Research Article

"Self as a Tissue of Contingencies:" Rorty's Model of Narrative Identity and Solidarity

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Abstract

The paper explores Richard Rorty's novel approach to individual identity, emphasizing its narrative and contingent nature, and its implications for fostering solidarity in contemporary society. There have been several attempts since the Greek period to the modern times to have dwelled in to the notion of subjectivity. However, in particular to Descartes' cogito, the vast majority of modern philosophers regarded it as an ontological problem, investigating into 'what is self' rather, concentrating on the entirety of 'self', itself. Although, it was Freud who had shifted the narrative from 'what' to 'how' and 'who.' Nevertheless, the legitimacy and the relevance of the concept have been questioned by several contemporary thinkers which can be grouped into various extremes, giving us interdisciplinary answers to 'who,' 'what' and 'how' notion of self, subjectivity and identity is, and can be. So, the primary aim of this paper is to elucidate how Rorty's anti-essentialist perspective on identity, influenced by Hume's skepticism and Nietzsche's creative subjectivity, challenges traditional notions of selfhood and promotes a more fluid understanding of individual and social identity keeping in mind the objectives of examining the interplay between language, memory, and social interaction in constructing identity, and analyzing the role of irony and solidarity in ethical and intercultural contexts. Furthermore, the study would imply significant outlook in understanding identity in a globalized world marked by intercultural conflicts and ethical relativism, offering a pathway for reconciling individual and collective identities in diverse socio-cultural landscapes.

Keywords: *Self; Narrative Identity; Rorty; Contingency; Solidarity, Intercultural Ethics.*

1. Introduction

With retrospect to the ancient philosophical discourse, it has more or less determined self by establishing it in definite terms of 'whatness', interrogated as to 'what self is?' rather, concentrating on the proposition 'who self is?' Take for instance, Plato's dialogues asserting "self" as reason/intellect that constitutes the human soul, inseparable from the body [is what Plato suggests in his *Dialogues*] while, Aristotle insists on the inseparability of body and soul, [argues self to be both, the composition of body and soul]. However, it was for Socrates, whose wisdom rests on his famous dictum "*know thyself*," considered as the groundbreaking element to debate over self-knowledge. The admonition to "know thyself" implies that there is something to be known/learned about but what exactly it is, the knowledge of 'who self is?'

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In the history of modern philosophy, and in particular to Descartes's "*cogito ergo sum*" there has been an ongoing debate over the ontological nature of self. Descartes in his "*Meditations II*" identified self as a conscious entity, an entity which can be observed and captured, and something that can be reflected upon. John Locke shared the same view with Descartes, for in his seminal work, "*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*," he rests upon the notion that:

> [We] must consider what person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places… For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes everyone to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity (Locke, 1690 [1999], pp. 318 - 19).

Contrary to what Descartes has proposed and Locke followed, and on a larger scale, the essentialist tradition has faced several attacks from various thinkers, challenging whether or not, identity possesses any stable or fixed core. For instance, David Hume outrightly rejects self as any kind of existing entity. He argues that if such a thing as "self" exists, then it is merely fictitious, not as real entity. Furthermore, while introspecting in search of the self, Hume claims that he finds nothing but fleeting feelings and perceptions, no object per se and finds self as a "bundle of perceptions" or, "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume, 1888, p. 252).

If one deeply reflects on the modern interpretations of "self" one might presume that the modernists regarded it as an entity that has an essence, denominated as 'self' and characterized as 'the subject'. The word 'subject' could be associated to its grammatical meaning, i.e. 'the subject of the sentence', an entity that carries out an action [denoted by the verb]. The self as a subject is performative [performing mental and physical actions; a thinker, experiencer, perceiver, etc.], through which the self could be referred to by the very pronoun 'I', offering diversified modes of subject performativity, for instance, 'I heard' someone knocking. However, it was the genius of Sigmund Freud who repudiated the idea of essence associated to the question of who - combined with these two characteristics of being the 'essence' and being a 'subject' brings forth the idea of single-unified Being - Freud's breaking up of the unity of the person begins with his earliest writings on hysteria or plainly through his "*Interpretation of Dreams.*"[1] One of Freud's Hysterical patients, Elisabeth von R. had not told Freud about her love for her brother-in-law, and while in interrogation she replied: "*I didn't know—or rather I didn't want to know. I wanted to drive it out of my head and not think of it again; and I believe latterly I have succeeded.*" To this Freud had argued, how could a single-unified subject know and not know at the same time. Thus, his intention was to undermine the idea of a single subject and expose us to the significance of the self in itself which till date 'is to be sought.'

