8 and 23).

The notion of "*Solidaritätspflicht*" (Becker et al. 2004, 35), for instance, suggests that solidarity is something that members of a community – or, in an extended sense, even of all humanity[195] – owe one another (cf. Bayerts 1999, 3-4). This conception is particularly present in

[195] Although the notion of *duty* to solidarity often assumes an institutional level and is therefore not universal but communal (Derpmann 2008, 305).

contemporary *political* discourse, as political actors commonly call for solidarity (e.g., among European countries, towards refugees, towards worse-off countries during the Covid-19 pandemic et cetera). Solidarity can indeed be a "politically charged term" (Principe 2000, 139), where it repeatedly assumes the notion of something that we should (or ought to) have or implement. Considering this view, solidarity designates something we *can* want and accordingly *can* decide to implement.

Yet, if solidarity is a feeling (or a sense), and if we can reasonably assume that a feeling or a sense is at least in part unintentional, non-deliberate or uncontrolled, a duty to "feel" solidarity seems nonsensical. This means that neither the *creation* of a feeling of solidarity is possible *in a strict sense*. We can, however, further assume that one can create *conditions* (cf. also chapter 1, pp. 35-39) to provoke feelings of solidarity (in others and in oneself), e.g., as Rorty suggests, through redescriptions of the world and others, that help extend the perceptual space and possibly help see fellow human beings differently, thus possibly develop a feeling of solidarity towards them (cf. chapter 2).

If we grant this assumption, we must agree that solidarity can be created at least indirectly – by changing some of the conditions that determine moral perceptions. If we then assume that solidarity is a mechanism of moral progress, and if moral progress is a moral end (as previously suggested), then *the creation of conditions* that may evoke solidarity can be understood as a moral responsibility and/or duty – rather than the feeling of solidarity itself.

From historical accounts of solidarity, with C. Gide, L. Bourgois and A. Fouillé, emerge a distinction between *solidarité de fait* and *solidarité devoir*. While the former is natural (and the base for the latter), the latter is deliberate (cf. Große Kracht 2017, 199-200). The *moral* value is primarily expressed in the voluntary or wilful implementation of solidarity (hence the latter). This distinction is useful to make sense of the above, specifically within the framework of the expanding circle (of solidarity) (see section 5.2.5). On the one hand, the twofold understanding of solidarity suggests inquiring into the possibly *natural* character of solidarity, as a feeling or sense, with the function to, following Jaeggi, hold a society together. On the other hand, it helps investigate the moral value of solidarity, as it is understood as something that depends – to some extent – on moral actors themselves.

5.2.2 Solidarity in Rorty: the expanding "we"

Rorty is considered to have had a considerable impact on the conceptualization of the term solidarity in the contemporary age (Ritter & Gründer 1995, 1009-1010). The centrality of the notion of solidarity in Rorty's framework of morality and moral progress is based on his assumption that it is a notion that remains intact, even if morality is stripped of its metaphysical foundations (*ibid.*; *CIS*, 190). This assumption was laid out particularly in his 1985 paper *Solidarity or Objectivity?* (*ORT*, 21-34).

The paper starts with the assertion that there are two principal (conceptually dichotomic) ways to give sense to one's life: one is expressed in the desire for objectivity, the other in the desire for solidarity. The former – which for Rorty is the desire of the *realist* – is the dedication to approach Truth beyond historical contingencies, to escape time. It seeks the relation to a non-human reality. The latter – which is the desire of the *pragmatist* – is the dedication and contribution to a community – to its common goals and hopes. It puts human realities, needs and relations at the centre of its (moral) inquiries and efforts.

Rorty claims that the metaphysical tradition wishes to ground solidarity in objectivity. For Rorty, this means, amongst other things, to ground the idea of solidarity in the notion of an (intrinsic, immanent) human *essence*. This means further that human solidarity is justified on the bases of a recognition of a "core self", an essence, in all human beings (see above, cf. *CIS* 192). By opposing solidarity to objectivity, Rorty rather assumes that the former can work and persist without the latter. Solidarity, in his view, must rather emerge from seeing "more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, custom, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities […]" (*ibid.*).

A declared Darwinist and anti-essentialist, Rorty is careful not to ground any of his accounts – comprehending his stance on moral progress – on concepts that presumably imply absoluteness, timelessness, intrinsic nature and immutability. As argued, he is, therefore, particularly careful with the use of the concepts of human nature and human essence. He

repeatedly claims that we should "give up the philosophical search for commonality", or for "the big thing that unites us" (*PSH*, 85).
I claim, however (cf. section 5.3.3), that "the recognition of more important similarities" does not entirely work – not even in the Rortyan framework – without the former (the recognition of a commonality as human beings). To overcome the "more traditional differences", Rorty lays out, as compared to something bigger, in fact, points to the recognition that there are other (more crucial) things we all have in common, indeed as *human beings*.

It has been proposed that the Rortyan notion of solidarity can be understood as a *compassion* ("*Mitgefühl*") towards addressees, with whom a subject feels a sense of *affiliation*, i.e., with whom they identify as a "*we*" (cf. Ritter & Gründer 1995, 1010). This feeling then can lead to an action or cooperation, yet the notion of cooperation is not necessarily constitutive of the notion of solidarity.

The Rortyan notion of solidarity hence implies both notions of *commonality* and *compassion*, and therefore echoes the broader contemporary understanding of the concept. Rorty generally describes or expresses compassion in terms of sentimentality or responsiveness (to others' pain) (cf. section 5.3.1). The notion of commonality is generally explored within the notion of "we" or "us". While the responsiveness to others translates into a moral *concern*, the recognition of a "we" strengthens the moral *status* (of the other). The former is dependent on the latter, for the social actor must recognize the moral status of the other in order to express a moral concern.

Rorty admittedly inherits the notion of the "we" from W. Sellars (*CIS*, 194), who understands morality, including moral judgements, moral reasoning and moral motivation (cf. Loeffler 2019), in terms of collective intentionality, i.e., as "we-intentions". In Rorty, the "we" roughly refers to the notion of "being one of us".

The Rortyan conception of the "we" implies both a more naturalized form (e.g., our kin or community, which then arguably grounds a *solidarité du fait*), and a more deliberate (or moral) "we" (which then refers to a *solidarité devoir*). A "we" has either or both psychological (based on a feeling of belonging) and/or rational[196] grounds.

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[196] I will explore in section 5.2.2 how Rorty uses and understands "rationality" in this matter.

It is implied that the "we" is not necessarily fixed but rather open and expansible (cf. Jaeggi 2001, 297). Rorty asserts that to increase solidarity, we need to expand our conception of whom we consider "we". The underlying condition of solidarity is, therefore, a (psychological or rational) identification with a certain group (or groups) – a "we" (or "we"s), which determine(s) the moral status of "others", and therefore determines the moral concern.

I understand Rorty's account of the "we" as both universalistic and particularistic at the same time. In fact, on the one hand, I claimed above that his idea of solidarity ultimately relies on the notion of a recognition of a common humanity (universalistic), even though he generally argues against this notion.

On the other hand, Rorty considers that more exclusive (particularistic) "we"s are more forceful in regard to the development of a feeling of solidarity. Rorty asserts, in fact, that the recognition of "one of us human beings" does not have the same force as identifications with smaller groups (community, family, local sports club, et cetera). Advocating and reinforcing a universal we-conception is hence not as effective as advocating a more particular one. The force of the identification with the smaller group generally derives from a contrast with a "they" (*CIS*, 190), i.e., for example, a common enemy. "Us human beings", in this view, might have a force only if it is contrasted with another group of people if the latter is being dehumanized, conceptualized as inhumane or the "wrong sort of human being" (cf. *CIS*, 190; *TP*, 168; *TP*, 179). As history has shown numerous times, this discriminating conceptualization of what goes as "human"[197] (processes of dehumanization[198]), carried out by subjects who describe and hence categorize their own and the others' group, can assume a political function and hence create exclusion, other or rather than inclusion.

Rorty claims that the particularistic view of the "we" is not incompatible with him "urging that we [constantly] try to extend our sense of 'we' to

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[197] The fact that social agents (re-describing subjects) are capable of perceiving and/or describing other people (who evidently appear to them – based on scientific-biological standards – as human beings) as less or non-human shows, acc. D. L. Smith (Smith 2020, 64) how the human mind works in this regard: "it shows that we […] think of humanness as something deeper that's 'inside' of them – something more than portions of the physical body".

[198] In Smith's terms (cf. Smith 2020, 72), dehumanizing implies thinking of (a group) of people as members of an alien and inferior race: a lesser kind of human being.

people whom we have previously thought of as 'they'" (*CIS*, 192). This means to claim, in other words, that a limited particularistic "we" can be expanded.

This expansion – i.e., an expansion of one's moral concern to increasingly more people – is then a bottom-up progress. Yet (cf. chapter 4), if the expansion is deliberate (if it hence has moral value), then the subject of expansion needs a notion of a larger, more comprehensive image of "we", towards which they may tend in their efforts. I will elaborate on this claim in the next section (cf. section 5.3). When Rorty advocates the image of his ideal liberal utopia, which represents the idea of an ultimate, all-comprehensive solidarity, he hence keeps relying on the notion of a global and all-inclusive "we".

5.2.3 The particularistic "we" and the particularistic notion of solidarity

Rorty hence starts out from the assumption that the moral concern for "one of us" is stronger than for a stranger. "One of us" may refer to a person or a group of the same community, ethnicity, class, or nation (cf., e.g., *PCP*, 42), or to a person or a group with similar sets of strong common beliefs and assumed interests. The available insights into evolution and what the expanding-circle streams draw from them offer extensive evidence to back this assumption (cf. Singer 2011). It is this naturalized concern for the "one of us" (mind *solidarité de fait*) that builds the base for a possible expansion of the concern for others. I argued that it indeed becomes a moral matter only when it *transcends* what comes naturally (mind *solidarité devoir*). Or, so to quote Rorty's "favourite moral philosopher", A. Baier: "[t]o behave morally is to do what comes naturally in your dealings with your parents and children or your fellow-clan members" (*PCP*, 45).

Rorty takes this forceful, restricted concern for the fewer and closer seriously, particularly when it comes to the matter of *expanding* the conception of "we" to increasingly more people. "Do we say that these people must be helped because they are our fellow human beings? We may, but it is much more *persuasive* [m.e.] to describe them as our fellow Americans" (*CIS*, 191). In other words, he claims that in terms of effectiveness, within the conversation, we should let our interlocutors

see the particular things they have in common with certain individuals or groups, as compared to other groups (third parties). He backs this idea with other assumptions, such as that, for example, those who acted to save Jews in World War II did so because they identified with smaller and more local groups than the human race, e.g., a fellow Milanese or a fellow of the same profession (Geras 1995, 9). Yet, for instance, N. Geras convincingly debunks this assertion by showing a large number of reports confirming many rescuers acting on pure "humanitarian reasons", i.e., because "they were human beings" (*ivi*, 11-36).

