Sketch of a conversational society

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Abstract
In this paper I consider what it might mean to see society as a kind of
Rortian conversation. Although the idea of conversation is not always
explicit in Rorty's social thought, it is, I think, implicitly present. To
therefore invoke it as a model is not to do an injustice to Rorty, but to
bring out features of his own thought that he tends to underplay. In
suggesting that we take seriously the notion of society as a kind of
conversation, we should be careful not to overplay the aspect of talk-
ing, which is only a part of conversation. We should bear in mind that
it also means living together. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that
Rorty introduces the idea of conversation as a way of thinking about
discourse, and so the notion as Rorty uses it prioritises the notion of
talking. I would argue, however, that Rorty leaves his notion suffi-
ciently vague and undefined to make it amenable to extension. In or-
der to argue that we should look to the idea of conversation as a way
of thinking about society more generally, I will proceed as follows. I
will begin by considering the notion of conversation as discourse, fo-
cusing on two particularly prominent strands of criticism in response
to this idea, namely that it ignores the role of argument and reason,
and that it is a pointless sort of practice. Having rebutted these strands
of criticism, I will outline a way in which we can extend the notion of
conversation to society as a whole, and I will do this by debating with
critics who see Rorty as privileging language over the more material
and institutional aspects of society. Finally, I will argue that the con-
versational model is superior to the more entrenched deliberative
model of democracy. Through an examination of one particular phe-
nomenon, claro culture, which causes practical and theoretical diffi-
culties for the deliberative model, I will offer a prima facie reason for
suggesting conversation as a superior and more pragmatic alternative.

It is in *Philosophy and the mirror of nature* (1980), that Rorty most famously talks
about conversation. He introduces the notion as a way of elucidating the post-episte-
mological role of the philosopher. Such philosophers, he suggests, should become
good conversationalists. Rather than seeking to adjudicate others' contributions or
translate all contributions into a neutral framework, the philosopher should use herme-

neutic strategies to keep the conversation going. The notion of conversation itself remains, it must be admitted, vague. So while Rebecca Comay (1986:123) suggests that Rorty's society looks very much like "a 'better' liberal arts college with a commitment to interdisciplinary studies; Fischer (1990:235) is reminded more of a visit to "a pre-school playroom"; Bouveresse (2000:142) sees Rorty as describing something like the current state of French philosophy and worries that this way of doing philosophy has led, in practice, towards the increased isolation of philosophers from each other. Bernstein (1982:351) finds in it:

> ... a profound moral-political vision that informs his work and suggests what our society and culture may *yet* become.

Given the amorphous quality of the idea of conversation that allows it to be viewed so variously, it is crucial that I offer some reading of the notion of conversation in order to show why, like Bernstein, I take it to be a valuable moral-political vision before attempting to extend it further.

Since Rorty introduces the idea of conversation in the context of extending Kuhn's ideas of normal and revolutionary science to the more general notions of normal and abnormal discourse, I will use those notions as a framework. In so doing, I will draw on Nancy Fraser's recognition that we find in Rorty's writing an attention to three types of discourse – normal, polylogical, and monological. Fraser (1990:313) explains polylogical (abnormal) discourse thus:

> It is the simple negation of the discourse of normal science, that is, of discourse in which interlocutors share a sense of what counts as a problem or question, as a well-formed or serious hypothesis and as a good reason or argument. Abnormal discourse, then, is discourse in which such matters are up for grabs. It involves a plurality of differentiable if not incommensurable voices and it consists in an exchange among them that is lively if somewhat disorderly.

Fraser (1990:313-4) associates monological (abnormal) discourse with that of the strong poet or ironist theorist:

> It is a discourse that consists in a solitary voice crying out into the night against an utterly undifferentiated background. The only conceivable response to this voice is uncomprehending rejection or identificatory imitation. There is no room for a reply that could qualify as a different voice. There is no room for interaction.

