# RICHARD RORTY'S SELLARSIAN UPTAKE

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## Introduction

Acknowledgments of the importance of other thinkers frequently pepper Richard Rorty's writings in an offhanded, name-dropping sort of way. These mentions serve to bring to mind the general spirit if not the exact letter of these others' works, and Rorty used this to emphasize resonances between his positions and those he brought up while simultaneously downplaying (or just leaving out) their differences. Wilfrid Sellars is one philosopher who received this treatment; his name appears throughout Rorty's work, but most of these mentions are cursory and lack reference to any particular quotation or essay.

This is primarily an introduction to the influence of Wilfrid Sellars's thought in the work of Richard Rorty. In a short paper like this, it is necessary for important issues to be deemphasized and, in some cases, ignored. Despite this, because Rorty claimed that during his PhD training at Yale "Sellars became my new philosophical hero, and for the next twenty years most of what I published was an attempt to capitalize on his achievements,"[1] a key to understanding the origins and development of Rorty's thought is understanding at least something of Sellars's. Exploring the relationship between these two thinkers could easily sustain a book-length work, and each of the points of contact I take up here rightly deserves its own essay. Nonetheless, by briefly looking at three marginally interrelated themes, a preliminary picture of Rorty's Sellarsian inheritance emerges. This picture shows that while Rorty clearly took up Sellarsian insights, many of these were utilized in ways somewhat different than Sellars intended.

Inarguably, Rorty's most influential writing is the 1979 *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. In this book, he engaged directly with Sellars's most widely-read piece, the 1956 "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." As is well-known, this essay is "a general critique of the entire framework of givenness,"[2] the upshots of which Rorty applied and extended in ways somewhat at odds with Sellars's own conclusions. This paper's first section will explore Rorty's use of Sellars's arguments against and response to "The Myth of the Given."

The second section moves from the epistemological sphere to the metaphysical. In particular, I intend to see what application the overused term 'naturalism' has for both writers. Necessarily related to this is the question of what role scientific inquiry plays for each of them. The influence I argue for here is potentially more tenuous than that explored in either of the other two sections, largely because Rorty's commitments are difficult to nail down and his reading of Sellars's position is, stated charitably, shaky.

Finally, I will take up an ethical theme, the role of what Sellars called "we-intentions." His writings on this topic are especially complex and obscure, a worrying fact when the notorious difficulty of the rest of his work is kept in mind. Sellars's thoughts on this topic are almost entirely ignored, even among notable Sellarsians. One of the few contemporary thinkers to identify his ethical positions as directly descended from Sellars's is Rorty. Their positions differ, however, in important respects. From Rorty's exploration and practicalization of Sellars's arguments, important insights may be gained. Most important is a shift which allows Sellars's claims to touch ground, providing applicability for an otherwise systematic and interesting but altogether too rarified metaethical schema.

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Intellectual Autobiography," in *The Philosophy of Richard Rorty, Vol. 32 in The Library of Living Philosophers*, Randall E. Auxier and Lewis Edwin Hahn, eds. (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2009), p. 8.

[2] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 14.

While much of the secondary literature on Rorty's work contains reference to his dependence on Sellars's epistemological and metaphysical insights, almost no one mentions the impact of his ethical work.[3] Because the already more-explored connections involve the best-known portions of Sellars's work, this paper's longest section is the third: by working through the role of Sellarsian ethics in a Rortian context, two underappreciated birds will be hit with but one stone.

**Rejecting "The Myth of the Given" – and Then Some**

So many elements of Richard Rorty's later works can be traced back to insights and arguments found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The rejection of foundationalist epistemology undertaken there had wide-ranging impact, opening for Rorty particular research paths while precluding him from others. Central to the arguments in that piece is what Rorty called Sellars's "attack on logical empiricism … that … raise[s] questions about the epistemic privilege which logical empiricism claims for certain assertions, qua reports of privileged representations."[4] Rorty relied heavily on Sellars's attempt to bring a behaviorist critique to the privileged access of 'mental states' empiricism has long held:

> Sellars asks how the authority of first-person reports of, for example, how things appear to us, the pains from which we suffer, and the thoughts that drift before our minds differs from the authority of expert reports on, for example, metal stress, the mating behavior of birds, or the colors of physical objects.[5]

Traditionally, following Descartes and others who endorse substance dualisms, a strong distinction has been held between the latter category of items, which includes the physical stuff of the world, and the former,

which is made up of the mental events to which the only possible access is privileged and private. But with this distinction made suspect, with the separations between 'mind' and 'body' and 'inner' and 'outer' brought into question, how can the authority of these seemingly disparate kinds of reports be unified?

