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### **Rorty, Philosophy, and The Question Concerning Technology**

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## Rorty, Heidegger, and the Danger and Promise of the Technological Archive

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I recently discovered that “Rorty” is a British colloquialism meaning “boisterous and high-spirited.” I found this amusing, because Rorty in person was famously subdued and somber, his understated delivery in striking contrast to the dramatic and often polemical content of his claims. Delivered in his slow, deep drawl, Rorty’s polemics were alternately infuriating or delightful, depending on one’s preexisting attitude toward whatever Rorty was currently disassembling and reassembling in his own image. Dennett caricatured Rorty’s chimerical, almost oxymoronic style as “firebrand views delivered in the manner of Eeyore.” Eeyore, I might remind you, is the slow and gloomy, baritone-voiced donkey in Disney’s animated adaptations of Milne’s *Winnie the Pooh*, a character who in one film goes around, with an endearingly oblivious obstinacy, continually rebuilding his little house of sticks which is repeatedly being destroyed by others; and who spends another film patiently carrying his friends’ mountain of baggage past a fence into a territory they have never explored before. Dennett’s slightly mean joke was more inspired than he realized. And it is undeniable that Rorty’s understated personal comportment and somber, laconic, almost melancholic delivery stood in stark contrast to the bold, energetic, and optimistic authorial voice that comes through on the page of his beautifully-written books and essays as well as (we can now see) in many of his letters preserved in the UC Irvine archive.

Much was said about this fascinating clash of styles while Rorty was still alive to embody it, for it struck all of us who first read his work and then heard him speak. But now that Rorty the man has disappeared into the archives that preserve his thoughts, what remains of that strange collision of styles he embodied while alive? Let us assume that the stylistic disparity between

his speech and his writing remains invisible to those who encounter only his writing. Is that conflict of styles preserved, nonetheless, in the recollections, descriptions, and records which continue to circulate in the increasingly technological archives? (Does it matter here whether these archives are scholarly, journalistic, or personal—distinctions which technology is rendering ever more indistinct?)<sup>1</sup> Surely, as long the memory of Rorty is archived in forms that include video recordings of his live performances, his striking contrast of styles will linger on, even if only as a ghostly afterlife of events which are, in another sense, clearly no longer here. Yet, what does it mean to say that an event is no longer here, although its archived memory remains indefinitely? Answering that question would help us get at what is being lost with *technological archivization*—a suggestive name, I shall suggest, for the historical current in which we are currently caught. I believe that thinking about “technological archivization” as the current of the current can help us understand what Heidegger called “enframing” (*Gestell*). And if so, then technological archivization needs to be understood as a larger ontohistorical process in which this present event is, in part, a microcosm, albeit a paradoxical one, as a living event commemorating the opening of Rorty’s technological archive.

If the question of the archive is also the question of memory, and of the responsibility of memory, then we can ask: What is the *opening* of memory? How can memory be opened in a way that remains responsible to that which it remembers? Can technology, which increasingly remembers everything, truly remember anything? Not without our interventions. How, then, can the larger archivization that is the *technologization* of reality itself be opened up to what it cannot remember without our interventions? How do we learn not just to use technology without being used by it, but to deploy technologies against what Heidegger teaches us to recognize as the nihilistic *technologization* of intelligibility? What role can opening the Rorty archive play in opening that broader technological archivization to what it currently tends to forget (and so render preemptively unintelligible)? In my own terms, I would ask: How can *the current of the*

*current* be opened, channeled, or diverted so that it becomes genuinely responsive to *the texture of the text*? That is the broad line of questioning I would like to pursue here, however briefly, in order to recall that basic responsibility which, under the influence of technologization, we tend to forget.