It wouldn't do any justice to say that the concept of self is certainly fixed or unequivocal rather, it's highly interdisciplinary and has been interpreted by various thinkers in the contemporary times. The discussion manifolds and can be polarized in various ideological axes – involving themes like personal identity, self-consciousness, consciousness of the other selves - with several binary oppositions like being/becoming; subject/object; mind/language; essence/appearance; personal/social, and, etc. which has predominantly influenced philosophical theories. We already have a brief glimpse of how Hume conceives "self" and in the same spirit, Nietzsche critically projected self merely as a construction or illusion of one's conscious state of mind. Nevertheless, both models and insights find their complete expression in the neo-pragmatic account of Rorty's narrative identity, and following the underlying theme the paper addresses as to how his model, one that is grounded in *contingency* and *redescriptions*, would provide a practical framework in fostering *solidarity* in today's pluralistic society, while avoiding both, essentialism and eliminative reductionism. Furthermore, the paper encompasses two contrasting dimensions, where on one hand, the conceptual dimension would analyse Rorty's anti-essentialist stance to identity or selfhood, an alternative to the conventional understanding; while on the other, the practical dimension would examine his account as a response to the recent intercultural conflicts and moral relativism by employing a close textual reading of his primary literature as well as a comparative conceptual analysis. Thus, instead of answering "what self is" [a persistent and prevalent quest followed since the ancient times], the paper would analyse as to how different vocabularies of self, project themselves with an assessment of how impactful their practical implication is.

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[1] Freud illustrates plurality of human subjectivity through state of dreaming, and argues dreaming cannot be explained if we envisage self as a single-unified entity.

Classical pragmatists may have briefly engaged with this theme, but it is the contemporary pragmatist Richard Rorty who, in response to the intercultural and moral conflicts of today's globalized world, considered it necessary to shed substantial light on the idea of self and its related concerns. In this context, the paper seeks to explore Rorty's reflections on the narrative model of identity, examine the ways in which his account resonates with Hume's skepticism and Nietzsche's conception of subjectivity, and evaluate the broader implications of his model for cultivating solidarity as a means of reconciling both individual and collective identities within diverse socio-cultural settings.

2. Methodology

This study adopts an interpretive methodology, a choice that corresponds well with the neo-pragmatist philosophy of Richard Rorty. Rather than searching for a fixed or universal conception of identity, the analysis seeks to engage with the plurality of perspectives by comparing conventional philosophical accounts of subjectivity with contemporary rearticulations, or as Rorty would term them, "vocabularies." The approach emphasizes how these vocabularies function within specific social and cultural contexts, and how they generate practical consequences with the potential to foster solidarity.

To this end, the paper undertakes a close textual and conceptual examination of Rorty's seminal work *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, situating it in dialogue with David Hume's skeptical account of the self and Friedrich Nietzsche's creative model of subjectivity. This comparative engagement not only highlights the interpretive shifts from essentialist to anti-essentialist understandings of identity but also underscores the practical implications of such shifts for ethical and intercultural relations in a globalized world. By weaving together hermeneutic analysis, philosophical comparison, and socio-ethical reflection, the methodology aims to illuminate how Rorty's model contributes to rethinking individual and collective identity in the face of contemporary challenges.

