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ON THINKING "POST-FOUNDATIONALLY" ABOUT THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE DISTINCTION

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Does the notion of a public/private distinction survive the 'post-foundationalist' turn in recent philosophy and political theory? Distinguishing between metaphysical and normative senses in which the distinction has been made, this paper argues that the second is rather harder to sever from the first than those contemporary theorists who seek to avoid strong ontological claims would have us think. I take Richard Rorty's work as exemplary of a 'post-foundationalist' approach, distinguished by its constructive engagement with the 'metaphysics-free' rethinking of social norms. Notably, Rorty seeks to retrieve the public/private distinction in the process. In exploring curiosities about the conclusions he reaches, I argue, against them, that it is partly because of the ontological instability of any public/private distinction that a rigid adherence to it is morally and politically problematic. Given this, I suggest that the attempt to dispense with *all* foundational claims is harder to pull off than many have argued. Far from being a necessary move, it may hinder the development of the kind of genuinely nuanced account of subjectivity denied by the all-too-heavy influence of the Cartesian heritage.

I

There have been two main ways, in western philosophy since Descartes, of tackling the notion of "privacy". One is metaphysical, or descriptive. In this sense, the possibility of privacy depends on the possibility of a distinct, privileged realm in which the individual human subject relates solely, and directly, to him- or herself. The other is normative. At stake here is the *value* of privacy: the importance, perhaps, of shoring up a demarcated private realm in order to protect individual liberty from the intrusions of the state or others. Both of these ventures have, of course, proved to be the source of rich controversy: respectively, about the legacy of Cartesianism and the merits of political liberalism. How the two ventures relate, too, is something of a moot point. One might defend privacy in the first sense, while critiquing the second. Equally, one might argue that privacy as a value floats entirely free of any commitment to the plausibility of privacy in the metaphysical sense. On still another tack, one might suggest that it is the con-

struction of privacy as a social imperative that itself has invested its metaphysical counterpart with its plausibility and influence.

Acknowledging that one *might* take each of these options is not, in itself, to grant them tenability; still, these are examples of broad positions that have, in fact, been taken up. In this paper I want to explore a little more deeply the relationship between these two senses in which the private might be said to be distinguished from the public. As my title suggests, my aim here is to consider what thinking "post-foundationally" about this issue has amounted to. This term—like "foundationalism" itself, and "anti-foundationalism", and other offshoots—is slippery, and carries a variety of senses. My concern is not to make a case for "post-foundationalism" as such. Rather, it is to examine its impact in this particular context. I take Richard Rorty's work as exemplary of a metaphysical antifoundationalism which seeks to maintain a normative commitment to the public/private distinction. In exploring one or two curiosities about the conclusions he reaches, I argue that this position is not as sustainable as he makes out. Given this, I draw some tentative conclusions about the nature and scope of a tenable anti-foundationalism in political terms.

II

It seems helpful to begin by addressing the characteristics of "anti-", or "post-foundationalist" thinking. To do this we must first consider what it is (or was) to be a foundationalist in the first place. There is a ready answer in the very choice of metaphor itself. Foundationalists, for their opponents at least (and for whatever reason, very few people call *themselves* foundationalists), are those who rely on, or postulate, some kind of prior, given, ground from which inquiry or history or life itself proceeds. *Something*, then—be it God, the Forms, the *cogito*, Nature, Absolute Spirit—provides a kind of immutable underlay to everything else which is up for discussion. It thus provides a sort of security, but also a challenge: the kind of challenge which (so say those who are labelled "foundationalists") only a suitably-equipped epistemology, or ontology, can meet. The challenge is both to describe and delineate this foundation, and to derive its implications.

But while this sketch may capture the flavour of its general usage, there is something rather unspecific about the target of "foundationalism" invoked so far. For the notion of a "foundation" tends to appear, in the accounts of its critics—be they postmodernists such as Lyotard, pragmatists such as Rorty, gender theorists such as Judith Butler, or phenomenologists such as Heidegger—in two different versions at once. On the one hand, there is that familiar bugbear the "Archimedean point": a position outside mere subjective, perspectival knowledge from which knowledge in general can be validated. This position—its existence, and the possibility that it might be attainable—is often said to involve a kind of impossible

intellectual gymnastics: a stepping outside mere human, historical horizons into a separate dimension where knowledge appears as it really is, in itself, as if from no perspective. Rejections of the possibility of such a manoeuvre, and *a fortiori* the possibility of a "God's-eye view", might collectively be classed as *epistemological* anti-foundationalism.

