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# From Representation to Dialogue

Polarization, Emotions, and Moral Arguments

in Political Discourse

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*From Representation to Dialogue. Polarization, Emotions, and Moral Arguments in Political Discourse*

Abstract

**From Representation to Dialogue. Polarization, Emotions, and Moral Arguments in Political Discourse**

Political polarization is often explained by emotions. Not only are emotions widely exploited as a political strategy, e.g., by populist parties, but furthermore, points of view are often discredited as based on mere emotion as opposed to so-called "rational" thought. The goal of this dissertation is to present a more constructive reflection on emotions in public discourse, focusing on normative dissents.

Political discourse can be understood as an effort of participants to avoid being redescribed, i.e. avoid the situation where other participants describe them and argue against them on the basis of the resulting redescriptions. Strategies of redescription limit the other's possibilities to reply to a presented argument, as well as the chances of a mutual understanding. Such a way of arguing is problematic for both political and moral reasons, harming both the redescribed other and the democratic process through increased polarization. Some aspects of this have already been discussed as Epistemic Injustice or Political Gaslighting.

I propose to look at political debate as a dialogue and a result of a creative process rather than the mere exchange of self-enclosed logical arguments. Looking at debates merely as a series of arguments participants construct and exchange risks falling into redescriptive patterns. In centering around the avoidance of being redescribed on the one hand, and the value of dialogue on the other, this dissertation argues that the idea that with language, discourse, as well as our stories of who we are and what our lives are supposed to be about, always remain open-ended, is useful to see political debate and moral argument as a creative process.

I connect the work of Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty to Walt Whitman and his idea of the subject 'containing multitudes'. As a result, understanding the linguistic means by which individuals interact with the world and others as mere tools will be presented as a key idea in a pragmatist discussion of the problem of redescription and dialogue, and of the emotionalization and polarization of public debate that can result from them. An approach to dealing with polarization and redescription starts by seeing oneself as open-ended.

To define oneself as something, then, is merely a tool to be able to keep living one's life according to that very description. Democratic participation becomes about becoming one's own, full person and about keeping, rather than being kept from, evolving. To come to be oneself implies to maintain positive relationships towards others, based on mutual recognition rather than redescriptions or categorizations of them. The final chapter will propose some preliminary criteria to evaluate arguments along the lines discussed in this project.

Ágrip doktorsritgerðar

**Frá endurskilgreiningu til samræðu: Skautun, tilfinningar og röksemdir í stjórnmálaumræðu**

Skautun í pólitískum viðhorfum er iðulega skýrð út frá tilfinningum. Bæði höfða stjórnmálaöfl á borð við pópúliska flokka til tilfinninga og sömuleiðis er oft gert lítið úr skoðunum sem taldar eru byggja á tilfinningum einum frekar en svokallaðri skynsemishugsun. Markmið þessarar ritgerðar er að gefa uppbyggilegri mynd af tilfinningum í opinberri orðræðu, með áherslu á siðferðilega andspyrnu.

Stjórnmálaorðræðu má skilja í ljósi viðleitni þeirra sem taka þátt í henni til að forðast endurskilgreiningu, það er, forðast aðstæður þar sem aðrir þátttakendur í umræðu skilgreina þá og nota skilgreiningu sína til að ráðast á viðhorf þeirra. Aðferðir endurskilgreiningar takmarka möguleika þeirra sem fyrir henni verða til að svara gagnrökum og draga úr líkum á sameiginlegum skilningi. Því skapar þessi tegund röksemdafærslu vanda bæði siðferðilega og pólítskt. Þeir sem fyrir henni verða líða fyrir það auk þess sem grafið er undan lýðræði með því að stuðla að skautun. Sumar hliðar þessa eru þekktar úr umræðum um þekkingarlegt ranglæti og pólitíska gaslýsingu. Ég held því fram að stjórnmálaumræður sé best að skilja sem samræður og sem árangur af sköpunarferli frekar en sem orðaskipti þar sem skipst er á einangruðum röksemdafærslum. Hætt er við því að með því að skilja umræður einungis sem flokk röksemda sem þátttakendur í umræðunum orða og setja fram hver við annan, verði þær ofurseldar gagnkvæmum endurskilgreiningum. Með því að beina sjónum annars vegar að viðleitninni til þess að forðast endurskilgreiningu og gildi samræðunnar hins vegar eru hér færð rök fyrir því að það sé gagnlegt að sjá stjórnmálaumræður og siðferðileg rök sem skapandi ferli sem snýst um tungumálið, orðræðu og sögurnar sem við segjum af okkur sjálfum og því lífi sem við viljum lifa.

Ég tengi verk Mörthu Nussbaum og Richards Rorty við Walt Whitman og hugmynd hans um sjálfið sem „inniheldur aragrúa". Af þeirri tengingu leiðir pragmatísk umræða um endurskilgreiningu og samræður, sem byggir á því að reyna að skilja þá miðla tungumálsins sem einstaklingar nota í samskiptum sínum við annað fólk og ytri veruleika og hvernig opinber umræða tekur á sig skautaða og tilfinningahlaðna mynd. Með því að þroska opinn og breytilegan sjálfskilning er hægt að takast á við skautun og endurskilgreiningu.

Að skilgreina sjálfan sig sem eitthvað er því aðeins tæki sem stuðlar að því að maður geti hagað lífi sínu á ákveðinn hátt. Lýðræðisleg þátttaka fer þá að snúast um að verða sjálfstæð og heilsteypt manneskja sem heldur áfram að breytast og þroskast frekar en að komið sé í veg fyrir það. Að verða maður sjálfur felur í sér að haldið sé jákvæðum tengslum við aðra og byggt á

gagnvæmri viðurkenningu frekar en endurskilgreiningu eða flokkun. Lokakafli ritgerðarinnar leggur fyrstu línur um hvernig megi leggja mat á röksemdir út frá þeim hugmyndum sem settar eru fram í fyrri köflum hennar.

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# Contents

## 1. Introduction

How should moral arguments be understood and responded to when they seem highly emotional? Should they be rejected as flawed or simply evaded? Political polarization frequently tends to be explained by emotions. Growing suspicion towards liberal values is often seen and described as based on emotion rather than reason, and conflict often seems irreconcilable. Examples of this are the extreme tensions following the refugee movements of 2014 and 2015, populist demagoguery in various Western countries, racial conflicts, or, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. In this, not only are emotions widely exploited as a political strategy, e.g., by populist parties, but also points of view are often discredited as based on mere emotion as opposed to "rational" thought. I refer to the increased visibility and discussion of emotion in political debates as *emotionalization*. Polarization and emotionalization are often linked to each other (Nguyen et al. 2022, Talisse 2019), and the polarized, fragmented character of the public sphere has even led to reflection on a new era of "abnormal justice", asserting that, within political discussions, "contests over basic premises proliferate, deviation becomes less the exception than the rule" (Fraser 2017: 39). Not only, then, does the public appear polarized, but the very method of discussing and tackling such polarized dissents has become questionable.

Such aspects of the way political differences (seemingly) are debated, or fail to be debated, challenge former theoretical approaches to discourse and argument. Ideas such as participants being moved by the "unforced force of the better argument" (Habermas 2001: 14) being victorious over the worse ones, the notion of a public sphere with its own rules of argumentative conduct, separate from participants' private lives, or the idea that consent and finding a common solution to a problem at hand were the goal of everybody participating, are assumptions about discourse that have been problematized before, e.g., by feminist theorists (Cohen 2013). With these ideas comes a supposed openness of the discussion as well as the participants: That participants be convinced by the better argument does not mean

that it was clear from the start what that better argument is. Rather, the debate itself moves towards finding that best argument. "Actors attempt to convince others by good arguments, but they are also open to being convinced by the arguments of others […]. It is not clear from the outset what the best arguments are, but it is rather through mutual dialogue that the best arguments are expected to emerge" (Steiner 2012: 4). The idea, then: Participants are supposed to ensure dialogue and productive discussion through openness and adherence to the best argument. It is the argument, its emergence, and its prevalence, that discussing is supposed to be about. Emotions, though not unimportant to e.g., moral evaluation or the motivation to enter a normative conflict to begin with, are often separated from such an idea of argument, sometimes even including the idea that emotions counteract, or hinder, the prevalence of the best argument.

With regard to the participants' motivation, though, recent developments put this picture into question. Not only have phenomena such as the BREXIT campaign or disinformation around the COVID-19 pandemic led to an environment of "post-truth" (Hyvönen 2018), but the very motivation of participants to take issue with political and normative questions can be described in a richer way than as a mere search for a better reasoning or the truth about a subject. Such developments are intensely researched, and have been widely discussed in public, politics, and the media (Davies 2016, Thompson 2021). When speaking of political discourse, then, what is referred to here is not a specific, normative theoretical concept but rather the mere phenomenon of political debates and utterances.

Nevertheless, it seems that thinking about emotions in discourse does still lack a conceptualization that answers the questions: If so far it has not been overly useful to assume rational agreement as the (only) point of participating in discourse, what would be? And what does that mean for our ways of evaluating what a good argument is, or a good contribution to debate? How can it explain some of the moments that, in hindsight, are called polarized, or emotionalized? And does this explanation lead to any new ideas about a remedy to this situation, or about alternative norms for good arguments and a productive political discussion?

The goal of this dissertation is to present a more productive, constructive way of reflecting on emotions in public discourse, specifically focusing on normative dissent and arguments.

It departs from a different perspective on what it means to engage with political issues. What can participants actually be assumed to be doing when entering political debates, arguing over normative questions, or joining a protest? The common assumption that participants have a shared goal of reaching rational consent, based on the prevalence of the better argument over the worse one, is not being refuted here. Rather, its use as a sole premise is questioned. This questioning, though, is not about whether or not this assumption is true, whether or not it describes the world and participants' actions adequately. Rather, the assumption of participants aiming for rational consent is questioned on pragmatic grounds. So far, it has not been useful in resolving conflicts around topics such as migration, the BREXIT referendum, or protective measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. While not making any empirical claims to explain how political discourse, in fact, works, or what, specifically, motivates single actors in such cases to participate, this dissertation presents a way of looking at these phenomena from a different theoretical angle. This entails describing the practice of political discourse in a different way, understanding utterances of participants accordingly, and thinking anew about the implications of such a model for normative expectations about arguments and contributions to political debate, be it by individual citizens, journalists and authors, scientists, or politicians.

In order to outline a more productive understanding, and borrowing from Richard Rorty (1993), chapter 2 will show how political discourse can be seen as the effort of participants to avoid being redescribed, i.e., to avoid the situation where other participants describe them and then argue against them on the basis of these descriptions. Starting from a pragmatist perspective, participants' vocabulary, and language, as well as their beliefs about the world expressed in that language, are understood as means to get by in this world, tools to shape and interact with rather than to truthfully depict it (Rorty 1980). They are, therefore, always tentative, and open to modification.

The danger of being redescribed can be both real and merely anticipated. Yet, strategies of redescription are a frequent tool in political discourse, and the chapter will provide examples for that, clarifying a strategy that I call seeing others *as X*: When, in an argument or discussion, one gives the perceived identity of the other an important role, this is to strengthen one's own case. But it has other, less desirable consequences as well. The other's possibilities

to answer that argument, as well as the chances of participants to reach a mutual understanding, are severely reduced. From rather obvious cases of sexism, such as implying to a woman that an engineering degree may not be "the right fit for her," to less direct arguments, such as expressing doubts that a male discussion partner can have a qualified opinion on, or even ever adequately understand, the problem of security in public space for women, such strategies do several things at once to the argument the speaker is delivering, the addressee, and the discussion as a whole: Not only do they redescribe, and thereby harm, the other and limit their chances at critical reflection as well as political participation based on perceived identity categories. They also put in doubt the epistemic capacity of speaker and addressee to understand a problem jointly, thereby limiting the choice of possible solutions to it. They do not only harm the addressee, but also the possible political process of addressing, debating, and potentially remedying problems. As a third effect, they hinder, and discourage, potential dialogue and mutual understanding between participants, thereby undermining democratic culture and the democratic process itself. Chapter 6 will specifically focus on this, referring to the work of Walt Whitman and the role of free, individual expression of oneself not only, as Axel Honneth (1996) argues, for personal development and mental health, but also for one's personal development as a democratic citizen and the creation and maintenance of a democratic culture.

This picture of discourse, leading to participants aiming at avoiding having such redescriptions applied to themselves, differs from an idea underlying prominent existing discourse theories, such as Habermasian Discourse Ethics: The idea that, even if only implicitly, participants are motivated by the perspective to reach rational consent. In contrast, this dissertation will depart from the work of Axel Honneth and his theory of recognition (Honneth 1996) in order to replace the striving for rational consent with a desire to be seen as who one believes one is. Such a motivation leads to strategies of avoiding redescriptions taking center stage. It will become clear that both such redescriptions and arguments that rely on them, as well as attempts to avoid being redescribed, to escape the (sometimes real, sometimes only perceived) danger of becoming an object of such strategies, can fuel rather than calm down the heat of such polarized debates, and thereby cause harm on a political level. Therefore, while addressing the problem of what is often described as emotions in political discussion, the argument the dissertation makes is less about emotions as such and

any specific quality of emotions with regard to political discourse than about underlying processes of redescription resulting in conflicts that often seem to be emotional.

Chapter 3, then, will discuss the normative implications of such strategies, and show the problematic character of redescription in a moral sense. Referring to the work of Axel Honneth and Richard Rorty, I will argue that discourse would not only be more productive, but, in addition, less hurtful towards many of its participants, if arguing on the basis of such redescriptions were avoided. By using such redescriptions of fellow discourse participants and turning them into what I will be calling argumentative commodities, participants do not only intensify, rather than resolve, polarization and conflict, they also hurt others. This dimension of the problem of redescription has already been partially reflected on under terms such as Epistemic Injustice (Fricker 2010) or Political Gaslighting (Latif 2020), and the fruitfulness of the relationship between Rorty's work and the topic of Epistemic Injustice has been specifically addressed (Penelas 2019). In addition, substantial parts of what has been called emotionalization of public discourse can be explained by participants getting hurt by such redescriptions. Using redescription as a strategy in such discussions, though often promising or tempting from an individual point of view, is therefore a form of injustice and should be avoided.

But what is the way out of it? Chapter 4 will build on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1999) and Dmitri Nikulin (1998; 2010) in order to start thinking about political discourse in a different way. Rather than as a series of arguments individuals make and exchange in order to lead up to the point they are trying to make, the goal of this chapter is to see discussions and dialogue as a product of a common creative activity between the participants. Connecting Rorty to Bakhtin and Dostoevsky, it will be argued that having one's identity defined, and one's life story told, by someone else, is a hurtful experience. The attempt to preserve one's "I," as Bakhtin calls it, in order to counteract such definitions, can be successful only in dialogue that is not reduced to a sequence of merely monological statements. The individual self, rather than being complete from the start, needs the possibility to fully come to be itself through dialogue. Both Honneth and Bakhtin stress, from different perspectives, the importance of interpersonal relationships for the subject's ability to develop a healthy sense of self and to be a free individual. Democracy therefore needs a specific form of dialogue in

order to allow for its citizens to become full, free individuals. It is therefore striking that discourse contributions by, e.g., PEGIDA protesters were often rejected partially because participants seemed to be "emotional" as opposed to a more restrained or seemingly "reasonable" conduct in debate (Jacobsen 2014). Emotions, in this perspective on the phenomenon of PEGIDA, had replaced or distorted so-called reasonable thought and argument. Such exclusions of discourse contributions are not only not helpful in reducing polarization, but, as I will argue, are blockades on the way to a fruitful dialogue.

Bakhtin's and Nikulin's ideas of dialogue fit in well with Rorty's idea of edifying philosophy and conversational justification. A model of discourse combining these approaches grants the dialogue itself and its continuity a special place in the assessment of contributions to it. In this sense, it shifts the focus from former, e.g., Habermasian, ideas about the (ideal) goal of rational consent towards the task of keeping the conversation going, stressed by Rorty. Other than the latter, though, it will not adopt his skepticism towards arguments in general.

It will be shown that a Rortyan ethics of discourse centering around the avoidance of hurtful redescription can in fact be compatible with an idea of discourse that does not reduce discussions to a mere exchange of independent, single narrations based on group identities, nor to an ever-generalizing, rationalist systematization through arguments. Building on the idea of chapter 2 to see utterances in discourse as part of an effort to preserve one's own, narrated self, discussing means far more than that. Discussing and searching for recognition are, on top of exchanging opinions, an effort to not be reduced to a mere description, a copy of a "blind impress," in Rorty's and Philip Larkin's words (Rorty 1993: 23f.). By centring around the avoidance of being redescribed on the one hand, and the value of dialogue on the other, this dissertation then aims at using Rorty's work without running into the frequently heard criticism of relativism. Rather, the idea that with language, discourse, as well as our stories of who we are and what our lives are supposed to be about, never come to an end – always remain open-ended (Rorty 1991a: 14) – is not only a central idea in both dialogism and Rortyan ironism, but also a useful protection against simplistic relativism rather than an open door for it.

In order for this to happen, though, a decisive and much discussed problem in Rorty's thought, the distinction of public and private, will have to be dropped. This is what chapter 5

will argue for. Furthermore, it will show how the work of Martha Nussbaum, especially her ideas concerning the role of emotions in politics (Nussbaum 2013) and the connection of moral theory and literature (Nussbaum 1990a–d; 1995), can be helpful for this project. It will not only discuss the consequences of letting go of the distinction between the public and private sphere, but also ask about the implications of granting emotions centre stage in the process of political discussion and dialogue, not as a side effect, but rather as a central element of politics. Acknowledging the fundamental emotional neediness of individuals, the chapter will connect discourse participants' need for recognition and being seen to their ability of creativity and imagination. Positive relationships, based on compassion for others' suffering, both require a certain imaginative effort from individuals and provide a chance to escape redescriptive, polarizing discourse practices. Emotions are, then, a vital part of both establishing dialogue and positive relationships as well as moral judgements. Rather than about emotion-free argument, from this perspective, political dialogue is about keeping open possibilities of compassionately imagining others' situations as well as possibilities of dealing with them. In democratic discourse, as an open and creative process, emotions and compassion are indispensable both for the upkeep of that discourse and its moral quality.

As chapter 6 will show, the moral problematic of redescription and recognition is not merely a philosophical issue, nor is the follow-up question of what precisely it means to describe oneself as something. This last chapter will follow the pragmatist idea that describing the world (or oneself) as something is a pragmatic tool for being in and interacting with the world rather than a claim about what precisely oneself, the world, or the other is. Following up on Rorty's idea of open-endedness, the chapter will connect the work of Nussbaum and Rorty to Walt Whitman and his idea of the subject *containing multitudes* (Whitman 2004). Similar to Bakhtin and Dostoevsky, the individual in Whitman actively escapes the attempts of others to describe or categorize them; just as there are no final, true descriptions of the world around us, subjects are, with Bakhtin and Nikulin, unfinalizable (Nikulin 1998). The chapter will connect this idea to Nussbaum's discussion of a poetic way of judging, as well as Richard Rorty's discussion of metaphor. Understanding the linguistic means by which individuals interact with the world and others not as descriptions of that world, but merely as pragmatic tools which enable that interaction, will be presented as a key idea in a pragmatist discussion of the problem of redescription and dialogue, and of the emotionalization and polarization of

public debate that can result from them. Together with a consciousness of the problematic of redescription, this leads to a way of looking at oneself and others in a different way: Not as being, nor as representing, anything fixed and static, but rather as constantly evolving, defying precisely the descriptions and definitions that strategies of redescription, of seeing others "as X," heavily rely on. Rather than about precisely defining who or what oneself and others are or represent, an approach to deal with this problematic in a productive way starts from the challenge of seeing oneself and one's life as open-ended.

To describe oneself as something, then, is merely a tool to be able to keep living one's life according to that very description. As will be shown, many common, everyday ways of speaking contradict this open-endedness, from political arguments to the way people often talk about their jobs and careers or their life plans. From this perspective, what participants aim for in political discussion, avoidance of redescription, is widened and gains a more positive, rather than merely negative, connotation. In addition to keeping discussion and dialogue open rather than ending them for the sake of seemingly final truths, democratic participation becomes, at the core, about becoming one's own, full person and about keeping, rather than being kept from, evolving. This goal, though, is not to be misconstrued as a self-centered or egotistic one. Rather, to come to be oneself implies, with Honneth, to maintain positive relationships towards others, based on mutual recognition rather than redescriptions or categorizations of them. In this way, the final chapter, once again, will explicitly transcend the boundary between public and private sphere, democratic culture and personal development, by making the challenge of being one's own, full person, and letting others be theirs, a challenge of both private, personal relationships and public debate. This approach not only connects public and private life but also echoes what Christopher Voparil refers to as "Rorty's pragmatic maxim: Putting democracy first" (Voparil 2022: 10). Lastly, the chapter will give some ideas of criteria to evaluate arguments along the lines discussed in this project, and to differentiate redescriptive from non-redescriptive discourse contributions, in order to give a first answer to the question of what precisely the ideas presented here actually mean for the practice of having a political argument.

In this way, the dissertation starts from an alternative description of what participants do in political discussion and what motivates them to do it, via a normative discussion and re-

conceptualization of the conflicts arising within that process, before moving to preliminary ideas about how not only to understand, but to better the present situation. However, the dissertation does not claim to be exhaustive, and even though examples from various political contexts will be given throughout, it does not discuss cases in depth, nor does it provide solutions for this problem. Furthermore, the dissertation does not provide its own model of society, nor an answer to the question of what politics is supposed to be, since such an approach, practically speaking, might run into the very same problem this project is supposed to address: That excluding certain ways of going about participation in debates leads to more fragmentation and polarization instead of mutual understanding or changing opinions. This problematic is independent from any specific form of conceptualization of politics or society at large.

Rather, the goal of this project is far more modest. It is an attempt at understanding the problem of polarization and emotions in political questions and conflicts in a new way, and to reflect on the possibilities of such a new way for the evaluation of moral arguments. More exhaustive recommendations and empirical studies will have to follow in later projects. This dissertation rather forms a theoretical base for such empirical research, and possible perspectives for it will be given at the end of it.

## 2. We Do Not Represent Anything: The Representation Fallacy, the Struggle to Be Seen, and the Political Ambiguity of Redescription

In this chapter I argue that the difficult and polarizing debate about the emotionalization of arguments can be put aside if we change our perspective on the activity of participation itself. Public discourse is still predominantly understood in terms of rational agreement reached through logical argument. From this point of view, emotionality undermines rationality, causing polarization rather than agreement – often preferring irrational beliefs to rational. I argue that we should understand participation in political discourse and the aims and motivations behind it differently. I suggest that emotions not only influence views, but also fundamentally structure the way discussion works in public debate. Political argument must

therefore be understood in terms of the emotions that underlie it, so that its full implications can be recognized.

A starting point may be to see participation as motivated not only by the desire to get one's views accepted by others, but primarily as a desire for personal recognition and acceptance. This is not to make the empirical claim that participants (or all participants) necessarily, and empirically provably, fit this description. It does not constitute an empirical claim. Rather, it is a pragmatic assumption about contested moral arguments, which helps theorize polarized, political confrontations. Need for it arises when the usefulness of assuming that participants in political debates single-mindedly insist that their views be accepted as true is put in doubt on the practical grounds that it seems unhelpful in reducing polarization, in producing publicly accepted solutions or in lessening hostility in heated public debates.

Assuming a desire for *recognition* as the primary mover of such discourses (including normative ones), rather than a secondary factor based on the results of normative discourse, allows for a different take on how to describe what participants do when they take part in discussions, and therefore makes it possible to find different ways to talk about political arguments and emotions in a normatively meaningful way. To get there, I will discuss an idea of recognition that is less normativity-laden and works independently of pre-existing moral norms.

The basis of this argument will be the work of Axel Honneth, particularly his concepts of invisibility and reification, and Richard Rorty, namely the idea of the poetic creation of selves and political communities and the idea that being redescribed by others is something people want to avoid. As I will argue, redescription can be understood as an act of denying recognition. Consequently, the dissertation will start by examining the work of these two authors, proceeding from the following question: What makes sense to assume that participants want from discussing normative questions and why they enter such discussions? After reviewing prominent existing answers to this question, I will make a different proposal, starting from the hypothesis that discourse participants mainly aim at being seen as who they believe they are. Following this, I introduce a way of understanding strong emotions in discourse as results of redescription.

In this lies the first of two ways in which redescription emerges as ambiguous: As a potentially powerful tool for imagination and political and moral progress on the one hand, and a source of potential injury, conflict, and increasing polarization on the other. This is what I would like to call its political or *pragmatic ambiguity*. Rather than seeing discourse merely as analysis of implicit or explicit arguments behind claims, as is often done, it is proposed that redescribing the other discourse participant is not only something participants frequently do, intentionally or unintentionally, but can also be seen as a prominent potential source of emotionality, and hostility, in these discourses. It seems to be an ordinary part of public discourse to brand ideas and arguments with labels such as "conservative" or "progressive", for instance. Lately, more strongly evaluative, as well as racialized or gendered, labels have become more common, such as talk about "typically male" thinking or specifically "white" perspectives on political issues, used to brand the ideas or discourse contributions of others rather than one's own, often in a negative connotation.

Behind these acts of labelling there seem to lie two premises:

a) We think what we think and believe what we believe not only because of critical thinking and rational, logical deliberation, but based on our identity.
b) This identity as well as its connection to what we believe (or should believe, even) is not carved out, defined, or discovered, by ourselves, but can be prominently, and legitimately, defined by others and incorporated into the way those others see us.

This identity seems to be used as a legitimate part of how participants understand, and react to, arguments. As far as one accepts this description of what people do in discussions, this is a view of political discourse that is, as I will argue in the next chapter, irreconcilable with an ethics of discussion aiming at recognition and the avoidance of redescription. Most importantly, though, this redescriptive approach to evaluating others' discourse contributions is a source of injury and conflict for the redescribed as well as all other discourse participants. The present chapter theorizes the possible connections between the theory of recognition, Rorty's idea of redescription, and the problem of managing emotions in discourse, and extends these connections to the current debates around identity politics and perspectivism.

As a first step, the question arises of what participants try to do, what they aim at, when entering political discourse. What, then, is the point of normative discourse? Rather than giving an answer to this from empirical research, different theories make different

assumptions about what the main reason for entering these discourses is, such as the longing to be justified in one's beliefs or the need for recognition. After discussing different approaches to this, an alternative will be presented. This approach will link Honneth's idea of commodification undermining the possibility of recognition to Rorty's problematization of redescription and the failure to take others on their own terms, in order to problematize certain argumentative strategies as what I would like to tentatively call 'treating others as argumentative commodities'. My main aim in the next chapter, then, will be to show that such a move blocks mutual understanding and undermines conflict resolution. The challenge I propose to it is a moral one, since I argue that it should be seen as a form of injustice.

## 2.1. Transcendental Pragmatics and Discourse Ethics: Aiming at Justification

So far, there are several answers as to what people are trying to achieve in discourse, such as justifying their views to others and giving reasons for them (Apel 1973: 399), based solely on the idea of better arguments trumping worse ones (Habermas 1984: 25). We do not just try to talk others into agreeing with our normative beliefs; we want to be reassured of being justified in our beliefs. This justification, then, relies on a common normative background automatically created through normative discourse itself (Habermas 2009a: 16). Habermasian Discourse Ethics relies on the principle that, by entering normative discourse alone, every single discourse participant accepts certain pragmatic premises of discourse (Habermas 2009b: 120). In the view of Discourse Ethics and Transcendental Pragmatics, then, normative discourse can be seen as a game played in the public sphere, running by certain, agreed-upon rules implicitly accepted by all participants, and detached from their private identities. This split becomes necessary for several reasons. On the one hand, normatively, Apel underlines the necessity of discerning philosophical argument from human solidarity: Whilst philosophical practice must aim at the ideal of a consensus implicitly anticipated and aimed at by all discourse participants, political practices of solidarity must aim at their own political realization. These two aims are incommensurable to Apel (Apel 1976: 10f.). On the other, descriptively, it becomes necessary for Habermas, because he

diagnoses a split within the identities of participants, coming with the process of modernization, resulting in duties being clearly separated from customs (g. *Gewohnheiten*) (Habermas 2009c: 113f.). The public citizen with his or her duties is separated from the private person with customs, likes and dislikes, which frees the citizen to act rationally in discourse. The participant, when arguing in discourse, is "relieved of the pressure of action and experience, in a hypothetical attitude" (Habermas 1984: 25). The practice of public, normative discourse is separated from other, personal, and private, practices, experiences, and social functions. This, in short, means to aim at mutual understanding (G. *verständigungsorientiert*) (Habermas 1999: 110), simply because the split between different parts of the identities participants adopt in public discourse is made in such a way that the part acting in public discussion is supposed to share the ideal of aiming at mutual understanding.

Consequently, emotional reactions, though recognized as a vital part of politics and political debate and in no way excluded from it, are important for public, normative discourse only in so far as they signal, in the case of guilt, consciousness of having violated a norm or, in the case of indignation, the necessity to discuss a normative conflict (Habermas 1999: 37f.). Participants are supposed to aim at consensus, which forces them to take the perspectives of other participants on matters. Consensus then equates to adopting the same position for the same reasons (Jezierska 2019: 6). In other words: Even though there is a possibility for emotions playing a part in public normative discourse, they are supposed to arise in an abstract way only, as a reaction to violation, not as a reaction to personal injury or interpersonal conflicts with other discourse participants. Personal feelings of injury or conflict are seen as irrelevant to the force or the trajectory of arguments.

This form of discussing and consenting, though, is based on Habermas's description of modern society and his named diagnosis of splits in modern identities (Habermas 1990). Habermas's and other liberal theorists' division between the private and the public sphere (Calhoun 1999; Habermas 1990) was widely criticized by, among others, numerous feminist theorists (Cohen 2013; Landes 2013), as it seems to make Discourse Ethics "insensitive to particular needs, aspirations, and life-experiences" (Cooke 2018: 72). A critique, though, not left undisputed within feminist scholarship (Keller 2008). The feminist critique of this

division mainly problematized its tendency of eliminating problems of justice in the private sphere, such as care work, from public discourse, and thereby neglecting the importance of affective bonds for ethics (Young 1987), as well as the ideal of public discourse being separated from personal, private problems, and therefore being able to rely on criteria of rationality. This excluded, at least as an ideal, emotionality in judgement. This thinking was pictured as typically male and opposed to female moral thought focusing on empathy and care (Gilligan 2003).

The idea, then, of introducing emotions into our thinking about moral justification and discourse is far from new. When trying to do so, though, feminist theorists tended to shift from normative discourse as a matter of justification towards stressing the importance of care and compassion among discussants (Noddings 2013). While criticizing liberal and rationalist approaches to ethics and political theory as resulting in problematic conclusions that lack empathy towards the people concerned (Slote 2015), care ethics fails to present a basis for an argument backing its position that goes beyond mere compassion. Within a concept of public discourse mainly concerned with justification, this did not lead to an incorporation of emotions into normative ideas of discourse and argument, nor did it help discern better from worse arguments.

Feminist criticism of rationalist theories such as Habermas's tended to prematurely oppose what Habermas and others called reasonable argument or rational discourse as a male-dominated sphere to any form of (female) political communication, stating that "the norm of rational debate favors critical argument and reasoned debate over other forms of communication" (Kulynych 1997: 324). Rightly stressing the shortcomings of rationalist discourse theories at taking emotions and care into account, these authors were very quick at juxtaposing an ethics that accounted for care and positive interpersonal relationships with "rational calculation of costs and benefits [… and] rational recognition of the Categorical Imperative or the Principle of Utility" (Held 2015: 19).[1] What is missing from these accounts is an alternative model of argumentative or communicative accountability, a lack which the present project seeks to help remedy. Accountability is to mean that participants in political

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[1] Similarly to this juxtaposition, Jon Elster aims at understanding "the relations between rationality and the emotions" (Elster 2003: 283f.).

arguments are expected to take into account, and take responsibility for, the consequences of their speech acts—be it to accept, or engage with, possible logical implications of their arguments or positions, or with other aspects, such as the danger of hurting other participants. This is not to say that any form of argument that might hurt another person's feelings is to be criticized on that ground. Rather, the idea of redescription I am going to put forward in this chapter and the next is an attempt to clarify one specific form of hurting others, and to show that this specific form can be criticized as immoral.

As has been pointed out, Habermas's model "denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimension and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities" (Mouffe 1999: 752). As will be shown later, the approach presented here shares Mouffe's skepticism concerning political discourse and participation mainly being about consent as a fabrication. For Mouffe, such consent is built on the basis of exclusion (Mouffe 1993: 146). It presupposes that participating in such discourse means agreeing on the aim of the game. This approach differs from Habermas and other rationalist theorists in that it doubts the status of rational consent as a common goal of public discourse. Other than critics of PEGIDA demonstrators in Germany, for instance, who dismissed their position not only for reasons of its content, but prominently because it seemed mainly based on "feelings," as opposed to "rational argument" (Jacobsen 2014), Mouffe explicitly leaves room for the possibility that such rational argument was never the goal of political participation to begin with. Similarly to Mouffe, Claude Lefort questions Habermas's procedural assumptions when stating that "there is no law […] whose foundations are not susceptible of being called into question […]. Democracy inaugurates the experience of an ungraspable, uncontrollable society […] whose identity will constantly be open to question, whose identity will remain latent" (Lefort 1986: 303f.). The very aim at which such a search for consensus could be directed, then, is very much open to debate.

Rather, an idea of public discourse primarily aimed at something different will be developed starting from the concept of recognition. By fully appreciating the normative dimension of interpersonal relationships themselves, apart from shared social or moral norms, which becomes possible through Honneth's Hegelian approach to injustice, normative discourse can be understood as necessarily emotional, as opposed to ideals of rational public discourse

prominent in the discussion. This implies that participants in discourse aim at more than the concept of justification can capture. Personal recognition, independent of moral norms, has a value that must not be overlooked in an attempt to understand and do justice to political discourse.

2.2. Axel Honneth: Aiming at Recognition

Rather than picturing discourse participants as mainly aiming at justifying their beliefs, from another point of view, people engage in political fights for recognition, motivated to enter the political arena by being hurt in their feelings of self-worth (Honneth 1996: 167). Their social struggle is grounded in moral experiences of misrecognition (Honneth 1996: 139), rather than exclusively of injustice. This certainly does not exclude injustice as a ground for political action or protest, but rather puts it into a wider theoretical framework. Injustice is only one, though undoubtedly prominent, form in which misrecognition can be experienced. Neither is misrecognition necessarily grounded in injustice, nor are all forms of injustice cases of misrecognition. These experiences motivate political resistance as a reaction to the violation of a "tacit but effective" moral consensus (Honneth 1996: 167): One party acts in violation of a norm the other party sees as fundamental for society. Rather than, like Habermas, seeing this violation as the main reason for normative conflict and discussion, the hurt resulting from that violation is what fuels social protest and the struggle for recognition in Honneth's account. Participating in these discourses, then, is both about being justified and being recognized, and rules define relationships of mutual recognition (Honneth 1996: 167). This comes closer to a notion of being accepted, of having positive relationships with other discourse participants—even opponents. In participating in discourse, people try to avoid, or oppose, misrecognition. By making a normative dissent explicit, they risk finding their relationship to other participants described in a hurtfully different way from what they expected, what they believed it to be. Their primary aim is to be in a relationship shaped by recognition. It is what they need to exist as individuals, to describe themselves as beings with certain positive traits (Honneth 1996: 173). In short, what people in public discourse do when

claiming recognition can be described as redefining relationships. Rather than merely discussing injustices or differences in their normative beliefs, they can be seen as aiming at being recognized by, and having a specific form of relationship towards, fellow participants.

The connection between the concept of recognition and an interpersonal relationship becomes apparent in Honneth's reading of Hegel. In German, there is no clear linguistic differentiation between relations (as in the abstract way Honneth talks about social relations between groups) and relationships (as in a potentially personal, emotional, or intimate connection between specific persons). Both are included in the German *Beziehung*. The meaning of either abstract and logical, emotional, and intimate, or merely statistical connections (e.g. correlation or causality) is created only through context or through the combination with other nouns allowing specifications. An example of this would be *Geschäftsbeziehung*, which can mean both business relation (a mere connection) or business relationship (stressing the cooperative or personal aspect of working together), depending on how the word is used. The same German word *(Beziehung)*, though, applies to friendships or romantic relationships. To understand how the approach of this project is rooted in Honneth's theory of recognition, then, it is important to understand the concept of *Beziehung* Honneth uses, initially taking it from Hegel. For Hegel, the mere existence of a relationship already implies mutual duties towards each other, independently from norms or laws present within a society (Honneth 1996: 15).

This form of relationship, in turn, is a normative ideal of its own embedded in pre-existing norms. As there are expectations and normative ideas about what people in such a relationship should or should not do, there is also an expectation as to which actions define the relationship at hand as a certain type (such as friendship). Whatever exactly the character of such a relationship, though, it is these relationships that, for Hegel, constitute the starting point for his thinking about society rather than the individual and his or her rights. It is an error, to Hegel, to

> presuppose the 'being of the individual' to be 'the primary and the supreme thing'. In this context, Hegel labels all those approaches to natural law 'empirical' that start out from a fictitious or anthropological characterization of human nature and then, on the basis of this and with the help of further assumptions, propose a rational organization of collective life within society. The atomistic premises of theories of this type are reflected in the fact that they always conceive of the purportedly 'natural' form of

human behavior exclusively as the isolated acts of solitary individuals, to which forms of community-formation must then be added as a further thought, as if externally. (Honneth 1996: 12)

As a result, the very possibility of establishing or discussing norms stems from individuals' ability to build and maintain specific relationships. Communities come into being through the dynamics and development of relationships, not the mere addition of single individuals and the preservation of their rights. And, subsequently and in harmony with Honneth's idea of individual identity realizing itself in relationships, the personal freedom of the individual results from interpersonal relationships. The sphere of interpersonal relationships is the place within Honneth's image of society in which freedom can first be experienced by the individual (Honneth 2014: 131f.). In authors such as Kant and Hegel, Honneth traces the belief that this requires interpersonal relationships that are free from economic market considerations or expectations of personal gain (Honneth 2014: 136). From this stems recognition's key role in making individuals full persons, which will be discussed in chapter 2 and 3.