Conversation, as I understand it, involves all these types of discourse, even the monological. In particular, conversation does not stand in contrast to normal discourse, as so many criticisms of Rorty's views presuppose. Rather, conversation includes normal discourse as one, and only one, of its moments. This interpretation of conversation is not universally accepted. Conversation is often seen as standing against and replacing normal discourse, and is therefore seen as potentially irrationalist, relativist, or even subjectivist or nihilist, with the result that critics who take such a view find themselves pleading for the role of reason and argument.

The flavour of this line of criticism is exemplified by Fischer and Williams. Fischer (1990:235) seeks to defend the rationalist against what he takes to be Rorty's (perhaps intentional) misunderstanding:

Far from hoping to put an end to conversation . . . rationalists wish it to continue. The desire to defend criteria, objectivity and progress in this tradition stems from a fear not that discussion will begin but that it will end by degenerating into a shouting match or power struggle among incommensurable perspectives.

Bernard Williams (1990:35) defends analytical philosophy against Rorty's criticisms on the grounds that it embodies

. . . a very abstract example of certain virtues of civilized thought: . . . it gives reasons and sets out arguments in a way that can be explicitly followed and considered, and . . . it makes questions clearer and sorts out what is muddled . . . analytical philosophy asserts important freedoms, both to pursue the argument and, in its more imaginative reaches, to develop alternative pictures of the world and of human life. It is both a creative activity and an activity pursued under constraints – constraints experienced as, among others, those of rational consistency. . . . Both in this philosophy and in the sciences, the ideal is the old Socratic ideal that mere rhetoric and the power of words will not prevail.

Both Fischer and Williams suggest that Rorty leaves no space for giving reasons, using and defending criteria, clarification and argumentation. I, on the other hand, think that Rorty is well aware of the virtues of reason and argumentation, but also of their limited utility. Argumentation can proceed only on the basis of some agreement about assumptions and premises. Where there is such agreement, argumentation can be an invaluable tool. Where there is no agreement, however, we may have to use other persuasive tools such as story-telling and narrative construction. Sometimes we may have so little in common that all we can do is keep talking until we build up sufficient familiarity with each others' vocabularies and personal language that we can begin to tell stories and perhaps even argue and thereby build up new conventions and possibilities for agreement. All these modes are important and have their place; each has its own utility and virtues.

The notion of conversation, then, includes a variety of modes in which different sorts of approach may be appropriate (by which I mean they may work). Just as it is a problem for game theory that we may be mistaken about which game we are playing, so it is a problem for the notion of conversation that we may not know which mode of conversation we are participating in. Are we fruitfully disagreeing, or merely talking past one another? Are we disagreeing about some matter of substance or merely semantics? If we are mistaken about the mode of conversation in which we are engaged, we may choose the wrong tools, we may try to argue from Darwinian premises and thus fail to persuade our religious fundamentalist interlocutor; or we may tell the analytical philosopher a story and be met with incomprehension. That we can get things wrong in this way is not a flaw in the notion of conversation; it is a reason for thinking that we cannot and should not try to limit our interactions to a single type, but instead continue our explorations, reaching out to create meaning in and out of the blankness.

We should, I would argue, be careful to take conversation seriously as a kind of talking together rather than, as is often the case in practice, of talking against. We should avoid the tendency to treat conversation as though it were, at best, a seminar discussion, courtroom examination, or some equally formalised and explicitly rule-governed speech context. This again is to confuse conversation as a whole with

what is only one of its modes. Conversation is free-flowing; it moves from one topic to another (and sometimes back again) in ways that cannot be predicted or controlled. Its informality allows for contributions from anyone at any time, and it involves interruptions, incursions and recursions. A conversation may be brief or extend over years; it may even continue when none of the original parties take part in it any longer.

