

Wade in the Water:
Evasion, Transformation and Hope

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Wade in de water, Wade in de water, children,
Wade in de water, God's a goin' to trouble de water.
See dat band all dress'd in white,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.
De Leader looks like de Israelite,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.
Wade in de water, Wade in de water, children,
Wade in de water, God's a goin' to trouble de water.
See dat band all dress'd in red,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.
It looks like de band dat Moses led.
God's a goin' a trouble de water.
Wade in de water, Water in de water, children,
Wade in de water, in de water,
God's a goin' to trouble de water.

(African-American Spiritual)

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It is perhaps best if we settle neither for modernity, nor post-modernity. Perhaps it is time that we consider those worlds not well lost and talk now about the neo-traditional rather than the post-modern, the possibility of grand visions rather than meta-narratives. Perhaps we must talk about the ways to reclaim the essences of old worlds, if not their forms, in which our souls have their parched taproots still, and consider the possibility of a quickening discourse, urgently needed, made possible only by passage through certain moments of thought and forms of life.

What if logos is not to be known, but felt? What if the metaphysics of presence is only a problem in a certain tradition, from a certain point of view? What if the quest for certainty is not so bad as we thought if recast as an unending quest for self against a backdrop of awe and wonder and existential humility? Might we not then, again, be whole?

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The theme of this conference is “philosophy and liberation.” But what does philosophy have to do with liberation? I think that the answer to that question depends on what one means by “philosophy” and upon what one means by “liberation.” In what follows, I am going to allow that philosophy, understood from certain points of view, may have something to do with liberation, understood from certain points of view.

First, let me take up the question of philosophy, understood from certain points of view. After the retrenchment of logical positivism and analysis, after the linguistic turn, after structuralism and post-structuralism, the calling into question of the epistemic Subject, the injection of notions like “warranted assertibility” into the epistemic lexicon, and the substitution of “justification” for “truth” in some philosophical circles; after the attack on Eurocentric rationalism, deftly and rightly waged by some in this room and some who are the bright lights of this particular institution; after anti-foundationalism; after uncovering the deep flaws in ahistorical approaches in matters of normative ethics and culture; after the critique of logocentrism and the metaphysics of presence; and after the constant and persuasive attacks on the professionalization of philosophy, I have come to view the work of the philosopher, construed both in the context of teaching and research roles in universities and outside of those roles, as pretty much that of an interdisciplinary itinerant intellectual (as “intellectual” is broadly understood in our contemporary context) who pokes her nose into everybody else’s business, who has something to say about pretty much whatever she finds compelling enough to say something about, and who has a certain amount of gravitas when she does, even given the list of internal upheavals in what is still often thought of, gingerly or warily, as the academic “discipline” of philosophy.

So when she finds it compelling to talk about problems in modal logic, or the logic of markets, or race or class or gender issues, she steps in with a bag of intellectual tools that are pretty special, pretty unique, and sometimes she even has something useful to say about these different subjects – subjects that it should be clear by now are not hers alone and do not constitute a special area of knowledge that is the special pale of a group of thinkers called philosophers.

In a world of specialization, of economists and physicists and geneticists and accountants, I think there is an important place for people who do this interdisciplinary and itinerant sort of intellectual work, and that if philosophers didn’t already exist to do it they would have to be invented. So while I chide philosophy

from time to time, I have taken Robert Brandom's advice as penned in the Introduction to Hilary Putnam's *Realism with a Human Face*, and refrain from scorn, and I see a valuable place for it, as understood from certain points of view. For that reason, I no longer have much use for the expression "post-philosophy." The idea of a world without philosophers is but a curiosity of a single track of a certain culture's train of thought, a culture which arrogated to itself the right to define even the limits of a life of the mind and suggest that it has solved all the questions of existence that are "worth" asking – a typical form of arrogation for this culture. It has never occurred to it that there are new questions, ever new questions, to be wrestled, and that people called philosophers will always be around to do the wrestling. That a return to the etymological construction of philosophy is the old-new territory for a species headed toward both possible self-destruction and the very manipulation of its genome in ways that can not be predicted, with consequences that cannot be anticipated fully. Post-philosophers may well dwell in the academy, but true philosophers the species will likely never be without. That said, it was these same post-philosophers who have pointed the way toward the waters that would help us evade the old masters of old moments of thought and forms of life. We can receive their gifts, and thank them, and move on, for the love of wisdom:

*"There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust."*¹

Much of the work that philosophers can and should do is not only inside but outside of places like this one; and if philosophy is a vocation rather than just a career one should feel as good about doing it in the context of community centers, op-ed pages and temples as one should feel good about doing it in the context of classrooms and journal articles and books put out by university presses. That of course requires the desire and time to translate difficult concepts into useful tools, and useful weapons for the defense of the soul, as the need may require. It requires a desire to convey to one's fellow citizens the lessons one has learned in the intellectual trenches, what may be useful to them in learning to get along and to enrich their lives, rather than demonstrate a vast learning or engage in internecine battles in a still Eurocentric academy that has tended to buy into false notions of "progress" and "civilization" and "education," whatever its protestations to the contrary.