In distinction to Habermasian Discourse Ethics, Honneth's approach in his *Struggle for Recognition* does not aim at providing a normative theory, but rather an explanation of social protest, resulting from groups of people being hurt in their feeling of self-worth (Honneth 1996: 167). They are denied recognition as persons, as human beings, and act accordingly. Subsequently, their ambition to finally and fully become themselves (Honneth 1996: 173) is what fuels the protest and the conflict. It is especially this point that makes it possible to reconstruct redescription as a lack of recognition, as will be shown later. Affective care becomes part of the normative framework modern societies apply to judge the actions of institutions or social inequalities (Jütten 2018: 83).

One might summarize Honneth's claim as follows: Participating in discourse is in large part about making yourself heard, about making yourself seen as yourself. And the relationship (Beziehung) participants seek in aiming at being recognized by another person implies mutual duties, regardless of other, abstract norms or a society's formal laws. Honneth is not the only one who sees, though partly implicitly, the potential of interpersonal relationships for the question of democracy and public discourse. Anthony Giddens observes

remarkable parallels between what a good relationship looks like, as developed in the literature of marital and sexual therapy, and formal mechanisms of political democracy […]. Within a wider polity, or in relationships, the individual must have the psychological and material autonomy needed to enter into effective communication with others […]. That is to say, the very framework of the democratic system – or of the relationship – is open to 'public' discussion. (Giddens 1994: 118f.)

Here, the distinction between public and private is being left aside and dialogue established as good practice for both realms (Dobson 2014: 2). Good relationships become a reference point for the evaluation of political discourse, while, at the same time, the terms of what exactly a good relationship is constituted by are put to debate. This project will investigate how this relationship, then, is able to create a communicative space in which the mere application of abstract rules for reasoning or moral norms does not lead to success. In formulating his theory of recognition as a theory of social protest rather than as a moral, normative one, Honneth misses the potential of interpersonal relationships included in his approach. By taking interpersonal relationships as the starting point of individual freedom and individuality itself, and of the possibility of becoming full selves, this chapter will discuss this potential in more detail.

## 2.3. Richard Rorty: Redescribing Society

Richard Rorty prominently sees the point of discourse as a completely different one. He stresses the importance of common visions of a possible future society for discourse. The force of logical argument, on the other hand, is presented by Rorty as something overrated. Rather than for rational consent, Rorty hopes for participants to find common visions of society they can both find appealing. Rather than as any specific form of discourse, Rorty describes participants as being in conversation with each other. This form of communication is fundamentally different from what participants do according to Discourse Ethics, starting from the different concept of language and truth that Rorty presents.

2.3.1. What do language and its speakers do?

To talk about this conversational form of communication, it is necessary to consider the theory of language and truth behind his conception. As from a Rortyan perspective language does not in any way correspond to or represent the world, it is free to do something else: to create it. For Rorty, "all of us are poets deep down" (Inkpin 2013: 299). The aim and the ideal of political discourse in Rorty's sense is not the logical analysis and weighing of arguments, but rather the constant invention and reinvention of a better world, of which others are not convinced by logical coherence, but rather by appeal. Subsequently, the ideal of *Bildung*, which he adopts as his term of edification, cannot be to acquire descriptive and theoretical knowledge about the world, but rather to find a more interesting language to talk in (Voparil 2015: 123). "To say that one should replace knowledge by hope is to say [...] that one should stop worrying about whether what one believes is well grounded and start worrying about whether one has been imaginative enough to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs" (Rorty 1999a: 34). In a radically pragmatist manner, then, the criterion for the quality of arguments or contributions to a discussion is evaluated by the degree to which they can be interesting to others and useful for making the debate more fruitful. What the present project takes from this idea is, among other things, the thought that arguments must be useful for a discussion in more diverse and creative ways than merely in order to demonstrate the correctness of an opinion. Chapter 4 will discuss the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the idea that utterances in dialogues can be aimed at the construct of the dialogue as a whole rather than at such a demonstration.

Rationalist ideals of discourse and argument, however, seem to contradict this idea. The individual's aim in Habermasian discourse, for instance, should be the clear and formally correct reasoning for a specific norm, or a specific decision based on such a norm. In a discourse world as Rorty envisages it, then, individuals must accept the contingency of their own ideas and ideals, including the norms the Habermasian might want to use to back up their opinions. This challenge is best met with an attitude of liberal irony, a virtuous ideal Rorty presents in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (CIS)*. The two figures of the strong poet and the liberal ironist illustrate the attitude Rorty envisages citizens in a liberal society ideally should adopt.

2.3.2. The liberal ironist: Embracing contingency as an ideal

Within a Rortyan world in which no thought can exist without language, communication about that world depends on language alone rather than on the world. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask whether the linguistic means used to describe the world capture the way it is or not. The very thought of language accurately fitting the non-linguistic world becomes obsolete, as all descriptions of the world could only be corrected by comparing them to new descriptions of the world: the object of description itself is not available in language. The pragmatist solution of this problem then entails no longer trying to discern true from untrue statements about the world in any descriptive sense. Rather, useful theories should be discerned from less useful ones. This ends the idea that science could strive towards truth as a final goal; an accurate, correct description of the world. Rather, old ways of speaking, old vocabularies, can be differentiated from and compared to new ones that help solve problems otherwise unsolved (Rorty 1993: 52). Descriptions of the world we construct, then, are always contingent, and one cannot claim for them to be true in the sense of a correspondence to the non-linguistic world.

The liberal ironist, Rorty's model figure to describe a liberal position in the postmodern condition, embraces rather than fears this contingency of all world descriptions. "She has accepted the fact that her descriptions of the world are contingent, that there is no way to prove their accuracy or definite superiority over other descriptions" (Rorty 1993: xv). As a liberal, she is at the same time convinced "that cruelty is the worst thing we do" (Rorty 1993: xv). The ironist accepts that the central, normative beliefs she holds are merely historical contingencies, that there is no way to prove their truth beyond the changes of times or places This includes the "hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease" (Rorty 1993: xv). Rather than the persistence of timeless norms of justice, or their argumentative defense, the liberal ironist's aim is the reduction of suffering and cruelty independently of specific moral norms that would tell people to aim for it. Cruelty, which Judith Shklar defines as, "the deliberate infliction of pain

upon a weaker person or group […] in order to achieve some end" (Shklar 1989: 29), and suffering are the primary reasons to deem actions morally wrong, even if there are generally accepted norms that can be used to defend them. Norms are then mere pragmatic instruments without a moral value on their own account. They function as tools for the avoidance of cruelty. Other than in approaches such as Habermas's, there is no common, last principle, such as rationality, to ground normative claims in. Rather, principles, to Rorty, are nothing more but "useful generalizations of the culturally agreed-upon moral intuitions […] forged by the contingent forces of history" (Showler and Dieleman 2022). In fact, the very act of a normative claim can only be successful as far as it is made to a group that, by chance, shares my normative beliefs. A morally problematic action is an action the "we" agreed not to do rather than an action that is universally wrong. Therefore, Rorty was often called a relativist, a description he never accepted. In his understanding of the term, which I will adopt for the remainder of the dissertation, Relativism implies not that beliefs are contingent on time, place, or culture, but rather that each culture, group or even individual is entitled to their particular truths. To be true then is to be true for someone or to be true in a particular place or time. Rorty, on the other hand, refuses to elevate any beliefs to a status of unrevisability. There are no claims anymore that we can deem "definitely false" but, out of courtesy, decide to "tolerate," as a relativist might suggest. The contingency of all beliefs unites individuals and groups despite different beliefs in a common view of beliefs as fundamental to who we are.

As was stated in the beginning of the chapter, this discussion starts from the idea that understanding emotionality and conflict in political debates requires reflecting on the reasons and motivations that lead to participation. Specifically, it means to think of alternatives to rational consent as such a motivation. From what has been said so far, such an alternative emerges. Once it could be accepted that all beliefs participants hold are contingent, the goal to force different, contingent vocabularies under one, final paradigm while insisting on the universality of particular arguments seems problematic. There is no last point of knowledge an argument could ever actually lead to, except the point where disagreement has been resolved. Rather, the idea of final agreement is, at best, an idealization, a pragmatic instrument to motivate discussion.

Consequently, for the liberal ironist, polarization in the sense of extreme divergence of opinions, even of whole vocabularies, is a normal state of the discourse world. The asset of Rorty's theory for the problem of political polarization is that the lack of common values or accepted premises to start discourse from is already presumed in it. All timeless, non-contingent norms that might unite different groups in a discussion or give them a solid ground of previously agreed-upon knowledge to start the debate from, vanish. Even the very description of different groups, or different individuals, is nothing to rely on. The contingency of language in the sense that vocabulary and, to some extent, identity, is a matter of choice, that it is the story humans are used to telling themselves about their own life, gives rise to what Rorty describes as "the contingency of selfhood" (Rorty 1993: 23).

Departing from Philip Larkin's reflections on death, Rorty suggests that the "struggle between poetry and philosophy" reflects the "tension between an effort to achieve self-creation by the recognition of contingency and an effort to achieve universality by the transcendence of contingency" (Rorty 1993: 25). While poetry and art are often concerned with the expression of specific, often personal, thoughts, feelings and conflicts, science and philosophy are supposed to aim towards definite conclusions, certainty, and universal truth. Theology is a further example Rorty gives for a discipline claiming to have found an answer to "what it is to be human" (Rorty 1993: 26), and what human life is aimed at. For example, the frustration that arises among discourse participants over the (dis)belief in the existence of human-induced climate change indicates the expectation that there was a common ground for further discussion, the expectation that there are central beliefs that are necessary to give public debate a framework to happen in. This hope, though, often seems futile. Rather, discussions can be seen as constantly oscillating between the expression and poetic creation of participants' selves, the possible common creation and expression of a common idea, and the constant danger—and temptation—of redescribing the other and being redescribed in turn. Based on John Dewey's work, Stephen Fesmire (2003) likens such discussions to improvisational jazz performances. This is a fitting image to understand this oscillation. In such a situation, then, emotions have the power to profoundly influence, and even structurally change, discussion. I am talking about emotions at this point because, as I will argue in the following section, the process of being redescribed is hurtful, and the effort of trying to avoid it potentially very emotional.

### 2.3.3. Being redescribed as a hurtful process: Language, identity, and the strong poet

In *CIS*, Rorty starts out by making the point that we should stop trying to unite our thoughts about what is right, just, and politically correct with our beliefs about what is worth aiming for in our private life, the process of private self-realization. It is from this starting point that he can make most of his theoretical claims—as hostile as he is towards theory in general in many regards. In the following section, I will, first, work out what it means to be redescribed and why it is hurtful. This makes it understandable how, in a second step, political participation can be, partly, seen as an effort to resist being redescribed.

Previously, I explained how, to Rorty, it seems futile to think about how exactly the world should be described correctly, and simply wrong to assume that language could ever be shown to correspond to the world. Rather, language can be seen as a mere tool to help us cope with the problem of having to communicate about the things that are in our lives. It could be argued here that language, obviously, is a vast part of personal identity in Rorty, and therefore its role seems to go beyond that of a tool. This would undermine the radicality of Rorty's claim of its contingency, though: While language can certainly be seen as a part of identity, that very identity can never go beyond the status of temporality. Thinking back to Phillip Larkin's poem, which Rorty so prominently discusses in *CIS*, this wish of "finding a 'blind impress' which applied *not* only to one man once" (Rorty 1993: 26), this is just not the case. It might be easy to read Rorty's claim that such an impress can never be found exclusively as describing humanity as a whole. And it certainly does apply to humanity as a whole, to "all of us" (Rorty 1993: 26). But it also does apply to the individual: This blind impress, the desired, unattainable picture, would apply "only to one man *once*," meaning its applicability does not end with that one man's death, but rather much sooner, momentarily after the description's use. Although Rorty does not seem to elaborate on this temporal dimension in his text at this point, it is certainly there: The pictures, the words we find to describe ourselves, have an expiration date. As much as we would love to do so, we cannot save them, take them with us through time. Therefore, if one said that language was a big part of personal identity, the role it played in it could always, nevertheless, be only temporal.

Language cannot fix anything beyond its temporal use. Rather, it can help master a temporal situation.

I referred to Rorty's idea that arguments in discourse should aim at being imaginative and interesting rather than corresponding to some non-linguistic realm. In this final section, I would like to explain how, from Rorty's point of view, insistence on this connection is not only based on a fantasy about the relationship between language and reality, but also undermines political communication.

To understand this, it is necessary to see the link Rorty establishes, following the poet Phillip Larkin, between poetic creation and the fear of dying. Starting out from a poem by Larkin, Rorty suggests that our fear of dying is more than the fear of physical demise. Rather, the fact that life has an end also means that the list of specific things we cherish and find important, even defining the way we live, has an expiration date. What defines our identities as individuals, what makes us "us," is our "idiosyncratic lading-list," our "individual sense of what was possible and important" in this life (Rorty 1993: 23). Losing this is what most humans, poets in particular, are afraid of. The figure of the strong poet, which Rorty uses to illustrate this idea, is going to be discussed later.

Just like language can be seen as a mere tool to cope with having to organize and communicate about our lives, it can be seen as a tool to cope with knowing that these lives are going to end. To find one did not have one's own language, one's own vocabulary, to begin with, is to find one spent "life shoving about already coined pieces. So, one will not really have had an I at all" (Rorty 1993: 24). Rather, one will realize one was a mere copy of who others already were. It is more than understandable, then, that, as Rorty asserts, "most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms—taken seriously just as they are and just as they talk" (Rorty 1993: 83).

People, then, struggle to be seen as themselves. This struggle is, on the one hand, not too different from the struggle for recognition Honneth sees participants in. What differentiates the two, on the other, is that the struggle to be seen aims at something even more basic, less elaborate, than recognition. To want to be taken seriously just as one is resembles wanting to be seen as more than a mere commodity. It is, though, much less dependent on any kind of normative agreement or category. To recognize wanting to be seen as an understandable goal

of discussion does not require any preliminary normative category or consent about norms. Rather, it can be thought of as much like the everyday feeling we have in communication if somebody is "talking about" us rather than "talking to" us. What Rorty's approach does, though, is to give us a possibility to phrase this experience in an elaborate theoretical model, and, in addition, to give a reason for why it is morally problematic, apart from giving us a bad feeling. There is often a purposeful separation between the negative feeling that can arise from another's statement and that statement's evaluation in terms of its logical structure. This implies that there is a content to what another person said and a feeling this gives us that is separable from this. Contrary to this, while Rortyan pragmatism has been criticized for over-emphasizing the linguistic aspect of statements and underestimating emotional and somatic aspects of listening to others, phenomena such as racial prejudice have been pointed out as the result of embodied, somatic experiences inaccessible to argument (Shusterman 2012: 43f.), thereby remedying a shortcoming of Rorty's approach:

> Though the nondiscursive qualities of consciousness (the warm, intimate feelings of one's being alive that James evoked) seemed central to James's idea of personal identity, Rorty expels them from the self. Instead, he textualizes the self as nothing but a linguistic web or complex of narratives that comes uncomfortably close to an essentialist view of human nature as exclusively linguistic (Shusterman 2012: 40).

As I am going to try to make plausible in this chapter, the critique that Rorty's approach is blind to the problem of such experiences seems short-sighted once one grasps the full extent of what redescription, and the painfulness of being redescribed, can mean. As far as Rorty's focus on language goes, the question of which constraints this puts onto his approach would be too much to lay out in detail here. A first, obvious answer to this, though, might lie in Gadamer's wide definition of language as "being that can be understood" (Gadamer 2013: 490), a notion Rorty explicitly referred to (Rorty 2000). While it is true that Rorty imagines the self as a linguistic web—that we are, at the end of the day, seen as mere vocabularies—this does not necessarily entail excluding such nondiscursive qualities Shusterman mentions from the self. If it could be shown that this is not necessarily the case, this would also help with the problem of the inaccessibility of prejudices.

A problem that arises with Shusterman's criticism is his assumption that Rorty's figure of the self as a linguistic web can be taken as an actual model for what the self really is. It seems perfectly plausible, though, to understand this description Rorty gives here as an excluding

one: Rather than actually imagining a web of meanings and stories and giving it the quality of being our selves, we can understand these webs of meanings and stories as mere activities. Whether or not such webs of meaning or stories actually exist is irrelevant to the activity of humans weaving. Rather than imagining such webs as the product of such weaving, and the action of weaving as being aimed at such a final product, it is possible to see the activity of weaving these webs as just what people do, or rather, in a double sense, as how people are: To live means to keep weaving, in a manner similar to how, in dialogism "to be is to be in dialogue" (Nikulin 1998: 395), since the web Rorty calls the self is already "social through and through" (Vescio 2022). Weaving these webs is a mode of being as well as evolving, since "any part of the web […] can be rewoven at any time, though not all of it at once" (Vescio 2022). While there are, then, parts of ourselves that will have to stay as they are while we change, the way or rhythm in which we weave—and return to weaving—those selves does not follow any rules or predictable patterns. Consequently, the attempt to stop the weaving and catch our interlocutors or what they are in some clear, descriptive terms must fail not only because we will never catch that description, but also because we would stop being there to do the catching, stopping our weaving movement in order to extend our arms.

At this point one might think back to W.V.O. Quine's example of the rabbit running by an anthropologist and his informant (Quine 2013: 25). The informant points at the rabbit and calls out "gavagai!" The problem the anthropologist is faced with is to refrain from the immediate instinct to conclude from this that *gavagai* must be the word for rabbit, as it might just as well mean, e.g., *animal*, or *white* (Quine 2013: 25f.). Verbal communication, and political discourse and argument with it, will never get rid of this indeterminacy, this potential for contingency.

Similarly to this evasion of categorization, approaches stressing the sensory aspects of democratic participation share similar goals with the present project when highlighting the possibilities that, e.g., situations of liminality within participatory theatre require the participants to suspend and question "existing categories, identities, and options for political action" (Ryan and Flinders 2018: 144). Thereby, they open up a space of possibilities for mutual understanding, counteracting populism's tendency of redescribing political conflicts

and dissent regarding normative questions into a conflict between "whatever […] is conceived of as lying between 'us' […] and the state" and transforming itself "into a new form of representative government" (Urbinati 2019). Populist movements, as Urbinati states, reduce the diarchy in democracies, the distance between sovereign and government, between will and opinion. Populist politicians, such as Donald Trump, claim to remove the distance between what their followers want and what government does. The process of discussion and compromise usually characteristic of parliamentary politics gets eliminated. Situations of liminality, as described above, are reduced, and the potential for productive uncertainty with them. Therefore, such liminal situations in which the named categorizations are suspended and questioned are a chance to counteract the tendency to quickly transform identity categories ("we," "they") into political positions. In a similar manner, cultural or sexual identity is referred to as a representative category by proponents of leftist identity politics: the idea that, regardless of diarchy, specific persons represent (or misrepresent) other specific persons by means of specific shared characteristics. The criterion for the representativity of, e.g., a national parliament, shifts from the representation of an opinion or political position to a representation of "us," from the representation of political ideas to one of groups. One recent example of this argument can be found in discussions about the representativity of the German Bundestag in the aftermath of the 2021 German federal election, following the criticism that too much of a majority of the MPs had been jurists, teachers, and, in general, state servants before starting out in national politics. In Quine's words: By reducing the diarchy, populism alleviates the citizen of the task to actually find out whether "gavagai" means *animal* or *white* and saves them the trouble of critically engaging with other people's statements. Contingency is brought to an end.

Coming back to Rorty's understanding of language and identity, adopting different roles as a means of mutual understanding that goes beyond the mere analysis of another's speech can enable us to embrace the contingency which situations of liminality produce as a potentially productive, creative element of debate. These situations of liminality can be understood as moments of contingency. In doing so, the approach of this project is an ameliorative one in that it looks for a concept of redescription that "best suits the *point* of having such a term. We will ask, what is the purpose of talking about X [here: redescription] at all?" (Haslanger 2012: 222ff., as cited in Manne 2018: 42). Thereby, the idea of redescription is established

as a means to understand, and, in chapter 3, partly criticize, a certain way of arguing and communicative behavior in political discourse that is opposed to participants' (assumed) desire to be seen as themselves. Rather, similarly, to, e.g., misogynist mechanisms singling women out as a "certain type of woman" (Manne 2018: 58), redescriptive discursive strategies make individuals into representatives of something, such as talk about "typically white" or "typically male" attitudes, for instance.

In summary, no matter what exactly the topic or who the object of such redescriptions is, one can describe a form of argument that these phenomena have in common. This boils down to the opinions, behavior, or ways of talking seen as "typical" of a group of people, who are described from the very same position from which the typification is made. Understandable, personal feelings of injustice are translated into a critique that is "personal, but not particular" (Manne 2018: 59), by which one runs the risk, if not careful, of overlooking "relevant considerations of fairness. One generally does not want to attach a shaming label to someone in virtue of a near-universal trait of character, attitude, or behavioral disposition" (Manne 2018: 66).

2.3.4 Metaphors and the practice of discourse

The desire to be taken on one's own terms may, within a Rortyan idea of language, pose some serious problems to the practice of political discourse. Generally, when looking at this practice through a Rortyan lens, it has to be kept in mind that Rorty himself marked out "three ways in which a new belief can be added to our previous beliefs, thereby forcing us to reweave the fabric of our beliefs and desires—perception, inference, and metaphor" (Rorty 1991a: 14). While perception can change beliefs rather obviously by offering direct hints that make a person doubt them, inference is more complex, "making us see that our previous beliefs commit us to a belief we had not previously held—thereby forcing us to decide whether to alter those previous beliefs, or instead to explore the consequences of the new one." (Rorty 1991a: 15).

What inference and perception have in common is that they do not change the language and the possibilities of expression and reasoning it offers. They merely define certain sentences

as true or false, but do not actually influence the possibilities we have of making new sentences. Thinking and reasoning then, only within these possibilities, comes down to what Rorty, with Heidegger, calls a "mathematical" practice (Rorty 1991a: 14): To think means to modify and create relationships between already existing sentences and statements. Thereby, the truth-value of certain statements can change, for instance by showing that a previously held belief does not actually logically follow from other beliefs we have and are not giving up. Staying within this practice of thinking means to narrow thought down to an application of formal logic and to explore the possibility this recombination of sentences provides. Philosophical reasoning, then, as any reasoning, aims at clarifying the meanings and possibilities of pre-existing sentences by recombining them over and over and exploring different ways of relating them to each other.

As a third possibility Rorty introduces metaphor as a way of attaining beliefs. This way is conceptualized as a method of admitting

> that cognition is not always recognition, that the acquisition of truth is not always a matter of fitting data into a preestablished scheme. A metaphor is, so to speak, a voice from outside logical space, rather than an empirical filling-up of a portion of that space, or a logical-philosophical clarification of the structure of that space. It is a call to change one's language and one's life, rather than a proposal about how to systematize either. (Rorty 1991a: 14f.)

Metaphors, then, can shift the scope of conversations or thought processes. As voices from outside of logical space, they have the power to shift our understanding of the world. Rather than providing a logical explanation or a further step in an argument started earlier, describing phenomena, or arguments, in different words or metaphors can provide a speaker or a conversation with a different outlook on the problem at hand.

What does this mean for the practice of political discussion, and the description of that practice? In the previous sections, I tried to show how the practice of political discourse can be seen in different ways: It can be understood as a practice of rational reasoning towards a conclusion, following the rules of conduct of this very practice of logical reasoning. The point of political discourse, then, is, like in all discourses, essentially rational. Beliefs and claims are put to the test and examined, and what is at stake is their justification and consistency. The practice of political discourse, then, is a consensual activity based on rules

that state the way in which to reach consensus, and consensus is the aim of it all. The premise of this discourse is that we all agree on this aim, and, in addition to that, agree on a distinction between issues that belong to public discourse and other concerns we might have and should be confined to the private realm, outside of this public arena.

In connection with what was said earlier, about the way in which redescription can hurt us in a substantial, even existential, way, this idea seems rather far-fetched. The description of participation in political discourse as an activity aimed at being as rational as possible and agreeing on an issue seems to suggest that the very motivation that got people into participating in discourse, namely the desire to be recognized and truly seen, changes through discourse. The ambition Honneth sees in participants, to truly and fully become themselves, has to be changed, it seems, in order to argue that discourse will motivate participants to aim at mutual understanding and rational consent. The best argument in this type of rational discourse would have to be an end in itself, detached from the desire for recognition just the way the discussion of public, political matters would have to be detached from the participants' private identities. The split Habermas diagnosed as an empirical, societal fact, between modern individuals' private lives and their political ambitions and opinions, is normatively necessary to model discourse the way Habermas did, to see it as a fully rational, consensus-driven enterprise. Then, and only then, can his normative idea of discourse and consent-manufacturing apply.

To see political discourse, though, as a practice in which redescription and metaphorical speech, in Rortyan jargon, are deemed normal, or at least usual and frequent, means to have to think differently about how arguments should be made. Not because participants in discourses do not actually fulfill all normative standards of Habermas's discourse theory, but because the aim of the whole operation might be an entirely different one, as well as the way to get there, or even to participate in the journey. Acknowledging the influence of metaphors as described above leads one to further acknowledge that the aims or directions of this operation can be subject to change. It seems appropriate to presume recognition, and not formal, logical, argumentative perfection, as aim of discourse participants. Furthermore, the way in which people do get to argumentative goals can be seen as a different one as well. If we presume the number one concern of somebody listening to an argument to be its

recognizing or non-recognizing character, its communicative or judgmental tone, rather than its logical coherence or the systematicity of the speaker's overall worldview, it seems reasonable to expect quality standards for arguments to shift.

This shift is compatible with Rorty's observation that a fruitful political dialogue requires people to establish a common democratic identity rather than to over-emphasize particular ones (Rorty 1998a: 97). Rather than making differences in identity too important for the discussion of political problems, Rorty sees the cultivation of a common identity derived from democratic citizenship as paramount for democratic society. In this, his description of the difficulties of political communication in the United States in the 1990s resembles the description of German Sociologist Armin Nassehi of contemporary Germany, arguing that current developments in identity politics and diversity management are reversing the achievements of enlightenment and democracy. According to the latter, rather than respecting the humanity of other citizens, and seeing their humanity (and common identity) as transcending differences, differences between groups of humans are stressed and given importance, identity markers tend to become more important than the persons themselves (Nassehi/Köhler 2020). Seen from the perspective of redescription, this makes growing divides and hostility more likely. Prominent German social democrat and former president of the *Bundestag* Wolfgang Thierse, while stressing the importance of minority rights and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, criticized in *Spiegel* that current forms of identity politics tended to distance citizens from each other rather than enhance dialogue. They risked, said Thierse, destroying mutual understanding and possibilities to work on important topics of social justice (Thierse 2021). As a result, a heated debate about Thierse as a (white, male) person emerged. Some politicians asked for him to be excluded from the Social Democratic Party, a gay member of which told Thierse in an e-mail to stop publishing "reactionary, fascist crap" ("reaktionäre, faschistoide Dreckscheiße") (Cranach et al. 2021).

The important point for the sake of this chapter is not to determine whether Thierse was right or wrong. Examples like these merely illustrate that, while aiming at more equality and justice, redescription of others is not only frequent, but, first and foremost, a promising strategic device. The scandal around Thierse, and the vehemence of his critics, was fueled just as much by him being a white man as it was fueled by what he said. Thierse's aim in

writing this article was, as he himself said, to express concerns about the form in which debates seemed to him to be working in present-day (German) politics. The redescription of Thierse as a typical, old, white man made that aim into a mere helpless attempt at securing old perks for members of his over-privileged identity group.

The primary alternative Rorty gives us to talking to each other in pre-established schemes is to listen to a "call to change one's language" (Rorty 1991a: 15) coming from outside logical space. Just imagine being in a heated discussion with a very emotional person with whose normative ideas (say, concerning migration politics) you strongly disagree. Presuming, just for a moment, that concerns about logical consistency really might not matter[2] for the other person at this point, their reluctance to follow a perfectly thought-out, logical reasoning, or to give such a reasoning themselves, may signal to us that the idea of formal logic, cognition by recognition, is not the tool to go by at this particular moment. It may show that the most basic aim they are guided by is not rational consent, but something that lies, at least partially, outside of our well-explored, formally logical space. Such a gap between what people might actually be aiming for when participating in discourse and what the normative assumptions of others expect them to be aiming for can tentatively be understood as what Miranda Fricker (2010) calls *lacunae*: the fact that, at this particular moment, there does not seem to exist a socially accepted form to express what these people are searching for. On the other hand, discourse participants experiencing injury through redescription and trying to resist it face a similar problem. There has not been a vocabulary established yet to convey or criticize this phenomenon precisely. Because it remains unexpressed, such injury has the potential to intensify spirals of polarization and miscommunication, as people inflicting these injuries lack the necessary hermeneutic resources to understand it, resulting in what Fricker calls hermeneutic injustice. The idea that discussing moral norms should be logic-driven and aim at generalization above all ends is so engrained in the structure of how this discussion functions, that the actual matter is hard to even see. To accept seeing the practice of discourse

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[2] This problem becomes apparent in formulations such as T.M. Scanlon's, when he specifies that "thinking about right and wrong is, at the most basic level, thinking about what could be justified to others on grounds that they*, if appropriately motivated*, could not reasonably reject" (Scanlon 1998: 5, my emphasis). Another way of making the same premise, it seems, is Bob Talisse's idea that "the folk epistemic commitments we—you and I—already endorse are sufficient to motivate an overriding commitment to democratic politics, in spite of our deep and serious disagreements over our most fundamental moral commitments" (Talisse 2009: 6).

as an ever-changing army of metaphors, as Rorty puts it with Nietzsche, means to accept that some of them manage to grasp the problem at hand better, more cooperatively and less redescriptively, than others. And the aim of being seen is something people at quite different points within the political landscape potentially do have in common, regardless of their differences.

To accept that the aim of discourse participation can, indeed, be something other than rational consensus or finding the best argument means to start understanding people on their own terms. It means to widen society's hermeneutical resources, as Fricker puts it (Fricker 2010: 1), in order to understand these normative conflicts differently, and more productively. A participant able to understand the emotional reaction of another as a reaction to a possible redescription that made them feel hurt is in the position to start to understand their own actions in discourse better, and, therefore, to possibly restart dialogue with that other person in a more productive way, rather than remaining polarized. It also means, again, avoiding, in Fricker's terms, hermeneutical injustice[3] which can result in the conceptual exclusion of groups (Morgan-Olsen 2010). This exclusion on account of participants disregarding the alleged rules of discourse and argument becomes hard to justify once we acquaint ourselves with the idea laid out in this chapter that the main purpose of discourse participants' contributions might not be what we have in mind, such as a rational argument, agreement, or reasoning. A society that acquired the hermeneutical resources to understand very emotional utterances in discourse not exclusively as deviations from a normative idea of reasonable discourse, but rather as an effort to be seen, would not be forced anymore to either dismiss them or to try and engage with them, understand them, on a level that makes criticizing them impossible.

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[3] Another way of looking at this might be the classic constructivist imperative: "Act always so as to increase the number of choices" in a particular interaction (v. Foerster 2003: 227).

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that recognition, and the lack thereof, can be thought of independently from the agreement to previous moral norms, and rather as a matter of a specific relationship between individuals. Rather than picturing the struggle for recognition as following the establishment of moral norms, I argued that to participate in political discourse should be seen in terms of the desire for recognition rather than as an attempt to impose a certain normative belief. A refusal to acknowledge them, on the other hand, implies an attempt to exclude. This personal aim seems to better explain phenomena such as extremely polarized political discourses, in which agreement by the force of the better argument often seems not only impossible, but not desired by a large part of the participants. Rather than at this rational consensus, I proposed here that participants can be seen as aiming at recognition without presuming moral norms for it. Their primary aim in political discourse is assumed to be personal recognition, meaning a specific form of personal acknowledgement by their fellow discourse participants.

This perspective offers an alternative way of understanding highly emotionalized and polarized debates. Rather than as a consequence of mere populist demagoguery or unwillingness to abide by the rules of rational argument, certain emotional discourse contributions and arguments can be understood as a reaction to perceived redescription, or as not being taken "on one's own terms." Their emotionality can (but need not always) be understood not as a consequence of the position people hold, so that, say, somebody denying the reality of climate change could be assumed to do so for emotional reasons and a sheer unwillingness to acknowledge any consequences of scientific research; but rather, it can be understood as a consequence of the feeling of being redescribed and categorized as somebody, or part of a group, that one does not want to be described as. Of course, this does not make their argument any better. Furthermore, they might be convinced they have good reasons why they should not be redescribed as such a member. The discussion evolving out of this can very easily shift from a debate about a political or normative question to a discussion about whether or to what extent one is who one is described as. Very emotional

discourse contributions, then, can be seen as a reaction to the hurt that this kind of redescription can produce.

This way of revolting against what is perceived as an unjustified redescription can, apart from its possible logical incoherence, be understood as a logical consequence of the way a discussion goes, rather than as a merely populist, well-thought-out strategy to undermine rational argument. The description of how very polarized, emotional debates work and what participants do in these debates seems to still be largely influenced by a normative idea of a rather unemotional, rationalist discourse ideal participants are supposed to aim at, or at least to play along with. The description of such debates as "emotional" as opposed to "rational" or "well-ordered" equally follows this normative pattern.

This description of what people do in discourse, what they aim at, and what they try to avoid, shows a deep ambiguity of the act of redescription. Whilst, as Rorty pointed out, it can be a strong instrument in promoting positive social change, in giving people an idea of what a better, future society might look like, it equally bears the potential to be hurtful, cruel, and counterproductive for discourse if participants start redescribing each other in terms and vocabularies the other does not accept. While it does have the ability to evoke compassion, cooperation, and positive political change if applied to a shared vision of society, redescription also bears the potential of hurting others, distancing rather than uniting people and increasing, rather than reducing, polarization, emotionality, and animosity among participants. Chapter 3 is going to discuss this in more detail.

This is, of course, not to say that arguments and opinions in discourse should not be explicitly criticized on the grounds of being, e.g., racist. Their critique becomes problematic at the point where it is connected to the identity of the other participant. For instance, on a rather banal level, there is a difference between warning the other that their argument might, at some point, lapse into borderline racist thinking without them noticing it, and therefore be problematic, and stating, redescriptively, that the way their argument is phrased shows problematic racist thinking and represents a typical problematic in the thinking of their social group, such as white men. Redescription, here, is an underlying problem leading to a statement that can then appear patronizing or arrogant, and thereby undermine democratic discourse.

In the following chapter, I am going to argue that this way of redescribing other discourse participants, while possibly seeming logical and obvious to the describer, can also be argued to be morally problematic.

**3. Aims of Discourse Participation and the Moral Ambiguity of Redescription: Recognition, the Poetic Activity of Arguing, Avoiding Being Redescribed, and Seeing People *as x***

So far, political discourse has been described as an activity aiming at being seen in a discourse world in which participants run the risk of being perceived mainly as representatives of a social group and its alleged attributes (such as a specific protest movement). Being hurt by redescription, then, can be seen as one source of polarization, frustration, and rising emotionality in political debate.

Following up on this descriptive model of political discourse laid out in the previous chapter, I will link the aims discourse participants can be reasonably assumed to have about this problem, namely the avoidance of redescription, to a normative discussion of recognition and redescription. In this, I will make the point that "seeing people as x/representatives of x" is an injustice and come to the hypothesis that, for a theory of moral argument, coping with the emotionality of discourse requires understanding two things: That emotions cannot be dismissed just because they are emotions, and that we should avoid thinking of others as representatives of anything, but rather learn to take the concerns of our discourse partners as what they are in and of themselves, as expressions of persons rather than as representations of political parties, abstractly defined social groups, ideas, or schools of thought. I argue with Richard Rorty that redescription has the ability to either foster creative, productive, democratic discourse about how to improve and change a society, or to lead to one-sided, cruel, and, therefore, potentially morally problematic forms of communication, increasing polarization and conflict. This latter aspect is why parts of the communicative acts of discourse participants can be understood as efforts to avoid instances of being redescribed, as well as reactions to such redescriptions. In history and in the present, a broad array of phenomena can be analyzed with the help of this concept of redescription. In addition, I will make the case that this kind of redescription is morally wrong. An immoral aspect is what these discursive strategies have in common. I refer to it as argumentative commodification.

## 3.1. Redescription as a lack of recognition

In a diary entry from 1946 entitled *Der andorranische Jude* ("The Andorran Jew"), German author Max Frisch tells a story that later became the basis for his famous play, *Andorra* (1961): In a timeless, fictionalized little village in Andorra, a young man is generally (and falsely) believed to be Jewish, which leads to his neighbors explaining his behavior by his Jewishness. Others talk to him about the "sharpness of his intellect" (*Schärfe seines Intellekts*, my translation) (Frisch 2011), leading him to actually put effort into sharpening it. As Frisch puts it, he does it *notgedrungen*, "forced by the circumstances," because he sees no other way of reacting to that description of himself. And the tale of him not being able to "love his country" leads to him realizing one day that he really does not believe he loves his country, just as he starts to believe something else people say about him: that he cannot stop thinking about money. The prejudice becomes his identity. The cruelty of redescription, here, crosses a boundary and becomes cruel even if, following Shklar's definition, it is not necessarily always applied to weaker individuals. Exactly because redescriptions have this power to become part of people's identity, pre-established ideas of the powerful and the powerless, or the rich and the poor, though still important, do not keep redescription from being cruel.

Frisch's story gives an example of redescription's power and what it can do to individuals, though of course not only to them. Such instances will accompany the following chapter. After painting a picture of two central concepts, recognition and redescription, and explaining why certain, formal ways of logical argument are not helpful in reducing polarization, the aim of this chapter is to argue that redescription of others can in fact be understood as a form of misrecognition, or, more precisely, reification, within Honneth's approach, and therefore can be deemed an injustice.

### 3.1.1. Honneth: Preventing the other from becoming a self

Recognition was already discussed as the primary motivator for humans to participate in protest and challenge current social practices in Honneth. Their protest is fueled by their hurt feeling of self-worth through the violation of a tacit, presumed consensus. In this section, I

would like to pin down the aspect of personal misrecognition and hurt, as opposed to the misrecognition of groups, within Honneth's work, as the present approach starts from the premise of discourse participants personally interacting with each other in potentially highly emotional discussions that are not primarily motivated by their belonging to a specific social group. Rather, with or without differences between them with respect to this factor, participants are pictured as interacting as individuals rather than actively, and consciously, representing or speaking for a larger social group or community. To enter this rather personal level on which recognition can be discussed, I will rely on two central terms within Honneth's work: invisibility and reification.