But there is another order of claim, which—I would argue—should be kept separate from the first., and which will provide our main focus in what follows. This is that there is nothing which *exists*, in a prior or determinate sense, before knowledge, discourse, inquiry, or social life gets to work on it. That is to say: nothing has an inherent nature. This is an *ontological* claim, rather than an epistemological one. In contemporary terms, it surfaces most readily in the work of those "textualist" thinkers who argue, more or less explicitly, that there is no "nature" before the discourse of nature sets to work, no "world" beyond that which is constructed through description and practice, no "self" before there some or other mode of narrating the self has constituted that self as "real", and so on. "Reality", on these terms, is itself a construction. So there is no sense in which any aspect of the world could stand prior to or beneath the flux of culture, as the kind of foundation which mystery mongers like foundationalists would like to invoke. The routine scare-quotes around "nature", "self", and "reality" here are used by proponents of this view to highlight the instability, the *non*-foundationality, of all such terms as evoked in discourse of whatever form.

Often enough, as I have said, these two varieties of anti-foundationalism have come together, as a rather amorphous package. Thus, while thinking presented as "post-foundationalist" may typically be making both of these claims at once, it tends not to acknowledge any gap between the two. And this leads it into trouble. Put briefly, the trouble stems from a certain blindness towards what Roy Bhaskar has called the "epistemic fallacy": the view, as he puts it, "that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge" (Bhaskar 1978, 36). It is a fallacy of which (as philosophical traditions) empiricism and idealism are especially guilty—since both, by their natures, have a tendency to presume that the question "what is x?" can be resolved by answering the question "how do we *know* about x?" Thus for Hume, for instance, the idea of a unitary, continuous self is rendered untenable by the fact that, from a first-person perspective, there is no available "impression"—to use his terminology—which can give rise to such an "idea" (Hume 1962, 300-312). To use another vocabulary, such a reduction echoes what Adorno called "identity thinking": the idea that we will know an object once the sum total of correct classifications of it has been reached (Adorno 1973, parts 2 and 3). Ontology is collapsed into epistemology; the status of any independent "reality" hinges on the success or failure of our descriptions of it. Whether or not one shares the concerns of Bhaskar and Adorno that this might lead us to a kind of philosophical paralysis, the case that putative

epistemological foundations are not one and the same as putative ontological foundations is a forceful one.

But to return to the matter at hand: what might this have to do with the public/private distinction?

III

That distinction has itself come in a number of forms, all of them hallmarks of the liberal tradition in political theory, but in different ways.[1] Firstly: the distinction between the state and civil society. Civil society, here, is the counterpart to the state in the sense that it represents the sphere in which individuals are, or should be, free to pursue their own conception of the good. It is "private" in the sense that it is not interfered with by politics—the public power of the state. Here the "private" is defined only negatively, as that field into which the state cannot, or should not, extend its influence.[2] Secondly: the distinction between the personal and the social. Here, what is counterposed to the private sphere is not state or political activity as such, but society in a more general sense. On this understanding, civil society itself may place constraints on individuals, may limit their freedom in ways less explicit or didactic than those arising from state control—but no less intrusive for all that. Pressures of social conformity may interfere with the ways in which an individual would otherwise be living her life. Thirdly: the distinction between the public and the domestic. Here, as Squires (1999, 26) puts it,

> the public comprises both the state and civil society and the private is defined institutionally as the relations and activities of domestic life, often assumed to embody the intimacy valued for self-development.

Such are the operations of liberal theory as it seeks the optimum balance between the rule of law and the rights of individuals, each pursuing its own conception of the good. Each distinction has proved contentious. For their part, anti-foundationalists will typically argue that the very idea of a rigid public/private distinction, in each of these guises, depends on an adherence to a falsely "neutral" conception of the subject. That is to say: in assuming people to be equal, atomized, unencumbered, definitively rational individuals, modern liberalism installs a

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[1] I borrow here from classifications provided by Will Kymlicka (1990, 247-262), and acutely rearticulated by Judith Squires (1999, 24-27).

