# The inner borders of pragmatism: toward a Rortyan reading of Peirce[*]

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the dialogue between "hard" and "soft" pragmatism, represented respectively by Charles S. Peirce and Richard Rorty, with the aim of tracing—and in part transcending—key divisions running across the pragmatist tradition. It highlights central divergences, notably between Peirce's account of the relation between practice and reality, alongside his notion of the final opinion, and Rorty's antirepresentationalist reworking of "concrete reasonableness" around the concept of contingency. At the same time, both thinkers converge in linking reason with feeling or sentiment, particularly through Peirce's framing of esthetics as a normative science—a perspective that may, from a Rortyan viewpoint, be understood as rethinking the cultural role of scientific practice. By exploring these tensions and continuities, the study outlines a broader conceptual space where reason and practice jointly foster progress, understood as an ongoing effort toward self-transcendence. In doing so, it offers a renewed appreciation of pragmatism's contemporary relevance across ethics, aesthetics, and social thought.

**Keywords:** Pragmatism, Richard Rorty, Charles S. Peirce, antirepresentationalism, contingency, concrete reasonableness, final opinion/final vocabulary

# Las fronteras internas del pragmatismo: hacia una interpretación rortiana de Peirce

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina el diálogo entre el pragmatismo "duro" y el pragmatismo "blando", representados, respectivamente, por Charles S. Peirce y Richard Rorty, con el objetivo de trazar—y en parte superar—algunas divisiones clave que atraviesan la tradición pragmatista. El análisis pone de relieve divergencias centrales, en particular entre la concepción peirciana de la relación entre práctica y realidad, junto con su noción de opinión final, y la reelaboración antirrepresentacionalista que Rorty hace de la "razonabilidad concreta" a partir del concepto de contingencia. Al mismo tiempo, ambos pensadores convergen en vincular la razón con el sentimiento, especialmente a través de la caracterización peirciana de la estética como ciencia normativa – una perspectiva que puede entenderse, desde un punto de vista rortiano, como una reconsideración del papel cultural de la práctica científica. Al explorar estas tensiones y continuidades, el estudio sugiere un espacio conceptual más amplio en el que razón y práctica contribuyen conjuntamente al progreso, entendido como un esfuerzo continuo de auto-trascendencia. De este modo, ofrece une apreciación renovada de la vigencia contemporánea del pragmatismo en los ámbitos de la ética, la estética y el pensamiento social.

**Palabras clave:** Pragmatismo, Richard Rorty, Charles S. Peirce, antirrepresentacionalismo, contingencia, razonabilidad concreta, opinión final/vocabulario final

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## Introduction

The original pragmatist movement underwent at least two conceptual births. First, in 1878, with Peirce's formulation of his maxim in *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*. Second, nearly thirty years later, with the rechristening of his own position as "pragmaticism," motivated in part by disagreements with William James and F. C. S. Schiller—whom he accused of having "carried pragmatism too far" (Peirce, 1998, p. xxvii)—but above all by a wish to counter distortions the term "pragmatism" had suffered since falling "into literary clutches" (Peirce, 1998, p. 334). Seeking, in response, to reassert the laboratory spirit that always guided his philosophical ventures, Peirce thus gave rise to what Ryan White (2013) aptly describes as "a split or breach" within pragmatism, so that it appears, from its very beginning, as "the product of a division within and against itself" (p. 61).

This inner division solidified into the now-familiar picture of *two* seemingly irreconcilable pragmatisms. According to Cheryl Misak (2013), a Peircean version (her preference) is "committed to doing justice to the objective dimension of human inquiry," while another, drawing on James, holds that "there is no truth at which we might aim—only agreement within a community or what works for an individual or what is found to solve a problem" (p. 3). This split appears to have deepened since the 1960s, with the "revival" of pragmatism, particularly under the influence of Richard Rorty, who never concealed his thoroughly un-Peircean ambition to treat philosophy as a literary genre. For Rorty (1991a), pragmatism has been haunted by a tension between scientism and romanticism—between "an attempt to raise the rest of culture to the epistemological level of the natural sciences and an attempt to level down the natural sciences to an epistemological par with art, religion, and politics" (p. 63). He saw in James and Dewey a creative balance between these impulses, linking romanticism to both a democratic ethos and a sensitivity to historical contingency. In Peirce's case, however, his judgment was far less even-handed. On the one hand, Peirce's moral and political commitments bore the stamp of an aristocratic ethos[1] (Rorty 1992, p. 168); on the other, his philosophical outlook was animated by the conviction that "there *were* non-trivial and deep structures destined to be discovered—structures that were not merely inventions of a given historical period" (Rorty 1992, p. 168). By contrast, Rorty sought to "bring to the fore in

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[1] It is worth recalling, in this regard, that Peirce also supported slavery, along with his father's racism and secessionist leanings (see Menand, 2001, pp. 160–163).

pragmatism those elements that downplay the value of science in favor of poetry, and [to] see human beings primarily as creators of themselves, rather than as inquirers" (Rorty 1992, p. 168).

Rorty thus stands out as a catalyst for the divisions within pragmatism—specifically, between what Nicholas Rescher (2005) termed a "hard pragmatism," spanning Peirce through C. I. Lewis and Hilary Putnam to Susan Haack, and a "soft pragmatism," following James, Schiller, and Rorty himself. Rescher regarded this split as a "crisis" that "cries out for adopting […] a reconstructive understanding of what pragmatism is all about—one that keeps the doctrine close to its Peircean roots in the criteriology for assessing meaning and truth in matters of fact regarding the world's ways" (p. 364). Yet must the Peircean way be the only way? And why should the coexistence of two strands amount to a "crisis"? Following Christopher Voparil, I would argue that the real problem lies not in the loss of pragmatism's supposed "roots"— which have been growing apart from the outset—but in the entrenchment of rival positions that block the way of further inquiry. On this view, "the contemporary resurgence of philosophical pragmatism faces a critical impasse" not because of its pluralist landscape, but because "divisions and internecine quarrels continually thwart and fragment these new energies" (Voparil, 2022, p. 1).