For Honneth, the need for personal relationships aimed at something more than market exchange and personal gain is a vital part of the realization of freedom. Rooted in this idea of freedom, as this chapter will make clear, is the need for positive relationships, to others as well as to oneself, that is constitutive for social interactions as well as political action, as the very idea of friendship outside of the family unit provides individuals with a "new form of interaction" to "talk about their feelings" (Honneth 2014: 137). It seems therefore reasonable to reconstruct the phenomenon and the challenge to normative theory that is constituted by emotions in political discourse as a question of interpersonal relationships. In order to do so, the following section will reconstruct central aspects of misrecognition, namely invisibility and reification, as aspects of personal relationships between individuals. By doing so, it becomes possible to understand emotions in discourse, such as indignation, as the emotions of individuals rather than expressions of collective normative expectations.

3.1.1.1. Invisibility as an act of humiliation

In his paper "Invisibility" (Honneth 2009), Honneth asked for the implications of his approach to recognition in an epistemological context. Starting from the often cited example of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which tells the story of a black man feeling how white people seem to "look through him" rather than acknowledging his presence, e.g., when passing by him on the street, Honneth develops the idea that not reacting to people's presence,

acting as if they were not there, is a rather active way of intentionally showing contempt for them (Honneth 2009: 12). Being recognized, then, is, primarily, about being seen at all. More specifically, it is about being seen for what one is. If seen as something different, if perceived solely within the categories of the other, the subject is humiliated. Honneth stresses that there are two ways of recognizing another person: The mere act of perceiving them as a person (*Erkennen*, "to realize") means to know that somebody is there. To truly recognize somebody, though (*Anerkennen*), means to acknowledge that this person's presence means something, that he or she has a value (*Geltung*). To be visible is much more than to be visually perceived. Just as a baby is granted a special form of attention and recognition through special mimic and gestures that do not express any specific content, but rather acceptance, recognition, and affection (Honneth 2009: 18f.), all humans use non-verbal gestures without specific content to actively acknowledge each other's presence, such as shortly greeting each other just by nodding (Honneth 2009: 19).

It is the lack of these gestures that can lead to severe social pathologies and, for the individual in question, end in invisibility. Non-verbal, expressive gestures such as the nod mentioned before, are vital for recognition and are equivalent to moral actions (*Gleichnisse einer moralischen Handlung*) (Honneth 2009: 20). Accordingly, speaking and arguing without considering what another person has to say, and to dismiss it by labelling it racist, emotional, or irrational, are acts of misrecognition, even if what the other person says seems illogical. Because that is exactly what this expression says: it *seems* like that. That is not to say that this impression can never be right; rather, that there is no point in using such an evaluative term (racist, sexist etc.) other than as a non-relational feature of the other person or of what they said. To call someone's statement racist would then merely mean to say that, within this present communicative situation and this specific interpersonal relationship, I perceive (and believe to have good reasons to perceive) what the other person said as racist, and that this perception provokes linking their statement to other statements I perceive as similar. Of course, I can, then, explicitly say that what the other person said seems to me remarkably similar to other statements which I expect that person to disapprove of. Put more briefly one might say that qualifying certain utterances as racist or sexist should not happen, nor be understood, independently of the communicative situation they are applied to. Chapter 6 will

discuss details and further implications of such an understanding of utterances as acts of relating oneself to a situation, or a problem, rather than describing it.

This understanding does not mean to stop using such terms or utterances as critical, evaluative tools. It just means that the object of that evaluation changes. As was explained earlier in the context of Shusterman's critique, we can understand ourselves as constantly weaving the webs of meaning that constitute ourselves, without ever getting to the end, and arguing can be described as a process of becoming. Looking at ourselves, our partners in discussion, and arguments in this way would mean to see an utterance, such as "this thing you just said is racist," as just another rejoinder in an ongoing dialogue, in that constant weaving. And even if we kept saying "you are racist" at some specific point, understanding ourselves as these works in progress would mean to understand "to be racist" as the same thing as "to weave that web in a racist way in this moment," as if the weaver had made a mistake in the weaving pattern. To understand this process of weaving as doing something, though, would keep interlocutors from understanding such descriptions or evaluations as non-relational features. It would help preventing them from adding connecting threads to categorizations, such as "old, white man," that could give these evaluations an additional, explanatory layer that would connect making racist statements to fitting a description. Rather, it would make a statement such as "this is racist" into a phrase closer to Quine's term *gavagai*. It becomes much more fruitful here to understand the phrase "this is racist" as an utterance having various facets, from "this was a clearly racist statement" to "I felt offended by your statement." The denomination that "this is racist" would then not necessarily have to be understood as a clearly defined normative evaluation of the statement, but rather that the statement had a certain, problematic quality within the communicative situation. It would mean not to refrain from calling statements racist but rather to understand this statement differently, and more openly. It would also mean that such descriptions do not have to be final but can rather be understood as referring to the statements' quality in a fleeting communicative context. While using and understanding such redescriptions as a linguistic tool to understand one's situation, e.g., by saying, "what you said was racist and therefore problematic," is unproblematic from this perspective, and even a description such as "that makes you a racist" could be understood merely as such a tool, there is an additional potential

argumentative step that can follow from such redescriptions. This additional step makes such redescriptions problematic and will be discussed in the following section.

### 3.1.1.2. The category of reification: Making people into commodities

Another category opposed to recognition is reification, one of the several ways in which humans can be denied recognition within Honneth's social philosophy. Thus, reification is explicitly regarded by Honneth as morally wrong (Honneth 2008: 20). As a first definition, Honneth describes reification as "a type of human behavior that violates moral or ethical principles by not treating other subjects in accordance with their characteristics as human beings, but instead as numb and lifeless objects—as 'things' or 'commodities'" (Honneth 2008: 19). Originally borrowed from Georg Lukács and deeply rooted in Marxist theory (Honneth 2008: 21), Honneth develops the concept further. As a consequence of market exchange, "the subject is no longer empathetically engaged in interaction with his surroundings but is instead placed in the perspective of a neutral observer, psychically and existentially untouched by his surroundings" (Honneth 2008: 24).

The all-encompassing logic of the capitalist market, then, lets subjects lose sight of the humanity of their partners in interaction, and solely see them as a means to an economic end. Instead of reacting to their surroundings in a manner characterized by (Heideggerian) care, from a participant perspective that empathetically tries to understand others' positions, discourse participants take a "detached, contemplative stance to the other" (Honneth 2008: 34). As a result,

> the bond of human interaction will be broken, for it will then no longer be maintained by their reciprocal understanding of each other's reasons for acting. The elements characterizing the so-called participant's perspective thus consist of the act of taking over the perspective of another person, and the resulting understanding of the other's reasons for acting. (Honneth 2008: 34)

This moment of losing sight of the humanity of others is important in the process of commodification. It links a strict inability or unwillingness to take the other "on their own terms" (Rorty) to their potential dehumanization.

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On a descriptive level, it seems easy to apply this to the aforementioned phenomenon of polarization. Discourse participants on either side of the polarized debate are perceived as increasingly irrational. By making them appear more extreme, taking other participants' perspective seriously becomes increasingly challenging, separating how we perceive them from how we perceive ourselves. But even in less polarized contexts, such commodification can happen. An example might be seen in recent discussions about the greater inclusion of women into decision-making in public politics, such as the architectural design of cities. In this context, cities are sometimes claimed to be designed in a way that makes women feel unsafe to an unnecessary degree, for instance because parts of it are badly lit, or have other characteristics threatening to women. This is explained by the fact that too few women (and too many men) tend to be in influential positions in city planning, leading them to not consider the specific needs, especially security concerns, of female citizens:

> To move forward we must acknowledge, […] that public spaces are not designed with women in mind. This is borne out in the obvious and visible – poor street lighting – and the less tangible – the fact that certain groups, namely women and disabled people, have historically been excluded from the process of designing buildings, meaning that they do not suit their needs in basic ways (for example, inaccessible walkways, narrow toilet cubicles and a lack of communal spaces). (Spratt 2021)

While the critique of making public spaces feel unnecessarily unsafe is absolutely acceptable, there is a part of this argument that is problematic: the part that makes the mistake of connecting this issue at hand to a non-relational feature of the city planners, namely their gender. Their gender becomes a non-relational feature explaining their presumed inability. While the historical exclusion of women from such jobs is a problem in itself, as a problematization of an existing injustice in the way such spaces are built it would be enough to merely criticize urban planning's specific shortcomings. Such shortcomings, though, cannot be explained by a presumed general inability of men to understand or sympathize with female suffering. For such sympathy, it is not necessary that their experiences be fully compatible. Rather, by assuming such inability, arguments such as this are at risk of not only questioning the ability of whole groups (here, men) to experience or imagine something, but furthermore to question their ability of having basic moral feelings about such topics, and thereby depriving them of a central element of what it means to be human, to be recognized

as full subjects. This does, of course, not mean to relieve decision-makers of their responsibility to be (more) receptive to such problems. If anything, the opposite is the case. As an alternative, Leslie Kern manages to tackle the problem in a different tone, describing the complications urban spaces provide for parents (both men and women):

> Under neoliberalism, most of the "solutions" generated [for mobility in urban spaces] [….] have been market-based, meaning they require the ability to pay for extra services, conveniences, and someone else's underpaid labor. Very few changes […] have reimagined and reworked the built environment […] in ways that take care work seriously. (Kern 2020)

It is important to note here that Kern raises the same problem as Spratt does, who refers to her book: the incompatibility of the built, spatial environments in most cities with needs and tasks that, historically, have affected women differently (and more) than men. The difference between the two lies both in complexity and, most importantly, in acknowledging the influence of deeply capitalist ideas of efficiency and the importance of different tasks, such as unpaid vs. paid labor, on these constructions. Kern therefore manages to discuss the problem without having to resort to redescription of others. As a result, her argument not only gains in moral quality by not redescribing, but also in depth.

Overall, this perspective on the potential for reification in political arguments poses problems for rationalist accounts such as Habermasian Discourse Ethics. Within situations of polarization and highly emotionalized debate, the very thought of an all-encompassing logic based on which participants are expected to mold their arguments and judge those of their fellow participants is a blueprint for maximizing polarization, frustration, and distrust among people. This is not to imply that the logic of arguments should not be subject to testing and critique. Rather, it adds a different layer to the critique of utterances in discourse. It becomes problematic when empathetical engagement switches into detached, argumentative management of other participants as mere representations of opinions rather than as full persons. On a normative level, it threatens to reify other participants, to treat them and their statements as mere tokens in an argumentative exchange. Making their struggle to be seen into a bargain of detached, abstract reasons misses part of the point of their political participation. Starting from the premise that the primary aim of political discourse, to them, is recognition by their fellow discourse participants, reducing their contributions to their abstract argumentative content alone, however small it may be, means denying them

recognition. On a political level, such strategies are counterproductive in reducing polarization or fostering dialogue.

Earlier, I referred to this as making others into argumentative commodities, or an act of argumentative commodification. Every single aspect of what another person says in a political discussion can, potentially, be detached from this person's act of speaking and be made into something else, into an argumentative token that can be used in an array of different ways. It can be connected to the contributions of others in ways the other participant did or did not intend. This possibility is partly linked to what I will describe in the following section as the idea of humans representing. One example is the frequent use of "man" as a derogative part of neologisms such as "mansplaining" or "manspreading" (Young 2016). Robin DiAngelo, in an attempt to discuss problems of race and "white fragility" in the US, risks a similar mistake:

> The belief in objectivity, coupled with positioning white people as outside of culture (and thus the norm for humanity), allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience. This is evidenced through an unracialized identity or location, which functions as a kind of blindness; an inability to think about Whiteness as an identity or as a "state" of being that would or could have an impact on one's life. (DiAngelo 2011: 59)

By explicitly referring to the thought of white people representing a norm for humanity, DiAngelo not only gives in to the temptation of seeing white people's thought or behavior as representative of "being white," but also overlooks a problem she is partly describing here: the idea that seeing oneself as something is related to representing something (an experience, or "humanity"). To criticize this is not to imply that the problem she is describing is not important or worth discussing, but rather to say that she seems to miss an interesting perspective she herself is already mentioning, namely that the problem might not be seeing oneself as representing "all of human experience," but rather seeing oneself as representing at all. From the perspective developed so far, what DiAngelo sees as a problem of scope— as a question of exactly how much of the human experience (white) people believe they represent—can be seen as a conceptual problem of representation itself. Simultaneously, her criticism of such a mindset of seeing oneself as representing all of humanity makes a mistake very apparent from a Rortyan perspective. As Susan Dieleman states

> it would be a mistake to think that one vocabulary would better represent the "reality" of race relations as they are or as they should be in, say, the United States. There is the vocabulary that we choose, given our priorities and its usefulness in helping us achieve our priorities; once that vocabulary is chosen, then the world appears to us and influences us in particular ways. By changing the vocabulary, new and different aspects of reality become salient, conditioning our language and practices. (Dieleman 2017: 135f.)

Rather than describing others as they appear to be, and explaining their attitudes or behavior accordingly, a pragmatist perspective on the problematic puts the very language we phrase problems in into doubt and underlines the importance of that language not for describing, but for grappling with such problems. Commodifying others in the way described here transforms them from actors dealing with problems into representations of problems—and from there into the named argumentative commodities. Conversely, this challenges an idea of selves as static or clearly defined. Not only is there no white identity for DiAngelo to describe and ground her arguments in, but white people, in the same way as all people, do not have such an identity to start from at all. In Dieleman's (and Rorty's) perspective, the criticism DiAngelo brings forward might be more productively formulated as a pragmatist question about what identity is good for in the first place rather than a question about which identity people (whether rightly or wrongly) see themselves as representing or not representing. To take up Dieleman's phrasing, there is no vocabulary that would represent what people truly are, such as white or black; there are vocabularies that serve as more or less helpful tools to make sense of one's life. This, though, is not necessarily to be understood as a deep meaning of identity that could be correctly described. Such a perspective does not only show a problem of DiAngelo's criticism, but actually could work in her favor by putting seemingly simple, static views of whiteness as a norm into doubt.

It is especially the idea of commodifying others and its closeness to dehumanization that is important in the intent to link Honneth's ideas to Rorty's problematization of redescription, and it will accompany us through the argument of this chapter. Redescription, and the injustice that it results in, is an old and widespread phenomenon, for which other authors have found various expressions. To say, as Simone de Beauvoir did, that "one is not born, but becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 1956: 273) is to acknowledge the power of redescription. On this first level, this power can merely be summarized as the phenomenon that description can make people into what they are described as. Max Frisch's story is an example of that.

The prejudice becomes the protagonist's identity. Just as Honneth describes it, it is mostly not what people do to him that does the Andorran Jew harm: "Most Andorrans did not do anything to him. So they did nothing good to him either" ("Die meisten Andorraner taten ihm nichts, also auch nichts gutes") (Frisch 2011, my translation). Rather, the harm lies in what they believe him to be, and thereby make him become.

Another side of redescription can be seen in more recent examples, such as PEGIDA. At the peak of migration fluxes in 2015, Sigmar Gabriel, then German Federal Minister of Economic Affairs, was visiting an improvised camp for refugees in Saxony when he reacted to recent violent outbursts of anti-immigration protesters. In his attempt to stress the importance of integration and a peaceful social life, he called the perpetrators "pack" (similar to "scum") (Straub 2015), leading to PEGIDA demonstrators proudly holding up signs reading "we are the scum" ("wir sind das pack") at the next protest, and motivating deeper conflict and higher numbers of protesters. In his attempt to express how deeply inhumane he found their position, he had not only redescribed them, but had actually intensified their feeling of being on the right side of society. If the federal minister wanted them to become "scum," they had no problem with doing exactly that, becoming what he already believed they were anyway. Gabriel had to experience what Richard Rorty had already pointed out: That once he described reality, namely the protesters, just as he thought they really were, the question was not whether there was anything about these protesters that could make his statement about them "true or false" (Rorty 1998c: 86). While he had not actually given them a reason to believe what they believed even more fervently or to be even more vocal about it, he had certainly given them a cause to do so (Rorty 2001: 246). What is more, it would define the way he would be able to interact with them in the future.

The counterpart to this omnipresent potential of making others into something they are not is the realization of personal freedom through relationships that I mentioned earlier. To Honneth, human nature comes to freedom through mutual reinforcement within personal relationships: "In modern society, therefore, in the midst of anonymization and isolation, personal relationships represent social relations in which our inner nature is set free by mutual confirmation" (Honneth 2014: 132). To be in interpersonal relationships shaped by recognition and acceptance as what we are means to be human, or rather, to even be granted

the possibility to be fully human. To be denied those relationships means to be denied part of our nature as humans. It means being denied the possibility to become more than we currently are. In Rorty's metaphor, to be denied these relationships means to be denied our chance to keep on weaving, to keep evolving. Note that Honneth does not claim that in such positive relationships our inner nature was recognized or correctly described. Rather, to be set free, at this point, also means to be subject to change, to be impossible to pin down. To deny the possibility to become something else, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's words, would mean to deny the possibility "to become anything; neither wicked nor good, neither a scoundrel nor an honest man, neither a hero nor an insect. […] It is even impossible for an intelligent man seriously to become anything, and only fools become something" (Dostoevsky 1993: 5). To keep becoming without ever becoming anything, then, and without aiming at becoming anything, is to be free. Dostoevsky will be discussed a little more closely in the next chapter.

By introducing this conception of freedom into his theory, Honneth adds a twist to the idea of recognition. Whilst recognition alone is simply what we need to be fully human persons, freedom (and, of course, recognition with it) is what we need to evolve. More generally put, I would like to keep this point distinct from Honneth's idea on freedom here: Freedom, granted through mutual recognition, is what prevents humans from being dehumanized and allows them to unlock a potential within themselves for a positive development. It is what makes us capable of not only being fully human, but also of being conscious of our humanity and our freedom, and of using it. This is what the angle of recognition can add to a Habermasian Theory of Discourse, as it seems to be "evident for Habermas that the relation between subjects presupposes that they recognize one another as subjects" (Cobben 2012: 1). At the same time, though, freedom, to Habermas, is based on interaction, "fundamental for truth and freedom" (Cobben 2012: 8). In order to freely communicate and discuss, then, a relationship is paramount in which recognition, and thereby freedom, can be had, and in which commodification through argumentative means is avoided.

In this, Honneth resembles Rorty's idea that communication and dialogue, if done in a proper manner, as a practice aiming at keeping dialogue alive rather than ending it on arrival at final answers, is what makes for a democratic culture, enhancing personal freedom. He also

resembles Rorty, as we will see soon, in connecting the possibility (or denial of the possibility) to be reinforced in our nature, to be strengthened in being what we are, to a form of positive dialogue and relationship. It gives a hint towards the idea that, in everyday political discourse, to be formally right, to be merely logically consistent, is rather far from enough to make sure not to do wrong. The, still rather common, idea that this were enough is what can lead to, or reinforce, phenomena such as polarization and (discussion of) overly "emotional" protesters. Once we drop the premise Habermas makes that rational argument necessarily includes, or rather guarantees, fully seeing each other as subjects, it becomes apparent that something more is to be added to make for truly good arguments. While necessary for discourse, seeing each other as full subjects is far from being a given. Rather, it is a value that draws its importance from the idea of rational discourse (in Habermas) and the injustice that is the denial of recognition (in Honneth).

This, though, happens rather negatively in Rorty. While Honneth, coming from his theory of recognition, goes on to connect it to a positive idea of freedom, Rorty lets us understand this desirable state, rather negatively, as the absence of a cruel form of redescription. The next sections will reconstruct recognition as this absence of redescription and look more closely at the potential for cruelty that lies in redescription, while especially emphasizing its connection to the idea of political representation.

3.1.2. Rorty: Redescription as destroying others' selves and the idea of humans representing

In this section, I would like to argue for the following two claims:

1. That the common discourse practice of individuals being seen as representing something, such as a social or professional group, can be deemed wrong once we adopt a Rortyan point of view on language and see it as a form of unjust labelling.
2. that, once this point is made, using this thought of humans representing, without their will, something other than themselves in political argument is a frequently practiced,

but unjust, argumentative maneuver which fails to perceive the other person's thoughts, first and foremost, as their personal reflections.

To do so, I will take up two central ideas of Rorty's work, namely the contingency of selves and the image of a world without substances and essences, to claim that in Rorty's discourse world humans do not represent anything. "For pragmatists, there is no such thing as a non-relational feature of X" (Rorty 1999c: 50), which makes it impossible to think of anything or anybody as a representative of anything or anyone outside of a specific relationship within the practice of discourse. There is no feature, no opinion or way of talking, that could be separated from a certain individual or situation in order to be deemed typical of x in general, a maneuver which is, however, a common strategy in political discourse. Specific phrases said in discussions, or particular behavior, are deemed typical of "white privilege," "Muslim culture," or "male thinking." The problematic aspect of such ascriptions is not, of course, to oppose views because of a striking characteristic, such as their racism. Rather, the problem is their connection to specific groups, or giving the fact that an interlocutor belongs to a specific group an explanatory function as to why they are saying what they are saying. An example of this are the discussions around the representation of certain groups (and their interests), such as women or migrants, in political or company bodies. In the wake of the 2021 German national election, for instance, it was discussed whether political parties should be forced to send an equal number of men and women to represent them in the parliament, or whether certain professional groups, such as non-academic professionals, should be pushed to be more strongly represented, to the expense of, e.g., teachers and lawyers. Behind such criticism lies the idea that the parliament should "represent" the population (Kinkartz 2021).

I would like to argue that once we drop the idea of language representing reality, which Rorty asks us to do, the relation between x and y in a phrase such as "x stands for y," "x represents y" or "x is a typical example of y" changes. To drop the idea that language represents a non-linguistic world means to stop thinking of things or persons as able to be ascribed nonrelational features (Rorty 1999c: 50). To talk about some behavior or argument as typical of a certain social group and using this in an argumentative or dismissive way (for example,

the prominent use of the Twitter hashtag "OKBoomer") does exactly this: "OKBoomer" most certainly expresses something, maybe frustration or boredom, that younger people are feeling when reading or hearing certain statements that then provoke this reaction. And to say that descriptions like this are problematic is certainly not to say that these people should not feel such things or express those feelings. It is merely to say that reducing other people's statements or positions to consequences of such non-relational features does something to the communicative situation: it makes the other into the argumentative commodity mentioned earlier. It makes the rest of the argument *non*-relational. It ends every possibility for the discussion to leave what, in chapter 4, I will call monological ways of reasoning and arguing.

An example of reducing others into argumentative commodities, of using their non-relational features, is what happened to Hanna Arendt upon the publication of her reports on the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem in 1961, that in 1963 would become *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt 2006). Having read her texts in the *New Yorker*, numerous Jewish survivors were not only appalled by her representation of Eichmann, his "banality," or her discussion of the ambivalent role of Jewish Councils and Jewish collaboration in their own people's destruction. Rather, what infuriated these people in addition was the fact that one of them, a Jew, had been able to write this. Arendt was injured by that on several levels, but most prominently opposed the idea of speaking for anybody, of representing anything beyond herself: "I mean on the one hand that I do not belong to any organization and speak only in my own name, and on the other that a person must think for himself and, whatever you may have against my results, you won't understand them unless you know that they are my results and no one else's" (Arendt et al. 2017: 209), Arendt wrote in a letter to her friend Gershom Sholem in 1963. It was an answer to a letter in which he had not only expressed his problems with her interpretation of the history of the Holocaust and the Jewish role in it, but also with her form of presentation: "It is the heartless, the downright malicious tone you employ in dealing with the topic that so profoundly concerns the center of our life. There is something in the Jewish language that is completely indefinable, yet fully concrete—what the Jews call *ahavath Israel,* or love for the Jewish people. With you, my dear Hannah, as with so many intellectuals coming from the German left, there is no trace of it" (Arendt et al. 2017: 202).

The redescription here is more complex. Rather than describing people on the other side as something, as Frisch described it, Sholem and other Arendt critics went one step further. They saw Arendt as something, a Jew, and therefore understood what she did, and their own disappointment in her, exclusively as a part, and consequence, of that Jewish identity. Not only, then, can redescription make people into something they are not; it can also present criteria as to what it must mean to be what that redescription makes them seem to be. In the eyes of her former friends, Arendt not only lacked empathy for Jewish suffering. The hurt from the lack of empathy they perceived on her side alone would have been a quite different, and potentially productive, topic of conversation with her. In their criticism, though, it was paired up with the expectation that whoever claimed to be one of them, whoever described themselves as Jewish, had to show a certain attitude towards Eichmann and the Holocaust. Their emotional injury was paired up with a specific image of what Hanna Arendt, in their eyes, had to represent. Paradoxically, then, redescription has the power to ascribe responsibility due to identity, even when doubting that very identity. Sholem's problem with Arendt vastly depends on her being Jewish. If he truly could deny her Jewish identity, the problem would be smaller.

The most prominent discussion of the problem of redescription within the Social Sciences, though, might be what in Anthropology and related disciplines became known as the Writing Culture Debate. Ethnographers, as Vincent Crapanzano noted, love to describe. What is more, they love to understand the things they describe:

> The ethnographer conventionally acknowledges the provisional nature of his presentations. Yet he assumes a final interpretation – a definitive reading. "I have finally cracked the Kariera section system," we hear him say. "I finally got to the root of all their fuss about the *mudyi* tree." He resents the literary critic's assertion that there is never a final reading. He simply has not got to it yet. (Crapanzano 1986: 51)

The problem Crapanzano describes here lies at the core of the most prominent methodological debate in late 20th (and 21st) century ethnography: what does it mean to describe (and understand) other people, especially in a postcolonial context? What lies behind the question of ethnographic representation is the danger of making informants into mere figures within descriptions anthropologists produce all by themselves. Humans are at risk of becoming what the anthropologist has to "crack." Postmodern critics of earlier, rather authorial practices of ethnographic writing, such as Crapanzano, saw this. The difference

between their approach and the one of this project is that they still had a trace of hope that there might be a better form of ethnographic representation. From ethnographic novels (prominently, e.g., Smith Bowen 1964) to cooperative writing projects with informants, anthropologists tried to find a way of better "representing" their subjects. The Rortyan critic of redescription cannot believe in this solution but can only drop the idea of representing altogether. Their problem, though, is the same: the danger of making others into "x." And just as Hanna Arendt felt herself forced to have anything she did and said accompanied by the assertion of doing and saying it "as a Jew," giving it an unintended, additional layer of meaning, the Kariera in Western Australia were to understand the "true," deeper meaning of their understanding of kinship and social relations through the ethnographic description of Crapanzano's example anthropologist.

The potential to redescribe others, then, is everywhere. It is not, though, a potential for a simple injustice. In the case of Crapanzano and the anthropologist, for instance, there is a difference between redescription and other possible injustices that an anthropologist might inflict on their informants, such as reporting lies about them, or not deeming what they say worth reporting. Redescribing others is not so much about simply picturing them in a wrong way. Rather, it is about making sense of what they do or say within a framework (what Rorty might call a vocabulary) alien to them. This framework, then, need not be wrong in the sense of a lie, an invention. The facts of what is reported may stay the exact same ones. After all, Hanna Arendt was a Jew, and she did write the things others criticized and redescribed her for. The Kariera informants in Crapanzano's example really did care for the *mudyi* tree. What redescription does, though, is to narrow the interpretive space in which the redescribed is still allowed to make sense of their own words, actions, and views of reality: to change, to be ambiguous about things, to evolve. The redescriber not only constructs a picture of how, what, or who the other is, which is something we might all need as a pragmatic assumption in order to fulfill our roles in our daily interactions. What they do in addition is to deprive the other of that ambiguity. In other words, what redescription does is stop the other from continually evolving.

Unlike common intents to deconstruct widely accepted images of "whiteness," "maleness," "blackness" and so forth, resulting in well-known, but rarely successful attempts to, e.g.,

claim that "Islam does not exist," "German culture does not exist" etc., (and therefore can also not be represented), this approach opens a different path. The problem someone concerned with polarization and the problematic double character of redescription has with claims such as the ones above is that, even though they claim to deconstruct, they, unintentionally, end up constructing, which means redescribing. Without intending to, they must necessarily construct a picture of how the world, outside of language, really is, and that does not contain, e.g., "Islam" as a clear-cut concept.[4] Differently, trying to understand political discourse from a Rortyan point of view, one inevitably must put up with the thought that words do not represent things. Words are merely means to reach communicative ends, not descriptions or attributes fitting anything or anyone in the non-linguistic world, whether these things are supposed to "really exist" or "not really exist."

The aim of arguments, then, and the criterion by which they are to be evaluated, is whether they are aiming at a valuable communicative end. This aim, and the possibility of reaching it, is completely independent from the argument being logically coherent or not. Without dropping logical coherence as a criterion for the quality of arguments, then, this approach introduces a new criterion into discussions. An internally flawless, logical argument can, nevertheless, be redescriptive and immoral. A logically imperfect argument can still provoke productive and cooperative discussion. To see the quality of arguments in this way means to drop one last shadow of correspondence inherent even in our everyday thinking about logic and coherence. Even if our arguments do not contain any empirical claims, asking discourse participants to stick to a single type of logic that is supposed to be a one-size-fits-all solution, independent from the concrete, present discussion, implicitly repeats this correspondence. It means to presume that, instead of corresponding to a non-linguistic reality "out there," our statements should correspond to an independent, all-encompassing logic "out there." And just like the first one, this is an attitude we should drop. Chapter 4 will discuss this problematic in more depth within the context of dialogism.

This is not to mean that truth or logic are set as relative. Rather, it means that all participants on all sides of an argument are to be granted a possibility to shape the language and logic of

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[4] A problem that has been widely discussed in (arguably short-sighted) critiques of constructivism (e.g., Ferraris 2014).

their discussion and their relationship together. This last word is vital. The point of this logic being valid is exactly that it was shaped cooperatively, which means, primarily, without participants being redescribed by others. This is not to claim that, by this one criterion, all is said about whether an argument is cooperative or not. Rather, it is a baseline to be elaborated on further in the future. Chapter 6 will elaborate on a weaker concept of such cooperativeness.

### 3.1.3. Seeing people "as x" and the moral ambiguity of redescription

Having established that seeing people "as x" is incompatible with a Rortyan, pragmatist conception of knowledge and language, the aim of the present section is to claim that these discourse strategies are also immoral. To understand this claim, two things are necessary. First, the deeply ambiguous character of redescription itself within Rorty's philosophy must be considered:

> The distinction between the old strategy and the new is important. The choice between them makes the difference between what Todd Gitlin calls "common dreams" and what Arthur Schlesinger calls "disuniting America." To take pride in being black or gay is an entirely reasonable response to the sadistic humiliation to which one has been subjected. But insofar as this pride prevents someone from also taking pride in being an American citizen, from thinking of his or her country as capable of reform, or from being able to join with straights or whites in reformist initiatives, it is a political disaster. (Rorty 1998a: 100)

This quote brings together the two very opposite possibilities of what redescription, as a process of self-reflection on the one hand and a process of potentially violent talk on the other, can bring to a society. The question of whether redescription is disuniting, polarizing, and hurtful, or rather uniting, creative, productive, and reformist, comes down to what exactly this redescription is aimed at. Rorty himself stressed that redescription has a potential of cruelty, that humans usually do not want to be redescribed (Rorty 1993: 89). This is certainly true of negative redescriptions but can also be a factor in cases where redescription is meant to be positive or empowering. At the same time, it is the main instrument of change and progress in Rorty's theoretical arsenal. Accepting this ambiguous character of redescription is crucial to make his approach productive for questions of today's political argument.

It seems remarkable that Rorty's take on finding a positive, leftist version of patriotism stresses a process of achievement and becoming, rather than a fixed, clearly defined object of pride. Rorty's idea of a leftist, non-cruel patriotism can only be achieved if what people have in common is thought of not as a fixed entity, a firmly defined set of truths or a clearly defined cultural, national, or political identity, but rather as a process, as something that is constantly evolving, constantly being achieved without ever really being achieved. Similarly, then, to us, what people have in common keeps evolving.

In this light, all political talk about common democratic, national, or even European, values, seems futile. The question whether right-wing anti-immigration protesters or centrist or leftist politicians are morally right or wrong cannot, then, be decided by simply trying to reconnect what they say to some set of, allegedly, common norms of argument or ethics, or even rights. The question of whether one argument is better or worse than another can only be answered by looking at the communicative process within the discussion itself. The very values or norms we might want to try to connect our opinions to are, necessarily, constantly in the making. The evaluation of arguments in this type of discussion, then, is a) purely procedural, and b) self-referential.

This, though, is not to mean that Rorty, or his ironist, were against arguing or arguments. Rather, it only means that ironists cannot always be expected to automatically be impressed by an argument just due to its logical character (Koopman 2020: 107). In other words, formal, logical coherence is not enough to make an argument a good argument. What finally makes an argument a good argument is, at first glance, independent from this coherence as defined by abstract rules of logic independent from the individual's lifeworld. This is not to mean that it is independent of any form of reasoning, but that the form in which such reasoning happens cannot be expected to exclusively abide by such lifeworld-independent, abstract rules.

The transcendence of the lifeworld in order to enter moral discourse, which Habermas sees as necessary (Habermas 2009d: 185f.), is impossible to Rorty, to whom "any attempt to evade the 'lifeworld' is illusory" (Calcaterra 2019: 68). Therefore, his theory lacks the very possibility of a vantage point from which to reliably find that logical coherence, which is not his aim. Nevertheless, it would be short-sighted to merely say that "Rorty's discussion of

ironist discourse presents it as culminating in the abandonment of theoretical aspirations and as limited in its application to the private sphere" (Inkpin 2013: 310). This popular way of summing up Rorty's thinking neglects the importance of the liberal ironist's ethics. The ironist is a person who accepts the contingency of his or her ideals. The liberal ironist, though, or rather the ironist liberal, knows very well that defending these very ideals is what he or she must do. In other words, the Rortyan liberal ironist's aspirations are anything but limited to the private sphere. The difference between this ironist attitude and a rationalist one is not so much the commitment to political ideals, but rather the method that is believed to make these ideals accepted or popular. The rationalist, Habermasian way of thinking of discourse and argument is that, by its very definition, a good argument is good by its logical consistency, and the element leading people to accept the argument is this consistency resulting in its "unforced force" (Habermas 2005: 37). In short, the way to make an idea accepted or popular is to have good, logically sound arguments for it, because what people in deliberation aim at is consensus based on rational agreement; coming to the same conclusions for the same reasons (Jezierska 2019: 6). This concept, though, assumes that rational agreement, or a consensus reached by this form of agreement, is valued in itself by the discourse participants. Although meant as a normative theory, Discourse Ethics therefore must make assumptions about the actual participants in discourses, who need to be seen as accepting rational agreement as a theoretical ideal of discourse, even if an agreement is not reached. Participants need to agree on a common interest (Gaon 1998: 695). A central idea of the present text, though, is to question this very ideal. Recent criticism of polarized discourse, populism and the emotionalization of public debate seems to presume that the named emotionality and polarization somehow endanger and disfigure an otherwise rational, logical argument, or that increasing polarization and populist speech turn a rational discourse driven by argument and aimed at consensus into an overly emotional, unproductive chaos resulting in right-wing protests or BREXIT campaigns. Such a description of the problem presumes that the participants' motivation is the possibility of such rational argument and consent. It results in having to not only make this assumption, but also having to explain why, then, participants seem to act against their own motivation, which, in turn, is done by showing that certain psychological effects lead to people behaving in a way that increases polarization. Rorty's approach is quite different from this, and, in a way, much simpler, because it does

not have to define an anomaly and then explain it. Rather, it understands political discourse, from the start, as an activity aimed at telling interesting, fascinating stories about what kind of society to become, rather than an argument about logical consistencies and inconsistencies of theoretical details. The Rortyan poet is somebody whose thoughts aim not at explaining the world, but at changing it (Rorty 1998a: 122). What Rorty's approach is not about is reaching consensus about how the world is or should be described. There is no point in trying to convince others of the adequacy of one's own description of the world, the truth of statements or the irrefutability of scientific facts. The mere logical consistency of statements is not a factor contributing to convincing other participants. As a consequence, the individual motivation of participants to enter discussions can be seen in a different way. They are, primarily, interested in avoiding undergoing hurtful redescription, not in reaching consensus. At first glance, one might wonder about this proposal, as participating in discourse might be seen as being about accomplishing something rather than avoiding something. It seems less bewildering, though, once one tries to understand that discourse can be perceived as a place where redescription is frequently taking place already. To Rorty, the world in which discourse takes place is, from the start, an agonistic one, such as Mouffe's, in which groups of people speaking in very different vocabularies face the challenge of trying to pull the other onto their side of the debate. Rather than finding the better reasons and arguments in a universe made up of reasons, the aim is to tell interesting stories or find ways of making a society seem appealing in which things are different, and, for the individual, to preserve one's own picture, one's own description of oneself. While doing this, they try to avoid being redescribed in a hurtful way. To understand, then, right-wing slogans about "fake news," for instance, merely as a populist, dismissive slogan against the media, would fall short. Rather, it is also an effort to escape that media's perceived description of oneself as "wrong" because of one's political views.

By connecting Rorty's thoughts on the pain of redescription back to what has been said earlier about Honneth and the commodification of others, redescription is shown to be wrong in another way. Complementary to the contention of the hurtful experience of being redescribed, it becomes apparent that participants, while trying to avoid being redescribed for their own good, should try to avoid redescribing others for moral reasons. Not only because it is, within Rorty's approach, a cruel thing to do, and cruelty is the one thing the

liberal should avoid (Rorty 1993: xv; 89), but because, referring to Honneth, redescription not only hurts, but risks to reify, to commodify others. Breaking that "bond of human interaction," as Honneth called it (Honneth 2008: 34), is both a pragmatically and politically unwise, and a deeply hurtful and immoral thing to do. A society, then, that had learned this, would be able to manage conflicts such as the one between right-wing protesters and the majority in a more promising way.

3.2. Arguing as *Bildungsroman* and the promise of beauty: Storytelling and invention in Rorty's politics

To sum up this Rortyan idea of discourse, one might say that the task ahead of the participants is not so much logical reasoning from premises towards conclusions, but rather invention on the one hand, and dealing with the risk of being redescribed in a hurtful way on the other. Discourse as understood at the end of the last chapter is, for one, a creative task with the hope of producing a common idea of society to move towards, a shared vision of a better world. At the same time, though, it is a potential challenge to individuals' ideas and values, and to their very self-understanding. It is both creative process and delicate management of a personal relationship at the same time. In order to discuss ways of discourse that aim at avoiding the hurtful redescription of single participants, I would like to point out two central instruments in this process of imagination, namely the ideal of a poeticized culture in general and metaphors as imaginative enlargements of logical space in particular.