3. Questioning and Reimagining the Self

It all begins with the cogito! In "Meditations on First Philosophy", Descartes introduced to the world an introspective account of the awareness of oneself, culminating with his notable dictum "cogito ergo sum". He had employed a logical methodology in demonstrating the idea that even in doubt the 'I' cannot doubt for, 'I' cannot challenge "the existence of the thinking that manifests itself in the mental sphere" (Forgione, 2018, p. 219) and to quote Descartes:

Here I do find something: it is thought; this alone cannot be stripped from me. I am, I exist, this is certain. But for how long? Certainly, only for as long as I am thinking; for perhaps if I were to cease from all thinking it might also come to pass that I might immediately cease altogether to exist. I am now admitting nothing except what is necessarily true: I am therefore, speaking precisely, only a thinking thing, that is, a mind, or a soul, or an intellect, or a reason—words the meaning of which was previously unknown to me. I am therefore a true thing, and one that truly exists; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: one that thinks (Descartes, 1641 (2008), pp. 19-20).

This Cartesian approach shifted from episteme to the metaphysics of self, where the former 'self' is represented as a thinking thing while, the latter demonstrates two distinct entities, in the forms of thought and extension, i.e. res cogitans and res extensa. However, the metaphysics of self, in relation to thought, was challenged by both, David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche and, both of these thinkers anticipate Rorty's anti-essentialist stance by illustrating the contingency of the vocabularies of identity and selfhood:

The temptation to look for criteria is a species of the more general temptation to think of the world, or the human self, as possessing an intrinsic nature, an essence…As long as we think that there is some relation called "fitting the world" or "expressing the real nature of the self' which can be possessed or lacked by vocabularies-as-wholes, we shall continue the traditional philosophical search for a criterion to tell us which vocabularies have this desirable feature. But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found. What is true about this claim is just that languages are made rather than found, and that truth is a property of linguistic entities, of sentences (Rorty, 1989, pp. 6-7).

Rorty's understanding could be conceived in line of the argument that both Hume and Nietzsche uses, where on one hand, in the Book I of the Treatise, Hume disregards the conception that "the subject can perceive a persistent self through the introspective consciousness to eventually suggest an elusive epistemic thesis" (Forgione, 2018, pp. 222-23) or as Hume contends, "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call

myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception" (Hume, 1888, p. 252). Meanwhile, the other end sees Nietzsche's extension of the Humean spirit, by demonstrating that metaphysical as well as moral deliberations cater to certain power interests, and argues that notions like "soul," "subject" and "self" merely function as "philosophical tools of domination" – instead of descriptive truths – which seemingly Descartes had constructed and was subsequently followed by his successors like Kant, who sought to define it in terms of "transcendental apperception." So, with an attempt to overcome his predecessors' shortcomings, his rebuttal, and attempt to understand "self" is purely in physical framework, where he relegates "the self" or "the subject" to merely physiological workings of the brain or as Nietzsche puts it, "One may still refer to the I, but only if one stresses its purely logical character, i.e. sees it as an "ideal unity" or "regulative fiction" that results from an interpretation of the physiological processes out of which conscious thought in his various forms arises" (Gori, 2015, p. 191).