[2] Invoking, here, Isaiah Berlin's much-cited distinction between "negative" liberty (freedom from obstruction) and "positive" liberty (freedom deriving consisting in being under one's own active, rational control). See Berlin (1969).

particular model of the subject as the norm, and devalues, or is blind to, its alternatives. The model in question is, at root, Cartesian: in Iris Marion Young's words, "a gazer, an observer who stands above, outside of, the object of knowledge" (Young 1990, 125). It is conceived as that which sees without direct involvement with that which is seen. Young's depiction follows what have become, rightly in my view, quite standard lines of rejection. The Cartesian ego attains its status as a universal subject of pure reason precisely by way of a clean divorce from its own body and thus from any position in space, time, or history, and any relation to its own "sensuous continuity with flowing, living things" (*ibid.*). The "privacy" of the subjective realm is something which is achieved at an extravagant cost. As Charles Taylor presents it, the Cartesian subject gains control, and asserts itself, through disengagement both from the concrete, material world, and from other subjects (Taylor 1989, 159-164).

The appeal to a radically disengaged subject (in Taylor's neat epithet, a "punctual self") has been shown, from all kinds of directions, to be rather less neutral and universal than it may first appear. By communitarian, feminist and postmodernist critics alike, a link is directly made between the false universalism embodied in the model of the unencumbered "rational chooser" of lifestyle options and the requirements and constructions of liberal discourse. In this sense, the two senses of "privacy" mentioned at the start are mutually reliant, and the three distinctions between public and private equally contestable. Liberal/free-market ideology—centred on the safeguarding of "negative" freedom from the intrusions of state or others—will often operate on the assumption that this freedom is definitive of the human condition *a priori*. If our "natural", default state is one in which we are uncontaminated by relations to the world or to others, then the institutions of a just society, in liberal terms, will reflect this. Marx, in "On the Jewish Question", drew attention to the pernicious effects of the institutionalization of such a conception of human beings as isolated monads placed in competition by their pursuit of a freedom conceived in zero-sum terms (Marx 1977, 39-62). More extensively, recent feminist theorists have shown how a strict bifurcation between the public (populated by vigorous, rational citizens) and the private (characterized by more empathic, intimate, caring imperatives) might easily enough be shown to conform to, and reinforce, stereotypes of the "masculine" and the "feminine". For both Marxist and feminist critiques, formal, rights-based freedom in the public realm is secured precisely on the basis of placing another realm—for Marx, class-riven civil society and for feminists such as Carole Pateman (1988), hierarchical family relations—beyond the reach of political deliberation and jurisdiction. Thus the charge is made that formal equality enshrined in modern liberal societies rests upon inequalities at other, concrete levels to which liberalism, with its insistence on the public/private distinction, has tended by its very construction to be blind. The charge is backed up by the claim that a

reliance on an unwarrantedly atomistic, Cartesian account of selfhood underlies the formal individualism of the liberal project.

For those opposed to both metaphysical and normative elements of this Cartesian/liberal package, one oft-adopted tactic is to dismantle altogether the very notion of unitary, continuous subjectivity, and along with it the very idea that anything is definitive, or natural, about the human condition. This is the strategy adopted by a large proportion of professedly anti-foundationalist theorists. Often, it is accompanied by an assumption that such a move will—given the constitutive link between the construction of the "private" sphere at a social level and the construction of a model of subjectivity which itself affords a "private" realm—be inherently unsettling, and politically radical. Thus Judith Butler, seeking to destabilize all appeals to the "given", the "natural" or the "preconditional" about human subjectivity, argues that this will enable us to work on any such notions as "sites of political debate" (Butler 1992, 19). In place of the singular, universal, essentialist model of subjectivity relied upon by much conventional political discourse, she seeks to encourage the "performance" of multiple, particular, hybrid versions of subjectivity as a means of unsettling convention and opening up a space for newness (Butler 1990). But an alternative response emerges in the work of Richard Rorty. No less a thoroughgoing anti-foundationalist than Butler, Rorty's reaction to the dismantling of the Cartesian subject is to reinvigorate, at the public level, the standard liberal public/private distinction. This sets him apart. It is routinely said of anti-foundationalists that the political implications of their work are solely deconstructive. This cannot be said of Rorty. He sketches a forward-looking, affirmedly utopian, vision of an ideal liberal society. But my hunch is that there are problems inherent in his project which provide lessons which transcend it, and apply to "post-foundationalism" in general. To be specific: there are problems entailed in trying to go thoroughly anti-foundationalist in an ontological sense if this entails a blanket denial of all claims about transhistorical reality. What I mean by this will, I hope, become clear as we go on.[3]

