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A DEFENSE OF A WITTGENSTEINIAN OUTLOOK ON TWO POSTMODERN THEORIES

Sarah Halvorson-Fried

Abstract The way postmodern thinkers deal with issues of language and power has been highly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language. Wittgenstein's conception of language as a collection of "language-games" based on agreement in use rather than a direct reflection of objective reality is central to these issues. In this paper, I will show how this Wittgensteinian conception manifests itself in two important contemporary theories: the liberal ironism of Richard Rorty and the feminist philosophy of Luce Irigaray. I will show how Rorty's and Irigaray's Wittgenstein-influenced theories both bring Wittgenstein's philosophy of language into a more social context, and argue ultimately that through such theories we can better understand social issues in our modern world.

Much of postmodern theory deals with issues of language and power. According to many postmodern thinkers, most of the relationships between language and power go unnoticed, as the public usually sees language as a neutral medium within which we can communicate. But language has the power to oppress, the power to assign identities, the power to liberate. The way postmodern thinkers deal with these issues has been highly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein's later philosophy of language. In this paper, I will show how this influence manifests itself in two

important theories: the liberal ironism of Richard Rorty, a “distinctive and controversial [pragmatist]”¹ and the feminist philosophy of Luce Irigaray, a prominent name in the French school of feminism. I will respond to criticisms of Rorty that call his theory misrepresentative, and identify the disparity between Rorty’s and Wittgenstein’s goals as a vital reason to accept Rorty’s invocation of Wittgenstein. I will identify Wittgensteinian concepts in Irigaray’s feminism and establish a similar disparity in goals. I will then use a Wittgensteinian reading of Irigaray to illustrate the purpose and value of analyzing postmodern theory under a Wittgensteinian lens. Ultimately, I believe that it is through such a lens that we can better understand many postmodern approaches to the relationship between humans, language and the world. In particular, I will show in this paper that his conception of language as based on agreement in use is central to both Irigaray’s feminism and Rorty’s liberal ironism.

I. Rorty’s Use of Wittgenstein

Rorty refers to Wittgenstein’s later work in order to argue against the prevailing acceptance of universality and representation of truth in political and philosophical systems. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he criticizes the basing of political systems on sweeping political theories and ideologies and proposes a new “politics of redescription.” In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, he criticizes the epistemological tradition of Western philosophy, disparaging its perception of the ability to discover truth, and

¹ Bjorn Ramberg, “Richard Rorty,” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2007), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/rorty/>.

proposes a turn in philosophy toward a more conversational, less argumentative and truth-value-based approach. In both works, Rorty uses Wittgensteinian philosophy as a defense for his rejection of universalizing systems.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty spells out implications of Wittgensteinian philosophy of language, identifying Wittgenstein as one important thinker who revealed the human-created, shifting nature of “vocabularies.” Rorty’s “vocabularies” can be thought of as analogous to Wittgensteinian “language-games” and refer to specific cultural collections of ways of thinking, communicating, and acting (ways of living). Rorty argues that if vocabularies are indeed created contingently and in constant shift, if they are “optional and mutable,”² then the values they express, too, are optional and mutable. He asserts that neither the vocabularies nor their values should be imposed on anyone, and that political systems should seek to include *multiple* vocabularies. Such systems he terms “liberal utopias,” inhabited by “liberal ironists” who would recognize their own contingency, acknowledging the possibility of shifting truth and shifting morality, which continue to change as they are influenced by different (contingent) factors. Seeking to provide people with the most freedom of expression possible and alleviate the most suffering possible (this is the “liberal” part), they would promote their causes through redescriptions rather than arguments.³

Like Nietzsche, Freud, and Donald Davidson, Wittgenstein is a stepping-stone on the path to Rorty’s land of liberal utopias,

² Ibid.

³ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.

where we all recognize contingency. According to Rorty, Wittgenstein helped us along this path by revealing the contingency of *language*: In positing that language *forms* an objective framework based on agreement rather than *adhering* or *corresponding* to an (already-existing) objective framework, Wittgenstein makes us see language as a product of historical contingencies. Here it is useful to explore Rorty's use of Donald Davidson's philosophy of language, another stepping-stone. Davidson, like Wittgenstein, asserted that what makes language work is understanding between speakers, not expression of truth. Davidson's notion of "passing theories" from his 1986 paper "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" states that understanding between two linguistic beings occurs when their concepts of a word's meaning converge. Each person's concept of each word's meaning is in constant shift relative to context, so understanding – and meaning – are also in constant shift. This assertion helps us recognize the contingency of language by revealing its lack of necessity, like Darwin's theory of evolution revealed the contingency of the biology of species.