As it tends to imply, Hume's understanding of self [found in his Treatise] is grounded in naturalism, discussing self's genesis with respect to mental events and association of ideas, in relation to the principles of contiguity, resemblance and causation, and argues that idea or self's genesis is the product of our memory, a faculty which "alone acquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, tis to be consider'd, upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity" (Hume, 1888, p. 261). He further argues that if we hadn't this faculty, we wouldn't have ended up with the succession and chain of cause and effect, which constitute the idea of self or person in our minds. He defines 'self' as a "fictitious" entity, which is epistemically inevitable and working on the idea within this parameter isn't important at all and what's important is its role with different aspects of feelings, emotions, sociality and corporeality, which rationalism tends to dismiss. At this point – in Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity – we find Rorty synthesizing the two insights [of both the thinkers], and accords that all vocabularies are historically contingent linguistic tools rather than the ones which mirrors reality, as he writes, "The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's cause home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language – that is, of thinking up some new metaphor" (Rorty, 1989, p. 27). This transition from discovery to invention marks Rorty's contribution to contemporary discourse studies, one that resonates with Nietzsche's view of "self-knowledge as self-creation." To further illustrate, Nietzsche in his essay on "The Four Great Errors" argued that we humans are easily fooled by the idea of causation, where our capacity to think leads us to Truth or technically, our "will" originates from consciousness. However, for him, the very conception of "will" is an invention of the theologians for "…purposes of punishment, that is, for purposes of wanting to find people guilty" (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 35). So, whatever we see of the 'will' it's simply the result of our drives or instincts and with this underlying approach Nietzsche reinforces 'self' as a biological agent rather than being Christian or a metaphysical falsified 'soul,' resulting in Nietzschean model of "self as body," consisting of multiple drives and emotions. It is primarily the centre of – for which he has used a high variety of words – "drives (Triebe), impulses (Reize, Impulse), desires (Begierden), instinct (Instinke), power (Mächte), force (Kräfte), passion (Leidenschaften), feeling (Gefülen), affect (Affekte), pathos (Pathos), and so on." Here, one must significantly note that, with these varied Nietzschean vocabulary, the self tends to become to what Nietzsche referred to as a "dividuum" (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 42) composed of multiple drives, competing against each other yet, keeps evolving over time. Thus, according to Nietzsche the self, resides in our body or that the "self is our body" and, as Nietzsche asserts in another essay The Despisers of the Body, "…[b]ehind your thoughts and feelings…stands a mighty commander, an unknown sage – he is called Self. He lives in your body, he is your body. There is more reason in your body than in your wisdom."

Although, similar arguments [Nietzschean] can be found in Hume's analysis in the Book I of his Treatise, he repudiates the idea of a "single-unified self" defined in terms of a "series of perceptions" however, in Book II and Book III of the Treatise he admits to the existence of self. The difference in these two paradoxical claims, is that Hume in his two other books of Treatise deals with "self" in a moral and political framework, bearing strong resemblance to the contemporary notion of "narrative identity or self." Hume's picture of self is that of an agent with both flesh and blood, central to two definite conceptions of virtue and vice, presenting from a sentimental as well as ethical standpoint and focusing on the praxis of self, as Gerald Postema states that it "is not a metaphysical substance, but the relatively (but contingently) stable focus of practical concern." Furthermore, "the nature of Hume's narrative self, which consists in the self-consciousness people develop as bearers of characters of which they can be morally proud or humble" (Greco, 2015, pp. 700-01). So, in reference to the 'sentimental aspect of human nature' we can conclusively view Hume's self as a narrative self. Hume attempts at defining the "nature" of, to which he has referred to in several ways like, "self," "person," "the mind," or "the soul," and even though

he uses such varied expressions for a single agent, his purpose seems simple. In Treatise I he asks whether the notion of identity at all corresponds to anything "fixed" and "unchanging" over the course of time, to which he negatively responds, "I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception" (Hume, 1888, p. 252), and further concludes that "the rest of mankind… are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (Hume, 1888, p. 252).

It is by seeing oneself as proud and humble, that the "self-consciousness" is produced: "According as our idea of ourself is more or less advantageous, we feel either of those opposite affections, and are elated by pride, or dejected with humility" (Hume, 1888, p. 277). Furthermore, we are the possessors of both virtuous or vicious characters in association to which we're either proud or humble and also become an object to "each other's moral evaluations, thanks to the principle of sympathy" (Greco, 2015, p. 709). Following this course of line, we no longer see ourselves as "bundle of perceptions" but as "flesh and blood" single-unified beings with both virtuous and vicious traits, surrounded by various other individual beings attached with levels of sentimentality like us. Thus, when we talk about "human nature," Hume observes it in practice - self as a sentimental as well as moral agent - rather than the theoretical demonstration of it, or as he puts it, "We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs and in their pleasures" (Hume, 1888, p. 10). Rorty here, employs a complete linguistic account of identity, which suggests it to be a "tissue of contingencies" rather than some well-organized "system of faculties" – an idea that he acknowledges to be the legacy of Freudian understanding of self – and constituted through a web of beliefs and desires emerging from conversations and community engagements:

