

Word Count: 9927 (10,307 including references)

## **Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature**

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### **Abstract**

This essay comprises an overview of the plot to Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, followed by a more detailed examination of the three parts of the book. It begins by showing the importance of metaphilosophy to Rorty's project, while explaining the significance of PMN for both Rorty's philosophy as a whole, and the history of philosophy. Then follows the overview, after which I explain the detail of Rorty's arguments, while developing a line of argument to show that Rorty's final conclusion that there is no objective truth – because the world can be endlessly redescribed – undermines his argumentative strategy. Taking into account Rorty's standard response, according to which he was making a pragmatic social proposal, I conclude that Rorty's desire to avoid the nihilistic conclusion that life is meaningless, led him to transform existentialism into postmodernism; and that the result, however brilliant, is nevertheless unstable and badly motivated.

### **Keywords**

Metaphilosophy; Epistemology; Truth; Mind; Deconstruction; Myth of the Given;

Postmodernism; Existentialism; Meaning of Life; Kant

## 1. Metaphilosophy

Metaphilosophy attracts malcontents. If you are a philosopher who does not much like the contemporary philosophical scene you find yourself within, then there is a good chance you will start to think about what philosophy is, or could be. Then you can either set about transforming it into something more true to the essence your metaphilosophical reflections reveal it to have, and which you think the contemporary scene has strayed from; or else set about moulding it to your vision of what it should become. Philosophical malcontents have this luxury because the nature of their discipline is a notoriously elusive affair, cloaked in a long and diverse history, and designated by a title that means very little. Other disciplines rarely provide space for equivalent self-questioning, except at rare, pivotal points in their histories; but each new generation of philosophers has the option to turn their thought primarily upon philosophy itself, rather than the problems it delivers as default. Rorty took this option, with the dissatisfaction behind it fuelling a career-long effort to transform it into something more socially useful. It was a mission that defined his thinking.

Metaphilosophy is not just for malcontents. Establishment figures take it up too; Timothy Williamson (2007) provides a good recent example. But this kind of metaphilosophy bears little resemblance to the Rortyan variety. Williamson's interest is in honing philosophical methodology so the exact science he thinks his discipline has been steadily evolving into can make even better progress in future. He has little interest in determining the nature of philosophy (*ibid.*: 4), and thinks it should be essentially what it is now, only better. His dissatisfaction is limited to irritation with junior colleagues who cannot resist making big claims, when they should content themselves with modest ones that can be proved – through

diligent hard work – beyond any shadow of a doubt (ibid.: 278ff.). For that is how piece-meal progress is to be achieved.

Rorty's metaphilosophical message was always diametrically opposed to this. For Rorty, the history of philosophy leaves its current nature essentially up for grabs, while providing ample reason to think that regular attempts, made ever since Kant, to place it on 'the secure path of a science' have been badly motivated, peripheral to the best insights that tradition has to offer, and ultimately doomed to failure. Rorty liked big claims – the bigger the better – and often maligned as "scholasticism" the kind of tight argumentation that focuses on the detail, while leaving the big picture for posterity to determine. Rorty wanted social impact *now*, and his Hegelian historicism persuaded him that this was all philosophy could realistically aspire to.<sup>1</sup> He liked Sellars best, for instance, in those "few places" where he "let himself go" in order to provide a "vision of world history" (Rorty 1997: 10). Mainstream analytic philosophers who admire Sellars, by contrast, will typically cite his technical prowess to justify their admiration. Perhaps Rorty was more honest. Perhaps his lack of faith in the ability of technical argumentation to reach the truth, led him to pin his hopes for philosophy to achieve cultural respect and influence elsewhere. Perhaps these hopes, combined with his reflections on the history of philosophy, are what produced his lack of faith in argument and truth.

Rorty identifies a distinct kind of revolutionary metaphilosophy from his own, which seems to offer a mid-point between the extreme poles of business-as-usual and all-change metaphilosophy (Rorty 1979: 365ff.). Thus he thinks that philosophers who share the same aim as normal systematic philosophers – that of science-like, incremental progress – may turn to metaphilosophy because they do not think extant methods can achieve it. So they invent a revolutionary new approach to philosophy. Logical positivism provides a prime

example, with its metaphilosophy combining reflection on what philosophy had been and should become. The positivists saw that philosophy had hitherto combined metaphysics and analysis, and liking the latter but not the former, sought to make philosophy what it ought to be by eradicating metaphysics, while presenting a new vision of the purposes and methods of analysis.

Rorty's metaphilosophy shares something of this approach, in that he finds inspiration for his vision of what philosophy ought to be from its history. He likes Hegel's broad historical narratives and conception of philosophy as its time "held in thought"; and he likes subsequent "edifying" philosophers like Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Dewey, who react against and try to disrupt the efforts of systematic philosophers, in an effort to instigate new directions in the thought of their time. Since he aspired to be an edifying philosopher himself, then, his approach in this regard may seem to be essentially the same as the positivists'; he just had different ideas about where the wheat / chaff distinction lies.<sup>2</sup> But there are two differences which might distinguish his metaphilosophy as of a unique kind.

The first is that he rejects the Kantian aim of making philosophy scientific, because he thinks this cannot be done, and that there is no good reason to want to do it anyway; only obsolete social needs, lack of historical awareness, and pressure to conform to an intellectual culture dominated by science. He also thinks this Kantian aim will lead philosophy down the path of insularity, and detract from its ability to play its part in "cultural politics" (Rorty 2007a). The second is that Rorty denies that philosophy has a historical essence, which we can reflect on to distinguish the chaff from the wheat. On his minimalist conception, philosophy is just "a genealogical linkage connecting certain past figures with certain present figures . . . an ancestral relation of overlapping fibers" (Rorty 1991: 67).<sup>3</sup> How the authors caught up in this

literary web are to be interpreted is a matter he leaves open; and doing so makes space for him to realise his ambitions concerning what philosophy ought to be.