Rorty crystallizes this tension, often serving as the foil against which pragmatism has been (re)defined according to criteria "expressly designed to define pragmatism—or the *best* pragmatism—in ways that leave [him] on the outside looking in" (Voparil, 2022, pp. 286-87).[2] These criteria are typically Peircean in spirit, as much of the secondary literature accentuates the distance between Peirce's and Rorty's pragmatisms (see, *e.g.*, Legg, 1999, as well as Haack, 1993, who contends that "Rorty misunderstands Peirce thoroughly" [p. 411]). To be sure, Rorty himself helped to sharpen this opposition through his famously dismissive remarks about Peirce. Peirce, he claimed, was the least "important" or "useful" (Rorty, 2021, p. 7) of pragmatism's founders[3]—"his contribution to pragmatism was merely to have given it a name,

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[2] Voparil points to Cheryl Misak, Jeffrey Stout, and Nicholas Rescher as leading exponents of this strategy.

[3] "It seems safe to say that if Peirce had never lived, that would have made no great difference to the history of philosophy. For Frege would have made the linguistic turn single-handedly" (Rorty, 2021, p. 7).

and to have stimulated James" (Rorty, 1982, p. 161).[4] In fact, Rorty's evolving stance toward Peirce mirrors his own shift toward a full-blown "soft" pragmatism: after spending his early career attempting to "discover the secret of… Peirce's esoteric doctrine of 'the reality of Thirdness' and thus of his fantastically elaborate semiotico-metaphysical 'System'," he eventually came to recognize him as "just one more whacked-out triadomaniac" (Rorty, 1999, p. 134). Most later references to Peirce would remain passing and imprecise, revealing a striking asymmetry between the careful attention Rorty devoted to James and Dewey and the cursory treatment he reserved for Peirce.

This article seeks to nuance this dual image of pragmatism by tracing lines of communication between its two strands. My approach is explicitly Rortyan: I aim to regiment "hard" pragmatism within "soft" pragmatism by adopting Rorty's method—borrowed from Harold Bloom—of "strong misreading,"[5] that is, of "beat[ing] the text into a shape which will serve [the critic's] own purpose" (Rorty, 1982, p. 151). This "method" is not only justified but, in a sense, required by Rorty's elliptical references to Peirce. What I propose can be understood as an effort to clarify Rorty's Peircean inheritance, by staging my misreading on two levels: first, on Peirce himself, by recasting selected elements of his thought within Rorty's own concerns with "cultural politics," thereby seeking, in Voparil's words, to "read politically" both thinkers (2011);[6] and second, on Rorty's own reading of Peirce, by asking to what extent Rorty was wrong to dismiss Peirce (or grant him only cursory attention) rather than, as James did, let himself be "stimulated" by him in shaping his own views—and to what extent he may have been right to do so.

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[4] Indeed, in Rorty's view, James and Dewey are best understood not as heirs to Peirce but as thinkers who "reacted" against the Kantian conviction that philosophy could provide an "all-embracing ahistorical context in which every other species of discourse could be assigned its proper place and rank" (Rorty, 1982, p. 161). Their pragmatism matters because they succeeded in breaking with Peirce's project rather than in extending it; for it was only by deconstructing its origins the tradition could find a viable point of departure.

[5] Vincent Colapietro (2011) has pursued a similar line of inquiry in reverse, approaching Rorty through Peirce by the same method. Despite a difference in focus, I hope to show, likewise, that "Peirce can be read as preparing the way for Rorty in certain fundamental respects; in addition, Rorty can be read as carrying forward some impulses clearly integral to Peirce's project" (p. 40).

[6] This marks the main difference between Voparil's project in the opening chapter of *Reconstructing Pragmatism* (2022) and my own: whereas his reading focuses primarily on identifying common ground between Peirce and Rorty on the issue of realism, I seek to extend this inquiry onto a specifically Rortyan terrain – hence an arguably more forceful "beating" of the text.

Accordingly, I hope to outline a path for approaching Peirce through Rorty, aligning with the anti-representationalism, ethnocentric contingentism, and theoretical pluralism central to Rorty's brand of pragmatism. Building on this double misreading, the paper advances three connected claims. First, it reinterprets Peirce's *concrete reasonableness* as a key to Rorty's moralized conception of rationality, revealing how both thinkers locate the growth of reason in the refinement of our sentiments. Second, it proposes that Rorty's rejection of Peirce's scientific method should not be read as a repudiation but as a redirection—the articulation of a "fourth method" grounded in pluralism and self-transcendence, where progress is measured not by convergence but by creative re-description. Third, by bringing these affinities to light, the essay seeks to challenge the entrenched image of two pragmatisms at odds, and to join Voparil (2022) in claiming that "our understanding of pragmatism as a whole, our grasp of Rorty's thought, and even the stances of… contemporary pragmatists themselves, are enriched by taking Rorty more seriously" (p. 6). What emerges, finally, is a vision of pragmatism in which the moral and aesthetic dimensions of reason become inseparable from its critical and transformative force.

## 1. The Secrets of Thirdness: Vagueness, Representation, and Contingency

Rorty's short-lived career as a professed Peircean pragmatist, confined to the early 1960s, finds its clearest expression in *Pragmatism, Categories, and Language* (1961), his most sustained effort to shed light on the "secret" at the heart of Peirce's doctrine of Thirdness—that is, to make sense of his Scotist realism and his opposition to nominalism. Famously, Peirce regarded the realism of universals as a natural outcome of his pragmatism, understood as a method for clarifying ideas—one of whose aims was to "sweep away" metaphysical "rubbish" while preserving its "precious essence" to yield a "purified philosophy" capable of proceeding through the same observational methods as the "true sciences" (Peirce, 1998, p. 338). At first glance, the contrast between Rorty's early defense of a realist Peirce and his later, explicit endorsement of nominalism might seem to signal a radical reversal. Yet this engagement reveals not a change of allegiance but a deeper continuity. In this respect, the opening section aims to show how Rorty's youthful reading of Peirce already contains the seeds of the transformation that this paper as a whole seeks to trace—from Peirce's scientific realism to Rorty's moral and aesthetic pluralism. It argues that Rorty's interpretation of Thirdness

redefines rationality along three interwoven lines: an ontological insight into a world marked by vagueness and mediation; a practical insight into the contingent and resistant character of our habits; and a normative insight into concrete reasonableness as the ideal of growth that will later inform Rorty's own approach to cultural politics. In identifying these moments, the section sets the stage for the following analysis of how Rorty, by radicalizing Peirce's realism, eventually replaces the ideal of convergence with one of open-ended self-transcendence.

