ARTÍCULOS

DOES EPISTEMOLOGY REST ON A MISTAKE?*
UNDERSTANDING RORTY ON SCEPTICISM

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> Kant calls it a 'scandal to philosophy and to human reason in general' that there is still no cogent proof of 'the existence of things outside of us' which will do away with all scepticism [. . .] The 'scandal of philosophy' is not that this proof has yet to be given but that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again.
>
> Martin Heidegger 1927

1. *Introduction: The Master Argument*

According to Richard Rorty, philosophy's history is best understood as a story, not of different solutions to the same problems, but of long lulls of journeyman labour punctuated by the occasional revolution that ensues when some writer of genius —Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, or Frege— invents a novel vocabulary, and hence a fresh set of puzzles. Far from vanquishing the old timers in a fair fight, members of the philosophical *avant garde* typically

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* Compare the parallel query about moral philosophy, trenchantly posed by H.A. Prichard (1912).

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proceed by recommending that we try looking at things their way, and see how well we get on. Or as Rorty puts it:

> Interesting philosophical change (we might say "philosophical progress", but this would be question-begging) occurs not when a new way is found to deal with an old problem but when a new set of problems emerges and the old ones begin to fade away. The temptation (both in Descartes's time and in ours) is to think that the new problematic is the old one rightly seen. But, for all the reasons Kuhn and Feyerabend have offered in their criticism of the "textbook" approach to the history of inquiry, this temptation should be resisted.
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> (Rorty 1979, p. 264)

On this view, then, revolutionary philosophers do not want to solve the venerable old problems, but try instead to transcend them by changing the subject. In doing so, they supply a perspective from which the preoccupations of their predecessors lose their urgency and can come to seem quaint, even parochial.

Given Rorty's historicist understanding of philosophy, it is not surprising that he himself recommends that we ignore traditional epistemological problems because (as he sees it) the vocabulary required for their formulation has simply turned out to be more trouble than it is worth.[1] Indeed, for two decades now, Rorty has argued that the very idea of a "theory of knowledge" will seem neither tempting nor necessary unless we are in the grip of an optional picture —that of thought or language as the mirror of nature— that his neo-pragmatism abjures. Here is a fair first pass at his principal objection to epistemology, which we may call the *Master Argument*:

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[1] Cf. Rorty (1981e), (1984b), (1998c) for more on the historiography of philosophy.

(1) *Since epistemology stems from the need to explain how knowledge is possible, refuting scepticism is really the discipline's* raison d'être. *However,* (2) *scepticism —that is, the problem of determining the accuracy of our representations of reality— can be formulated if and only if it is assumed that language or thought is a* tertium quid *standing between the self and the world. Since* (3) *we need not adopt this representationalist picture,* (4) *the problem of scepticism is 'optional'. Consequently,* (5) *we can simply set aside epistemology, for its central problem rests on theoretical commitments we can eschew.*

At one fell swoop, then, Rorty's Master Argument promises to get rid of Cartesian evil demons and of the need for a discipline devoted to their exorcism. Can it make good on these ambitious claims?

I shall argue that it cannot. Focusing exclusively on premises (2) and (3) of the Master Argument,[2] I shall try to show that Rorty's main thesis (*viz.*, that scepticism presupposes what he calls "representationalism") is vitiated by a six-fold equivocation, and that a plausible interpretation of it indicates that Rorty himself may be a sceptic *malgré lui.*

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[2] I must stress at the outset that this does *not* mean that I concede the premise (1) to Rorty. On the contrary: his suggestion that without Cartesian scepticism there would be nothing for epistemologists to do rests on an eccentric and overly narrow understanding of the theory of knowledge —an understanding that would be anathema to epistemologists as different in outlook as Chisholm and Quine. Accordingly, I shall excuse myself from discussing premise (1) of the Master Argument on the grounds that I expect it will simply seem wrong-headed to most readers, who will recognize that there is more to the theory of knowledge (e.g., the Gettier problem, or the analysis of knowledge; the formulation of epistemic principles, and much else besides) than is dreamt of in Rorty's philosophy.

2. *Neo-Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism*

First, however, we need to get absolutely clear about Rorty's basic claims by (a) outlining his stance towards epistemology and scepticism; and (b) disambiguating "representationalism", epistemology's original sin.

A. Epistemology and The Mirror of Nature

What Rorty inveighs against, as is well known, is the idea that philosophy (as epistemology) is a "foundational" discipline qualified, in virtue of its privileged understanding of the mind and its powers of representation, to judge the rest of culture from its lofty Olympian perch —competent, that is,

> to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion [. . . to] divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all.
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> (Rorty 1979, p. 3)

What alternative, then, does neo-pragmatism propose? According to Rorty, the central project of post-analytic philosophy is simple: to compare and contrast vocabularies, playing world-views off against one another, whilst refraining from inquiring into their correctness or accuracy —at least insofar as that is construed as 'fit' or 'conformity' to something extra-linguistic.

This refusal to entertain questions about the relation between discourse and reality leads neo-pragmatists to declare the end of epistemology, since the problem of scepticism cannot survive the demise of the idea that language is a medium of representation. This theme —that epistemology withers away once we discard the representationalist intuition that "deep down beneath all the texts, there is

something which is not just one more text but that to which various texts are supposed to be adequate" (Rorty 1982a, p. xxxvii)— has been prominent in Rorty's work since the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where it looms large:

> [T]o think of knowledge as something which presents a "problem", and about which we ought to have a "theory", is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations —a view of knowledge which, I have been arguing, is a product of the seventeenth century. The moral to be drawn is that if this way of thinking about knowledge is optional, then so is epistemology, and so is philosophy as it has understood itself since the middle of the last century.
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> (Rorty 1979, p. 136)[3]

Putting this all together, we can summarize Rorty's views on scepticism, epistemology, and representationalism in four theses, [S1]–[S4]:

[S1] *Epistemology and Scepticism*: Epistemology largely owes its existence to the need to refute scepticism: "[n]obody would have wanted 'human knowledge' (as opposed to some particular theory or report) justified unless he had been frightened by scepticism" (Rorty 1979, p. 229). Consequently, the theory of knowledge "survives nowadays only because some philosophy professors still think it important to take epistemic scepticism seriously [. . .] Once you get rid of the sceptic [. . .] then I think you have little motive for waxing epistemological" (Rorty 1995b, p. 226).