IV

Rorty explicitly rejects what he calls the idea of the "True Self"; "the inner core of one's being which remains what it is independent of changes in one's beliefs and desires". There is thus no distinct entity, "the self", in the sense which Descartes conceived it. He makes this point in typically deflationary terms "there is no more a centre to the self than there is a centre to the brain" (Rorty 1991, 123). Rorty's denial of centred selfhood recalls, in a "linguistified" idiom, Hume's self-professedly futile search for an impression of a unitary, continuous self

[3] I provide a fuller exposition of the originality of Rorty's project than there is space for here in Calder (2003).

behind the "theatre" of passing perceptions which confront us as we introspect. While Hume's subject is "a bundle of perceptions" in a state of "perpetual flux and movement", Rorty's subject is a shifting network of linguistically mediated beliefs and desires. There is no "substrate" beneath or above those beliefs, but just relations between beliefs. Thus there is no "inside", or common human core, which accepts or resists "external conditioning" (1998a, 322). Rather, the contours of each "self" are to be described in terms of what Rorty calls a "final vocabulary": the set of words which each of us uses to justify our actions, our beliefs, and our life (1989, 73). There is no necessary parameters governing the formulation of this vocabulary—rather, it is a "hit-or-miss" affair (1991, 199).

Clearly, then, this picture of selfhood runs right against the grain of the metaphysical notion of a privileged "private" realm we mentioned at the outset, since such a notion (at least as Rorty sees it) would depend on the existence of a "centred" self which provided a fixed pivot organizing our beliefs and desires. But Rorty retains and endorses the other, normative side of the "privacy" problematic. He does this because while he regards the metaphysical legacy of the Enlightenment as a series of mistaken questions and philosophical dead-ends, he regards its *political* legacy—"bourgeois liberalism"—as a wholly precious achievement. Not least among its strengths are its combined priorities of making space for private self-creation, while promoting public solidarity. In this spirit, he submits that

> J. S. Mill's suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and preventing suffering seems to me pretty much the last word (Rorty 1989, 63).

Certainly, the prime contentions of Mill's *On Liberty* surface more or less intact in Rorty's claims that "if we take care of political and cultural freedom, truth and rationality will take care of themselves", and that freedom can be understood negatively, as "leaving people alone to dream and think and live as they please, so long as they do not hurt other people" (Rorty 1990, 634-5). Here, then, is a clear case for retaining the normative priority of privacy without the metaphysical commitments which have, all too often from Rorty's point of view, been assumed to be its necessary companion.

Rorty's ideal citizen is, famously, a "liberal ironist". An "ironist" is one who "faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires" (Rorty 1989, xv). But the liberal ironist is one who *privatizes* her sense of irony. Because she is a liberal, her first *public* concern is to help create the kinds of solidarity which the stable practice of liberal democracy requires; to extend the reach of the conviction which for Rorty is what makes her a liberal—that "cruelty is the worst thing we do" (*ibid.*). In the absence of the metaphysical resource of a theory of a common human nature, this *enacted, created* (rather than "discovered") solidarity provides something which "stands beyond history and institutions" on which the

liberal ironist can stake her public hopes. It represents an ungroundable desire "that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease" (*ibid.*). As shifting, centreless selves we are endlessly redescribable; the beliefs and desires we hold most dear are open to limitless reconfiguring. Thus the private is to be protected as the sphere within which freely creative, playful, ironistic self-redescription can proceed untethered. As such, it cannot be reconciled with the public domain: public rhetoric cannot be ironist (*ibid.*, 87). This, for Rorty, is because while in the private, self-regarding sphere our redescriptions are our own affair, when transferred to the public realm, redescription has the power to cause cruelty—specifically, humiliation. So "the best way to cause people long-lasting pain is to humiliate them by making the things that seemed most important to them look futile, obsolete, and powerless". Thus "redescription often humiliates", by threatening people's capacity to view themselves in their own terms, rather than their redescriber's". Human beings have "a common susceptibility to humiliation". Privately, I may redescribe however I like. But as a liberal

> the part of my final vocabulary which is relevant to such actions requires me to become aware of all the various ways in which other human beings whom I might act upon can be humiliated (Rorty 1989, 89-92).