Sellars located the answer to this in a critique of givenness, his rejection of the position that there can be knowledge about pre-conceptual perceptual experiences, the results of which apply—*mutatis mutandis*—to Rorty's worries about the privilege of mental discourse. Sellars went on to explain, "the point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a 'foundation' of non-inferential knowledge of matters of fact,"[6] a summary that suggests his critique applies to foundationalist epistemology generally.

Sellars presented the difficulty of 'givenness' accounts as an inconsistent triad:

> A. *X senses red sense content s* entails *x non-inferentially knows that s is red*.
> B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
> C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is φ* is acquired.
>
> A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B.[7]

Each of these three propositions is in some way fundamental to traditional empirical accounts of knowledge, and each seems remarkably intuitive. The first suggests that when one looks upon an object and sees that it is red, he or she knows it is red. The second speaks to humans having bodies that allow them to interact at a basic level with their environments without training. The third, which is where Sellars's nominalism is on full display, indicates that the particular objects to which and ways in which humans have come to assign

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[3] An important exception to this is Christopher J. Voparil's *Richard Rorty: Politics and Vision* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), which contains three explicit references to Sellars's writings as the launching pad for important parts of Rorty's ethics.

[4] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 173.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 19.

[7] Ibid., p. 21.

the labels of 'subject' and 'predicate', and even that humans divide the world in this way at all, is contingent.

Consequently, something like this inconsistent triad also has had significant impact on traditional understandings of language acquisition: historically, it was thought that children acquired language by their parents repetitiously pointing out given objects and conjointly using identifying terms. Sellars, following Ludwig Wittgenstein, referred to this account of language-learning as 'Augustinian', though this is in large part caricature.[8] Regardless, Sellars noticed that for this picture of language acquisition to make sense, children would have to have non-inferential access to the way in which the world's myriad objects are divided one from another prior to learning their names. Said more directly, on this view, children are required to have concepts before they have learned how the world is to be conceptualized, which seems to involve a linguistic miracle.

Sellars argued at length that "instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing and cannot account for it."[9] As he wished to save the second two propositions of the inconsistent triad and still make sense of language-acquisition, Sellars jettisoned the first proposition, suggesting that there is an inference necessary to move from sensation to knowledge. The majority of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" is an extended argument that such inferences should be understood as causal necessities, rather than foundations, for knowledge. Robert Brandom has summarized the upshot of this, especially in reference to language and concept-acquisition, by saying that "in order to master *any* concepts, one must master *many* concepts. For grasp of one concept consists in mastery of at least some of its inferential relations to other

concepts. ... [T]o be able to apply one concept noninferentially, one must be able to use others inferentially."[10]

Sellars noted that a consequence of rejecting the first proposition in the trilemma and accepting the other two is that

> all awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts,* etc., in short all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair. Accordingly, not even the awareness of such sorts, resemblances, and facts as pertain to so-called immediate experience is presupposed by the process of acquiring the use of language.[11]

This claim, that all awareness is linguistic, provided the launching point for Rorty's later claims that human knowledge and experience of reality is linguistic. At first blush, this seems a reasonable extension of Sellars' claim, for Rorty could argue that for the stuff of experience to be experienced, one must be aware of the experiencing. Likewise for knowledge: for generalizations, categories, and facts as such to come to be requires that one first be aware of their referents during the process of generalization, categorization, fact-finding, and so on. By subsuming all awareness under the heading of linguistic behavior, Sellars's position extended the reaches of language throughout much of human life and inquiry, though not as far as Rorty's ultimately did.