[S2] *The Conditional Correctness of Scepticism*: Cartesian-style scepticism is unanswerable as it stands: "nothing

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[3] Cf. Rorty (1979, pp. 6, 12, 140, 392), (1981a, p. 128), (1986, p. 139), (1989, p. 10), (1990, pp. 371–372), (1991a, pp. 2–3), (1991b, pp. 3–6).

can refute the sceptic" (Rorty 1979, p. 294). So we must concede that the sceptic's verdict is at least *conditionally correct*: provided we agree that the sceptic's question is not ill-posed, we have to admit that his answer to that question is the only rationally defensible one, and concede that we lack knowledge of the external world.[4]

[S3] *The Evasion of Scepticism*: Nevertheless, we can avoid scepticism by showing that it depends on 'optional' assumptions we are not constrained to endorse. Since "the sceptic cannot be answered directly but does not need to be" (Rorty 1995d, p. 157), all is that is needed is a dissolution, not a solution. What we must do, in other words, is find fault with the problem by rejecting the vocabulary or framework of ideas required for its formulation.

[S4] *The Neo-Pragmatist Diagnosis*: Scepticism presupposes "representationalism" —crudely, the idea that language (or thought) is the mirror of nature, whose goal is the accurate reflection of extra-linguistic (or extra-mental) reality. Accordingly, to excise this intuition would be to erase "the picture of language as a medium, something standing between the self and the nonhuman reality with which the self seeks to be in touch" (Rorty 1989, pp. 10–11), and thereby "to drop the picture which the epistemological sceptic needs to make his scepticism interesting and arguable" (Rorty 1986, p. 129).

Theses [S1]–[S4] are the raw materials for the Master Argument. We can immediately spot three of the argument's leading ideas: the claim that epistemology's *raison d'être* is to refute scepticism; the claim that the sceptic cannot

[4] Numerous important contributions to the literature express sympathy with this pessimistic view. Cf. Heidegger (1927); Wittgenstein (1969); Cavell (1979); Stroud (1984), (1989); Strawson (1985); Grayling (1985); Nagel (1986); McGinn (1989); Hookway (1990); Fogelin (1994); and Williams (1996).

make his case without appealing to some representational-ist premise; and, finally, the claim that a representational-ist picture of thought and/or language is optional. These claims raise a great many questions, but two stand out as especially pressing. First, what is "representationalism"? Secondly, why are we urged to discard it? We cannot begin to evaluate the Master Argument until we have answers to these questions. Accordingly, we need to take a closer look at the details of Rorty's anti-representationalism.

B. The Varieties of Representationalism: Six Senses

How, then, are we to understand "representationalism"? This is where things become frustrating. Instead of defining the position, or identifying it with a clearly defined thesis, Rorty falls back on examples, suggestively juxtaposing figures from recent Continental and analytic philosophy. Drawing on a variety of sources, he includes the following in his pantheon of anti-representationalists: (i) Nietzsche's perspectivist dictum that truth is "a mobile army of metaphors" (Nietzsche 1873, p. 46);[5] (ii) James's refusal to regard truth as "the simple duplication of the mind of a ready-made and given reality" (James 1907, p. 87);[6] (iii) Heidegger's emphasis on the priority of "readiness-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*) over "presence-to-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*);[7] (iv) Dewey's critique of the spectator theory of knowledge;[8] (v) Wittgenstein's retraction of the Tractarian

[5] Cf. Rorty (1989, pp. 17, 27–29), (1991b, pp. 2–3).

[6] Cf. Rorty (1979, pp. 10, 279), (1980, pp. 162–163), (1981c, p. 205), (1986, pp. 127–129), (1995a, pp. 281–282).

[7] Cf. Rorty (1976d), (1979, pp. 6, 12, 162–163, 368–372), (1984a), (1989a, p. 59), (1991b, p. 4), (1994b, pp. 94–95).

[8] Cf. Rorty (1977, pp. 86–87), (1978, p. 94), (1979, pp. 39, 159), (1980, pp. 162–163), (1981c, p. 193), (1983), (1988c), (1991a, pp. 1, 12–17), (1995c).

picture theory of the proposition;[9] (vi) Quine's epistemo-
logical holism, expressed figuratively by the suggestion that
beliefs form a web, not an edifice;[10] (vii) Goodman's vat-
ic suggestion that worlds are fashioned, not found, so that
there is no pre-fabricated reality, only a rich and irreducible
plurality of man-made versions;[11] (viii) Derrida's mockery
of the idea that the interpretation of texts can be ground-
ed on something extra-linguistic;[12] and (ix) Davidson's re-
jection of the so-called "third dogma of empiricism", the
dualism of scheme and content.[13]

   If we are not bewildered in the least by this list, we cer-
tainly should be. There is, of course, nothing wrong with
the use of examples *per se*; but is it really so clear that
Rorty's heroes —some of whom, like Quine and Heideg-
ger, make strange bedfellows indeed— are all taking aim at
the same target, or that their writings uphold and support
a common moral? That, I think, seems most implausible.
Indeed, the reader cannot be blamed if he comes away from
Rorty's texts with the suspicion that "representationalism"
is a moving target, glossed in terms of metaphors and the
odd (vague) historical allusion. This is because Rorty's rep-
resentationalist foes —an obstinate but largely anonymous
lot —are said to invoke "[t]he whole vocabulary of iso-
morphism, picturing, and mapping" (Rorty 1980, p. 163),
regard "a *tertium quid* between Subject and Object" (Rorty
1982a, p. xviii), and "see language-as-a-whole in relation to
something else to which it applies" (Rorty 1982a, p. xix), or

   [9] Cf. Rorty (1976c), (1979, pp. 136, 295), (1981a, pp. 110–114),
(1989, pp. 11–13, 21–22, 53–55), (1989a).
   [10] Cf. Rorty (1979, pp. 169–175), (1988b, pp. 107–108).
   [11] Cf. Rorty (1981c, p. 192), (1982a, pp. xxxix, xlvii), (1989, pp. 10,
20), (1994c, p. 206).
   [12] Cf. Rorty (1978), (1981d), (1989b).
   [13] Cf. Rorty (1972), (1986), (1989, pp. 9–19, 13–20).

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as "a veil between us and reality" (Rorty 1986, p. 145). Too vague to repay unraveling, this tangled skein of phrases is best ignored. Does this mean we can simply write off the Master Argument as a lost cause?