There are certain ways of approaching problems that philosophers are still particularly good at. These ways are born of philosophy's own struggles to come to terms with itself, as well as from engagement in the history of ideas – good and bad – and the responses to them – good and bad – that are not and should not be relegated to the land of relics and intellectual museums, primarily because of the human tendency to forget and thus to continue to float the same old good and bad ideas from generation to generation. We need to keep alive a living and working record of these good and bad ideas for the sake of posterity in the hope that future generations have enough grasp of intellectual history so as to avoid reinventing problems like the interaction between mind and body, or blank slate theories of mind, or reduction of experience to be no more than the mere reception of stimuli, or the idea that we might be better off with philosopher-kings rather than elected representatives, or even that the critique of certain modes of religious thought means, necessarily, the end of religion and spirituality as the heart of a life well-lived. Santayana's warning remains apt.²

So much for philosophy, then, from certain points of view. As for liberation, what one generally means by talk of liberation are forms of economic and political re-configurations in favor of those who have been locked-out, in Marxian terms alienated, locked into powerless classes, held down because of gender and

race and sexual preferences, and so forth. This type of liberation is something that will always be at the forefront of philosophers' work, who understand their business from certain points of view, such as that prophetic point of view that we continually hear from Dr. West. I would prefer to take a broader view, one that construes liberation as having to do with more than alienation, power and class questions, or even gender and so-called "race" matters. Indeed, I think that what philosophy may have to do with liberation must not be limited to these alone, nor even to analyses of the plights of the wretched of the earth alone, although these may take up a lot of our attention and concerns, and should. A principal question of philosophy has always been the question of justice. However, there are other types of liberation, interwoven with the pressing and urgent issues of power and class and gender and race, but that can be, profitably, tweezed apart from them.

There is the liberation that seems to follow from exploding some of the bad ideas about what the "game" of life entails, what it is all about. There is the liberation from nihilism, a liberation that I believe we must take equally seriously, a liberation that talk of species-being may not address nearly as well as Emersonian talk of the Over Soul, or Native American talk of the Great Spirit, or Buddhist or Taoist or even Hindu narratives when they themselves are understood from certain points of view. There is the liberation that comes from having *a Big Picture* about the meaning of life, *a Big Picture* that need be neither dogmatic nor suffer from the problematics of Lyotardian meta-narratives, but that may be affective and romantic and sublime antidotes to nihilism for a race in dire need of a meaning larger than the instrumental purposes that drive it. There is the liberation to live out narratives that direct and economize one's efforts and projects from cradle to grave. These have to do with existential rather than political forms of liberation. We must, in fact have both. This requires a new kind of philosophical engagement with the religious, the place where some 86 percent³ of the people in the country say they are and where I dare say 96 percent likely are when the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune strike, even if but for a fleeting moment. A philosophy concerned with liberation needs to find a way to re-engage the religious as part of the context of a form of life, a reality within certain Gadamerian horizons, within our own hermeneutic circles, and by that engagement perhaps affect religion's own self-understanding, and elicit its enormous powers as fuel for the justice we want to see sprout around this globe.

We still have our Enlightenment hangovers, and I agree with Charles Taylor when he tells us the following in his *Sources of the Self*, with one word substitution on my part, i.e. the substitution of the word "modernity" with "experience." Says Taylor:

It is quick to jump to the conclusion that whatever has generated bad action must be vicious (hence nationalism must be bad because of Hitler, communitarian ethics because of Pol Pot, a rejection of instrumental society because of the politics of Pound and Eliot, and so on). What it loses from sight is that there may be genuine dilemmas here, that following one good to the end may be catastrophic, not because it isn't good, but because there are others which can't be sacrificed without evil All this, in a context of historical ignorance, helps to accredit the over-simple and almost caricatural readings of one or another strand of [experience]. Some readings make various facets of [experience] seem easy to repudiate. . . Above all, we have to avoid the error of declaring those goods invalid whose exclusive pursuit leads to contemptible or disastrous consequences. (504, 511)

But we too often don't, and we philosophers are too often pendulum riders like everybody else, rather than sane and wise counselors of wisdom and caution and restraint and prudence.