Michael Fischer (1990:238) recognises this fact, but wishes nevertheless to emphasise constraints (which he implies that Rorty ignores) to which conversation must be subjected:

> Contrasted to a certain kind of argument – a debate, for example, or a scientific paper – a conversation seems loose in structure. Participants are freer to shift topics and to digress. Similarly, the rules of a conversation – when a person speaks, for instance, and for how long – seem more flexible, generated by the discussion rather than prescribed in advance. ... [But] Each feature of a conversation – shifting subjects, for example, and taking turns – is governed by procedures that participants have learned. ... Similarly, despite their flexibility and open-endedness conversations have a beginning, middle and an end. There are formulas for initiating a conversation ..., sustaining it ..., and ending it. . . . We know when these rules have been broken – when we've been interrupted, say, or lectured. Conversations, then, may not heed the more rigid, external constraints that bind arguments, but they are not for that reason lawless.

Fischer wishes us to think of conversation as a norm-governed activity, and moreover an activity whose underlying social and cultural norms can and should be made explicit. It is certainly true that ordinary conversation is norm-governed. There are also good reasons for wanting to make those norms explicit. Perhaps by doing so we will, for example, find ways in which certain voices are systematically silenced and excluded from the conversation, or that certain ways of conversing are potentially cruel and humiliating in ways we do not recognise. Nevertheless, insofar as Fischer suggests that the norms governing conversation should form some type of regulative ideal, I think we should resist such an approach. I believe that part of Rorty's reason for leaving conversation unspecified is an attempt to resist the regulative approach.

What does need to be spelled out perhaps is the point or purpose of conversation. Hollis (1990:250), for instance, makes the point that conversation needs a goal:

> Yet this notion of Socratic, or almost any, conversation is, by itself, absurd. At diplomatic cocktail parties one perhaps passes the platitudes for the sake of passing them; and encounter groups may possibly have the encounter as their goal. But, if "Socratic" has anything to do with Socrates, the goal is wisdom. It may be a goal needing a sinuous pursuit, with some benefits of the hunt immanent in the hunt itself. But without the goal the activity is unintelligible.

Underlying this line of criticism, no doubt, is the fear that without an explicit purpose, conversation may become redundant, as Rebecca Comay (1986:122) reads it:

> The conversation continues: without interruption or impetus. Sanguine, indifferent to social criticism, it knows itself to be irrelevant and becomes an idle plaything for the sophisticates.

Rockmore (2002:440) suggests that the Rortian conversation can, in fact, have no goal because of the metaphilosophical assumptions from which it proceeds:

> For Rorty, either we know how the world is, in which case discussion comes to
> an end, or we do not and cannot know how the world is, and the discussion is
> endless and not worth conducting since we finally cannot know anything other
> than that we cannot know anything.

If Rockmore is correct, then it seems that there is never any point in talking. Michael
Fischer (1990:238), however, contends that conversation does not need a goal:

> Whereas an argument aims at demonstrating a truth, often by discrediting
> someone else's position, a conversation is an end in itself, an instance of the in-
> teraction that it furthers. Accordingly, whereas we aim at clinching or resolving
> an argument, we try to sustain a conversation. We consequently praise good
> conversationalists for their liveliness, wit and imagination, for their ability not
> to end the discussion but to keep it going.

Rorty himself offers no explicit goal for conversation. Instead it is an exploration
driven, he thinks, only by hope – the hope that if we continue to talk to each other we
may come to agree or at least fruitfully disagree (1980: 318). This dual hope might be
seen as expressing a deeper tension within Rorty's notion of conversation, between
what I call an agonic conception and a consensual conception. It is one of the strengths
of Rorty's philosophy that he does not try to resolve the tension between *agon* and
consensus, insisting instead that both models play their role in the conversation.