No. Things are not so simple: a closer look reveals that Rorty uses the term "representationalism" to refer to several distinct doctrines he regards as untenable. More specifically, I detect a half-dozen main uses of "representationalism", which I shall now present, along with a brief statement indicating Rorty's opposition to each:

[R1] *Representationalism and Ontology*: The meta-philosophical position that the selection of an ontological scheme or vocabulary is determined *only* by whether or not it conforms to (i.e., faithfully depicts) an independent existing metaphysical structure of reality, and is no way interest-relative.

Rorty's rejection of this view —he insists that "the meta-philosophical question about pragmatism is whether there is something other than convenience to use as a criterion in science and philosophy" (Rorty 1993, p. 456) —is uncompromising. R1 cannot be correct, he insists, because the choice of a vocabulary is ultimately a practical issue, not one about getting reality right: "When we turn from individual sentences to vocabularies and theories, critical terminology naturally shifts from metaphors of isomorphism, symbolism, and mapping to talk of utility, convenience, and likelihood of getting what we want" (Rorty 1980, p. 163).[14]

[R2] *Representationalism and Meaning*: Semantic theories according to which the meaning of sentences is given by their (realist) truth-conditions.

[14] Cf. Rorty (1982a, pp. xxi, xxxvii), (1989, pp. 4–7; 20–21), (1991b, p. 4). Note how reminiscent this is of Carnap's (1950) old distinction between internal and external questions.

Rorty claims R2 compares unfavorably with theories of meaning which take use or assertibility as their central concept. The real issue between the two camps, we are told, is "whether to treat language as a picture or as a game" (Rorty 1981d, p. 110).[15] Here Rorty's sympathies clearly lie with the later Wittgenstein, who took a dim view of his earlier picture theory of the proposition and came to see language as a set of social practices, or a form of life.

[R3] *Representationalism and Epistemic Justification*: An atomistic view of verification, as opposed to the confirmational holism advanced by Quine in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism".

Following the lead of Quine —according to whom "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body" (Quine 1951, p. 41)— Rorty opts for the view that "knowledge is not like an architectonic structure but like a field of force" (Rorty 1979, p. 181). Empirical beliefs cannot be tested in isolation, but only as a block. Thus R3 must go by the board.

[R4] *Representationalism and Truth*: The traditional thesis that the nature of truth consists in correspondence with reality or the world.

R4 can be written off as an answer to a bad question, Rorty thinks, since he maintains that there is no philosophically interesting question about how language hooks onto the world. Instead of asking whether language "pictures" or "reflects" the world, we should study the relation between human linguistic practices and extra-linguistic reality in a purely naturalistic spirit, seeing such practices in broadly Darwinian terms as yet another way organisms adapt

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[15] Cf. Rorty (1988d), where a surprising effort is made to portray Davidson —long a champion of a truth conditional account of meaning— as an assertibility theorist.

to their environment. Once we agree with neo-pragmatists that "[w]e understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world when we understand their causal relations with the world" (Rorty 1986, p. 128),[16] we will see through the traditional correspondence theory.

[R5] *Representationalism and Conceptual Schemes*: The so-called "third dogma of empiricism", or the dualism of scheme and content, "of organizing system and something waiting to be organized" (Davidson 1974, p. 189).[17]

Rorty follows Davidson in giving up the dichotomy between a scheme of categories and the raw material —"something neutral and common that lies outside of all schemes" (Davidson 1974, p. 190)— on which it is imposed. He also agrees with Davidson that without R5, we will appreciate that "[l]anguage is not a screen or filter through which our knowledge of the world must pass" (Davidson 1984, p. xviii).

[R6] *Representationalism and Objectivity*: The intuition that empirical knowledge purports to be knowledge of something objective (in the minimal sense that what is known is independent of my knowing or believing it).

Rorty is suspicious of such talk, for he fears it tempts us to embrace "the notion of a world so independent of our knowledge that it might, for all we know, prove to contain none of the things we have always thought we were talking about" (Rorty 1972, p. 14). That notion is untenable, he

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[16] Cf. Rorty (1979, pp. 266–294), (1988b, p. 97), (1989, pp. 15–21), (1989a, pp. 50–51), (1991a, p. 12), (1995a, p. 281). He adds that "my differences with Putnam come down, in the end, to his unhappiness with such a purely causal picture" (Rorty 1993, p. 449). See the Appendix for further discussion of his neo-pragmatist understanding of truth.

[17] Cf. Rorty (1972, pp. 5–9, 12–14), (1979, pp. 259, 265, 309), (1986), (1989, pp. 9–20), (1990, pp. 373–374), (1991a, pp. 8–12), (1995a), (1995d).

thinks, because Davidson has shown that "most of our beliefs [...] simply must be true" (Rorty 1972, p. 12).[18]

This completes our catalogue of Rorty's representationalisms. It takes no great philosophical acumen to perceive that the range of positions on this list is considerable: substantive theses in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and epistemology sit cheek by jowl with apparent truisms and controversial meta-philosophical commitments, though no effort is made to explain what they all have in common (if anything) or how they are logically related. Now, where does this leave the Master Argument's case against epistemology?

3. *Scepticism and Representationalism*

If the Master Argument is to carry conviction, its proponents must defend premises (2) and (3): the claim that scepticism about our knowledge of the external world cannot be formulated without representationalism, and the claim that representationalism is "optional". The question before us, then, is whether there is some single form of representationalism, R, such that it satisfies two conditions:

(i) *The Indispensability Requirement*: R is indispensable to the case for scepticism about our knowledge of the external world; and

(ii) *The Optionality Requirement*: There are good reasons for not adopting R.

Unless some form of representationalism satisfies both conditions, the Master Argument will be unsound and its target —epistemology— will escape unscathed.

Now, will any of Rorty's representationalism fit the bill? To answer this question, I want to set aside R6 momentarily

[18] Cf. Rorty (1972, pp. 14–17), (1982a, pp. xxi–xxxvii), (1986, pp. 128–132).

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in order to argue that none of the remaining representationalisms satisfy condition (i), though some may well satisfy condition (ii). To show that none of the first five representationalisms satisfies the Indispensability Requirement, I shall examine three major forms of scepticism (espoused by Hume, Descartes, and Kant) in Section 3 (A)–(C), in an effort to discredit the suggestion that there is some single form of representationalism among R1–R5 that is presupposed by all three philosophers. Then, in Section 3 (D), I will consider whether R6 satisfies condition (i) and, if so, where that leaves Rorty's case against the very idea of epistemology.