This tension between Sellars himself and Rorty's use of Sellars arises because, as Teed Rockwell argues in his "The Hard Problem is Dead…,"[12] Rorty was not attentive to later Sellarsian texts in constructing his arguments in

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[8] See, for instance, Christopher Kirwan's "Augustine's philosophy of language," in *Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 186.

[9] Wilfrid Sellars, op. cit., p. 87.

[10] Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 49.

[11] Wilfrid Sellars, op. cit., p. 63.

[12] Teed Rockwell, "The Hard Problem is Dead; Long live the hard problem," unpublished manuscript, available online, http://www.cognitivequestions.org/hardproblem.html. In this piece Rockwell comments extensively on Rorty's use and misuse of the Sellarsian reply to "The Myth of the Given," ultimately showing that John Dewey and Sellars are more in line than Rorty and either of the two.

*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, texts that show a striking ambivalence toward awareness's linguistic character. While the Sellars of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" was clear that awareness is linguistic, he later insisted that

> [n]ot all 'organized behavior' is built on linguistic structures. The most that can be claimed is that what might be called 'conceptual thinking' is essentially tied to language, and that, for obvious reasons, the central or core concept of what thinking is pertains to conceptual thinking.[13]

This is a significantly weaker claim than that defended by Rorty, as when he stated, "either grant concepts to anything (e.g. record-changers) which can respond discriminatively to classes of objects, or else explain why you draw the line between conceptual thought and its primitive predecessors in a different place from that between having acquired a language and being still in training."[14]

But even if we admit that Sellars and Rorty were at odds on the depth of their linguistic idealism, there is a key upshot of Sellars's rejection that Rorty used to lasting effect. In undermining traditional accounts of givenness, "the essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state, we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says."[15] It is here that the irreducibly normative and social character of justification becomes apparent, a point which has received significant development in the hands of Rorty's student Brandom. A portion of Rorty's application of the communal nature of justification will be unpacked in this paper's third section.

**Disputing the Priority of Science**

A recent account of "Sellars's substantive philosophical commitments" begins "Sellars's deepest philosophical commitment is to naturalism."[16] It goes on to express the difficulties of this term, including Sellars's own statement that "Naturalism … was as wishy-washy and ambiguous as Pragmatism. One could believe *almost* anything about the world and even *some* things about God, and yet be a Naturalist." Despite his frustration, Sellars ultimately stated his allegiance to this position: "I prefer the term 'Naturalism,' which … has acquired a substantive content, which, if it does not entail scientific realism, is at least not incompatible with it."[17] This last criterion was of moment for Sellars because of his explicit commitment to scientific realism: "In the dimension of describing and explaining, science is the measure of all things: of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not."[18] While this *scientia mensura* is regrettable to later Sellarsians more interested in his account of the irreducibility of social normativity,[19] it is a feature that remains consistent throughout his work. In another article, for instance, Sellars spoke directly of the "primacy of the scientific image," claiming that people's commonsense way of talking about middle-sized objects is at base false.[20] Sellars's scientific realism is not therefore an easily ignored misstep but rather an oft-repeated and central component of his philosophy, tied up with many

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[13] Wilfrid Sellars, "The Structure of Knowledge." In *Action, Knowledge, and Perception*, ed. Hector-Nari Castañeda (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), p. 305.
[14] Rorty, op. cit., p. 186.
[15] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 76.

[16] Willem A. deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 15.
[17] Wilfrid Sellars, *Naturalism and Ontology, the John Dewey Lectures for 1973-74* (Reseda, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1980), p. 1-2.
[18] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Robert Brandom, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 83.
[19] It is precisely this point that motivated Rorty to divide Sellarsians into right- and left-wing camps. The former see scientific realism as the key Sellarsian commitment, while the latter see it, in Robert Brandom's phrasing, as an instance of backsliding, "a pre-Sellarsian remnant," that is at odds with other Sellarsian positions.
[20] Wilfrid Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *In the Space of Reasons*, Robert Brandom and Kevin Scharp, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 369-408.

of his positions, including (importantly) his philosophy of perception.