On the one hand, there is a conception of conversation as agonic, marked primarily by
dissent and competition between alternate views. Pushing Rorty in this direction is his
general antirealist perspective. His ideas that language does not picture the world, but
merely gives us tools for coping with it, and that the world, as Rorty (1991: 97; 1989:
5) puts it, stands in a causal but not justificatory relationship to our beliefs, mean that
the world may give rise to experiences that are open to interpretation. Different inter-
pretations are not merely possible but likely, and there is no objective way of deciding
between them. We have a powerful mix of ideas leading towards the agonic concep-
tion of a conversation, in which Fraser's polylogical discourse predominates.

   Alongside this, we find a powerful set of considerations in favour of a consensual
model of conversation, aimed primarily at finding common ground and agreement.
Among the ideas pushing him in this direction, are his notion of truth as that which we
agree upon. In order for conversation to launch at all, there has to be some minimal
agreement in this sense; only the hope of further and more substantial agreement could
keep the conversation going. This is a hope that Rorty himself expresses. There is thus
the hope that we can find or create at least moments of normal discourse, and perhaps
even sustain them.

   Where then does the monological fit in? I have said that I consider even the
monological to be a form of conversation, but the monological certainly proscribes the
margins of conversation. In some senses it is hyperagonic – the cry of the lone voice.
It offers a different way of looking at things, but does not actively engage with others.
Perhaps, though, we should not be too quick to assume that the monological voice –
the voice of the lone genius – is antisocial. Lurie (1991:225) notes that the creation of
culture requires two human abilities: the first is to follow rules (practices, customs);
and the second to invent new rules (practices, customs). Both these activities are so-
cial; the first requires "joining in", and the second requires "attracting others". The
hyperagonic monological voice of the strong poet may thus be seen as an attempt to

attract others through exemplification and iteration. The lone voice may not actively engage with others, but its very cry calls for a response.

There is a different sort of monologue, though, which is a sort of hyperconsensualism. This rests on the assumption that everyone really is attempting to say the same thing as oneself, and thus only one's own articulation is needed. It is this hyperconsensualism that Comay (1986:128), for instance, worries about in Rorty's philosophy. She believes that Rorty's conversation "steamrollers all difference and becomes a night in which all cows are black". She further points out that Rorty's own conversational practice is deeply monological and points to the "systematic way in which Rorty has managed to neutralise the potentially radical force of almost every thinker he encounters". I think Rorty certainly does fall into these traps that Comay identifies, but insofar as we see this as problematic, we should treat it as a warning to tread more cautiously in our own conversational practice, rather than an invitation to reject the concept of conversation altogether.

One way, then, to answer the question regarding the point of conversation is to view conversation as not only lacking a single set of rules or norms or a single set of practices, but also a single goal. Sometimes, conversation aims at winning an argument or at "attracting others", and sometimes, as Roth (1990:354) notes, at creating solidarity:

> Conversation can lead to a kind of solidarity, one that is based not on some discovery of a common essence, but on an acknowledgment of connections and shared beliefs that tie people together. It is crucial for Rorty that the realization of the contingency of these connections and beliefs need not undermine our willingness to preserve them, even at great risk.

Another way to answer the question is to note what all of these moments – normal, polylogical, monological, the agonic, the consensualist, and the hyper-forms of both – have in common, namely that they are all attempts to persuade. In normal discourse, we proceed from some shared basis through argumentation, hoping for agreement and consensus. In polylogical moments we employ other forms of persuasion – such as stories – to find common ground. The strong poet offers his own iteration of metaphors or the example of his life (or those of his characters) as a way of "attracting others", so that is once again a sort of persuasion. Only in the hyperconsensualist moment does persuasion cease to be the goal. But even here, Rorty's monological quality is often intended as a type of persuasion – to show that what otherwise seems incomprehensible is not so.

It is this idea of conversation as a multivalent persuasive activity in which a variety of forms are encouraged, with both agonic and consensual moments, that I think we should take from Rorty and use in constructing an idea of liberal society.

If the idea of conversation is indeed the key to understanding society, then the question is to what extent conversation is a plausible and illuminating model for thinking about society. The most obvious objection to thinking of society in this way is that the conversational model is in some sense idealist; it privileges words and thoughts over actions and reality. To what extent is this objection valid?