Davidson lets us think of the history of language, and thus of culture, as Darwin taught us to think of the history of a coral reef. . . . Our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much as a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids.⁴

⁴ Ibid., 16.

Just as the present state of species has depended on many contingent factors, so has our language. Rather than an expression of or correspondence to reality, it is somewhat a product of chance: Things could easily be otherwise. In addition, they are bound to continue to change. For this reason, according to Rorty, no singular ideology can be the right one: The circumstances under which ideologies and social theories come into being will never be static. As situations change, so should the vocabularies we use and the values on which our political systems are based.

Rorty does for philosophy in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* what he does for politics in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, presenting this idea of redescription rather than appeal to universal truth within the discipline of philosophy. In this book, Rorty criticizes the epistemological tradition and details what he sees as a necessary shift in Western philosophy. He uses the arguments of several philosophers, including Wittgenstein, to critique the representational view of knowledge central to traditional epistemology. According to Rorty, Wittgenstein, along with Sellars, Quine, Kuhn, and Davidson, showed that neither the mind nor language is capable of mirroring reality. Subsequently, the discipline of philosophy had to change, because epistemology ceased to make sense.⁵ As such, the traditional questions of philosophy are no longer relevant to our time. They are not, as many believe, timeless. The last sentence of his book reads,

The only point on which I would insist is that the philosophers' moral concern should be with

⁵ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 169).

continuing the conversation of the West, rather than with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation.⁶

We should not “insist on a place” for these traditional problems precisely because they will not, as so many philosophers have believed, lead us to discovery of universal truths. When we do philosophy, according to Rorty, we should neither assume that we operate outside the boundaries of contingency nor that we have a privileged ability to discover “truth.” Rather than some sort of elevated search for truth, he claims that our Western tradition of philosophy is just another vocabulary (or language-game).

Instead, as in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty would have us enter a more conversational approach. Once more, Wittgenstein’s influence is clear. Under Rorty’s “naturally holistic conversational justification,” which he favors over the “reductive and atomistic” justification of the epistemological tradition, social justification of belief creates knowledge. Just as language finds objectivity of meaning in social agreement under Wittgenstein, so does knowledge find objectivity of truth in social agreement under Rorty. Under this view, philosophy as a search for truth is nonsensical: We “have no need to view [knowledge] as accuracy of representation” since “we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief.”⁷ Rorty terms this view “epistemological behaviorism” and once again attributes his theory to Wittgensteinian influence.

⁶ Ibid., 394.

⁷ Ibid., 170.

Explaining rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former, is the essence of what I shall call ‘epistemological behaviorism,’ an attitude common to Dewey and Wittgenstein.⁸

And for Rorty, if we recognize philosophy’s inability to discover truth in any objective sense, then we should change the discipline. Just as in *Contingency, Irony, and Soliarity*, Rorty would have us reject a privileged, contingently created position of philosophy in favor of a conversational discipline inclusive of multiple language-games.

A legitimate worry for many critics is that Rorty simultaneously makes normative claims while rejecting normativity. This may indeed be a problem for Rorty, but for the purposes of this paper it is not relevant. My task here is to show the validity of Rorty’s invocation of Wittgenstein. Another worry is that in expounding on the created nature of meaning, Rorty is rejecting objectivity of meaning in any form; in ordinary words, for instance, like “apple” or “table.” Such a rejection would make Rorty an anti-realist. I do not think he aims to do this: Rorty’s concern is primarily with the abandonment of essential identities in order to allow for shifting notions of selves, cultures, and truths. He makes this distinction himself in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

We need to make a distinction between the

⁸ Ibid., 174.

claim that the world is out there and the claim that the truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that the truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations.⁹

Rorty is decidedly not an anti-realist, though he does have a pluralist notion of truth: Since truth is not “out there,” since it is created by humans, it can be created in many ways. The last worry I will explore in the next section: that in fact Rorty may not be able to use philosophers like Wittgenstein as he does; that he may be misrepresenting them and that his use of Wittgenstein may be unfounded.