One who comes to Sellars's thought by way of Rorty may consider the preceding paragraph bizarre. Introducing the first book-length republication of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," Rorty wrote of Sellars's "justified suspicion of the science-worship which afflicted the early stages of analytic philosophy."[21] In support of this, Rorty approvingly noted Sellars's statement that "empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once."[22] James O'Shea has argued convincingly that Rorty here downplayed the differences between his positions and Sellars's and in so doing weakened the utility of his introduction by misrepresenting Sellars's ideas.[23]

A favorite point of criticism against Rorty, especially from followers of earlier pragmatists, is the way in which "Rorty holds that science is now quietly receding into the background."[24] Compared with Sellars's scientific realism, this statement is true, but Rorty does not think that "technoscience becomes only one 'vocabulary' among others with no particular privilege,"[25] for this would suggest he was a relativist of exactly the sort he consistently asserted himself not to be.[26] Instead, Rorty suggested, "the question should always be 'What use is

it?' Criticisms ... should charge relative inutility."[27] And science is very useful indeed, something Rorty admitted when he went on to say that he "retain[ed] the conviction that Darwinism provides a useful vocabulary in which to formulate [his] pragmatist position."[28] A similar sentiment underwrote his ostensible acceptance of the title 'naturalist', which he defined as being "the kind of antiessentialist who, like Dewey, sees no breaks in the hierarchy of increasingly complex adjustments to novel stimulation—the hierarchy which has amoeba adjusting themselves to changed water temperature at the bottom, bees dancing and chess players check-mating in the middle, and people fomenting scientific, artistic, and political revolutions at the top."[29]

It is clear that the results and method of science do not take center stage in Rorty's work and in this way may be said to "recede into the background," but this seems largely because his project had aims other than those to which science was immediately relevant. It is also clear that Rorty rejected scientific realism, largely for reasons related to his disdain for talk of a 'way the world is', a vocabulary with which Sellars was comfortable. Despite this, Rorty was surely a naturalist who thought there was an important, though not ultimate, role for science. When asked in an interview about lingering scientism in some of his work, Rorty initially demurred, explaining that "there are lots of different justifiable assertions, including not only scientific assertions but aesthetic and social judgments." On further pressure, he invoked Sellars, stating, "I think of myself as stealing the point … that one's categories in metaphysics should be the categories of the sciences of one's day. But that's simply to say what a boring subject metaphysics is."[30]

[21] Richard Rorty, "Introduction," in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Robert Brandom, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 10.

[22] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Robert Brandom, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 79.

[23] James O'Shea, "Revisiting Sellars on the Myth of the Given," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2002): pp. 490-503.

[24] Larry A. Hickman, *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture: Putting Pragmatism to Work* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 88.

[25] Ibid., p. 96.

[26] See, for instance, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism," in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), esp. pp. 166-68.

[27] Richard Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," in *The Rorty Reader*, Christopher J. Voparil and Richard J. Bernstein, eds. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 182.

[28] Ibid., p. 184.

[29] Richard Rorty, "Inquiry as Recontextualization: An Anti-dualist Account of Interpretation," in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 109.

[30] Richard Rorty, "From Philosophy to Postphilosophy," interview by Wayne Hudson and Wim van Reijen, in *Take*

**An Application of Sellarsian "We-Intentions"**

In his 2005 book on Sellars, Willem deVries wrote, "Almost thirty years ago, W. David Solomon lamented the neglect of Sellars's ethical writings. The situation has not changed in the interim."[31] It is clear that Rorty was exposed to these writings or at least some of the ideas they contained, and he describes key components of his ethical thinking as "borrowed from Wilfred [*sic*] Sellars."[32] The differences between their positions, however, are marked: like many other contemporary metaethical accounts, Sellars's is one in which form is stressed rather than content, but Rorty consistently eschewed formal characterizations. Part of the aim of this section is to show how Rorty's ethical positions may be called broadly Sellarsian despite his sloughing off so much of what Sellars took to be central.