Rorty's insistence on the force of the particularistic view becomes even more evident when we consider the notions of the "we" and solidarity together with another notion he emphasizes during his later years, i.e. loyalty. There are interesting parallels between his notion of solidarity and that of loyalty, and I would argue that within some particular arguments of Rorty's, they are interchangeable. I understand loyalty as a *particularistic* virtue, which sometimes implies a third party (e.g., a common enemy, an "other" that has different interests than the addressee of loyalty), and sometimes simply means a loyal person being responsive to the needs of a specific person, group (and more broadly causes, principles and ideas), (cf. Kleining 2017). Furthermore, I understand loyalty as being, at least to a large extent, based on sentiment (*ibid.*).

The routes of loyalty can be traced back, once again, to our evolution, within which it served as a mechanism for the survival of the group (Jollimore 2013, 52-59). The "sentiment" of loyalty is strongly linked to a *sense of moral duty* an individual has towards the other (or towards a group). Rorty's emphasis on the concept of loyalty in his later years, I believe, at least stresses us to take *particularistic sentiment* seriously when discussing the matter of the "we". In other words: it is a reminder of the naturalized-sentimental bases of the "we" and the force they have in regard to its possible extension.

Yet the notion of loyalty, in Rorty, I argue, becomes more problematic when at a certain point, he advocates the idea of a loyalty towards the whole human species (and beyond), i.e., a loyalty "to all those who, like yourself, can experience pain" (*PCP*, 45). For assuming that loyalty is indeed specifically particularistic and dependent on individual sentiment (with roots in mechanisms of group survival – be that affiliation based

on genes or on other commonalities), it is difficult to argue how the circle of loyalty can expand to such a large extent, even conceptually.

There are different "we"s with whom one can identify. The sense of belonging, in Rorty, is not restricted to the community into which one is born (Rondel 2009, 60). It starts out from specific contexts in which one happens to be born and raised, but the sense of the "we" potentially changes over time. Individuals, furthermore, generally identify with different groups, which may even enter into conflict with each other.
One Rortyan example that is often quoted throughout the literature is that of the Muslim woman who identifies with "we Jeffersonian liberals" and "we feminists" (e.g., Kymlicka 1989, 66). It seems reasonable to argue that if we are inclined to identify with two apparently conflicting groups, we must either choose one over the other or find a way to conceptually unite them within our individual identity (e.g., by justifying parts of both of them in light of our individual life choices). The latter might develop into identifying with a third "we" that unites parts of both stances (e.g., "we progressive Muslims", cf. *ibid.*).
What can be drawn from this specific example Rorty offers is the conclusion that the identification with a "we" may happen on at least two levels, both of which are based on the idea of commonality: (1) one that might emerge from rather fixed social structures or organizations (such as nations, religions, or communities); (2) another one that is based on a common cause or belief.

J. Puget, for instance, supports this stance with his assumption that social groups ("we"s) belong to "two different orders" (Puget 2006, 110). The first refers to organized closed structures that define fixed places, which are closed and pre-established structures (e.g., state or social institutions) and present an interior-exterior border. The second depends on "the emergence of a problem". For Puget it is the second order that is specifically founded on a "feeling of solidarity" (*ivi*, 115 - 116). If Puget is right, we may talk about the creation (and increase) of solidarity only when we refer to a "we" that transcends the (contingent) previously established "we"s we are born into. However, if we accept that solidarity is grounded in a sense of commonality, compassion and/or, arguably, cooperation, there is no reason to believe that the idea of solidarity cannot be conceptualized within a first-order "we". Solidarity towards one's compatriots, for instance, may, however, fade or decrease if one more strongly identifies with a different "we" (e.g., a group that emerged based on a certain cause).

Common causes and identities are again linked to common language games (cf. chapter 2). When in 2020, for example, the German political party *AfD* or the Italian *Lega* showed their support[199] for then-US-American president D. Trump and his policies to "get rid of illegal immigrants" they expressed what we may describe as a solidarity towards the policies of a nation-state different from their own. These policies were not advantageous for the people of their own nations. They rather supported what, in a certain light, appeared to be one common cause among political right-wing movements all over the globe. They further developed (despite using different languages) similar language games in regard to both the tone and the content of their public communications (e.g., promoting, among other things, security, strength, tradition, and national identity). In this specific example, the first order of identification (the own nation-state) was not entirely abandoned for a second-order "we" (the common cause). The latter was rather combined with what was identified by them as the former.[200]

Another level of identification is based on *common experience*. A compelling notion is that of "I know what it is like" (Geras 1995, 80; *TP* 185). Even if two parties do not belong to the same group nor support each other's major causes, they may still feel solidarity towards each other when identifying with certain experience, such as poverty, fear, disappointment, pain, humiliation et cetera.

For Rorty, the recognition of the common capability of feeling pain and humiliation is a notion that can potentially be extended to all humanity (and, in the case of pain: potentially to all sentient beings). A recognition of pain – which includes humiliation as a specific kind of psychological

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[199] Cf. e.g., www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/04/27/news/salvini_su_trump_lui_e_come_me_non_e_razzista_lo_aiuto_con_putin_-138556869/; www.jungewelt.de/loginFailed.php?ref=/artikel/359839.verbot-antifaschistischer-gruppen-trump-dreht-frei-afd-applaudiert.html.

[200] D. Chong and R. Rogers, in this regard, further distinguish between "identification" and "consciousness". The first one refers to an individual's sense of belonging, while the second one combines this basic in-group identification with a set of ideas about the group's status and strategies for improving it (Chong and Rogers 2005, 350). They call consciousness-raising the diffusion of an ideology to offer prescriptive solutions and encourage group members to act in solidarity to achieve common goals (ivi, 367). In their view, solidarity consists of both group identification as well as interpretative and group-based ideologies.

pain – for him is, therefore, a notion on which an ever-larger expansion of a sense of "we" can be based. This means that a recognition of pain in the other may provoke not only compassion (moral concern) but also a possible identification with the other, i.e., the recognition of a certain commonality (i.e., the ability to feel pain). The latter may then ground a new – enlarged – conception of one particular "we" of the subject, which translates into granting the other moral status.

An identification with one other, based on the common capacity to feel pain, is justified based on the assumption that every human being has experienced some sort of pain. This does not imply that all kinds of pain are comparable, but rather that the mere concept (of the experience) of pain can be understood by potentially any human being. A recognition of a common pain does, therefore, not necessarily require the subject first recognize a "we" based on a common nationality, religion or even political cause. However, the subject must recognize that they share certain (human or sentient) traits, which allow them both to experience pain or humiliation or both. A "we" based on the recognition of pain (including humiliation) is hence potentially universal, as it grounds in the recognition of a capacity inherent in (presumably) all human beings.

5.2.4 The universal "we" and the notion of human

I infer that Rorty's arguments imply that rather than starting from a fixed notion of what the essence of human is, in a world without metaphysical reassurances, there can still be hope for social actors to eventually recognize a (human) commonality based on the recognition that certain other people can feel pain too.

I argue, however, that in order to recognize pain in others (and hence potentially extend their moral concern to them if they were not already morally concerned previously), social actors must already possess a concept of "human" and acknowledge that the latter implies being capable of feeling pain.

Take one of Rorty's favourite examples in literature – about which he presumes that it has contributed (and may still contribute) to moral progress – *Uncle Tom's cabin*. It seems to me that it is indeed not the mere description of pain (and humiliation) that makes the reader identify with

the protagonist. Rather – if anything – the reader identifies with him on a broader level which then supports the acknowledgement of his pain. I would argue indeed that emotional involvement is generally based on a subject's recognition that a certain pain (of an "other") is similar to the pain the subject themself would experience were they in a comparable situation. In fact, to witness a dying insect struggling, for instance, does generally not lead to an identification (of pain) with the insect. I argue, hence, that it is generally the other way around, compared to what Rorty seems to suggest: a recognition of a sufficient number of similarities with an "other" is generally a condition for a potential feeling of compassion for the other's pain.

To identify with a character such as Uncle Tom implies, at least in part, that the reader imagines how much they themself would have suffered had they been in his situation. Putting oneself in someone else's shoes (cf. also pp. 144-145) requires the faculty to imagine that one could have ended up in another person's position had the historical, cultural and personal circumstances been different. (How would I have handled all this pain and humiliation? How much would I have suffered?). It seems to me, indeed, that the level of moral concern is, to a significant extent, dependent on the *degree* of identification with the other (here, as a human being).

This argument may become more evident when one considers the effects processes of dehumanization[201] had (and still have) on how some

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[201] When (groups of) people are dehumanized, they are typically described (and, consequentially, perceived and/or conceptualized) as less than human or not human (see above) and thus deprived of an important *degree* of their moral status. In fact, Smith argues that dehumanization is not (necessarily) based on differences but that it rather "invent[s] differences" to support certain agendas and political projects (Smith 2020, 90). For him (as I laid out above), dehumanization always follows the desire to harm others (for whatever reason that may be) rather than the other way around. I argued above that those two notions are rather interlinked. Smith further claims that depriving someone of their humanness (by, e.g., redescribing them as an animal) is not the whole story, as regarding a being as an animal is not enough to make you want to harm it. (E.g., in my words [see above]: a subject recognizing an insect as an insect does not necessarily lead to the wish to harm it. This rather happens when one is, in some way, threatened – or at least annoyed – by the insect.) However, this assertion obscures a series of arguable issues: (1) as much as the other way around when non-human animals are "humanized" (i.e., I refer to an elevation of non-human animals to "our kind" – as it sometimes, arguably, happens with pets, when people decide that they are their family members), and their moral status is thus enhanced; by depriving human beings of their human status, indeed one deprives them of an important *degree* of their moral status. (2) Smith is right to claim that an exclusion from the universe of

subjects (have) conceptualized the pain of others throughout history (cf. Smith, 2020). Witnessing the pain (and potential humiliation) of slaves, I would argue, did not make slaveowners more sympathetic to them. The same argument applies to the processes of dehumanization undertaken by the Nazi regime (cf. Steizinger 2018), which socially justified the suffering of Jews and precluded their supporters from developing a feeling of compassion. When Rorty hence says that "we should stay on the lookout for marginalized people — people whom we still instinctively think of as 'they' rather than 'us' and try to notice our similarities with them", it requires, I argue, having at least an underlying notion of our common humanity.

Geras (Geras 1995, 34) quotes a story told by S. Podgorska, in which one boy hits another boy while telling him: "You are a Jew!". A worker, who sees the scene explains to the boy, "he is just a boy like you". The boy is persuaded by this argument, as he recognizes the shared notion of being a boy. With this story, Podgorska voices the concern that we need to "teach people humanity".