A. Hume and The Circle of Belief[19]

Does Humean scepticism about the external world support Rorty's anti-representationalist diagnosis? At first blush, it might seem that it certainly does. Consider this passage, from the final section of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*:

> By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them? [. . .] It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be answered? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.
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> (Hume 1748, XII, p. i)

[19] I borrow this expression from Van Cleve (1985), who provides a lucid and most instructive treatment of the issues raised by the argument we are about to discuss.

According to Hume, the assumption that true judgments accurately depict an inaccessible mind-independent reality makes a mystery of verification, effectively undermining the possibility of empirical knowledge.[20] This way of looking at things may appear to vindicate Rorty, for it suggests that scepticism is the product of our commitment to the correspondence theory of truth, or R4. That is, we can construct the following argument using the raw materials Hume provides:

(H1) If truth is a matter of correspondence with the facts, then S can justify her body of beliefs only if she can compare her representations of reality with reality itself.

(H2) Such a comparison is impossible: since there is no exit from the circle of our beliefs, we have no independent access to the world.

∴ (H3) If truth is correspondence, then none of S's beliefs about the world amounts to knowledge. [H1, H2]

(H4) Scepticism is untenable: we can and do have empirical knowledge.[21]

∴ (H5) Truth cannot be a matter of correspondence with reality. [H3, H4]

However, I submit that there is less here than meets the eye. Two things deserve special comment:

(1) The correspondence theory of truth is not an indispensable presupposition of scepticism.[22] This is illustrated

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[20] Berkeley voices a similar complaint (Berkeley 1710, section 86), but his response is very different from that of Hume: whereas the latter accepted scepticism, the former sought to avoid it by denying that ideas are epistemically prior to objects.

[21] Obviously Hume does not endorse this anti-sceptical premise, so I do not attribute (H1)–(H5) to him.

[22] Indeed, Alston (1996) argues that it is not sufficient either, but I shall let that pass here.

nicely by the case of Brand Blanshard, the most lucid and scrupulous defender of the coherence theory of truth, who unexpectedly found himself carrying the epistemological burden he claimed rested squarely on the shoulders of his opponent, the correspondence theorist. For although Blanshard used (H1)–(H5) to argue that the correspondence theory divorces the test of truth from its nature and so engenders scepticism,[23] he recognized that a coherence theory may be accused of making truth epistemically inaccessible as well. Here is his statement of the objection:

> What is it that our judgments must cohere with in order to be true? It is a system of knowledge complete and all-inclusive. But obviously that is beyond us —very probably forever beyond us. If to know anything as true, which means simply to know it, requires that we should see its relation to the total of possible knowledge, then we neither do nor can know anything.
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> (Blanshard 1939 II, p. 269)

The difficulty arises, then, when we ask what system of judgments the coherentist invokes. Coherence with one's *present* corpus of beliefs is insufficient: such an outright identification of truth with justification *simpliciter* is rendered problematic by the commonplace observation that truth, unlike justification, is not a property that a statement can 'lose'. Apparently, then, a far more rarefied form of coherence must be invoked: p is true if and only if it would be a member of an ideally coherent (i.e., consistent, absolutely complete, and systematically integrated) set of beliefs. Trouble looms here, too: if the proponent of a coherence theory glosses truth in terms of some ideal system or *focus imaginarius*, he faces a variant of the objection he brought against the champions of correspondence. For

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[23] Cf. Blanshard (1939 II, pp. 268–269).

how now can S tell whether a given belief of hers, even if coherent with her current doxastic system, will be a member of the elect final set?

So the objection is simple enough: coherence with the ideal system —namely, "the system in which everything real and possible is coherently included" (Blanshard 1939 II, p. 276)— is not appreciably better off than correspondence with an inaccessible reality unless some pre-established harmony can be established between coherence-with-one's-present-set-of-beliefs and coherence-with-the-ideally-comprehensive-set-of-beliefs. Although Blanshard sees the problem, he does not solve it. Nor have recent proponents of epistemic theories of truth —Hilary Putnam, for instance— fared much better.[24]

The significance of this is obvious: if the problem of scepticism plagues the partisans of the coherence theory, then the correspondence theory cannot be a necessary condition of the problem's formulation. Since the case for scepticism can get off the ground quite well without appealing to correspondence, R4 does not satisfy condition (i).[25]

(2) Note, too, that (H1)–(H5) has often been pressed into service by Rorty in his attempts to discredit the idea that truth means mirroring nature. Indeed, the argument is his principal objection to R4, and it is discernible in most of his major writings.[26] However, this strategy puts the neo-

[24] I defend these claims at length in McDermid (1998b).

[25] Although I cannot agree with Rorty that the sort of correspondence theory he opposes is a necessary condition of scepticism, I do think that many of the questions he raises about truth are well worth asking. Perhaps he is right, for instance, to be sceptical about the idea that truth is an explanatory term —a difficulty, he suspects, that an appeal to a mysterious relation of "correspondence" merely defers (Rorty 1982a, pp. xxiv–xxvi), (1986, p. 128). But see the Appendix for a discussion of Rorty's deflationary approach to truth.

[26] Cf. Rorty (1976a, p. 67), (1979, pp. 178, 293), (1981b, p. 180), (1981d, p. 154), (1982a, pp. xviii–xix, xlvii), (1985b, p. 83), (1986,

pragmatist in a ticklish and untenable position. The charge he brings against the correspondence theory —namely, that we cannot justify our beliefs by comparing them with an unconceptualized reality— can be made to stick only if we assume that our epistemic access to the world is mediated by language or discourse, so that "there is no way to get outside of our beliefs and our language" (Rorty 1979, p. 178). But the implied contrast between being "inside" language or "outside" it seemingly makes sense only if we persist in thinking of language as a medium, or as a *tertium quid* that somehow interposes itself between our minds and the world. But this understanding of language is precisely what Rorty's Master Argument is directed against. How, then, can he try to score points off the correspondence theory by lamenting "our inability to step outside language" (Rorty 1989, p. 75)? Such talk, it would seem, presupposes some form of the very representationalism Rorty aspires to transcend.