…the person who has doubts about his own final vocabulary, his own moral identity, and perhaps his own sanity - desperately needs to talk to other people, needs this with the same urgency as people need to make love. He needs to do so because only conversation enables him to handle these doubts, to keep himself together, to keep his web of beliefs and desires coherent enough to enable him to act. He has these doubts and these needs because, for one reason or another, socialization did not entirely take (Rorty, 1989, p. 186).
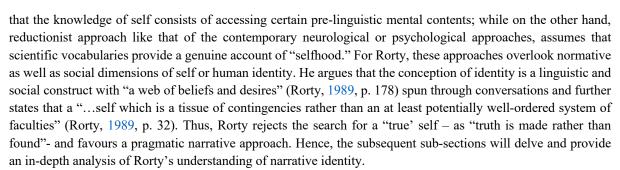
This idea can also be observed in Hume's Enquiry where self is not only defined in terms of rational but also, socially active, as he notes, "Indulge your passion for science, says she [nature], but let your science be human, and such a may have a direct reference to action and society…Be a philosopher; but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man " (Hume, 1999, pp. 89-90). In a similar vein, Nietzsche in his 'On The Genealogy of Morality' traces self with an historical construct, shaped by moral and cultural valuations, and is further have seen to have analyse the development of "bad conscience" from the internalization of instinctual drives under societal constraints: "I look on bad conscience as a serious illness to which man was forced to succumb by the pressure of the most fundamental of all changes which he experienced,– that change whereby he finally found himself imprisoned within the confines of society and peace" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 56). However, for Nietzsche this process creates a false dichotomy between the "inner self" and the "outer self," perpetuating the myth of soul different from the body, and that one can liberate from such lies by embracing the multiplicity of self, characterised by the aggregate of forces and drives. Additionally, in his later work Ecce Homo, he urges his readers to:

Become what you are," a significant call to creatively synthesize one's drive into a coherent narrative, as Duncan Large in his introduction to Ecce Homo puts it, "For a self (on this understanding) is not something you just are—you have to achieve it, and keep achieving it over and over again. The ethic of self-becoming in Nietzsche is intimately connected to the strenuous ethic of self-overcoming, that is, overcoming the parts of yourself that are not, ultimately, of yourself or do not, as Nietzsche puts it, belong to your task, your destiny (Nietzsche, 2007, p. xvii).

Thus, Nietzsche's insistence on "self-overcoming" embodies the perpetual reinterpretation of identity transcending socio-cultural norms, and segregating all three understandings – Hume, Nietzsche and Rorty – of the narrative account, identity shifts from a metaphysical concern to everyday stories and practical questions, useful for fostering human solidarity.

4. Rortyan Model of Narrative Identity

Richard Rorty in his seminal text "Contingency, Irony and Solidarity" radically departs from the essentialist stance on "self" and begins with an analysis of both Cartesian Dualism and psycho-biological reductionism, aligning with Hume's "contingency of selfhood" and, rejecting the conventionalist stance of self and the contemporary reductionist view of self to mere neurological processes. According to Rorty, on one hand, the Cartesian dualism approaches the self as an object which can be known through some "privileged introspective access," presuming

that the knowledge of self consists of accessing certain pre-linguistic mental contents; while on the other hand, reductionist approach like that of the contemporary neurological or psychological approaches, assumes that scientific vocabularies provide a genuine account of "selfhood." For Rorty, these approaches overlook normative as well as social dimensions of self or human identity. He argues that the conception of identity is a linguistic and social construct with "a web of beliefs and desires" (Rorty, 1989, p. 178) spun through conversations and further states that a "…self which is a tissue of contingencies rather than an at least potentially well-ordered system of faculties" (Rorty, 1989, p. 32). Thus, Rorty rejects the search for a "true' self – as "truth is made rather than found"- and favours a pragmatic narrative approach. Hence, the subsequent sub-sections will delve and provide an in-depth analysis of Rorty's understanding of narrative identity.