Given the broader features of Rorty's philosophy – his anti-representationalism, in particular – it is tempting to read Rorty as purely a constructionist, unconcerned with the material aspects of reality and the need for social action. Topper (1995:964), for example, offers this indictment:

Oddly, Rorty's preoccupation with avoiding a return to foundationalism, meta-
physics, and Truth have left him so resistant to all forms of systematic analysis
that his alternative to foundationalism is in many ways every bit as aloof from
the complexities of ongoing social and political issues as the foundationalist
philosophy which he sought to replace.

One of the virtues of *Achieving our country* (1998) is the way it brings into focus – in
a way that Rorty's previous work had not – his own commitment to a politics of action;
his own dismay with theorists who over-intellectualise political questions. On the
other hand, it must be admitted that he does emphasise (perhaps, even overemphasise)
the constructed aspects of social reality and the role of the intellectual, and gives inor-
dinate attention to the place of language.

That Rorty does indeed privilege language over action does not mean that any soci-
ety premised on conversation need do so, however. Since the idea of conversation
models a notion of liberal democratic society, however, we should not ignore language
and talking altogether. For what in the end sets democratic societies apart is that they
involve active participation from their citizens, and this continuous active creation of
democratic participation is often a matter of talking. So it is no accident that freedom
of expression is held to be highly important in democracies.

A Rortian liberal democracy would be a society that welcomes all contributions
from all voices, encouraging argument and anecdotes, old vocabularies and new meta-
phors, new meanings, extensions of old meanings, and reductions.

Tom Sorrel (1990:24) also sees this idea of conversation in Rorty's work. He force-
fully argues that it goes too far:

> To say that liberalism tolerates many forms of persuasion, however, is *not* to
> say that according to liberalism anything goes. *Not* anything goes, because not
> all forms of speech can be interpreted as persuasive speech. In particular, it is
> unclear that the particular *outré* forms of speech Rorty so admires in philoso-
> phy can be recognized as persuasive. Rorty confuses the real invitation liberal-
> ism extends to different forms of persuasive speech with an imaginary invita-
> tion liberalism is supposed to extend to different vocabularies. The latter invita-
> tion is far wider than the former, and only the former seems to be derivable
> from liberalism. "Anything goes so long as it is in the sphere of persuasion"
> does not mean that anything goes so long as it is in the sphere of words or that
> any new vocabulary deserves an encounter with a going vocabulary. To put it
> another way, it is only the upshots of certain linguistic encounters that liberal-
> ism takes to matter to truth. Encounters between arguments fit the bill; encoun-
> ters between language games do not. They are at the wrong level of generality.
> In any case, it would have been odd if liberalism had been made for the poetic
> culture. Rorty's picture of this culture as one in which new linguistic forms are
> continually killing old ones, seems better suited to a politics of permanent revo-
> lution than to liberalism.

Sorrel, then, argues that a liberal society is one that extends an invitation to, and toler-
ates only forms of persuasive speech, which he restricts to argumentation, because he
supposes (taking a Millian line) that what matters about free speech is that it results in
truth. Rorty, he thinks, as do I, envisions a society that extends the invitation and toler-
ance to include new vocabularies, and fears that this is incompatible with liberalism.

Failing to take the goal of truth seriously, it results in instability. What is at stake for Sorrel then, is the nature of liberalism and its relation to (the goal of achieving) the truth.

Let us begin with the question of liberalism. I take conversational society to be liberal only in Rorty's broad sense - it eschews cruelty and humiliation. Thus it is no argument against the model, and perhaps even an argument for it, that it does not fit the actual extant idea of political liberalism. Moreover, the demand that liberal society take alternative vocabularies rather than mere claims seriously is not as unrealistic as Sorrel suggests. Is this not precisely the demand of multiculturalism? Is not one way to take these demands seriously to try out new experimental visions of liberalism rather than the conservative model Sorrel upholds?