Rorty, then, is trying to be anti-foundationalist about his liberalism. Does he succeed? Not, I would argue, in respect of the ontological sense of the term outlined earlier. It is often been pointed out that in advocating a purportedly post-foundationalist liberalism, Rorty in fact lapses into a claim about what human beings, in common, are like: i.e., susceptible to humiliation. The wrong of humiliation amounts, in practice, to a deprivation of autonomy which Rorty (covertly) requires that we have by virtue of being self-redescribing beings. Now consider the following passage:

> "Who are we?" is quite different from the traditional philosophical question "what are we?"... This "what?" question is scientific or metaphysical... Traditional moral universalism blends an answer to the scientific "what?" question with an answer to the political "who?" question... Following the model of religious claims that human beings are made in the image of God, philosophical universalism claims that the presence of common traits testifies to a common purpose (Rorty 1996, 3-4).

To put it bluntly, Rorty conducts exactly the sort of exercise, in claiming that all human beings are susceptible to humiliation by redescription, that he describes the moral universalist as making. He identifies a core, definitive aspect of human being, installs it as a "what", and then defines it as the paradigm case of cruelty,

which is, after all, "the worst thing humans do". He thus importantly fails to avoid altogether what he calls

> the embarrassments of the universalist claim that the term 'human being'... names an unchanging essence, an ahistorical natural kind with a permanent set of unchanging features (Rorty 1998a, 211-212).

The unchanging essences of "human being" are, at least, "to be the sort of thing that can redescribe itself and others of its kind", and "to be the sort of being that can thereby be humiliated". This is why cruelty is not something about which liberals can be ironic. Thus Rorty could not, substantially, distance himself from this statement by Terry Eagleton (1990, 410) of (in effect) the limits constraining our redescriptions:

> All human beings are frail, mortal and needy, vulnerable to pain and death. The fact that these transhistorical truths are always culturally specific, always variably instantiated, is no argument against their transhistoricality.

Hence, Rorty's normative support of privacy as a bulwark against humiliating redescription by others is, surreptitiously, based on an ontological claim.

So when Rorty states that having taken "the morally relevant definition of a person, a moral subject, to be 'something that can be humiliated'", the ironist's sense of human solidarity "is based on a sense of a common human danger, not on a common possession or a shared power", he is relying on slippery logic (Rorty 1989, 91). For in saying, shortly afterwards, that "pain is nonlinguistic", Rorty is saying that there is a prelinguistic potential to be humiliated. This potential is not a "mere" danger, or a possible effect of discourse. It is a common possession. It is thus, definitively, a foundation in the ontological sense. And in any case, its *being* a shared power requires precisely the existence of a shared power: to humiliate others. In the absence of this power, the danger would not arise. And cruelty is the worst thing we do. Thus, as Simon Critchley (1996, 26) rightly points out, Rorty is in fact "attempting to base moral obligation and political practice upon a foundational claim about human susceptibility to humiliation, upon a recognition of the other's suffering". Our private irony cannot detach us from the claim; if it did, rather obviously, we would no longer be *liberal* ironists.

Turning now to our primary concern, it is clear enough that the public/private split which Rorty calls upon runs the danger of rehearsing the classical liberal blindspot regarding injustices committed in the private sphere.[4] That said, this private sphere is not conceived in empirical terms. It cannot be made to correlate cleanly with the domestic arena, for instance, since one's private ironizing is

[4] A point made by Fraser (1990), and by Bickford (1993; see especially 109-111).

permitted by a diremption of the self, rather than a hard distinction between public and private actions.[5] It is attitudinal, rather than pertaining to aspects of social structure. But what it does do is reintroduce the problem of "harm", as conceived (vaguely) by Mill in *On Liberty*. For as with Mill, it is difficult to see exactly what *constitutes* "harmful" actions—if redescription can here be taken as an action in an equivalent sense. The trouble with Rorty's formulation is that "the things which are most important to me" about my own final vocabulary *might* include my cherished liberal belief that cruelty is the worst thing we do. But they might equally include my next-door neighbour's belief that all liberals should be summarily executed. Since the creation of a final vocabulary is her own private affair, there is nothing to withhold her from cherishing this belief, or indeed from organizing her life around it.Thus if humiliation does consist in making the things most important to people seem "futile, obsolete and powerless" then she will, definitively, be humiliated by my forceful redescription of her as an enemy of the liberal virtues and thereby ineligible for the same "we" as "I".