I do not think these differences mark out a distinctive approach to metaphilosophy, however. The first gains much of its force from the claim that philosophy cannot proceed like science, which would require a good argument to back it up; an argument which, on the face of it, PMN provides. Such an argument would seem to need to take place on a realist plain to have any purchase on its target; which again is what, on the face of it, transpires in PMN – despite its conclusions apparently precluding such argumentation. But arguing against previous approaches to philosophy is what all revolutionary philosophy does. And the second purported difference is put in doubt by the fact that Rorty's interpretations of the historical figures he discusses are fairly conventional in PMN, and apparently need to be, in order for his arguments to find their mark. So I think Rorty was, after all, just cherry-picking the parts of the history of philosophy he liked best, and suggesting a way to put them together into a new and improved programme. His metaphilosophical approach was essentially the same as the revolutionary systematic philosopher, except without the systematic aims; but this difference is simply because he disapproved of systematic philosophy, rather as the positivists disapproved of metaphysics.

Now rather than diving straight into the contents of PMN, I have so far been concerned with its metaphilosophical trajectory, which strikes me as rather more familiar than he would have us believe. This beginning seems appropriate, given that the reason PMN is such an important book is that it is where Rorty presents his metaphilosophy. Moreover, it is where he *argues* for it. In his other major work, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty acted out that vision by practicing philosophy the way he thought it should be practiced; he provided a concrete

model of a possible future the first book motivated. As such, the two fit together perfectly. The second repeats some of the arguments of the first in its early chapters, albeit it in condensed form, but Rorty's scepticism about the value of argument here becomes more prominent than before (Rorty 1989: 8ff.; Rorty 1979: 12), and his main concern is now with doing something new; with reading philosophy as literature, such that its authors are driven on not by a will to understand the world, but rather the need to express their individuality, for instance.

Rorty was most proud of his second book (Rorty 2007b: 17), and occasionally went out of his way to slight the first, describing it as, for instance, “partly amateurish cultural history and partly an attempt to dissolve certain very particular problems which were being discussed by analytic philosophers in the 1970s” (Rorty 2000: 214). There is enough plausibility to this to see how an older Rorty might have convinced himself of it; but it simply does not ring true with the incredible scope, ambition, and – especially in its final part – passion of the book. Nor with the fact that his pre-PMN works essentially lead up to it (Rorty 2014), and that there is very little it contains which he did not continue to press home for the rest of his life. Nothing substantial was abandoned; he simply lost enthusiasm for some of its terminology (and most notably, gained enthusiasm for the terminology of “pragmatism”), some of its history, and a couple of philosophers he had once seen as allies. Even his irony and solidarity combination – ostensibly the main conceptual novelty of the second book – was presaged in the first under a different terminological guise (Rorty 1979: 383-7). As he said himself in his final assessment, “I still believe most of what I wrote in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*” (Rorty 2007b: 13) – an understatement, in my view. But he went on to say it was “out of date”, having been superseded by better critiques of the mind-body problem and epistemology by Daniel Dennett and Michael Williams respectively. Even if there was some

truth to this, however, the older Rorty neglects the fact that within his book, these critiques underpin a unique and overarching purpose; he rather uncharacteristically failed to make a holistic assessment.

He also says that the second book did “on a larger scale” what the first had done, namely provide a “big swooshy narrative of the history of Western thought” (ibid.: 17). Again, I find it hard to see it that way. The inclusion of politics, literature, and much more continental philosophy might justify “larger scale”, I suppose; though PMN was arguing for a pluralistic democracy between *all* discourses about the world. However CIS strikes me as considerably more piece-meal, containing readings of Proust, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Nabakov and Orwell, which are indeed held together by a narrative, but which might have stood on their own; it all seems much less “swooshy” to me. More importantly, it strikes me as a very different kind of book primarily because by this point, Rorty saw philosophy as one kind of literature among others, and is acting out that vision; the justification offered is secondary, and largely recycled. But in PMN, Rorty is making an urgent case that there is something seriously wrong with philosophy as it has hitherto been practiced, and his suggestions for how it might continue in future come only at the very end (the last six pages). The emphasis reversed, which is why the second so naturally follows the first.

Still, it is easy to see why Rorty might have favoured CIS, for it realised the vision that meant so much for him; he had become bigger than analytic philosophy, and was now trying to engage in cultural politics. PMN simply laid the metaphilosophical foundations for him to do what he wanted, and he did not want to get bogged down in an ongoing defence of them. Plus creative people typically favour their later work; otherwise they would lose the clearest justification for their having kept going. But it is just as easy to see why PMN is the book

analytic philosophers continue to regard as Rorty's main work. For it speaks to and challenges them, while offering conclusions much bigger and more exciting than they are accustomed to, outside of their acquaintance with more distant historical figures; seemingly outrageous conclusions that just beg to be overturned – by those open-minded enough to empathise with his point of view, and not just use the scale of his interests as an excuse to dismiss his arguments as “sloppy”.

I am inclined to take the essentially Rortyan line that the success of CIS will be determined by whether the approach to philosophy demonstrated there will be adopted by others and bear sufficiently interesting fruit. Alan Malachowski thinks it will, and maybe he is right; we will have to wait to see how the “New Pragmatism” pans out (Malachowski 2010). However I think PMN is already successful. Not because it brought an end to representationalism, taught the world how to be “consistent” atheists (Rorty 1998: 62), and instigated a revolution in philosophy. So far it has categorically failed on all these fronts, and that situation may well not change. Rather, it was successful because it made Rorty a canonical figure whose ideas are part of the history of philosophy. The impact of those ideas on contemporary, cutting-edge debates is hard to access, as is the impact of, say, Sartre and Quine; but it is certainly there, and shines clearly through on occasion. But as with all canonical figures, articles and books about him are regularly produced, and that, it seems to me, is the result of his book addressed squarely to philosophers, rather than the one that showed them and others something new. So long as the history of philosophy never becomes entirely detached from its ongoing debates, Rorty's ideas will have the potential to affect them. Sceptical metaphilosophy was nothing new with PMN, of course, but Rorty's achievement with that book was to place a dedicated, full-scale defence of it into the history of philosophy.



## 2. The Plot

The plot of PMN goes something like this. The establishment's conception of philosophy is all wrong. Philosophy is not an ancient discipline with a subject-matter consisting of perennial problems for the human intellect. Rorty does not think the traditional problems of philosophy are such that any suitably-primed member of the species *Homo sapiens*, whether from the Stone Age or the Space Age, would in principle be able to empathise with them. He does not think it was inevitable that people came to be concerned by these problems, but rather an accident of history. And he thinks that once we reflect on that history, together with the social irrelevance of these problems to the present age, we will be motivated to forget them; to simply leave them alone. Then we can turn our minds to finding something more useful to do with the great writings of the philosophical tradition, which may have been misguided, but which are still inspirational feats of the imagination.