Let us thus ask, were Rorty not himself lost to the archives, would he think that anything important was being lost to the archives? The fact that Rorty is not here to answer that question suggests that *something important has been lost*; for, by being deprived of Rorty's living presence we are deprived of the new and surprising answers of which he was capable. Apropos absences felt present here at UC Irvine, I would add that Derrida thinks of technological archivization in these terms, but rightly complicates any simple dichotomy between the spontaneous, creative *response* of which living beings remain capable and the automatism typical of the technological *reaction*. As Derrida writes (and I have sought to expand and so clarify his point):

Supposing, *concesso non dato* [that is, without conceding the point], that a living being ever responds in an absolutely living and infinitely well-adjusted [or perfectly *responsible*] manner, without the least automatism, without ever having an archival technique overflow the singularity of the event, we know in any case that a spectral response is always possible ([a spectral response] thus informed by a [preprogrammed] *techné* and [so] inscribed in an archive). There would be neither history nor tradition nor culture without that possibility [of a spontaneous response living on in the spectral form of its own institutional routinization]. It is this [tension between the spontaneous response of which life is capable and the automatic reaction characteristic of the machine] that we are speaking of here. It is this [tension between response and reaction], in truth, that we must answer for [with our own responses].<sup>2</sup>

As Derrida points out, the tension between spontaneous response and preprogrammed reaction, between the living event and its reduction to a preexisting code or its inscription in an archive, is

a tension even the most spontaneous response must confront and find a way to negotiate. For, every event (no matter how new) opens itself to routinization and repeatability, or else that event would have no intelligibility to us. (Here we can hear Derrida as developing Levinas's central idea that alterity only becomes intelligible to us through its confrontation with the order of the same; and yet, if the other is entirely subsumed by this order of the same, then it is no longer other. The other has to be appropriated into our preexisting categories in order to make sense; but if the other is fully reduced to the order of the same then it would no longer be other and so would no longer be capable of literally *making sense*.) This is the tension: Life must be archived if it is to live on, and yet it ceases to live on if it is ever reduced to its archive. And this is Derrida's solution: Only by continuing to transform the archive can life live on. Derrida thus gives us a rather Levinasian way of thinking the danger and promise of technological archivization. Returning to Rorty, I shall suggest a more Heideggerian understanding of this danger and promise, one in which "the final vocabulary" (as Rorty put it) is *being* rather than *alterity*—a Levinasian "metaphor" for which Rorty himself could find no use.

That Rorty could find no use for "alterity" is telling. I think none of us would deny that something vital has been lost with Rorty's disappearance into the archive (even though we have lost less of Rorty than we would have lost without these archives, for which we should thus be grateful). Yet, Rorty himself, when he was able to answer for himself, seemed not to believe that technological archivization carried any inherent danger along with it. Rorty rejected all such Heideggerian suspicions concerning the nature of technology, almost as if he were rejecting the melancholic implications of his own living voice. Let me draw on UC Irvine's on-line Rorty archive and quote from a 3 February 1992 letter Rorty wrote to Alan Rosenberg (a philosopher working on the fraught topic of *Heidegger and the Holocaust*). In this letter Rorty declares (with typical candor) that:

...I can't really take seriously the notion of "technology" which you and Heidegger share. I can't

help seeing the United States as as much or as little a product of Baconianism, and as much or as little a matter of erecting *Gestelle* as Auschwitz, and so I have trouble seeing Bacon and the *Gestell* as more than a neutral background against which various things, good and bad, occur. The whole idea of “the essence of the West,” as opposed to various good things and bad things about the West, is one I have trouble with.

Here Rorty adopts the traditional liberal view of technology as a neutral set of tools that can be used either for good or for ill.<sup>3</sup> It would be unfair to call this the “guns don’t kill people; people kill people” view, since Rorty does not deny that particular technological devices push and pull in particular directions; he only denies that “technology” as a whole possesses any such overarching historical drift. Of course, this *technological neutrality thesis* is precisely what Heidegger’s ontological critique of technology challenges, which is why Rorty “has trouble” with Heidegger’s view that the “essence of the West” reaches its ontohistorical apotheosis in such an overarching “notion of ‘technology.’” “I have trouble with” is probably just Rorty’s understated way of saying “I reject,” but I want to suggest that Rorty really does have trouble here, because what he nicely dubs “Bacon and the *Gestell*”—that is, respectively, the modern control of objects and the late-modern optimization of resources—are indeed “more than a neutral background against which various things, good and bad, occur.” Indeed, as we will see, Heidegger’s critique threatens to vitiate and render obsolete Rorty’s own paradigmatically modern attempt “to identify the meaning of life with getting what we want, with imposing our will.”<sup>4</sup>