4.1. Redescription and metaphor

Narrative identity is created through redescribing oneself, and as we encounter new vocabularies and metaphors, we acquire the ability to redescribe ourselves in new ways. For Rorty, these redescriptions aren't simply accurate representations of a pre-existing self rather, creative projections which are perpetually evolving and transforming of who we are, as he writes, "The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language - that is, of thinking up some new metaphors" (Rorty, 1989, p. 27). The idea of redescription of self finds its trajectory in his deconstruction of the conventional philosophical theories which grounds all knowledge claims in "foundationalism" and "representationalism," the former emphasizing over the indubitable and certain foundations of knowledge and the latter mirroring the knowledge through certitude – "mind as the mirror of nature" – and, to see to it, Rorty propagates his notion of redescriptions as a tool, as he writes, "…to see redescription as a tool rather than a claim to have discovered essence. It thereby became possible to see a new vocabulary not as something which was supposed to replace all other vocabularies, something which claimed to represent reality, but simply as one more vocabulary, one more human project, one person's chosen metaphoric" (Rorty, 1989, p. 39). Thus, the aim here is not to seek accuracy of representations but fruitfulness of redescriptions. Likewise, his emphasis on "metaphors" central to self-creation connects to the aesthetic dimension of experience - for self-creation is a work of art, rather than a discovery of science – emerging through creative process of metaphorical redescription or as Rorty puts it, "A sense of human history as the history of successive metaphors would let us see the poet, in the generic sense of the maker of new words, the shaper of new languages, as the vanguard of the species" (Rorty, 1989, p. 20). Thus, Rorty's narrative model of identity has some significant epistemological implications, instead of looking for certainty and stable self, self-knowledge consists in developing some fine and useful modes of narrating actions and experiences; and, a fluid self-creation and recreation, description and redescription takes on a distinct character.

4.2. Ironist's Self-Reflection and Contingency Awareness:

Rorty's model is based upon his commitment towards contingency, as he begins his analysis by addressing the challenges of conceptualizing reality through language, which doesn't mirror reality but shapes it, including understanding of ourselves, asserts Rorty. Moreover, language is the product of historical accidents and social developments, i.e. contingent so, the vocabulary through which we comprehend ourselves is also contingent. For Rorty there is no single true vocabulary which could capture human essence rather, multiple vocabularies that serve multiple purposes, enabling varied forms of self-understanding and creations. However, it is worth noting that Rorty's take on contingency surpasses language and shares with Hume the notion that sociality, the focal point in a non-essential idea of self thereby, implying that our sense of selfhood fundamentally depends upon social interactions, cultural contexts and linguistic communities. Furthermore, the "contingency of selfhood" also means that one's identity rather than being discovered, is created, crafted through perpetual narrative self-description and redescription, aligning with Nietzsche's emphasis on self-creation.

Throughout his work "Contingency, Irony and Solidarity," we find "the ironist," as a central character who embraces the contingency of his beliefs while striving for self-reinvention by radically and continually doubting "the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered" (Rorty, 1989, p. 73) thus, recognizing that her identity is one narrative among many, and corresponding to Nietzsche's "free spirit" who challenges the inherited values. The ironist enables the perpetuation of self-recreation via metaphorical redescription, without giving in to either dogmatism or relativism. It is important to note that, the ironist also embodies "discourse reflexivity" or "meta-discursive awareness", being aware that the vocabularies encompassing identity and selfhood are historically contingent linguistic constructs thereby creating a differential ethical as well as epistemic position, as Rorty writes:

I call people of this sort "ironists" because their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies, puts them in the position which Sartre called "meta-stable": never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves (Rorty, 1989, pp. 73-74).

4.3. Solidarity and Moral Progress:

Lastly, the ironist provides space for creative self-redescriptions in accordance with its commitment to discourses of certain values and projects of pluralistic communities. Nonetheless, Rorty doesn't simply and solely follow this course of thought rather, he tempers Nietzschean model of subjectivity with Hume's emphasis over "sympathy" culminating in his account of solidarity. The former reveals as to how social power relations shape or forms an individual's conscience and moral vocabulary while, the latter uses sympathy as a tool or mechanism which evaluates an individuals' character on the basis of socially embedded moral capacity. Rorty however, employs and further advances these insights into his formulation of solidarity and its expansion through "moral imagination," and with this approach his model of narrative identity culminates in his account of solidarity, broadly connecting human identity to moral concerns:

> The view I am offering says that there is such a thing as moral progress, and that this progress is indeed in the direction of greater human solidarity. But that solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation - the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us" (Rorty, 1989, p. 192).