Although I do not always agree with others about how we do so, I take concerns about a community's or people's need to form life-worlds and plans of life as concerning these existential forms of liberation as well as liberation in terms of class and social place, forms of liberation that attend the ability to throw off definitions, imposed from the outside, of who they are and what they should hope for and what they should think – imposed by power of various types, even sometimes imposed by philosophers still drunk on bad rationalism.

The career of Eurocentric reason and the career of the Western Church, the techno-mania and market-madness of the age, the creation and sanctification of *homo economicus* and instrumental man, these are some of the things that have come along to tell people who choose to live lives that have little to do with markets or instrumentalist pursuits or so-called secularism or some narrow imperatives of so-called reason that their lives are wrong – wrong by the standards of an idea of some fictional inexorable progress, as defined by Western sensibilities, supposedly birthed outside of time and chance. It is a form of liberation that can be glimpsed in stories like this one reported by psychologists Daniels and Horowitz in their work *Being and Caring*, the story of a man liberated from the manic logics of his time, in the spirit of Emerson's *Self-Reliance*, a story I shared with my students this week:

An old Indian named Pota-lamo sold onions in a shady corner of one of Mexico City's great markets. Asked [by a single patron] how much he'd accept for all his strings of onions, Pota-lamo said he would not sell them all. "Why not?" the customer asked. "Aren't you here to sell your onions?" [Pota-lamo] replied: "No, I am here to live my life. I love this marketplace – the crowds . . . the sunlight and the waving palmettoes. I love to have Pedro and Luis come by and say 'Buenos Dias,' and talk. . . . But if I sell all my onions to one customer, then is my day ended. I have lost my life that I love – and that I will not do. (*Being and Caring*, pp. 3-4)

Pota-lamo's answer makes little sense by the standards of Western rationality or that of Wall Street, with which I have more than some familiarity, but what his answer reflects is an affirmation and defense of his personhood, his sense of himself as connected to more than the duty to provide a living for himself and his family, or to use his time efficiently and economically and to good purpose, *as so defined by others*. It is a kind of liberation that reminds me of a particular phrase that Supreme Court Justices Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren constructed in an oft referred to *Harvard Law Review* article concerning the right to privacy. They spoke of a right to an "inviolable personality" that was part of a more general "right to be let alone". To borrow that construction, liberation is the right to be let alone to tell oneself a story about one's existence and to decide to take that story seriously enough to put to the test in daily life, as did Pota-lamo in this story, and to live with the consequences, as might attend not selling all of your onions when you have the chance. It is the liberty to don a set of clothes, to join certain clubs that reflect the things that one considers relevant to one's predicament as a frail and exposed human being, to one's values as a thinking, suffering, hopeful, fearful human being. It's the liberation to tell intellectual and economic and Eurocentric imperialists, of the markets or of the intelligentsia, to go to hell, and stand with your string of onions, and live your absurd and glorious little life.

I think that after the many criticisms of the various European Enlightenments and of philosophy itself (and I mean philosophy with a capital "P" – as Lucius Outlaw puts it, i.e. professional philosophy in the Western mode), we need to start taking more seriously the consequences of those criticisms – we need to start taking more seriously where they take us. Whether we are speaking of philosophy with a capital P or philosophy with a small p, whether its Western professional form or ethno-philosophy or philosophical

sagacity or other valid forms outside of the academy, forms that may have more to do with wisdom than mere conceptual analysis and careers, we are stuck with our conclusions, hard-earned ones, about the historical nature of normative commitments, about the rights of cultures and communities to determine their own destinies and axiologies, about the fallibility of both theory *and* critique, about the untenable nature of a particular civilization's view of inexorable progress, about the contingent nature of human events, about taking the creation of life-worlds and critical plans of life seriously, about the place of the human heart in what we do.