Rather than an ancient discipline dealing with perennial problems, Rorty thinks philosophy as we know it now began to arise in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when intellectuals fixated on the metaphor of the mind as a mirror of nature; a metaphor which already had cultural currency, having been poetically employed by the likes of Shakespeare. These intellectuals started to take the metaphor literally. They started to think of the mind as each person's first point of contact with the world; as a conglomeration of inner reflections of the environment, such that we are guided around that environment by knowledge of these reflections. This idea was fixated upon it because it seemed relevant to the pressing intellectual issue of the day, namely the conflict between church doctrine, and the new science of men like Galileo; a conflict most spectacularly illustrated by the disagreement about whether the Earth was at the centre of God's creation, as the church insisted, or whether it was orbiting the Sun, as Galileo's

observations and reasoning seemed to show. If the mind was a mirror of nature, and hence the basis of all knowledge was rooted in reflections hidden within each individual, then this seemed to vindicate the scientists' reliance upon observation and reason. So reflection on mind seemed capable of providing foundations for science.

Philosophy as we know it began to emerge, then, with an effort to assist science in its cultural conflict with the religious establishment. How effective the mirror of nature idea was in this regard is not an issue Rorty lingers over, but science did eventually secure its own secular autonomy, of course, and the church had to retreat from dictating the nature of God's creation, to the more enlightened position that God provided us with the faculties to work these matters out for ourselves. In any case, Rorty's polemical interest is in what happened next; namely that people started to see that the mirror of nature idea generated distinctive problems of its own. For it seemed the mirror would have to be different from the rest of the world, given its special reflecting qualities; but also part of it, in order to explain how mind and world can be in reciprocal communion – that was the metaphysical mind-body problem. And if we only see reflections of the world, then the question arises of how we can know those reflections are accurate – that was the epistemological “veil of perception” problem.

Work consequently began on trying to solve these and other related problems, before in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rorty's nemesis – Kant – wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason*. This book transfigured the mirror of nature problematic, making it considerably more complex and multi-faceted than it had been before, while laying the foundations for Kant to go on to systematise pretty much everything – all aspects of human intellectual, emotional, aesthetic and political life. To this day, Kantians all around the world are still working out the implications of Kant's views (or just what those views amount to). Kantian philosophy's

resources are endless, and its implications all-encompassing. It provided subsequent generations with a paradigm to build a professional way of life around. And Kant provided this paradigm with an ancient history, by convincingly tracing his concerns back to those of Plato and Aristotle. This allowed him to lay claim to the honourific title ‘philosophy’, a word ineluctably associated with the Greeks, while making his paradigm seem continuous not only with over two millennia of Platonists and Aristotelians, but also with his immediate predecessors like Descartes and Locke, who had similarly grappled with the problems of the mirror. And thus, as Rorty sees it, philosophy as we know it was born. It has been part of the academic establishment ever since because of “Kant’s eternalization of the intellectual situation of eighteenth-century Europe” (Rorty 2007b: 13).

Any potential for social value it may once have had has now long been expended, however, and yet the discipline continues to attract young scholars who fail to realise that without Kant, “Greek thought and seventeenth-century thought might have seemed as distinct both from each other and from our present concerns as, say, Hindu theology and Mayan numerology” (Rorty 1979: 149). So Rorty’s task is to undermine the Kantian image of philosophy, in order to persuade philosophers to find something more useful to do. He goes about this on two parallel fronts. Firstly, he tells this deconstructive history. And secondly, he argues that the mirror of nature idea is fatally flawed, such that even if you neglect to ask yourself about the point of tackling its problems, you are still demonstrably wasting your time. In particular, the definitive reason it is flawed was brought to light in 1950s analytic philosophy. Thus the game was already up by the time Rorty wrote PMN, and it was the need to publicise this purported fact – not even realised by the philosophers who made the breakthrough – that led him to write it, he tells us (ibid.: 10).

Now the aims of dismantling philosophy's history, undermining its traditional problems, and persuading its practitioners to radically change direction, might seem more than enough for one monograph to tackle; but Rorty had an even grander ambition for PMN. An ambition that does not sit easily with his attempt to downsize philosophy, and occasional comments to the effect that philosophy is a "somewhat peripheral academic discipline" (Rorty 1998: 58). But nevertheless it was an ambition that clearly drove him on. For Rorty does not think the success of the mirror of nature idea can be explained solely in terms of its one-time potential for social utility, plus the imaginative brilliance of Kant. Rather, he thinks it spoke to an outdated but persistent human need, and that the world would be a better place if we could outgrow it. He formulated this need in various ways throughout his writings, but the one I like best is the need for "redemptive truth" (Rorty 2007a: 90). Redemptive truth is "a set of beliefs which would end, once and for all, the process of reflection on what to do with ourselves"; it would present "the one true description of what is going on", allowing "every thing, person, event, idea, and poem" to be fitted into a "context that will somehow reveal itself as natural, destined, and unique" (ibid.). It would be, you might say, *the meaning of life* (c.f. ibid.: 84). The grandest ambition of PMN is to persuade us that philosophy will never lead us to redemptive truth, that this goal is illusory, and that if we can learn to abandon it, we will become better placed to harness the full potential of human life. We would thereby complete the process the Enlightenment set in motion.

For all the acute modesty with which Rorty liked to portray himself, his discipline, and his first major work, this is the ambition which underpins PMN.<sup>4</sup> He thinks the mirror of nature idea was seized upon because it offered the prospect of a new, more secular vision of redemptive truth, at a time when the power of religion was beginning to wane. For it seemed that if philosophy could work out exactly how the mirror (the mind) works, it could

determine the conditions under which it accurately reflects the world. On the assumption that science meets these conditions, then, the redemptive truth could be discovered, rather than divinely revealed, with scientists taking the place of priests as its privileged purveyors; this is a task to which science was always very badly suited, in Rorty's view (*ibid.*: 98ff.). Or alternatively, philosophers could take on the task themselves, by building metaphysical systems to reveal the objective truth, and from this basis, work out the redemptive truth about what we should do in it.

But both the goal, and the mirror that was supposed to help us reach it, are chimerical, according to Rorty. And once we realise this, we will abandon objective truth, stop privileging science, and grasp that how we think of ourselves and our world is a matter we must decide for ourselves. No fact of the matter will make the decision for us, for we are free to describe and redescribe the world to our hearts' content, thereby discovering fresh possibilities and sweeping away descriptions that have outlived their usefulness; this is "the most important thing we can do" (Rorty 1979: 358-9). Thus liberated from objective truth, our creativity will be unleashed. Human beings will have achieved the prerequisite maturity to take control of their own destinies.