This understanding of solidarity operates through conversational engagements rather than theoretical demonstrations, expanding and ameliorating our moral community through day-to-day interaction and problem solving instead of simply recognizing abstract principles. Norman Geras in his book "Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind" notes that Rorty in the beginning of his essay "Solidarity" assesses the situation of a Jew at the time of Auschwitz, where if one were to live in Denmark or Italy, the chances of being either recused or hidden by their respective neighbours was more likely than in Belgium. The only way this difference could be described was by conceiving the Danish's and Italians' showing "a sense of human solidarity which many Belgians lacked" thus, comes the idea of 'one of us.' Geras goes on to assert that for Rorty "this notion carries less force when its sense is 'one of us human beings' than it does when referring to some narrower grouping, such as 'a comrade in the movement' or a 'fellow Catholic.' Typically, he claims, 'it contrasts with a "they" which is also made up of human beings – the wrong sort of human beings" (Geras, 1995, p. 9). Our sense of solidarity, therefore, tends to grow stronger than ever with the notion of collectives, one that is "smaller and more local" than the very idea of human race. This approach further provides framework for discourse analysis which examines whether or not linguistic practices expand the boundaries of one's moral community, making Rorty's work quite relevant in either of the contemporary studies of socio-political discourses such as identity politics or intercultural discourse studies.

5. Conclusion

Although Nietzsche's notion of multiplicity resonates with Hume's bundle of perceptions, their views diverge on the issue of self-creation: Hume reduces the self to passive perceptions, while Nietzsche conceives of an active, self-creating subject defined through narratives of strength and weakness. Rorty's model of narrative identity draws from both Hume's skepticism and Nietzsche's perspectivism, offering an anti-essentialist framework that shifts the question from what the self is to how the self-functions. His neo-pragmatic stance avoids both metaphysical essentialism and eliminative skepticism, presenting identity as a dynamic process of continual creation, recreation, description, and redescription—reflecting plurality and flexibility in human self-understanding.

This view parallels contemporary discourse theory's claim that language is constitutive rather than merely descriptive. Rorty's concepts of vocabulary, redescription, and solidarity serve as tools for analyzing how discourse constructs, sustains, and transforms identities within power-laden contexts. The ethical and social implications of this model are far-reaching. First, it respects cultural diversity, encouraging cross-cultural dialogue without imposing universal moral principles, and fostering understanding through multiple narratives. Second, it offers a way to address identity-based conflicts: conceiving identity as contingent and revisable enables innovative vocabularies for conflict resolution, moving beyond rigid win–lose dynamics. Third, it recognizes the influence of power and privilege in shaping identities while resisting their reduction to power alone. Rorty's notion of "final

vocabulary," akin to framing effects, illustrates how linguistic choices, such as conservative terms like law and order or progressive terms like social justice, both shape policy and construct communal identity. Acknowledging contingency cultivates epistemic humility, enabling genuine dialogue across vocabularies. This is exemplified in Adidas's 2022 termination of its partnership with Kanye West: the company shifted its language from neutral terms like under review to moral terms like hateful and dangerous under public pressure, illustrating how new vocabularies can emerge to embody social responsibility.

Rorty grounds solidarity in narrative empathy rather than abstract reason. Solidarity expands as people imaginatively engage with others' stories, through literature, history, and personal narratives, broadening the sense of "us" and fostering empathy, recognition, and cooperation. His model frees the self from metaphysical fixity, showing identity as fluid, socially embedded, and ethically generative. The ironist's oscillation between self-doubt and empathy captures the moral capacity of contingent selves. It calls for expanding moral imagination through sentimentality, reminding us that "the world does not speak; only we do." In this silence, we find both freedom and responsibility to author inclusive, evolving narratives of who we are and who we may become together.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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