An implication of this is that, as Eric Gander argues, Rorty's focus on humiliation as the archetypal, gravest harm actually *annihilates* any sustainable distinction between the public and the private. The only reason why Rorty's liberal ironist must keep her private vocabulary private is that it will be illiberal—otherwise, why keep it private? But those who are susceptible to humiliation by others—all of us, as human beings—must, in fact, be characterized by our inability to split ourselves down the middle in this way. For "if we all could simply split our vocabularies into a private and a public part... it seems that we could all be free of the possibility of being humiliated" (Gander 1999, 88). Why? Because with the capacity to be consistently ironic about our own private vocabularies, we would be able to distance ourselves from what we hold most dear about our self-redescriptions. But the very problem of humiliation must arise because we cannot in fact do so. Looked at from the reverse angle, it is easy enough to imagine scenarios in which having to keep one's private vocabulary private would itself be a humiliation. Gander takes the case of the clashing private vocabularies of a homosexual and a moral traditionalist, once both of them have signed up to the idea that humiliation is wrong. For the homosexual, being forced to keep his private vocabulary private (and so not disclose his sexual preferences) would itself be humiliating: it would be to render one of the things most important to him powerless. But for the traditionalist, in light of his alternative unique, private final vocabulary's ordering of values, humiliation would loom in continued membership of a society which publicly acknowledged homosexuality. If either decided to leave the society, withdraw their citizenship and seek asylum elsewhere, then

[5] Rorty (1998b, 60) registers a certain bemusement with Fraser's objections by insisting that his vision of the private indeed pertains not to "the kitchen or bedroom" but to "what you do with your solitude".

this itself would humiliate those dutiful liberals whose own final vocabularies led them to invest deeply in the flourishing of an inclusive, cruelty-free "we". And so on, and so on: the chains of humiliation might, quite conceivably, be endless. Humiliation—as indeed harm, in Mill's account—seems to suffer the drawback that, as a criterion of right action, its definition could never be pinned down to the extent that it would provide a standard which could, in practice, be readily and clearly invoked. To put this differently, it is not definable in methodologically individualistic terms—terms on which Rorty's work, like Cartesianism and mainstream liberal theory, relies.

V

Where does this leave us? Of course, one example of post-foundationalist thinking may not be a reliable guide to all its incarnations. Still, I hope that a certain point has become clear. It returns us to the distinction drawn earlier between epistemological and ontological forms of anti-foundationalism. While the former might be said to lend itself to a healthy resistance to dogmatism, a defence of fallibilism in the face of bland, or blind, or oppressive orthodoxy, the latter is, in social terms, harder to sustain. This is evidenced in Rorty's failure to avoid "foundational" ontological claims in support of his normative priorities. And partly because it is "slipped in" rather than theorized in any depth, this ontology rehearses problems inherent with the classical liberal appeal to a monadic, atomized self. A chance has been missed here: the chance to be explicit about the scope for an alternative ontology which avoids those problems.

I would suggest, then, that the contested nature of liberalism's installation of a rigid public/private split should not direct us to a dissolution of all claims about human nature, and the limits it may place on acceptable practices. Rather, it should return us to that very terrain, to interrogate the notions of human nature which populate both "metaphysical" theories of the political and their purportedly "post-foundational" counterparts. The shortcomings of a Cartesian conception of the self should not, by themselves, lead us to disavow the very possibility of a preferable alternative. Far from it: if the "punctual self" appears as empty, non-gendered, and non-situated, then there is an imperative to concern ourselves with fleshing-out an alternative, definitively *relational* conception of the subject. This relationality will take on different forms in different circumstances; aspects of its constitution will depend on contingent factors. But aspects too will be intransigent: namely, its very relationality, both to the world, and to others, as a condition of subjecthood. The achievement of autonomy is not, *pace* Descartes, the tenets of the liberal tradition, and sometimes indeed (despite himself) Rorty, a project which is conceivable by a human subject defined, whether by norm or metaphysics, primarily in terms of private relations with itself. Rather, it emerges from the

subject's practices in the world, and its situating of itself with regard to others. It is in this sense that a hard division between two ontologically separate spheres, characterized by different orders of activity, different attributes, is difficult to sustain. This is not to deny the scope for any such distinction, or its potential worth. But it is certainly to question its tenability as a "foundational" claim of this type.

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