To persuade us of all this, Rorty's strategy is as follows. In the first part of PMN, he tries to historically and conceptually deconstruct the mind. Then in the second part, he tries to show that the philosophical project of determining when our minds accurately represent the world, and thereby produce knowledge, is irrevocably flawed; and that this was demonstrated by developments in 1950s analytic philosophy. Now this second task might seem redundant, for if Rorty succeeded in persuading us to abandon the mirror of nature in part one, we would also have to abandon any hopes for it to show us what constitutes knowledge; no mirror, no

reflections. However, a large proportion of part two is taken up with Rorty arguing that we should not, after abandoning the mirror, try to reconstruct the project of discovering the conditions under which accurate representation takes place. Mind was just the traditional philosophical means for seeking redemptive truth, and the one which made philosophers most confident they had an ahistorical subject-matter to concern themselves with; but it is the goal rather than this particular means which is Rorty's principal target. Finally, in part three, he sketches his utopian vision of life without objective truth, and right at the very end, makes suggestions about what philosophy might do in future – in order to avoid accusations of being an “end-of-philosophy”-type philosopher (it did not work). CIS subsequently took up these suggestions.

And that, in a nutshell, is PMN. I shall now turn to the question of how successful it is; successful on its own terms, that is. Already, I think, tensions are discernible from the overview I have presented; and I do not think I have skewed it to make this so. For how did Rorty expect a work of philosophy to bring about something as culturally enormous as a widespread abandonment of objective truth, by showing that philosophy is a much smaller and less significant phenomenon than had previously been thought; one which lacks any special expertise, and was born out of an idea that has impeded cultural progress? Why should anyone listen to a *philosopher* who says that? And supposing they do, if there is no limit to how we describe the world, does not that very assertion admit of redescription? If not, surely it must be objectively true, and hence self-contradicting. Relatedly, is not Rorty arguing that the mirror of nature idea is objectively false? If so, he cannot conclude that there is no objective truth; if not, how do his arguments support his conclusion? In addition, given that Rorty's notion of endless redescription is considerably more conducive to the idealist tradition of philosophy than the realist, was he really proposing such a radical break from

what he portrayed as the history of philosophy's pointless oscillation between realism and idealism? Was he not simply making the latest case for idealism, while diminishing the tradition that provided the only hope of making such grand conclusions viable?

### 3. Part One

Rorty's deconstruction of the mind-body problem begins by questioning the unity of the concept of mind. Why, he wonders, do we group certain states together as mental, and then contrast them with the physical? To presuppose this is a natural grouping and contrast, he thinks, is to concede too much to dualism at the outset. After all, pains and beliefs possess no obvious commonality – an intuition Rorty shares with many philosophers (e.g. Searle 1983: 1) – and if even physicalists concede that all these items are at least apparently non-physical (for otherwise there would be no problem for them to solve), then this appearance needs to be explained. Rorty finds the explanation in a series of historical errors.

Beliefs (and other intentional states) were thought non-physical because of a misunderstanding of the nature of meaning. Sensations (and other phenomenal states) were thought non-physical because they were conceived as *things* whose essence is pure appearance, in order to provide a primitive account of our privileged access to them; but they are actually states of people, and states do not have essences. Then they were yoked together, because some intentional states are also phenomenal (e.g. occurrent thoughts), and Descartes used this accidental coalescence to reconceive the phenomenal as mental; which he wanted to do in order to house the secondary qualities in the mind, and thereby save them from the science of Galileo, which seemed to render them illusory. Descartes managed this by spotting

an apparent commonality between thoughts and sensations in that they can both be indubitable .

And thus the mind-body problem was bequeathed to us. It resulted from mistakes which made it seem that sensations and beliefs belong together and cannot be physical. But there is no good reason to group them together, so the concept of mind is a mishmash; and neither is there any good reason to think they cannot be physical, so there is no obstacle to being a physicalist. Note that this entire argument presupposes an agenda shared by most contemporary philosophers of mind, namely to defeat dualism and pave the way to physicalism. Moreover it all seems to take place on a realist plain, by showing that the real nature of meaning and the phenomenal was historically misunderstood, and that the mental is not really a unified category. Past philosophers made mistakes because they had obsolete theories and were motivated by obsolete social needs. Rorty does not simply argue that it would now be more useful to describe the mind as physical; that agenda would have called for a completely different approach. Rather, he argues that our predecessors got it wrong, and thereby landed us with a pseudo-problem.

This argument, which takes place in Chapter 1, has a couple of loose-ends. For Rorty has yet to tell us what privileged access really consists in, and relatedly, why some intentional and phenomenal states seem equally indubitable. He takes this up in Chapter 2, but had already provided an answer in one of his earlier classics, namely “Incorrigibility as the Mark of the Mental” (reprinted in Rorty 2014). In that paper, he adapted Sellars’ idea that the linguistic practice of incorrigibility – of granting authority to people’s sincere first-person reports – explains intuitions of privileged access. Given that this practice generates no obstacles to physicalism, and could in principle die away – if third-person science developed to be more



reliable that first-person reporting – then Rorty has everything in place to complete an argument for eliminative materialism. And since eliminative materialism is what he was best-known for at the time, that must have been what his original readers were expecting.