As pointed out in the previous sections, in a Rortyan discourse world, knowledge as the accumulation of facts corresponding to a non-linguistic world can no longer be the aim of science and discourse (Voparil 2015: 123). Rather, *Bildung*, borrowed from Hans-Georg Gadamer, is supposed to be the new aim of discourse, and means

> finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. The attempt to edify (ourselves or others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline which seems to pursue incommensurable aims in an incommensurable vocabulary. But it may instead consist

in the "poetic" activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new disciplines, followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics; the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions. (Rorty 1980: 360)

A poetic version of normative, political discourse would, in short, mean to go after several, interdependent aims at once. It would mean aiming at finding a common language to speak in, which would have to be interesting in the sense of opening possibilities of dialogue and understanding with other participants. This is especially true for those whose views seem far from our own. But, on the other hand, especially in cases in which this connection seems impossible, in which the aims several different groups bring into discourse are incommensurable, another aim of discourse would have to be finding new aims. A significant difference between Rorty's approach and other discourse theories seems to be that having a common aim, having something in common, is a value in itself, and on this account should be something arguments aim for. To see whether arguments facilitate further conversation, then, becomes a way of evaluating them. This by no means claims that any argument that aims at prolonging a conversation is automatically a good one. It rather means that one which does not do that is worse than one which does. Switching, as Michael Oakeshott called it, from an argument to a conversation means subscribing to this aim, or rather, relativizing the former aim of winning and the conclusive demonstration of a point against some other position. Rather, "it is with conversation as with gambling, its significance lies neither in winning nor in losing, but in wagering" (Oakeshott 1962: 198).

Furthermore, this argument leads to an interesting, though potentially problematic, consequence that a poetic discourse theory such as this must account for. Logical coherence and the truth of an argument's premises are no longer necessarily sufficient to deem an argument acceptable. It is important to note here that this does not mean to abandon the idea that arguments should be coherent. Rather, the range of possibilities of how to establish (or endanger) coherence is broadened, based on the idea that, as arguments are common products of discourse participants and their dialogue with each other, the process of this dialogue must be considered when talking about the production of an argument. The common idea of mere logical consistency is based mainly on an idea of arguing that works with ready-made arguments once entering public discourse. Participants are supposed to have made connections between the parts of their own arguments and to present these arguments as

ready-made pieces of thought. The answer to such an argument can only be one of three options: to accept the argument, to doubt the truth of the premises, or to doubt the logical coherence of premises and conclusions. The present project adds another dimension to this list: the idea that within the very method of constructing arguments, a norm of avoiding redescription of the other participant can be incorporated.

In a Rortyan discourse world, arguments are no longer mere syllogistic constructs, but stories and images. With Walt Whitman, Rorty imagined political discourse as "a poetic agon, in which jarring dialectical discords would be resolved in previously unheard harmonies" (Rorty 1998a: 24f.). A democratic society would become "both self-creating poet and self-created poem" and thereby "create the taste by which it will be judged" (Rorty 1998a: 29). Similarly to communicative action in Habermas, then, poetic action in Rorty, if understood along the lines proposed here, would create its own rules. The formal, or rather poetic, aspect of arguments would be a source to create arguments as well as an instrument to evaluate them. If the thought of interpersonal relationships creating arguments, rather than participants deducing them, is taken seriously, there is no ground on which to exclude emotional participants (and their emotional arguments) per se.

I mentioned earlier that the idea of discourse presented here is a purely procedural one. This proceduralism, though, is not to be thought of as a clear-cut rulebook. Other than in Habermas, there is no normative idea of rationality that could back up the process of finding norms. Rather, this back up can be thought of as Walt Whitman's poem. Other than in Apel, this approach claims that the two directions of rational discourse aiming at the best argument and political discussion aiming at solidarity are, in fact, compatible. This type of compatibility might not meet Apel's idea of commensurability, though.

At this point, arguments and discussions are creative products. Here, the idea of metaphors as enlargements of logical space comes into play.

3.3. Metaphors as enlargements of logical space and the ideal of a poeticized culture: a slightly hidden ambiguity of redescription

As mentioned in chapter 2, Rorty construes metaphors as one of three ways in which new beliefs can enter discourses, beside perception and inference from the previously known (Rorty 1991a: 14f.). What inference and perception have in common is leaving the vocabulary that beliefs are formulated in unchanged. In this way, thinking and philosophizing are merely about exploring possibilities of reorganizing and recombining the given instruments that language provides. In contrast, metaphors create something new. They are the instrument of what Rorty thought poets responsible for in liberal societies. Therefore, this section will explore possibilities of thinking about metaphors as paramount for construing arguments as creative products. Thinking of metaphors as the basis for a new kind of language "is to think of truth as something which is *not* already within us. Rather, it is something which may only become available to us thanks to an idiosyncratic genius. Such a conception of truth legitimizes auditory metaphors: a voice from far off, *a Ruf des Gewissens,* a word spoken out of the darkness" (Rorty 1991a: 14). In short, accepting metaphors as the basis for mutual understanding means to accept the possibility that this understanding, that consensus or that others are convinced by one's opinion, may not happen for logical reasons. Rather, logic is to be thought of as "open-ended" (Rorty 1991a: 14).

The basis for changing one's beliefs or for finding compromises in such discourses would be a factor lying outside the mere logical evaluation of sentences. As mentioned before, this is not to mean that the idea of logic as such becomes obsolete. It is rather to acknowledge the possibility that the degree to which an argument is convincing need not have anything to do with its content or formally logical coherence. It can, though, depend on these factors, be it entirely or partly. The force of an argument, then, results from a mixture of several factors, depending on who is talking to whom, in which circumstances, and about what. To present good arguments is, first and foremost, to avoid redescription of the fellow discourse participant. Therefore, before even attempting to start the challenging task of finding criteria for better or worse arguments in this setting, it will be established when to refute an argument because it redescribes another discourse participant. Further conceptual details will then have to be developed from there.

At the same time, though, in construing arguments in this way, this approach vastly diverges from Rorty in allowing self-creation and public justice to be part of the same realm. Rorty had explicitly denied this possibility. The whole approach of his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is based on the idea that fusing the private realm of self-creation and the public realm of reason and institutions is impossible. He thought we should rather stop trying to "hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision" (Rorty 1993: xiv), even though Rorty himself names that as one of the central longings of man: to unite beauty and justice in one (Rorty 1999b: 9f.).

It is this tension between acknowledging the central desires of humans and, at the same time, knowing that they are impossible to fulfill that produces part of the emotionality of political discourse. Rorty's strict division between private and public sphere, poetic self-creation and liberal argument, has been widely debated, and it seems hard to find a clear reason why he was actually so convinced of this impossibility. Later, he would regret that he had never "found a satisfactory way of reconciling my admiration for the romantic intellectual with the habits of a democratic society," conceding that *CIS* "doesn't do justice to the interplay between public and private" (Rorty 1992, cit. in Milnes 2011: 27), and even calling the distinction "misguided" (Rorty 2010: 506, cit. in Bacon 2017: 954).

The human longing for recognition (in a much less formalized way than Honneth initially formulated it) can be supplied as a link between the public and private realms in Rorty; that the longing for positive relationships, the desire to be seen as what we really believe we are, can offer a prospective solution to the long debate on the separation of private and public spheres, and can also help reading Rorty in a more productive, yet possibly unintended, way.

If metaphors are thought of as a possible part of political discourse, if perception and inference are not the only possibilities for consistent arguing in public debate, present discussions on the emotionality of discourse and the erosion of argumentative standards can be approached in a new way. By following Rorty's, ironist approach and redescribing the phenomenon of such emotional, polarized discourses as a struggle to be truly seen instead of being hurtfully redescribed, recognition and redescription, public and private sphere, and the standards of logic and poetic reinvention and creativity can enter the same playing field.

Consequently, discourse participants should avoid being redescriptive in their arguments in the same way they should be concerned with being logically consistent.

At this point, a problematic aspect of Rorty's idea of metaphor must be addressed. While describing logic as open-ended due to metaphor, Rorty does not see metaphors as actually having any cognitive significance. Meaning only exists as literal meaning (Haack 1988: 294). With respect to metaphorical aspects of political discourse, this seems short-sighted. Rather, at this point, I would like to propose that metaphors, even if they have meaning, can retain their role of possibly interrupting or redirecting a discussion and of expressing something in a new way. The way participants in discourse use metaphor ("old white man" is a recent one that comes to mind) can hardly be described as not giving the metaphor meaning.

The question this opens up is at which point exactly metaphors that might have been useful to give expression to a relevant notion, such as discrimination and power structures, stopped being a, clearly, metaphorical term. In the case of the "old white man," for instance, the term seems to be oscillating between a way of expressing particular experiences of discrimination or power and a way of labelling certain arguments or discourse participants and thereby trying to disqualify them and their contributions. In this last case, the metaphor actually gains a descriptive character, it stops actually being a metaphor. If this goes unnoticed, though, the only result from this seems to be further emotionalization, hurt, and polarization. So, again, metaphors emerge as another aspect of speaking, arguing and language use in Rorty that can be seen as deeply ambiguous. This ambiguity might be less obvious than the others mentioned, but at the same time, not less prominent in its influence on discourse. This is going to be discussed in more detail at a later stage.

Just as we should discuss the possible ways that metaphors can enhance communication, as I wrote above, it should also be kept in mind that some metaphors, while potentially useful in expressing a certain feeling or a specific perspective, simply lose their metaphorical force if taken beyond that. "Old white man" seems to be such a case, though just one of several. Just as with all language in Rorty, accepting that language cannot "accurately" describe the world means to see it merely as a tool, designed, first and foremost, for two things: to express ourselves and make ourselves heard, and to (ideally, non-redescriptively) communicate with others. Neither of the two seems to work well without the other, which means that if we fail

to clearly communicate to others that our language use is to be understood as a means of self-expression rather than of description (especially not description of them!) we, most likely, will fail at making ourselves understood. The problematic of redescription and polarization and the challenge of understanding, instead of alienating, each other, in large part comes down to clarifying for what we intend to use our descriptions.

3.4. Conclusion

I argued that Rortyan redescription, if aimed at another person or group, can be seen as an act of misrecognition in Honneth's sense in that it prevents the other from becoming a true self. Furthermore, I made the point that argumentative strategies based on such redescriptions risk reifying others and making them invisible in the Honnethian sense of the terms. It seems therefore advisable to differentiate between two kinds of redescription, depending on what this redescription is aimed at. Whilst a cooperative redescription that aims at reinventing what a common relationship, a society, or a community could look like can be considered a worthwhile aim of political discourse, this chapter tried to make the point for recognizing another type of redescription as morally problematic. This is a redescription aimed not at a common picture of a better future, but a redescriptive act aimed at the other participants of a debate, as opposed to taking them "on their own terms," as Rorty put it (Rorty 1993: 89).

As a result, the discursive strategy of describing people as representatives of or "typical" for something, such as "white men," "refugees," "Muslims," etc., can be shown to be problematic, as such strategies render individuals into mere argumentative commodities. This is what I called "seeing people as x." If the thought of interpersonal relationships creating rather than deducing arguments is really to be taken seriously, if one follows Whitman's idea that society can be seen as a poem creating the very standards by which it is to be judged, there is no ground on which to exclude even very emotional participants simply because of their emotional conduct in discourse.

Consequently, this ambiguity also applies to metaphor and its use in political discussion. I tried to show how the (sometimes unclear) distinction between metaphors used as metaphors and metaphors used as descriptive terms, metaphors literalized over time without everybody noticing, can be a further source of misunderstanding, hurt, and polarization. Therefore, I hold that we might want to cultivate a practice of discourse in which, complementarily, a certain benefit of the doubt towards this question might become more usual than the impulse to immediately react emotionally towards the redescriptive aspect of the contribution. These aspects, of course, go far beyond the scope of the present chapter. Some of them are going to be taken up again later.

Having described this deeply ambiguous character of redescription as a potentially cruel, immoral action as well as an instrument of progress in Rorty, I hold that we should differentiate between the cruel redescription of the other and a creatively redescriptive, cooperative task of common poetic activity. The latter should be the goal of political discourse, imagining discourse participants, moral consensus, and norms as both "self-created poem" and "self-creating poet," constantly creating and recreating arguments and consensus.

Basing arguments on the redescriptions of our interaction partners, though, means nothing more and nothing less than to stop talking to them. Rather, in redescribing others, people talk to the resulting redescriptions instead of real persons, which is why the aim here was not to say in which cases redescription is justified or unjustified, but rather to stress that, no matter what the case is, redescribing the other is unjust if providing the base for one's own further argument. This, in turn, does not mean to exclude the expression of emotions. Returning to the example of the German politician, Wolfgang Thierse, to tell him, say, that his article made his fellow social democrats angry, hurt, or frustrated would have been quite different from calling him an old white man producing "racist crap." Nor is the problem in criticizing Thierse's arguments or word choice. Rather, it is about connecting such frustration or criticism with the redescription of Thierse as an "old white man."

Redescription and misrecognition both keep the other from becoming a full self. Rather, we should imagine ourselves as constantly creating and recreating the relationships to our fellow discourse participants, and thereby our very own possibilities of creating new answers to

normative problems. Solidarity and consensus are, then, possible to unite after all. To present a good argument and to communicate showing solidarity, are, in the perspective presented here, two sides of the same coin. And to feel represented by somebody in a world in which nobody represents anything might be rephrased: to feel one has a positive relationship towards somebody. Such an idea of substituting the feeling of being represented by something else could help remedy the systemic problem of the idea of representation, or more exactly, humans representing something.

It might be argued that as long as people have the desire to feel represented by, say, politicians, it seems far-fetched to want to get rid of such an idea. A concept of a positive relationship could substitute that. This relationship, though, does not mean specific, or even especially private or semi-private, relationships, such as the ones described between, e.g., trans*persons and their allies within the discussion on epistemic injustice (McKinnon 2017). Rather, the idea of relationship I have in mind here is a premise of all kinds of discussion, whether we know each other on a personal level or not. The important aspect here is that individuals discussing, or having a normative conflict of any sort, are thought of as aiming at being recognized as persons rather than being redescribed, no matter what exact type of relationship they are in.

The problematic of redescription described here is, in some respects, akin to well-known discussions and concepts, such as labeling (Molek-Kozakowska 2010). Rather than offering an alternative to these concepts, redescription is a more general proposal to understand a variety of phenomena, e.g., labeling, from a different perspective. Like labeling, it problematizes categorizing people and ascribing characteristics to them: others are made into commodified representations of something. In summary, all acts of labeling can be called redescriptions, but not all redescriptions are necessarily acts of labeling. Similarly, some ways in which redescriptions have the potential to force somebody into accepting other peoples' assumptions about their own argument, such as premises they did not actually make themselves, can be described as (political) gaslighting (Latif 2020). In so far as political gaslighting refers to a wide array of phenomena, though, including, e.g., epistemic questions of whether certain things (such as climate change) are real, not all acts of political gaslighting are what here are called acts of redescription. Rather, as I hope to have shown, the moral

problem of redescription is presented within a school of thought that explicitly leaves behind the question of things being "real" or "true" in the sense that descriptions correspond with the non-linguistic world. An aspect of redescription similar to gaslighting would rather lie in making people believe to have (implicitly or even explicitly) said something, or meant something by saying what they said, that they did not actually say or mean.

This is to show that, while applicable to similar problems, the approach presented here cuts across the areas of such contributions. The similarities and differences among them are neither reason to see them as necessarily opposed nor as merely a different way of saying the same thing. Rather, it is an offer to open a dialogue about, hopefully, enriching new perspectives on known topics.

## 4. Language and Norms as Common Creative Products: Dialogue, Polyphony, and the Self as a Story in Bakhtin and Rorty

"It was not only that I could not become spiteful, I did not know how to
become anything; neither spiteful nor kind, neither a rascal nor an honest man,
neither a hero nor an insect. Now, I am living out my life in my corner,
taunting myself with the spiteful and useless consolation that an intelligent
man cannot become anything seriously, and it is only the fool who becomes anything."

"I will explain; the enjoyment was just from the too intense consciousness of one's own degradation;
it was from feeling oneself that one had reached the last barrier, that it was horrible, but that it
could not be otherwise; that there was no escape for you; that you never could
become a different man; that even if time and faith were still left you to change into something
different you would most likely not wish to change; or if you did wish to, even then you would do
nothing; because perhaps in reality there was nothing for you to change into."

(Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*)

4.1. Introduction

From the joy he takes in his inability and unwillingness to change for the sake of others to the pleasure of his own humiliation and his contempt for rationalist science, Dostoevsky's 'Underground Man' is not only a major starting point for Bakhtin's thoughts on Dostoevsky's dialogic novel. He is also a fitting image for starting to think about the problems of anti-scientific scepticism and emotionality in political discourse. Not only has he lost hope of changing, of "becoming anything," he even doubts that becoming anything is a valuable goal at all. And yet, he seems to constantly sense the reader's tendency to want to make him into something.

The Underground Man will cross the path of this chapter again later. The aim of the chapter is to show that Bakhtin's work makes it possible to look at political argument as a product of common creative effort, and at contributions to this discourse partly as efforts to maintain one's own, personal voice rather than having one's identity described, narrated by someone

else. This is a motive the Underground Man shares. He is constantly trying to, as Bakhtin put it, preserve his own "I," an idea that resembles, and will be connected to, Honneth's idea of recognition. It will be shown how Rorty's conceptualization of redescription and the idea of a narrated self can be linked to the Bakhtinian idea of consciousness as embodied in signs. Furthermore, Rorty's ideas of conversational justification and edifying philosophy can be connected to Bakhtinian dialogue as the place in which selves come to be themselves.

In a next step, I will show how Nikulin's thoughts on the musicality of dialogue and the irreducibility of that dialogue to its constituents complement Rorty's thoughts on edification and the holistic character of conversational justification presented in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (*PMN*). Overall, the work of the main authors discussed in this chapter makes it possible to think of political discourse as a dialogical, common, creative process in which monological, dialectical argument, on its own, loses its meaning and force. Within this process, the preservation of narrative power over their selves can be understood as one of the participants' main concerns.

4.2. Understanding language as a radically social phenomenon

Bakhtin criticizes the linguistic approach of his time to understand language as a monological phenomenon, focusing, as Voloshinov/Bakhtin[5] put it, on the monological utterance (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 72). Identifying the "actual mode of existence of linguistic phenomena*"* within interaction between language users (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: xv)*,* the basic unit of analysis for his linguistics, as well as any theory of language in his point of view, is the concrete verbal utterance and its context. Criticizing what he calls "abstract objectivism" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 58), most prominently the structural linguistics of Saussure, he presents a perspective not only focusing on the concrete utterance as the unit *par excellence* of linguistic analysis, but also on the everlasting struggle between two contrary forces in language, namely a centripetal and the centrifugal force in discourse. While

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[5] Due to the partly unclear editorial history of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's works, including issues of authorship, I follow Michael Holquist (2002) in this way of referring to their works.

dominant social groups tend to aim at unifying language, meaning, and views of the world, a centrifugal force, heteroglossia, fragments ideological thought and language into different languages, thereby allowing for "different views of the world" (Morris 1994: 15).

Starting from this direction, the following chapter is going to discuss the relationship between individual consciousness and society with its social norms and social ideology, as Bakhtin sometimes says, and elaborate on the idea of consciousness as a dialogical process in itself. Furthermore, language is going to appear within this process as a product of collective, creative activity.

### 4.2.1. Individual and society in Bakhtin and Freud: Dialogic consciousness and collective language as a product of creativity

Social ideology, to Voloshinov/Bakhtin, is inescapable for the individual. Conscious experience

> is already ideological and, therefore, from a scientific point of view, can in no way be a primary and irreducible datum; rather, it is an entity that has already undergone ideological processing of some specific kind. The haziest content of consciousness […] and the most sophisticated cultural monument are only extreme links in the single chain of ideological creativity. Between them exists a whole unbroken series of degrees and transitions. (Voloshinov 2004: 87)

Language as a shared norm, then, appears as not only collectively shared, but also ideologically coloured. Not unlike Rorty's idea of all thought necessarily already being in language, Voloshinov/Bakhtin proposes an individual consciousness whose content is already ideologically processed. In both authors, then, although coming from different directions, there is no such thing as pure experience; when understood as such, it has always already gained form. In this, Voloshinov/Bakhtin strongly opposes Freud, particularly his focus on the individual as an object of psychological study. Bakhtin moves away from this focus on single individuals. Rather, all thought is explained with reference to socio-economic factors on the one hand, and social relationships on the other (Voloshinov 2004: 15). The psychological dynamics Freud described in the individual are, according to Voloshinov/Bakhtin, merely consequences of those socio-economic factors, their

"projections into the individual psyche" (Voloshinov 2004: 80). From there, Bakhtin's position towards the idea of scientific neutrality also becomes understandable. Such neutrality seems impossible to him, not least because of the sociological fact of different social classes, and, therefore, different class interests. These different class interests are, "precisely […] wherein the power of any theory, of any thought, resides" (Voloshinov 2004: 25). This shows how, in Bakhtin, social relationships, social classes, and class consciousness precede any form of individual psychological phenomenon or subjective consciousness. Put more strongly, there is no such thing as a cognitive operation of an individual performed in isolation. As soon as a thought takes form in any verbal manner, it is already part of a larger web of social relations.

Consequently, this also applies to all forms of verbal utterances. As Bakhtin stresses,

> We shall never reach the real, substantive roots of any given single utterance if we look for them within the confines of the single, individual organism, even when that utterance concerns what appears to be the most private and most intimate side of a person's life. Any motivation of one's behaviour, any instance of self-awareness (for self-awareness is always verbal, always a matter of finding some specifically suitable verbal complex) is an act of gauging oneself against some social norm, social evaluation – is, so to speak, the socialization of oneself and one's behaviour. (Voloshinov 2004: 86f.)

The last sentence already points to an aspect that will become important within the dialogue between Bakhtin and Honneth. All consciousness, then, and thereby all thought, is already dialogical. Consciousness, as much as "every act of being […] is shared being" (Nikulin 1998: 390), is always already dialogically shared. Similarly to Honneth, the individual relies on the relationship to another to be able to exist as individual.

Consequently, with utterances being the product of social relations, to Bakhtin, language is itself a radically social phenomenon. Similarly to Rorty's position presented in the last two chapters, he denies the immediate connection of linguistic symbol and non-linguistic reality (Brandist 2004: 116). Bakhtin grapples with the view of Saussure's linguistics on language as an abstract, stable system, as to him language only exists in so far as it is a part of a concrete utterance. There is no such thing as language in itself (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 123). Language can only appear to the language-user within what Voloshinov/Bakhtin calls a specific ideological context: "In actuality, we never say or hear *words,* we say and hear what

is true or false, good or bad, important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, and so on. *Words are always filled with content and meaning drawn from behaviour or ideology.* That is the way we understand words, and we can respond only to words that engage us behaviourally or ideologically" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 70, italics in orig.).

Such understanding is always already evaluatively coloured. Not only is there no such thing as language (and linguistic meaning) in itself, but there is also no such thing as perceiving an utterance in or as itself. There are only different instances of evaluatively reacting towards these utterances. The very meaning of language, of a linguistic sign, depends on being ascribed a social value, since "the sign is a creation between individuals" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 22). Thereby, the utterance as a whole can only be understood as an inherently social phenomenon (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 82). Any kind of verbal communication is to be understood exclusively within the social situation it happened in (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 95). This angle connects to Bakhtin's understanding of all utterance, all language, being permeated by a momentum of hidden dialogicality, which puts him close to Apel's notion, mentioned in chapter 2, of thinking and utterances always being part of an implicit dialogue (Apel 1973: 399).

4.2.2. Bakhtin's idea of hidden dialogicality as an analytical instrument

One of the most prominent points of Voloshinov/Bakhtin's critique of Freud is his focus on the individual person. Freudianism, as well as Saussurean Linguistics (while conceiving of the system of language as something collectively shared), from Bakhtin's perspective, miss a vital point in the localization of language activity and the relationship between the individual and those shared norms. While self-awareness is seen by Bakhtin as a counterpoint towards social norms and the individual most certainly does not simply form part of an undifferentiated collective, it does need dialogue, social interaction, and social relations as a way of existing in this world. Therefore, utterances can never be understood on their own. Dialogue, at this point, is understood by Bakhtin very broadly as "verbal communication of any type whatsoever," including, e.g., writing (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 95). Similarly to the

idea of discursive thinking in Apel, every utterance, even if only uttered by a person alone, is always understood as an utterance directed towards someone, and "in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 85–86). While seeing the Freudian individual enclosed in a "socially vacuous atmosphere" (Voloshinov 2004: 24), Bakhtin conceptualizes even the inner speech of the individual as part of an ongoing dialogue. The differentiation to make between different kinds of utterances here is not one of dialogical versus monological utterances, but rather between different kinds of dialogicality, namely the understanding of the phenomenon of hidden dialogicality, moments in which "we sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fibre to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person" (Bakhtin 1999: 197). Language, then, wherever found, is always understood as part of a larger, ongoing dialogue rather than as an isolated phenomenon.

At the end of the last chapter, it was stressed that utterances in political discourse that seem very emotional or extreme can be interpreted as reactions towards other participants' potentially hurtful and redescriptive utterances rather than mostly as political or moral positionings themselves. The idea of hidden dialogicality shows a possible way of carrying out that interpretation. Within this section (3.2.) the aim was to make the point that dialogism can serve as a tool to describe and to explain political discourse, especially in instances of polarization and debates that seem emotionally heated.

As an example, political utterances that seem to be standing on their own can, in this perspective, be understood as reactions towards other utterances that might not be on recipients' minds right now. When Hanna Arendt wrote *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she might not have given as much importance to Jews' image of herself as those people expected. She just might not have foreseen the degree to which her writing was going to be perceived as the writing of a Jew, and herself as a part of a group. While there was an injustice in Sholem denying Arendt the ability to speak only in her own name, as she put it, she might have underestimated the degree to which other utterances were a part of their dialogue. At the

same time, not to let dialogue fall prey to these other utterances, to be conscious of the many ways in which dialogue can be influenced, was something Sholem might have paid more attention to. Maybe their dialogue would have been a different one.

In section 4.4., dialogism will be linked to the perspective of redescription laid out in the previous chapter, in order to make for an analytical perspective to describe discursive interaction in a normatively meaningful way.

4.3. Dialogue as the other of Dialectics

In chapter 2, it was shown how several normative approaches to moral argument or political discourse tend to set rational consent as its aim. This includes frequently heard criticism of, e.g., right-wing anti-immigration protesters as overly emotional or "irrational." Behind this notion of irrationality stands not only the idea of logical reasoning as the method of public deliberation, but also the idea of rational consent as the ideal endpoint of such reasoning among participants equally motivated to get there. Participants are supposed to agree in the formulation of the aim of discourse as well as the method to get there.

Such a normative ideal does not seem to agree with what Bakhtin has to say about verbal communication. His conceptualization of verbal communication has, as will be shown, much more in common with what I called the struggle to be seen on the one hand and a common poetic creation on the other.

4.3.1. An alternative to dialectic argument and the idea of allosensus

Dmitri Nikulin's theory of dialogue can help to clarify this. The aim of this chapter is to argue for a notion of political discourse as dialogue, as something fundamentally different from dialectic argument as Nikulin conceives of it. This notion of dialogue then, connects with Bakhtin's idea of unfinalizability of the other, resulting in what Nikulin has called a

"categorical imperative" (Nikulin 1998: 385). Nikulin's differentiation between the inherent tendency of written argument to evolve in a dialectical, monological way, and a form of philosophizing focused on voice, verbal interaction, and dialogue, presents a base for arguing that dialogical forms of argument and discussion would mean a fundamentally different way of thinking about the quality of arguments for or against moral or political positions. The chapter will give examples to discuss this perspective.

Dialectics, according to Nikulin, went through a radical change concerning its position within the arsenal of methods of philosophizing. From being one among many methods of reasoning, originating as a technique applied within platonic dialogue (Nikulin 2010: 16), dialectics, fuelled by the rise of Cartesianism with its focus on the subject as well as its striving for universal truth, rose to be the central method of philosophical reasoning (Nikulin 2010: xii). As a method, then, centred around a single thinking subject, focussed on its autonomy, it tends, according to Nikulin, to isolate that reasoning subject from its environment, while at the same time trying to suspend itself from the reasoning altogether (Nikulin 2010: xiii).

This fundamental change from a dialogical to a subject-centred activity leads to Dialectics being a rather impersonal business in Nikulin's perspective. The aim is to present an argument that is independent from the one who presents it, an argument that is correct in any communicative circumstance, leading, regardless of style, to a "universal abstract truth" (Nikulin 2010: 87.). This argumentative correctness results in dialectics presenting sequences of logical steps to get from one statement to the other. In addition, being potentially very long, dialectical arguments tend to be, as Nikulin observes, much more suited for written form rather than for verbal discussion. Dialectics "is essentially a *written* enterprise" (Nikulin 2010: 120).

As such, it seems at odds with the business of dialogue as Bakhtin understands it, "cut-off from its origins in dialogue" (Côté 2000: 26). While a dialogist critique of monological, dialectic argument like this shares some concerns with feminist approaches to moral theory, such as Carol Gilligan's criticism of male-dominated, rationalist moral theory and her position on the importance of interpersonal care (Gilligan 2003), the perspective is a different one. Feminist approaches to this point mainly discuss the source of moral reasoning, e.g., the

("male") rationalist idea that moral decisions should be argued for merely through rational argument vs. the idea that there can be morally important emotions motivating moral decisions, such as acting out of empathy for someone, that should be considered even when they contradict such "rational" arguments. The dialogical idea being followed here, though, is not so much about how and why to make moral decisions, as it is about the importance of the conversation in arguing for such decisions. It is less about deciding moral conflicts than it is about how to go about the business of discourse itself.

In this, dialogism differs decisively from dialectics. The presentation of a dialectic argument aims at finalization, at systematization, at the elimination of accident. Presenting arguments is not presenting persons who argue (Nikulin 2010: 119). Rather, the validity of the argument is supposed to be independent of such persons. Such a business, then, seems all too open to the conversion of discussion participants into what I have called argumentative capital. It is the methodological flagship of avoiding seeing people, and thereby, as was argued earlier, missing a fundamental aspect of political discourse. Considered by Aristotle merely as a method of finding mistakes in arguments rather than building new ones (Nikulin 2010: 42), its focus is, quite apparently, not the opening of dialogical space. As an example, constructing a consistent argument concluding that an interaction partner's opinion is racist might seem to be extremely useful to make a point. It will probably not be useful, though, in starting an open conversation about one's political differences.

From a Bakhtinian point of view (and that of the Underground Man, one might add), the problem with dialectics, then, is not its form as such, but the decline of dialogue that results from its universal application to more and more areas of philosophical activity. The flaw of the crystal palaces the Underground Man hates and ridicules so much is not in building, or trying to build them, but in locking him out of them.

Nikulin's alternative proposal to escape the dialectic trap of consensus and dissent, then, is allosensus. He distances himself from a consensual concept such as Habermas's, which "terminates the life of dialogue" (Nikulin 2010: 78), an idea not unlike Rorty's notion of final truths ending discourse. Rather, the point of dialogue itself is conflictual. By spilling themselves out into dialogue, participants keep adding to the dialogue. The point of the

exercise of dialogizing is not to reach a consensual endpoint, but rather to keep expressing oneself. This idea shows similarities to the idea of continuously evolving discussed before.

This conflictual aspect of dialogue, though, is not to be confused with mere antagonism (Nikulin 2010: 78). Both consensus and antagonism end dialogue, and therefore end its possibilities of self-expression for the participants. A good example for this may be seen in, e.g., Alt-Right activists on social media deliberately trying to provoke a ban from the platform rather than aiming at having their arguments understood (Bump 2022). In polarized discourse situations like this, when consensus will clearly not be reached, the ban seems like the more promising political signal. Rather than being redescribed within some kind of argumentative paradigm, rather than helping build the crystal palace, such Twitter users prefer making a point out of their difference, of truly being "an other." Allosensus, in turn, presents a perspective in which such self-expression could be possible without risking bans from Twitter or other forms of forced separation from the ones we do not agree with.

Nikulin stresses the importance of personal exchange. The aim of dialogue, then, is not consensus, but allosensus, a form of disagreement that keeps the dialogue alive. It is a form of disagreement that "nevertheless allows for interaction and reciprocal recognition of the other" (Nikulin 2010: 81). This is not so much about a difference in opinion in the sense of agreeing to disagree, but rather to acknowledge a dissent without ending the dialogue. It is about valuing this ongoing dialogue despite, and over, (dis)agreements or (failure at) convincing the other. This notion resembles both Honneth's idea that participants look for personal recognition as well as Rorty's notion that the point of arguments is less in finally deciding questions than in keeping the conversation going (Rorty 1980: 378). Rather, consensus terminates the dialogue, and is therefore not a goal to strive for (Nikulin 2010: 78). In other words, being banned from Twitter rather than trying to find a common ground for dialogue is a valuable political signal for the user only if being in dialogue implies orientation towards consensus. Consensus-orientation gives the act of leaving the discourse a meaning and force it need not have, clearly stressing how little one cares for a consensus with others. In contrast, by describing the value of being in dialogue regardless of a consensus being reached or not, Nikulin here provides a possibility for a good dialogue to be worthwhile in itself, independently of its result.

Similarly to Habermas, Nikulin proposes an ability of dialogue (in Habermas: normative discourse) to eliminate inequalities for the time being (Nikulin 2010: 81.). As ambitious as this idea may seem, it is, though similar, decisively different from the cancelling of inequality in Habermas. What makes this cancelling of inequality possible in Habermas is rational argument, the force of reason, which is a normative force. In other words, if the alt-right Twitter user wants to be treated as an equal within this paradigm, they are expected to meet its requirements. The function of dialogue in Habermas, then, consists precisely in cancelling out inequalities, and therefore is a prerequisite to even reach the normatively desired state of good discussion. This discussion is supposed to work by rules entirely independent of that: a rational, sound argument (Nikulin: a dialectical argument) is logically sound independently of that equality, and its force rather results in such equality. The Twitter user from before seems to already agree to a certain paradigm of argument and discourse. Not wanting to agree to that makes aiming at the ban seem so promising. It is this tacit prerequisite of discussion that even makes not participating have a political meaning, which makes being banned from Twitter for one's comments (and, e.g., joining certain Telegram groups instead) a political act.

Similarly, it is the assumption that seeking a calm, reasonable discourse with one's political adversaries is hopeless anyway that made it possible for Donald Trump to be elected president on utterances such as warning against Mexican immigrants during his announcement in June 2015:

> When Mexico sends its people, these aren't the best and the finest […]. They're not sending you… They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us[sic]. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (Mulloy 2018: 173)

Statements such as this one are obviously, blatantly racist. They are not smuggled into political discourse by carefully testing and treading the line between what kind of statement is still possible to "get away with." And they are certainly not what is expected of a presidential candidate. But it is the perception that these Mexicans are not like the listeners, are not "good people," that makes the racism into political capital, working in favor of the listeners' feeling of being redescribed, of not being listened to. They do not have to argue, they do not want to join the discussion, as they see no point in trying. The point of

participating is not to discuss, not to dialogize, but to be represented as the "right" people (Urbinati 2019) rather than being treated as an equal citizen. They do not necessarily believe, or aim for, the elimination of inequality through discourse and argument.

In Nikulin, this elimination of inequality can rather be understood as a goal towards which to keep striving, an ideal in the back of the participants' heads. Not aiming for this goal changes the quality of the dialogical exchange. The normative idea of what a good contribution to a discussion is, then, includes, in Nikulin, a norm of a positive relationship towards the discourse partner that the idea of rational argument in Habermas does not. One might say: Other than in Habermas, Nikulin's idea of what a good argument is includes, not as an addition but rather in itself, normative ideas about how to talk to, how to treat, the other in discussion. There is another goal to discourse than rational consent. Rather, the goal of discourse is a specific way of communication, no matter whether a consensus is reached or not. While the dialectician works towards the deconstruction of another's arguments (Nikulin 2010: 15), dialogism's approach works towards building something. It is edifying in the Rortyan sense. The examples of the Twitter user and the Trump supporters change in such a perspective: both they and dialogue as a whole aim at making things heard. If one keeps in mind the description of political protest as trying to be seen that was presented in chapter 2, it becomes clear that Nikulin's idea of allosensus allows for a different approach towards the problem of polarized political discourse and the emotions at play in it. The Twitter user, or the German right-wing protesters mentioned in chapter 2 who protested with signs saying, "We are the scum" clearly express emotions by doing so. Both the Twitter user as well as the protesters do so gratefully, using the redescriptions others (Twitter, the federal minister, the "establishment") already made of them. This is not to say that such redescriptions do not hurt. Rather, it is to say that such grateful use of redescriptions is a way of using the hurt and the feeling of injustice they evoke, and communicating it for political gain, a strategy especially promising for influential leaders of such protests. Being redescribed, though hurtful, is already factored in, and Donald Trump can talk about immigrants the way he does precisely because being seen and redescribed as racist is already part of the deal.

Allosensus, then, offers a way of making this deal look sufficiently bad. If participating in discussions and being heard does not require the individual to aim at consensus anymore, it

gains in appeal as compared to the alternative, populist strategies described above. Thus, in several aspects, Nikulin's idea of dialogue resembles Rorty's approach to discourse. What he is proposing here is an edifying approach to philosophy. And just like Rorty, keeping the ongoing dialogue alive gains priority over finding final answers or best arguments, or even aiming at reasonable disagreement. Chapter 4.5 will look for more possibilities to make these approaches, as well as Bakhtin's work, meet.