But I am not at all sure we mean what we say regarding those conclusions. While it is very difficult to conceive of philosophy as divorced from its critical tools, *and I would argue it should never be*, it seems at the same time true that philosophers are not really ready to shift from critic to auditor, from outside provocateurs and gadflies to members of the commonwealth ready to join in the work of helping one's compatriots make the most out of their own existential commitments on their own terms and within the short spans of time that we and they are given. I think that notwithstanding our many pronouncements about the rights of communities to exist on their own terms, we may not really have meant what we have said. I think that we may in fact still be holding on to a latent logocentrism, a latent rationalism,⁴ a latent condescension regarding how the peoples of the planet have chosen to live their lives with their customs and religions and traditions. As I have reflected on this point over the past few years I have developed a much better appreciation for what our Afrocentric brothers and sisters have been saying for a very long time. Our analyses still reek of bad rationalism, logocentrism and Eurocentric values of efficiency and instrumentality in a world where being inefficient and affective, in the manner of Pota-lamo, may well be the only way to remain sane. We still tend to want to approach various life-worlds from places external to them, bringing certain modernist, post-modernist, and Western sensibilities to bear, like unleashed and untrained dogs, and using critiques that have little to do with the internal logics of those cultures and communities. I think many of us still, deep down, think that there is in fact some predestined place that reason is supposed to be taking us. In that regard, it may be that another crisis for philosophers is that we will remain forever outside of the internal logics of communities, outside of the *eros* of communities, and a deep understanding of the relevant structures that hold those communities together – from their rhythms to their religions.

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As mentioned, a vast majority of Americans, of whatever hue, either attend places of worship or claim a belief in God, or otherwise claim to have a spiritual life that takes seriously the idea that what science and empirical analysis gives us by way of explanation of reality are insufficient, unable to speak to their own lived experience. Without necessarily putting it in these terms, they view rationalist's choices of Darwin or the Devil, formal logic or nonsense, modernity or tradition with some suspicion, or as false, as do I. They take intuition and Blink as seriously as logic and referential, discursive Think. So they go on showing up at synagogues and churches and prayer meetings and Zen retreats notwithstanding the so-called irrationality of such activities, as do I.

I think many of us are still logocentrists at heart, notwithstanding our protests to the contrary. I think that the human predicament, the tragic sense of life we talk about as well as the power of spiritual elation is lost on many of us, as seems apparent in our dry and often lifeless writings, our inability to turn off our critical minds long enough to hear the yearnings of the heart. Until we can figure out what is going on in our average fellow citizen's lives – the fears if not utter dread, the hopes and dreams, the longings and the pains, the joy and *enthusiasm* – we will be stuck approaching life through the back door, despite what we say we wish to do. Why do people cling to their spiritualities – their prayer beads and singing bowls and

their crucifixes and medicine wheels? How can we philosophers who see philosophy from our certain points of view make sense and use of religion in the modern world without setting up the discussion as a false choice between reason and superstition, between sublime investigation and occult nonsense? When religion is dismissed it is dismissed, often, with a caricature, or the invocation of the worst of that which religion is capable, rather than the best. (And in doing so, it has made religion try to argue back, unprofitably, on the same terms as its critics' interrogations – one of its biggest and continuing mistakes, as religion is more about the seriousness of a set of questions than about the falsifiability or verifiability of its answers, more about a decision than a collection of arguments.) Philosophers, I would argue, should relearn to speak a language that has left many of us long ago, if we would be able to dialogue with those we hope to assist in solidarity.

There is a way. It can be done by learning to listen rather than just critique, and by learning to translate rather than just hear as many concepts and basic ideas found in the various approaches to religion as is possible; to give religion and spirituality a new hearing by engaging in a different kind of study of mythopoetic texts, the psychology, sociology, and the phenomenology of religion. And by this, I mean no mere and arid “philosophy of religion.”

But not religion and spirituality alone. There is a kind of liberation that comes from a serious yet melioristic commitment to the ways of one's people; to what counts as relevant to one's life, whether certain rights of passage, household structures and filial relationships, sex roles, the comportment of children, and the like, without falling into a bad relativism. We want these commitments to be “rational” but by rational here I mean only that such commitments be made after due and sane reflection upon the alternatives and the acceptance of the consequences of those commitments. That is all “rational” means to me, in the final analysis. It is Pota-lama's rationality in not selling all his onion strings when he had the chance. But it does not mean, of course, that it is beyond the border of critique. Where to strike the balance is the challenge before us.

All of this creates a tension for Western intellectuals who have read lots of books about gender formation and patriarchy and social constructions. We want a kind of liberation that fits well with our Western sensibilities, even though we assert the opposite. We will unlikely never stop having many of those sensibilities – how can we? – but we should approach alterity more graciously, as guests, and turn off the gaze of our Western-style culturally ablating rationality in order to make room for the construction of life-worlds, to make room for the ancestors and the old ways, and to engage in prayer and rituals that reflect the deep sense of fragility and connection with the world and a reality of which we are all but a small and very impermanent part.