The notion of the "boy" (which the boy recognizes in both himself and the other) refers to a narrower commonality compared to humankind, and hence if Rorty is right, it might have been more forceful than the assertion "he is just another human". However, it still indicates that, by referring to a broader commonality, the boy was persuaded to overcome a narrower difference (i.e., one being a Jew). One may argue, of course, that in the boy's understanding, the notion of "being a boy" was quite specific to his own reality, not so broad at all, and maybe even narrower, less abstract and hence more forceful than the notion of the "Jew". Even if this is accurate, it still has to be granted that "being a boy" is a relatively broad notion with which the boy apparently could identify more strongly. The "we boys" was stronger than the "we (non-Jews)" versus "them, Jews".

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moral obligation (or, paraphrased, circle of moral concern) does not necessarily lead to subjects harming the excluded. However, to exclude them from the circle – i.e., to push them towards the outer end (and eventually out of) the circle – makes harming them more legitimate than if they were conceptually (or perceptually) closer to us (the centre of the circle). In fact, other than in the case with the insect: while certain harm may be inflicted upon other humans (or certain non-human animals) only if the subject is (seriously) *threatened*, the insect may be harmed (fatally) even if the subject is simply *annoyed* by its existence.

If we wanted the notion of the "human" to have a similar force over other discriminating notions, and if our linguistic practices have indeed the impact on the perception of our common notions as discussed in chapter 2, then, I argue, we need to work on enhancing and reinforcing the notion of *human* within our linguistic practices.[202] In this view, for Rorty to discredit the idea of a "common humanity" (*CIS*, 189) or of "a special [human] ingredient" might go against his own project to enhance a greater solidarity.

Rorty would indeed do better to pick up the notion he ascribes to Dewey and redescribe human nature (pragmatically) as something *open*. This would mean – in the matter of conceptualizing a universally human "we" – *not* to debunk questions such as "what is a human being?" (as Rorty suggests). It rather means to give value to this question within the conversation (without a retrieval of essentialism[203]). It means to inquire into this question precisely within both the free and open, (epistemic,) and inclusive conversation he advocates (cf. chapter 3). It means to be responsive to *diversity*, within this conversation, about what being human means. It implies, thus, that by grounding the expanding circle of moral concern in the recognition of a commonality ("we"), it must not mean grounding it in the idea of an approach towards an absolute sameness (cf. Smyth 2020), but rather that this notion of commonality implies an infinity of diverse traits. It comprehends recognizing *diversity*, *variations* and *change as part of the concept of human* (and of human nature and common humanity) rather than a reason to grant one group of human beings a larger degree of humanness (or personhood) than the other.

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[202] Though I agree with D. L. Smith that pointing out human traits may not be *sufficient* to oppose the motivated states of mind that ground processes of dehumanization (cf. Smith 2020, 89), I still argue that the notion is *necessary* to work against the same processes.

[203] In fact, to strengthen the notion of the human, here, must not mean claiming an essential and inherent foundation of the notion but rather understanding it as a "contested and unstable category" (Smith 2020, 114) and thus comprehending all the dangers (from a moral point of view) linked to the very instability.

5.2.5 The expanding circle of solidarity: solidarity as both a mechanism and end of moral progress

Rorty is indeed close to the Singerian framework of the expanding circle, as he implies that natural-evolutionary based moral concern (and status), must be (deliberately) expanded: "we should try to keep going" (*CIS*, 196). By grounding it in the notion of solidarity, he not only implies an expansion of *compassion* (responsiveness and sentiments) to increasingly more people, but he moreover emphasizes an expanding *commonality* and *possible cooperation* (on goals and hopes that are based on that commonality).

Within the framework of the *conversation* (cf. chapter 3), this not only means expanding our moral inquiries to the concerns of increasingly more stakeholders (expansion$_1$) but make efforts to possibly make them (equal) conversation partners (expansion$_2$), who may make efforts of further processes of inclusion themselves. More than expanded moral concern from the more powerful (within the conversation) towards the less powerful, an effort to enhance a "we" (as Rorty has in mind) comprehends a *redistribution* of the power (including semantic authority), as it creates images of "*common* hopes and goals" (implied and translated in(to) social ties), i.e., a synthesis between self-interest and moral concern for others. It implies the creation of a *culture* of solidarity,[204] which is favourable for the creation of further inclusion, inclusiveness and inclusive-oriented thinking, both within social belief, practices and institutions.

Solidarity, as I have anticipated, is further linked to the notions of responsibility (Principe 2000, 139) and moral obligation or duty. Solidarity generates acts of taking responsibility (*ivi*, 142). This would mean that we feel responsible towards those with whom we feel in solidarity. From this would further emerge the sense of a moral duty if

[204] Rorty does not use the notion of a "culture of solidarity" explicitly (which, for him, seems to be implied in the notion of an ideal liberal society). I use this term inspired by his notion of "human rights culture", which he borrows from E. Rabossi (*TP*, 170). The idea behind the notion of *culture*, here (cf. also section 3.3.3.2), is that it does not require "foundationalism" to justify the implementation of human rights but that an increase in human responsiveness towards the suffering of others (which again is implied in his understanding of solidarity) moves the (social) world into a direction, in which the implementation of human rights becomes (socially or culturally) fundamental.

we assume that the notion of responsibility implies, among other things, a rational element of duty and obligation (Jonas 1984, 163). By extending the sense of solidarity to a larger and larger group, we would consequently and implicitly extend our sense of responsibility and moral obligation (or moral concern).

Moral obligations are indeed relative to the groups to which one belongs, assuming that (as Rorty does) we grant that (1) ideas of moral obligation (i.e., what one ought to do) emerge from specific group-related contingencies and (2) that one's moral concern is restricted to particular groups (be they narrower or broader) as compared to other groups. As the groups (i.e., "we"s) to which one belongs may conflict, so do moral obligations (cf. *CIS*, 197).

Rorty uses both these assumptions to defend his view, according to which there are no universal moral obligations. Except when he indeed refers to one universal moral obligation ("the only moral obligation"), which he describes as "helping one another satisfy our desires, thus achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness" (*EFT*, 8).[205]

If moral progress is hence explicated by increasing solidarity – by expanding our sense of the "we" and therefore expanding our moral concern – it further means expanding this moral obligation (i.e., the obligation to achieve the greatest possible amount of happiness) towards increasingly more people and groups. Moral progress, therefore, further must mean extending this moral obligation to a larger and larger group. In this view, both solidarity and moral obligation are grounded in commonality (or the "we") and go side by side. It is not clear how this amounts to conflicting groups which cannot be unified in a third inclusive group, as suggested above. In the above example of "we progressive Muslims", the resulting third group may even be smaller than the original two.

We might furthermore describe the matter of the one moral obligation as follows: if it is our duty to help one another satisfy our needs and desires, and if solidarity implies subjects being invested in each other's goals (particularly when they are vulnerable and on the line), then the

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[205] As argued, this stance on moral duty is restricted as it explicitly extends solely to human beings. However, I suggested that this is to be understood as a fundamental step of (of the ladder) – particularly, in support of expansion$_2$ – towards possibly further expansions (expansion$_1$) of the circle of moral concern.

increase and/or expansion of solidarity may as well be described as a moral duty.

Solidarity, in Rorty's framework, can hence be understood as both an end and as a mechanism of moral progress: on the one hand (1), the assertion "moral progress is in the direction of a greater solidarity" hence implies that solidarity is an end of moral progress. Moral progress is *towards* a greater solidarity. Therefore, to assess that there has been a greater solidarity is to assess that there has been moral progress.

On the other hand (2), if a greater (feeling of) solidarity accommodates a greater inclusiveness (see above) or accommodates, specifically, an expansion of moral concern and status, solidarity may further be understood as a mechanism of moral progress. Creating a greater solidarity hence means to creating a mechanism or condition (cf. section 1.4) favourable for moral progress. The notion extends further if (cf. chapter 3) inclusion or the expansion of moral concern are not merely understood as moral ends in themselves but if they are collaterally comprehended as a function to *create moral knowledge*.

I argued in chapter 3 (following claims in chapter 1) that moral progress, in Rorty, as in pragmatism in general, may indeed be understood as an increase in moral knowledge if moral knowledge is conceptualized within a both antirealist and anti-subjectivist framework: moral knowledge comes at the end of a moral inquiry (in Rorty and Kitcher generally "conversation") which, rather than being justified by a non-human entity, is concerned with having an insight into the needs (and possible happiness) of ideally all possible stakeholders concerned by moral practices and institutions (comprehending, not at last, future generations). For K. B. Wray (Wray 1999, 273) solidarity is a "*precondition* [m.e.] for meaningful discourse".[206] To create solidarity hence functions as to accommodate a greater inclusiveness (i.e., no at last, increased free, open, epistemic, and inclusive conversations), and consequently a greater moral knowledge – granted that moral knowledge is understood in pragmatist terms (cf. chapter 3).

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[206] In Wray's view, solidarity is not just something we can pursue (as an end), but rather it is a consequence of a way of life linked to the development of shared norms, practices, and language games within a community (a "we").

5.3 Creating and expanding solidarity: the role of language

To say that solidarity is made rather than found (*CIS*, 195), in Rorty arguably implies the prescriptive notion that, rather than searching for an all-comprehensive *solidarité de fait* in the world and among human beings, social actors must aim to deliberately extend their restricted senses of solidarity, from the bottom up, towards increasingly more people or groups (*solidarité devoir*). As argued above, granted that solidarity is indeed a feeling or a sense, and therefore not (entirely) deliberate, it means first and foremost to create *conditions* favourable for the enhancement of solidarity. If we accept that solidarity is based on feelings of commonality and compassion, it means that to create solidarity, one must create conditions that are favourable for the enhancement of those two grounding notions. For these deliberate efforts, I have been claiming, the image (*Bild*) of an all-comprehensive human solidarity is useful as an inspiration and (utopian) point of orientation.

5.3.1 On sentiment and rationality

Rorty repeatedly states that one way to create and expand human solidarity is to increase people's responsiveness to increasingly more people's needs and their pain (cf. *PSH*, 81; *CIS*, 192), i.e., to increase *compassion* – one of the grounding notions of solidarity.

Rorty aligns this thought with what Baier calls "progress of sentiments" (*TP*, 181), which, I claim, may be understood as both a condition of moral progress and as a moral progress in itself. A progress of sentiments can be obtained through "sentimental education", which aims to increase the "ability to see the similarities between ourselves and people very unlike us" (*ibid.*).

In order to accept Baier's account, Rorty argues, we must overcome our sense that sentiment is too weak a force and that something stronger is required. It means overcoming the idea that reason is "stronger" than sentiment. Baier, so Rorty claims, "would like us to get rid of both the Platonic idea that we have a true self and the Kantian idea that it is

rational to be moral" (*ibid.*). In support of this position, Rorty argues that (creating) "moral progress is not a matter of an increase of rationality [... but rather] a matter of increasing sensitivity" (*PSH*, 81). According to this angle, it can be assumed that a feeling of compassion can consequentially lead to a recognition of commonality – the feeling of "we", which grounds solidarity together with feelings of compassion. To create solidarity, therefore, one may first and foremost concentrate on the enhancement of compassion and sentiment.