In his ethical writings, Sellars's focus "[wa]s to identify moral judgments as one form of practical judgment and to explore the relationship between them and other practical judgments."[33] He considered morality to be "a field of inquiry in which good reasons can be offered for answers to questions belonging to that field."[34] This focus on the process of developing new judgments is necessary, Sellars argued, because rarely does normative reasoning move from a single belief to an obvious action; rather, it is only through a progression of related beliefs that one determines a proper course for action. On his account, ethical statements and beliefs are not inert: real belief cashes out in real consequences or, as Peirce claimed, "*belief* consists mainly in being deliberately

prepared to adopt the formula believed as a guide to action."[35]

The reason for this seems plain enough: in normative discourse, an individual who accepts one judgment frequently commits him or herself to another, which may entail some action taking place. An example of this may be seen in an individual simultaneously believing "I want my children to go to college" and "For my children to go to college, I will have to pay for their tuition." By having both of these beliefs simultaneously, the individual is required to do what he or she can to engage in an action, namely tuition-paying. But there is more to this chain of reasoning than just these two statements; there are enthymematic linking terms that play into this sort of decision-making. Beginning with but one or two practical judgments can frequently set off a long series of further judgments, all of which eventually lead to consequent action.

Many traditional accounts of practical philosophy in general and ethics in particular have been content to claim that judgments of this kind are best rendered in the imperative mood; for instance, the prescriptive character of normativity has frequently been cashed out as 'thou shalt' this or that. Sellars was convinced that any account of imperative inference cannot fully express the entailment-relationship of these judgments, so he required that they instead be treated as nonimperatives.[36] His way of doing this was to recast such judgments as *intentions*,[37] which are always in the

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*Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself*, Eduardo Mendieta, ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 27.

[31] Willem deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), p. 246.

[32] Richard Rorty, "Postphilosophical Politics," in *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 33.

[33] W. David Solomon, "Ethical Theory," in *Synoptic Vision: Essays on the Philosophy of Wilfrid Sellars* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 155.

[34] Wilfrid Sellars, "Science and Ethics," in *Philosophical Perspectives: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Reseda, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1967), p. 194.

[35] Charles S. Peirce, "The Meaning of 'Practical' Consequences," Collected Papers 5.27.

[36] It is in this way the Sellarsian system avoids emotivism. Quite a lot more could be said about where Sellars's work fits into the history of analytic metaethics; for the moment, it is enough to note he was attempting to put flesh on the bare bones of Prichard's insights (cf. Solomon, p. 155) while pushing back fervently against Ayerian emotivism.

[37] Sellars's treatment of intentions is where his formalism becomes most apparent. James O'Shea explains, "As a tidy formal device, Sellars in his various discussions of human agency formulates … action-generating volitions in terms of a 'Shall' operator on first-person propositional thinkings: for example, 'Shall (I

indicative mood. If all normative judgments are understood with this modality, they can be used as elements of indicative inference, which preserves the explanatory efficacy of a practical-reasoning account of moral decision-making. For Sellars, indicative-volitional statements functioned simultaneously as intentions, reasons, and causal antecedents of action, which are precisely the results needed when one makes a moral judgment.

As I emphasized in prior sections, Sellars recognized the irreducibility of the social in both his dismissal of givenness and his synoptic philosophical vision. This attentiveness to cultural imbeddedness continued in his ethical writings. With it established that moral judgments can only be understood as intentions, Sellars examined how this plays out in communities, especially when norms disagree. In these cases, we feel a sense of contradiction: For instance, one speaker might think the United States should be at war while another thinks quite the opposite. Each of these two likely believes in the exclusivity of his or her judgment; from speaker A's position, speaker B is wrong, and the same is surely the case for speaker A's position in the opinion of speaker B. If either of these positions were understood as nothing more than individual ethical expressions, there could never be normative contradictions, for "I believe the

United States should be at war," said by Speaker A seems to be contradicted by either "It is not the case that Speaker A believes the United States should be at war" or an additional utterance by Speaker A, "I believe the United States should not be at war." But neither of these proposed contradictions is acceptable: the first is a negation of ascription instead of a negation of intention, while the second is an entirely different positive intention.[38]

Even if these forms were to contradict, it is notable that no statement at all made by speaker B could in principle contradict those of speaker A. The intentions, dispositions, and judgments of B may certainly disagree with those of A, but if Sellars's normative-intentional scheme is correct, they may never individually be brought into contradiction.