II. Is Rorty’s Use of Wittgenstein Valid?

Rorty makes bold claims when he uses philosophers like Wittgenstein to support his politics and philosophy of redescription. Is this use valid? We might ask, as some have: How can Rorty make the jump from Wittgenstein’s notion of language as use to “contingency of language” in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*? Does Wittgenstein really exhibit language’s contingency? Does Rorty accurately represent Wittgenstein in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, when he cites Wittgenstein as one of the philosophers who changed the nature of

⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 5.

epistemology? Does he interpret Wittgenstein's notions of language-games and of language as agreement correctly? I argue first that he does in fact represent Wittgensteinian concepts of language accurately, and second that these questions are somewhat inappropriate, because Rorty and Wittgenstein have very different goals. Wittgenstein is trying to determine the nature of communication. His task is quite an apolitical one: He simply wishes to discover the true nature of language, and he discovers it to be a practice based on custom. Rorty has a larger goal in mind: He wishes both to convince us that all of our practices based on custom are not necessarily right, that we cannot justify anything with an appeal to "truth" since everything we do and think is not necessary but contingent, and to propose new systems – of society and of philosophy – based on this recognition. It is because of this disparity of purpose that Rorty's use of Wittgenstein is not, as some critics have proposed, invalid. Rather, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, like Darwin's theory of evolution, is useful to Rorty for purposes of illustration: Wittgenstein serves both as a useful comparison and as an important predecessor. In appealing to Wittgenstein, Rorty is simply laying out for the reader Wittgenstein's influence on his own theory.

Wolf Rehder is one of these critics. In "Hermeneutics versus Stupidities of All Sorts: A Review-Discussion of R. Rorty's 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,'" Rehder disparages Rorty for his use of philosophers like Wittgenstein.

As witnesses for his holistic, antifoundationalist, and pragmatist new view of philosophy as hermeneutics, Rorty calls, among others,

Foucault, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Quine, Gadamer, Feyerabend and Heidegger, a truly motley group of big names. However, he makes only makes a meager case against epistemology and traditional philosophy with this impressive phalanx of witnesses for the prosecution. It is not going too far to say that his backing up his case with this echelon of genuinely great men does not only not do justice to their philosophical work, but even tends to demean their work and their role in the history of philosophy. This is so, because Rorty's 'positive' case, his hermeneutic turn and proposed transcending of truth-oriented inquiry is, unfortunately, surprisingly naïve.¹⁰

It is naïve, according to Rehder, because there cannot be useful conversation without conflict, nor can it exist without a common language or discourse. In Rehder's view, Rorty is proposing the opposite: agreement between different languages and discourses. "Any fruitful discussion is based on some sort of disagreement."¹¹ This is a commonly held view: To engage in conversation, we must share a language-game; and to debate, we must disagree. It seems to me, though, that in criticizing Rorty on this point Rehder is simply not taking Rorty seriously: Rorty's point is that useful conversation is possible – better, even – if it considers perspectives of multiple vocabularies. To say that useful conversation must happen within the same vocabulary is to refuse Rorty's proposed

¹⁰ Wulf Rehder, "Hermeneutics versus Stupidities of All Sorts: A Review-Discussion of R. Rorty's 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,'" *Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie / Journal for General Philosophy of Science* 14, no. 1 (1983): 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25170640>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

shift, to disregard his entire point of making the discourse of philosophy more inclusive of multiple language-games. Rorty's usage of all of these philosophers to defend his "naïve" system obviously troubles Rehder. After all, he says, "[It] does not only not do justice to their philosophical work, but even tends to demean their work and their role in the history of philosophy." It is this criticism that I will now address.

First, Rorty does seem to accurately represent Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein created a new framework for objectivity based on social agreement rather than on truth. This agreement in no way determines truth or falsity, but instead forms a new standard of objectivity. In response to the invisible interlocutor in section 241, "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?" Wittgenstein offers an alternative: "It is what humans *say* that is true or false; and they agree in the *language* they use."¹² Agreement does not determine truth in the world, only truth in our agreed-upon shared account of the world – in our shared language. It is this agreement that allows us to communicate with one another. People are understandable when their definitions accord with socially accepted ones. When Rorty says that Wittgenstein "[explains] rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former,"¹³ he seems to be correct: Wittgenstein's account of a socially formed objective framework does conform to Rorty's "epistemological behaviorism," as it locates objectivity in social accordance.

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1953), 88.

¹³ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 174.

Second, it is useful to ask *why* Rorty appeals to “this impressive phalanx of witnesses.” Does he aim to represent them? Given the difference in Rorty’s and Wittgenstein’s goals, strict adherence is not necessarily essential. Any apparent disparity between Rorty’s and Wittgenstein’s systems is unimportant, because Rorty and Wittgenstein are not making the same kind of claim. They are not talking about the same kind of thing. When Rorty says, “the truth is not out there,”¹⁴ he does not mean that we create the objective world. Indeed, he explicitly distinguishes between “the claim that the truth is not out there and the claim that the world is not out there.”¹⁵ He means that our social and cultural institutions, our beliefs, our methods of inquiry (like philosophy) are created in the same way that language is, in the same way that evolution is. Rorty does not really claim to adhere to Wittgenstein, so he cannot be criticized for it. In both *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty invokes Wittgenstein as an important influence, but not as his only influence. Where Wittgenstein’s goal is to discover and describe, Rorty’s is to reveal, convince, and change.