Rorty's aim in 1961 is to position Peirce alongside the later Wittgenstein against contemporary "nominalism"—by which he means the positivist current within analytic philosophy[7] that treats vagueness as a degenerate state, to be overcome only by perfect determination. By contrast, for Rorty, Peirce's realism hinges on the primacy of indeterminacy (Rorty, 2014, p. 25-26). The category of Thirdness, specifically, assumes particular significance for Rorty, as it reveals a form of rationality shared between mind and nature—grounded not in the apprehension of common universals, but in their being shaped by the same kinds of "determinate indeterminations" (Rorty, 2014, p. 29). Peirce's image of a universe "perfused with signs" amounts to an acknowledgment of a real vagueness that is not simply a product of our minds or our language (Rorty, 2014, p. 27). This parallel indeterminacy shields us against the misplaced ambitions of verificationism and the skeptical anxieties that inevitably accompany them. It also anticipates one of Rorty's later antirepresentationalist slogans: our words do not, as Plato would have it, "cut reality at the joints." And, crucially, we should not worry about whether they do:

> In applying Peirce's categories to the act of naming, no new exit has been found from the maze of words; but perhaps something has happened to the man who feels caught in the maze analogous to what happens to a prisoner who takes to heart the realization that all men are, in one sense or another, prisoners. All that has happened is that the maze of words has been enlarged by more words, but what more can we reasonably hope for, once we are convinced that language cannot be transcended? (Rorty, 2014, p. 29).

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[7] Such a program also challenges the common view of Rorty as a defector from analytic philosophy. In reality, his intellectual background is pragmatist from the outset (see *e.g.* Calcaterra, 2019, pp. 7–8), which makes his trajectory better understood not as a break with analytic philosophy, but as a shift from one form of pragmatism ("hard") to another ("soft").

Here, the concern is not whether a vocabulary mirrors reality but its "convenience" (Rorty, 2014, p. 23) for a given community.[8] Rorty's later "relaxed" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 60) repudiation of the correspondence theory of truth can be seen as prefigured by the observation that the universe itself exhibits indeterminacy, relieving us of the need to worry about it in our own speech. In that sense, there is, after all, a kind of "correspondence" between language and reality!

Rorty preserves this interpretation even after crossing what, from Peirce's perspective, would have been enemy lines. By embracing nominalism, he eschews the notion that "abstract entities have a sort of supernatural ability to adhere to people who try to toss them away" (Rorty, 1998, p. 336). And yet, even if this move seems to place him in opposition to Peirce, it remains consistent with the interpretation offered in 1961. If the point of realism was never to secure a one-to-one correspondence between language and fixed natural universals—conceived as thing-like entities (Rorty, 2014, p. 25)—but rather to uncover the irreducible vagueness at work in each of them, then Rorty may well be said to have remained a realist in that sense. This is precisely what underlies his later adoption of Davidson's vocabulary—particularly the critique of the scheme-content dualism, which erases the relation of "making true" between subject and world (Rorty, 1991a, p. 120), yet does not thereby deprive us of the ability to "get things right" (Rorty, 2000, p. 375).[9] From this standpoint, objectivity arises not from a mysterious correspondence but from the "triangulation" formed through the shared responsiveness of speakers to one another *and* to a common world (Rorty, 2000, p. 376). As Voparil (2022) notes, this shift in idiom—from Peirce to Davidson—should be read as a continuation of the same project: Rorty remains a "Peircean realist" (p. 20) in holding that the causal ties that connect us to the world and the justificatory ties that bind our beliefs together leave no gap to be bridged in explaining our attunement to it. In this sense, his antirepresentationalism continues to serve a therapeutic purpose: as in 1961, its aim is to ward off the anxiety provoked by the idea that being trapped in a maze of words—with no hope of transcending it—entails drifting away from reality. This strategy makes it possible to dispense with the hard pragmatist's adherence to the

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[8] As a complement to the previous note, it is worth noting that this emphasis on "convenience" already anticipates Rescher's (2005) description of soft pragmatism, for which truth is "a matter of expediency – of what we find to be efficient in practice" (p. 358). Even within Rorty's early, "hard" phase, such tendencies toward the "soft" variety are already discernible.

[9] For a careful discussion of the difference between "made true by facts" and "getting things right," see Huetter-Almerigi, 2020.

"traditional conceptions of truth as adequation to facts," while still affirming a "truth-reality coordination" (Rescher, 2005, p. 359), albeit in a minimal or "trivialized" sense (Voparil, 2022, p. 86).

This continuity explains why Peirce's categories continue to play an operative role, though largely absent from Rorty's later vocabulary. Specifically, Rorty's way of separating causal from justificatory relations in our contact with the world bears a strong resemblance to the distinction between Secondness (reaction, brute force, actuality) and Thirdness (mediation, generality, thought), which Peirce consistently presents as irreducible (see, *e.g.*, his emblematic example of the gift in Peirce, 1998, pp. 364-365). Similarly, for Rorty (1998), the fact that we may be "content with an account of the world as exerting control on our inquiries in a merely causal way" does not thereby imply that such control is also "rational" (p. 140). When we confuse our causal relations to the world with the inferential and discursive practices through which we justify beliefs—practices which never point beyond themselves, but only to further propositions and concepts—we reintroduce the familiar anxieties associated with the "word-world" relation as a site of epistemic tension. In doing so, we once again create "a context in which skeptical doubts make sense" (Rorty, 1998, p. 154), by raising questions that, for Rorty, are best left aside, namely:

1) On what grounds could we ensure that our descriptions really represent "how things really are anyway" (Rorty, 1998, p. 86)?

2) Is there a privileged descriptive context that connects us to the intrinsic nature of reality: a context that is not (or not merely about) another text, but bears on "the real essence of the lump which lurks behind its appearances—how God or Nature would describe the lump" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 85)?

A second aspect of Rorty's later thought can be discerned in his 1961 reading of Peirce: specifically, his account of contingency and self-creation. At that stage, Rorty (2014) understands habits and signs as "neither natural nor altogether conventional" (p. 28), and as always exhibiting some degree of resistance to change or to interpretive flexibility.[10] Despite his later shift to nominalism, this insight remains central to Rorty's thinking: for

> If you are a nominalist, any exploration of presuppositional relations between
> concepts in which you may engage will take the form of an argument that you could

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[10] "A sign can have many interpretations (while resisting some more than others) and a habit can express itself at various times in various manners (but not in any and every manner)" (Rorty, 2014, p. 28).

not use some words in certain ways if you did not use some other words in certain other ways (Rorty, 1998, p. 331).