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Rorty famously presents Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey as the three most important philosophers of the twentieth century, and he frequently singles out Heidegger’s “history of being” as the most important part of Heidegger’s view. The trouble, however, is that Rorty also frequently suggests that Heidegger’s history of being is false—merely “good Whig history,” as

he once said to me—that is, a good example of a narrative told in order to empower the narrator, just one of those self-serving “narratives which ‘place’ rival canons” by showing, in this case, how they all fit into Heidegger’s metanarrative of “the history of being.”<sup>5</sup> In Rorty’s view, “Heidegger knew what he wanted to hear in advance. He wanted to hear something which would make his own historical position decisive, by making his own historical epoch terminal.”<sup>6</sup> Whether or not Rorty’s view is right, it leaves quite puzzling why Rorty would believe Heidegger is such an important philosopher if he also believes that Heidegger’s most important philosophical view is merely a piece of rhetorical self-aggrandizement. In order to understand what exactly Rorty rejects in Heidegger’s view and why, we need to at least briefly characterize Heidegger’s understanding of the history of being.

A good deal of Heidegger’s history of being can be explained in terms of five of its component theses, which we can call *ontological historicity*, *ontological holism*, *ontotheology*, *ontological epochality*, and *ontological excess*. *Ontological historicity* is simply the idea that humanity’s basic sense of reality changes with time. (Heidegger takes the idea of historicity over from Hegel but purges it of its residual teleology and changes it to fit his own understanding of Western philosophy.)<sup>7</sup> *Ontological holism* is the view that, because everything *is*, if you change our historical conception of what “isness” itself is, you thereby set in motion a change in our sense of everything. So, how does our sense of the being of entities change? For Heidegger, such fundamental historical changes are accomplished by metaphysics, which means by a succession of *ontotheologies*. An ontotheology is basically a double answer to the question, what and how *is* an entity? Ontotheologies establish our understanding of the being of entities by grasping the entire intelligible order from both the inside-out and the outside-in simultaneously.

Heidegger’s understanding of the history of being as ontotheology can be very briefly summarized as follows: The ontological and theological paths of Western metaphysics begin

when Thales and Anaximander understand the final ground of reality in the diametrically different terms of the innermost core and the outermost horizon, respectively. Plato (“the first metaphysician”) gives us the first ontotheology when he unites these two different ways of thinking in his doctrine of the forms, which explain both the underlying unity of things and their ultimate fulfillment. Aristotle takes over but inverts Plato’s metaphysics with his conception of primary and secondary substance, or “whatness” and “thatness.” The medieval scholastics then transform Aristotle’s conception into *essentia* and *existentia*, and this ontotheological distinction between the essence and the existence of entities continues all the way down through history to Nietzsche, who conceives the totality of entities as such as will-to-power caught up on an endless cycle of eternal recurrence. When successful, these ontotheologies doubly anchor the intelligible order by temporarily establishing an understanding of being, thereby holding back the floodwaters of historicity for a time—the time of an “epoch.” (“Epoch,” as readers of Husserl know, comes from the Greek word for “to hold back” or, as Derrida liked to say, “to put in parentheses.”)

There are three such *ontological epochs* or overlapping constellations of intelligibility in Heidegger’s “history of being”: the ancient, the medieval, and the modern. Heidegger further divides at least two of these epochs into early and later ages, so that the ancient epoch is composed of the pre- and post-Platonic ages, and the epoch of modernity is divided into a modern and a late-modern age. The basic problem, for Heidegger, is that each of these historical understandings of being understands being reductively as only “the being of entities,” and thereby forgets “being as such,” a dynamic *ontological excess* that both informs and partly escapes all the ontotheologies that attempt to fix it in place once and for all. Heidegger designates this never finally circumscribable ontological excessiveness—this inexhaustible “abundance” that, in his words, “gives itself and refuses itself simultaneously”<sup>8</sup>—with a succession of different names: the “noth-ing of the nothing,” “earth,” “be-ing,” “*alêtheia*” or



“dis-closedness,” “the presencing of presence,” the “difference,” the “fourfold,” and so on.