III. Illumination Through Irigaray

Irigaray is Wittgensteinian in many of the same ways as Rorty: She holds a pluralist view of truth, rejects normativity, and uses Wittgenstein’s notions of language-games and forms of life. But because she does not invoke Wittgenstein’s name to defend her views, as Rorty does, she is never criticized for misrepresentation,

¹⁴ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

as Rorty is. This fact reveals Rorty's immunity to such criticism. Her theory also illustrates the effectiveness of applying later Wittgensteinian philosophy to postmodern theories. Through an exploration of her work, I hope to show this usefulness.

In *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, Irigaray questions the assumed impartiality of language and calls on us to recognize both its sexed nature as "the language of man" (a title of one of her chapters) and its unfairly universalizing tendencies. She states in her introduction, "This book is a questioning of the language of science, and an investigation into the sexualization of language, and the relation between the two."¹⁶ In "Linguistic Sexes and Genders," she identifies the sexism inherent in language, examining particular words in her native French. In "This Sex Which Is Not One," she states that "female sexuality has always been theorized within masculine parameters"¹⁷ and attempts to conceptualize it differently, outside these parameters. One of Irigaray's main concerns throughout her various works is to show how the current linguistic system is oppressive to women while claiming to be universally neutral, an idea clearly influenced by Wittgenstein, as I will show. Another concern is to show how change is possible through new feminist language-games, the details of which can be confusing and have been debated, but which is clarified through a Wittgensteinian reading of her theory.

Irigaray uses the Wittgensteinian notion of language-games

¹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, trans. Gail Schwab (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5.

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," trans. Claudia Reeder, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 99.

as well as his conception of objectivity as agreement to describe the problem of a universal language that is catered toward men but purported to apply to women as well. According to Irigaray, the language we accept as universal – the language of politics, of science, of philosophy – is actually an oppressive, particular language-game.

A sexed subject imposes his imperatives as universally valid, and as the only ones capable of defining the forms of reason, of thought, of meaning, and of exchange. He still, and always, comes back to the same logic, the only logic: of the One, of the Same. Of the Same of the One.¹⁸

Just as, in Wittgenstein, we cannot form a private language because all words we use are defined by the linguistic community, so, in Irigaray, is it nearly impossible to escape from the purportedly universal dominating male language-game. In the same vein as Rorty, Irigaray questions the value of rationality and criticizes the language of traditional philosophy, which is decidedly male and which is imposed on women while masking itself as universal to all.

From [Irigaray's] point of view, the philosophers, of whatever persuasion, are comfortably installed in the male imaginary, so comfortably that they are completely unaware of the sexuate character of 'universal' thought.¹⁹

¹⁸ Irigaray, *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, 228.

¹⁹ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 103.

How, then, is feminist theory even possible? The problem is as follows: “Not using logic risks maintaining the other’s status as *infans* . . . Using logic means abolishing difference and resubmitting to the same imperatives.”²⁰ If we operate outside the dominating language-game, we will not be taken seriously, and if we operate within it, we are giving in, trying to fit ourselves into the oppressive system.

Irigaray’s solution, possible under Wittgensteinian influence, is to form a new language-game that challenges this discourse. Irigaray appeals to the female body in the formation of a new language of feminism, under two assumptions: First, that the male body is already intrinsic to philosophy – in ethics, for instance, where the point is to enhance positive effects on the body (e.g., health) and circumvent negative effects (e.g., death). Second, that the female body is currently defined by male desire and male language.²¹ The body is important both in the symbolic and in its realized form for Irigaray. Rather than being forced to conform either to the supposedly universal language of men, based on the male body, or to form a new language based on the male-created female body, “the female body has to be allowed its own imaginary existence in the form of symbolic difference.”²² This imaginary existence can only be realized by privileging female life, female sexuality, and the real female body, as they are “for themselves.”²³ Irigaray’s solution is Wittgensteinian because it relies on Wittgenstein’s notions of language-games as flexible, changing

²⁰ Irigaray, *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, 228.

²¹ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 150.

²² *Ibid.*, 103.

²³ Irigaray, “This Sex Which Is Not One,” 106.

and organic and of language as a form of life. Formation of a *new* language-game is possible because language-games are always coming into and out of being. The female body itself is an important part of the female form of life, and so can be appealed to in Irigaray's formation of a new feminine language-game.