In this light, to acknowledge our contingency—that is, to recognize that we are our own makers, without being able (or needing) to ground our vocabularies and practices by appealing to the authority of some "non-human Other"—is not to surrender to total arbitrariness. On the one hand, "convenience" has its criteria: one can always assess, within a given community, what proves more or less useful. Indeed, much of Rorty's intellectual energy was spent arguing that representationalist vocabularies are unnecessary, and indeed actively harmful to our self-understanding—without ever claiming to offer a definitive proof of it (see *e.g.* Rorty, 1989, p. 9). On the other hand, our habits have a stubborn tendency to resist: however contingent in origin, they nonetheless acquire a certain inertia, a cumulative weight that is not easily shaken off. Rorty himself often acknowledged, particularly in his dialogues with fellow "wet liberals" (Rorty, 1998, p. 52-53), his unwavering allegiance to the norms, practices, and vocabularies they shared—and even to the conviction of their superiority over other and earlier traditions— despite being unable to provide any rigorous foundation for them (see *e.g.* Rorty, 2021, pp. 71, 151–152). This is the crux of ethnocentrism as a meta-theoretical stance: to affirm the contingency of our norms and practices—and thus the impossibility of providing them with ultimate warrant—while also acknowledging the pressure they exert upon us. It is in this light that Wittgenstein's metaphor becomes especially meaningful: at the limit where "my spade is turned," I can no longer justify my practice by appeal to further reasons—"this is simply what I do" (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 91). Granted, but the spade *still turns*, meaning quite literally that something (my practice) *resists*. We create ourselves, but never out of nothing: we must always contend with a context that places limits on our projects of self-transformation—even if those limits are never absolute, let alone "natural."

The line of argument pursued so far can be extended into a domain where the link between Peirce and Rorty is less obvious but no less instructive. Here, the categories lead us from Peirce's cosmology—arguably the most metaphysical part of his work—to Rorty's liberal politics. Specifically, Peirce's notion of the "law of mind" exemplifies habit in its own right, differing not only from brute reaction but also from the determinism of strict laws. As a cosmological principle, mind stands apart from matter, which itself is nothing but "effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws" (Peirce, 1960c, p. 20):

> The truth is, the mind is not subject to "law" in the same rigid sense that matter is. It only experiences gentle forces which merely render it more likely to act in a given way than otherwise would. There always remains a certain amount of arbitrary spontaneity in its action, without which it would be dead (Peirce, 1960c, p. 108).

This involves the idea of an indeterminacy at work in a double sense: (1) at the genetic level, in that the lawfulness of the Universe finds its origin in an initial state of indeterminacy or "a chaos of unpersonalized feeling" (Peirce, 2010, p. 110); (2) at the evolutionary level, insofar as it is by virtue of this mental component—present both in the structure of habit and in the universe's ability to change its habits—that novelty is able to continually arise. There is, in fact, a hesitation, or a tension, in Peirce's speculations between a fully fixed final state—as embodied in the conception of a universe "progressing from a state of all but pure chance to a state of all but complete determination by law" (Peirce, 1993, p. 293)—and the model of concrete reasonableness, grounded in the idea of an infinite growth in the development of increasingly complex and multifaceted relations among things, with no terminus ever to be reached: "the essence of Reason is such that its being never can have been completely perfected. It always must be in a state of incipiency, of growth" (Peirce, 1960a, p. 337).

This framework finds a significant echo in the expressly political stance developed by Rorty in his later writings: the idea that a liberal vision of the community presupposes a constant effort to "expand our sense of 'us' as far as we can" (Rorty, 1989, p. 196), integrating ever-new and diverse perspectives. Indeed, Rorty at times draws approvingly on the Peircean themes of synechism (Rorty, 1998, p. 106) and evolutionary love (Rorty, 1999, p. 39), interpreting the "growth of Thirdness" as "the gradual linking of everything up with everything else through triadic relationships" (Rorty, 2021, p. 4), which in turn results in an ever-widening weave, in both breadth and depth, of relations among things—here understood politically, among individuals and communities. Such is the lesson of the Deweyan tenet that "growth itself is the only moral end" (see Rorty, 1999, pp. 8, 28, 120). Peirce thus offers a cosmology devoid of metaphysical rigidity, which can be seen as prefiguring Rorty's historicist anti-essentialism. For Peirce, evolution has a certain direction, but is not bound to any fixed blueprint. That is, habit and its development have, as Thirds, an inherently rational or "reasonable" dimension, yet such rationality has no content beyond the idea of increasingly more complex and varied forms of interconnection at the cosmological level—leaving aside the question of what such relations might (or should) actually be.

## 2. What Does "Final" Really Mean?

Having traced in Peirce the outlines of a rationality immanent in nature and practice, the discussion now turns to its teleological ambitions—to what Peirce called the "final opinion." The section asks what it means for inquiry to reach such an end, and how Rorty's notion of a "final vocabulary" transforms this aspiration. For Peirce, the "final" appears to express a faith in a rational order that, given time, will overcome the accidents of history and yield convergence; for Rorty, it marks the refusal of that faith—an insistence that our existing practices, methods, and norms, though necessary for inquiry, can never free us from the contingency built into them. From this contrast emerge two distinct visions of rationality: one that seeks assurance through established procedures, and one that finds progress in their continual re-creation.

This contrast hints at the deeper rift that would eventually set Rorty apart from Peirce. Indeed, in view of the distinctively open and undogmatic character of Peirce's metaphysical outlook, why did Rorty make so little substantive use of it? It seems that, for Rorty, Peirce lacked a genuine *literary* gift: the ability to tell "edifying" stories—"satires, parodies, aphorisms" (Rorty, 1979, p. 369)—about his time, beyond what he had to say about the scientific method. He lacked what thinkers like Hegel or Heidegger could offer him: a richly developed, concrete content—something Rorty valued precisely because it lent itself to metaphorical redescription, and whose absence in Peirce can, given such sensibilities, be read less as a virtue than as a drawback. Even though Peirce identified the fundamental principle of evolution—and did so fully and very early, recognizing its world-historical significance (as illustrated by his account of a conversation with Chauncey Wright in Peirce, 1960b, pp. 43–44)—he used it only in a narrative aimed at establishing the hegemony of his own, scientific culture, even as he framed it within his undeniably anti-foundationalist and fallibilist commitments.[11] For this reason, Rorty kept Peirce at a considerable distance throughout his career, as most of his ideas were too contaminated by the laboratory spirit to permit the kind of strong misreading Rorty liked to practice with metaphysical thinkers such as Hegel,

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[11] See *e.g.* Abrams, 2002 for a discussion, in dialogue with Rorty, of anti-foundationalist metaphors in Peirce.