This opposes what I have argued above when I claimed that it is rather the other way around: i.e., in order to feel compassion, one must first recognize a certain kind of commonality – at least to some degree.
We might at least assume that granted that solidarity indeed grounds in both notions of commonality and compassion, they are both intertwined and dependent on each other.

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, it is one of Rorty's most consistent stances to oppose the rationalist (Kantian) tradition within his account. If N. Smyth was right to claim that the expanding-circle line of thought is linked to the rationalist tradition (cf. Smyth 2020, 25), Rorty would be indeed a particular representative (cf. also *TP*, 172; *TP* 185). For Rorty, if there is no (metaphysical) core self that can be (rationally) recognized, what remains is to understand commonality based on sentiment (compassion), which grounds the feeling of solidarity.[207] An increase of sentiment or compassion means indeed, first and foremost, a responsiveness towards (other people's) pain and feeling of humiliation.[208]

Rorty was interested in the concept of pain as early as in *PMN*, where he explores what he later explicitly calls its "nonlinguistic" character (*CIS*, 94). He defends this notion by explaining that it is not language and cultural environment that have created the awareness of pain, but

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[207] As I discussed in chapter 3, Rorty is generally aware of the role sentiment plays within moral belief, reasoning, and practices. For this reason, he advocated putting (more) emphasis on "persuasion" rather than on "argument" within the matter of changing moral beliefs and practices (within the conversation). For the same reason, Rorty may find it more useful to generally advocate a lookout for other people's pain rather than an effort to conceptualize others as fellow human beings.
[208] Rorty considers "humiliation" a particular sort of pain, which humans (as compared to non-human animals and sentient beings) can experience. As argued above, at least with this notion, Rorty ascribes a "special ingredient" to human beings (and, I claim, to humans' nature), even if elsewhere he argues otherwise (cf. *TP*, 174).

that pain is rather something that we share with "nonlanguage-using beasts" (*ibid.*). He further explains that even a child that does not speak yet knows what pain is (*PMN*, 127). Pain, in this view, comes hence before language (cf. also chapter 2).

There is not enough space in this thesis to explore the extent of Rorty's notion of pain, which reaches from his early critique of analytical philosophy to his political thought. In light of the specific debate about moral progress and the creation of solidarity, it is, however, essential to point out a few aspects of Rorty's stance.

In his view, given that pain is something independent from the language people speak but rather reunites them on an arguably universal level, the most useful way to make a subject aware of other people's pain is to put into circulation (i.e., into the "conversation") detailed empirical descriptions about *varieties* of pain and humiliation (*CIS*, 192). It is hence not about arguing that everyone feels pain, nor about conceptualizing pain, but about describing how different kinds of pain feel to different people. It is about creating a knowledge of the pain of others that is exclusively justified by the descriptions people make of their own pain, hence by the individual confirmation of an idiosyncratic painful sentiment itself. As pointed out before, novels play an important role in this account of Rorty's. Yet, he further confirms that any kind of particular story, including, e.g., work by journalists, within the conversation, potentially contributes to this progress of sentiments, i.e., the expansion and increase of compassion.

Rorty claims that if we hear "sad, sentimental stories" (cf. *TP*, 185), we might identify with the emotions transmitted in that story ("this is what it is like to be in her situation", cf. *ibid.*), and hence create a basic sense of commonality. We hence create a ground for solidarity.

However, as I have claimed above when referring to the example of *Uncle Tom's cabin*, in order to be responsive to the pain the protagonist lives through, a subject must first have a certain understanding of how their pain relates to the protagonist's pain. They must recognize their own idea of pain in the pain they perceive in the other. I argued that there must indeed be, to a certain *degree*, an identification with the protagonist of the story, i.e., a basic idea of commonality (a common nature, a common "ingredient").

One may agree with Rorty that there is no reason to believe that rationalization is a necessary condition for a subject to recognize a basic commonality: as even primitive animals recognize and organize with members of their species, such recognition may play out on a much more instinctive level.

However, I would argue that a certain degree of rationalization of one's basic commonality with others is inevitable in the case of human beings if we consider that humans are, in principle, reasoning beings. I would further argue that, assuming that Rorty is right to claim that given cultural conditions and descriptions are largely responsible for whom we consider being part of the immediate or given "we", in order to push through those limits and conceptually include others into the "we", we will have to rely, at least to a certain degree (cf. chapter 2), on our rational capacities to do so. The assertion "he is just a boy like you" gave the boy in Podgorska's example reason to reconsider.

As much as he explicitly opposes the "rationalist tradition", Rorty does not get around the notion of rationality. He hence (re-)describes the notion of rationality in his own terms by distinguishing three different concepts (cf. *TP*, 186ff) in the very context of his explicit discussion of moral progress:

He defines (1) "rationality_1" as the ability to cope with the environment by adjusting one's reactions to environmental stimuli in complex and delicate ways. For Rorty, this rationality, which increases with the capacity to speak a language and create new technology, is ethically neutral.

(2) "Rationality_2" denotes "an extra ingredient that human beings have, and brutes do not". An appeal to this rationality establishes an evaluative hierarchy rather than simply adjusting means to "taken-for-granted ends".

He finally aligns (3) "rationality_3" with the notion of tolerance and with a willingness to alter one's own habits to reshape oneself into a different sort of person. He links this rationality further with a reliance on persuasion rather than force, with talking things over rather than fighting, and with letting others live their lives, i.e., with finding new peaceful ways of shared lives.

What Rorty criticizes about the single rationality term of the "western [Kantian] intellectual tradition" is that within it, those three notions have been conceptualized as one. He criticizes that the single concept suggests that the cleverer humans get by adapting to their circumstances, the more tolerant (more moral) they become (cf. *TP*, 187). For Rorty, what matters, in the moral and ethical sphere is the relation between rationality_1 and rationality_3. He is far less interested in the notion of rationality_2.

Within the expanding-circle framework, as outlined in chapter 1, this division by Rorty might be laid out as follows: rationality_1 is the human capacity to deal with a contingent environment, supported by the language they "have programmed themselves" with (cf. also chapter 2). Rationality_3 is the capacity to comprehend the (social) advantages of moving into a certain direction morally – i.e., a direction that might imply a greater inclusiveness (cf. chapter 1). This, however, would confirm that even in the very Rortyan framework, the expansion of the circle (of solidarity) is not exclusively left to sentiment but also grounds in a rationality-ingredient of human beings, even if it is redescribed in aspired anti-Kantian terms.

5.3.2 On linguistic-cultural boundaries and ethnocentricity

Rorty argues elsewhere that rationality means "simply [being] able to use a language" (*PSH*, 86). The ability to speak a language enables subjects to discuss, with others, beliefs, desires, moral issues, et cetera, i.e., engage in moral reasoning. Yet people speak particular languages, which restricts their engagement to particular sorts of people (*CIS*, 177).

This underlines, once again, that – within the Rortyan stance – moral progress must occur locally (cf. chapter 1), and it refers to what Rorty calls his "ethnocentric" stance — a choice of term I find rather unfortunate.

While the term *ethnos* may include the notion of a common language and common customs, it also points to the particular notion of "race" and etymologically to nation. Moreover, ethnocentrism is often understood as implying the superiority of one's own ethnic group or culture (cf. Harding 1992, 446). Yet, Rorty wants to refer to any group

or community whose members share a common moral vocabulary (i.e., moral foundations and practices on which any moral development is based) and, to employ Sellars' term, "we-intentions". Calling those groups *ethne* implicitly restricts the group-defining commonalities to racial or national traits and possibly precludes the reader from imagining a pluralistic community. What makes this even more problematic is when he argues in the first person: he recommends that members of his very own "we" should be content with an ethnocentric approach (because what else can you do?). This might be confused with him suggesting that his moral reasoning is restricted to the "ethnos" of white US-Americans, rather than letting the reader understand that the group he refers to is open-ended, morality-system related and subject to constant change. A more compelling notion seems to me, for example, W. H. Sewell's "semiotic community" (Sewell 2005, 166).

When Rorty talks about "ethnos", he, therefore, talks about a group of people who "share enough of one's belief to make fruitful conversation possible" (*ORT*, 30). Those who are not part of a subject's ethnos may, for instance, not even recognize moral justifications as justifications. What Rorty aims at is the *expansion* of ethne. This means, in the matter of language, creating ways to communicate with others and build new grounds (invent and redescribe vocabulary), on which then to build *an ever more inclusive and fruitful conversation*. It means to create an "ever larger and more variegated ethnos" (*CIS*, 198). Needless to say, this expansion of the "ethnos" (which hence primarily concerns language and "whom we owe a [moral] justification") is analogous with the expansion of the more general "we" ("*de fait*").[209]

The notion of the expansion of the ethnos supports, once again, that the expansion of "we" must not be understood in mere terms of expanded sentiment and responsiveness but that it is also grounded in the expansion of language, which possibly enlarges the perceptual and conceptual space, and increases the possibilities to morally reason.

When it comes to the willingness to extend moral status to a larger group of people, so Rorty sustains, there is not much more that we can do other than *depart from where we are*. This is well illustrated in the specific notion of the expansion of the "ethnos", which is the expansion of a

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[209] I argued above that *solidarité de fait* is the foundation of a *solidarité devoir*. Or, with Singer: the expansion of our moral reasoning and the extension of our moral concern to a larger and larger group of people is *based* on a *preliminary* kin or in-group altruism.

specific "we" (*de fait*), and hence implies the ambition to find new and more inclusive moral aspects and answers to moral problems (and hence "progress" morally). In Rorty's words: "all we can do is work with the final vocabulary we have while keeping our ears open for hints about how it might be expanded or revised". (*CIS*, 197).

In my view, the conceptual-terminological difference between the expansion of the (more general) "we" and that of the "ethnos" is the following: it makes sense to limit the expansion of the "ethnos" to a bottom-up process and admit that there are limits to an ethnos, understood as a group that disposes of the same moral vocabulary (i.e. shares moral beliefs, practices and institutions, and justify them accordingly). It is difficult to imagine that the properties I just ascribed to the notion of the "ethos" can apply (without exceptions) to all humanity. It would be nonsensical to pretend that we must, at all costs, work towards a scenario in which all humans use the same (or similar) tools to justify moral beliefs and practices, as this would presume that everyone speaks the same (or similar) languages and is hence capable of understanding every one (or great part of) each other's points of view – considering the historically and culturally contingent conditions different people live in and the contingent linguistic tools they must develop to cope with those conditions (cf. chapter 2). It is rather more fruitful to be content with a bottom-up construction that *expands* conversations among groups and "ethne" and hence prudently pushes through cultural and conceptual limits by creating (and agreeing on) new conversational bases and links. Expanding the ethnos, therefore means finding new ways to understand each other's moral justifications, i.e., creating new bases for the conversation about "what to do". This then might lead to the creation of new we-intentions and new "we"s.