Importantly, Irigaray does not declare herself Wittgensteinian; but a Wittgensteinian reading of Irigaray both makes sense, as I have shown, and clarifies some aspects of her solution. Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith show how such a Wittgensteinian reading clarifies and does justice to Irigaray in "Wittgenstein and Irigaray: Philosophy and Gender in a Language (Game) of Difference." Specifically, a Wittgensteinian reading solves an interpretative conflict among Irigaray scholars. Critics have typically either called Irigaray essentialist, which she explicitly claims not to be (her disparagement of universalizing language is clearly anti-essentialist) or as speaking in metaphor or symbolism when she speaks about the body (since they know she is anti-essentialist, they cannot imagine she would invoke the *real* body). Even Margaret Whitford, a prominent Irigaray scholar, acknowledges the difficulty of reading Irigaray, in that "we are not quite sure what status is given to Irigaray's statements."²⁴ She wonders whether they are "empirical descriptions . . . ideal descriptions . . . descriptions of the reigning imaginary . . . or perhaps simply metaphors again."²⁵ Reading Irigaray under a Wittgensteinian lens, say Davidson and Smith, "might provide a

²⁴ Whitford, *Luce Irigaray*, 102.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

third alternative”²⁶ and solve this conflict: Through Wittgenstein, we can come to terms with Irigaray’s simultaneous rejection of essentialism and appeal to the body in formation of a new, subversive, feminine language-game. Wittgenstein’s notion of “blurred concepts” or “family resemblances” lets us recognize the possibility of using something like the female body to create a new language-game without essentializing it.

Women’s anatomy might be understood as a real component of the patterns, context, and environment that might give rise to a feminine language-game. So, while anatomy is not an *essential* referent to which language must be fixed, it is a valid and pertinent feature of a feminine form of life.²⁷

Wittgenstein told us that definitions need not always be fixed, that a “the indistinct [picture] is often exactly what we need.”²⁸ In the same way, female anatomy need not be essentialized to serve as a reference point for the creation of a feminine language-game. We see, then, that Wittgensteinian philosophy does not only manifest itself in Irigaray’s theory; it can also help clarify it.

IV. A Difference of Goals: Language and Power

Like Rorty, Irigaray has a political goal, one that is vastly different from Wittgenstein’s descriptive one. Rorty and Irigaray

²⁶ Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith, “Wittgenstein and Irigaray: Gender and Philosophy in a Language (Game) of Difference,” *Hypatia* 14, no. 2 (1999): 83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810769>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 34.

both assume that language has power: In both of their theories, it is language that oppresses and language that has the power to liberate. This relationship between language and power was termed “discourse” by Michel Foucault, and refers to language and other shared aspects of culture as a mechanism that perpetuates itself through use, never calling itself into question. Central to this idea is the Wittgensteinian one that language is based on agreement in use, that social agreement in use forms the objective frameworks within which we communicate. Wittgenstein was the philosopher to assert that there was no ideal language capable of representing reality. Maxine Greene says in “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation” that our postmodern task “may be a matter of recognizing that there is no single-dimensional medium reflective of the ‘facts’ of the world, but a multiplicity of language games, as Ludwig Wittgenstein made so clear.”²⁹ Postmodern thinkers like Foucault, Rorty, and Irigaray, as well as Judith Butler, Monique Wittig, and Edward Said, among others, have accepted this task, drawing out the social and political implications of Wittgensteinian philosophy of language.

Wittgenstein thus proves to be invaluable to postmodern theories of language and power: Though Wittgenstein never approaches the social and political ideas that theorists like Rorty and Irigaray do, his work is ultimately their basis. For this reason, and as we have seen through these two case studies, a Wittgensteinian reading of postmodern theories helps us understand them.

²⁹ Maxine Greene, “Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representation,” *English Education* 26, no. 4 (1994), 208.

V. Eliminating False Clarity: The Value of Wittgenstein-Influenced Postmodern Theory

Both Rorty and Irigaray use Wittgensteinian notions of language and social agreement to call into question the universality we so often use to solve political, philosophical, and scientific problems. Irigaray questions the universality of political, philosophical, and scientific language, while Rorty questions the ability of universalizing, truth-seeking systems of politics and philosophy to provide us with acceptable solutions. I once heard in an ecology class that “our best chance of solving problems is to recognize the complexity of the situation rather than appeal to an ideology.” The professor said such an appeal gives us “false clarity.” It seems to me that this is true, that more realistic views do not think themselves universal, and that Rorty’s and Irigaray’s Wittgenstein-influenced theories that seek to reveal the complexity of the situation in lieu of the false clarity of universalizing political, philosophical, and linguistic systems are ones to consider with utmost seriousness and thoughtfulness.

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