– En somme, dit Tarrou avec simplicité, ce qui m’intéresse, c’est de savoir comment on devient un saint.

– Mais vous ne croyez pas en Dieu.

– Justement. Peut-on être un saint sans Dieu, c’est le seul problème concret que je connaisse aujourd’hui.(…)

– Peut-être, répondit le docteur, mais vous savez, je me sens plus de solidarité avec les vaincus qu’avec les saints. Je n’ai pas de goût, je crois, pour l’héroïsme et la sainteté. Ce qui m’intéresse, c’est d’être un homme.

– Oui, nous cherchons la même chose, mais je suis moins ambitieux.¹

The Possibility of Other Narratives

If the conclusion that I reached at the end of the last chapter, that Foucault had begun to do something quite different from the thinkers who preceded him without ever fully making this change explicit, the same cannot be said for Richard Rorty. Few if any philosophers have so consistently and vigorously articulated the need for a new set of “rules of the game” – indeed, for a wholesale change of game – if we are to take the consequences of post-foundationalism seriously. There can be no doubt that Rorty’s work shares much with that of Foucault – and it is, from the point of view of the present book, both helpful and illuminating that Rorty

has engaged directly with Foucault’s writings on a number of different occasions.2 There are also, however, a number of significant differences, of which the most immediately striking are the methodology and critical targets chosen by each. Both writers are, of course, products of the philosophical traditions in which they were raised: while, for Foucault, the problem of the human subject and his ethics as radically self-constituting was already familiar from those whose work I sketched in Chapter IV, Rorty’s thought is much more concerned with working through his profound sense of dissatisfaction with the teachings of the analytic philosophical school in which he was educated. While, as we have seen, for Foucault, the final move towards post-foundationalism resulted from his understanding of power as all-pervasive and, indeed, all-creative (even responsible, for example, for the construction of “truth” and “knowledge”), Rorty’s conclusions, albeit very similar in most (philosophical) regards, are drawn instead from the essentially negative project of an ongoing critique of the traditional epistemological claims of analytic philosophy. This, to my mind, leads to some very important differences between the thought of the two men, to which I will return in more detail below. Given the vast disparity in the two approaches, however, it may seem remarkable that they come to share anything at all, let alone the “wide areas of agreement” that Rorty himself acknowledged.3

Perhaps not all that remarkable, however. One recurring feature of Rorty’s early work is his persistent telling and retelling of the narrative that I outlined in the previous two chapters, as the shift away from the idea of philosophy as the search for objective truth (and moral philosophy for objective right and wrong) with a varied cast of characters, some appearing in more versions, others in fewer, with some even playing slightly different roles depending on the optic that he has chosen. Rorty has many ways of telling the story of how philosophical thought came to reject the set of problems – and perhaps more importantly, the set of expectations – that had directed the endeavour for millennia. On occasions, he takes a very focused lens, insisting that we can see this progression in the works of single thinkers, and in particular, in the three most important (in his eyes) of the twentieth century: Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey, whom he claims all began searching for the universal, the ahistorical, yet finished with the realisation

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