4.3.2. The musicality and eros of dialogue

To Nikulin, non-literary dialogue is mainly driven by "the desire to speak to the other" (Nikulin 2010: 77). The examples in the past section showed an aspect of that. This motivation differs quite remarkably from suggestions about the motivation for discourse participation in rationalist theories such as Habermasian Discourse Ethics, driven by the search for rational consensus and common norms. What makes interpersonal, especially oral, dialogue, so unpredictable, then, is its orientation towards an understanding of the other and their possibility to express themselves (Nikulin 2010: 77). To Nikulin, dialogue is decisively different from rhetoric, as it does not aim at persuasion, but rather "allows one to live and be" (Nikulin 2010: 109). The main aim of dialogue, thus understood, is the expression of oneself rather than proposing or refuting arguments. In this, it resembles the idea of a political discourse aiming at being seen, developed in chapter 2. Dialogue is where human beings, according to Nikulin, really find their place, since "to be is to be in dialogue" (Nikulin 1998: 395). Being in dialogue is not only inescapable – we can never not dialogize – but also desirable.

This perspective on what it means to have a discussion also needs a different approach as to how it is structured and what the inner logic of the dispute is about. Nikulin's proposal here is an idea of "erotetic" logic (Nikulin 2010: 24): the structure of a dialogue is really just the structure of a dialogue, and not owed to the structure of an argument proposed within it. In other words, dialogue comes first, similarly to the way in which, in Rorty, the conversation and its ongoing life is an achievement in its own right, without depending on its outcomes.

Dialogue is, first and foremost, about itself. Rejoinders within dialogue make sense within its structure as a whole, even though this whole is unpredictable and never complete (Nikulin 2010: 100). Rather than about the arguments, which, as Nikulin stresses, might as well be produced by single persons, dialogue is about "the expression of one's personal other" (Nikulin 2010: 55). Dialogue, while not specifically aiming at consent, must still aim at revealing the other as a person (Nikulin 2010: 80). This offers an alternative, more hopeful way of dealing with problems of populism. For example, a Trump supporter who feels seen as a person by the ones who disagree with them might be far less receptive to being as explicitly singled out as a "good person" as Trump did in his speech. They would feel less of a need to be part of the "right" side, or to see themselves as "the people" (Urbinati 2019).

This approach to talking to each other stresses the importance of thinking about the other in dialogue. Thinking back of chapter 2, dialogue is exactly the place where humans "keep evolving." With this comes a different approach as to the courtesy of interaction: put very briefly, not interrupting means not dialogizing. Rather than avoiding it, dialogue needs constant interruption (Nikulin 2010: 96).

### 4.3.3. Voice and dialogue as the other of writing

In opposition to writing, Nikulin understands dialogue as dealing with fundamentally different kinds of problems: dialogue is not about abstract truths or logic, but rather about the already mentioned self-expression of participants (Nikulin 2010: 79f.). In this, it resembles the alternative description of political discourse presented in the chapter 2, a conception of political discourse that is about being seen as what one believes one is. Based on this different goal, dialogue differs from writing also in its flexibility. While writing, once done, is fixed, dialogue is always adaptable. Written speech, then, by its very nature undergoes "distillation into dialectic," and aims at presenting results and final conclusions (Nikulin 2010: xiii). It is impossible to interrupt. Written language does not have to (and cannot) deal with unforeseen rejoinders.

Dialogue, on the other hand, gives participating voices the task of "spelling themselves out in the rhythm of simple, quick, and partial exchanges with the other in a constantly renewable attempt at breaking through to the other" (Nikulin 2010: 116). The aim of dialogue, here, is to be understood. If not in complete understanding, it lies in at least starting something new. Breaking through to the other always implies the chance of change, of something unforeseen. This leads back to Nikulin's observation that dialogue, contrary to dialectical argument, is alive and open, that "no point in a dialogue or any part of it can be considered complete" (Nikulin 2010: 107). Again, the connection to Rorty's work becomes apparent, as he had argued against the notion of objective truth as referring to the non-linguistic world and becoming independent from ongoing discourse. The conversation, rather than closing in on truth, becomes open-ended (Rorty 1991a: 14). Rorty would also have connected with Nikulin on the idea that dialogue, other than, e.g., rhetoric, aims at amplifying others' statements, at making them useful for carrying on the conversation rather than narrowing them down to one specific, alleged, final meaning. Such "hermeneutical conversation," as Nikulin also calls it (Nikulin 2010: 70), resembles Rorty's idea of contingency as something to be fostered and kept alive, rather than reduced and solved within dialectical conclusions and generalization (Rorty 1980: 180f.). A conversation as Nikulin describes it is aimed in the opposite direction of what Rorty calls redescription, the reduction of the described other to something describable in one's own, fixed vocabulary.

Rather than such application of pre-made language to new or complicated problems, including other discourse participants, a dialogic world does not allow for the one-sided finalization of argument. This suits the strong poet in Rorty, anxious about getting stuck in pre-existing vocabularies. Rather, Nikulin's model of dialogue describes what, in other contexts, is true of music: Dialogue is an interaction in which "each voice sounds independently but also within the whole of the dialogue, which in turn is irreducible to the sum of its constituents" (Nikulin 2010: 155). In this dialogue, we can be interrupted, but we also expect to be interrupted. Rather than being interrupted in a fight, interruption in dialogue resembles the way different voices interrupt each other and overlap in a piece of music. Not only do we anticipate interruption (Nikulin 2010: 104), but the different voices also lead to polyphony, following a common rhythm established during the dialogue (Nikulin 2010: 106). Just like the whole dialogue, a musical piece is considered more than just a sum of different voices. Dialogical argument is constantly emerging. Similarly to the individual in the last chapter, dialogue and argument within it constantly keep evolving.

This whole enterprise, though, relies on the discourse participants' unfinalizability.


4.3.4. The other in dialogue: Unfinalizability and the "Bakhtinian Imperative"

Unfinalizability is a key element of dialogue (Nikulin 2010: 77). Applying to dialogue itself as well as to its participants, it describes the impossibility of finally ending dialogue. Dialogue can always be carried on, there is no way of putting an end to it for good, excluding the possibility of a next rejoinder. The same applies to participating persons, who can never surely be said to be the same they used to be. Individuals, in this context, are understood as constantly evolving. There is no state in which it would make sense to say an individual is what he or she "really" is, no instance in which anyone "ever ultimately coincides with herself" (Nikulin 2010: 77). This idea shows strong resemblances to Rorty's discussion of the correspondence between language and reality as well as the idea of self-creation and redescription. To say that there is, in Rorty's words, no such thing as a final vocabulary, and that there is no possibility to show the truthfulness of one's words by making them correspond to the world outside language, seem to say the same thing. Rather, all rejoinders

in dialogue are at the same time never complete and never coincide with a non-linguistic reality in a provable way.

The point of dialogue, then, is precisely not to get to an end, which differentiates it from dialectics. As an endeavour "in which each interlocutor is present as a uniquely recognizable and recognized voice, through which each one communicates with the others and expresses one's personal other" (Nikulin 2010: 154), the aim of communication is a different one: Allosensus, as "a non-confrontational disagreement that allows one to listen to the other and to continue the discussion" (Nikulin 2010: 154) takes the place of dialectical finalization and rational agreement. Such dialogue also counters the tendency of polarization, described in chapter 2, of perceiving other people´s views as more extreme than they are, as "distorted, feeble, ill-founded, and extraneous" (Talisse 2020: 118). Such strong categorizations of others have no place in dialogue: "The unfinalizability of dialogue lies in the impossibility of extinguishing one's personal other, and of fully and ultimately thematizing or framing oneself in a finite number of statements through discussion or the steps of an argument. Hence dialogue can always be continued and renewed without any repetition of its contents" (Nikulin 2010: 154). The point of dialogue from the individual's point of view, then, is, first and foremost, one's own self-expression, one's own attempt to keep evolving and to be taken seriously on one's own terms (as Rorty would have it), without this process reaching an end. It amounts to what Nikulin calls the Bakhtinian Imperative, demanding of us to "treat the other as a person" (Nikulin 1998: 385). To be treated as one's own, full person, then, is to be recognized (Honneth) and to not be redescribed (Rorty) or finalized.

## 4.4. Bakhtin, Dostoevsky, and the polyphonic novel

"'For pity's sake,' they'll shout at you, 'you can't rebel: it's two times two is four! Nature doesn't ask your permission; it doesn't care about your wishes, or whether you like its laws or not. You're obliged to accept it as it is, and consequently all its results as well. And so a wall is indeed a wall…etc., etc.' My God, but what do I care about the laws of nature and arithmetic if for some reason these laws and two times two is four are not to my liking? […] but neither will I be reconciled with it simply because I have a stone wall here and have not got strength enough. As if such a stone wall were truly soothing and truly contained in itself at least some word on the world, solely by being two times two is four. Oh, absurdity of absurdities! (Dostoevsky 1993: 13)

Our Underground Man whom we got to know at the beginning of this chapter is angry. Not just angry, almost desperate; constantly oscillating between ironically mocking the world outside his room, showing contempt and aggression towards it, and desperately trying to make a good impression on it. His contempt is, to quite some extent, grounded in his ironic depreciation for science, for rational thought with its "crystal palaces." But why exactly is that? In the quotation above, the Underground Man gives us a reason for his contempt for science. It is not merely his disliking of it: it is the fact that it does not console him. Starting from this point in Dostoevsky, I would like to reflect again on the function of ideas in dialogue, and their connection to emotions.

### 4.4.1. Ideas and idea-feelings in Bakhtin and Dostoevsky

Dostoevsky's work is a fitting point of departure for those reflections, as

> Dostoevsky's world is profoundly personalized. He perceives and represents every thought as the position of a personality. Therefore, even within the limits of individual consciousnesses, a dialectic or antinomic series can be no more than an abstract element, indissolubly interwoven with other elements of an integral and concrete consciousness. Through this concrete consciousness, embodied in *the living voice of an integral person*, the logical relation becomes part of the unity of a represented event. Thought, drawn into an event, becomes itself part of the event and takes on

that special quality of an "idea-feeling," an "idea-force," which is responsible for the unique peculiarity of the "idea" in Dostoevsky's creative world. (Bakhtin 1999: 9–10)

It is this notion of idea-feelings that is interesting here. Ideas and arguments are not interesting anymore merely in themselves, but as parts of a dialogic whole. As was shown earlier in the work of Nikulin, Bakhtin's hero rather precisely reflects the problem of dialectics, seen from the perspective of dialogism: its very aim is the de-personalization of thought. The point of an argument in dialectical terms is its logical conclusiveness; it is precisely the abstract, formal correctness of "twice two makes four" the Underground Man so sarcastically comments upon. The central principle of Dostoevsky's work, then, is the inversion of that, of the whole movement of dialectical thought (Bakhtin 1999: 10). Rather than de-personalizing thoughts by generalization and abstraction, Dostoevsky personalizes them by putting them back into a concrete, social, communicative situation. Ideas, as part of concrete dialogue, do serve a purpose beyond their mere logical conclusiveness or inconclusiveness and beyond being factually correct or false.

Rather than merely as the product of an individual's reflection, Bakhtin understands ideas as events, as a dialogical composition (Bakhtin 1999: 88). This leads him to understand ideas in Dostoevsky as indissoluble from their bearers: there are no thoughts or ideas "in themselves" (Bakhtin 1999: 31). Ideas only function within dialogue as idea-feelings or forces, fulfilling a purpose as part of a larger, dialogical process. The idea itself, its mere representation in language, does not have a purpose of its own. It was already mentioned that Bakhtin's thinking shows parallels to Rorty, and this is another one. While in Bakhtin, ideas serve their purpose as part of a dialogue, in Rorty, ideas, rather than correctly "representing" the world outside discourse, merely push that discourse forward and prevent the dialogue from stopping. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.5. For the moment, it can be concluded that Bakhtin's concept of idea-feelings offers a way of conceiving of emotional contributions to discourse as well as communicative problems between different participants or groups as a rather understandable phenomenon rather than as a deviation from the rationalist norm needing explanation or justification. The idea that arguments for normative positions ought to be given in a "rational," logical form—the form Bakhtin would have called de-personalized—is based on the notion of dialectic argument, of monologue. This monologue, though, can be understood as a form the initial, dialogic argument is already

transformed into: "Like the word, the idea is by nature dialogic, and monologue is merely the conventional compositional form of its expression, a form that emerged out of the ideological monologism of modern times" (Bakhtin 1999: 88). This reflects the recurring idea that monological, dialectical argument is merely impoverished, the remains of a formerly dialogical process from which the dialogical other was cut out. Circling back to the comparison to Apel, monologue is best understood as part of a bigger dialogue. Even individual thought, as Apel stresses, is always, if only implicitly, part of an ongoing communicative process with others (Apel 1973: 399). This is the point at which, for Bakhtin, the novel might be able to help.

4.4.2. The liberating, heteroglot character of the novel in Bakhtin and Dostoevsky

For Bakhtin, the novel, by its heteroglot character, reflects the possibility of human consciousness to break free of "thraldom to the 'absolute' word" (Morris 1994: 19). Similarly, to Rorty, the idea of a single, uniting language to talk about the world in a manner that produces true utterances is refuted. The novel, with its variety of different characters and perspectives, is a fitting playing field for Bakhtin's argument.

For Bakhtin, it reflects the ultimate example of a non-united discourse. Rather, the novel constructs different relationships between the reader, the narrative discourse, and the character's discourse, which "he calls the 'orchestration' of multiple social voices within an artistic unity" (Morris 1994: 19). Literature, then, serves as a way to see the future differently, to see reality in a way other forms of discourse would not have brought to light (Holquist 2002: 81). Bakhtin shares this hopeful perspective on literary texts with both Rorty and Nussbaum. Within this non-united conglomerate of voices, characters are more than what they used to be before Dostoevsky. Rather than a representation of several fixed characteristics, "as a specific profile assembled out of unambiguous and objective features which, taken together, answer the question 'Who is he?'" (Bakhtin 1999: 47), the character in Dostoevsky's work is a fully conscious, and self-conscious, person. They do not represent any particular social group of which they are merely a typification. The character does not,

so to speak, primarily serve a narrative purpose within the author's composition of a novel, but rather has a purpose simply as and in themself. To put it into Honneth's words: The character in Dostoevsky's novels, according to Bakhtin, is recognized as a person rather than reified. It is given the freedom to become a full person rather than what in the last chapter has been called an argumentative (here, rather, narrative) commodity merely helping the narrator to reach a goal of narration or argument. Rather, "the character is an *event* and not a static entity whom we can file into a predetermined category" (Patterson 1985: 135). The character, is, then, a true other, resisting, in Rortyan terms, any attempts of redescription. In light of Rorty's and Shusterman's discussions of the self, one might go one step further. By continuously evolving, by *happening*, as Patterson suggests here, the self evades attempts at redescription, categorization, and the ascription of static meaning. Bakhtin stresses that, unlike other figures in novels before Dostoevsky, characters are fully aware of where they are headed. The only way in which that knowledge is concealed from them is if they conceal it from themselves (Bakhtin 1999: 247). If one thinks of political argument as a form of storytelling in a Rortyan sense rather than as a strictly dialectical endeavour, what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia can be understood as a form of non-redescriptive discourse. "The destruction of one's own image in another's eyes, the sullying of that image in another's eyes as an ultimate desperate effort to free oneself from the power of the other's consciousness and to break through to one's self for the self alone—this, in fact, is the orientation of the Underground Man's entire confession" (Bakhtin 1999: 232). He is constantly trying to gain the reader's recognition as a full person, while at the same time doing everything to conceal the fact that he needs it (Bakhtin 1999: 230). He is, in Bakhtin's terminology, constantly trying not to become a mere character, but rather to stay a real person. His whole monologue throughout the novel is directed towards destroying the image the reader (and the narrator) have, or are supposed to have, about him. By making "discourse about himself deliberately ugly" (Bakhtin 1999: 232), he tries to defy the author's power over his description. The aspect of neediness will be discussed further in chapter 5.

### 4.4.3. Author and hero: Reported speech and monologization as power

Having established the idea of the Underground Man constantly fighting the narrator's power over him and constantly trying to destroy the picture the author paints of him, it becomes clear that ways of reporting what the character has to say reflect different forms of power relations between them and the main character. Bakhtin strongly emphasizes the relationship between monologue and power: monologizing the world, "imposing an eternal single meaning upon it" (Morris 1994: 13), means to exercise power, and will always be the goal of the ruling classes. To monologize means to narrow the range of ways a story can be told. It means, from a Rortyan perspective, to reduce contingency, and thereby to exercise power. Monologue presents an interpretation, a description of the world, that potentially excludes differing perspectives that, if at all, only feature in the discussion in the form of descriptions or interpretations through the lens of the monologue. Various ways of using language in order to relate to the world are at danger of being overlooked. Language in dialogue, on the other hand, leaves open various possibilities of being filled with meaning, since "no living word relates to its object in a singular way. The orientation of a word toward an object is not so much determined by the object's resistance but more generally by the diverse orientations toward the object of other possible words and arguments" (Nielsen 1995: 824).

Dostoevsky's way of writing novels, then, is not only artistically interesting to Bakhtin, but politically liberating. While political power draws on unifying the meaning of language, Bakhtin stresses the word's "fundamental polysemanticity" (Voloshinov/Bakhtin 1986, 1973: 80). The monological world, in contrast, has no space for the representation of other people's ideas: they are "either assimilated, or polemically repudiated, or cease to be an idea" (Bakhtin 1999: 85). New ideas that enter this monological world will, at some point, be rephrased in another person's voice, and by that, inevitably change (Bakhtin 1999: 195). Everyday language, seen from this perspective, is the constant repetition of "other people's words" (Bakhtin 1999: 195), gaining new meaning by being taken out of the original utterance's context.

This description of everyday speech seems to fit nicely with current problems of polarization and redescription in political discourse, as described in chapter 2. A statement that, initially, seemed harmless to the speaker, has the potential to always be redescribed within the

vocabulary of another discourse participant as "racist," or "sexist" no matter what the content (or the intention) of the statement was. This is not to mean that it necessarily always happens, nor that statements cannot actually be racist or sexist, but the possibility is an important feature of what participants do in public discourse. In Bakhtin's monologic world, then, if taken to its extreme end, there is no such thing as misunderstanding. To understand an utterance in a way different from the way the speaker meant it simply means to give it a new meaning.

The question, then, is not mainly how to avoid the constant change of the meaning of utterances through different ways of understanding them, but rather how to prevent the reduction of all these possible meanings into one, monologic truth, how to avoid the concentration of power through the reduction of contingency. In other words: the question is how to prevent meaning from becoming a monologic whole, a monolithic block, and, ultimately, a mere question of power. Against this danger of the monologization of the world, a discourse stressing what Bakhtin called the liberating power of the novel must emphasize polysemanticity, must embrace it rather than trying to reduce it. Bakhtin stresses that Dostoevsky managed to give room to other people's ideas, capable of "preserving its full capacity to signify as an idea […], neither confirming […] nor merging it with his own expressed ideology" (Bakhtin 1999: 85). This, in a nutshell, is what contingency seems to be all about. Confirming or denying the idea would take that contingency away. All too carelessly merging the idea with one's own would mean to start redescribing it. At the same time, such merging would mean, in Honneth's terms, to prevent the other from being a full person.

The representation, then, of other people's ideas in public discourse without merging them with one's own vocabulary or introducing them into and using them within one's own position is a point at which, both in Honneth and in Bakhtin, "the concreteness of individual relationships is confronted with the objectified world of culture" (Koczanowicz 2011: 564). The point at which concrete dialogue meets this objectified culture is the point at which the danger of redescription and argumentative commodification becomes most clear. The power of redescription is also a means of monologization. The abstract argument built on such redescriptions fails "to provide the missing link between the singular and concrete human act

and the general, abstract ethical imperative" (Erdinast-Vulcan 2014: 55). This connection is given in the concrete experience of (mis)recognition, in the possibility or impossibility to become (to keep becoming) a full person. In Rorty's jargon: It becomes apparent in the experience of being redescribed, of being enclosed into, and formed by, someone else's description and vocabulary.

It is these parallels between Bakhtin's work and Rorty's ideas that seem especially fruitful for the present project. While contingency has been discussed at length in this chapter, it must be noted that irony has not. Even though Bakhtin does not discuss irony in any way similar to Rorty, the concern for redescription and the challenge of preserving one's "I", of avoiding merging with other ideologies, are closely related. This does not, however, necessarily entail irony. The Bakhtinian individual trying to preserve one's "I" could, in Rortyan terms, be compared to the strong poet rather than the ironist, and a concern for the difficulties or cruelties of having your "I" described by another would be a liberal concern about cruelty rather than an ironist one. In this perspective, the ideal "poetic agon" that Rorty imagined Deweyan democracy to be is the process in which, as Nikulin phrases it, individuals get the chance of "spelling-out" themselves (Nikulin 2010: 118) in never-ending dialogue, or to "keep becoming" as it was phrased earlier. To monologize dialogue, then, means to exert power over other participants in a similar way as redescription was shown to do in the past chapter.

4.5. Never-ending dialogue and the dialogical self: Bakhtin and Rorty

The goal of the following section is to connect Bakhtin's notion of the preservation of the other person's "I" in dialogue to Honneth's idea of recognition, as well as to Rorty's ideas of conversational justification and narrative identity. During the chapter, it will become possible to think of identity itself as a result of such dialogue.

4.5.1. The affirmation of another's I, relationships, and recognition

As a central element of Bakhtin's work on the social character of language, it can be stated that the individual is not only constantly part of social relations, but fundamentally depends on them. Rather than merely actively entering social relations as a conscious subject, they are defined by them. Their existence is made possible solely through their embeddedness in social relations:

> The abstract biological person, biological individual […] does not exist at all. It is an improper abstraction. Outside society and, consequently, outside objective socioeconomic conditions, there is no such thing as a human being. Only as a part of a social whole, only in and through a social class, does the human person become historically real and culturally productive […]. What is needed is, as it were, a second birth, a social birth. (Voloshinov 2004: 15)

The individual, then, is not able to exist entirely on their own as a full person. Rather, they depend heavily on their relationship with others, with a social structure, not only for vital resources such as nourishment or protection, but in order to become real (to have, as Rorty might put it, a life) and to enter the world as a subject. The individual is bound to continuously depend on others. Voloshinov stresses that "not a single action taken by a whole person, not a single concrete ideological formation (a thought, an image, even the content of dreams) can be explained and understood without reference to socioeconomic factors" (Voloshinov 2004: 15). With Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach he sees "the essence of man […] not [as] an abstraction inherent in each separate individual", but rather as "the aggregate of social relationships" (Marx 1942: 198, as cited in Voloshinov 2004: 15).

This idea resembles Honneth's concept of recognition discussed in the previous chapter, as well as what Bakhtin stressed as one of the central principles of Dostoevsky's work and the polyphonic novel: "the affirmation of someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (Bakhtin 1999: 11). Simultaneously, this affirmation of another's "I" as a subject links Bakhtin's work to Rorty's conceptualization of redescription: it depends on not drowning them in foreign redescriptions. Treating the other as a (full) person requires stepping back from such redescriptions.

How Dostoevsky treats his novels' characters, according to Bakhtin, then, can be seen as a way of preserving their self-descriptions, of allowing the other to be a subject. Rather than, in a dialectical manner, being transferred into some foreign systematic structure, "in Dostoevsky's work each opinion really does become a living thing and is inseparable from an embodied human voice. If incorporated into an abstract, systemically monological context, it ceases to be what it is" (Bakhtin 1999: 17). Dostoevsky's characters, then, are recognized by their creator as full persons in the Honnethian sense. The meeting of two consciousnesses as equals is the only place where "aesthetic events" (Morris 1994: 6) can happen, namely, events that, as their result, can produce selves. In order for the self to come to its full existence, an aesthetic event is required, necessarily involving another consciousness (Morris 1994: 6). The self is always a creation of two consciousnesses, and therefore, again, the self always fundamentally needs the other, just as the Underground Man, even though he despises his listeners, needs them as part of his dialogue.

### 4.5.2. Ideas as rejoinders in Bakhtinian dialogues and Rorty's idea of never-ending dialogue of humankind

What was pointed out for the case of the individual in the last section is also true of the ideas uttered in dialogue: they do not stand for themselves; they need the dialogical context. To Bakhtin, each utterance "is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 95). Ideas, if only stored in the consciousnesses of single persons, risk dying and vanishing. The idea, imagined by Bakhtin as a living creature, needs the habitat of dialogue to flourish. It "begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to […] give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*" (Bakhtin 1999: 87f., italics in orig.). Not only, then, is another idea needed for my own idea to take shape: another person is.

The dialectical method of rational, self-conscious subjects methodically, and monologically, reasoning from premises towards conclusions, then, is rejected at this point. Rather, ideas need constant dialogue with other ideas. Analogously to individuals discussed in the last

section, ideas depend on the response of other ideas, on rejoinders, to exist. In the last section, the idea of individuals depending on others in order to exist as individuals was linked to Honneth's concept of recognition. In this section, I would like to clarify how looking at ideas as living creatures that depend on others links Bakhtin to Rorty's image of never-ending dialogue and conversational philosophy. Rorty stresses the open-endedness of philosophical conversation as one of the most prominent differences from the objectivist urge to end conversations by finding definite, final answers to questions, and emphasizes openness rather than systematization (Rorty 1991a: 14f.). Bakhtin, on the other hand, pictures discourse as a whole as the creative, "generative process of a given social collective" (Voloshinov 1986, 1973: 95). This generative process is diametrically opposed to dialectics' urge to reach conclusions and finalize the dialogue.

As Nikulin points out, this urge risks overlooking productive aspects on the way. Namely the aporia, as "precisely that moment of dialectical 'non-viability' (which is the literal meaning of 'aporia') that points not so much at a mistake in one's deduction, but rather is a productive tip for further development of a thought, or even points at the need for a radical change in the whole framework" (Nikulin 2010: 117). Dialectics risks missing this potential that can make dialogue take a leap forward.

The ironist, in Rorty's view, creates such moments of dialogue in discourse. Beside inference and perception, Rorty stresses the importance of metaphors as a "third source of beliefs" (Rorty 1991a: 14). Paraphrasing Davidson, Rorty compares the use of metaphors to "suddenly breaking off the conversation long enough to make a face or pulling a photograph out of your pocket and displaying it, […] or slapping your interlocutor's face, or kissing him" (Rorty 1993: 18). Introducing metaphors into an argument breaks its dialectical structure. It opens space for something unexpected, for self-expression, or simply for dialogue. It enables participants to truly "spell themselves out," as Nikulin puts it (Nikulin 2010: 118).

Discourse, then, seen from the combined vantage point of Bakhtinian dialogism and Rortyan ironism, is oriented not towards finalization, conclusion, and logical flawlessness, but rather towards continuation, keeping dialogue alive, and allowing for true self-expression—at the expense of predictability and systematic, dialectical structure. Every idea, however brilliant, is only seen as another rejoinder in dialogue. Neither will logical argument reach an end point

from which there are no more directions left to go, and all meaning finalized; nor will a new idea, produced in dialogue, ever end that discussion. Any new idea resulting, however unexpectedly, from that dialogue, will only give rise to new dialogue.

4.5.3. The self as dialogical, the self as story: Identity and contingency in Rorty and Bakhtin

Just as ideas are never finalized and defined, selves do not reach that point for Bakhtin and Rorty either. Both Bakhtin and Rorty can be said to refute the Kantian idea of conscience (and consciousness) that located the core of the self somewhere inside it (Rorty 1993: 30). Bakhtin stresses that even consciousness itself relies on signs: it "can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs" (Voloshinov/ Bakhtin 1986, 1973: 11). It was already pointed out that individuals rely on dialogue in order to keep existing. As Michael Holquist observes, to Bakhtin, "being human is to mean. Human being is the production of meaning, where meaning is further understood to come about as the articulation of values" (Holquist 2002: 155). Spelling oneself out, as Nikulin writes, can be seen, then, not as the action of a pre-existent self, but rather as its condition. To be is to be in dialogue. One might add: to be is to be in dialogue and to have a non-finalized meaning within that dialogue. To have one's meaning finalized is to lose an important part of what it is to be human. This meaning, then, a sense of self, can only be had within dialogue. In order to understand who one is, another consciousness is needed: the "aesthetic production of a unified perception of bodily and personal being is […] a loving gift mutually exchanged between self and other" (Morris 1994: 6). Dialogue is not a situation that selves enter as fully complete, finalized beings, but rather a prerequisite of them coming into being, a result of a positive, interpersonal relationship. The subject "cannot be directly represented or communicated"; (self-)consciousness needs to be "rooted in discourse or gesture" (Nielsen 2000: 149). Dialogue, as the aesthetically productive process it has been described as before, produces the self. The "blind impress" Phillip Larkin was looking for in the poem Rorty cites in *CIS* (Rorty 1993: 26) can never be found; it must always be constantly reproduced in dialogue. To say, with Rorty, that there is no blind impress to be found as to the existence of

oneself is to say, with Bakhtin, that there are no first or last words (Holquist 2002: 37). Rather, there is merely a dialogical process of evolving.

Rorty foresees this process of evolving as paramount for a liberal, edifying culture in *PMN*. To edify ourselves in this sense means to be taken "out of our selves by the power of strangeness," to become "new beings" (Rorty 1980: 360). Dialogue, and the other in dialogue, have the potential for change not because they have the better, dialectical argument to convince us to change our opinions, but rather because dialogue can show us the futility of looking for final, undisputable solutions, and produce us anew as beings. To show that new vocabularies for dealing with the world might be more attractive than old ones means to recalibrate our relationship towards this world.

To justify our opinions, then, is "not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice. Conversational justification, so to speak, is naturally holistic" (Rorty 1980: 170). As a holistic enterprise, dialogue and conversational justification can produce us anew instead of showing our old selves how they should rather link the dots of information they already have differently. The important point to stress here, though, is that this creation of new selves is a dialogic enterprise involving at least two individuals. Talking about dialogue producing us anew, one ought not to think that one discourse participant could somehow convince another one of their opinion by simply producing a different version of them. That is exactly what the unfinalizability of the other expresses, and what I argued in the last chapter would be inflicting an injustice on the other in the form of redescription. Rather, what participants can produce is a common creation, an "us." Our selves, then, can be seen as continually evolving, contingent products of dialogue, constantly in and depending on that dialogue, rather than some defined variation of a blind impress. Selves are constantly becoming, evolving by being created through the very dialogue they themselves produce. Similarly to the musical aspect of dialogue pointed out by Nikulin, this common creation is an interaction in which "each voice sounds independently but also within the whole of the dialogue, which in turn is irreducible to the sum of its constituents" (Nikulin 2010: 155). The attempt to extract one of the participants out of the dialogue and define their meaning would inevitably fail, as would the intent to understand their argument without the context of the whole creation. Once the conversation is entered,

monologic, dialectic argument does not only lose its "forceless force"; it is rendered meaningless.

## 4.6. Conclusion: Understanding language and moral norms as a product of common creativity

The aim of this chapter was to show that Bakhtin's work makes it possible to look at political argument as a product of common creative effort, and at contributions to discourse partly as efforts to maintain one's own, personal voice rather than having one's identity described and defined by someone else. His concept of polyphony serves as a lens through which to look at the problematic of redescription and polarization described in chapter 2, as discourse participants' struggle for recognition can be understood as an effort to preserve their "I" in Bakhtinian terms. Redescription, with its power to potentially make one realize they did not even have a life of their own, as Rorty puts it, shows significant parallels to the Bakhtinian approach. Furthermore, the Rortyan idea of the self as a story, a web of meaning, can be linked to Bakhtin/Voloshinov's idea of consciousness as embodied in signs. Dialogue as the place in which selves, for Bakhtin, become themselves, shows significant similarities to Rorty's idea of conversational justification: If the point of dialogue stops being mere dialectical justification, but rather shifts towards becoming oneself, both authors can be described as proposing what in Rortyan jargon can be called a form of edifying, creative, political discourse. Moral norms, then, become products of a common creative effort rather than the results of careful, systematic, dialectical construction. Rather, justification works in conversational ways, as Rorty points out in *PMN,* which does justice to Nikulin's point that dialogue can never actually be reduced to its constituents. It should be seen as one, as a creative construction that only makes sense in its completeness, just as in Rorty conversational justification is "naturally holistic" (Rorty 1980: 170). This becomes especially clear in Nikulin comparing dialogue to a fugue (Nikulin 2010: 83). It is, however, not to imply that dialogue is free of conflict or animosity between participants. Rather than to elevate dialogue to such an idealized state, it is merely to reiterate the idea that, in spite of

such conflict or animosity, the continuation of dialogue is valuable and a worthwhile goal in itself.

Overall, the work of the main authors discussed in this chapter makes it possible to think of political discourse as a dialogical, common creative process in which participants aim at preserving their perceived individuality, their "I", and monologic, dialectical argument, if on its own, loses its meaning and force.

**5. Poetic Judgement and Emotions: Morality and Imagination in Rorty and Nussbaum**

As the last chapter showed, Rorty and Bakhtin are well compatible on the question of where and how selves come to be themselves. Rorty gives us the idea that not merely our lives, but rather our selves can be seen as stories we keep telling rather than as finite, definable, and clearly describable. This is the result of taking Rorty's, and Shusterman's, idea of living as weaving one's identity seriously, compatible with Nikulin's Bakhtinian notion that "to be is to be in dialogue" (Nikulin 2010: 81). This can be pushed further to the notion that, whilst being means to be in dialogue, it does not entail the notion of being sufficiently described as anything specific. Just as Dostoyevsky's Underground Man noted, this entails concluding that being can be rephrased as a constant process of becoming, without ever becoming "something." It means that the story of who we are never comes to an end and that we evolve without there being a goal to that evolution. As far as our narrated identities go, not only is there no place to be except dialogue, but also nothing to be but "in dialogue." To say that we do not become anything specific is to say that the descriptions we ourselves (or others) produce of who we are will always remain mere tools for successful interaction. It is therefore not enough to say that, as subjects, we are not final, that we always keep evolving. Rather, whatever our descriptions capture is never a statement about what we are (even if only temporarily). As I will argue in this and the next chapter, descriptions are merely tools, little scratch notes helping us to interact with each other.

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will ask for the implications of Rorty's distinction between private ironist and public citizen as well as the consequences of dropping it. It will be argued that dropping it will not only solve some questions Rorty would struggle with until the end of his academic

life, but also allow for a concept of political argument as a common poetic activity similar to the ideas presented in the previous chapter (5.2.). In a manner similar to Rorty's idea of edification, not only can communicative activity in public discussion be seen as an effort to tell a common story about a society or political culture (Rorty), but also as the individuals' effort to keep becoming, to be recognized (Shusterman, Honneth) rather than finalized (Bakhtin, Nikulin) or redescribed, and therefore stopped in that process. To keep becoming, in this context, is to mean that the story of individuals' lives keeps being told and evolving. While Rorty's strong poet, on their death bed, can say about their own life: "Thus I willed it" (Rorty 1993: 29), we cannot finalize other people's lives. "The drama of an individual human life, or of the history of humanity as a whole, is not one in which a pre-existent goal is triumphantly reached or tragically not reached" (Rorty 1993: 29). Redescription, as an attempt to finalize others, stops their evolution, the open-endedness of their lives and interaction.

Chapters 5.3. and 5.4. will go on to the work of Martha Nussbaum to show that this entails granting compassion and vulnerability a central position in a normative idea of political argument, given that "from a vision of a person as real and potentially lovable, we can get to the hope for a real dialogue" (Nussbaum 2018). In addition, the moral ideal of perceptive equilibrium and Nussbaum's idea of fancy can be connected to Rorty's idea of edification to see arguing as a creative, dialogical process. Within this process, emotions, as will be argued with Nussbaum, take a central role. In so far as, as was argued before, recognition, being seen, and keeping up dialogical relationships with others are important to discourse participants, emotions are central to political discourse, since they are "acknowledgements of neediness and lack of self-sufficiency" (Nussbaum 2001: 22). The need for recognition and positive relationships discussed in the previous chapters is never free of emotion. Without such relationships, we feel what Nussbaum describes as "painful solitary powerlessness" (Nussbaum 2018). Not being recognized, not being in such positive relationships, is painful in and of itself.

Apart from this first way in which Nussbaum helps clarify the importance of emotions for political and moral discussion, there is a second aspect in which her work is helpful to show how emotions are fundamental to moral evaluation. Such evaluation, and subsequent

decisions, need, first and foremost, careful and adequate perception of the situation and problem at hand (Nussbaum 1990c: 79). As will be shown throughout this chapter, the problematic of redescription is closely connected to a lack of such adequate perception. Emotions, then, are not counterproductive for moral reasoning, or clouding some otherwise rational moral judgement, but are rather an aid for such adequate perception (Nussbaum 1990c: 79). Ironically, some ways of dialectical argument that end up redescribing other discourse participants and claiming the latter were too emotional risk, through a lack of emotion and empathy, to evoke precisely the conflictive, polarized, and emotionalized discourse situation they strive to avoid. Rather than merely finding good arguments, adequate perception requires empathy towards the ones we disagree with. An adequate emotional perception, according to Nussbaum, requires the ability and the willingness to compassionately imagine the other's situation.

The argument of the chapter connects these two aspects, and authors, in that the individual drama of a life with no defined end plays an important part in the individual's dependence on relationships and other people. Part of the reason why being redescribed and having our lives narrated by other people is so hurtful is the fact that we do, indeed, need them and their recognition. The ability and willingness to compassionately imagine another person's situation rather than finalizing their stories, then, is not only necessary for an adequate moral perception, as Nussbaum argues; it is also necessary in order to build and maintain positive relationships to others.

5.2. Public and private in Rorty: A complicated distinction and consequences of its abolishment for the role of metaphor in discourse

As Rorty seemed to be convinced, and others have noted (Inkpin 2013: 310, Bacon 2005), ironism is mostly construed as a private attitude. It rests on the notion that the ironist separates their public efforts for ideals from their private aspirations of self-completion, their aiming at "private perfection—a self-created, autonomous, human life" (Rorty 1993: xiv). As I will try to show in this subchapter, this separation between public and private is not necessary,

and even hinders the Rortyan approach from being more fruitful for the purposes of this project. Specifically, an autonomous life, as Rorty says, does not necessarily happen alongside of and separate from public deliberation and discussion. Rather, it is dependent on a specific kind of relationship cultivated not only in private, but also in public. To say, with Rorty, that we should "distinguish books which help us become autonomous from books which help us become less cruel" (Rorty 1993: 141) ignores what was said earlier about the intricate relationship between being recognized, being one's own, full self, and recognizing others.