Within this process, on the other hand (cf. chapter 4), it is not only fruitful but advantageous to admit the possibility of an ideal all-inclusive, *global "we"* towards which to aspire. It becomes particularly important in a *global society*, where human beings live in interdependent social networks that are supranational (Korab-Karpowicz 2009, 306). Global society is "an expression of growing global consciousness [that] can replace neither family nor nation, but [...] adds a new element to them, namely humanitarian fellowship and responsibility" (*ivi*, 312).

Expanding the "we" specifically, on the other hand, is primarily a matter of enlarging both the conceptual and the perceptual space of what the

"we" is, i.e., whom it includes. Enlarging the conceptual space has to do, among other things, with reasoning and finding new justifications of why a certain other should be included or is actually part of a subject's "we". Both enlarging the conceptual and, further, the perceptual space may be pursued through what Rorty calls "redescriptions", as largely argued in chapter 2: it can be assumed, so I discussed, that a term used to describe a certain phenomenon or object, has an impact on how the latter is perceived.

5.3.3 Enhancing solidarity. "Humanization": reinforcing the notions of human and common humanity

Geras asserts that Rorty's stance claims "human solidarity – but no common humanity" and that he hence takes away what might ground not only the idea of human solidarity but further humanism and human rights (Geras 1995, 71 - 72). However, as I have insinuated, Rorty does not abandon the notion entirely, even though some of his explicit assertions may indeed suggest otherwise (cf. *CIS*, 189). For once (similar to his attitude concerning the idea of what I called absolute solidarity within his liberal utopia), Rorty recognizes the *inspirational value* of notions such as "humanity": "such notions have kept the way open for political and cultural change by providing a fuzzy but inspiring focus imaginarius" (*CIS*, 195). Here, it remains questionable, however (cf. also chapter 4), how a universal concept of humanity could be an inspiration (and hence be taken seriously enough) without defending an underlying common humanity in actuality. It seems to me that, pragmatically, it would be indeed useful to insist on a universal (yet admittedly anti-essentialist) notion of humanity in order to support both the idea and the goal of a human solidarity (i.e., an all-comprehensive *solidarité devoir*). My stance, as insinuated, is that even if we admit that what human is has changed throughout history and evolution, it does not preclude agents from promoting a strong and universal conception (and perception) of the notions of human and human nature. Even granting Rorty that there is no universal notion of human nature "out there" to be *found* does not preclude social actors from exploring and defending such notions. It does not preclude them – in linguistic pragmatist terms – from *agreeing* on what those notions mean (and can mean).

It is indeed not only the insights into evolutionary theory, but moreover, those into linguistics, description-dependence and constructivism (cf. chapter 2), that make Rorty reject the notion of (a fixed and universal) human nature: what being human *means* depends on how we describe it, and that has changed throughout history (cf., e.g., *CIS*, 189). There is no absolute notion about human nature to be "found" because "human" – conceptually – can mean many things. Historically, certain groups were (or have been), at times, excluded from the idea of what could be called a full humanness:[210] e.g., slaves, women, and children.

However, I argue, precisely because in contingent historical contexts, certain groups of people have been excluded from what "human" means, we need to make an effort to create a robust, inclusive notion of "human" and consequently of "common humanity", which can stand the ground – accompanying a resisting and persisting solidarity (*de fait*) – "when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behaviour are collapsing" (cf. *CIS* 189).

When referring to the enlargement of the conceptual and perceptual space, here, the *conceptual space* concerning the notion of human involves moral reasoning, descriptions and justifications of/about what "human" is. It involves, first and foremost, what Rorty has synthesized within his notion of conversation (cf. chapter 3), i.e., the historically contingent social-linguistic practice, where concepts are made, transformed and justified. It is in this conversation where agents decide what it means to be a human being; who counts as a (full or good) human being; whether women, children or people from certain groups or communities shall be granted full "humanness", i.e., whether they are "rational enough", "mature enough", "moral enough".

Rorty's doubt (cf. also above) is that arguing for someone's humanness within the conversation is not always strong enough to change one's moral consideration (cf. Geras 1995, 97). This might, e.g., be the case, when there are, for instance, stronger ongoing dehumanizing practices. Yet, precisely because of the power dehumanizing practices have (as pointed out above), I agree with Geras that "the notion of '(fellow) human being' […] is for human beings an extremely powerful mode of

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[210] This notion can be aligned with Rorty's notion of *personhood*, which he describes as a matter of *degree*, something that "slaves typically have less than their masters" (*TP*, 219).

moral inclusion" (*ibid.*), and hence, from a pragmatist point of view, should not be met with too much scepticism.

The *perceptual space*, as argued in chapter 2, is more subtle, as it is more immediate and previous to moral reasoning. If Rorty's premises are accurate, our vocabulary, i.e., how we name or denominate something, has an impact on how this something is perceived. Accordingly, if we describe this something differently, our perception of it — over time and generations — might change. If this is accurate, then giving, e.g., two different names to two similar (or interchangeable) objects reinforces the (perceived) difference between them and might change how we value one compared to the other. (See section 2.3.3, where I compared occurring tendencies in English-speaking compared to German-speaking circles when it comes to the matter of gender representation in public conversation and discourse). Similarly, this must mean that by giving the same name to two similar (or interchangeable objects), we underline their interchangeability.

I shall consider the following assertion(s) by Rorty:

> [1] Women, men used to say, are permanently childlike; that is why it is appropriate to spend no money on their education and to refuse them access to power. [2] When it comes to women, however, there are simpler ways of excluding them from true humanity: for example, using "man" as a synonym of "human being" […] (*TP*, 169).

The first part [1] refers to the conceptual space, as it has to do with social reasoning and/or argument about a certain group of people and their role in society (made by the more powerful interlocutors of the public conversation). The second part [2] refers to an outline of the perceptual space: throughout intellectual history, the concept of man was being aligned with that of human being while women were referred to, and consequently (at least in part) perceived, as a sort of sub-category. Similarly, as discussed in chapter 2, when women were starting to occupy positions in society previously limited to men, e.g., when women were granted to become doctors of medicine, terms (e.g. "doctress") were introduced, which emphasized their diverse (or inferior) status (cf. Kaiser 1984, 231), which made them perceived as inferior. I argued that if language has an impact on how we perceive the

world, and if equality (or equal value) is a goal (cf. *CIS*, 87), then we should move in the direction of less discriminating language practices.[211] In terms of the creation, enhancement or increase of solidarity, this is important to comprehend in regard to the creation of a "we". If we assume that a "we"-awareness supports feelings of compassion, and therefore solidarity – as much as (as Rorty claims) responsiveness to (nonlinguistic) pain creates a "we"-awareness, and therefore solidarity – we must comprehend how language determines the space for the perception and conception of different "we"s.

In light of an ideal creation (or enhancement) of a universal human solidarity, the effort must be to linguistically enlarge the spaces (cf. chapter 2) in a way that is supportive of the notion of "human" and hence "human fellowship". Korab-Karpowicz describes the latter as "a unity that comes out of *diversity* [m.e.]" (Korab-Karpowicz 2009, 308).

Indeed, putting the focus on the recognition of commonality, I argue, does not necessarily imply, as N. Smyth claimed (cf. chapter 1, pp. 28-29), not taking into account internal diversities. Reinforcing the notion of a common humanness rather implies insisting on those differences and *variations* (cf. chapter 4, pp. 154ff) and insisting that they are indeed part of the human condition.

On a conversational-argumentative level, instead of making an effort to ascribe certain traits to certain categories of people, this would mean insisting that humans can be different things – that they behave and socially (as well as biologically) develop in an infinite number of ways, independently of their gender, origin, sexual orientation et cetera.

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[211] By, e.g., granting all doctors (independent of their gender, ethnicity, origin, age et cetera) the same description (as done nowadays in English-speaking realms, yet not (yet) in outer languages), one would ascribe them a similar value and, help them be perceived similarly, despite all kinds of idiosyncratic differences, beyond gender. As discussed in chapter 2, redescriptions are not a sufficient condition for the perceptual space to change: in this specific case above, the image we have of medical doctors (how a doctor looks like) has to change alongside the linguistic description. This can happen, on the one hand, by educating more diverse people accordingly and allowing them to enter the workforce, and on the other hand, by representing a greater diversity of people who are doctors in the public sphere. The latter can happen, e.g., by asking doctors of different gender, age and ethnicity for expert opinions and public statements. In mainstream/pop culture, e.g., increasingly more diverse people (people belonging to minorities and under-represented groups) have been casted, in recent years, to represent doctors in television shows and motion pictures.

Instead of saying that there is no universal human nature, Rorty would do well to insist indeed that the constant development of what a human being is (independently of all the human sub-categories) is how human nature can be understood (pragmatically, without a retrieval of essentialism). Admitting that the human being is "in progress", I hence argue further, does not preclude one from defending a universal notion of the human being; it rather requires it.

Insisting on a common humanity or humanness must further not imply, as S. Sontag worries, that one would "take a 'we' for granted" (Sontag 2003, 7). Sontag argues that one can never really understand what the other has gone through, i.e., what the pain of others really means. For Sontag, this requires an exercise of empathy and imagination, which brings me back to Rorty's insistence on – following Baier – sentimental education and, specifically, on the inclusion of more voices and human stories in the conversation. Rorty's hope is that hearing more engaging stories about idiosyncratic pain and humiliation would make people recognize that there is something that unites humans — the faculty to feel pain and humiliation indeed — and that based on this recognition, they would develop an enlarged and ethically fundamental sense of the "we". It is the insistence on the idiosyncratic character of pain and humiliation, as Rorty claims – i.e., on their *diverse* manifestations in *diverse* people – that can support the (creation) of a "we" based on a sense of the variations and diversifications it implies. To be aware of the *pluralistic character* of a *strong "we"* may hence be supportive of not taking the "we" for granted, i.e., of constantly making an effort to comprehend the idiosyncratic needs, desires and pain manifestations among the members of a "we".

Considering both the conceptual and the perceptual levels, we may talk about a "humanization" of language games. This notion opposes that of "dehumanization" (see above) and refers to a social practice that has the goal of strengthening an increasingly inclusive notion of the human being and of the range of individual diversities it implies.

For Wilson (cf. pp. 45-46 and 188-189), dehumanizing practices fall under what she called moral disengagement (cf. Wilson 2019, 43), i.e., deviations from a "normal" baseline morality. She called "moral engagement", on the other hand, not the return from those deviations to normal morality but rather an active process that extends the baseline

(*ibid.*). For Wilson, moral engagement (implying morally engaged actors) is the motor for moral progress.