In order to account for normative contradiction, Sellars reconstructed intentionality, asserting that there is more to moral discourse than only an individual interlocutor's intentions. Maintaining the universality he desired while simultaneously keeping ethical beliefs as action-motivating thoughts required that he posit "We-Expressions of Intention."[39] These are intentional statements that "express the intention of a group but are asserted (or expressed) by members of a group."[40] Thus, when speakers A and B genuinely disagree about whether the United States should be at war, they are not each merely expressing their own respective I-intention but rather making a claim about the desirability of the aims of one of the groups to which they both belong. So while speaker A and B might each individually assert, "I

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will *now* do A)'," *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism with a Normative Turn* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), p. 179. Sellars later devised use of a subscript after the 'Shall' to denote the intender, such that "Shall$_{Brown}$ (Jones will go to the store)" is read "Brown intends that Jones will go to the store."
While Sellars's 'Shall' operator is handy and worth discussion, giving a full account of its proper use would lead us too far afield, for Rorty disregards it entirely. Readers seeking more on this topic should see the relevant chapters of deVries's and O'Shea's books as well as Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), p. 180 and following; Bruce Aune, "Sellars on Practical Reason," in *Action, Knowledge and Reality: Critical Studies in Honor of Wilfrid Sellars,* Hector-Neri Castañeda, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975); Hector-Neri Castañeda, "Some Reflections on Wilfrid Sellars' Theory of Intentions," in *Agent, Language, and the Structure of the World: Essays Presented to Hector-Neri Castañeda, with His Replies*, J. E. Tomberlin, ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

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[38] A third potential formulation, "It is not the case that I believe the United States should be at war," uttered by the same speaker A, does contradict "I believe the United States should be at war," but it cannot be cashed out as an intention in the same way any of the other pseudo-contradictions may for reasons related to well-formed and proper deployment of the (here intentionally neglected) shall-operator.

[39] Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968), p. 215.

[40] W. David Solomon, op. cit., p. 175.

intend that the United States will (or will not) be at war," insofar as they are making a normative claim, there is a deeper form underlying their utterances. This underlying position is expressed in the form "We intend the United States will (and will not) be at war," though neither of the disagreeing speakers explicitly says this. This formal referent—the objects of which are interrelated, intersubjective, and shared—preserves the possibility of genuine and direct deliberative contradiction. We-intentions thus solve a problem that remained apparent in any individualistically intentional account of practical judgment.

Sellars was clear that we-intentions are not just conjunctions of individual intentions. While two individuals might each share a certain judgment and intention, their individual assertions taken together do not account for the features of we-intentions Sellars needed to make morality truly robust. Likewise, we-intentions cannot be an individual intention attached to a belief that others in one's community hold a similar position. This fails on two accounts: Sellars was clear that I-intending and we-intending are different forms of intention,[41] and more significantly, "we-intending involves a special 'form of consciousness' … [or] 'form of life'."[42]

This latter criterion is undeniably provocative, especially insofar as it directly sheds light on how Sellars took communities to be something more than simply the sum of their constitutive members. Intending in this new mode or form of life, intending within a group *is* the very form of moral discourse.[43] Due to his use of we-intentions, the particular moral judgments of an individual are inherently linked in virtue of explanation to those of the individual's particular group-affiliations. In an October, 1998, article in the *London Review of Books*, Jonathan Rée chided Richard Rorty for "using a histrionic 'we' to align himself with some group that was

being hounded by self-appointed guardians of philosophical propriety: 'we pragmatists', 'we anti-representationists', or 'we historicists', for example."[44] While this way of expressing his inclusion in these disparaged philosophical movements may seem at first impression over the top or insincere, it also may reveal the degree to Rorty was influenced by Sellars's group-centered ethical framework and inasmuch evinces sincerity. Beyond this, Rorty freely admitted that he "was trying to describe social progress in a way borrowed from Wilfred [*sic*] Sellars: the expansion of 'we' consciousness, that is, the ability to take more and more people of the sort fashionably called 'marginal' and think of them as one of us, included in us."[45]

Rorty's use of the term "borrow" is at once appropriate and somewhat misleading: while it is clear his ethical writings were influenced by Sellars, there are major differences between their presented understandings of "we-intentional" ethics. While Sellars has a robust, systematic account that gets him from experience to ethics, Rorty seems to slough off much of this formal work, making use of Sellars's conclusions without any particular regard for how they were developed.