Ironism is not to be mistaken for irrationalism: "The ironist, says Rorty, is not opposed to argument, even deductive and airtight logical arguments. But the ironist is also not, as it were, automatically impressed with argument, nor are they convinced that argument always deserves rational priority" (Koopman 2020: 107). It is precisely this attitude towards "rational," public argument, that allows for one of the entry points to move ironism from the private realm over into public discourse. There is a possibility for those, as Koopman calls them, airtight, logical arguments to go astray. As much scrutiny as one might have put them under before presenting them in discussion, they can go wrong, and become problematic, not because they are incoherent, but because they fail to avoid redescriptive elements, and follow-ups to those elements that might, again, be utterly reasonable. That does not mean that such arguments are not important. Rather, by sticking to this type of argument, the problematic of redescription discussed in earlier chapters cannot be fully captured. The ironism in criticizing redescriptive arguments, then, lies not so much in denying the coherence of logical arguments, but rather in 1. considering the possibility of participants not being moved to change their opinion by the conclusiveness of such arguments, and 2. including in their assessment the question of redescription, and being willing to refute otherwise compelling arguments based on the answer to that question. This is merely to claim that there are possibilities for reasonable arguments to, nevertheless, miss the point of the discussion, or even be outright immoral within the communicative context in which they are uttered. As was mentioned frequently throughout the past chapters, e.g., anti-immigration protesters might keep protesting despite being criticized or being called racists even precisely because of that: to them, to be called "scum" by a member of government is not an insult, nor a devastating judgement, but part of the goal. The Underground Man in the previous

chapter does not deny that 2 and 2 equals four. What he denies is that this should move him to change his opinions in any way, as if he were somehow obligated to change his views due to that conclusion. What he denies is that such an argument has any priority over completely different aspects of his way of forming beliefs. What he is looking for is not conclusiveness, but consolation, and he will likely go with any argument that provides it. In this, he is not unlike conservative German politician and former federal minister of transportation in Germany, Andreas Scheuer, answering a journalist on television in 2016. Referring to the debate around the "refugee crisis" and Scheuer's openly critical position towards what he deemed to be too liberal an approach to immigration, the journalist confronted him with the fact that "whoever is persecuted for political reasons has the right to get asylum in Germany." Scheuer replied: "This is *your* opinion" (Kreiner 2016). There is no open denial here that the journalist presents a legitimate point (which, in this case, is merely a fact), but rather that Scheuer should be impressed by that, or change his own opinion. The ground on which to refute such arguments, then, is not to show that they are incoherent or pointing out the falsity of their premises. Such an approach simply does not seem very promising. Rather than asking how Scheuer came to this statement, whether it is reasonable or not, or to debate these questions with him, the interesting question might be what the statement is supposed to do for him or his political supporters, beside avoiding a critical question. Insisting on debating his statement with him, in contrast, is unhelpful, since the critical issue at hand will, ironically, have less chances to be discussed the more the journalist insists on discussing it. The journalist corrected Scheuer by naming a fact, believing that this should move him to overthinking his position. The motivational factor for Scheuer (and, as he supposed, his voters), though, to change their opinions was clearly not facts, or new knowledge, but rather, as the Underground Man might have put it, resisting the builders of the Crystal Palace trying to replace the comfort of personal opinion with brute facts. This example, then, illustrates the first aspect of an ironist approach to evaluating arguments mentioned above. The second aspect is the question discussed in the previous chapter concerning the reliance of arguments on redescriptions of the other. The second aspect is not about the success of arguments or participants' motivation to change their opinion. Rather, it is about the possible redescriptive character of an argument and the pain and injustice it inflicts on others, for example when doubting a participants' competence to understand an issue due to an identity ascription. If

doing so, an ironist attitude towards public argument need not even say anything about whether such arguments "always" or "sometimes" deserve priority over others or not. For such an ironist position, it becomes possible to keep this priority under the sole condition of refuting arguments if, and only if, they, explicit or implicitly, are based on such redescriptions, and other participants are made into what I called argumentative commodities. The liberal within the liberal ironist must oppose this as a form of cruelty. Once such redescriptive steps in argument have taken place, these arguments become problematic for that very reason. From an ironist perspective, such as the one laid out in this project, it is simply not necessary to take a stance of any kind against "rational" arguments (whatever precisely that would mean).

Having clarified this, it becomes possible to describe a clear criterion in order to justify the refutation of otherwise logically coherent arguments. From a liberal ironist perspective, arguments are to be refuted if they 1. are logically incoherent and/or 2. rely on the redescription of others from the speaker's own perspective. In analogy to the problem of seeing people "as x" argued for in chapter 2, it can be said that arguments are to be refuted if they, in part or in whole, can be rephrased in forms such as "because you represent/are (describable as) X." The latter was already likened to political gaslighting (Latif 2020). While the focus in the case of gaslighting is on exploiting an existing power dynamic, though, redescription does not require such a power relation, and can rather sometimes, temporarily, be a tactic of gaining rather than using power over others.

Such redescriptions breach the Rortyan public/private distinction. As far as arguments in public discourse are concerned,

> [T]he public argumentations with which we prove our assertions, judgements and purposes are what really counts, and they are always revisable, confirmable, and retractable, exactly because they undergo the conversation between qualified subjects and do not conform to the laws of science or the presumed apodictic certainties *in interiore homine.* This is the concept of justification that Rorty connects with the value of human conversation (Calcaterra 2019: 54).

What ensures the ongoing dialogue at this point, then, is the principally revisable character of all arguments made in discourse. All arguments, and all utterances, are, similarly to Bakhtin's description, nothing but parts of an ongoing, contingent dialogue. Their revision does not happen merely based on individual, rationalist scrutiny, but rather nowhere else but

in dialogue. Revisable, at this point, is not merely to mean the fact that participants can change their opinion based on new information, or more appealing or more convincing arguments from themselves or others. Rather, a conception of argument such as this one can incorporate criticism of western rationalist accounts of argument, such as its dependence on historicist models of time (Chakrabarty 2008: 10), by understanding utterances as, in principle, completely revisable parts of a larger, dialogical construct. From the previous chapter, it became clear that "the whole of the dialogue, […] is irreducible to the sum of its constituents" (Nikulin 2010: 155). Redescription, though, does risk doing exactly that when trying to pinpoint the other, as was argued with Shusterman, at a specific point within the process of continually evolving. Trying to find an "end" to this process means to presume its linear temporal structure.

What Calcaterra presents here, in contrast, is an irreducible, dialogical, conversational process functioning as a whole, as opposed to the "forceless force" of single, pre-made, monological arguments thrown into dialogue as finalized objects that are expected to be convincing regardless of the dialogical context they are thrown into. That is not to say that they are false, unimportant, or worthless. The position presented here is not a relativist one, proposing that the value of arguments could be changed at will from context to context, but an ironist one. The equation of irony with relativism in criticism of Rorty is still alive today, such as in claims that his ideas enabled the rise of Trumpism, with its "repeated rejection of a strong standard of truth [which] seemingly echoes Rorty's own recurrent assaults—from *PMN* onwards—on the very idea that 'knowledge,' 'facts of the matter,' or 'rational justification' can be anything more than the product of local justificatory practices" (Forstenzer 2018: 3). At a closer look, though, an ironist position counteracts rather than enables relativism. Rather than easier, it would become harder for beliefs such as the ones Trump spread to actually become strong. As Bjørn Ramberg argues, "the recognition of contingency is good for liberalism, because, on the whole, in a post-metaphysical culture it will be more difficult to argue for its competitors" (Ramberg 2014: 145).

The ironist is not interested in devaluing truth or argument in the sense their critics suppose. They are rather like a traveller crossing a border and knowing that their change might not be accepted in the stores over there, and that if it is, they cannot know its precise value yet. The

rationalist strikes them as the kind of eager, but unrealistic person who thinks a Swedish store taking their Norwegian change simply goes without saying. The ironist does believe it would be great if they did and that there is a chance they might. But they also know that there can never be any guarantee simply because the coins can be changed back. Rather, the transaction's success may depend on a variety of factors within the specific situation that have little to do with questioning the actual value of the money they have to offer. Such factors might include them asking nicely, the store owner's mood, or whether or not they know someone planning on going to Norway soon.

Simultaneously, the ironist simply does not feel the need for relativism, since "in the absence of a standpoint outside of culture and history, there is no perspective from which we could declare our beliefs and practices relative" (Bacon/ Rutherford 2022). A relativist standpoint, then, is just not of any use to the ironist. To say that the success of arguments depends on the context of an interaction is not a statement about their truth-value, but simply a statement as to what precisely one should expect such claims to do in a conversation. It is not a statement about whether or not they are true, or in what sense they are true (the kind of question equally useless to ask as the question of whether quarks really exist or not), but rather to what degree they can be expected to be useful for the purposes one wants to use them for. This usefulness, then, can depend on a variety of contingent factors such as the ones mentioned in the example of the traveller earlier. Their project is an open-ended, multi-layered affair, and entering the store they do not know yet what will end up making it successful or unsuccessful.

Within such a multi-layered process, the role of metaphors is an important topic. As Rorty stresses, metaphors are not arguments, but rather disturb them, like stopping the conversation to make a face would disturb them. They do not lead towards a goal or a conclusion, but rather do the opposite, keeping the conversation open-ended. This is how, in Richard Rumana's words, "the aesthetics of metaphorical descriptions is an important element in ethics" (Rumana 2000: 55, cit. in Voparil 2015: 121). As was stressed in chapter 2, metaphors are a potentially very open way of expressing one's own situation, such as the metaphor of the "old, white man" was shown to have done. Talking about "old, white men" is not merely talking about male human beings of a certain age group, the colour of their skin as biological data, and not just about a certain status, power, wealth, or social role that is attached to them.

Rather, it expresses that the speaker is dealing with the fact that there are (privileged) people who have status and power that they themselves do not have, or their deeming it unjust. It problematizes the relationship the speaker has towards such people (or even just towards the abstract knowledge that there are such people).

Terms like this give expression to something in the relationship between the speaker and the world they inhabit. They are tools for dwelling in the world rather than for its depiction, saying less about the world they seem to describe than about the way the person uttering them and using them as tools goes about their life. As a statement, to say, "this is an old, white man," then, is not fundamentally different from, e.g., "let's call that plan A." As will be shown later, this fits well with the Bakhtinian approach to dialogue and its participants' unfinalizability: Understood in this way, phrases such as "old, white man" merely point towards some form of unfinished business, in a double sense, and towards the way speakers are trying to go about it. What makes them metaphors in the Rortyan sense, then, is not necessarily them being false (in the sense that we talk about the mouth of the river, even though rivers do not have actual mouths). What makes them metaphors is the fact that they do not refer to what they seem to be describing. What they refer to is not there in the same way the mouth of the river is not there. Still, there is an actual problematic there that is being encapsulated and referred to by the phrase, just as there really is an actual thing in the world that the phrase "mouth of the river" can refer to.  This is also what makes these metaphors so complicated, and potentially conflictive, in political discussions. Since metaphors are "constantly dying off into literalness" (Rorty 1993: 16), they are a constant risk in communication. The phrase "old, white man," for instance, does indeed seem to describe the phenotype of a human. In contrast, most people would probably not think that rivers have actual mouths. What the phrase expresses, though, if understood as a mere metaphor rather than as a description, is a certain social constellation, a way the speaker relates to (the idea of) a white man.

Missing a metaphor's death and understanding it as a mere description, then, ends dialogue, as dialogue relies precisely on the impossibility of being captured in such reduced form. It thrives on polysemanticity (Voloshinov 1986; 1973: 80). Both the creators and the addressees of such metaphors are at risk of this. In a way similar to dialectics in Nikulin, letting

metaphors die off into descriptions (or redescriptions of others) restricts the possibilities of the discussion. Understanding, with Rorty, moral and political progress as a history of "increasingly useful metaphors" (Rorty 1993: 9) depends on dialogue staying open and irreducible, in Nikulin's and Bakhtin's sense.

As will be shown, such concern for the death of metaphors connects to Nussbaum's concern for emotions in politics and public discourse, and the harm that neglecting them can do to democracy. Considering how, in, e.g., "metaphors for unpleasant emotions, physiology and culture combine" (Otis 2016: 304), specific metaphoric ways in which emotions are described can lead to people suppressing or denying these emotions. This is not only visible, as Sara Ahmed has pointed out, in the common linguistic root of passions and passivity, which made it so simple to associate emotionality with the (passive, powerless) feminine (Ahmed 2014: 3); it also appears in general descriptions of specific emotions, such as rage, self-pity, or resentment, as negative or ugly (Otis 2016: 304). From a Rortyan perspective, then, such descriptions are simply the metaphors that actors (society at large, as Otis stresses, or individuals) use to deal with the challenge of such emotions. Letting the way we deal with other people's emotions lead us to believe that such words describe the way that emotion "is" (instead of our individual coping strategy at this precise moment) is not only premature, but risks redescribing the emotion as well as its bearer. As another example for this, one might think of jealousy "rearing its ugly head."

Metaphors, then, are an important element in ethics partly because missing their death (Rorty 1993: 16) and misunderstanding them as descriptions of the world can, on the side of the speaker as well as the addressee, end dialogue as well as lead to the marginalization of politically important emotions, such as anger in the face of injustice or fear keeping people from standing up against such injustice. Expressions such as "old white man," then, are difficult because they are, in a sense, undead: alive to some, giving expression to important political emotions; dead to others because they connect them to an actual, real-life object as its description. The process of producing and killing off metaphors that Rorty describes gets stuck in a loop: conflict intensifies, and emotions intensify with it.

In understanding the role of metaphors and emotions, the issue of (showing) vulnerability is important, since, in Nussbaum, it connects to the importance of emotions in general for the

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overall functioning of a democratic society. The following sections will therefore argue that emotions, and the right approach to dealing with them, are important for ethics on the level of dialogue and personal interaction as well as for the functioning of a democratic society as a whole and citizens' positive relationship towards it.

## 5.3. Vulnerability and the importance of emotions for rational thought and democracy in Nussbaum

The goal of this chapter is to illustrate the vital importance of vulnerability and emotions for Nussbaum's thinking about democracy. Similarly to Rorty, Nussbaum also stresses the importance of hope, clarifying, in a next step, the vital role imagination and "fancy" play for the positive development of political dialogue and a democratic society. In light of the reflections on metaphors as expressions of emotions in the last section, it will become clear that imagination and fancy go hand in hand with the problematic of emotion and vulnerability in political discourse. Therefore, emotions connect to the question of what a good argument is within public discourse on several levels: the level of democracy and its proper functioning, the level of personal vulnerability and interpersonal relationships, and the challenge of moral judgements.

### 5.3.1. Emotions as a vital part of rational thought and democracy in Nussbaum

As discussed at the beginning of chapter two, the question of whether and how emotions play or should play a role in the normative evaluation of political decisions, whether they tend to lead to the impossibility of so-called "rational" argument or are a threat to democratic culture, still seems to be present at the heart of the debate around polarization dynamics and populist politics. Martha Nussbaum has pointed out the ambiguity of emotions and their potential consequences for democratic life: "Emotions can destabilize a community and fragment it, or they can produce better cooperation and more energetic striving toward justice. Emotions

are not hardwired from birth but are shaped in countless ways by social contexts and social norms. That is good news, since it means that we have considerable room to shape the emotions of our own political culture" (Nussbaum 2018).

 As was already pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, Nussbaum sees emotions as vital for moral decisions, but only if they serve and are accompanied by an adequate perception of the situation at hand. They can be good moral guides only in so far as they are based on correct, true representations of the situation and its facts (Nussbaum 1995: 75). Discussing the problematic laid out in chapter 2 from a point of view shaped by Nussbaum's perspective on political emotions, then, means to, first and foremost, 1. recognize their vital role in personal and political life as well as their ambiguous character, and 2. clearly identify such good moral guides among emotions arising in political debate. The aim of this subchapter is to clarify this ambiguous role of emotions and the importance of taking emotions into account as a central motivational factor when discussing or analysing moral arguments in political discussions. Nussbaum provides a descriptive-theoretical account of emotions in public matters that, similarly to the way Honneth's theory of recognition was in chapters 2 and 3, is a starting point for an alternative approach to the analysis of contributions to political discourse. She fends off the objection that emotions are irrational, animalistic forces in that 1. emotions do have an object towards which they are felt, and 2. these feelings imply thoughts about that named object (Nussbaum 1995: 60f.).  Rather than clouding judgement or hindering individuals from making moral choices, Nussbaum therefore sees emotions as necessary for the development of the very ability of moral reflection and decision.

Already in infancy, "intimate bonds of love and gratitude" are what individuals need to develop their "ability to do good in the wider social world" (Nussbaum 1995: 69.). Nussbaum here resembles Honneth's view on relationships of recognition during childhood and their importance for the development of a healthy sense of self as well as the ability to feel compassion for others (Honneth 1996: 98). It is this ability for compassion that makes humans capable of good actions, and literature, as the medium that can train the imaginative abilities, plays a vital part in this. In allowing these emotions to take a role in moral decision making, the particularity of each case of moral decisions is considered without losing sight

of general obligations and rules (Nussbaum 1990a: 157, see chapter 4.4.). Practical reasoning, then, needs emotions, as they are "less deceptively seductive" than mere rational thought (Nussbaum 1990d: 40). To deny the role of emotions in decision-making processes means to fail to see the world completely (Nussbaum 1995: 67).

This view on the role of emotions for public discourse and politics complements Rorty's account as well as the argument made in chapters 2 and 3 in that emotions, in enabling discourse participants to perceive the situation at hand more adequately, could become a force counteracting tendencies to redescribe others. Redescription, judging the other based on one's own vocabulary rather than taking them on their own terms, can be understood precisely as one form of the failure to completely see the world that Nussbaum talks about, as a failure to truly understand the other (Nussbaum 1990a: 156). Such failure, in turn, can be connected to a lack of cultivation of emotions growing up, as cultivation of a healthy self-confidence during childhood is part of the development not only of the person, but of the democratic self (Nussbaum 2018). In this, possible objections stressing the "private" nature of emotions as opposed to the "public" use of reason can be countered. Honneth and Nussbaum meet at this point in connecting the adult subject's ability to function in social relationships during childhood to their ability to develop a healthy sense of self and thus to their functioning as a subject within a democratic society. Both refer to Donald Winnicott (Nussbaum 2018; Honneth 1996: 99f.) in stressing the importance of developing a healthy sense of self in separating from the mother. The ability to cultivate a sense of oneself in the relationship to another, and with it to foster adequate moral emotions, then, depends largely on a specific form of positive relationship to oneself as well as to others. To develop or have moral emotions (such as anger about an injustice, or even disgust) requires the ability to cultivate such positive relationships. This prerequisite for a functioning democracy in Nussbaum's sense bridges the public-private divide and requires the individual to come to terms with their own vulnerability.

While the problematic of the divide between public and private life was discussed with Rorty earlier, this provides another reason for seeing the two as a continuum. The (private) development of a healthy sense of self is politically relevant for the public just as much as interactions within public, political discourse can have influence on, and can be influenced

by, the relationship of participants towards themselves. Seeking recognition and healthy, fair relationships with other discourse participants, then, means to also aim for a positive relationship toward oneself. Thinking back to the last chapter, the Underground Man illustrates this when his repeated, ostensive self-loathing spares him the trouble of having to engage with his addressees. In doing so, he can go on being the "spiteful" man he claims to be, and there is nothing his interaction partner can do about it. After all, even though the Underground Man talks to us incessantly, we do not actually ever get a chance to talk back, and so there is not really anything about us for him to perceive. Although, at first glance, he is opening up to us about his emotions and his inner troubles, we are not actually in dialogue with him.

Rather than deeming emotions problematic or irrational, then, democracy relies on them both in general and within specific interactions. Both the functioning of a democratic system and the interactions and relationships between its citizens need emotions and a sense of their importance. The citizen telling another, whose position they do not share, to be "more reasonable" or "less emotional," then, risks redescribing the other, hurting them and enlarging the divide between different political groups. What undermines an argument is not so much emotions, per se, but rather speakers trying to eliminate emotions (to have a "rational discussion") and thereby failing to acknowledge their role in the debate.

Furthermore, these participants actively spare the other the work of having to speak for themselves. Spoken from Nussbaum's perspective, then, they deny the other the possibility of becoming their "own person [which] is constitutively dependent on the recognition of others" (Honneth 1996: 138). In this, they do not only hurt the other in not granting them the recognition they seek and deserve, but also their own judgement, since precisely letting the other speak for themselves, as their own person, reduces their arguments' deceptive seductiveness that Nussbaum talks about. In avoiding the Underground Man's mistake, then, there lies a potential for democratic discourse. In granting emotions a place at the table, and asking the work necessary for that from others, democratic discourse and democratic hope are intimately linked to citizens' feelings and vulnerability.

5.3.2 Vulnerability, hope, and their connectedness to human relationships in Nussbaum

For Nussbaum, emotions are a result of the ever-present, constant vulnerability of human beings. The mere fact that life is unforeseeable and uncontrollable makes us vulnerable beings, "something needy and incomplete, that has hostages to fortune," and life "a vulnerable business, in which complete control, is neither possible, nor […] even desirable" (Nussbaum 1995: 57). To acknowledge the role of emotions for personal and political life, then, means to accept this uncontrollability of life, and the emotional challenge this creates. This challenge resembles the challenge of dealing with the contingency of one's own life in Rorty.

"Tendencies to protect the fragile self by denigrating and subordinating others" (Nussbaum 2013: 3), then, are a way the fear of contingency Rorty speaks about is transported into public discourse and becomes a problem in the form of what is often called "emotional" debates. It is, thus, fear that is at the root of a diverse array of negative, and politically conflictive or problematic, emotions. Envy, anger, fear, and disgust are the four emotions Nussbaum weaves together in *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018) to better understand emotions in political conflicts, such as about gender- or race-based equality politics. Part of such tendencies to protect one's own self in the face of contingency were discussed in chapter 2 as the fear of being redescribed. At a larger scale, this can also lead to the marginalization of certain politically important emotions mentioned in chapter 5.2.

Fear gets a prominent position within Nussbaum's thinking about such negative emotions, as it is "not only the earliest emotion in human life, but it is also the most broadly shared within the animal kingdom" (Nussbaum 2018). Its "way of running ahead of careful thought" (Nussbaum 2018), though, also makes it problematic in these contexts. As one form of emotional vulnerability, it tends to make us asocial beings, driving "out all thoughts of others" (Nussbaum 2018). It represents the antipode, if you will, to what Rorty dreamed of when talking about solidarity as an ideal. It is a parallel to the role of racism and other attitudes that impede not only empathy, but also the literary imagination, and with it personal relationships (Nussbaum 1995: 95). Looking at anger, similarly, as a form of "infantile

helplessness" (Nussbaum 2018), it is also connected to the fear of death, helplessness's "adult cousin" (Nussbaum 2018).

This connection between fear, anger, and mortality connects Nussbaum to Rorty and the fear of losing one's vocabulary. Helplessness in the face of contingency remains, therefore, albeit in different ways, a topic central to both Nussbaum and Rorty, and the fear resulting from it is a major factor in highly polarized, conflictive, and emotional political debates. Similarly to Honneth, Nussbaum identifies early childhood helplessness as an experience of paramount importance (Nussbaum 2018), and the fear resulting from this helplessness interacts vividly with anger and disgust, as "fear infuses disgust's aversion to mortality and embodiment, producing strategies that exclude and subordinate" (Nussbaum 2018). Many strategies that, if considered from the point of view of chapters 2 and 3, can be seen as harmful redescriptions, seen from this angle appear as the result of not facing or not dealing with these fears in an appropriate manner, but rather choosing the seemingly simpler strategy of blaming others, and differentiating "them" from a constructed "we": "If 'we' can somehow keep 'them' out (build a wall) or keep them in 'their place' (in subservient positions), 'we' can regain our pride and, for men, their masculinity. Fear leads, then, to aggressive 'othering' strategies rather than to useful analysis" (Nussbaum 2018). Such othering, and the helplessness connected to it, becomes clear in the populist strategy of presenting oneself as the "right people" (Urbinati 2019), such as in explicitly differentiating "them" from "us,", e.g., in a statement by Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán regarding LGBT rights:

> Hungary is a tolerant nation. Tolerance, however, does not mean that we would apply the same rules for people whose lifestyle is different from our own. We differentiate between them and us. Tolerance means patience, tolerance means an ability to coexist, this is the basis of the Hungarian Constitution which clearly differentiates between a material relationship between a man and a woman and other, different forms of cohabitation. We are going to keep this. (van Schijndel 2018)

Not only does Orbán clarify that the people he talks about are "different," but he also clearly refers to the rest of the Hungarian population as the "constructed we" Nussbaum describes. For her, othering strategies and attitudes such as racism are the counterpoint of literary imagination, as they impede any form of empathy and real personal relationships. Racism "defeats literary judging," which, in turn, would be the hope for having a partnership, a real personal relationship (Nussbaum 1995: 95). Faith in these relationships, though, is exactly

what is needed for a well-functioning democratic society (Nussbaum 2018). "To see white people not as a looming mountain of hatred but as people—that is the beginning of hope" (Nussbaum 1995: 96). Hope and imagination, then, can be construed as counterpoints to constantly looming tendencies of redescription and polarization in a similar way that liberal irony and the consciousness of the contingency of one's beliefs can counteract redescription in Rorty. While Rorty's strong poet struggles against other people's redescriptions of who they are, and the ironist liberal is supposed to sidestep such redescriptions with an ironic smile, Nussbaum sees hope and imagination as potential forces that can lead out of such ascriptions and their hurtful implications. Their primary place to be nurtured and flourish is in personal relationships. Avoiding redescription, then, means making literary judging possible, a way of seeing the world differently. Referring to Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man,* similarly to Honneth in *Invisibility*, Nussbaum illustrates how white Americans' "inner eye," their imagination, fails to see people of colour and their reality (Nussbaum 2012: 140). Democratic hope, then, needs imagination, and needs the refutation of ongoing redescription of others. In this, it also needs irony, stressing the transient character of all descriptions we may make for ourselves of other people. Precisely this transient character is what Orbán openly denies, referring to the constitution as well as clearly stating that nothing is going to change in his politics in this regard. His differentiation between "us" and "them" quite openly relies on picturing the Hungarian constitution as unchangeable and the descriptions of who both parties are supposed to be as stable. Democratic hope, though, can only stay alive within an ideal of perceptive equilibrium and fancy, which the next subchapter is going to talk about. In such a state of fancy, Orbán's talk about a clearly defined, stable "them" simply stops making sense.

From Nussbaum's point of view, though, it remains important to stress that apparent weaknesses such as fear can be productive for a functioning democracy. Knowing our weaknesses "makes us sociable and turns us to humanity; thus, our very inadequacy can become the basis of our hope of a decent community" (Nussbaum 2010: 34). This point can be put as follows: Acknowledging weaknesses such as fear of contingency seems to be a more productive and positive way of dealing with it than transforming such fear into redescriptions of others, or fierce defenses of our redescriptions of the world as necessarily true or unchangeable. Such redescriptions aim at exactly the control in life that Nussbaum

deems impossible and undesirable. Overall, relationships and communication seem to fulfil a similar role in Nussbaum as they do in Rorty: functioning as the space in which contingency, and fear thereof, can be constructively dealt with.

How it is dealt with there, then, influences whether such fear will lead to increased polarization and impasses in political communication, or can, as Nussbaum hopes, serve as a catalyst of better dialogue. The way in which polarization, redescription, and fear of contingency have been problematized with Rorty so far meets Nussbaum's approach at this point, as the task of cultivating emotions mentioned in the previous section is not merely an individual task for healthy personal development. Rather, Nussbaum calls for a "public cultivation of emotion" (Nussbaum 2013: 3). For such cultivation, the reading of novels, among other things, is seen as a helpful and important exercise.

## 5.4. Fancy and perceptive equilibrium: Literature and poetic-moral judgement

Based on the existence of an analogy between moral and creative imagination, Nussbaum proposes that certain novels can be read as works of moral philosophy (Nussbaum 1990a: 148). Life itself can be understood as a work of art, the moral task of living a good life as the attempt to "make a fine artistic creation" (Nussbaum 1990a: 163). At this point, the parallel to the lifelong task of the strong poet in Rorty seems apparent. Living and creating, going through one's life and telling a good story, creating a fine work of art, can be understood as the same task. This becomes apparent in Shusterman, who stresses that "effective self-knowledge requires some form of mindful literary practice and even, preferably, a form of writing" (Shusterman 2010: 11). To live a life implies to tell oneself its story.

Compared to Rorty, Nussbaum takes this idea a step further by discussing the implications of an ethics of imagination for our interaction with others. While Rorty is very much concerned with the individual on their own, with the strong poet and the challenge of facing the contingency of their life story, Nussbaum is more interested in the implications the idea of a literary life, the idea of life as a narration, has for interaction, dialogue, and our ways of treating others. Both authors, though, stress the relevance of imagination for the

establishment of a strong democratic system, and discuss the importance of how the world is described, and redescribed, for the possibility of political change.

## 5.4.1. Perceptive Equilibrium as a moral ideal

Throughout her work, Martha Nussbaum has discussed the role of emotions in public and political life, and the tendency of many theories of ethics and politics to rule emotions out, to look at them rather conspicuously. As she stresses, emotions, though, are necessary for moral judgement, helping solve the problem of careful moral reflection being caught between the particular and the universal (Nussbaum 1990b: 182). While the focus on generalized norms for moral evaluation tends to make us lose sight of the individuals affected, too narrow a focus on them and their particular motivations and life situations makes judgement equally difficult. In having to navigate these two perspectives, "bewilderment and hesitation may actually be marks of fine attention" (Nussbaum 1990b: 182).

To connect this to authors discussed earlier, it is important to see the similarity here between hesitation and contingency. The hesitation to validate one's perception of a situation, or of other people within this situation, as the one and only description of what is going on – in a dialogue, a political debate, a fight with one's partner – means to be weary of the danger of redescription, the tendency to evaluate and describe situations, other people, or their positions, in one's own vocabulary, without acknowledging that vocabulary's contingency. Thinking back, for example, of the dialogue between Hannah Arendt and Gershom Sholem, one can see how this idea of imagination helps understand the pitfall Sholem fell into. From the perspective of the redescription problematic laid out in chapter 3, Sholem redescribed Arendt as representing "the Jews." From a perspective of perceptive equilibrium, then, Sholem failed to mobilize the necessary imaginative resources to give Arendt what one might call the benefit of the doubt. He failed to consider exactly the possibility that Arendt stressed in her answer to his criticism: that she did not want to speak for anyone beyond herself, that representing "the Jews" just was not on her agenda when writing about Adolf Eichmann, and Sholem's criticism seemed to presume that it was. From this perspective, the problematic of

redescribing others does not primarily lie in a failure to feel compassion towards them and their situation, but rather, more fundamentally, in a failure to even imagine what this situation might be like in order to be able to sympathize with it. Imagination and compassion are intertwined. If not based in a sincere effort towards understanding, compassion, even if motivated by the best intentions, might easily seem belittling rather than an acknowledgement of another person's suffering or emotions. Pity for the sake of pity alone often does not make us feel any better and may even tempt us to fall into redescriptive practices (think of the ambiguity of a phrase like "poor girl"). If not accompanied by an actual understanding for the other person, such shortcomings resemble what Miranda Fricker has called hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2010).

Rather, from the perspective Nussbaum gives us on this matter, it becomes clear how intimately compassion and solidarity are connected to imagination. This does not mean that in order to feel compassion we must be able to precisely imagine another person's situation. Very often, this may well be impossible. Rather, it means that sympathizing with them implies some effort to imagine their situation and put ourselves in their shoes, whether adequately or inadequately. This is less to understand precisely what their situation is, but rather to avoid redescribing this situation all too quickly from our own, limited perspective. There is a hermeneutic, interpretive failure to be avoided here that can lead to hurting others rather than helping them. Emotions can be hermeneutic resources that help to better understand other people's situation and avoid the pity pitfall. They are helpful in the effort to give our conversation with that person the "open-endedness" Rorty calls for. The more one tries to imagine different pictures of the other person's situation, the less one risks grounding one's arguments in inadequate, and hurtful, redescriptions of it. Imagining the other's situation, then, is less a question of getting it "right" than trying "to think up interesting alternatives to one's present beliefs" (Rorty 1999a: 34). Interestingly enough, it is this parallel to Nussbaum that Rorty seems to underestimate when suspecting that while "the intertwined compliments of 'successful truth-seeking,' 'cognitive achievement,' and 'faithful representation of reality' seem to me the vestiges of an outdated philosophical tradition, whereas to Nussbaum they seem the obvious and natural way to appreciate a novelist's achievement" (Rorty 2001: 260).

The assessment Rorty presents here is rather unfortunate, and it seems to overlook rather than to highlight the productive parallels between the two with regard to the moral importance of novels and imagination. As Nussbaum remarks, such imagination, and the moral potential of art in general, does not imply depicting something as precisely as possible. Rather, "the keen sight of the writer and reader of life is in a standing tension with the 'sight' of passion" (Nussbaum 1990b: 187). Descriptions, if trying to resolve that tension, risk losing the intimacy of interpersonal relationships and keeping the subject from clearly perceiving the moral side of a situation (Nussbaum 1990b: 189). The theoretical or logical resources participants might try to use to solve a particular problem, then, risk rendering them "inattentive to the concrete responses of emotion and imagination" (Nussbaum 1990c: 81) and unable to adequately perceive the situation. This marks the difference between an actress improvising within a specific situation, relying on interaction and acting off her colleague's responses, and her merely reading from a script (Nussbaum 1990c: 93). It is similar to the ability Stephen Fesmire is alluding to when, as was mentioned in the last chapter, likening dialogue to a jazz improvisation (Fesmire 2003). Avoiding redescription, then, doing justice to one's interaction partner, requires accepting dialogue with them as an evolving situation in which we are required to keep the interaction going off our interlocutor's rejoinders rather than talking to each other in different, merely independent, monologues. "Keeping the conversation going does not mean keeping collection of *monologues* going, where we are talking past one another, sometimes in clouds of self-certainty, sanctimony, and censoriousness" (McClean 2022). Neither does it mean to deny the positionality of different participants (e.g., in positions of power or wealth), but rather to not let the knowledge of those positions keep us from responding to the other person's statements rather than merely to our redescription of them.

Imagination, on the other hand, is construed as similar to Honneth's recognition. As was mentioned before, just as Nussbaum uses the example of Ellison to show how white Americans, through lack of imagination, fail to see non-white people and their reality (Nussbaum 2010: 107), Honneth exemplifies his idea of invisibility by referring to the same novel. Lack of recognition can indeed be understood as a lack in imagination for the situation of people different from us, an imagination akin to what Rorty asks for when asking for human solidarity, containing the ability to understand the other as evolving, as, with

Shusterman, an ongoing, developing narration. To stop the dialogical process and claim to know what the other "is", rather than to allow for them to be "something yet-to be," as Bakhtin put it (Bakhtin 1990: 123), means to stop imagining, means trying to find a stable, unchanging description of the other to rely on.  The individual's value to themselves, their self-worth, is placed "in the future, the future governed by meaning" (Bakhtin 1990: 123). Stopping the other in becoming what they are yet to be, denying them that future, means to deny them their only way of finding and understanding themselves.

The alternative to this is an attitude of fancy that lets people keep imagining, keep creating possibilities of making sense of what the other says, without setting one of those images as final. The following chapter will look more closely into this concept of moral imagination.

5.4.2. Fancy as a moral attitude in Nussbaum and its connection to novels

To Nussbaum, just as to Rorty, novels and literature are central parts of her thinking about moral theory. And, similarly to Rorty, she refers to Whitman and Dickens as having put forward the idea that a just society needs, among other things, fancy to flourish, "including its playfulness, including its eroticism" (Nussbaum 1995: 43). Fancy, at this point, is moral imagination, "the ability to see one thing as another. We might therefore also call it the metaphorical imagination" (Nussbaum 1995: 36). It is, then, not far from Rorty's idea of the poet finding new descriptions and new vocabularies, describing an ability to see known things in a different light, to make sense of them in a new way. Fancy, though, does not rely on this metaphorical power alone. Rather, it is deeply connected to pleasure. Novels have the ability, for Nussbaum, to arouse compassion for their characters or kindle moral feelings and intuitions towards the situations displayed, exactly because they bring pleasure. "A tedious novel would not have had the same moral power" (Nussbaum 1995: 35). Aesthetic quality and enjoyment on the one hand and moral power on the other are related.

This aesthetic quality also plays a role in the novel's ability to make the already known seem new. Novels can show that which is known and common, but nevertheless often uncomfortable and "object of […] emotional refusal" (Nussbaum 1995: 10). To be morally

meaningful, then, these strange or uncomfortable things must be shown by the novel in a way that arouses some form of emotional response. Sympathetic imagining counteracts prejudice, which often "cannot survive the individualized knowledge of a member or members" of the group it is directed towards (Nussbaum 1995: 92). The disgust that prejudice may make individuals feel can be countered with alternative ideas and images of what another person's life may look like. Sympathetic imagining, one could conclude from this, is aimed in the opposite direction of a redescription of the other. Redescribing and reifying someone, in the way described in chapters 2 and 3, rather avoids having to deal with any unforeseen emotional reaction towards that person, their situation, or their arguments. It avoids intimacy (Nussbaum 1990b: 189).

Literature, with its ability to make us sympathetically imagine others' lives, can counteract this tendency of avoiding intimacy, as it "places us in a moral position that is favourable for perception, and it shows us what it would be like to take up that position in life. We find here love without possessiveness, attention without bias, involvement without panic" (Nussbaum 1990a: 162). To take up a thought from the ending of chapter 2, this seems rather close to having a positive relationship towards someone. Fancy, as a way of speaking, "even when it speaks about its adversaries, […] cannot long restrain itself from treating them as partners in a game of words, in which delight is taken for its own sake" (Nussbaum 1995: 40). This last citation already shows an important shift in perspective once one starts thinking about dialogue and discussion in this manner: the shift from looking at the way we treat our interaction partners towards looking at dialogue, at our interactions as a whole. As in Rorty, then, discourse itself can be seen as a creation, an ongoing inventive enterprise. In this, compassion, often fostered through reading and literature, is not an additional skill for better judgement, but a necessity. Ethics, to Nussbaum, seems to be a rather futile endeavour without people being able to put themselves into the shoes even of distant others (Nussbaum 1995: xvi). Both Rorty and Nussbaum, then, rely on imagination and creativity alongside compassion. Compassion only works if equipped with imagination. The following section will give a first perspective on what the criteria for arguments and discourse contributions might be for looking at discourse in this way.