Second, there is Sorrel's claim that only some types of speech (particularly arguments) are persuasive. This is a matter I have already dealt with. I have tried to show that even the lone voice in the wilderness is an attempt at persuasion in that it seeks to attract others to it. In any case, this is surely an empirical matter and another argument for an experimental approach. It suggests that we should let everyone speak and see who persuades, how and why; rather than determining beforehand (and who are "we" to decide?) that only some forms of speech will succeed.

Finally, there is the question of the relation between speech, persuasion and truth. Rorty does not necessarily disagree with Sorrel that truth is an important aim of conversation. They differ, I suspect, in how they understand truth. For Sorrel, truth seems to be something we find through discursive encounters, while for Rorty it is something we create from them – truth for Rorty is simply whatever, as the result of free and open conversation, we agree upon. It may be that, in fact, we agree upon very little (perhaps even as little as the banal truths of arithmetic), but this is all the more reason to continue talking to find further agreement or fruitful disagreement.

Can the conversation be free and open, though? Kaiser (1990:1074), for instance, worries that Rorty imagines that free conversation is easily obtained. He points to some important differences between the notion of freedom in communication, as employed by Rorty and Habermas, in that for Habermas, "undistorted communication" is merely a "regulative counterfactual idea", while Rorty seems to retain a belief in its actual possibility:

> According to Rorty, freedom as "undistorted communication" is a *fact* as soon as discourses are entirely freed from any internal (i.e. Metaphysical) or external constraints (such as physical violence; brutal force).

I think Kaiser is correct to be worried on this account. In particular I think that Rorty underplays the question of power, and would argue in general that, in order to realise a Rortian conversational society, we need to take power much more seriously than Rorty himself does. Nevertheless, I would also argue that the turn to deliberation that both Kaiser (through his invocation of Habermas) and Sorrel (through his insistence on argument) would press upon us, is retrograde. Rather than making this argument on a general and abstract level, I want to demonstrate the superiority of conversation at handling one particular phenomenon – claro culture – which the deliberative model cannot.

Claro culture is given its name by Diego Gambetta (1998:20). Its essential features are that it places great store in having strong opinions on any topic from the outset and on winning arguments rather than listening to and learning from others. Gambetta

takes the basic idea of claro culture from Hirschman, who identifies it with Latin America. Gambetta extends it to Italy, but for our purposes what matters is simply that it is an identifiable phenomenon of which our model must take account.

Given its features, a claro culture (or subculture), as Gambetta (1998:30-1) argues, limits the space for argumentation to the following cases: the first strong opinion expressed wins (and the power and authority of the claimant is implicitly accepted and reinforced); the strong opinion is accepted but subtly undermined by the suggestion that it is obvious ("claro") and old-hat (the argument is thereby drawn); an equally strong opposing opinion is expressed and the argument degenerates into a restatement of these two opinions, generally with an acoustic or equivalent escalation leading to either the defeat of one party, or violent confrontation.

Such a culture is clearly hostile to deliberation, which in its ideal form, according to Elster (1998), is motivated by reason and aims at transforming parties' preferences through argumentation, which is to say it is motivated to find an objective solution through an appeal to impartial values. Claristas are not motivated towards productive argumentation motivated by reason, and Gambetta, therefore, suggests that attempts to engage with claristas on deliberative grounds are unlikely to result in anything other than frustration. He is left with the hope only that the development of technology and science in claro cultures might foster a more deliberative attitude amongst claristas. Confronted with the clarista, then, the deliberationist is literally silenced. His toolbox is insufficient to enable him to engage the clarista, but rather than consider his own position limited, he prefers to blame the clarista for the impasse and wait for history to vindicate him.