It looks, in short, as if Rorty is trying to have it both ways: he presses the anti-comparison point when taking aim at the correspondence theory, then drops it when trying to dissolve the sceptical problematic. On pain of inconsistency, he can only retain one of these commitments. Which is it to be? If he were to renounce (H2) and allow that beliefs can be justified by direct confrontation, then on what basis could he reject the correspondence theory of truth? If, on the other hand, he were to accept (H2), he would compromise his anti-representationalism, and the core of the Master Argument would thereby be endangered. So it looks very much as if either (a) Rorty has failed to discredit R4, the intuition that truth is accuracy of representation

p. 130), (1987, p. 38), (1988b, p. 101), (1989, pp. 20, 75), (1989b, p. 110), (1991a, p. 6), (1994a, p. 74), (1995a, p. 281), (1998a, p. 127). I discuss this argument as it is used by Davidson, Goodman, Putnam, Rescher, Rorty and others in McDermid (1998a).

(since his main argument against the correspondence theory requires him to say that we cannot get outside language), or (b) he is a sceptic *malgré lui* (since although he thinks that scepticism is unanswerable unless we reject *all* forms of representationalism, he nevertheless remains —no doubt unwittingly— in the grip of picture of language as the mirror of nature).

Since, then, R4 fails to satisfy the Indispensability Requirement, we must continue our quest for a form of representationalism that satisfies condition (i). We turn next to the case of Descartes.

B. Descartes and Dreams

Consider, then, the dream hypothesis described by Descartes in *Meditation I*:

> At the same time I must remember that I am a man, and that consequently I am in the habit of sleeping, and in my dreams representing to myself the same things or sometimes even less probable things than do those who are insane in their waking moments. How often has it happened to me that in the night I dreamt that I found myself in this particular place, that I was dressed and seated near the fire, whilst in reality I was lying undressed in bed! At this moment it does indeed seem to me that it is with eyes awake that I am looking at this paper; that the head I move is not asleep, that it is deliberately and of set purpose that I extend my hand and perceive it; what happens in sleep does not appear so clear nor so distinct as does this. But in thinking this over I remind myself that on many occasions I have in sleep been deceived by similar illusions, and in dwelling carefully on this reflection I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which I may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep that I am lost in astonishment. And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream [. . .].
>
> (Descartes 1641, pp. 145–148)

For the purposes of discussion, we can reconstruct the core of the argument very simply:

(D1) What I perceive in dreams does not come from (i.e., is not caused in an appropriate way by) things located outside me.[27]

∴ (D2) If I am dreaming that p (any proposition about the external world) then I do not know that p. [D1]

∴ (D3) If I know that p, then I know that I am not dreaming that p. [D2]

(D4) I can never know that I am not dreaming that p (since "there are no certain indications by which I may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep").

∴ (D5) I cannot know any proposition about the external world. [D3, D4]

Where are the esoteric "representationalist" premises hidden here? It is hard to say. To be sure, the argument does trade on assumptions that are not explicitly stated. To cite two instances:

(1) The validity of the inference from (D1) to (D2) is guaranteed only if auxiliary assumptions are securely in place. Because my dreaming that p is consistent with the truth of my belief that p, the possibility that I am dreaming threatens my claim to know only because it prevents my belief from being justified. It does so, Descartes intimates, because perceptual beliefs lack the epistemic status required for knowledge unless they are produced by, or appropriately related to, the objects or states of affairs

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[27] Here I paraphrase Descartes's own formulation of the assumption; what appears in parentheses is a gloss. What, however, does it mean for a perception to be "caused in the appropriate way"? See Lewis (1986), for a discussion of some cases in which it proves difficult to spell out in detail why the connection between objects and visual experience is not appropriate.

they are about. Far from being introduced by Descartes, this intuition is ancient: according to Cicero, for instance, Zeno maintained that a presentation could not amount to knowledge unless it was "impressed and moulded from the object from which it came in a form such as it could not have if it came from an object that was not the one it actually did come from" (*Academica* 2.6.18). It is, then, this assumption that underwrites the first step in the argument.[28]

(2) Premise (D3) directly follows from (D2) only if knowledge is closed under known logical implication. The basic idea is simple: if I know that my knowing that p is incompatible with q, then I know that p only if I know that q does not obtain. The principle is controversial, however, having been singled out for severe criticism by Peirce, Austin, Wittgenstein, Dretske, Rescher, and Nozick, all of whom deny that we need to know that we are not dreaming in order to know anything about the world around us.[29]

Nevertheless, these assumptions have nothing to do with representationalism. What reason, that is, is there for saying that the Cartesian sceptic needs to articulate the criteria for choosing an ontological scheme (R1), adopt a truth-conditional theory of meaning (R2), insist upon confirmational atomism (R3), introduce a heavy-duty correspondence theory of truth (R4), or invoke the dualism of scheme and content (R5)? Unless and until Rorty gives us detailed and convincing answers to these questions —and I have yet to find a place where he does so— I confess that I cannot see why we should take the Master Argument (at

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[28] Cf. Williams (1978, pp. 58–59), who dubs this assumption "the causal conception of perception".

[29] Cf. Peirce (CP 5.265, 7.323); Austin (1946); Wittgenstein (1969, pp. 27, 250, 334, 392); Dretske (1970), (1971), (1981); Rescher (1980); and Nozick (1981). A critique of this anti-sceptical response can be found in Stroud (1984).

least as applied to the case of Descartes) any more seriously than Rorty himself takes scepticism.

It seems, then, that Cartesian scepticism does not need to rely on any of R1–R5. Accordingly, let us now conclude our survey of modern scepticisms with Kant, who presents the anti-representationalist with his last chance to vindicate the Master Argument.

C. Kant and Things-in-Themselves

By arguing that the *Ding an sich* is permanently beyond our ken, Kant thereby limited human knowledge to the realm of mere appearance —a result which led some of his more perceptive contemporaries to conclude that the upshot of the critical philosophy was virtually indistinguishable from scepticism.[30] Supposing —at least for the sake of argument— that this interpretation of transcendental idealism is valid, let us now ask whether the thesis that things-in-themselves are unknowable presupposes some form of representationalism.

Kant maintains that the problem of explaining how knowledge is possible can only be addressed satisfactorily by answering a more daunting question, namely "How are *a priori* synthetic judgments possible?" (Kant 1781, B 19). He insists, however, that it is hard to understand how contentful judgments about objects are knowable *a priori* —unless, that is, we assume that certain general features of the objects of possible experience are necessarily determined or conditioned by the structure of our cognitive faculties. Or, as Kant puts it:

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[30] Cf. Beiser (1987) for a thorough discussion of Platner, Maimon, and Schulze, all of whom anticipated the charge (later developed by Fichte and Hegel) that transcendental idealism eventuated in a form of scepticism.