Philosophers do conceptual analysis well enough, to be sure, but where is the wisdom? An odd and ironic question, but one that I think is critical. We have remained so isolated from the reality of people on the ground – both the bourgeois and the wretched – that we are often outsiders with respect to the quotidian affairs of life and the mechanisms and structures that can make that life better here and now, and feel worth living. This is not true of all of us, to be sure, but I think it is true of many of us. Not only will we not move into the internal logics of a vast array of religious thought, the species of which are far more than our narrow samplings – narrowly and erroneously construing religion as that the essence of which is far beyond the pale of proper philosophical considerations (whatever that means) – we refuse, also, to perform good service even as citizens. We hold our noses, too often, as we pass by the critical fields of commerce, and we often treat their actors, businesses and markets, as *per se* repugnant, rather than focus our criticism on the rapacity and simplemindedness of too many of their managers, people who are themselves caught up

in a false consciousness regarding their own complicity in an ideology that serves to shut out far too many from the fulfillment of their needs and dreams. Why should we, therefore, be listened to by those who work in those fields, providing the material goods and mundane services upon which we haughtily and sometimes self-righteously repose in our seminars and at our conferences. We disengage from the structures of the world in the hope that some day, some how, a superstructure will emerge that will satisfy our self-sanctified theories. One of the reasons that professional philosophy is so problematic is its complicity in the “incestuous amplification” – to borrow a phrase – of this disengagement from life, of what I call the *intertextuality of irrelevance*. I would argue strenuously, and I believe the law of love dictates, that the managers of our institutions ought not be abandoned to the gross and often vulgar logics by which they sometimes operate. They, too, are our brothers and sisters. If they are watching the shadows on the wall, what have we to say to them that is reflective of the painful journey we would ask them to make as they walk from self-interest toward an other-regarding ethic, from a false economics that has been rightly called *autistic*, toward an existential economics that weighs the toll of concentrations of wealth and the characterization of human beings as mere human resources. They need to be addressed as fellows and not enemies, provided with alternatives and solutions that can begin to move their institutions in the direction of service of others (which is their mission, after all) rather than self-service and rapacity – in the direction of recognizing themselves as actors in the life of the commonwealth. We must help them become courageous, as they are the ones with their hands on the mechanisms of power and resources and who are the caretakers of those imperfect institutions with which we are, for the time being, stuck.

If our philosophy is to have anything to do with liberation, rather than merely being born of struggle, we philosophers must be *ambivalent* in the etymological sense of that word. We can amongst ourselves do what we often do at conferences like this – hone our critical skills (unfortunately, sometimes at the expense of one another’s dignity). But there is nothing that says those critical skills cannot be engaged in the dual work of supporting the worker in the field – the specialist, the engineer, the administrator, the manager, the executive, the theologian, the rabbi, the priest, the nurse – by providing alternative insights and possibilities of self-description rather than suggesting self-ablation, while at the same time doing deeper analysis of the social structures that remain so problematic. We can, after all, mix our questions. What is justice? What is fairness? And how do we get more of them? What does it mean to be human? Why go on?

It is true, of course, that the deeper analysis entails speaking truth to power and calling out the incongruities between conditions and ideals, rather than just stirring the thoughts and presuppositions and consciences of institutional managers as I have just suggested, and being willing to drink the hemlock in doing so, if necessary. Either way, this is the work of vocational rather than merely career philosophers. In that ambivalent role we are at the same time *of it* and *in it*, i.e. social auditor and social critic both, attempting not only small gestalt shifts in the perspectives of those who wield power and pull its levers, but also larger shifts, sometimes radical shifts, toward a vision of a country and of a world in which there are fewer of us whose circumstances preclude a decent life, fewer of us who are in material need, fewer of us who are unable to pull-up a chair to the table that is so filled with so much, for so few.

So my answer to the question, “What does philosophy have to do with liberation?” turns on a notion of philosophy as an ambivalent and itinerant endeavor, that takes place both inside and outside of the academy, driven by love and respect; that works hard to grasp the life worlds and plans of life of people in community and to intermediate and translate between communities where possible. I view the philosopher as one who plays this role as both auditor and critic, as one who has a *stake* in his own community and nation and works for their betterment, and who is willing to, at the same time and as necessary, speak truth to power and paint new visions of the future for the sake of human happiness. I do not see the philosopher

as necessarily more committed to justice than anyone else, but as a species of global thinker, dwelling in the gaps of discourses and ideas, whose critical skills can be put to the service of justice in important ways, provided it is done with respect and humility.