Heidegger,[12] or Derrida, without running the risk of smuggling back in a representationalist or scientistic metaphysics.

This "contamination" is especially apparent in Peirce's accounts of Thirdness in the course of his pragmaticist turn. It is here that the dual birth of pragmatism plays its role as a dividing line between its two rival strands. At the heart of Peirce's conceptual shift lies a reformulation of the 1878 maxim through the adoption of a counterfactual standpoint. That is, whereas previously the determination of a thing's "practical effects" was subordinated to our actual experiential contact with it—so that, for instance, the question of whether a diamond is hard prior to any test made upon it amounted to a mere "arbitrary 'usage of speech'" (Peirce, 1998, p. 356)—Peirce's "extreme scholastic realism" now leads him to maintain that "it is a real fact that it *would* resist pressure" (Peirce, 1960d, p. 166). This acknowledgment of the reality of "would-be's"—namely, of dispositional or habitual laws governing the behavior of things, and expressed through our "intellectual concepts" (Peirce, 1998, p. 421)—underpins a new definition of the real as "that which is such as it is regardless of how it is, at any time, thought to be" (Peirce, 1998, 356). The representationalist element emerges here in the claim that such a property provides a guarantee with respect to the final opinion, in which "the state of things which will be believed […] is real" (Peirce, 1998, pp. 342–343). In other words, Peirce's framework assumes that reality can, in principle, serve as a standard against which our concepts and practices are measured:

> Thought, controlled by a rational experimental logic, tends to the fixation of certain opinions, equally destined, the nature of which will be the same in the end, however the perversity of thought of whole generations may cause the postponement of the ultimate fixation (Peirce, 1998, 342).

From a Rortyan standpoint, such a position (most clearly in the remark about "the perversity of thought of whole generations") inevitably appears as a refusal to grant full weight to contingency and its uncertainties—together with their potentially troubling consequences, as illustrated by Sartre's remarks on fascism: "in reality, things will be as much as man has decided they are" (quoted in Rorty, 1982, p. xlii). Against this, Rorty insists on viewing "all [our] criteria as no more than temporary resting-places, constructed by a community to facilitate its inquiries"

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[12] For a paradigmatic example of such a strong misreading—arguably a remarkably charitable one—see Rorty's rendering of Heidegger's "more primordial" understandings of Being as those that "[make] it easier to grasp [their] own contingency" (Rorty, 1991b, p. 43).

(Rorty, 1982, p. xlii), and which cannot be measured against any external standard that might assure us we are on the right track. This framework illuminates the provocative edge of Rorty's expression "final vocabulary" in light of Peirce's concept of the "final opinion": in both cases, one has reached the ultimate stage of justification, at which it ceases. Yet Rorty's framing casts an enduring suspicion upon the "final"—in the sense of "completed"—character of inquiry: a vocabulary "is 'final' in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse" (Rorty, 1989, p. 73). In other words, where Peirce looks toward the *terminus ad quem*, Rorty refers us back to the *terminus a quo*—for in the absence of any secure grounding at the outset, the very idea of a definitive endpoint becomes empty.

Rorty's ambivalence—despite occasional and discrete endorsements—toward Peirce's theme of the "growth of Thirdness" becomes understandable at this point, as it remains too closely tied to the idea of "something that will guide us toward CSP[13] along convergent lines" (Rorty, 1998, p. 52). Even if one takes care not to equate universals with things, pragmaticist realism implies that general concepts do have metaphysical traction, such that conceptual mediation must conform to a general reality rather than merely to social utility or coherence. This very traction is what is supposed to ensure convergence at the ideal end of inquiry. Yet such convergence is not even evident in our practices, provided they are apprehended in their totality: "Peirce's idea of 'the end of inquiry' might make sense if we could detect an asymptotic convergence in inquiry, but such convergence seems a local and short-term phenomenon" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 131). In fact, for Rorty, the domain of scientific rationality is inherently local, and is defined by being "methodical," that is, "to have criteria for success laid down in advance" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 36), in a sense close to Kuhn's "normal science" or Wittgensteinian "rails," which guarantee correctness in the successive application of such criteria. This "procedural" sense of rationality, as I shall call it, is not to be confused with its pluralistic or "civilized" sense (Rorty, 1991a, p. 37), which "names a set of moral virtues: tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 37). Thus, what distinguishes science from, for example, literature is that, in the former, "the vocabulary in which the explananda are described has to remain constant" (Rorty,

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[13] "CSP" is the acronym coined by Wilfrid Sellars for "Conceptual System Peirce," which Rorty interprets as "the notion of 'the community of inquirers at the ideal end of inquiry'" (Rorty, 1998, p. 52).

1982, p. 142), whereas in the latter "one can achieve success by introducing a quite new genre of poem or novel or critical essay without argument" (Rorty, 1982, p. 142). Accordingly, while the procedural sense of rationality excludes the "humanities" from its scope, the civilized sense captures what is truly valuable in all our cultural practices—including, as we shall see, in scientific practice itself.

Thus, even though Rorty's most frequent approving reference to Peirce is undoubtedly his account of (true) beliefs as "rules" or "habits of action," his own conception of habit is largely deflated compared with one that suggests a gradual adjustment to universals operating at an ontological level. For Rorty, the presupposition of such an adjustment underlies any version of the final opinion, or "idealized rational acceptability," but it remains implicit until one asks: acceptable for whom (Rorty, 1998, p. 53)? Yet the only meaningful answer can be: "us, at our best," or a representation of the "ideal community" as one with which we can feel solidarity. Taking ethnocentrism seriously means acknowledging that our rationality is always limited by, and proportional to, our imaginative capacities, in the sense that we cannot conceive of an ideal term radically alien to our present practices. Does this then imply that we must abandon our ideal of progress? In fact, the opposite is true, so that the concept of progress becomes incomprehensible only if we remain confined to CSP: such a conception of the final opinion either amounts to an arbitrary extension of our own criteria of rationality to a future situation in which we have attained "an accurate representation of what was already there" (Rorty, 1979, p. 370), or to a confusion of "the possible transcendence of the present by the future with the necessary transcendence of time by eternity" (Rorty, 1998, p. 61). Soft pragmatism, for Rorty, thus provides the more coherent framework for thinking about truth and progress. It accepts, with Rescher (2005) and the hard pragmatist, that "the applicative efficacy of our beliefs is seen [as] the best-available standard we have in forming our estimates of what the truth of the matter happens to be" (p. 359), yet refuses to elevate this standard into a final measure of reality. In this spirit, civilized rationality replaces the desire for ultimate objectivity with the hope for solidarity (Rorty, 1991a, pp. 27–28), that is, the "transcendence in the direction of a future contingency" (Rorty, 1998, p. 108)—whose betterment can only be hoped for, never guaranteed.