It is not what they got, however, because Rorty was now beginning to transcend analytic philosophy in the interests of his endless redescription thesis. Instead, he embarks on a highly convoluted discussion of an imaginary alien race – the “Antipodeans” – whose history developed in such a way that they never developed a mind-body problem. When we Earthlings meet them, they cannot understand what we are talking about, despite the best efforts of our philosophers to work out whether they actually have minds or not. The imaginary discussion is so convoluted, in fact, that I have always suspected that Rorty intended to parody what he regarded as pointless philosophical scholasticism in this chapter. In any case, the main conclusion is clear enough, namely that the Antipodeans get along fine without the troublesome concept of mind, and there is no good reason we not should follow their lead. The surprise comes when Rorty does not reach this conclusion with eliminative materialism, which he now rejects on the grounds that there are no facts about reference which might determine that terms for mental states have always been referring to physical states (Rorty 1979: 118ff.). Incorrigeability is not the mark of the mental, then, just “all that is at issue” (ibid.: 121). And his new conclusion is that having seen through the history that gave us the problem, and how well the Antipodeans get on without it, we should simply refuse to take up a stance within its conceptual tangles; we should just forget about it. Rorty still advocates physicalism, understood as the “probably true (but uninteresting)” claim that physics can predict “every event in every space-time region” (ibid.: 28); but insists that we detach it from the philosophical issue of ontological primacy.<sup>5</sup>

There are some big problems in his argument, which I shall leave for my other essay in this volume, ‘Rorty’s Philosophy of Consciousness’. But nevertheless, his general approach, as I have argued before (Tartaglia 2008), is one which contemporary debates could learn from. The overarching problem I shall press here concerns its motivation and trajectory. For on the face of it, the only good reason to try to deconstruct the mind-body problem, and show there is no good reason to think the mind cannot be physical, is to defend physicalism; the normal, ontological kind, which thinks science gets things right, and that it is important to silence challenges to the scientific world-view to hold superstition and anti-science at bay. Now Rorty clearly shared some of this motivation, in that the whole of part one is a crusade against “mind-stuff”, and he defends his own watered-down version of physicalism. And yet the scientific realist perspective of the normal physicalist is his overall target; he does not think science, or anything else, gets reality right, and his endless redescription thesis is designed to put science in its place by instigating a pluralism according to which all discourses are potentially on a par, thereby revealing the privilege traditionally accorded to physics as dispensable Enlightenment propaganda. Dualists and idealists broadly share this kind of aim – and that places Rorty on both sides of the debate at once.

Light is shed on this situation in a later essay, where he says that “getting rid of spooks (...) has exhausted the utility of natural science for either redemptive or political purposes” (Rorty 2007a: 103). That gets to the heart of it, I think, in that Rorty thought belief in ‘spooks’ was socially bad, but that science had already managed to dampen it down, making continued philosophical debates about the mind-body problem a waste of time. But Rorty does not argue this in PMN; he argues that the mind-body problem is rooted in philosophical errors. And in any case, the social question is very much a moot point, especially at this present time of writing, when the problem of consciousness is all the rage among both philosophers and

scientists, and when scientists are on the verge of creating machines able to perform cognitive tasks that only people have previously been capable of. The latter raises social concerns about employment redundancies – especially among the traditional middle-class, whose dissatisfaction has hitherto been the main engine of social unrest – that future mechanisation now seems likely to bring about. Maybe in this situation, we would all be better off continuing to believe that consciousness marks a radical division between people and machines; if not a principled one, then at least one we currently have no idea how to physically enact, despite our growing ability to make machines that behave like us.

Rorty does not consider issues like this, but rather writes as if he has already decided that it is socially deleterious to think our minds set us apart from machines. But suppose he had considered the social implications and concluded that belief in spooks is good for us. Would he then have altered his description of the Antipodeans to present their world as a catastrophic dystopia, while defending different theories of meaning and privileged access? If he would, then we have no reason to trust his arguments – they could have gone either way, depending on the outcome of his secret social deliberations. If he would not, this would suggest that he thought reality simply does not contain any spooks; in flagrant violation of his overall position. It seems to me that such considerations place Rorty's entire method of argumentation, his final conclusion, and particularly the fit between them, into serious doubt.

#### **4. Part Two**

Rorty begins part two by telling his story about Kant's invention of philosophy. The key conceptual blunder which made this possible is attributed to Locke, and is the idea that sensations come to us ready-conceptualised, and thus able to provide our epistemic point of

contact with the world. So within Lockean empiricism, the idea is that a sensation of redness, for instance, comes to us already understood as red, and it is on the basis of such “simple ideas” that we build up the rest of the more complex ones we understand the world with. As such, all our beliefs can ultimately be traced back to the sensations given to us by our perceptual capacities and thereby justified in terms of the world that systematically caused them within us. The mirror of nature idea thereby gave theoretical substance to the simple empiricism of “experience is the best guide”, offering the prospect of a principled way of adjudicating between our various beliefs about the world, to determine which are best grounded in the world itself. It was hoped that apparently intractable disputes (such as between science and the church) could be decisively settled on a theoretically neutral plain, and we could refine our theories to make them maximally sensitive to the world’s impartial input, thereby discovering the truth; hopefully a redemptive one.

The trouble with this idea, according to Rorty, is that nothing is ready-conceptualised; neither sensations nor anything else. The world does not make sense of things for us; we have to do that for ourselves. Kant came close to realising this when he said Locke had “*sensualised* all concepts of the understanding” (Kant 1787: B327), and insisted that concepts and sensory input needed to be brought together to generate knowledge. However he wound up simply making a more complicated version of the same Lockean mistake, as Rorty sees it, and it was not until the 1950s that the problem came clearly into view as what Sellars called the “Myth of the Given”. The problem is essentially a mix-up between causal explanation and justification; sensations may be part of the causal explanation of knowledge – part of the causal condition that generates knowledge – but that does not mean they justify our beliefs, and thereby make them count as knowledge. The idea of ready-conceptualised sensations was a “mongrel”, as Sellars put it (1956: 21), and there were no other “givens” capable of taking

their place. Quine bolstered this argument, as Rorty tells the story, by showing that no principled distinction could be made between analytic and synthetic statements, such that the truth of the former was determined only by how we define our terms, while the truth of the latter depended on the input of the world. Rather all statements are part of the same “web of belief”, and the world does not dictate how we adjust this web in light of experience.

Neither Sellars nor Quine realised what they had done, namely shown the theoretical bankruptcy of Kant’s discipline. But Rorty did, and concluded that since any attempt to base our decisions on something outside of historically contingent conversations will inevitably succumb to the Myth of the Given, the justification for our descriptions can have no firmer basis than open discussion, and ultimately, considerations of social usefulness. It had seemed otherwise, only because the mirror of nature idea persuaded us that knowledge was a relation to an object. But it is in fact a relation to a proposition; and a proposition is not the kind of thing you can come causally face to face with, to be coerced by its sheer presence. Realising this, we become “epistemological behaviourists”, as Rorty rather clumsily put it; “clumsily”, because he promotes this in a book arguing for the demise of epistemology. Almost immediately after publication, though, he switched to the terminology of “pragmatism” (Rorty 1982: chapter 9).