5.4.3. Fine awareness, rich responsibility, benign imagination: Incompleteness and the poet as judge in Rorty and Nussbaum

Both Rorty and Nussbaum refer to Walt Whitman as a literary inspiration and background to their ideas of democracy and political change, taking from his writings "that the ability to imagine vividly, and then to assess judicially, another person's pain, to participate in it and then to ask about its significance, is a powerful way of learning what the human facts are and of acquiring a motivation to alter them" (Nussbaum 1995: 91).

In Rortyan vocabulary, one might say the will for political change requires solidarity. It requires compassion for other people's pain. It requires, in Nussbaum's words, fancy, a moral imagination that puts connection with others before the mere correct description of facts. The ability to put oneself in someone else's shoes is central to any moral evaluation at this point. Literature plays a central role in this for Nussbaum, who takes imagination as the central ability reading novels can foster in people, including training a "willingness to be incomplete" (Nussbaum 1990b: 180), and thereby dependent on others. She shares this dependency as an important part of interpersonal relationships with Honneth. In addition, literature matters immensely to Rorty, who hopes that novels make readers "less cruel" (Rorty 1993: 141), and thereby more capable of positive relationships with others, fostering ongoing conversation. A conversation which, in turn, always remains incomplete, a conversation that does not aim at finalization, and definite truth or results that could end it, but rather at its own prolongation, at an ongoing relationship.

The notion of incompleteness deserves some further consideration at this point, as it links Nussbaum's writing to what was said about Bakhtin and Dostoevsky in the previous chapter, to the notion, stressed by Nikulin, that human beings are, necessarily, unfinalizable. The dialogue between Bakhtin, Nikulin, and Nussbaum can problematize an ambiguity of this openness, this impossibility to fully grasp another person, not unlike the way in which Rorty's and Honneth's work problematized the ambiguity of redescription in chapters 2 and 3. Unfinalizability does not imply that there are no final decisions that humans make or clearly defined projects they tackle. It merely means that the sum of all these projects and decisions can never be summarized in a description that would not leave room for change, or

something desired to be said. Finalizing another person through redescription, then, is not about giving final descriptions of things past or done; nor is it about being correct in one's descriptions of others. The point of unfinalizability is not in pointing out the fallibility of such descriptions. Rather, it is about reassessing the role of descriptions. It is about using the descriptions we make of others as a tool directed towards the present and future, rather than as (fallible) final descriptions. As an example, imagine a convict coming back into their hometown after serving jailtime and their neighbour aggressively telling them, "I know what kind of person you are." The hurtfulness of that remark lies just as much (maybe more) in the claim to know what that person is (going to be) like now (despite not having met them in years) as in pointing out that they made mistakes in the past. To see them in a certain light as a personal tool (say, to remind oneself that one would like to keep some distance to them in the future) is one thing; to make one's own description of them from a tool into a finalization of them is another.

Both Rorty and Nussbaum refer to the idea of the poet as judge, referring to Walt Whitman. Judging requires, first and foremost, a specific kind of emotion. A fair judge, to Nussbaum, is not emotionless, but rather cultivates the right kind of emotions towards the situation at hand: "Her emotions should be those of the judicious spectator, not personal emotions bearing on her own profit or loss in the case at hand, or any other personal taste or goal that is grounded in her own situation rather than the situation of which she is the spectator" (Nussbaum 1995: 90). The judge's literary imagination, her trained ability to put herself in other people's shoes, even if she only knows them from a story or mostly through the facts put before her in documents, is central to her ability to judge fairly. The awareness of individuality is central to this fairness. Even though judges can never "investigate the life story of every citizen" (Nussbaum 1995: 44), they can be aware of the complexities in people's lives, and they can "acknowledge the separateness, freedom, and qualitative difference of each in the manner of the novel" (Nussbaum 1995: 44). It is this attitude that refrains from seeing individuals, as Whitman put it in "By blue Ontario's shore," merely as "dreams or dots" (Whitman 2004), and thereby from eliminating such individuality. It is, after all, refraining from redescribing. It is, to Nussbaum, an attitude that counteracts a tendency of some economic theories (as well as politics) to subsume all descriptions of the world under their utilitarian paradigm (Nussbaum 1995: 13f.). Referring to Charles Dickens'

sarcastic description of such a utilitarian, merely economic worldview in *Hard Times*, she establishes her idea of literary imagination as a force to counteract that worldview. Seeing other human beings as more than dreams or dots, but rather as infinitudes, makes the poet, in Henry James' words, the "seer and speaker under the descent of the god" (James 2011: 341, cit. in Rosenberg Nutters 2015: 109). In James and Nussbaum, then, both a novelist and a philosopher or theorist express "a sense of what life is and what has value" (Nussbaum 1990d: 6), just as the poet's vocabulary, his lading list, in Larkin and Rorty, expresses what was "possible and important" in their lives (Rorty 1993: 23). They do so, though, leaving room for imagination, since that imagination is needed for individuals to develop compassion for their fellow humans. Again, the point of writing and describing is not the accurate and complete depiction of a situation. Rather, adequate perception of that situation leaves room for imagination to foster the compassion, the emotional relationship, needed for fair moral judgement.

A sense of imagination for other people's suffering paired up with a sense of what is possible and important are then the traits of a poetic, literary judge. Such a judge looks for possibilities of transforming a situation into something positive, a judgement that is fair, but nevertheless looks not simply for what is, but what might be, treating others as potentialities rather than finalized factors of their own judgement. That is the kind of judge both Nussbaum and Rorty seem to be looking for. Their judgement would be creative in the sense just described, in the sense that the solutions for problems discussed would not necessarily lie in the arguments already presented, merely following from them in what Nikulin might call a dialectical manner. Rather, such solutions (or, one might say: good arguments) would lie within the dialogical situation and the possibilities it offers. If the goal of a discussion ceases to be, with Rorty, about deciding who found the better, more accurate, description of how the world is, and instead would be about how best to reinvent and imagine that world, new, different criteria might emerge of what a good argument is. This chapter will conclude with a preliminary attempt to formulate such criteria, to be refined in the next one.

5.5. Conclusion: Dialogically creative argument: From injustices to potentialities

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that Martha Nussbaum's work provides an important way of looking at emotions as a central, and necessary, element of political discourse, rather than as a detraction from rational political thought. Chapter 2 already made a similar point about the emotional aspect of citizens seeking recognition. Nussbaum's depiction of humans as, first and foremost, emotionally needy beings fits well into what has been discussed in the previous chapters concerning the inescapability of dialogue and the ways in which humans depend on positive relationships with others. Furthermore, the concept of perceptive equilibrium shows how such emotions are necessary for moral judgement, as they enable us to perceive the situations to be judged in an adequate way. The concept of fancy can serve as a positive way of looking at the problematic of redescription discussed in chapter 3, as well as the difficulties of letting others be (and become) themselves throughout dialogue, discussed in chapter 4.

Fancy, a benignly imaginative attitude towards others one is in dialogue with and towards the dialogical situation itself, looking for possibilities of understanding and dialogue that may not yet be there, can be distilled from Nussbaum's writings as a moral ideal, which fits well with Rorty's notion that redescriptions of others are cruel and should be avoided. Imagination can then be seen "as the result of human cooperation, a social and collective achievement" (Rey 2022) without ever coming to any end that could be achieved, but rather enlarging the realm of the possible (Rey 2022).

In chapter 3, I tried to refine this Rortyan notion in the sense that redescriptions are unjust to others and are harmful if they form the base of further argument; when seeing others "as X" is taken as firm ground for a follow-up argument to rely on. The second goal of this dissertation was to show that, when starting out from the dialogical approach in Bakhtin's and Nikulin's writing, it becomes possible to understand arguments and their goals in a different way. In this understanding of what it means to argue with each other, the goal of argument lies less in proving the other wrong, or finding gaps in their argument, but rather in producing something new, in finding new ways of talking about issues and increasing the ability of dealing with them. Monological arguments lose meaning, and are replaced in the

following, by the idea of dialogue as a creative construction. That construction's holistic character, its irreducibility to its single parts, as Nikulin stresses, makes arguing with others a shared, partly creative effort. In such an effort, solutions and answers are less deducted, but rather invented and constructed. It is a process that is not only creative in the sense that solutions and answers cannot always be deduced out of pre-existing knowledge through mere dialectical reasoning; rather, it must be, if not cooperative in the strict sense, fanciful and imaginative. Both the challenge of creating new ideas and new possibilities for dialogue and the problematic of keeping democratic society emotionally accessible to citizens are part of fostering non-redescriptive, dialogical political discourse. They are connected because many forms of finalizing dialogue, which close it off against such new possibilities, also risk falling into redescriptive forms of argument.

The argument developed in chapters 2 and 3 has now been expanded in chapters 4 and 5. While it began with the injustice of discourse participants redescribing others, and participants aiming at avoiding being redescribed, the argument here is rather about a view of all interaction partners and the dialogue between them. Even more so, it is less about single participants than about what the participation itself, the dialogue, can be about: benignly and compassionately imagining new possibilities for what we could be, and what society might look like. Chapter 6 will make some suggestions for how to think about and evaluate arguments along these lines.

## 6. Infinitudes in dialogue: Metaphorical interpretation and the multitudinous subject

So far it has been argued that political discourse, and political protest with it, can be, at least in large part, understood as a constant intent of individuals to avoid being redescribed and thereby to preserve, with Honneth, their freedom. Redescription, on the other hand, can be seen as something participants perceive as a constant, latent danger to that freedom and their own self-conception. In addition, redescribing others can be deemed an injustice towards them, specifically in cases in which arguments within political discussion are based on such redescriptions (seeing them "as X"). Such redescriptions deny the subject recognition, the need for which was named as a driving force behind participation in political discourse (see chapter 2).

Furthermore, in chapter 4, it was shown how the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Dmitri Nikulin can provide a starting point for understanding arguments and their goals in a new way. In this understanding of what it means to discuss with each other, the object of argument lies in producing a new, common idea or an interesting conversation rather than in proving the other wrong, finding gaps in their argument, or providing a flawless dialectical chain of thoughts leading from accepted premises towards one's opinion. This shows an additional dimension of the problem of redescription and recognition in political discourse. Rather than merely avoiding redescription, the participants can aim to come to a point in dialogue in which this dialogue itself is seen as a worthwhile project, rather than the defense or refutation of single opinions. Rather than proving each other wrong, the dialogue between participants becomes the key focus of discourse. This is in unison with Richard Rorty's emphasis on the need to continue conversations rather than to seek their resolution by reaching so-called truths. The work of Martha Nussbaum was used in chapter 5 to show that her idea of fancy, the search for possibilities of thought and dialogue that may yet be developing rather than being already fully there, can be connected to Nikulin's and Bakhtin's idea of the unfinalizability of both dialogue and the subject. Furthermore, it connects well to Rorty's idea of metaphors, changing the vocabulary and the possibilities of expression that language provides rather than

merely changing relationships between such expressions. In addition to the problematic of redescription, then, political argument and dialogue face the constant possibility of new expressions and new ways of speaking emerging in order to cope with new problems.

6.1. Introduction

These previous arguments now lead to several questions which should be addressed for this approach towards political discourse stressing dialogical, creative argument and the avoidance of redescription. Maybe most obviously: what precisely makes an argument fanciful and imaginative as opposed to redescriptive?

A second array of questions, especially thinking back on Bakhtin's and Nikulin's idea of dialogue as a common product of more than one speaker, concerns the relationship between non-redescriptiveness and cooperativeness: how far does the former presuppose the latter between the participants? What distinguishes the non-redescriptiveness of speech and arguments I propose here from a strong idea of cooperativeness in approaches such as the one of Jürgen Habermas? Is there a way of being non-redescriptive without being cooperative in any way? Is cooperativeness simply replaced by non-redescriptiveness?

The chapter will discuss this by connecting Axel Honneth's concept of freedom to the idea of *continuously evolving* developed with Shusterman earlier. The idea of self-realization in relationships derived from that will then lead to Walt Whitman and his propagation of the multitudinous subject and to what I will tentatively propose as a duty of metaphorical interpretation. Here I will argue that earlier ideals of cooperativeness embedded in normative theories of political discourse, such as Habermasian Discourse Ethics, should be replaced by a weaker alternative which, in the words of Richard Rorty, I will call the requirement of "not turning away" (see Rorty 1998a: 13). Such a requirement resonates with Martha Nussbaum's idea of poetic judgement and a "literary attitude" (Nussbaum 1995: 92) towards ethics.

While strongly connected to emotions, both as a problem of politics and as a problem of interpersonal relationships and communication, the goal here is not to make any statements about the qualities of specific emotions or their desirability for dialogue and democracy, e.g., which kinds of emotions are "better" or more or less desirable for the democratic process.

Rather, as will become clear throughout the chapter, emotions themselves play a role in this in so far as their importance for and their role in dialogue is acknowledged, and dealing with them within political discourse is problematized as a challenge for democratic societies as well as individuals.

6.2. The truth will not set you free: On the primacy of being seen over truth

The argument I am about to make is based on my redescription of what participants can be seen as doing in political discourse provided in the beginning by invoking Rorty's idea of the primacy of democracy over truth (Rorty 1998b). Political problematics of, e.g., climate change denial or heated debates about measures against COVID-19, such as vaccines, are good examples to show that "the truth does not make us free" (Koopman 2006: 108), that it does not necessarily remedy, or even clarify, political conflict. Rather, as chapter 2 argued, engaging in political conflicts can partly be understood as a struggle to be seen as who one believes one is, and being certain to "have the facts on one's side" may not turn out to be as useful as one had hoped. I will then argue that Rorty's discussion of metaphor as the "growing point of language," presented in the following section, can guide the evaluation of arguments in so far as it helps incorporate the idea of (not) seeing others *as X* presented in the first part of the dissertation into the dialogical, poetic approach discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

6.2.1. The priority of freedom to philosophy: Honneth's concept of freedom, democracy's priority in Rorty, and *continuously evolving*

Rorty's description of metaphors as "growing points of language" (Rorty 1991a: 13) is important as a starting point for this section and can be understood as an immediate consequence of different ways that beliefs change in his account. In differentiating three different ways in which beliefs can be changed—inference, perception, and metaphor (Rorty 1991a: 14)—Rorty also differentiates ways of understanding the relationship between beliefs

about the world and the language they are expressed in. By changing beliefs through inference or perception, we simply change our assumptions about things being true or false; we "alter the truth-value of sentences, but not our repertoire of sentences" (Rorty 1991a: 14). Rather than changing our relationship towards the world we inhabit, such change merely shifts the relationship between our previously held beliefs. As Rorty explains, if we see a friend of ours commit a murder, this perception will lead to us having to change our beliefs about that friend. The same is true in case of inference, if we conclude from what we already know that our friend must have committed that murder (Rorty 1991a: 14). Metaphors, on the other hand the possibilities of what can be expressed and make language grow.

Language is given a chance for such growth precisely in cases in which expressions in discourse are understood metaphorically, in the sense that they are seen as a coping mechanism of the subject with their surroundings rather than as a description of anything, a way of self-expression that speaks about relations, not the world outside of such relations. Metaphorical language aims at expressing something that has not been expressed before. An example of this can be seen in Miranda Fricker's discussion of lacunae regarding, e.g., the experience of sexual misconduct (Fricker 2010: 150). Metaphors, then, are points at which language grows into a space that it does not have words for yet. They are tools speakers create to express new problematics and formerly unknown emotions. In this sense, metaphors are points in language at which the "left-wing Kuhnianism" Rorty proposes (Rorty 1998d: 38) localizes the Kuhnian paradigm shift. Rorty "translates the Kuhnian account of progress from the scientific realm to the social realm" (Dieleman 2010: 901) and thus makes metaphors a major challenge to established discourse practices. Specifically, they pose a challenge to what was discussed before as the dialectical approach to argument, since the latter cannot prepare for them. They open up possibilities for conversations and discussions to develop in unexpected ways and unforeseen directions.

Simultaneously, this opens up chances for more productive communication since it amplifies the possibilities of understanding utterances. As was discussed in the previous part, a phrase such as "old, white man" can be understood not merely as the description of a non-linguistic world, meaning a description of people, but also as a coping mechanism of some speakers to deal with the world they inhabit. In this perspective, talking about "old, white men" or "woke

brigades" does not primarily mean to describe a certain (type of) human being. It means to cope with a social phenomenon and the challenges it poses and can be understood by others as a tool for that.

If understood merely in a descriptive sense, though, metaphors between life and death, as described in chapter 5, can become blockades in dialogue. Taking such redescriptions as the basis of one's arguments is one case of such a blockade that is specifically unjust towards the described, as argued in chapter 3. This blocking, counterproductive character, then, is not only due to the hurtful effect such redescriptions can have, simply reducing participants' motivation to have a productive discussion, but also because, within a Rortyan framework, such redescriptions counteract the idea we ourselves have of living our lives. Taking into account that, following Rorty, we "raise questions about our individual or national identity as part of the process of deciding what we will do next, what we will try to become" (Rorty 1998a: 11), it becomes clear that, by stopping the other in that process of evolving, their way of thinking about their identity and of living and understanding their lives gets inhibited. If being something means the same as trying to become something, being forced into a specific, static redescription means to be kept from being. It means, as Rorty puts it, that "one will not really have had an I at all" (Rorty 1993: 24). Shusterman stresses how for Rorty, as well as Dewey, "self-realization is the highest value for liberal democracy," a self-realization that in Rorty's case is, importantly, "distinctively individual and aesthetic," a question of how to deal with being alone (Shusterman 1994: 397). Being oneself, then, is, similarly to Honneth, deeply linked to avoiding being stopped in one's process of evolving, but also to relationships with others. Just as we do not want to be finalized through the descriptions of others, self-realization needs a moment of indeterminateness, something left unknown. A fully known self would be one whose meaning was finite and fixed, instead of future-oriented and unfinalizable.

Similarly to the self in Shusterman discussed before, dialogue, and the self with it, keeps growing into previously unknown forms. At this point, the Rortyan discussion of metaphors can serve as another way of expressing the difference between dialectics and dialogue in Nikulin. Dialogue is "open-ended" in that the metaphorical language in it gives expression to previously inexpressible issues. The story of expressing these issues is never fully told and

is not finalizable through another person's voice. Others can never be fully explained, they always remain unpredictable, and only in remaining incomplete and independent can a person be considered free (Nikulin 1998: 386). To be free means to be independent of the definitions of others, means to keep evolving. Yet such freedom is possible only in relationships shaped by recognition, since only those relationships let the individual become a full self (Honneth 1996: 173) and have a chance to maintain their "I". Only in those relationships do individuals get a chance to remain unfinalized.

Here, the distinction between public and private, already discussed in the first part, is, again, a decisive obstacle for the potential of Rorty's approach, since calling self-realization the task of doing something with one's aloneness (Rorty 2008: 13) fits perfectly with Honneth's theory of recognition if one refrains from restricting it to a strictly private sphere. Not unlike the lonely Underground Man in Dostoevsky, whether in appreciation or in disdain, the individual needs the relationship to another *I* in order to become oneself and to keep evolving. It is not only a prerequisite of becoming a full self, but also of not being made into something else, of being free. There is no self-realization, nor freedom, then, without the potential that relationships with other people provide the individual with. The relationship is what is needed to be able to both become oneself, be free, and be respected, i.e., not to be redescribed and made into something one is not). Without such positive relationships, the process of continuously evolving discussed earlier comes to a halt.

Becoming oneself, then, is not to imply any final product of that process, but its endless, open character: its unfinalizability. To become oneself is to constantly keep evolving, to keep becoming. Rather than implying any clearly defined process towards a final result, being one(unfinalizable)self means that the answer an individual finds for themselves as to who or what they are is nothing but a tool to keep doing just that: to keep evolving. Rather than striving for timeless truths about the world or the nature of (one)self or others, to be oneself means to come to terms with such truths being forever unattainable. Therefore, to be oneself is not a task that you "get right" or "get wrong," but one that simply never gets to a finalized point at which such "getting right" could be assessed.

This view of being oneself yields a new perspective if applied to political discourse and participation. The participants' goal to avoid being redescribed may seem like a purely

negative goal at first sight. After all, there is no goal to be attained in the other direction. At a closer look, though, it is much more than that. To avoid the pain of being redescribed is, at the same time, to preserve one's chance to keep evolving. Connecting back to the discussion of Honneth in chapters 2 and 3, it is possible to say: to try to avoid being redescribed is a form of trying to maintain one's freedom. To be kept from evolving is to be denied that freedom. Conversely, as it was stressed that redescribing others leads us to talk to the redescriptions we produce of them rather than to them, to try to avoid redescribing others also means to give oneself the chance to get to know those continuously evolving others, and therefore the chance to widen the epistemic possibilities of the debate. Such an approach towards discussing widens that very discussion's range of possible outcomes, and therefore bears more chances for fruitful communication, as well as positive results, for all participants.

6.2.2. "Containing Multitudes": Walt Whitman and the postmodern aestheticist self

From this, just as chapters 2 and 3 clarified the injustice of basing one's own arguments on redescriptions of others "as X," the recipient of such redescriptions is asked not to dismiss all kinds of redescriptions instantly. Rather, there is a duty on the side of the recipient to try to understand such redescriptions as metaphors providing coping mechanisms such as the ones described above. Other participants' statements should be understood with the hypothesis in mind that they are instruments to solve problems, not descriptions of the world or of ourselves. This is consistent with the first part arguing against basing arguments on redescriptions in so far as, following Rorty, metaphors are, precisely, not arguments, but rather "utterly unfamiliar noise" (Rorty 1998e: 167). If either side tries to make them into such arguments, dialogue reaches an impasse, and further redescription is likely to follow. Language, to stay within the Rortyan conception, is prevented from growing. It is restricted from expressing critical issues that speakers feel the need to express. Understanding language as constantly evolving and dialogue as a constant assessment and reassessment of linguistic tools to express or solve problems requires participants to take this transient character of language into account.

Consistent with the idea of "continuously evolving" in the last section, as well as with this criterion on the side of the recipient, is Walt Whitman's idea of the subject "containing multitudes." Whitman is a prominent figure in the writings of both Rorty and Nussbaum, stressing, e.g., the importance of attentiveness and empathy for a democratic culture (Kateb 2011: 37). His work also fits well with Bakhtinian dialogism in so far as considerable parts of it evolve around the importance of the individual's connectedness and "responsiveness" towards others (Kateb 2011: 21). To treat others responsively is to be "hospitable" to them (Kateb 2011: 20) and to seek a democratic "way [...] of being connected to others" (Kateb 2011: 20). Democracy is deeply connected to the kinds of relationships individuals (seek to) have with each other. Living responsively, treating others hospitably and searching for responsive interactions and relationships is, then, part of living democratically (Kateb 2011: 32), and such connectedness relies on the other being given the possibility to keep evolving, rather than being finalized. This is also compatible with Rorty's idea of redemption (from egotism) centering "on human relationships and not religion or philosophy" (Llanera 2017: 105). To be a democratic subject, in short, is to live responsively and receptively towards others and to seek a dialogical relationship with them; democratic action is a poetic activity (Frank 2007: 415), based on both the political insight that such dialogical relationships further democratic debate as well as on the moral idea that seeking relationships of recognition with others is a moral requirement.

Within this dialogical relationship, then, normative discourse always becomes a discussion with another person, an action within a relationship towards that other. Questions of what to do become questions of how to "act toward this other 'I'" (Nielsen 2000: 145), and therefore questions of how to act in a way that does not finalize that "*I*." The requirement of recognition, the task of taking the other on their own terms, becomes the task to refrain from treating the other as a finalized entity, and rather as an internally plural infinity, a multiplicity of internal vocabularies that are "a necessary condition for ironic self-creation" (Dempster 2016: 642). It asks the subject to accept the other's (and their own) self's inaccessibility (Bauerlein 1987: 147). Possible disagreements about the nature of the self, then, simply do not have to matter to citizens (Rorty 1998b: 182). Therefore, the problematic of me getting redescribed is not whether the redescription someone offers of me is "correct," or whether I find it adequate. Rather, the action of redescribing the other and grounding further arguments

on that is, already, problematic in itself. While people can keep changing and redescribing themselves to themselves, they can be very easily hurt and offended by others trying the same thing. Rather, feeling seen by someone is a trait of a positive relationship towards that person. In absence of such positive relationships, though, it is easy to see Whitman's multitudinous self as a site of resistance against redescription, such as in the famous stanza fifty-one of his *Song of Myself*:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

(Whitman 2004)


Whitman, here, opposes the idea that his life, that his way of living it, must amount to some conclusive or coherent pattern, that the story he makes up about his life while living it must come to any form of conclusion. His resistance, here, though quite different in tone, is not so different from the resistance the Underground Man shows against the novel's author and reader. Where the latter does not want his life and person described in another person's words, Whitman's lyric self does not want to have their utterances, their poem and self-expression reduced to some interpreter's version, to something that "makes sense" to them or loses its contradictions. Removing these contradictions, then, is just not what Whitman's communication is about, just like Bakhtin's and Nikulin's dialogue is not mainly about reaching conclusive, contradiction-free arguments. Even more so, putting what Whitman has to say about his self under any such description by making it fit a pattern would undermine that lyric self and its autonomy.

As becomes clear in "Song of Myself", the only way Whitman sees to catch a glimpse of that self lies within love, since love does not rely on such reduced versions of the other: "A choral support of trust is especially strong where Whitman speaks of love: 'I swear I will never mention love or death inside a house, / And I swear I never will translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air'" (Pierson 2014: 34).

This inaccessibility of the self resembles the impossibility described before of stopping the subject within the process of evolving. Precisely this ongoing process, though, is what, with

Whitman, could be called the closest one can get to actually being who one "really is", or in Honneth's words, to become oneself. The democratic self, to Whitman, is precisely "one that came to recognize the vast multitudes of possibility within its own identity" (Folsom 2010: xx). The democratic self, in Bakhtin's terms, is never finalized, not even to itself. It is never fully explained or translated to others. Both Honneth and Whitman agree that becoming oneself requires a specific form of positive, interpersonal relationship. What Honneth found in mutual recognition, Whitman saw in love.

In this perspective, Rorty's idea in *PMN* that the goal of discourse should be keeping the conversation going (Rorty 1980: 378) gains a new, specific momentum. Keeping discourse going and keeping the relationships within discussion going means to preserve the possibility of continuously evolving for the participating subjects. It means to refrain from finalizing others, finding ultimate descriptions or explanations of what or who they are. Finding different, "more fruitful ways of speaking" (Rorty 1980: 360) is not only a common creative effort rather than an effort at correct representation or truthful description; it is also the way to go in order to "edify (ourselves and others)" (Rorty 1980: 360). In keeping the conversation going and edifying ourselves, we participate in the effort of building something that goes beyond ourselves, building, in a word (with Whitman), democracy. What Rorty called edification can never come to a definite end, precisely because stopping that process would defeat its purpose. The point of building that democratic culture is to build a place in which individuals do not have to be finalized, in which building and evolving do not have to come to an end. Keeping dialogue open and possibilities for individual evolution alive means to maintain democratic culture.

Such a connection of personal becoming and democratic discourse can also counter Shusterman's criticism that Rorty's idea of self-creation ultimately has to lead to ethics being resolved in aesthetic questions (Shusterman 1988: 342) by embedding such self-creation into relationships of mutual recognition, and thereby adding a specifically moral quality to it. Furthermore, it clarifies the problem of Shusterman's objection according to which the Rortyan self had to "get its own act together […] before it can hope to cohere with others in more than a fleeting cohabitation of the same geography or language-game" (Shusterman 1988: 351). Rather than selves being privately created or perfected before entering public

discussion, selves seeking recognition are constantly in the making within such discussion, as interpersonal relationships and recognition are what the subject needs to be free, rather than a task to be started only after preparatory self-perfection. Self-creation and interpersonal relationships, including their "moral grammar," to use Honneth's expression, are always already intertwined.

Consequently, this is the point where the moral and the pragmatic dimensions of the problem of redescription creating growing political polarization meet. Besides the problem of redescription as an immoral form of using and hurting others, the first chapters also stressed the problematic that redescription increases rather than dissolves political polarization and makes mutual understanding more difficult. As an example, while it is perfectly ordinary, say, to make the point that my interlocutor's statement seems racist to me, this is very different from either calling them a racist or even saying that the statement is racist. While one is simply explaining the way in which I employ certain tools (my knowledge or conception of what racism means, my language skills) to the task of having to deal with my interlocutor, the other plainly makes a statement about what the other person is. To say that the other is a racist is also to claim that I can say what people around me are. From a Rortyan perspective, where language is a mere tool to deal with the world, by calling the other a racist I have shifted back to a language practice of depicting that world. By saying that what the other person said was (or can be construed as) racist, I am problematizing their statement, criticizing them for it, and forcing them to clarify what they meant in further dialogue. By saying that they are racist, I am not only claiming to see them, to define them correctly (no matter what they would like to be seen as) as racist, but also granting myself the power to stop their process of evolving. As the next section will show, I am finalizing them in the Bakhtinian sense by making the matter of my interaction with the world (by means of words) into a matter of describing that world and the people in it. By trying to separate my moral evaluation of their statement from the dialogue I am in and the individual I am having it with, I put myself into the position to use their statement as a justification to manufacture a redescription of them, which I can then use as a further argumentative tool.

This does not entail, however, that descriptive terms of individuals should be completely erased from our language use. It is not even necessarily to mean that they should not be used

in such dialogues. The problem rather lies in the ways participants understand these descriptions. As was argued earlier, we constantly rely on descriptive terms of the world around us, and the people in it, to get by in our everyday life. We use them as pragmatic tools to organize the information we gather about our surroundings, for example. Therefore, not all use of redescriptive concepts is problematic. As an example, imagine someone, A, sitting in a café by themselves when a second person, B, walks in who, to them, instantly, for whatever reason, seems "creepy." This description is certainly anything but favorable towards B, and there is a good chance they do not intend to harm anyone, including A. But if this redescription as "creepy" leads A to a certain action (say, move further away from B, or even leave the café) that makes them feel safer, this is not what is meant by the problematic of redescription. It is merely to use a perception (however adequate or inadequate) as a tool to guide certain actions that make one feel safer, which is certainly not blameworthy. Now, imagine they meet again another day. Let us assume A thinks the same thing, remembering the situation in the café, and thinks that it is "that creep again." That thought leads them to making sure there is a lot of distance between the two of them, or even makes them leave the café. This case is not problematic either from the perspective developed here. A problematic would arise, though, if A's perception of B were made into an actual judgement, a description, of what this person is like, for instance when describing that person to others. The problematic lies less in what A thinks or does, but in how precisely they (and others) understand the thought: "that creep." If it is a tool that tells A (sadly) that they will be more comfortable at a different café for now ("I feel uncomfortable because I think B seems creepy"), they are certainly not doing anything wrong, and we should have compassion for their situation rather than criticize their behavior. The difference also does not necessarily lie in momentary versus long-term description; it is perfectly legitimate for A to say, e.g., that "I always feel uncomfortable in B's presence." Important in the last two phrases, though, is the acknowledgement on the side of the speaker, A, that the problem is, for now, about themselves feeling uncomfortable with B, about themselves experiencing their relationship with B in a certain way, rather than about any characteristics of B.

Furthermore, this is no statement about the "adequacy" or "truthfulness" of the description, or about believing or doubting their statement. It is rather to clarify the difference between treating the statement about their surroundings as a) a pragmatic, adequate tool to deal with

a situation (including, possibly, criticizing the other person's behavior), or b) as a "truth," as a depiction of who or "how" that person really "is." Avoiding, or criticizing, redescriptive practices in discourse, then, is not about forbidding any form of it, nor is it about rigidly narrowing down possibilities for individuals to express emotions, points of view, concerns, or just to give what they see as an adequate description of their situation. It is not about a specific form of moral or political correctness. The point is not so much about what kinds of statements should or should not be made as it is about the way we should understand what a statement is, what precisely it is good for. The same applies in bigger contexts, such as political (and especially very polarized) debates. Imagine witnessing an anti-PEGIDA demonstration in Germany in 2015, and asking a protester, C, why they are here protesting. The answer C gives is that PEGIDA's positions are racist, maybe even that the protesters are racists. There is, for now, no problem with that, and the criterion for this being a problem is not so much whether or not the protesters really are racists. Rather, it is in the way in which C understands their statement. To say that I have reason to deem PEGIDA's positions racist, that this description is an adequate tool to deal with the statements their followers make (and therefore, e.g., to decide to go to the protest), is absolutely legitimate. Now, let us assume that C meets someone, D, who attended the pro-PEGIDA protest. D tries to give them reasons why they joined PEGIDA, including, e.g., fear of personal economic decline, or anxiety about worse chances at employment due to more migration. C is perfectly justified in arguing that D's fear is unjustified, and that they have good reasons to think that participating in PEGIDA protests is still wrong. A vastly different reaction to this would be to say that none of these reasons matter because "I don't argue with racists." In both versions, the problematic is the racism inherent in PEGIDA and its demonstrations, and in both cases, C is obviously entitled to criticize it. In the latter case, though, the reason is not actually the racist character of a specific argument or position, nor the racism inherent in PEGIDA's organization. It is, rather, a description of what D "is" (namely, a racist), rather than of something arguably wrong that they did (namely, joining PEGIDA). In this perspective, the tendency of polarization, described by Talisse, to see groups of people on the other side as more and more homogenous, applies to single people in a similar way: redescribing deprives the anti-PEGIDA protester of their ability to see the other as a full person who participated in a PEGIDA protest. Rather,

C identifies D as representing PEGIDA at large, and nothing more than that. D is identified as "a racist." C both finalizes D and diminishes chances at mutual understanding or dialogue.

So far, the aspect of polarization has been treated as a political problematic rather than a moral one. The moral issue of redescription was discussed as an additional problem independently of polarization and its effects on democracy. Whitman makes it possible to connect both these aspects and see polarization as both a political and a moral issue. Subjects in discourse rely heavily on that discourse continuing. As opposed to written language, only "speech thwarts the continued recognition and the preservation of self which motivated Whitman to speak in the first place" (Bauerlein 1987: 140). Ironically, then, the frustration and hurt of feeling redescribed and being denied recognition leads individuals to distance themselves from others and resort to strategies of redescription themselves. The continued recognition they are seeking, then, and that Bauerlein is speaking of, can be described with Bakhtin and Nikulin as a dialogical relationship, a relationship in which neither participant is being finalized, but all participants are freed of the burden of having to coincide with themselves, of having to struggle against others' redescriptions.

In this sense, the problematic of redescription links the merely political phenomenon of polarization to a moral problematic of how to treat other participants in discourse. Without the overall political discourse avoiding all too hardened, polarized fronts, the individual loses this freedom and is rather reduced to the more extreme version of themselves (Talisse 2021) that others already see in them and redescribe them as. It has already been discussed how certain redescriptions and labels can make people into what they are described as (what Simone de Beauvoir called "becoming a woman" and what Max Frisch's Andorran Jew experienced). Polarization, then, gains the power to turn us into more extreme versions of ourselves because that is how it already makes others see us—and vice versa. Precisely in ending dialogue, making people merely talk about each other rather than to each other, the participants are turned into much more simplified, extreme versions of themselves because they lose the freedom of not having to coincide with themselves. Just as the Underground Man, who sarcastically concedes that "only fools become something" (Dostoevsky 1993: 5), participants are led to believe that they must become something, that they must stop evolving. Much like the Underground Man, they are led to believe that others are right in describing

them as they do, in believing that they will not become anything else. Ironically, then, the label they never wanted to adopt becomes all they feel able to be within the discussion. Much like Shusterman (1988) wrote, they are led into getting "an act together" and become more extreme in the process. To allow for individuals to remain unfinalized and in the process of evolving, in contrast, is to allow for dialogue.

## 6.3. Poetic judgement and the multitudinous subject

Whitman's democratic subject resembles Bakhtin's dialogue participant not only because neither of them ever "coincides with himself" (Bakhtin 1999: 59), but also insofar as it "lives in receptivity and responsiveness, in a connectedness different from any other," a connectedness that "is not the same as nationhood or group identity" (Kateb 2011: 21). Democratic individuality, then, is not based on the subject's ability to recognize or cherish their particularity, but rather "on the possibility of them coming to a deep (albeit fleeting) awareness of their fundamental sameness" (Mack 2002: 157). What binds people together in this perspective is not resemblance with nor particularity from each other. Rather, it is being aware of their own and others' constant becoming, being aware of the fleeting character of the things they have or do not have in common. It is this fleeting character in which their similarity lies. They have no firm ground to base their similarity (or difference) on. Much like individuals in Honneth, subjects rely on relationships with others to become full individuals.

The first chapters made a negative argument claiming that redescription leads to less dialogue and more polarized debates and should be avoided due to its hurtful character. This was afterwards led into a more positive direction by discussing the possibilities of fruitful dialogue. It can now be converted into a positive argument via the work of Whitman. In not being redescribed and by being allowed to keep evolving, participants gain a chance to find a common ground in not having to be anything. Avoiding being redescribed, then, is not only a motivation participants share for themselves in entering discourse. It is, via the

acknowledgement of oneself and others as constantly evolving subjects, an actual common ground to stand on and from which to start a conversation.

6.3.1. The multitudinous subject and its unfinalizability

Both Whitman's democratic subject and the Bakhtinian subject in dialogue need this dialogue, this relationship. Only there can the subject exist, as representational description threatens to destroy the subject, just as writing threatens to stabilize and de-temporalize the subject and divide it into a static part on the one hand, and the original, desiring, and evolving part on the other (Bauerlein 1987: 137). This is what was described in chapter 2 as the constant threat of falling into redescriptive practices of argument. Dialogue, on the other hand, can create a connectedness like the one Whitman was after. And just as Whitman knew the performance of his poems, the moment of interaction itself, of speaking in the moment, was the best place to look for such connectedness, Nikulin argues against writing for similar reasons, seeing in the written text just another representation of what he calls dialectics, presenting arguments rather than the person behind them (Nikulin 2010: 119).

Opposed to that, the subject and the other are seen as always unfinalized. This unfinalizability spans the other as well as the self, since "at any given moment, there is always more to know about oneself than one can say" (Kateb 2011: 30). A finalization, a full redescription is just not possible. Rather, the urge to redescribe, to categorize, or to judge others is being replaced, in Whitman, "by the desire to accept or empathize or sympathize with them" (Kateb 2011: 30). The resemblance to Bakhtin's dialogism can be traced further at this point by considering the performative aspect of Whitman's account of self. Not only is the self of the poet and performing speaker multiple, but it is also constantly evolving while in interaction with the listeners. The multitudinous self in Whitman is not simply represented, not simply described, within the poems, but enacted, brought to keep becoming within the performance. It is less a fixed state but rather "the dynamic of becoming human" (Zeb/Qasim 2015: 43), not unlike the notion discussed by Nikulin of pouring oneself out into dialogue.