If dehumanization falls under moral disengagement, we may consider "humanization" as possibly constitutive of moral engagement. According to Wilson (following A. Bandura), moral engagement implies "tak[ing] personal responsibility […]; remain[ing] sensitive to the suffering of others; and see human commonalities rather than distance themselves from others or divest them of human qualities" (*ibid.*; cf. Bandura 1999). She asserts that "all morally progressive change […] has involved first, redescription of disadvantaged or despised others […]".

In conclusion, (1) if what I called humanization of languages is supportive of the creation of a "we", (2) if an enlarged "we" implies the expansion of responsiveness (i.e., compassion) to more and more people; and (3) if indeed (human) solidarity grounds in the unity of both the notions of commonality and compassion, then humanizing language progresses may ultimately lead to the expansion or creation of solidarity. Yet, as much as I discussed that increasing solidarity is not a sole manifestation of moral progress (nor a sole mechanism), humanization is not the exclusive tool for creating solidarity. For instance, as Rorty stresses, sometimes – considering an "ethnocentric" expanding-circle-mechanism, which always starts from where one stands – the notion of the human may sometimes not be enough, or at least be weaker than narrower notions such as "[us] fellow Americans" (*CIS*, 191).

In regard to other linguistic practices – besides those concerning the creation of a "we" – a general public advocacy of the (hope for the) possibility of solidarity is further fundamental (both socially and politically) if we assume (cf. chapter 4) that a hope for a possible outcome is supportive for agents to be motivated to engage in practices to achieve that very outcome. For agents to act in light of the creation of solidarity, to be embraced by a culture that is not only favourable but hopeful of an ever-greater solidarity, seems vital. The creation of such a *culture* (see above), therefore, seems key. This implies advocating a greater solidarity as a central moral goal. This, again, may be achieved, amongst other things, through a variety of (experimental) language games and applications. For example, solidarity may be advocated (e.g., through political discourse) based on its functional value as something that holds a growing and expanding society together. Or it may be

advocated (e.g., within moral education) as a moral duty or responsibility (see above) and hence as a moral end in itself.

Even if we grant that language development is not a sufficient condition for the increase of solidarity, it is reasonable to assume (cf. chapter 2 and chapter 3) that "once we have programmed ourselves with a language", the latter is constitutive for a *solidarité devoir*, i.e., solidarity in moral terms – as both a mechanism for moral progress (in the large sense) and as a moral end.

5.4 Conclusion

> Moral development in the individual, and moral progress in the human species as a whole, is a matter of re-making human selves so as to enlarge the variety of the relationships which constitute those selves. The ideal limit of this process of enlargement is […] an ideal self to whom the hunger and suffering of any human being (and even, perhaps, that of any other animal) is intensely painful. (*PSH*, 79).

In chapter 1, I claimed that in Rorty (different to Kitcher or Williams), there is no neat difference between the moral and the ethical in terms of dividing the questions of "who to be" and "how to behave". In Rorty, the two are rather interwoven, and both directly concern the matter of moral progress, which he understands as a kind of expanding circle.

The Rortyan expanding circle is outlined pragmatically. I have argued, starting from chapter 1, that a pragmatist stance denotes that the expanding-circle framework is *one possible type* of moral progress, or rather: that expanding the circle is one compelling way to achieve moral progress. I have indeed argued that rather than asking, "is there a moral progress?" the pragmatist asks, "what kind of moral progress is there, and how can it be achieved?". This denotes, following both Peirce and Dewey (who both imply that for something to be meaningful, it must have practical bearings), that there is a focus on implementation, method and progressive action in pragmatist accounts. They further imply hopefulness, bottom-up constructions and problem-solving and often have naturalist grounds. The Rortyan expanding circle, I claimed,

(similar to the Singerian) has naturalist grounds and ultimately keeps expanding based on both human agency, reason and sentiment; i.e., further expansion ultimately becomes an actual "moral" issue.

I have asked whether *solidarity* is a compelling notion of understanding and in which to ground this pragmatist expanding circle; i.e., further, whether the goal of increased (human) solidarity is a compelling ground for one's moral action. I conclude that the notion of solidarity, as I have defined it (following Rorty's account and proponents of the contemporary debate), is indeed cogent for different reasons:

(1) Solidarity, conceptualized as *solidarité de fait* and *solidarité devoir*, fits into the expanding-circle-framework, as it may be justified on evolutionary-naturalist grounds (*de fait*) and ultimately understood as a *moral issue* – as something to be implemented and created by moral agents (*devoir*).

(2) Solidarity implies altruism yet exceeds it by *including both the self and the other* into the larger "we". Solidarity starts from where "we" are.

(3) Solidarity ideally conciliates and synthesizes a desire for self-realization with the concern for others. It hence implies one's own well-being. It has to be "understood as an engagement that is related not only to the other but to the preservation of [a] common form of life [*Sittlichkeit*]" (Jaeggi 2001, 295).

(4) Different from particularistic notions such as loyalty, solidarity can be conceptualized (at least ideally) as something universal, which may extend to all humankind. A *human* solidarity is hence a compelling *Bild*, in which to ground one's action in light of moral progress, i.e., in Rorty specifically, one's redescriptions.

(5) By grounding in both the notions of compassion, commonality and possibly consequential collaboration, an expansion of solidarity not only refers to moral concern (expressed in compassion or responsiveness towards the other and their pain or needs) but rather emphasizes the notion of the moral *status*. The other hence not only is the receiver of compassion but rather – through the recognition of commonality and possible cooperation – possibly becomes an (ideally) equal (conversation) *partner*. They *cease*, in fact, *to be "the other*" and are integrated into a new "we", through which they themself (may) become

the subject of expansion and inclusion and solidarity-*givers*. Expansion$_2$ then implies and leads to expansion$_1$.

(6) Other than a compelling end (*Bild*) of moral progress, solidarity can further be understood as a mechanism and pursued in this sense, for it accommodates *inclusion* and does not exclude a responsiveness to diverse human traits. It implies, in fact, not a convergence to *one* sameness but rather a greater responsiveness to idiosyncratic needs, hopes and suffering, implied in the greater (pluralistic) "we". As a mechanism for a greater inclusion (in the conversation), it can further lead to a greater moral knowledge, understood in pragmatist terms. This hence accommodates an understanding of moral progress as a greater (pragmatist) *moral knowledge*.

To defend moral progress on the ground of an increase in solidarity, in the linguistic pragmatist Rortyan framework, hence means that the possibility to expand solidarity justifies the real possibility of moral progress. To say that there has been an increase in solidarity does not mean that there has been a steady expansion throughout history but, first and foremost, that instances of expansion of solidarity have been possible (at given times and places) and that it is thus possible to create conditions to further expand it in the future. As social agents are considered to have the power to create or impact those conditions, at least in part, it becomes their responsibility to (aim to) do so. If linguistic action can influence those conditions, creative uses of language (by the individual) and new language standards (on a political level) ought to be used to possibly create and enhance solidarity. An increasing solidarity then becomes a compelling point of orientation for moral, social and political action when pursuing moral progress.

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this work has been to contribute to the ongoing academic debate about the notion of *moral progress* by inquiring into the pragmatist corner of the discussion, specifically Richard Rorty's linguistic pragmatist take on the notion. I asked whether and how an account like Rorty's, which aims to combine an optimism about moral progress with a scepticism about moral objectivity, can be defended. I ask further whether, following the Rortyan proposal, (expanding) *human solidarity* is a compelling notion in which to ground a pragmatist understanding and defence of the idea of moral progress. I claimed that the Rortyan account is appealing to take into consideration, for it grants particular attention to the role language (and language development) plays for and within instances and processes of moral change. I claimed that this is especially significant today, as both the rapid progress of communication technologies and globalization have been provoking accelerated changes in our (public) communicative behaviour and the emergence of new pluralistic (communicative) communities.

I presented the notion of moral progress as a re-emerging concept in which philosophical researchers around the world have recently found a new interest. I defined moral progress as concerning society (or humanity) rather than the individual subject and as implying a morally desirable change (improvement) in both beliefs and practice (rather than merely one or the other). I asserted that *morality*, here, concerns, first and foremost, practices, institutions, and beliefs that (potentially) have *an impact on others' well-being* (and/or suffering) and that an action or belief may be considered "moral" if and only if they are not motivated by an exclusively selfish reason. I assumed further that moral progress generally involves the notion of learning and, therefore, the gain of some kind of moral knowledge. And I assumed that it must happen gradually (one step [of the ladder] at a time): certain practices and beliefs are not abandoned by a whole society at once, but rather there is (if at all) a tendency of fewer and fewer people keeping up those practices or beliefs, and/or more and more people (i.e., an influential part of people) replacing them with new (improved) ones.

I pointed out that defending the idea of moral progress is, in most cases, rather problematic. It is conceptually problematic, as it seems to require access to a universal standard of what is morally good (or better). It is empirically troublesome for while there is much evidence of instances of moral changes throughout the years and centuries, which are generally considered favourable (e.g., the abolishment of slavery, greater freedom for women et cetera), there is also much evidence for instances of what we can arguably call moral regress.

I have claimed that *pragmatist*-leaning philosophers aim to overcome (some of) the issues (generally opposing realist, subjectivist and relativist accounts, amongst others) by largely relying on an antirealist notion of moral truth and objectivity and by suggesting what we could call a more modest conception of moral progress. Pragmatist accounts, so I claimed, often consider moral progress, first and foremost, a (human) *potential* (or resource), which is realizable due to human agency and their capability to learn.

While there is, so I claimed, no comprehensive agreed-upon framework of what a "pragmatist approach" to moral progress implies, I outlined a few points which (so I argued) link diverse moral-progress theorists who declare themselves (or their frameworks of moral progress) "pragmatist". Among those points, I outlined that pragmatist stances often combine stances of naturalism, historicism, and pragmatic meliorism and that they largely understand moral progress as a (locally occurring) bottom-up problem-solving process, which ultimately results in morally more successful practices.

To focus on potential and *implementation* implies asking, "what kind of progress can there be?". It denotes (following Rorty) an "attitude" towards the notion of progress, which can promote hopefulness about a real possibility of moral progress. This is significant if we accept that being hopeful about moral progress may be supportive of the occurrence of moral progress, granted that the latter depends, at least in part, on human agency. I have argued that a pragmatist approach to moral progress (as I outlined it) – in which the Rortyan account fits – is therefore compelling.

I argued that the *type* of moral progress Rorty promotes, sustains, and inquires is what, in the contemporary debate, has often been called the

expanding-circle type of progress. The notion of the expanding circle famously traces back to P. Singer's 1981 work "The Expanding Circle", which, since its revised 2011 version, carries the subtitle "Ethics, Evolution and Moral Progress".