After presenting his pragmatism, Rorty goes on to argue that philosophers should not react by looking for a new-and-improved mirror-substitute to ground our conversations in the objective truth, such as by looking to developments in empirical psychology, or philosophical work on the semantics and logic of language. The same obstacles will face them, and the motivation will be just as bad. It is in these chapters (5 and 6) that Rorty’s later dismissal of the book as out-dated most rings true. But they were prescient nonetheless, in that

philosophers increasingly look to cognitive science for back-up. And these chapters still contain plenty of lasting content, much of which has been largely overlooked; such as an attempted deconstruction of Kripke's argument for a causal theory of reference (Rorty 1979: 288-95), a theory which has persuaded a new generation to take up analytic metaphysics, moral realism, a new approach to the mind-body identity theory, and lots of other things Rorty would disapprove of. The chapter on philosophy of language also allows Rorty to invoke Davidson to complete his deconstructive case. For although Sellars and Quine had already shown that the notion of conceptual schemes for understanding the world was unable to provide the epistemic guarantees it was designed for, since how we adjust these schemes to accommodate the world was not a matter the world would decide, it took Davidson to provide the icing on the cake, by undermining the scheme / world distinction altogether – by showing that we cannot make sense of the notion of alternative conceptual schemes. This idea, along with the distinctively philosophical notions of “world” and “truth” it supported, must be abandoned.

How successful was this part of the book? Let us leave aside for now my line of argument about the realist plain on which these arguments apparently take place. Namely, was Rorty arguing that Kant really invented philosophy, or just trying to persuade us of a useful description of the philosophy-phenomenon? Did he think empiricism really is blighted by the Myth of the Given, and that there really is no analytic / synthetic or scheme / content distinction? Or would he have argued to contrary, if convinced that doing so would be socially advantageous? I shall return to this theme shortly. Leaving that aside, then, the first thing to note is how thoroughly implausible the Kantian invention of philosophy story is. Kant and his immediate predecessors read and were influenced by Plato, Aristotle, and Medieval philosophers, and they took up their themes and interests in new ways. And even

leaving aside this direct influence, a common interest in the appearance / reality distinction, and its bearing on understanding the human place in the universe, is clearly discernible throughout the history of Western philosophy; I simply cannot take seriously the idea that we would not still have seen a plain connection between Plato's and Descartes' attempts to transcend illusory appearance had Kant never been born. Moreover, as we now know, and as was beginning to become apparent in the West at around the time of Leibniz, these same themes had been independently pursued in other parts of the world since ancient times; a fact that Rorty did his best to ignore, and when pressed, tried very ineffectually to deny / neutralise (see Tartaglia 2014). It is hard to see what more continuity could possibly be required in order to justify philosophy's traditional self-image.

The only smidgeon of plausibility to Rorty's thesis is in the idea that Kant brought together traditional interests in epistemology, metaphysics, logic and morality, and thereby made it possible to conceive them as parts of a distinct discipline bearing the title "philosophy"; though it is unclear to me that Plato had not already done that. But in any case, without the much weightier thesis Rorty proposes, his idea that philosophical problems stem from obsolete social problems loses credibility. For on the face of it, philosophical concerns are as natural – in a world where appearance often deviates from reality, and into which we are born without an instruction-manual – as concerns with the weather or the relations between numbers. Of course, the histories of meteorology and mathematics have been influenced by social concerns and needs, but the motivational influence of the need to work out the trajectories of cannonballs, for instance, has no bearing on whether the resulting calculations were correct. Perhaps Rorty would say that philosophical concerns are obsolete. But appearance still deviates from reality, and we are still being born without instruction-manuals

– and Rorty’s endless redescription thesis shows concern with the former, while his interest in novels as a means of moral education shows concern with the latter.

Nevertheless, perhaps the Myth of the Given puts paid to the mirror of nature approach to these concerns by establishing the endless description thesis. Perhaps that was all the conclusion Rorty needed; and sticking with it would certainly help him distance himself from the end-of-philosophy image he did not like. But I do not think it does establish it. Suppose we accept that nothing comes to us ready-conceptualised. Still, something does “come to us”, otherwise we would have nothing to talk about. A long tradition in philosophy has concluded that to explain the appearance / reality distinction, we must conceptualise this “something” as a mental representation. But if the world does not force this conceptualisation on us, and we have to decide for ourselves, it does not follow that this conclusion is wrong.

One way to make such decisions is in terms of predictive power, by seeing whether our descriptions allow us to make predictions that *come true*. But in more rarefied cases like philosophy, we have to content ourselves with whether our conceptualisations stand up to argumentative scrutiny, and produce intellectual satisfaction. Even if there are no conceptual schemes, there is still a difference between, say, how a chess player, and somebody who has never encountered the game before, will conceptualise a chessboard. And this kind of difference provides space for philosophers to debate how best to conceptualise the world, even if radically different forms of conceptualisation can be ruled out. Now it is extraordinarily hard to suppose that the world has no part to play in these decisions; and even Rorty – especially in his passing reference to “contact with reality” as “a causal, non-intentional, non-description-relative relation” (Rorty 1979: 375) – struggled to consistently maintain this stance (see Tartaglia 2007: 212-6 for discussion). But the Myth of the Given



idea does not rule this out in any case. It rules out the world playing an atomistic, foundational role; but that leaves other ways for it show some of our descriptions to be better than others – of the kind Sellars and Quine explored, for instance – and it certainly does not show that our only criterion of “better” can be social utility.

## 5. Part Three

Part three is where Rorty sets down his vision of a society unencumbered by objective truth, in which the whole world becomes a text to be endlessly reinterpreted. We are to embrace “the power of strangeness” (Rorty 1979: 360) by seeking out new and unfamiliar descriptions, so life can never get boring, and we can continually harness fresh forms of social utility; this is what our freedom ultimately consists in. Stale descriptions that have outlived their usefulness are to be left behind, as life becomes an “infinite striving” (ibid.: 377) which continually opens up new goals. Freed from the restrictive delusion of a single goal dictated by The Truth – a goal which always seemed to hang tantalisingly just ahead of us – we will be able to realise our full potential, or rather, decide for ourselves what that potential is. We will have outgrown the need for such a goal, which was always just a product of insecurity; the felt need for quasi-parental guidance. Systematic philosophy was a product of that insecurity, and edifying philosophy is to be welcomed for its continual efforts to disrupt its projects; to stop systematic philosophers setting certain descriptions in stone, by redescribing their efforts. Edifying philosophy “can never end philosophy”, though it can “prevent it from attaining the secure path of a science” (ibid.: 372); but Rorty speculates that maybe in the future a “purely edifying” philosophy will arise which is not simply a reaction to systematic philosophy, but rather “philosophy” solely in terms of the canon of literature it seeks to redescribe (ibid.: 394).