With this quick background sketch of the history of being in place, we can understand Heidegger’s critique of the “technological” understanding of being. The problem, in a nutshell, is that this enframing—this *technê* that imposes preexisting designs on things rather than attending poetically to the possibilities that things themselves suggest—obscures and even threatens to obviate this ontological excessiveness that in fact both makes enframing possible and so leads beyond it. Although Rorty never recognizes this, our technological understanding of being follows directly from the underlying Nietzschean ontotheology that unifies our late modern age. As though wearing Nietzschean goggles, we all tend to understand the being of entities as eternally recurring will to power, that is, as an unending disaggregation and reaggregation of forces with no end beyond the perpetuation of force itself. (Were I to press you on what this table *is*, for example, you would probably end up telling me that it is an arrangement of subatomic particles moving so fast that the table appears solid, when in fact it is just a rather temporary and empty form that these underlying forces have taken.) Insofar as we implicitly understand what-is through these ontotheological lenses, not only do we dissolve being into becoming, but we tend to relate to and so transform all entities into mere “resources” (*Bestand*), intrinsically-meaningless stuff just waiting to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency. As this historical transformation of beings into mere resources becomes more pervasive, it increasingly eludes our critical notice. Indeed, we late-moderns come to treat ourselves in the very same terms that underlie our technological refashioning of the world. We are no longer just modern subjects seeking to master an objective world, as Rorty likes to imagine, because we are turning the techniques developed for controlling the objective world back on ourselves, and this objectification of the subject is transforming the modern subject into just another intrinsically-meaningless resource to be optimized, ordered, and enhanced with maximal efficiency, whether cosmetically, psychopharmacologically, genetically, or

technologically.

Heidegger is deeply worried that as we enter this late modern age of technological enframing, it is increasingly becoming the case that: “Only what is calculable in advance counts as being” (TTL 136/USTS 17). For, our technological understanding of being produces a “calculative thinking” (DT 46/G 13) which quantifies all qualitative relations, reducing entities to bivalent, programmable “information” (TTL 139/USTS 22), digitized data ready to enter into what Baudrillard aptly describes as “a state of pure circulation” on the Internet.<sup>9</sup> Through this ongoing technological archivization—in which no event is too mundane or banal for someone not to blog about it or describe it on Facebook or Twitter—reality gets transformed into information so that it can enter into endless circulation on the web, where we too hope to join it by downloading our neural nets and living on endlessly as our own on-line avatars. For Heidegger, however, such issues are just symptoms; the deepest problem with this informatization of reality is the technological understanding of being that underlies and drives it. As we have seen, Nietzsche’s ontotheology dissolves being into nothing but “sovereign becoming,” an endless circulation of forces, and in so doing, it denies that things have any inherent natures, encouraging our growing obliviousness to the multiple ways in which things push back against all of our overarching designs.

So, what is the real difference between this technological understanding of being and the genuinely *post*-modern understanding of being for which Heidegger calls? The crucial difference is that, where the modern “Baconian” age understood everything as objects for the subject to master and control, and the late-modern, technological age of “*Gestell*” tends to treat everything as meaningless stuff standing by for optimization, a truly post-modern understanding of being would have to push through and beyond this late-modern understanding of entities as *nothing* but forces caught in a endless process of becoming—by coming to see this “nothing” not as nothing at all but instead as the “noth-ing of be-ing,” that is, as the way in which we post-

Nietzsche's first encounter that inherently pluralistic phenomenological excess which makes historicity possible. Put differently, a truly postmodern understanding requires us to recognize precisely what Rorty resists; namely, that when approached with a poetic openness and respect, things push back against us, making subtle but undeniable claims on us. We need to acknowledge and respond creatively to these claims if we do not want to deny the source of genuine meaning in the world. For only meanings which are at least partly independent of us and so not entirely within our control—meanings not simply up to us to bestow and rescind at will—can provide us with the kind of touchstones around which we can build meaningful lives and loves. Heidegger sometimes describes our encounter with such genuine meanings as an “event” of “enowning” (*Ereignis*), significant events in which we come into our own as world-disclosers by creatively enabling things to come into their own, just as Michelangelo came into his own as a sculptor by creatively responding to the veins and fissures in that particular piece of marble in order to bring forth his David, just as a woodworker learns to respond to the subtle weight and grain of a individual piece of wood, just as a teacher learns to recognize, cultivate, and so help develop the particular talents and capacities of an individual student.