Fittingly, Kateb (2011) suggests looking at Whitman's *Song of Myself* not only as a work in Political Theory (Kateb 2011: 22), but as a statement on the infinite potentiality of individuals:

> All the personalities that I encounter, I already am: That is to say, I could become or could have become something like what others are; that necessarily means, in turn, that all of us are always indefinitely more than we actually are. I am potentially all personalities, and we equally are infinite potentialities. (Kateb 2011: 25)

Whitman makes the reader see the relationship between the infinity of the self and democratic solidarity: because we keep evolving, because we are, in Rorty's words, open-ended,

> each of us is, in Emerson's word, an "infinitude," or, in another formulation of Emerson's, "an inner ocean." The deepest moral and existential meaning of equal rights is this kind of equal recognition granted by every individual to every individual. Democratic connectedness is mutual acceptance. Rejection of any other human being, for one reason or another, for apparently good reasons as well as for bad ones, is self-rejection. (Kateb 2011: 26)

This recognition then, this way of seeing each other as full selves in Honneth's sense, is not only what allows individuals to keep becoming. Seen from Whitman's perspective, it is also the very foundation of this democratic connectedness, of the possibility of democratic dialogue: what connects participants is not having a fixed target to direct their becoming at.

To try to understand each other, or even to find some common ground in a discussion, then, is, simultaneously, to accept that such agreement is likely to be a rather fleeting affair. Acts of redescription and processes of polarization change this aspect about political dialogue. Bob Talisse's description of the division of the American public sphere into "democratic" and "republican" spaces is a good example of this:

> To cite just one illustration, by repurposing foreign words to serve as the name of its drinks and decorating their stores with maps and photos of remote places, Starbucks overtly aims to appeal to the cosmopolitan self-image of the broadly liberal demographic it seeks to serve. By contrast, Dunkin' Donuts strives to associate coffee and doughnuts with the patriotic value of hard work ("America Runs on Dunkin'" is the current slogan), thereby aiming to capture conservative customers who want inexpensive caffeine and carbohydrates rather than the momentary semblance of being in a foreign country. (Talisse 2020: 84)

To utter certain political opinions, then, is anything but a fleeting affair in this context. Rather, it is made into a central aspect of an identity that is being stabilized by daily, routine

actions, such as where one gets a coffee on the way to work. To get my coffee at Dunkin' Donuts is to be a hardworking patriot, whereas my neighbor getting theirs at Starbucks seems to me to be a suspicious liberal, and vice versa. Whitman's desire to sympathize, his willingness to embrace his own and others' open-endedness, stands in stark contrast to that, and fits well with Rorty's way of seeing our selves merely as stories we tell, webs of meaning we weave. The self, in Rorty, is merely "the center of narrative gravity, as self-creation by self-description" (Kremer 2015: 69). The subject is simply incapable of conceiving more of itself, just like, in Bakhtin, the subject lacks the perspective of looking at itself as an object: "Just like the hero in a novel, the human subject's sense of itself is always confined to a partial 'inside' perspective, which can only be transcended through an external vantage point" (Erdinast-Vulcan 2008: 5). To acknowledge that what we tend to talk about as our self does not exist, that "there is […] only different ways of weaving new candidates for belief and desire into antecedently existing webs of belief and desire" (Rorty 1993: 83f.) is to acknowledge, as was argued before, that there is nothing for us to finally become. Statements about how or who others are can be regarded as transient tools, as a "Plan A" for dealing with an issue or getting through a conversation.

On the account of polarization and debate, then, this idea of self can be connected to what Gloria Anzaldúa has called *mestiza consciousness,* internalizing "both sides of a political conflict" (Dempster 2016: 646): "To rage and look upon you with contempt is to rage and be contemptuous of ourselves. We can no longer blame you, nor disown the white parts, the male parts, […], the vulnerable parts" (Anzaldúa 1987: 88). Acknowledging the multitudinous subject, then, includes not only the multitudinous character of other selves, but also one's own, acknowledging the processual, dynamic character of any dialogue between oneself and another person, a political opponent, or a member of a different political or social group. As was stressed in the context of Bakhtin's work, it means to make peace with the fact that there are no last words, that there are no guarantees that a well-thought-out argument is going to clarify what the speaker believes it will or change other people's minds accordingly. Both the other and oneself, then, are always unfinalizable, impossible to connect to one last, definite, and clear description, defying attempts at steadiness or truth (Rorty 1991b: 152). Our selves are anything but steady, since "imaginative and creative enlargement of self is preferable to the idea that one should strive to be adequate to the demands and

imperatives of a nonhuman, noncontingent authority" (Schulenberg 2015: 161). Unable to rely on any such authority or any non-contingent, fixed point towards which to strive, our selves depend on staying connected to other selves, and therefore must come to terms with their own and others' potentiality. We are constantly being kept on our feet without knowing for sure where we are going.

To come to terms with that also means to acknowledge and accept that the questions "Who am I?" or "What am I?" will always remain unanswerable and should therefore be dropped. While this might seem obvious and unremarkable from a philosophical point of view shaped by authors like Rorty or Whitman, it seems to be at odds with the way we tend to talk about our lives in everyday communication. Think of phrases such as "I am going to be a lawyer," "seven tips on how to become rich," or advice on the challenge of "becoming a dad." Such expressions suggest that the process of becoming these things is, indeed, finite, that there truly is something for us to be once we reach that state. Understanding the dynamic character of dialogue, though, means accepting the dynamic of one's own role and identity. It means to accept that "I am x" can never mean more than "I have to do this in that way." While this in no way affects the individual's possibility of self-reflection, e.g., in the sense of noticing that they seem to have changed or that they dislike who they think they "were" at an earlier point in their life, it merely means that whatever descriptions or terms individuals use for this remains momentary. It means to accept that a description of a situation or of another person is nothing more than a transient tool. To person A in the café, describing B as "creepy" is nothing more than a tool to deal with an uncomfortable situation. It is a tool to make sense of their feelings and potentially guide their actions. The description of B as "creepy" will give A a sufficient explanation to find their reaction of feeling anxious and leaving understandable. That is all this description has to do for them right now. It is a coping strategy and should be seen as nothing more.

Accordingly, addressees of such descriptions as well as people who are being described should, as I argued, understand these descriptions as mere coping strategies on the side of the speakers. Such an attitude could ease relationships towards other people as well as towards oneself. For instance, to say that I plan on being a lawyer can be to give meaning to my hours spent in the library every day studying for my next exam. Learning how to "be a dad" can be

to learn how to interact with, and care for, one's child. These things, then, become meaningful through these descriptions without there having to be a clear definition of what is described. Not only can this relax the relationship between us and our goals and ideas of what we have to "make of ourselves," but also towards others. Consider for a moment the scenario of A from the café in the example actually talking to B at some point and telling them about their feelings. While B might not be thrilled to hear either of the two, a statement such as "I felt creeped out by you," or even "you creeped me out because you did this/ behaved in this way," is certainly still very different from "you are a creep." The latter does certainly have the most potential for hurting and creating conflict rather than provoking dialogue or change.

It is, therefore, fitting that Kateb proposes to interpret Whitman's work as the elaboration of Thoreau's dictum that "the perception of beauty is a moral test" (Kateb 1984: 347). Just as, in Nussbaum, the well-lived life can be seen as a work of art, the assessment of beauty, a well-lived life, an action, or a political position, needs an attitude that does justice to this aesthetic quality; it needs the judge to remain perceptive, in order to produce a "true judgement" as a result of "responsive interaction" with the situations judged as well as the people one discusses with (Nussbaum 1990a: 153). Such true judgement is the result of an interaction aiming at dialogue, at such responsive interaction, rather than merely at the finalization of a debate. As an open-ended endeavor, the other cannot be judged merely by a specific outcome, or by their adherence to pre-existing norms and standards. Rather, the perception necessary for moral judgement, then, has to stay open to realizing changes and potential for development rather than to try and describe, or interpret, the other at merely one specific point in their process of coping with their environment, their process of evolving. It needs the named connection, that positive relationship that allows dialogue, and the selves in it, to remain open-ended.

The next section will, therefore, argue that participants, just as they should avoid basing their arguments on redescriptions of others, have a duty to try and interpret their interlocutors' coping strategies in a way that avoids seeing their statements as mere redescriptions. I call this approach metaphorical interpretation.

6.3.2. Poetic judgement and the unfinalizability of the other: In favor of a duty of metaphorical interpretation

The alternative to taking metaphors as descriptions is to assume that behind what another person says there is not (or not only) an argument, a dialectical construction (see Nikulin 2010), but rather something new, something that one really does not know yet, a space that language could grow "into." Such a metaphorical interpretation would adhere to what, with Martha Nussbaum, was called fancy in chapter 5: the assumption that the other, as well as the space behind what they say, are infinities containing multitudes (Whitman) rather than merely a clearly defined playing field of argument and logical analysis. The idea that, rather than a precise description or a clear definition of something, the other's statement provides an open, unknown space of possible conversation coincides with Nussbaum's description of the literary attitude that, rather than "ascribing negative attributes to a whole group of people" (Nussbaum 1995: 92), focusses on imagining possibilities not yet actualized. It does justice to the Bakhtinian idea that "meaning is future-oriented" (Patterson 1985: 137), as is the self:

> So long as the point at issue is not the value of life for me, but my own value for myself rather than for others—I place this value in the future, the future governed by meaning. At no point in time is my reflection upon myself realistic, for in relation to myself I do not know any form of givenness: the form of a given radically distorts the picture of my interior being […]. As soon as I attempt to determine myself *for myself (and not for and from the other), I find myself only in* that world, the world of what is yet to be achieved, *outside* my own temporal being-already-on-hand; that is, I find myself as something-yet-to-be with respect to meaning and value. (Bakhtin 1990: 123)

Poetic judgement, then, is less of a fixed set of techniques or rules for reasoning, but rather a way to "engage poetically with a human being" (Nussbaum 2018), to see more in those beings than Whitman's "dreams or dots" (Nussbaum 1990b: 54; Whitman 2004). Judgement in this sense is not a finalizing evaluation, but a beginning, an offer of dialogue, a poet's call to "make the future different from the past" (Rorty 1998a: 122), resembling Rorty's vision of "replacing certainty with hope" (Rorty 1999a: 31f.). Such an understanding would be metaphorical in the sense that whatever language expresses does not have to be expected to have an exact counterpart outside of it. Rather than describing, saying how things are, statements say something about the relationship between those things and the speaker,

including the dynamics and potential changes of that relationship. They are tools to do something for the speaker right now, not claims about an everlasting meaning. Rather, whatever meaning they have for the speaker can be understood as future-oriented, as something that influences the dynamics of that relationship. Behind a statement there is potentially much more to be found than it may seem to a recipient at first glance. In this sense, statements are expressions of relationships, not descriptions. Just like metaphors in Rorty, they are meaningful within a relationship and an interaction, but not in the sense of providing a specific, definite content. Not unlike the examples Rorty gives of pausing the discussion to do something else—making a face, kissing your interaction partner (Rorty 1993: 18)—such statements are meaningful within the interaction, but not necessarily outside of it.

Such an understanding of judgement would understand metaphors as the "growing points of language" (Rorty 1991a: 13) that Rorty described them as. Understanding the other as such infinite potentialities would be the opposite of understanding them as representations of something, which, in turn, would mean representations of something clearly defined, and therefore finite. It would mean to understand them as potentially quite different from how one might see them right this moment, to conjure up "a vision of a person as real and potentially lovable" (Nussbaum 2018). An attitude of fancy requires one to understand statements as metaphorical parts of an open-ended dialogue in which all meaning of such statements is oriented towards the future interaction with the other, both for the sake of the other as well as for the sake of the discussion itself, widening communicative possibilities and epistemic tools in order to adequately understand the issue discussed and the communication within that discussion. There is no clearly defined meaning of statements, then, that could be understood from outside this interaction. This is not to say that such statements were entirely inaccessible to others, but merely that third parties should avoid jumping to conclusions as to their meaning without considering that context.

This idea of judgement connects the different problematics laid out in the previous chapters. By understanding the other as open-ended, participants would avoid redescribing them as the basis for their own arguments. Furthermore, they would aim at enhancing dialogue and avoiding what dialogism calls finalization. Rather than aiming towards final answers, such a

dialogue would understand the future-oriented character of meaning and the pragmatic character of utterances as tools for interaction, as coping strategies to master the challenge of having to dialogize. To say that individuals keep evolving, then, is not so much a statement about what identity or the self are or how they can be described as it is a way of intentionally leaving that task aside entirely. It is not about what a self is, about what identity is, or about whether and how it can change. Rather, to be myself, and to describe myself the way I do, is to relate to and to cope with the world I inhabit in the way that I happen to do that. This applies just as well to my principles, which "should not be treated as necessary or sacrosanct, and have no meaning except as they are interpreted and lived by agents who grapple with and modify them in particular circumstances" (Curtis 2015: 131). They are not true due to their reference to any kind of non-linguistic world or timeless principles. Our self-descriptions, just as all the other ideas we happen to have, guide our behavior and "have consequences not because they are foundational or anti-foundational, or moral or immoral, but because they are embodied in the lives of concrete individuals—that is to say, because they are *lived*" (Voparil 2006). In the same sense, claims as to the incompatibility of irony as a public affair within liberalism, since it would prevent the existence of religions or indigenous knowledge lose in force in this perspective just as much as the fear that public irony would lead to people becoming incapable of holding any kind of belief, such as a religious one (Pérez León 2022). Rather, the point of such ironic believing would be to live one's beliefs in an open-ended fashion rather than to use them as molding tools in order to get one's life to conform with any pre-meditated blueprint, such as religious salvation or strict adherence to traditions.

Seeing their own self-descriptions merely as such coping strategies requires that individuals accept their own indefiniteness, in the sense that what we do with our lives, including the goals we strive to attain, does not entail that we become anything definite and easily describable. To accept, then, that such descriptions are merely pragmatic tools to relate ourselves to the world is to accept that the stories we tell ourselves about our plans, actions, and lives merely represent the fact that we need such stories to understand what we did and to keep doing what we are doing, including our stories about others. It means to learn to see ourselves and others as multitudinous, always on the verge of potentially changing in a way we cannot foresee.

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This does not, however, include somehow downgrading the self to a mere tool to interact with the world, and thereby finding just another description of what the self is. Rather, it is possible to refrain from any definition of what the self is and to just take utterances about ourselves as utterances that help us keep dialogizing, transient tools that help us keep interacting with the world. "Rorty is inviting us to see self-constitution as an activity of disinvestment of value, of tentative positioning and orientation which one is ready to give up as soon as one has crafted it" (Marchetti 2022).

This would not mean never having any preconceived notions of other people, but rather acknowledging that the ideas that might run after each other in the back of our minds about who or what another person "really is" will never reach a conclusion. It asks the participants to come to terms with having to treat the other as that infinite potentiality Kateb describes. Just as the author in Bakhtin has "no surplus field of vision, no perspective" (Bakhtin 1999: 251) on the character of their novel, discourse participants have no additional information about their interlocutors, and will have to deal with the open-endedness of discourse and its participants. In that, utterances of discourse participants are always part of a bigger, open-ended, dialogue. Accepting the role of our utterances as mere pragmatic tools, then, is also to accept, with Bakhtin, that "there is neither a first nor a last word" (Bakhtin 1986: 170) and we will never have that last word.

Understanding the other, and ourselves, as such infinitudes would therefore not only be consistent with what I discussed, with Shusterman, as subjects continuously evolving, but also with Rorty's description of discourse and dialogue as "open-ended" (Rorty 1991a: 14). Letting language grow, then, and keeping dialogue open-ended, would be the last remnant of a common goal of discourse. The cooperativeness still present in this approach would be a very faint version of it, similar to Rorty's minimum criterion of "not turning away" from the task of achieving the country together (Rorty 1998a: 13). While such an approach towards our own knowledge would certainly make discourse more difficult and complex for the single participant, this complexity is a price participants should be willing to pay for a more dialogical, productive, and less polarized democracy on the one hand, and for the goal of reducing the risk of hurtfully redescribing or being redescribed on the other. Normative theories of discourse tend to have high expectations of participants, and while this approach

certainly makes discussions more complex in some ways, it does yield two advantages for the participants. First, it widens the possibilities for dialogue. Participants conscious of their tendency to redescribe others and their situation, aware of the dangers of it, and trying to (however incompletely) avoid its pitfalls give themselves a much bigger chance at a productive dialogue with others. While the effort to be made here may seem daunting, it reduces the likelihood of frustrating, polarized discussions without any upshot or result. In this sense, the raised complexity of discussions may well be worth the participants' while.

Second, while the model presented in this chapter certainly raises the complexity of participants' tasks during debates, it reduces that complexity in other aspects. As the next section will argue, the requirement for the single participant here is still less complex than the requirement of cooperativeness present in other approaches. Not only has that ideal often failed in the past (hence the notion of not wanting to discuss with certain people, e.g., "racists"), it also puts a burden on participants regarding both their motivation to reach consensus and their ways of treating other participants and their arguments. In several ways, the question of what kind of emotions, motivations, or ideas about the relationship with the other participants should even be a part of the argument also raises the complexity of a debate considerably and may make it especially hard or daunting to enter a debate in the first place. The complexities and challenges of debating with each other are therefore merely changed from considerations mostly to be made before participating towards considerations to be made while discussing. While the discourse's complexity does not necessarily change, its accessibility rises.

Switching to the criterion of not seeing others "as X," then, would certainly be a challenge, but it would partially unburden participants of other restrictions such as reflecting on the precise goal of their argument: "Am I making this argument because I differ with a point, or just because the point upsets me? Does understanding why it upsets me make my argument more precise?" While participants should still reflect on such questions, which are certainly important and useful for having a productive debate, participants trying to leave such emotional aspects aside or having to reconsider each time whether this specific kind of emotion deserves a place in the debate are dealing with a considerable degree of complexity already. Changing the focus of debates in the way presented here would make certain aspects

of debating harder. For some people, the difficulty might increase more than for others, and such a change might well bring about a certain learning curve regarding the reflection on and expression of one's emotions. It would not, however, necessarily make participating more complex overall. Furthermore, in a debate in which everybody accepted the preliminary, metaphorical, and pragmatic character of statements, debating might actually become easier and more relaxed, steering clear of overwhelming requirements of linguistic precision and accuracy. If all our statements were agreed to be both mere tools and preliminary, the pressure to be precise and avoid misunderstandings right off the bat could be reduced, making debating less tense of an affair—and maybe even more interesting and fun. The overall difficulty of debating would not necessarily rise all too much. Rather than meeting high expectations of cooperativeness, not turning away from other participants could already be enough.

6.3.3. "Not turning away" as a weak alternative to cooperativeness and a normative requirement in two different respects.

Not turning away, then, is not to mean cooperativeness in a strong sense, but in a weak one. The discussion between discourse participants can be looked at under different aspects: is the conversation a) still a dialogue in the Bakhtinian-Nikulinian sense, b) non-redescriptive towards the participants as well as others, and c) open-ended and "fanciful" rather than dialectical and closed, leaving room for the described growth? If so, that is enough. Not turning away from that task, then, is, in a pragmatist fashion, understood as the "common poetic creation" of argument. Creating common norms and arguments is less of a finalized achievement than an ongoing, open-ended practice of continuously achieving, evolving, and creating together. Creating together in this sense does not mean working towards a definite result, but rather trying to keep creating. Even though this distinctly does not propose a strong norm of cooperativeness, it does pose a weaker requirement towards all participants to keep dialogue open. Dialogue, then, is not understood as a result, in the way that the agreement on a norm can be considered a result of a successful deliberation in other discourse theories. Nor

is a certain ideal of dialogue supposed to serve as a precondition for an agreement on good or sustainable norms. Rather, keeping dialogue open in this sense may require participants to value this openness, and the dialogue itself, higher than final results or their sustainability. Rather than in agreement (or in agreeing to disagree), the achievement of dialogue lies in its prolongation. Rather than in agreeing on new norms, progress lies in participants remaining able to keep dialogizing. This is not to mean that achieving results is not desirable, but merely that this is not the reason dialogue should be considered worthwhile. Rather, what makes dialogue worthwhile is threefold: firstly, it has epistemic potential for democratic discourse, in that redescriptive and monological forms of communication are at a greater risk of excluding important aspects of a problem. Second, it provides a counterpoint to such monological, redescriptive forms of discourse rather than merely calling redescription problematic. While that does not mean a clear, fixed model of what precisely discourse should look like, it does provide an idea, a direction to move towards. Lastly, in helping to avoid redescribing others, dialogue has the potential to reduce cruelty among discourse participants. It is, therefore, potentially both an epistemically and politically useful, as well as a morally valuable, idea.

Such an approach echoes Rorty's description of social institutions as "experiments in cooperation rather than as attempts to embody a universal and ahistorical order" (Rorty 1998b: 196). Furthermore, it is consistent with what was discussed in the last chapter as fancy, a benign, moral imagination. The open-endedness of metaphorical language in Rorty provides the playfulness and pleasure that, according to Nussbaum, help arouse compassion in individuals. True playfulness that is supposed to stay playful cannot be finalized without being lost. Redescription of the other, in turn, finalizes the dialogue, ends the playfulness of the situation, and prevents the discussion from being pleasant. Acknowledging the multitudinous character of the other would provide a guarantee to avoid basing arguments on the redescription of others and to keep the other unfinalized throughout the discussion, thereby providing a dialogical relationship towards them. This acknowledgment also grants a place in which, following Honneth, the individual experience of freedom is possible (Honneth 2014: 131f.).

The individual's way of becoming their full self through recognition would then be understood not as a means towards the end of being who one "really" is, but rather as a way of continuously evolving rather than being finalized, a way to stay fanciful and open-ended. With redescription understood as blocking the individual's way to freedom in Honneth's sense, the acknowledgement of the subject's multitudinous character would precisely fulfill the criteria given above. By seeing the other (and oneself) as multitudinous and unfinalized, and acknowledging the continuous and open-ended process of subjects continuously evolving, a rather thin concept of recognition of the other allows for unfinalizable, playful, and compassionate dialogue that refrains from letting the metaphors and linguistic tools used within it turn into redescriptions and become potential blockades in communication. Rather, such a practice would allow for the experimental cooperativeness Rorty wrote about without overloading this idea of cooperativeness with new normative burdens.

The requirements of avoiding redescription and of "not turning away" are, then, requirements in two different respects: they are moral requirements towards another person and, at the same time, requirements towards the conversation, the discourse itself. Both this moral relationship towards the other person as well as dialogue, political discourse, and democracy rely on this avoidance of redescription. Shusterman is therefore right when he states that Rorty's insistence on private morality and aesthetic life being independent of public concerns and culture is "unwise" (Shusterman 1988: 351). It threatens to endanger precisely Rorty's goal of ongoing conversation. Rather, in these two different respects, the moral requirement of avoiding redescription bridges the much-discussed gap between public discourse and morality on the one hand and the ethics of personal life and relationships on the other.

This idea has led some authors to downplay the role of reason in discourse, such as Richard Shusterman, who states that "affect rather than reason provides the ground for morality, human solidarity, and the politics emerging from our ethical values" (Shusterman 2019: 41) and calling affect the "true motor of all action" (Shusterman 2019: 44). Such distinctions, though, become questionable in the light of the idea presented here. Political discourse as a practice of continuously evolving and poetic creation would hardly fit any categorization along lines such as "emotional versus unemotional" or "affect versus reason," just as it does not fit into categories along the distinction of public and private. The point of this is not that

emotion and rationality, reason and feeling, or any other combination of such concepts were integrated or fused, or that the role of "emotions" in "reason" was discussed; such ideas still presuppose that there is something to fuse or combine. A concept of discourse as creative and open-ended, though, would precisely abolish what, with Nikulin, would be a central element of dialectics as opposed to dialogue: The idea that a certain, pre-determined way of going about the business of arguing necessarily must move towards a conclusion in a specific fashion, and that emotions could somehow be added, and dealt with, on top of that task. Rather, such a concept would result in pushing "ideal and nonideal theorizing alike out of the space of the conceptual and into the social" (Voparil 2017: 67). And it would mean to allow for what David McClean (2022) has proposed as a "sagacious turn", moving from buzzwords and categorizations towards questions.

6.4. Conclusion: Knowing unfinalizing from redescriptive arguments: A sketch of four questions to ask about discourse contributions

In summary, it becomes possible to develop questions to ask in order to differentiate unfinalizing from redescriptive arguments in the sense of chapter 2. In addition to 1) asking whether arguments rely on redescriptions of other participants "as X," it can further be asked 2) do participants acknowledge their (and others') arguments' metaphorical, pragmatic character as tools of self-expression rather than insisting that they represent the non-linguistic world? Do they manage to refrain from seeing their own arguments as representing or describing some reality the other participant presumably does not understand "truthfully," or "correctly"? Accordingly, participants should assume such a purely pragmatic sense for any speech acts or arguments by others that they themselves react to.

Furthermore, it can be assessed whether 3) participants and their arguments acknowledge the multiple and infinite character of others, rather than presuming or insisting on knowing who or how the other person "is," or what they "represent." This aspect goes further than the initial idea of not treating others "as X" in so far as, in addition to this, it acknowledges the possibility of the other changing and developing through time rather than presuming an

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unchanging, static self. Not only, then, does this aspect refer to (not) seeing others as representatives of certain groups (men, women, people of colour), but also to acknowledging that all pictures participants may have of the other are momentary, pragmatic tools to enhance interaction rather than lasting or "correct" descriptions of any kind. As a tool to relate myself to the world around me, any statement about who or what other people are merely expresses the fact that "I happen to deal with this (or them) in this way for now."

This should not be misunderstood, though, as an excuse to label other discourse participants in hurtful ways simply because one wants to, relying on the argument that it is not actually a description of them. Such an argument would forget about the aspect of avoiding cruelty in Rorty's idea of liberalism. To claim that the words I say about another person can mean anything or nothing, since they are only my personal tool for interaction instead of a description, would mean to overstate the ironist aspect of this approach, and to forget about the liberal aspect. To the liberal, such redescriptions remain cruel. What the argument presented here claims is not such a nonchalant attitude towards redescribing others, but rather a more careful one towards one's own ways of phrasing one's beliefs and the meaning one ascribes to them. Overall, the entire approach toward political discourse presented here relies on the tension between questioning the importance of certain claims to "truth" on the one hand without giving in to any temptation of describing truth or norms as merely relative on the other. What makes defending, and acting according to, such a position so challenging is not being able to decide for either of those two alternatives, but rather having to face the contingency of one's beliefs, language, and concepts. Carelessness with such labelling, then, would not only hurt others, but also undermine this position itself.

In connection to 3), a last question can be derived from Richard Rorty's idea of open-endedness: Rather than implicitly assuming a pre-set, dialectical end point of argument and disagreeing about the correct way to get there, contributions to political discussion should aim at considering the possibility that the discussion might create new goals and results that were not aimed for from the start. This underlines the constant, experimental character of political discourse and decision-making rather than assuming a shared, fixed, and clearly defined common goal of discussion (such as freedom, equality, or justice). Democracies and their goals, just like their citizens, keep evolving. Contrary to, e.g., nationalist narratives of

what their country is all about, societies, just as individuals, do not have a fixed description of themselves to fall back on. When evaluating arguments, it can therefore be asked: 4) Do arguments remain open to the possibility of the conversation going in a different way, a direction that is not even clear yet? Or do they already presuppose the argumentative outcome?

This experimental approach relies on Martha Nussbaum's characterization of fancy as a playful attitude characterized by imagination and "eroticism" (Nussbaum 1995: 43). This fanciful attitude is needed to replace the idea of cooperativeness so central in other approaches to political discourse. Fancy does not rely on any norm of cooperativeness among the participants, but on the contention that redescription and finalization of the other (and its use as an argumentative strategy) are morally problematic and counterproductive. Participants do not necessarily have to agree on ideas about acceptable or inacceptable emotions, or any specific common goal towards which their discussion should strive. Rather, the shared notion of the hurtfulness of redescription and the acknowledgement of each other's unfinalizability can be enough.

## 7. Conclusion

Growing political polarization and fragmentation of the public sphere has put the value of common norms about how to argue for one's political and moral positions increasingly into doubt. The common goal of participants to reach a rational agreement on norms to base their political decisions and actions on seems less and less effective in providing a useful, unifying guideline for politics and political discussion. In order to contribute to the discussion of how to remedy this situation, the goal of this dissertation was to offer an alternative idea of what participation in political protest and discourse can be described as being about, what participants can be assumed to be motivated by to participate, and what this means for the efficiency and the moral quality of some frequent argumentative strategies within that discourse. Rather than seeing participation in public discourse as motivated by the aim of finding rational consent, or having one's opinions justified, I proposed to see participants' engagement in discourse, to a large extent, as an effort to escape a perceived danger of being redescribed and identified the redescription of other participants as a rather frequent argumentative strategy. Political discourse can therefore be seen as the balancing of the desire to be understood purely on one's own terms (Rorty) with participants' need for categorization in order to understand the world around them, and a normative expectation to be treated with respect rather than to be hurt by others' redescriptions.

Chapter 3 then offered the argument that, on top of being counterproductive for political discussion by intensifying rather than resolving polarization and conflict, grounding one's arguments in the redescriptions of other discourse participants is a form of injustice. This is what I called "seeing others as X." By connecting Honneth's theory of recognition to Rorty's idea of redescription, I argued that such strategies should be avoided and that their use in arguments is open to justified criticism.

Supposing that participants, in entering public discourse, try to avoid being redescribed and, rather, aim at being seen as what they themselves believe they are, chapter 4 moved from the negative argument for the avoidance of redescription towards an idea of what the dialogue

between participants can be about. It looked at the problematic from a different perspective by considering the structure and functioning of the dialogue between them, rather than single speech acts or arguments by individual participants. Based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Dmitri Nikulin, language and utterances by discourse participants were understood not as single statements, but as part of an ongoing dialogue with others and as reactions to other utterances.

In this perspective, rather than as the interchanging presentation of single arguments, political discussions are understood as a common, creative effort in which all upcoming ideas are merely rejoinders to pre-existing ideas. Using the case of author and hero in novels as an illustration, Bakhtin shows how monologization, telling stories with one voice talking about others, rather than as a mix of different, equal voices and perspectives, can be a resource of political power. Dostoevsky's novel characters, specifically the figure of the Underground Man, can be read as openly defying the author's power over them. Other than many novel characters of his time, the Underground Man cannot be understood as a type. He does not represent any specific social figure or class, and, occasionally, even openly acknowledges the fact that he is part of a story read by others. Rather than telling a story in one, unified voice, the novel establishes different relationships between reader, protagonist, and author. The protagonist does not primarily serve a narrative purpose in the author's story, but appears as his own, full person. He is, in Honneth's words, recognizable as his own, full subject, and constantly fights the danger of what the strong poet in Rorty is most afraid of: having their life narrated by someone else rather than by themselves, being a mere type rather than a full person. He escapes from what Honneth calls reification. To have one's life narrated by others, and therefore be unable to become a full person on one's own, then, is a form of misrecognition. To make dialogue into monologue is a power move that keeps the other from ever being themselves and being recognized as a full subject. Rather, they are reduced to a figure in the tale of what that dialogue was about. Dialogue between two equals, though, is possible if participants manage to see each other as unfinalized, if they can acknowledge that they enter dialogue as incomplete, that the story of their lives is never fully told or understood. Nor do participants necessarily want to be so fully understood. Rather, individuals can be seen, with Walt Whitman, as "containing multitudes." The story of who they are never gets to an end.

Using the work of Dmitri Nikulin, the chapter showed how this problematic can be linked to what he calls dialectics: producing final, fixed, and unchangeable forms of argument aiming at a final result. The point of dialectic reasoning, in Nikulin, is to reach a certain conclusion. The argument before the conclusion is merely about showing that one's conclusion is correct (maybe even inadvertently so). The goal is to show that one's opinion is justified. Dialogue, in contrast, is less about the goal, the finalization of thought towards a result, than it is about the process. It meets with Rorty's neo-pragmatism in valuing ongoing communication over final results. Together with Bakhtin and Honneth, it can be concluded that all authors, in different forms, agree that one important aspect of communication with others, including political participation, is to avoid being finalized. It is to avoid a point at which the story of who one is, or who one can be, seems to come to an end, a point at which there is nothing left to say. Rather, there always must be a rejoinder to what was said before. The point of thinking and dialogizing is not final conclusions or explanations, but to keep dialogizing, to keep spelling oneself out, as Nikulin calls it, while simultaneously giving this opportunity to someone else. Similarly to the strong poet in Rorty, dialogue participants want to remain in power over the story of who they are.

Who one is, though, is the result of a creative process. With Martha Nussbaum, chapter 5 introduced an author who helps understand both creativity and emotions as central aspects of discussion, political discourse, and even arguments. Not only are emotions inevitable, but they are also even necessary for adequate moral judgement, grounded in careful perception of the situation at hand. Strong attempts at eliminating emotion from the debate risk losing sight of the persons that moral discussion is about. Similar to the tendency of reification through market exchange in Honneth, the individual gets reduced to a mere thing, a factor within a rather economic calculation. Not unlike dialectics in Nikulin, Nussbaum sees a danger of reducing the reflection on moral situations, decisions, and arguments to a rather confined, formalized way of reasoning, missing important aspects of the situations being judged, the individuals concerned, and their relationships to each other. To counteract this, a central aspect of the discussion in this chapter was the idea of fancy, a form of benign moral imagination. Rather than subsuming all moral questions, problems, and conflicts under a formalized logic, fancy is an attitude that is about benignly imagining someone else's

situation, resembling Rorty's idea of solidarity. It rests on seeing human beings, first and foremost, as incomplete, emotionally needy beings.

Both in Nussbaum and Honneth, political dynamics can be understood to a large degree as a result of humans needing positive, emotional relationships with others. While chapters 2 and 3 focused on redescription as a discourse practice that participants can inflict upon each other, the next two chapters concentrated on the dialogue between them. Participating in this dialogue without being redescribed in a hurtful way, then, is already a worthwhile goal in itself. This goal differs from the dialectical goal of finding the best argument towards a conclusion. The value of democratic, political discourse lies rather in the process itself than in the results that are produced. While there are procedural approaches to moral argument that focus on the arguments and their dialectical flawlessness, the process-orientation of the present approach goes further in adding the aspect of redescription. Using the redescription of others to ground one's argument is problematic even if the argument is, otherwise, flawless. In focusing on the quality of the dialogical exchange itself rather than of single arguments, the assessment of discourse contributions makes a further step towards the avoidance of hurtful and polarizing redescriptions. Rather than on proving each other wrong or merely being right, the focus of such dialogical argument is the creation of new possibilities. As Rorty stressed with his idea of edifying philosophy in *PMN,* the focus lies on finding new ideas rather than finding more solid foundations for old ones. Rorty and Nussbaum both stress the poetic, creative aspect of morality. They leave us with the task, as chapter 5 argued, of rethinking political and moral argument as a benign and compassionate interaction between participants that is centered not around merely finding the best argument or proving each other wrong, but rather around imaginations of alternatives to the status quo, and our emotions towards such alternatives as well as present, normative orders.

Finally, the goal of chapter 6 was to make some suggestions as to how to conceptualize a discourse like that and to develop normative criteria for arguments and ways of discussing. As a result, I presented four questions to ask in order to distinguish what I called unfinalizing from redescriptive arguments: whether or not they rely on redescriptions of others "as X"; whether or not they acknowledge the metaphorical, pragmatic character of other people's arguments, as well as the open, and multiple, character of others' (and one's own) selves;

and how far arguments acknowledge the open-endedness and indefiniteness of the discussion itself, rather than aiming at a pre-set final result.

While these criteria explicitly do not rely on a pre-existent, shared set of moral norms, they build upon participants recognizing the hurtfulness of redescription as well as the unfinalizability of the subject. Rather than the strong criterion of cooperativeness present in, e.g., Habermasian discourse ethics, the chapter presented a weaker guideline for approaching arguments, called "not turning away" from the discussion and its participants.

In terms of empirical and theoretical research on populist movements, moral conflict, and the phenomenon of redescription in such conflicts, this dissertation is obviously only a beginning. While giving examples of cases of redescription in past political debates and conflicts, the dissertation did not build on any empirical research of my own. This is one of the projects to follow in the future. Extensive case studies, for example, can show different strategies of redescription, and avoidance of being redescribed, in different political, national, or cultural contexts, to establish this idea not only as a moral category, but as a tool to better understand polarization and protest movements. One possible field of application might be the problematic of post-truth politics in various countries. Such research could then show the usefulness of the concept outside of mere philosophical theory. So far, since this is a dissertation building on pragmatist ideas, I do not claim to have shown any kind of truth on how political polarization comes about. Rather, I have tried to offer a way of looking at it that made it possible to discuss a wide array of different phenomena in a way that is more productive, and more helpful, than some earlier approaches. As an example, the phenomenon of post-truth politics, understood not as an epistemological problem, but a purely political one, gains a new dynamic if looked at within a framework of redescription. Future research will show whether such a new perspective can yield useful results for approaching this problem within contexts such as climate change denial, anti-migration protests, or populist Euro-skepticism.

As a first conclusion for political practice, the results of this project present a call to change one's relationship to one's beliefs and the practice of defending them. Between the assurance to be right if only the single parts of our argument relate well enough to each other in a specific way, and the idea that others, by fitting certain categories within our own thought,

can be understood as representatives of certain groups or ideas, and their arguments treated and dismissed accordingly, democratic discourse has a long way to go. Changing the way political discussion is often approached and performed along the lines presented in this dissertation will take a lot of time and effort. But even though it may take a long time and never be complete, such change seems necessary to meet the challenges described here. Democracy, just as individuals, keeps evolving. Neither end up at a final, specific state. Coming to terms with that may be one of the most important parts of what remains to be done. It is a challenge that, just as the problems discussed here, spans private and public life, political and moral questions, and comes with the challenge to reconsider the way we relate to ourselves, the world around us, our beliefs about it, and to other people. Just as there are no last words, nor is there anything we, or the ones around us, can clearly be described as being. There are, however, the relationships and dialogues we have with these elusive individuals, including ourselves. They are all we have to go on.

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