Now the stock (and best) response to this vision is presented in Putnam's objection that Rorty is trying to say "*from a God's-Eye View there is no God's-Eye View*" (Putnam 1990: 25).

This line of objection has been pressed many times (Dworkin 1991 does the best job, I think), and the main argument I have been developing so far – and will now complete – is along the same lines. However, I shall take into account Rorty's standard rebuttal (e.g. Rorty 1998: 57), namely that he was just making a move in cultural politics: a pragmatic proposal for something we should try on the grounds that this promises to bring about greater social utility, rather than the philosophical claim that certain arguments establish there is no objective truth. And my overriding concern is not to split-hairs with Rorty; for he was more than capable of splitting them in response. Such a visionary and broad-brush philosopher must be given the maximum benefit of the doubt if you are to effectively engage with him.

So Rorty was not arguing that it is objectively true that there is no objective truth, and hence that endless description is possible; and he was not arguing that considerations based on the Myth of the Given, for instance, establish this because of their objective truth (because causation really is distinct from justification). Rather, he was trying to persuade us to reject the concept of objective truth because he thinks believing in endless redescription would be useful; the arguments he employs are simply useful for getting us to believe this. But then you wonder how useful these arguments could possibly be. For you are only going to think the arguments *are* useful if you think both that endless description is useful, and that usefulness is a good enough reason to accept it – and if you think *that*, then you are not going to need the arguments. If you do not think that from the outset, however, then as soon as Rorty tells you the arguments are simply a useful means to his conclusion (thereby letting his private irony out into the public arena), or else you work it out yourself from the conclusion,

you are bound to feel tricked. For you will now realise that the arguments rest entirely on your accepting the conclusion they were apparently trying to establish; philosophers who naturally enough interpreted the arguments realistically were being seduced to go somewhere this interpretation could no longer hold. Either way, the argumentative bulk of PMN becomes an irrelevance; for if an argument's persuasive force depends entirely on its conclusion, it has no persuasive force.

Rorty was well aware of the edifying philosopher's predicament of having to "decry the very notion of having a view, while avoid having a view about having views"; he thinks this is "awkward, but not impossible" (Rorty 1979: 371). I think that his standard methodology of appropriating arguments from philosophers who drew very different conclusions from them accentuated the problem. But the main problem comes from the fact that he *did* have a view: he thought it was useful for us to believe in endless description, or at least that we should try it out. Without this view, his response to Putnam collapses along with his whole project; and in any case, practically his entire philosophical output (post-PMN) makes no sense without it.

The problem is that the notion of "useful" requires some kind of reality, since it begs the question "useful for what?" If you answer with something real, then you concede to objective truth; but if you answer with yet more usefulness, then the notion is drained of all sense. If you think of Rorty's proposal in a realist way, you can see what he has in mind. The world of endless description would be more useful because people will be more creative and intellectually flexible, sterile debates will be avoided, etc. Of course, Rorty has not really argued that this would be a positive social development, such as by weighing up the social costs and benefits – his argumentative strategy is entirely different (it is philosophical) – but nevertheless his opinion has a certain plausibility.<sup>6</sup> But thinking that people interacting with

each other differently will make the world a better place, is thinking of usefulness realistically; it is thinking that something about the world makes these interactions useful. Yet the endless description thesis tells us not to think of it like this, and instead think the description of this situation as more useful is itself simply a useful description. But if it is only useful to describe this world as more useful, we are back with the question “useful for what?” Rorty might say that it is useful from the perspective of our current description of usefulness to describe this world as more useful; because things we now describe as useful will become more plentiful. But once we accept that our current description of certain things as useful is itself just a useful description, we root usefulness in the description, rather than the things; and are left with no idea of what could make a description useful. In the end, we will not be able to avoid saying “useful for being useful” – and that means nothing.

Despite his best efforts, useful description became Rorty’s version of the idealist’s substitute for physical reality. But unlike the subjective realities of traditional idealism, it was not a coherent substitute. Useful description makes sense as something physical, or something mental; but not as a self-sustaining reality, since there are useful descriptions only because it is useful to describe them that way. The “them” immediately drops out and we no longer know what we are talking about. Of course, people could adopt the linguistic practices of the endless description world, and receive the benefits Rorty envisages (I am construing these benefits the only way I can, namely realistically). But if I am right, then their beliefs would be incoherent; so on realising this they would have to either go back to objective truth, or else learn to tolerate incoherence – if this kind of tolerance were to spread then I very much doubt it would turn out useful by anybody’s lights. But perhaps it would remain a secret known only to philosophers, and philosophy would soon be forgotten. This would require philosophy to have massive cultural influence one moment (in promoting an incoherent vision), then

immediately slip away into obscurity. That is the best outcome I can think of for Rorty's vision; but it requires an awful lot of "ifs", and so far as I can see, he provides nothing more than a few hunches about possible utility to persuade us to take the social experiment.

Now on the face of it, Rorty could have had almost all the benefits he desired by simply denying objective truth in morality, politics, and aesthetics, while leaving it in the physical world to keep his position coherent, insisting that this base truth cannot be filtered upwards to tell us what to do with our lives. After all, he was not promoting the social benefits of endless redescription of physical particles, and advocated a form of physicalism himself. Had he just made it ontological, his only significant loss would have been the lingering intuition that everything else then becomes second-rate truth (which he could have argued against by trivialising, but not rejecting, ontology). His Nietzschean worry that we treat objective truth as a God-substitute would be curtailed if such truth was limited to natural science, which he could have argued can never tell us anything redemptive. Most of the arguments of PMN could probably have stayed in place, in fact, had he not reached a conclusion that undermined them. So why go the whole hog and embrace endless redescription? Here is my redescription of his project; I am not sure if it is useful, but I am not sure why it would need to be.<sup>7</sup>