> If intuition must conform to the constitution of the objects, I do not see how we could know anything of the latter *a priori*; but if the object (as object of the senses) must conform to the constitution of the faculty of intuition, I have no difficulty in conceiving such a possibility.
>
> (Kant 1781, B xvii)

This means that knowledge, far from consisting in mere passive conformity to a ready-made reality, is made possible by two faculties: sensibility, through which representations or intuitions are received, and understanding, through which intuitions are brought under concepts and synthetic judgments about objects are formed (Kant 1781, A 50/B 74). Kant's conviction that both halves of these three dualisms —sensibility/understanding, receptivity/spontaneity, and intuitions/concepts— are required for knowledge is exemplified in his well-known remark that

> [t]houghts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise.
>
> (Kant 1781, A 51/B 76)[31]

[31] This position continues to exert influence within contemporary epistemology, where Kant is read as an anti-foundationalist opposed to the so-called "Myth of the Given" (or the traditional empiricist claim that experience is both a non-conceptual form of cognition *and* a source of justification). Cf. Sellars (1963) and McDowell (1996); cf. Neurath (1932/33). To affirm that "intuitions without concepts are blind" is to challenge one form of "non-propositional material foundationalism", to use a term I borrow from the useful taxonomy of foundationalisms and anti-foundationalisms developed in Pereda (1994, pp. 293–311).

Kant's claim that intuition is a necessary and indispensable ingredient in knowledge figures as an assumption in the argument for his controversial thesis that our knowledge must be confined to the world of appearances (or phenomena). Since the function of the pure concepts or categories of the understanding is to synthesize the manifold of sensory intuition, the scope of their legitimate application is necessarily restricted to the realm of possible experience. Kant contends, however, that we can have no intuitions (and hence no knowledge) of noumena, so that we are driven to conclude

> that objects in themselves are quite unknown to us, and that what we call outer objects are nothing but mere representations of our sensibility, the form of which is space. The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it.
>
> (Kant 1781, A 29/B 46)

We could argue, then, that this sceptical-sounding conclusion depends on Kant's deployment of the parallel distinctions between understanding and sensibility, spontaneity and receptivity, and concepts and intuitions. This would amount to putting the blame on R5, since our three Kantian dichotomies are evidently inseparable from the dualism of scheme and content, that is, the idea that mind or language stands in a special relation (synthesizing, organizing, or fitting) to something neutral and uninterpreted (experience, sensory promptings, or the given) that lies "outside all scheme and science" (Davidson 1974, p. 198).

Assuming this diagnosis is defensible, does it lend aid and comfort to Rorty's cause? My strong suspicion is that it does not. Even if we were to agree that Davidson has shown the dualism of scheme and content is untenable, and

concede that R5 satisfies the Optionality Requirement,[32] it still looks as if that R5 does not satisfy the Indispensability Requirement. Since we have already reviewed two major sceptical arguments —those of Hume and Descartes— in which R5 plays no essential role, we are entitled to dismiss the suggestion that we can rid ourselves of *all* forms of external world scepticism simply by dropping the dualism of scheme and content.

Defenders of the Master Argument may feel that I have construed R5 too narrowly by linking it with the apparatus of transcendental idealism. My reply is to ask what additional form(s) of representationalism the dualism allegedly discredited by Davidson is supposed to comprehend. To answer by saying, as Rorty is occasionally inclined to do, that "the dualism of scheme and content" is just another name for whatever disreputable picture underwrites traditional scepticism will not do.[33] If this sweeping claim is not to be dismissed out of hand as a self-serving stipulative definition, then it must jibe well with what Davidson actually says about the so-called "third dogma of empiricism". Yet it does not do so: it is not at all evident that the logical relations between R5 and R1, R2, R3, R4 and R6 are such that, if the arguments in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" succeed against the former claim, then the latter theses are thereby brought into disrepute. Certainly Rorty has given us no reason to suppose that any such connection obtains among these doctrines. Neither has Davidson, but then again he has never endorsed Rorty's controversial interpretation of his position —an interpretation astutely

[32] Whether Davidson has refuted the third dogma is a controversial issue which we cannot address within the confines of the present paper. For misgivings about the argument in Davidson (1974), see Rescher (1980a), Quine (1981), and Devitt (1991).

[33] Cf. Rorty (1986, pp. 128–129, 138–139), for instance.

criticized by John McDowell.[34] Davidson's own writings suggest a different moral: what rules out the possibility of scepticism, he suggests, is the adoption of an externalist account of content and not the denial of the third dogma.[35] If this is correct, then it is possible to formulate scepticism without the dualism of scheme and content. So R5 fits the bill no better than R4.

We have covered a good deal of ground rather quickly, so let us pause for a moment and take stock. Our original question was straightforward: Is any of R1–R5 essential to all leading forms of scepticism about our knowledge of the external world? To answer that question, we examined three versions of such scepticism, trying to see what representationalist assumptions (if any) each presupposed. Our survey has revealed three main things: first, that although R4, or the correspondence theory of truth, plays a key role in generating Hume's scepticism, scepticism can be formulated without invoking it (as we saw in the case of the coherentist Blanshard); second, that R5, the dualism of scheme and content, is one of the sources of scepticism in Kant, but is not invoked by Hume or Descartes; and, finally, that Cartesian scepticism does not depend essentially on any of the first five of Rorty's representationalisms. Since, then, none of R1–R5 figures in all sceptical arguments, we are entitled to conclude that none of R1–R5 satisfies condition (i), or what we called the Indispensability Requirement. This means that Rorty's Master Argument is unsound unless R6 —the sole remaining form of representationalism—

[34] Cf. McDowell (1996, pp. 146–156).

[35] "If words and thoughts are, in the most basic cases, necessarily about the sorts of objects and events that cause them, there is no room for Cartesian doubts about the independent existence of such objects and events" (Davidson 1989, pp. 164–165). The primacy of externalism has become increasingly evident in his more recent forays into epistemology; cf. Davidson (1991).

satisfies condition (i). But if R6 satisfies the Indispensability Requirement, then the Master Argument backfires and ironically makes a sceptic out of Rorty. Or so I shall now argue.