Despite the centrality of Sellars's positions in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, it was not until ten years later, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, that Rorty began to engage directly with Sellars's metaethical findings. The interstitial articles "Method, Social Science, Social Hope," "Solidarity or Objectivity," and "Science as Solidarity" all made passing references to the communal upshot of the Sellarsian view, but all were substantially within the bounds of epistemology and concerned with 'we' as members of a shared conceptual schema or language game rather than anything more obviously ethical.[46]

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[41] Wilfrid Sellars, "Imperatives, Intentions, and the Logic of 'Ought'," in *Methodos*, Vol. 8 (1956): p. 203.
[42] W. David Solomon, op. cit., p. 176.
[43] Wilfrid Sellars, op. cit., p. 204.

[44] Jonathan Rée, "Strenuous Unbelief," in *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 20, No. 20 (Oct. 15, 1998): p. 7.
[45] Richard Rorty, "Postphilosophical Politics," in *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 33.
[46] This is not to say, of course, that one can have epistemology without ethics or ethics without epistemology but only that the three noted articles

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity,* Rorty argued that if Sellars was right that all experience is conceptually mediated and all concepts are linguistic, and if Rorty was right that all language is contingent, then there is no way for philosophy—or any other human enterprise—to put together the one true account of how things really are. Without this possibility, [47] Rorty advocated giving up on metaphysical and epistemological enterprises within philosophy and instead finding ways to increase *solidarity*, which he took to be "the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers."[48] Rorty summarized his take on ethical discourse by stating the relevant application of his epistemic arguments:

> [this is] a way of looking at morality as a set of practices, *our* practices, [which] makes vivid the difference between the conception of morality as the voice of a divinized portion of our soul, and as the voice of a contingent human artifact, a community which has grown up subject to the vicissitudes of time and chance.[49]

From this, Rorty argued that since all moral claims are ours, attempts at justification must be limited to ourselves; gone is any hope for universal justification. Here is where the influence of Sellars's metaethical system may be seen most strongly, for Rorty proposed that "what counts as rational or fanatical [and, one might add, justified or unjustified] is relative to the group to which we think it is necessary to justify ourselves—to the body of shared belief which determines the reference of the word 'we'."[50]

Even without a specific referent of his use of the term 'we', a formal point may be made: 'we' are those "individuals who find themselves heir to the same historical traditions and faced with the same problems."[51] At different points in his writings, Rorty made reference to a number of different 'we's, but the one that consistently trumps all the rest is that of the political liberal: "the audience I am addressing when I use the term 'we' … is made up of people whom I think of as social democrats."[52] He then offered a laundry-list of positions to which the majority of these people might agree, but they distill down to one key belief that is both descriptive and normative in scope: "cruelty is the worst thing we do."[53] This definitional principle is borrowed from Judith Shklar, who "highlights the psychological origins and burdens that accompany a commitment to liberal politics."[54]

In one of his last books, Rorty explicitly identified his political ideal: "the hope [is] that someday, any millennium now, my remote descendents will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law."[55] If we understand a society based on love to be one in which cruelty is anathema, then it is clear how this ideal vision is an intimately linked extension of his earlier comments on the liberal's disdain for cruelty. But how did he imagine we might move from here to there? Two years prior to his death, he admitted ignorance: "I have no idea how such a society could come about. It is, one might say, a mystery."[56] But nearly twenty years earlier, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty took himself to be offering a firmer plan of action for bringing

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engage their questions from the perspective of knowledge-acquisition.

[47] No doubt this will be a point of tremendous contention, and it is fair to object to Rorty's construction of such a strongly exclusive disjunction: either we can get the one true account of things, or we should stop doing epistemology and metaphysics. Here I do not offer a defense or criticism of Rorty on this point, though either could be presented.

[48] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press,1989), p. xvi.

[49] Ibid., p. 60.