I argued that Rorty is close to Singer, as he grounds his understanding of morality in a Darwinian naturalism, yet ultimately links morality – comprehending moral responsibility and duty – to human action, agency and (collective moral) reasoning, which implies both the capability and willingness to *exceed* natural instincts of one's survival (i.e., the survival of one's kin and community; in other terms: one's *genes* and *memes*). It implies that (with A. Baier) "[t]o behave morally is to do what comes naturally in your dealings with your parents and children or your fellow-clan members". I argued further that, different to P. Kitcher (and B. Williams), for Rorty, "who to be" (presumably the "ethical" question) and "what to do" (the "moral" question) are deeply entangled with (and implied within) the issue of moral progress; the line between ethics and morality remains fuzzy within his output.

One of the central notions of the expanding-circle conception fundamentally significant for pragmatist-leaning approaches, I claimed, is that the moral basis (i.e., the *standard* that defines what is morally good) is the (inclusive) collective "we"/"us". I argued that to expand the circle in this regard means expanding the collective "we", not at last as a ground for moral standards, i.e., a basis for moral reasoning and, ultimately, knowledge. I conceptually divided the idea of the expansion (understood, here, as implied in a moral practice rather than as a natural tendency) into $expansion_1$ and $expansion_2$, where the first denotes an expansion of moral concern towards all those who are affected (all "stakeholder") by a certain moral practice, institution or system (including, possibly, all sentient beings and even ecosystems); while the second refers to the inclusion of as many stakeholders capable of moral reasoning (qua, human beings) into the collective "we" as possible. I pledged that in my work, I would mainly concentrate on $expansion_2$, which, however, is entangled with (and must ultimately lead to) $expansion_1$.

Moral reasoning – in Singer as much as in Rorty – is primarily thought of as a social practice (rather than an individual activity), for, following E. Anderson, moral reasoning, to be effective, must be done together. In Rorty, the notion of collective moral reasoning, I argued, is implicit

in what he calls, inspired by his philosophical "hero" J. Dewey, "the ongoing conversation of humankind". Conversation, I suggested, in Rorty, must be understood as twofold: (1) as something human beings (qua *zôa politika logon echonta*) have simply been doing; (2) as something which, in its ideal form, becomes a moral responsibility, granted that the latter is, as Rorty insinuates, a primary condition (and tool) of moral inquiry, as well as a necessary (yet not sufficient) condition for moral progress.

I argued that the expanding-circle type is a compelling notion for any pragmatist framework of moral progress, as it arguably rests on a picture of pragmatic meliorism, where human beings are (at least in part) responsible for moral progress. Yet, it is cogent if and only if it implies, contrarily to how N. Smyth understood it, that the recognition of unity (or commonality) for which it calls, further comprehends an acknowledgement of the infinity of *variations and diversities* that constitute that unity (i.e., the unity or commonality of being human). In Rorty, this is particularly supported by an underlying stance of anti-essentialism, which inherently rejects any fixed categorizations and subdivisions.

I pointed out that Rorty, while sustaining that moral ends and duties are necessarily community-dependent and therefore contingent – as they emerge from the conversation (where they are created, agreed upon and changed) – still presumes that (1) the one (universal) moral obligation ("what we owe one another") is "helping one another satisfy our desires and needs, thus achieving the greatest possible amount of happiness", well-being, and/or reducing suffering. He (2) implies (by following Dewey's dictum that "growth is the only moral end"), so I claimed that moral progress is in itself a (universal) moral end.

I have shown myself sympathetic to both points: to the first (though it may appear simplistic) as a necessary ground or constitution for the very notion of morality within an anti-authoritarian, antirealist, and pragmatist framework. The second, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the very idea of progress – the process itself, the flux. Inasmuch as we understand moral progress (at least in part) as a matter of human action, agency and thus responsibility, the aim is not merely the outcome (or end) of an instance of moral progress but also the stimulation. It becomes a moral responsibility (both on an individual and political-institutional level) to create conditions based on which moral progress may be instigated and can thrive. This further implies

that, following Dewey, the need for [moral] progress is constant, even when there are no apparent crises.

All this, I conclude, calls for a fortification of an (independent) notion of moral progress – independent from other notions of progress, such as social progress and human progress: while I do recognize that instances of what we may call moral progress are deeply entangled with other instances of changes throughout society and human practices, it has to stand on its own, as relating to the ambition to a potentially constant effort to create conditions supporting practices that are favourable for a greater well-being of others (and of more and more diverse "others"). These practices, then, must be understood as morally progressive themselves, hence implying a constant determination to include as many beings as possible into our circle of moral concern; by *tending*, as much as possible, away from the centre of the circle (where we stand as individuals and communities) and, possibly, even further.

Moral progress and linguistic practices

I discussed that an understanding of linguistic practices as a (necessary yet not sufficient) condition for moral change must be twofold: i.e., language determines both what I called, with M. Moody-Adams, the (1) *conceptual* (or, with Rorty, also "logical") and the (2) *perceptual* space for moral reasoning, deliberation, and conversation. I argued that, for we can reasonably assume that language has an impact on how one perceives and conceptualizes the world (including morality), language must be taken seriously within the current debate about moral progress.

I argued that Rorty preserves from the younger Wittgenstein (*TLP*) the importance the boundary of a specific language – i.e., (final) "vocabulary" – poses for one's conceptual and perceptual space for moral deliberation and thought. He assumes, however, by ultimately favouring the later Wittgenstein (*PU*), that if a certain language (or "language games") limit(s) that space, then new vocabulary, misuses of words and "redescriptions" of both concepts and circumstances, may expand the same space.

Redescriptions, I have discussed, become a key to moral change in the Rortyan account. Moral change, invoked by redescriptions, can be intentional or unintentional. The latter entails language users simply

losing old habits and linguistically adapting to contingent and changing circumstances. The former refers to language users consciously deciding not to use certain terms anymore, either because (1) they are not adequate to cope with a certain (moral) environment anymore or (2) because (arguably, less frequently) they aim to provoke (moral) change, through their language. The second requires language users to be aware of the impact their language may have on their morality.

With the connection between language development and human *agency*, which exceeds the mere conceptualization of language as a naturalized contingency, comes the notion of language as a *tool* for moral change and potential progress. The employment of this tool occurs (and/or may occur) both on the individual and the institutional level. I have hence explored how redescriptions become a matter of responsibility within both the moral and the political sphere, briefly broaching the issues of language standards and education.

I have discussed how, for Rorty, redescriptions are significantly steered by the human *imagination* of how a morally better world could look like. Again, in the matter of moral progress (granted that it concerns society or humanity rather than the individual), imagination significantly emerges from the shared human practice, which Rorty understands as the conversation (see above).

I argued that for the conversation to be ideal and hence potentially lead to moral progress, it must be free and open, epistemic, and inclusive. I have shown how Rorty explicitly defends, on multiple occasions, the first condition ("free and open"). I have discussed how he largely implies the third condition ("inclusive") within his overall account. I have argued that he would have done better to be more explicit about (and insist on) the second condition ("epistemic").

I have discussed how the Rortyan account calls indeed for an epistemology in regard to moral progress, and hence ultimately relies on the notions of truth, objectivity, and knowledge. I discussed how these notions are to be understood "pragmatically" in the Rortyan account. Moreover, I argued that it is indeed justified – even within a pragmatist stance (that sustains the notion of the expanded circle) – to link moral progress to the notion of a greater moral knowledge (yet, in a pragmatist sense). I argued how the expansion of the conversation (i.e., a conversation that is ever-more inclusive in the largest possible sense) is

indeed accommodating for the gain of moral knowledge. However, I stressed that inclusion (as much as openness and liberty) do not guarantee the epistemic character of the conversation. Rather, notions such as truthfulness, accurate information and, with Williams, "everyday truths" must be taken seriously. There must indeed be, as Rorty finally admits himself, a notion of "getting things right"; and, further, morally, a *commitment* to getting things right. With this attitude, I have concluded, Rorty ultimately opposes a stance of moral relativism and subjectivism. Though Rorty has been charged to confuse the notion of truth with justification, I have discussed how these two concepts, in Rorty, are clearly separate.

I discussed hence how inclusion, in this view, is to be understood as both a mechanism and as an end (within "the conversation" and within the expanding-circle conception of moral progress) and how it implies embracing and creating a *culture* which is favourable of (further) processes of inclusion. I have shown how the Jamesian notion of the *cries of the wounded* has a powerful place within this overall conception; however, that one must not *exclusively* rely on this notion to move morality forward and "keep the conversation [as moral inquiry] going".

I have hence discussed how, even if what Rorty calls conversation is a necessary condition for moral progress to potentially occur, it is not sufficient. To say that conversation is insufficient means that it would be naïf to pretend that linguistic change and (collective) moral reasoning alone could lead to moral progress. I pointed out, with A. Srinivasan, that non-conversational struggle, leading by example, self-sacrifice and shifts in social and political power have historically all played a decisive role in moral development to occur. "Conversation", I claimed, however, remains necessary: if language as a social practice is constitutive of moral thought and (not at last) practice, then it is further necessary for the comprehension and implementation of the content and meaning of struggles and shifts in social and political power.

Pragmatic versus teleological progress and hope

I have further inquired into the Rortyan notion of hope and into the presumption that hopefulness about moral progress is supportive for moral progress to occur, granted that it, in fact, depends, at least in part, on moral agency. I have argued that, if this is indeed the case, then it is,

first of all, pragmatically justifiable to promote, following D. Roser, a culture of hope (for moral progress).

Rorty indeed often expresses his "attitude" towards moral progress in terms of hope, i.e., suggesting that he is hopeful that there is moral progress. I claimed that by doing so, he subscribes to an optimism about moral progress, which he needs to justify only to a certain point.

In fact, Rorty claimed, at one point, that "hope needs no justification" (opposing it, hence, to the notion of "knowledge"). However, I have discussed that a pragmatic kind of hope – where *not only hope determines action but also action determines hope* – needs to be justified, at least to some degree. It needs to be based on a (pragmatic) knowledge of the past and present rather than translating into mere wishful thinking about the future. In Dewey's words: "projections of a better life [must be] based on a life already lived." Creating a culture of hope hence means both cultivating and promoting hope itself and creating social conditions that provoke hope in social actors. I have argued that this concerns both the individual and the political-institutional level and how the creation of a culture of hope (for moral progress) is linked to the notion of moral responsibility.

I further discussed how the Rortyan idea of progress must not be exclusively thought of in – with Kitcher – "pragmatic" terms (as a progress "from"), but that it must moreover be understood as a "teleological" kind of progress ("a progress towards"). I argued how there is indeed a notion of teleology (though not the immanent kind) in the Rortyan thought and how it is, in fact, *necessary* as it comes to terms with his ideas of imagination and hope.

I argued that within an account of human agency which relies on social actors imagining "a better future" towards which to tend, an image ("*Bild*") – as an inherent notion of "imagination" – is necessary.