D. Scepticism Revisited: The Epistemologist's Dilemma

The possibility just mentioned —that the Master Argument backfires— emerges from a consideration of two claims: (1) that *if* any of the representationalisms canvassed by Rorty satisfies the Indispensability Requirement, it is R6;[36] but (2) that R6 is a platitude we cannot easily part with. In other words, it fails to satisfy the Optionality Requirement.

R6, it will be recalled, states that the object of *my* knowledge is something that exists independently of my knowledge of it. Note that this thesis is weaker than both R4 and R5, implying neither. This is illustrated neatly by the case of Davidson, who rejects both the correspondence theory of truth and the third dogma of empiricism, but has unhesitatingly affirmed his commitment to the idea that "knowledge is of an objective world independent of thought or language" (Davidson 1986, p. 307; cf. p. 310).[37] Note that the latter Davidsonian view is considerably stronger than R6 (which only says that what is known must be independent of *my* knowing or minding it, as opposed to being independent of *all* thought), but clearly presupposes it.

[36] The "if" is absolutely crucial. I am not seeking to establish that R6 satisfies condition (i), nor do I need to. If the reader feels inclined to deny that R6 satisfies the Indispensability Requirement, let him bear in mind that this move will not save the Master Argument. On the contrary: if the argument of Section 3 (A)–(C) is correct, denying that R6 is indispensable is tantamount to admitting that none of Rorty's representationalisms satisfies the Indispensability Requirement. So Rorty loses, regardless of whether R6 is indispensable.

[37] There are signs Davidson has changed his mind, however. Cf. Davidson (1990, pp. 304–309). Cf. the alethic realism defended by Alston (1996), who accepts R6 without endorsing R4 or R5.

We find the idea that R6 is a presupposition of scepticism advanced by Bernard Williams, who holds that scepticism arises not from a recondite philosophical theory, but from something implicit in our ordinary concept of knowledge. This is

> a very basic thought, that if knowledge is what it claims to be, then it is knowledge of a reality which exists independently of that knowledge [. . .] Knowledge is of what is there *anyway*. One might suppose this thought to be incontestable, but its consequences can seem to be both demanding and puzzling.
>
> (Williams 1978, p. 64)

Let me suggest that the thesis Williams articulates here may provide the most plausible interpretation of Rorty's claim that scepticism rests on representationalism.[38] Indeed, this idea —roughly, that empirical knowledge implies a relation between an intentional attitude (of believing, or judging) and something that exists independently of that attitude or mental state— is arguably presupposed by all three forms of scepticism discussed in Section 3 (A)–(C). At any rate, it does not seem prima facie unreasonable to suppose that R6 satisfies the Indispensability Requirement, or condition (i).

The problem, however, is that when Rorty's proposal is understood along these lines, it loses its appeal. The reason

[38] Williams's suggestion that scepticism is the product of commonplace assumptions about knowledge being knowledge of an objective world is shared by Barry Stroud, according to whom "the source of the philosophical problem of the external world lies somewhere within just such a conception of an objective world or in our desire, expressed in terms of that conception, to gain a certain kind of understanding of our relation to the world. But in trying to describe that conception I think I have relied on nothing but platitudes we would all accept —not about specific ways we all now believe the world to be, but just the general idea of what an objective world or an objective state of affairs would be" (Stroud 1984, pp. 81–82).

for this is straightforward: unlike R1–R5, R6 does not seem an optional commitment, and so it flunks condition (ii). This is troublesome, because if we were to assert all of the following

(a) that scepticism can be avoided only by denying "representationalism"; and

(b) that the representationalism in question is none other than R6; and

(c) that R6 is, as Williams claims, a seemingly incontestable truism,

then it would follow that we can evade scepticism only by making a serious change in the way we think about knowledge. This would mean admitting that a central feature of our normal, pre-philosophical conceptual scheme is erroneous. But if an encounter with scepticism forces us to revise our most entrenched intuitions about what it means to have knowledge of the world, then the sceptic has in a sense succeeded, since as Michael Williams asks: "[W]hy isn't making fundamental changes in our ordinary thinking about knowledge just another way of agreeing with the sceptic?" (Williams 1996, p. 19). On this interpretation, then, the Master Argument seems to lead to the vindication of scepticism, not its dismissal (as originally promised).

What I am suggesting, in brief, is that Rorty's attempted evasion of scepticism may well conform to the structure of "the epistemologist's dilemma",[39] a predicament Barry Stroud succinctly describes in *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* where he speaks of

> a familiar pattern in the theory of knowledge. We find ourselves with questions about knowledge that lead either to an unsatisfactory sceptical conclusion or to this or that 'theory'

[39] For the terminology, cf. Williams (1996, pp. 17–22).

of knowledge which on reflection turns out to offer no more genuine satisfaction than the original sceptical conclusion it was meant to avoid.

<div align="right">(Stroud 1984, p. 168)</div>

According to Stroud, philosophers like Kant and Carnap promise to deliver us from scepticism, but their theories of knowledge are drastically revisionist, and leave us with grim options: we seem forced to choose between "scepticism or some explanation difficult to distinguish from it" (Stroud 1984, pp. 168–169). In such cases, the distinction between a flat-out capitulation to scepticism or a constructive philosophical response to it ultimately proves illusory. Provided R6 really is a platitude, this is true too of Rorty: if we can avoid the sceptic's counterintuitive conclusion only by rejecting fundamental pre-philosophical intuitions about knowledge and objectivity, then our neo-pragmatist's prescription is hard to distinguish from the disease it purports to cure. The fly, in other words, is still trapped inside the fly bottle —he just refuses to admit it.

4. *Conclusion*

Where, then, does this leave us? Arguably with the sense that Rorty's Master Argument simply does not go deep enough. For if we agree that scepticism represents a failure to carry out a certain philosophical project —that of validating something called "human knowledge"— and if it is conceded that scepticism is inevitable once we accept that project, then we can avoid the conclusion that we lack knowledge only by showing that there is something queer and objectionable about the presuppositions of that project. What we need to do, in other words, is expose the traditional "problem of the external world" as illusory in a way that manages to acknowledge the intuitive pull of

the commitments that shaped it, while showing why we are entitled to resist them. But this is precisely where Rorty fails to deliver. His anti-representationalist proposal is unpersuasive, largely because (to put it very crudely) sceptical arguments would seem much more artificial and contrived than they actually do if the "representationalism" that allegedly gives rise to them were one of the arguably optional R1–R5, whereas equating the sort of "representationalism" at issue with the arguably indispensable R6 means scepticism could not be dissolved without making major —and unwelcome— revisions in or conceptual scheme. In light of this, I would like to conclude by seconding John McDowell's recent complaint that Rorty's work provides us with "an object lesson in how not to rid ourselves of the illusory obligations of traditional philosophy" (McDowell 1996, p. 146). But whether we can do better remains to be seen.