The torpor or stupor of logocentrism and professionalization still sticks to many. So we must wade in the water, to borrow the words of the old spiritual, and do all we can to evade the dogs and masters of false ways that still pursue us, and emerge with new minds and new sympathies. The hope of social transformation that we so often talk about will not be helped by us if we continue to operate pursuant to an old academic mind-set, if we continue to view ourselves as above quotidian managerial affairs, and if we don't engage the existential dimensions of life, as well as the political and economic ones, in serious ways and with serious sympathy and empathy for our fellow, suffering, brothers and sisters. The question "What is to be done?" is only one question. Your fellows are also asking "Why go on?" and both that question and the answers they elicit must be respected and not glossed or elided; they must be understood and translated so that they can be mined for the truth that is in them. The question "Why go on?" is in some sense the most foundational; for if no answer is given it, the question "What is to be done?" loses its urgency. To dwell on political and economic liberation while eliding the need for existential liberation is a huge oversight for people who would call themselves philosophers concerned with liberation. And the assumption that such a question is the domain of another discipline returns one to the trap of dualism and domains of thought that are beneath the modern historicist, global, and cross-disciplinary thinker. We philosophers might do well to re-frame the meanings of tradition and religion so that we can again find our way to connect with those we claim to serve, that is, those of us for whom our love of our fellows and not the love of a discipline or career compels us to the tortuous and troublesome life of the mind, a cup that some of us wish we could pass.

1. Thoreau, from *Walden*.

2. “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

3. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

4. I owe the reader of this presentation some more clarity on my use of the word “rationalism” and “rationality” throughout, and my suggestion that there are good and bad versions of each. I recommend Richard Rorty’s essay *Rationality and Cultural Difference*, found in his *Truth and Progress - Philosophical Papers (Volume 3)*. Here, Rorty pulls apart three senses of “rationality” – Rationality₁, Rationality₂ and Rationality₃ (hereafter, R1, R2 and R3). R1 is mere “technical reason” or “skill at survival.” R2 is that ability to set goals other than mere survival. “The presence of this ingredient [R2] within us is a reason to describe ourselves in different terms than those we use to describe nonhuman organisms. This presence cannot be reduced to a difference in degree of our possession of [R1]. It is distinct because it sets goals other than mere survival; for example, it may tell you that it would be better to be dead than to do certain things. Appeal to [R2] establishes an *evaluative hierarchy* rather than simply adjusting means to taken-for-granted ends.” R3 is different still. “R3 is roughly synonymous with tolerance – with the ability not to be overly disconcerted by differences from oneself, not to respond aggressively to such differences. This ability goes along with a willingness to alter one’s own habits – not only to get more of what one previously wanted but *to reshape oneself into a different sort of person, one who wants different things than before*. It also goes along with a reliance on persuasion rather than force, an inclination to talk things over rather than to fight, burn, or banish. It is a virtue that enables individuals and communities to coexist peacefully with other individuals and communities, living and letting live, and to put together new, syncretic, compromise ways of life. The Western intellectual tradition has often run these three senses of ‘rationality’ together.” The problem for Rorty is found in a certain valorization of [R2] because “For on a pragmatic view science, religion and the arts are all, equally, tools for the gratification of *desire*. None of them can dictate, though any of them can and will suggest, what *desires* to have or what *evaluative hierarchies* to erect.” Rorty prefers *reasons* for preferences rather than *inexorable logics* that rest on hallowed methods such as those of science, and he is suspicious, as am I, of modernity’s overemphasis and valorization of this sort of valorization of R2, and the skewed valorization of the ingredients of *evaluative hierarchies*. Both Rorty and I think the consequences of pragmatism and other contextualizing, historicizing philosophies require that we drop evaluative hierarchies of thought and action based upon a conference with something outside of time and chance, something outside of history. Both evaluations and hierarchies are then limited to what communities and people find relevant to constructing forms of life that fulfill their trivial and non-trivial needs – what Rorty calls “desires.” My possible departure with Rorty is that *considering* the possibility of something outside of time and chance, or outside of possible experience – God or Tao, for example – may still lead one to construct certain forms of life, *sans* apodictic certainty that one has something called The Truth. There is nothing necessarily invidious with this consideration, and a fully developed [R3] will keep it so. This is a possible departure because, in some sense, I can’t see how Rorty could quarrel with such a consideration, given his view of the consequences of pragmatism.