I argued that Rorty suggests two sorts of images (as goals or ends for moral progress): (1) utopian images, which, by his own lights, translate into the overall image of an "ideal liberal society", which comprehends what I called an "*absolute* solidarity", and which is at the *end* of moral progress (as there is no more need for morality and hence for moral progress). (2) A series of more concrete, formally possibly achievable goals, such as a *greater* solidarity, a *greater* inclusiveness, *less* suffering, *more*

respect towards others, a *greater* freedom for increasingly more people, and ultimately *increasing* happiness. While the second kind suggests achievability, the first serves, first and foremost, as an inspiration and as a reminder that moral conditions could (and should) always be bettered. That, with Dewey, there is always and constant need for moral progress in actuality.

Solidarity

To ask whether (expanding) solidarity is a compelling notion in which to ground a pragmatist understanding and defence of the idea of moral progress, I argued, here specifically means to ask whether human solidarity is a cogent *image* in which to ground redescriptions that are ultimately aimed at provoking moral progress.

In order to approach this question, I first clarified that the notion of moral progress, in Rorty, does *not identify* with an expansion of solidarity, but rather, that the latter is one *instance* of moral progress, which is potentially achievable and thus justifiable as such. I discussed that to link the notion of moral progress to solidarity – in the Rortyan account that focuses on implementation – rather than merely making an effort to describe a type (or an instance) of moral progress means to *prescribe* a direction (namely, to expand solidarity) in order to *pave the way* for a possible (greater) moral progress.

Rorty's advocated primacy of solidarity (over "objectivity"), so I have argued, implies promoting the (pragmatist) *dedication to community, humanity, and social needs* rather than the aspiration to step outside space and time. It means to look forward rather than upward.

As I have discussed, different to what Rorty seems to suggest in various moments, this must not mean completely dropping the notion of objectivity but rather – when it comes to morality – understanding it within social dynamics and practices. I suggested that when Rorty urges us to be (de-absolutized) "Hegelian", one may also infer that this means to be dedicated to the issues of the objective *Geist* (according to Jaeggi, implying the preservation of the *Sittlichkeit*) and keep the notion of absoluteness (which is hence *aufgehoben*) as a mere "inspiring *focus imaginarius*".

Solidarity, in Rorty (cf. *CIS*), denotes an *end* of moral progress only when it is realized in its absolute utopian form: when there is no more difference between the self (including one's genes and memes) and the others. Solidarity, in fact, implies (so I discussed) that, ultimately, there is no neat difference between the self and "the other(s)": following J. Habermas, it rather includes one's own well-being, and hence overcomes the divergence between the self and the other, by proposing a formal synthesis. When solidarity has reached this absolute form, so Rorty implies, there is no more need for moral progress and morality altogether (including the *notions* of morality and moral progress), as the concern for others (as much as the practices that follow) come as entirely *natural* to subjects. This (within the prescriptive account Rorty implies) denotes that, as long as we find ourselves in the imperfect non-absolute state, there is a need for agents to do their best to enhance solidarity and hence moral progress; the need for the notions of morality and moral progress therefore persists.

One apparent issue with this position is that it seems to reduce the concerns of morality to human beings exclusively. However, I have argued that while Rorty focuses on human solidarity and on what humans "owe each other", he does not *limit* his idea of moral progress to the merely human realm – considering, e.g., his take on the ability to feel pain, and the greater expansive moral questions of "what to do with ourselves" and whom or what to be concerned about, which (potentially) exceeds the needs of human beings.

I have concluded that greater solidarity, as an *instance* of moral progress, is first and foremost to be conceptualized as an important step (of the ladder) and a crucial part of a possibly larger and (ever) more comprehensive moral progress. In other words: (1) a step towards a a possibly further expansion (where a greater solidarity remains a constantly inspired and aspired end, as – in the imperfect world – absolute solidarity remains unrealized), and (2) a mechanism for other morally desirable instances, for it (as I discussed) can accommodate inclusiveness (in the largest possible sense) and, by doing so, may support an increased moral knowledge, equality and liberty. It may further oppose instances of "moral-progress-stoppers" or moral regresses, such as (with Kitcher) false consciousness and processes of (with Wilson) moral disengagement.

As human beings are considered the (primary) subjects of morality – i.e., potential participants in the conversation and collective moral reasoning, as they have moral agency and thus responsibility – it seems cogent to focus on improving moral practices, institutions, and beliefs among them. This, however, must not exclude the effort to expand moral concern even beyond human beings. The two processes (as much as their stimulations) must rather go hand in hand. In this sense, it seems compelling to focus on what I have called expansion$_2$, granted that – by accommodating (the expansion of) an inclusive, epistemic, free and open conversation – it is favourable for, and thus implies, what I have called expansion$_1$.

In any case, within the framework of the expanding circle (which I argued to be cogent to pragmatically conceptualize the idea of moral progress), one always has to start from where they are, and – in Rorty's words – with the vocabulary, they have available. It means, pace Rorty, to be "ethnocentric" (a choice of term I found rather problematic).

To *prescribe* solidarity as a direction or ground for moral progress means to suggest grounding social actions (including redescriptions) – if they are to have a morally desirable effect on our beliefs and practices – on the idea (or image) of greater solidarity and on (collectively) imagining how we may achieve it. It means focusing on the effort of creating conditions (through our linguistic tools and others) in which human solidarity can thrive.

I conclude that solidarity – which I proposed to conceptualize as dividing into *solidarité de fait* and *solidarité devoir* – is indeed a compelling notion to ground the idea of moral progress within a pragmatist framework focusing on implementation, human action and moral progress as a resource.

For once, solidarity (as I outlined it) grounds in *both* the notions of *commonality* and *compassion* and, further, *potential collaboration*. This means, on the one hand, that the expansion of the "we" (commonality) – which is implicit in the idea of the expanding circle – must go hand in hand with what Rorty calls, following A. Baier, a progress of sentiments and a greater responsiveness (to others' pain; hence compassion). This supports not only the approach of an idea (and/or feeling) of unity but, moreover, an increased responsiveness to *diversity* (including idiosyncratic pain) and an understanding of it as being constitutive of

this unity. This may, hence, support an idea of moral progress (understood as an expanding circle) that comes to terms with both the idea of *inclusion* and *individualization*.
On the other hand, rather than a mere expansion of compassion (or of moral *concern*), the notion of solidarity indeed strongly relies on the notion of "we" (commonality), which strengthens the moral *status* of an increased number of people. In other words, so I have claimed, rather than merely including the needs and desires of increasingly more people (and possibly even non-human beings) into the conversation, it puts the emphasis on the effort of making increasingly more moral agents equal conversation partners. It implies expanding the conversation in a way that it not only includes increasingly more voices and concerns but *redistributes semantic authority (and power)* in a more balanced way – both on a social and political level.

I argued further that to *create* solidarity (as Rorty suggests) indeed means, first and foremost, to *create conditions* favourable for the increase of solidarity. In the linguistic-pragmatist framework Rorty proposes, this implies a focus on *how* processes of *redescription* may help enhance solidarity (or how to redescribe with increased solidarity in view).

I have hence discussed the significance of the notion of *human* (including the notions of "common humanity" and "human nature") in this matter. I showed how Rorty has expressed recurring scepticism towards these notions, assuming they oppose – so he seems to have feared – his Darwinian, anti-essentialist stances.

However, I have argued that instead of discrediting and rejecting the notions, Rorty would have done better to "redescribe" them in pragmatist terms. Rorty, in fact, has welcomed the Deweyan view, which considers "human nature" as something open and subject to change. I hence argued that Rorty would have done well to follow his "hero" in this stance and strengthen the concepts of human and common humanity by conceptualizing (and promoting) them as – with Korab-Karpowicz – a "unity that comes out of diversity".

I hence argued that, in light of a possibly greater human solidarity, processes of (both individual, collective, and political) redescriptions should be carried out with the aim to *strengthen* the concept of the human; to oppose processes of dehumanization and help expand the conceptual and perceptual space in a way that more easily overlooks

(morally) discriminating categorizations of human beings and get a stronger sense of what unites us all.

I finally conclude that the Rortyan notion of moral progress is compelling and justifiable, inasmuch as it is understood within a pragmatist framework, as I have outlined it. Granted that it is indeed useful to have a robust notion of moral progress (within our "ongoing conversation about what to do with ourselves") – as both an inspiration, motivation, and reminder that the world constantly calls for moral improvement (to be implemented by human agents) – a pragmatist (i.e., a pragmatic melioristic) account seems worth enhancing. The notion of human solidarity – grounding in a *solidarité de fait* and expanding as a *solidarité devoir* – seems like a cogent concept on which to base a pragmatist approach and enhancement of moral progress, provided that it takes the (universal) notion of "human" (including common humanity) not only seriously, but strengthens it in a way that it denotes a unity, which is, though, *open*, subject to *redescriptions*, and constituted of *variations* and an *infinity* of diverse traits.

ABBREVIATIONS

(m.a.) = “my assertion”;
(m.b.) = “my brackets”;
(m.e.) = “my emphasis”;
(m.i.) = “my interpretation”;
(m.t.) = “my translation”.

(*ABAO*) = Rorty R., Nystrom D. & Puckett K. (2002), *Against Bosses, Against Oligarchies: A Conversation with Richard Rorty*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
(*AOC*) = Rorty R. (1999a), *Achieving our Country. Leftist thought in twentieth-century America*, Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press.
(*CIS*) = Rorty R. (1989), *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
(*CP*) = Rorty R. (1982), *Consequences of Pragmatism. (Essays: 1972 – 1980)*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
(*DP*) = Critchley S., Derrida J., Laclau E. & Rorty R. (1996), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, London / New York: Routledge.
(*EFT*) = Rorty R. (2011), *An Ethics for today. Finding common ground between Philosophy and Religion*, New York: Columbia University Press.
(*EHO*) = Rorty R. (1991a), *Essays on Heidegger and Others. Philosophical Papers II*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
(*FOR*) = Rorty R. & Vattimo G. (2005), *The future of Religion*, Zabala S. (ed.), New York: Columbia University Press.
(*ORT*) = Rorty R. (1991b), *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Papers I*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
(*PAA*) = Rorty R. (2021), *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism*, Mendieta E. & Brandom R. B. (eds.), Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
(*PCP*) = Rorty R. (2007a), *Philosophy as Cultural Politics. Philosophical Papers IV*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
(*PHG*) = Hegel G. W. F. (1988), *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag.

(*PMN*) = Rorty R. (1979), *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
(*PSH*) = Rorty R. (1999b), *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
(*PU*) = Wittgenstein L. (1958), *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Oxford – Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.
(*RC*) = Brandom R. (ed.) (2000), *Rorty and his Critics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
(*TLP*) = Wittgenstein L. (2003), *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlungen*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.
(*TP*) = Rorty R. (1998), *Truth and Progress. Philosophical Papers III*, Cambridge / New York: Cambridge University Press.
(*WUT*) = Rorty R. & Engel P. (2007) *What's the Use of Truth*, New York: Columbia University Press.

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