[50] Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophy Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 177.

[51] Ibid., p. 184.

[52] Richard Rorty, "Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein," in *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Nov. 1987): p. 564.

[53] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. xv.

[54] Bernard Yack, ed., *Liberalism without Illusions: Essays on Liberal Theory and the Political Vision of Judith N. Shklar* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. ix.

[55] Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo, *The Future of Religion*, Santiago Zabala, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 40.

[56] Ibid.

about this ideal, and this plan was absolutely Sellarsian in content.

Without the possibility of transhistorical justification, Rorty recognized that no satisfaction can be found for a desire to condemn universally and fundamentally. The bugaboos of first year introduction to ethics courses, horrors such as the Holocaust and clitoridectomy, strike us as so repugnant that it is not enough to say they are wrong; rather, one must say they are *absolutely* wrong, wrong in all instances. On Rorty's account, this can still be said, but only by reference to community standards and the historical institutions that fund them, because there is nothing other than artifacts of this type. "I have been urging," Rorty indicated, "that we try *not* to want something which stands beyond history and institutions."[57] The question for a reader of Rorty must be whether one will join him in giving up the idea of "something that stands behind history."[58]

Instead of this kind of justificatory notion, Rorty offered *human solidarity*, the capacity of people to think of others as "one of us." This does not require an analysis of what it means to be 'us' or how one shall understand the other; "rather, it is … the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation. [It is] the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'."[59] The liberal 'we', which takes cruelty and humiliation to be its greatest enemies, gradually finds itself less and less concerned with the dissimilarities that have traditionally gotten in the way of greater fellow-feeling. If the liberal is sincerely concerned with eradication of cruelty, then engagement with any other feature of human life—whether communal or individual—must be thought of as subordinate to recognizing and stopping the humiliation of others. For Rorty, the effort to make others morally

considerable is not founded on philanthropic action at a distance but instead by considering others to be "one of us," or within our present 'we'. In the final analysis, the 'we' of "we liberals" is in fact—ideally, ultimately, and hopefully—subsumed and replaced by something more like "we sufferers."

This speaks to what Christopher Voparil notices as a developmental tension in Rorty's work:

> Rorty initially claimed that our sense of solidarity with others is strongest when we identify with them as a part of some particular--that is, less than universal--community, as 'one of us,' whether it be as Americans, as liberals, or the like. More recently, however, he seems to have abandoned this view, suggesting that we replace the ideas of justice and universal moral obligation with the idea of ... "loyalty to a very large group--the human species."[60]

I take it that the ideal of Rorty's solidaristic account in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* already had the seeds of loyalty to (or solidarity with) something like the human species, as the potential to suffer is common to both the present and limited 'we' but also to whatever more-universal one moral action attempts to develop. While sympathy at a distance may be difficult and thus our sense of solidarity easier in local communities, stopping there would be to abandon the Rortian pursuit of "think[ing] of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us'." In this way, Rorty went one better than Sellars, who wrote that "the commitment to the well-being of others *is a commitment deeper than any commitment to abstract principle*."[61] For while Sellars is right that the moral stance requires that other people matter to us more

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[57] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 189.
[58] Ibid., p. 190.
[59] Ibid.

[60] Christopher J. Voparil, op. cit., p. 86n.40. In the omitted portion of the quotation, Voparil suggests Rorty may have taken up the term 'loyalty' from Royce. Interestingly, Sellars claims that "the only frame of mind which can provide direct support for moral commitment is what Royce called Loyalty, and what Christians call Love of Neighbor." See "Imperatives, Intentions, and the Logic of 'Ought'," in *Methodos*, Vol. 8 (1956).
[61] Wilfrid Sellars, "'Ought' and Moral Principles," unpublished manuscript dated "Pittsburgh, February 14, 1966," available online http://www.ditext.com/sellars/omp.html.

than do vague principles, he identifies attention to other people with a "love of neighbor." Rorty pressed further than this, encouraging us to press at the traditional boundaries of our neighborhood, of the 'we' or 'one of us', ever aiming to enlarge the sphere of moral consideration, looking only to a baseline sense that other people can hurt and be hurt just as we can.