Can the conversationalist fare any better? It would certainly be too quick to simply assume that claro cultural interactions form another moment of conversation. Is the clarista resistant to argumentation or to all forms of persuasion? If the latter, then claro culture poses as much of a problem for conversation as for deliberation. Conversation, as I have argued, is at the core a practice defined by its commitment to persuasion. I have argued that this commitment can take a variety of forms, including the case of the lone voice calling for a response; but we cannot hold on to conversation as a meaningful category while expanding it to any speech form whatsoever. If any attempt to persuade the clarista to accept an alternative view must finally degenerate into violent confrontation, then should we not use Rorty's distinction between force and persuasion (1989:60) to rule out conversation with the clarista in advance, rather than only once the fists are flying? Claro culture, in other words, seems to occupy the very fine line between persuasion and force, rather than falling clearly within the category of conversation.

If claro culture is not quite conversation, should we join the deliberationists in waiting for history to push the clarista to our side? The quasi-moral imperative that Rorty would have us adopt namely, to keep the conversation going suggests that a Rortian would not adopt a quietist attitude to the clarista, but would attempt to use tools other than argumentation to coax her off the line and into our conversational circle. Given that conversation, unlike deliberation, does not privelege argumentation, it might use more rhetorical devices to assuage the conflict with the clarista and thus accommodate her.

Gambetta, despite having any such intention, gives us reason to hope that conversational gambits may work. The first hope comes from the fact that, while claro cultures may generally tend toward authoritarianism, Gambetta argues that they are compatible

with democracy. This shared commitment to a fundamental conversational ideal suggests hope that we might find further common ground. The second hope comes from Gambetta's recognition that rhetoric does play an important role in claro cultures; indeed the culture earns its appellation from him on the basis of its primary rhetorical strategy of responding to claims with "Claro!" Furthermore, Gambetta (1998:35) acknowledges that the impulsiveness that claro culture encourages in turn requires "an extraordinary amount of social emollient . . . to soothe people who risk making fools of themselves" and concedes that in this respect, rhetoric is more likely than argument to enable people to change their minds without losing face. What concerns him about this move to rhetoric is that it has a deleterious effect on political and public life. In particular, Gambetta (1998:35) claims:

> Lofty rhetoric will happily coexist with mean bargaining, and jointly they will drive serious discussion on principles out of public life. Where arguing rapidly becomes confrontational and murky, bargaining becomes the dominant option and society will be more cynical, less fair in terms of distributive justice, and more conflictual.

Whereas Gambetta views this as a matter of concern, it gives the conversationalist a third cause for hope, namely that claristas are open to persuasion through bargaining, as well as through rhetoric.

   The deliberationist is committed to argument and reason on principled grounds and resists both rhetoric and bargaining because he asscociates them with the manipulation rather than transformation of preferences. The cost of those principles is that deliberation remains only an ideal, eschewing the messier interactions of the real world. The conversationist, by contrast, is pragmatically motivated and thus seeks to create an ideal of interaction in and through those messy real world interactions. Is Gambetta right in suggesting that allowing claristas into the conversation would result in their infecting all of society with cynicism, conflict and injustice? He offers no empirical evidence to back up his claim, nor given the utter ineffecuality of deliberation in the face of claro culture, does he offer a solution to the problems he attributes to it. Conversationalism has no solution either, but does offer the hope that we have an array of tools to find a solution if we continue to engage rather than silence others or ourselves.

   Rorty's deliberationist and analytic critics both decry the move to conversation on the grounds that argumentation and reason are necessary to civilized philosophical or political life. The conversational model does not deny this. Deliberation and argumentation, it agrees, are good where they are possible. The problem is quite simply that they are not always possible, and so have limited scope and utility. The phenomenon of claro culture gives us a concrete case in which argument and deliberation fail. Confronted with a real example of failure the deliberationist or analytic is reduced to silence and resentful blame for their interlocuter. The more pragmatically inclined conversationalist, on the other hand, finds in the failure a spur to extend the interaction. This invitation to continue talking is one that the conversationalist extends not only to the clarista but also to the cornered deliberationist.

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