Appendix: Rorty, Truth, and Non-Cognitivism

We saw, in Section 3 (A), that since the sceptic exploits the gap between evidence and truth, it seems that we will be vulnerable to his advances as long as we regard truth as a property distinct from justification. But if this is so, then how could somebody think we could eliminate the possibility of scepticism simply by dropping the correspondence theory of truth? For isn't that exactly what Rorty is doing?

This raises the important question of how Rorty understands truth and how his stance on truth is related to his treatment of scepticism. Rorty would agree, I expect, that scepticism is only a problem for philosophers wedded to some substantive theory of truth, but would no doubt add that he regards such theories as misguided and resolutely eschews them. Does this mean he has found a way to

transcend the problematic of scepticism after all? Not at all —or so I shall now argue.

To address this issue, it will be convenient to treat his position on truth as composed of three strands:

(T1) *The Anti-Correspondence Strand*: Since "several hundred years have failed to make sense of the notion of 'correspondence' " (Rorty 1982a, p. xvii), there is no defensible non-trivial interpretation of the claim that true beliefs or statements accurately represent, or correspond with, reality. Accordingly, "[p]ragmatists say that the traditional notion that 'truth is correspondence to reality' is an uncashable and outworn metaphor [. . .] [T]he intuition that truth is correspondence should be extirpated rather than explicated" (Rorty 1985b, pp. 79–80).[40]

(T2) *The Deflationary Strand*: Pragmatists see the quest for a substantive theory of truth as misguided in principle: " 'the nature of truth' is an unprofitable topic" (Rorty 1989, p. 8). James and Dewey both realized that truth "is not the sort of thing one should expect to have an interesting theory about" (Rorty 1982a, p. xiii), for it is "not the sort of thing that has an essence" (1980, p. 162). So we should eschew all reductive definitions or analyses, regardless of their specific content (e.g., correspondence, coherence, consensus, coping, etc.).[41]

(T3) *The Non-Cognitivist/Performative Strand*: Truth is not a property. Hence, the truth-predicate is employed not to describe the items (statements, beliefs) to which it

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[40] See Rorty (1976b, p. 322), (1979, p. 279), (1982a, pp. xvi, xlvi), (1981c, p. 193), (1981d, p. 150), (1985a, p. 22), (1985b, p. 88), (1986, p. 132), (1988b, p. 97), (1995a, p. 281), (1998 I, pp. 27–29, 34–35, 96–97).

[41] See Rorty (1978, p. 97), (1980, pp. 160, 162), (1982a, p. xxviii), (1985a, p. 23), (1986, pp. 127, 128, 139), (1988a, p. 59).

is applied, but to perform a variety of speech acts: "[T]he word 'true' [. . .] is *merely* an expression of commendation" (Rorty 1985a, p. 23).[42] This view of truth ascriptions underlies T2: "The reason why there is less to be said about truth than one might think is that terms used to commend [. . .] do not need much philosophical definition or explication" (Rorty 1995a, p. 283).[43]

Thus Rorty can argue, on the basis of T3, that his account of truth is one on which scepticism cannot arise. The reason for this is clear: if truth is not a property, then evidently neither is knowledge (understood as true belief that is suitably justified or warranted), in which case there can be no problem about whether or not certain items (statements, propositions, beliefs) possess that property.

There are, however, difficulties with this revisionist proposal, only two of which I shall mention here. The first point concerns Rorty's strategy: although he claims to be following Davidson's lead,[44] T3 is actually rejected by Davidson, who endorses only T1 and T2. What Davidson rejects is the idea that truth is definable; but he does not deny that it is a property —nor, indeed, is it clear how he could consistently do so, given his truth-conditional theory of meaning.[45] Seen from this perspective, then, Rorty's attempt to build on Davidson by blurring the distinction

[42] Related views are articulated in Ramsey (1927), Strawson (1949), and Brandom (1988).

[43] See Rorty (1982a, pp. xvii, xxv), (1985a, pp. 23–24), (1989, p. 8). Cf. Brandom (1988). T1 and T2 come together in this passage: "The culminating achievement of Dewey's philosophy was to treat evaluative terms not as signifying a relation to some antecedently existing thing —such as God's Will, or Moral Law, or the Intrinsic Nature of Objective Reality— but as expressions of satisfaction at having found a solution to a problem" (Rorty 1998 I, p. 28).

[44] Cf. Rorty (1986), for a good example of this tendency.

[45] Cf. Davidson (1986), (1990), (1996).

between Davidson's views and his own more radical neo-pragmatism is unpersuasive (not to mention a bit disingenuous).

This brings us to the second issue, which is more substantive. Since Davidson's position is consistent, neither T1 nor T2 nor their conjunction entails T3. Why, then, does Rorty think we need to embrace the latter thesis? This is something of a mystery, for he never argues for it explicitly. Can the thesis that truth is not a property be derived directly from the observation that the word "true" is used to express, to endorse, to commend, or to persuade? No, since it does not follow from the fact that a predicate or linguistic expression is used to perform such speech acts that it is *merely* expressive. (A would-be seducer, for instance, may have ulterior motives in praising a woman's beauty, but that in itself does not imply that beauty is not a property.) Thus there is, it seems, a serious lacuna in Rorty's strategy: he cannot escape scepticism without T3, but has failed to give us any reason to accept that all-important thesis.[46]

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RESUMEN

En este ensayo examino un argumento presentado por Richard
Rorty en contra de la idea misma de "una teoría del conocimien-
to". Según Rorty, podemos dejar a un lado la epistemología,
puesto que su proyecto central —la validación de nuestro lla-
mado "conocimiento" del mundo, o la refutación del escepti-
cismo— no puede formularse a menos que hayamos aceptado
la idea de que el pensamiento o el lenguaje es un medio de
representaciones. Trato de mostrar que el problema del escep-
ticismo no se puede descartar así, puesto que este argumento
no es válido, en parte porque Rorty comete la falta de usar
equívocos (en su obra hay por lo menos seis sentidos distintos
de representacionalismo).