This poetic openness to that which pushes back in reality reveals what I referred to earlier as *the texture of the text*, which is in fact all around us; this is the seditious way I would like to hear Derrida's famous *aperçu*, “there is nothing but text.” Although the current of technologization tends to sweep right past the texture of the texts all around us (and can even threaten to wash it away), Heidegger is clear that once we recognize this technological current, we can learn to develop a “free relation to technology” in which it becomes possible to use technology against technologization, as we do when, for example, we use a camera, microscope, telescope, or even glasses in order creatively to help bring out something there in the world that we might not otherwise have seen, a synthesizer or computer to make a new kind of music that helps us develop our sense of what genuinely matters to us, or when we use a word processor to

bring out our sense of what is really there in the issues that most concern us. The simple question I would like to raise here today, then, is: How might we do this with the Rorty archive?

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Time is short, so let me quickly return to the question of what exactly Rorty is rejecting when he rejects Heidegger's understanding of technology as the current form of "the essence of the West." I shall limit myself to two brief points.

For Rorty, like Derrida, the idea of a world partly independent of us that pushes back on us, making claims that can inform our responses and make them truly responsible—this sounds like an outdated myth, what Derrida's *Of Grammatology* lampooned as "the myth of the transcendental signified." What Derrida took from his reading of Saussure and Heidegger, Rorty got from reading Quine and Sellars, and Rorty similarly rejected the idea that "philosophy has a prelinguistic subject matter."<sup>10</sup> Here, however, I think both Rorty and Derrida fail to take phenomenology seriously enough. (Otherwise put, Rorty should have read less Sellars and more McDowell, who we now know from Rorty's correspondence that he could not understand.) It may seem plausible to imagine that there is no meaningful way to be responsive to something outside language if one is spending one's time pushing words about words around on a page, but try asserting that a meaningful relation to the extralinguistic is a myth to a carpenter, a cook, an athlete, a teacher, a philosopher of art, or a scientist. (Remember that the Rorty-Putnam debate ended with Rorty forced to concede, in a seeming *reductio* of his view, that science is nothing more than a well-organized popularity contest.) Nor, I think, should we try to fall back on the old Dilthey-inspired distinction between natural and human sciences. For, the presumption that language has no meaningful relation to something outside it tends to generate highly self-indulgent poetry, whereas for Heidegger a true poet is a paradigmatic instance of the human being who has learned to develop a receptivity to that which is beyond words and yet does indeed push back, a sensitivity to those not-yet-things that call on us to struggle creatively to

build them a home in language that will nevertheless preserve their also belonging to the realm outside words. Heidegger thus teaches (as Rorty himself put it) that “around the openness provided by your understanding of being there is a larger openness of other understandings of being as yet unhad.”<sup>11</sup>

From this perspective, however, it is not Heidegger but Rorty who is buying into an outdated myth. For, Rorty’s own attempt “to identify the meaning of life with getting what we want, with imposing our will” looks, from the perspective elaborated here, like a failure to recognize that this modern, “Baconian” worldview is being rendered obsolete by our late modern predicament.<sup>12</sup> In the midst of this technological age, we need to preserve Heidegger’s secularized Kierkegaardian insight that life is made most meaningful when we learn to respond to meanings that are at least partly independent of us, and so no longer entirely within the control of our will. This is Heidegger’s realism, and it tempers the idealism built into his understanding of the central role ontotheologies play in focusing and disseminating historical constellations of intelligibility. There are always lots of things that these ontotheologies cannot account for (including their own conditions of possibility), and learning to attend to and think about these unaccountable things can help us learn to live in a genuinely postmodern way. For, to understand the being of the entities we encounter in a postmodern way is to no longer preconceive everything we experience as modern objects to be mastered or as late modern resources to be optimized, but instead to learn to discern and creatively develop the inherent meanings (or the solicitations and affordances) of things, to be open to the multiple hints things offer and to dedicate ourselves to bringing forth such hints creatively and responsibly into the world. This is Heidegger’s *plural* realism (which I have sought to develop in a forthcoming book on *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*).