Rorty came to philosophical maturity in the radical days of the 1960s; as did Derrida, his continental philosophy counterpart. Rorty was an early reader of continental philosophy, which was then dominated by the bleak existentialist vision that there is no redemptive truth for us humans; life is meaningless, and the best we can do is to strive for authenticity. The physicalist analytic philosophy of the day, in which fundamental truth is confined to a dance of particles taking place indifferently to our hopes and fears, must have seemed to confirm this nihilism; and Rorty knew how much the austerity of the scientific world-view, and the

hope for redemptive truth it seems to preclude, concerned the idealist philosophers who he chose as the focus of his postgraduate education. Now Rorty liked to tell us that he first came to philosophy in search of redemptive truth, but became disillusioned (e.g. Rorty 1999). Moreover, according to his first wife's testimony, as a young man Rorty had strong religious proclivities.<sup>8</sup> So what could he do to enact the next revolutionary step in philosophy – as the times and his inclinations demanded – when redemptive truth seemed untenable, but the alternative of a nihilistic truth seemed intolerable? Reject all truth. Then reality and the human place within it becomes a matter of interpretation decided by us. We may not get redemptive truth, but without the world to get in the way – with the final authority-figure silenced, so to speak – we at least recover the freedom to put a positive spin on things.

Rorty gives the game away, I think, in a discussion of Sartre's existentialism (Rorty 1979: 361-2). Sartre's mistake, he says, was to think that it is only the "for-itself" (us) that can be endlessly redescribed, as opposed to the "in-itself" (the world), which has a fixed essence. Rorty, however, proposes to extend existentialism by rejecting *all* essentialism, such that *everything* is opened up to endless redescription. Thus at a stroke, the existentialist pathos of our distance from an indifferent world is negated, and the meaning of our situation becomes as malleable as the literature Rorty spent much of his life immersed in. Existentialism evolved into postmodernism. And Rorty held his time in thought.

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## **Further Reading**

Tartaglia, J. (2007) *Rorty and the Mirror of Nature*, London: Routledge. This is the only comprehensive guide to the text of PMN, and is geared to the needs of students; so how could I fail to recommend it? It explains Rorty's arguments, and the various philosophical positions which he presupposes the reader's familiarity with; plus there is plenty of criticism, which is useful for essays and exams.

Malachowski, A. (ed.) (1990) *Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature and Beyond*, Oxford: Blackwell. This classic remains the best collection of critical essays on PMN.

Kuipers, R. (2013) *Richard Rorty: Contemporary American Thinkers*, London: Bloomsbury. This is the best book on Rorty's philosophy as a whole; and it contains plenty of useful stuff on PMN.

Guignon, C. and Hiley, D. (eds.) (2003) *Richard Rorty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. A very useful collection of essays for anyone studying PMN; especially for the editor's introduction and the essay by Michael Williams.

Malachowski, A. (2010) *The New Pragmatism*, Durham: Acumen. An accessible and engaging book, which usefully places Rorty in the context of other important pragmatist philosophers; though Rorty is very much the focus.

Blackburn, S. (2005) *Truth*, London: Allen Lane. Though Rorty is not always mentioned by name, his views pervade this book; and since Blackburn thinks they are crazy, it is very useful for those seeking a critical angle.

Dworkin, R. (1991) “Pragmatism, Right Answers, and True Banality”, in M. Brintand W. Weaver (eds.) *Pragmatism in Law and Society*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Despite the legal angle, this is the clearest, more forceful, and best exposition of the line of argument against Rorty which I take in this essay (which originally derives from Putnam).

Rorty, R. (1970) “Cartesian Epistemology and Changes in Ontology”, in J. Smith (ed.) *Contemporary American Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin; reprinted in S. Leach and J. Tartaglia (eds.) (2014) *Mind, Language, and Metaphilosophy: Early Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Rorty wrote this essay when the ideas that were to form PMN were still fresh in his mind; it encapsulates the main part of the plot in a nutshell.

Rorty, R. (1999) *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London: Penguin. Rorty was rarely more straightforward and engaging than in this collection of essays, and although most of them do not relate to PMN, the introduction and essays 2, 3 and 12 are definitely worth a look.

Ayer, A.J. (1936 / 1971) *Language, Truth and Logic*, Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin. This passionate, crystal clear and short classic should be compulsory reading for all philosophy students anyway; but it makes for particularly useful background reading to PMN, since Rorty’s book is diametrically opposed to almost everything it stands for.

## **Biographical Note**

James Tartaglia is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Keele University, UK. He is the author of *Rorty and the Mirror of Nature* (2007) and *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life: A System of Nihilism, Consciousness and Reality* (2016); editor of *Richard Rorty: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (2009); and co-editor (with Stephen Leach) of *Mind, Language, and Metaphilosophy: Early Philosophical Papers* (2014) and *Consciousness and the Great Philosophers: What would they have said about our mind-body problem?* (2016).

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Though he sometimes acknowledged being involved a long-term struggle (e.g. Rorty 1998: 41), he certainly knew what he wanted to achieve.

<sup>2</sup> Rorty never actually identifies himself as an ‘edifying’ philosopher in PMN, but he more or less equated it with ‘therapeutic’ philosopher (Rorty 1979: 5), and after later abandoning the ‘edifying / systematic’ distinction (Rorty 2007b: 14), he did call himself a ‘therapeutic’ philosopher (Rorty 1998: 142).

<sup>3</sup> Rorty is here amending slightly the position he presented at Rorty 1982: 92 (by making it even more minimal).

<sup>4</sup> *Contra* Neil Gross (2008), I think missionary zeal to realise this ambition presents a considerably more plausible candidate for what drove Rorty on, than do mercenary considerations for seizing opportunities for career-advancement, and the pressure to develop an intellectual self-concept that would allow him to succeed within his institutional settings. Gross’s book is easily the strangest biography I have ever read (it is also the only biography by a sociologist I have ever read); if Rorty gave it his blessing in order to make a posthumous anti-philosophical statement, then he really could not have done better.

<sup>5</sup> Looking back at his earlier papers, I am not sure any of this was terribly new, except for the fact that Rorty no longer wanted to be pigeon-holed as an eliminative materialist.

<sup>6</sup> As does the opposite one that it would stifle creativity and generate no end of waffle.

<sup>7</sup> For the full version of the story I am about to tell, within a much wider context, see Tartaglia 2016, esp. chapter 2, section 5.

<sup>8</sup> I must admit that this seems very strange to me, given that even truth was to become too religious a notion for Rorty; but she says he was ‘dedicated to the greater glory of God through philosophy’ (A. O. Rorty 1977: 40).