What is at stake in the concepts of the final opinion and of rationality is the fundamental divergence between Rorty's and Peirce's representations of philosophy. For Peirce, pragmatism was intended to bring more rigor to philosophy, notably by making our ideas clear(er). For

Rorty, clarity is merely a matter of familiarity (Rorty, 1998, p. 42), and rigor "is something you can have only after entering into an agreement with some other people to subordinate your imagination to their consensus" (Rorty, 1998, p. 339). This should not be taken to imply that these aspects of culture are negligible or uninteresting. But the true source of progress lies elsewhere: in what Rorty, following Dewey, calls the "means-end continuum," namely "the idea that you change what you want as you find out what happens when you try getting what you once wanted" (Rorty, 1998, p. 56). In this sense, contingency operates both upstream and downstream from our practices: it makes it impossible to absolutize our practices in terms of justification, yet at the same time it provides the very impetus for progress—even justifying it in a sense, since it is precisely because our practices are not absolute that we find reasons to transcend ourselves, by recognizing that "there are no purposes to be served save our own and that we serve no purposes except those we dream up as we go along" (Rorty, 1998, pp. 300–301).

## 3. The Esthetic Impulse: Splits, Shocks, and the Growth of Reason

By turning toward a conception of contingency inseparable from a theoretical pluralism that motivates both an "ironist" stance toward our practices and a genuine commitment to the idea of progress, Rorty came to describe himself as having repudiated his early Peircean ambitions—particularly his youthful pursuit of a systematic metaphysics—though, as we have seen, significant continuities remain. Yet the story does not end there. One final point of possible contact is explicitly acknowledged by Rorty, but never developed in any substantial way—probably due to the fragmentary and underdeveloped nature of this theme in Peirce's own work. For this reason, it will be the issue for which our misreading will be—or ought to be—most radical. This pertains to one of the rare traces of the romantic impulse that Rorty identifies in Peirce who, despite his determination to practice philosophy in the spirit of the laboratory or even to deduce his theories from mathematical logic, "at other times […] subordinated logic to ethics (and ultimately to aesthetics)" (Rorty, 1991a, p. 63). It thus relates to the status of Peirce's "esthetics" (*sic*) as a "normative science." The closing section, therefore, situates the culmination of the Rorty-Peirce dialogue within this domain, suggesting that Rorty's ideal of imaginative self-transcendence amounts to a fourth method of fixing belief—one that replaces Peirce's scientific faith in convergence with an aesthetic ethics of disruption and renewal.

Through the creation of "splits" that unsettle our settled vocabularies, rational progress becomes an ever-renewed progress of *sentiments*, sustained by the interplay of reason, imagination, and solidarity.

What is particularly instructive here is that Peirce's theory of esthetics develops in the wake of his turn toward pragmaticism, closely connected, in particular, with the role assigned to the concept of "self-control" in this context. Peirce reacts against a Jamesian conception of pragmatism (see Peirce, 1960b, p. 2), which he takes to assume that "Doing [is] the Be-all and the End-all of life"—a claim that, in his view, "would be its death" (Peirce, 1998, p. 341). Instead, an essential element of action is its "rational purport," which establishes a hierarchy between its material and intellectual components:

> In that thought requires existential acting, and further requires something else beside that, it ought to be plain enough that it exceeds the existential acting. The ruler of a nation depends upon his cook and his secretaries. That does not place him lower than they, but higher. Thought is higher than brute fact in much the same way that a statesman is higher than his secretaries: namely, it needs the existential facts, but regulates them (Peirce, 1960c, pp. 222-223).

Hence, the idea of "rational self-control" acknowledges the irreducible element of Thirdness present in action, while justifying an ideal of "correspondence" between a generality at work in the universe and its manifestation in our practice, thereby supporting its progressively greater rationalization.

> Accordingly, the pragmaticist does not make the *summum bonum* to consist in action, but makes it to consist in that process of evolution whereby the existent comes more and more to embody those generals which were just now said to be *destined,* which is what we strive to express in calling them *reasonable.* In its higher stages, evolution takes place more and more largely through self-control, and this gives the pragmaticist a sort of justification for making the rational purport to be general (Peirce, 1998, p. 343-344).

At first glance, the account presented so far does not seem very different from the diagnosis of representationalism legitimately attributable to Peirce from a Rortyan perspective—one may also note the recurrence of a rather undemocratic line in the comparison of the "ruler" with his "cook" and "secretaries." What matters, however, is the relationship between self-control and the *summum bonum*, that is, the ideal specified by esthetics.

Insofar as action is controlled by thought, it follows that its correction is governed by the science of reasoning, that is, logic, which Peirce conceives as a normative science intended

to determine how we ought to think (Liszka, 2017, p. 206). But logic answers this question only by presupposing its end—namely, the pursuit of truth and the avoidance of error—as valid and given in advance. We must therefore be able to answer the question of why one should study logic, that is, why one should pursue truth. Here, we are concerned with a "prudential norm" (Liszka, 2017, p. 207), which falls under ethics, responsible for establishing why truth is something good. Yet this still leaves an open question, namely: "Why should one seek the good or, for that matter, any worthy end?" (Liszka, 2017, p. 207). Answering this question is the task of esthetics, that is, the science of ultimate ideals. At the same time, this division of the three normative sciences is guided by Peirce's categories, with a correspondence between logic and Thirdness, ethics and Secondness, and finally esthetics and Firstness:

> For Normative Science in general being the science of the laws of conformity of things to ends, esthetics considers those things whose ends are to embody qualities of feeling, ethics those things whose ends lie in action, and logic those things whose end is to represent something (Peirce, 1960b, p. 82).

This means, consequently, that the ultimate "control of control" (see Peirce, 1998, p. 348) is a matter of feeling—even though, as Christopher Hookway (2002) emphasizes, this aspect "does not reveal the limits of rational self-control" (p. 238) so much as it shows that "our sentimental attunement to the demands of reason exceeds our intellectual understanding of what rationality involves" (Hookway, 2002, p. 239).