I think it was Rorty’s Nietzscheanism that kept him from taking this Heideggerian step beyond modernity. Rorty’s favorite line from Nietzsche was the early Nietzsche’s anti-realist,

radically-constructivist claim (in “Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense”) that “truth is a mobile army of metaphors,” that words cannot really get at things (that words and things remain “eternally apart”), so truth is just our name for the “illusions” we cannot seem to function without. Rorty developed this view into his own Quinean-Davidsonian, holistic-pragmatic amalgam, according to which our current conceptual schemes are composed of a patchwork of intersecting beliefs that continue to evolve in lots of interesting ways, that tend to wear-out and so need replenishing through new and creative metaphors. Unfortunately, this thorough-going meaning holism led Rorty to reject the ontological holism at the core of the later Heidegger’s understanding of historicity. Remember that for Heidegger, everything intelligible *is* in some way, so if we change our conception of what “isness” itself is, we thereby catalyze a transformation in our sense of what all things are which, once focused by an ontotheology, ramifies outward across the web of intelligibility, progressively changing our basic sense of everything—that is, until our thinking about things recalcitrant to the reigning ontotheology leads us to a new understanding of the being of entities, setting off the transformation once again.

Rorty’s holism seems to have encouraged him to reject this Heideggerian view in favor of the idea that (in his words): “Change in philosophical outlook is neither intrinsically central nor intrinsically marginal — its results are just as unpredictable as change in any other area of culture.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, Rorty seems to think that changing our sense of what it means for anything to *be* is no more likely to set off a fundamental realignment of our beliefs than any other change we might make. But that seems patently false. (Think of all the little modifications in our beliefs that have no significant impact on our lives, and contrast those with the few basic changes in Western humanity’s understanding of what it means for anything to be.) What we should say is not that any change in the semantic web is equally likely to change our basic sense of what it means for anything to be, but instead, in a kind of Heidegger-Rorty hybrid view, that we cannot predict ahead of time which changes will do so. We should thus say, as Heidegger

failed to, that Nietzsche reached his understanding of will-to-power as the force that drives the cosmos by ontologizing and so universalizing insights already arrived at by Adam Smith's understanding of the invisible hand in economics and Darwin's vision of the evolutionary arms-race between competing life forms in biology. The lesson, then, is that we cannot predict ahead of time where a transformation in our sense of what it means to *be* will come from, but we can maintain nevertheless that it is the dissemination of such a new understanding of being that will have the ontohistorically-revolutionary effects Heidegger taught us to discern and dedicate ourselves to developing.

One could simply reject the idea that our understanding of being is central to our web of beliefs, but then one must give up epochality too (as Derrida does), since it is the understanding of being that unifies the epoch. In this case, though, one must face the problem that history does not look like an unbroken ontohistorical flux (as Derrida sometimes suggests), nor like a more or less unbroken sameness, as Rorty sometimes seems to think. Thus Rorty once suggested to me that if we could go back to ancient Greece (and speak the language), then the people we talked with would be pretty much the same as the people we know now. I think Rorty is wrong to deny (or drastically downplay) historicity in this way, and Rorty had no response to the Dreyfusard counter-examples meant to show that, for example, the development of subjectivity as an interior space separate from the external world is an historical accomplishment two thousand years in the making. In the *Odyssey*, for example, one of Homer's ways of showing that "wily Odysseus" is the shrewdest person around is to have Odysseus pretend to cry, while inside he remains unmoved "like bone." Today the ability to pretend to cry is not evidence of a legendary genius for duplicity, but a simple trick that even hack actors and children can duplicate. Similarly, eight centuries later, Augustine would glorify another Saint for possessing the astounding ability to read without moving his lips. Although Rorty had no response to such examples, he stuck to his guns and simply pointed out that "Heidegger forgot that while Aristotle was writing the

metaphysics, there were slaves working in the Laurium mines,” a stunning non-sequitur in this context, but one which points toward Rorty’s basic disagreement with Heidegger.

For it is their political differences with respect to what really comes first—ontology or politics—that ultimately leads Rorty to reject Heidegger’s reading of the current, late-modern chapter in the history of being as a tragedy—albeit a tragedy that allows Heidegger to set up a happy ending in a forthcoming postmodern sequel. Rorty prefers to lop off Heidegger’s postmodern future and instead invert the mood of Heidegger’s critique, rewriting our current late-modern age as itself the happy ending Heidegger postponed to the postmodern age.<sup>14</sup> In fact, however, postmodernity has already begun; ages overlap. Without denying Heidegger’s own horrendous politics, I think we should acknowledge that his history of being opened up the thinking of “the political” which has had such an important impact on attempts to theorize and respond to the new political challenges involved in maintaining democracy in our technological age and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

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\*Draft, not for citation without permission. Please send comments to ithomson@unm.edu. This paper was delivered to the conference, “Time Will Tell, but Epistemology Won’t: In Memory of Richard Rorty” at UC Irvine on 14 May 2010. My thanks go to the organizers and other participants, esp. Michael Bérubé, Ian Bogost, Mary Rorty, Elizabeth Losh, Steven Mailloux, and Mark Wrathall.

<sup>1</sup>See e.g. James Ryerson, “The Quest for Uncertainty: Richard Rorty’s pragmatic pilgrimage,” *Linguafranca* 10:9 (2000-1), <[http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/print/0012/feature\\_quest.html](http://linguafranca.mirror.theinfo.org/print/0012/feature_quest.html)>, (accessed 10 May 2010), a rather scholarly work of journalism, filled with anecdotes and first- and second-personal recollections, published in a now defunct academic gossip magazine but still available on the internet.

<sup>2</sup>See Derrida, *Archive Fever*, E. Prenowitz, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 62-3.

<sup>3</sup>For an expansion of this point (which I owe to Andrew Feenberg), see my “From the Question Concerning Technology to the Quest for a Democratic Technology: Heidegger, Marcuse, Feenberg,” *Inquiry*, 43:2 (2000), pp. 206-7.

<sup>4</sup>See Rorty, “Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism,” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>See Rorty, “Philosophy as Science, Metaphor, Politics,” in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>See Rorty, “Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism,” p. 49.

<sup>7</sup>Rorty does not seem to grasp how thoroughly deteleologized Heidegger’s view of historicity is (see e.g. Rorty’s oft-repeated claim that Heidegger is saying that if we begin with Plato we will end up in



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pragmatism). On this point see my *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Ch. 1.

<sup>8</sup>See Heidegger, "Letter 'On Humanism,'" F. A. Capuzzi, trans., in W. McNeill, ed., *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 255.

<sup>9</sup>See Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, J. Benedict, trans. (London: Verso, 1993), p. 4; and Dreyfus's *On the Internet*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>10</sup>See Rorty, "Philosophy as Science, Metaphor, Politics," p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>See Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism," p. 46.

<sup>12</sup>See Rorty, "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism," p. 29.

<sup>13</sup>See Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Post-Nietzschean Philosophy," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup>See the opening pages of Rorty's "Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism," pp. 27f. Although Derrida refused to abandon this Heideggerian vision of the "future/to-come" (*Zu künft*), Rorty is in some ways more Derridean than Heideggerian. Derrida liked to say that he "parted company" with Heidegger's assumptions concerning *animality*, *epochality*, and *technology*. Rorty agrees about epochality and technology, as we have seen, whereas I would agree only about animality.

<sup>15</sup>Rorty seems to have had a tin ear for this Heidegger-inspired work on "the political"; the next sentence of the 3 February 1992 letter quoted earlier is "You don't seem to like Lacoue-Labarthe much either, but you also seem to have some basic agreement with him, one which I lack."