Yet this distinction—between rationality and our intellectual understanding of it—is, in effect, the very distinction Rorty recasts between procedural and civilized rationality. In other words, the "purposes we dream up as we go along," which can never be fully specified in advance without risking an arbitrary absolutization of our current practices, can be seen as a reformulation—albeit in a decisively historicist and contingentist vein—of "Peirce's view […] that what can be admired without reservation, and what can be sought as an ultimate aim, is reason and its growth" (Hookway, 2002, p. 238). This is not to suggest that reason should be regarded as something secondary, but rather that, when reason itself is taken as an ideal, it cannot confer that status upon itself. This, no doubt, is what Rorty has in mind when he writes, contra Habermas, that reason is not "the source of human solidarity" (Rorty, 1989, p. 68). In other words, human progress—understood as a process of proliferation rather than convergence (Rorty, 1991a, p. 27)—is not conditioned either on demonstrations of our capacity to speak the "Language of Nature" or on the existence of a shared human essence. Instead, it "has to be

constructed out of little pieces" (Rorty, 1989, p. 94), that is, through specific exemplifications, notably in "the disciplines which specialize in thick descriptions of the private and idiosyncratic" (Rorty, 1989, p. 94). Just as, for Kuhn, paradigm consolidations and shifts rely not on theoretical proofs but on compelling applications serving as "exemplars" (see e.g. Kuhn, 1970, pp. 80–81, 186–187, *sq*.), so too in Rorty does progress in solidarity arise only through concrete, particular engagements with the experiences of others: "In particular, novels and ethnographies which sensitize one to the pain of those who do not speak our language must do the job which demonstrations of a common human nature were supposed to do" (Rorty, 1989, p. 94).

Thus, as Rorty already noted in the 1960s, Peirce, despite his commitment to an "'ideal-language' account of the nature of philosophy" (Rorty, 2014, p. 64), also recognized that the guiding principle of inquiry had to be "a moral virtue rather than a theoretical insight" (Rorty, 2014, p. 64)—that is, self-control understood in light of its grounding in the normative sciences.[14] Similarly, for Rorty, our rationality is a matter of morality, which in turn depends on our capacity to feel empathy for an ever-growing number of individuals. In this sense, progress in reason is progress in morality, itself understood (following Annette Baier's expression) as a "progress of sentiments" (Rorty, 1998, p. 181). This, in turn, presupposes not the discovery of universal principles, but rather a "sentimental education" or a "manipulation of sentiments" (Rorty, 1998, p. 176) aimed at "extending the reference" of the class comprising those we treat as "people like us" (Rorty, 1998, p. 176).

Very well, but how does this ethical approach connect with a specifically esthetic one? Our analysis will proceed from the idea expressed in the following passage:

> When there is just one theory about the gods or the seasons, there is no *theory*—there are just the well-known facts about the gods or the seasons. Theory starts, as Dewey remarked, when somebody has doubts about what everyone has always believed, and suggests that there is another way of looking at the matter. The possibility of alternative theories ends only when interest in the subject has lapsed so far that no one cares what anyone else might say about it (Rorty, 1982, pp. 24–25).

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[14] As Christopher Voparil (2022) has shown, this early reading of Peirce enabled Rorty to perceive that epistemology itself rests on ethical dispositions, and thus to reframe philosophy as a practice of responsible self-legislation: a "rule-governed realm" in which vocabularies are chosen, not discovered, and for which philosophers must therefore accept responsibility (p. 20).

We may call the notion that a theory exists only in relation to alternatives the "Theory-as-Contrast Principle" (TCP), which can serve to interpret aspects of Peirce's esthetics in a Rortyan light. Indeed, returning to the conception of the *summum bonum*, it takes the form of an "esthetic goodness," itself understood "as a multitude of parts so related to one another as to impart an immediate quality to their totality" (Peirce, 1960b, p. 84). The Firstness operative in such apprehension is evident in the fact that it concerns something "to admire per se in itself regardless of what it may lead to and regardless of its bearings upon human conduct" (Peirce, 1960b, p. 26)—the very definition of Firstness as "whatever is such as it is positively and regardless of aught else" (Peirce, 1998, p. 150). In this sense, the values or norms highlighted by esthetics share an obvious affinity with the property of "non-noncircularity" in Rorty's concept of a final vocabulary: adherence to such a vocabulary is a matter not of reasoning, but of feeling. Yet Peirce observes that the notion of total order is not a reliable criterion of esthetic quality, since any system of relations can be perceived as esthetically pleasing: "vulgarity and pretension themselves may appear quite delicious in their perfection" (Peirce, 1960b, p. 81). Is it then possible to identify criteria for esthetic excellence?

It goes without saying that one cannot find a positive answer to this question in Rorty. What is particularly interesting in this context, however, is his conception of shifts in ideals—an approach that can be linked to the interplay of Peirce's categories. Indeed, the TCP can be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to values themselves, since in Rorty's holistic approach, they are inseparable from our theories, vocabularies, and practices. In the absence of competing options, a coherent set of propositions will therefore correspond merely to "truth" or "reality." But this property is purely *de facto*, that is, entirely contingent—*it so happens* that nothing else presents itself—and cannot be demonstrated without begging the question. Within an ironist-liberal approach to progress, the challenge is then to transcend ourselves by finding or creating "splits" in our culture (Rorty, 1991a, p. 13), or "tensions which make people listen to unfamiliar ideas in the hope of finding means of overcoming those tensions [without which] there is no such hope" (Rorty, 1991a, pp. 13–14). In Peircean terms, Secondness must be brought to bear against Firstness, that is, by generating shocks or reactions designed to disrupt the esthetic enjoyment of systems which derive their harmony only from their monolithic character. Yet this very shock possesses an esthetic quality in itself, at least if we are to believe Rorty's assertion that the most powerful source of belief change is *metaphor*, rather than perception or inference. As such, it is "a voice from outside logical space, rather than an empirical filling-up of a portion of that

space, or a logical-philosophical clarification of the structure of that space," and so "a call to change one's language and one's life, rather than a proposal about how to systematize either" (Rorty, 1991b, p. 13).

It seems that Peirce describes a similar structure of "splits" in *The Fixation of Belief* when examining the transition from one method to another. Each method is replaced by the next under the influence of external, contrasting factors: tenacity, by contact with other individuals (Peirce, 1986, p. 250); authority, by contact with other cultures (Peirce, 1986, pp. 251–252); and the *a priori* method, by recognition of its contingency and its determination by "accidental causes" (Peirce, 1986, p. 253). As is well known, this progression culminates in the scientific method, which is intended to "satisfy our doubts" through a process "by which our beliefs may be caused by nothing human, but by some external permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect" (Peirce, 1986, p. 253). Of course, Rorty strongly refuses to grant such a status to the scientific method, which carries the seal of its own contingency and cannot, for that reason, claim the authority of non-human causes; or rather, as noted previously, such causes are always at work—even in the other three methods—but they do not overlay our inferential practices of justification. But the essential point lies elsewhere: *there must be a fourth method*, even if its content must remain indeterminate. Recognition of our own contingency should not lead us to settle for the *a priori* method—whose reliance on what appears "agreeable to reason" mirrors what Tracy Llanera (2020) calls *egotism*, "a condition of inflated self-sufficiency and knowingness" (p. 132). On the contrary, such recognition should continually inspire, particularly within the framework of civilized rationality, a will to self-transcendence, even though this ultimately results only in a new contingency. This movement constitutes Rorty's counter to nihilism: it replaces the failed ambitions of an onto-theological "vertical transcendence" with a horizontal, "pragmatist transcendence", centered on our ongoing efforts toward "self-enlargement" (Llanera, 2020, p. 132), and thereby resists the "postmodernist disintegration of pragmatism into relativistic vacuity" that Rescher (2005, p. 364) traces to the influence of soft pragmatism.

What, then, would the fourth method in its Rortyan version be? For obvious reasons, the adjective "scientific" cannot apply—nor, for that matter, can the term "method." We may resort to the expression "pluralist attitude" to designate the dual process of recognizing and transcending our own contingency. Yet this attitude retains a key feature of Peirce's approach to the scientific method, which, paradoxically, may be seen as among the least pragmatist facets

of his thought: namely, the idea that science has nothing to do with, or must remain detached from, "vital matters." For Peirce, first, science is irrelevant to such questions, which must be resolved by instinct or sentiment (Hookway, 2002, p. 14). Rational reflection plays no role in political or applied ethical matters, and men who claim to act rationally in these contexts most often use reason as an excuse to satisfy their own selfish impulses (Peirce, 1960a, p. 346), thereby reducing reason to mere rationalization. Second, a scientist, according to Peirce, must not "believe" in the results of his inquiry, insofar as such belief, if implicated in resolving vital matters, risks creating personal interest in the truth of one's own theory, thus preventing rigorous and impartial examination (Hookway, 2002, pp. 27–28). Yet Peirce also maintains that scientific activity itself rests on a set of moral values, foremost among them *altruism*—an idea developed in his writings on probability, later known as Peirce's "logical socialism," a term coined by Karl-Otto Apel. Hookway (1997) interprets this idea as follows: "The claim that scientific activity rests upon 'altruism' is connected to this insistence that one should hold a detached, uncommitted attitude towards current opinions, whether they be conclusions of probabilistic inferences or the current deliverances of induction and the scientific method" (p. 209).

This idea can be linked to Rorty's position, according to which our sense of solidarity or "loyalty"—which, it must be recalled, is rooted in affective disposition rather than in demonstrative reasoning—narrows according to our material circumstances, that is, difficulties involving "vital matters," under which the scope of our sympathy contracts to increasingly smaller circles, or even to the individual sphere alone.

> The tougher things are, the more you have to be afraid of, the more dangerous your situation, the less you can afford the time or effort to think about what things might be like for people with whom you do not immediately identify. Sentimental education only works on people who can relax long enough to listen. (Rorty, 1998, p. 180)

Seen from this angle, one can grasp the rationale behind Rorty's ethnocentric insistence on the concrete conditions necessary for the realization of a liberal utopia: the need for societies where "wealth, leisure, literacy and democracy" (see *e.g.* Rorty, 1999, p. 162) enable us to explore new possibilities of self-creation and to understand individuals and groups increasingly different from ourselves. Reason and moral insight, in other words, cannot exist independently

of the material foundations—Peirce's "cooks and secretaries"—which allow for the "detached" stance essential to their exercise.

> The advantage that well-read, reflective, leisured people have when it comes to deciding about the right thing to do is that they are more imaginative, not that they are more rational. Their advantage lies in being aware of many possible practical identities, and not just one or two (Rorty, 2007, p. 201).

On this view, Rescher's (2005) reconstruction of soft pragmatism as an injunction to "forget all about truth and focus exclusively on praxis" (p. 358) is only partially accurate. The soft pragmatist does not abandon truth but rediscovers it along a different path—one that begins within the problems of praxis and culminates in the moral and material conditions that make self-enlargement possible. Consequently, insofar as it participates in this process of expanding our self-understanding by cultivating "peaceable […] and not quarrelsome habits" (Peirce, 1998, p. 342), through which we manage to transcend our various parochial frameworks of belonging, scientific activity is fully part of what we might call the growth of *civilized* reasonableness—even if it can never exhaust it.

## Conclusion

In a retrospective account offered during a discussion with French philosopher Vincent Descombes, Rorty reflects on having sought to "follow in Peirce's footsteps, in order to find a broad and comprehensive way of showing what was wrong in all reductionist projects" (Rorty, 1992, p. 166). Over time, however, this ambition came to seem misguided and pointless once we accept that vocabularies are necessarily plural—making the task of proving their irreducibility to one another a moot point. What philosophy can still do is not to "provide a theory of categories" or "a global context," but to pursue a Deweyan form of "clarification" (Rorty, 1992, p. 167)—inviting us to recognize other, more fruitful ways of describing what we do and what we are. Yet despite these tensions, it would be mistaken to depict a complete divorce between Rorty and Peirce, or between the "hard" and "soft" versions of pragmatism more generally. Rorty's reconception of clarification can be seen as a productive extension of Peirce's pragmatist insight: by situating inquiry within the context of human practices and social conflicts, he preserves the practical orientation of reasoning while freeing it from the metaphysical ambitions that once constrained it. This approach allows reason to function both

as a stabilizing tool—helping communities navigate shared problems—and as an instrument of progress, when applied to the careful revision of our beliefs and practices. Scientific method, in this framework, retains its value not as a privileged channel to "the way things are anyway" but as a source of collective understanding and solidarity. Through these lenses, Rorty converges with Peirce on the ideal of concrete reasonableness: a normative guide that, while inherently contingent and culturally situated, draws its vitality from our ongoing strivings to transcend inherited limits rather than from correspondence with an external reality. In doing so, he brings about a widening in Peirce's philosophical scope, replacing the aspiration for the supremacy of scientific culture with an inclusive acknowledgment of human practices in their full diversity. This recognition of contingency is not a hindrance to progress; it is its driving force, underscoring the transformative potential of our reflective, practical effort in navigating our circumstances.

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