Pragmatism without Method?

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I

Richard Rorty, and Stanley Fish as well, want a pragmatism without method.[1] Sidney Hook, as Rorty himself points out, referred to Rorty's version of Deweyian pragmatism as an "irrationalized" and "Nietzscheanized" version of Dewey. (R IV, 17) Rorty in turn thinks of Hook's Dewey, and Ernest Nagel's as well, is a *scientistic* Dewey—that is, a scientistic pragmatism too obsessed with method worshipping. Rorty claims "that the scientistic, method-worshipping side of Dewey, with his constant exaltation of something called 'the scientific method', was an unfortunate legacy of Dewey's youth, a youth spent worrying about the warfare between science and theology." (R IV 17) I think this assertion of Rorty's is mistaken, and indeed seriously so, for it underplays the import of the classical pragmatist stress on scientific method. It need not be and is arguably not method worshipping. Moreover, classical pragmatism's appeal is something that cuts far deeper than any concern with the warfare or conflict between science and theology. Hook's Dewey, which is a very faithful account of Dewey, is scientistic (though not in implausible ways) but it is not a view resulting from a preoccupation with the warfare between science and religion. Instead, it is from a viewpoint which is bent on searching for a reliable way of fixing belief, for a way of ascertaining and demarcating, if we can, what we can reasonably know and do from what we cannot. This is something Dewey took from Charles Peirce and applied determinedly to all domains of life and inquiry. Perhaps it is the illusion that Rorty thinks it is. Perhaps it is not the only way to reliably and reasonably fix belief. But it cuts deeper into our thought than Rorty believes. If it

comes to naught, we have lost something of very considerable importance. This need not be science worshiping.

Rorty maintains that to give the stress that Hook and Nagel do, following a central thrust of the classical pragmatists on scientific method, reflects an "unfortunate desire to privilege the language of natural science over other vocabularies—to see natural science as something more than another tool for accomplishing various human purposes." (R IV 4) We should indeed not regard "scientific rationality" as pleonastic or accept the scientistic claim that all knowledge is scientific knowledge and that to be substantive it must be a knowledge whose truth is ultimately testable by science such that what science cannot tell us humankind cannot know. There is no good reason for holding, Rorty claims, the belief common to logical empiricists and the allegedly scientistic side of pragmatism, as well as a belief held by many physicalists, that "natural science somehow gets closer to the way things are than any other areas of culture." (R IV 6)

Rorty takes it as scientistic and as a mistake to stress, as Dewey and Peirce frequently do, that the ways of proceeding and thinking of "the experimental scientist" should be held up "as a model to the rest of culture." (R I 63-64) Dewey, and Hook and Nagel following Dewey, tried to extend this model to ethics and politics and to social life more generally. Rorty regards it as a mistake to opt for the "let's bring the scientific method to bear throughout culture" side of pragmatism, as opposed to the "let's recognize a pre-existent continuity between science, art, politics and religion side." (R I 64) The stress on being scientific, using our "scientific intelligence", on taking a "scientific attitude" and above all on only relying, in fixing belief, on scientific method is, Rorty has it, mistaken. Moreover, "post-positivistic philosophy of science," Rorty claims, "has left [Hook's] account of 'scientific method' in the lurch." (R I 64) Such a Deweyian-Hookian stress on scientific method with its attempt to isolate the "essence of science" is, Rorty avers, not the best way to defend the values of the Enlightenment. It presents a false conception of a viable articulation and defense of Enlightenment values and it does not show us how in general we should fix belief.

Indeed there is no way *in general* in which we should fix belief. What, scientistic pragmatists claim, "makes any reason a valid reason for believing an hypothesis is not historical but invariant for all historical periods in the growth of science." (Hook, *The Quest for Being*, 185) Indeed there are, Hook recognizes, plainly various historical factors that influence theory-choice at any given stage of inquiry, but that notwithstanding, we can, he believes, isolate a kernel of scientific method (the logic of the scientific method) that is not historical-period dependent. But, Rorty responds, we have learned from Quine, Toulmin, Feyerabend and Kuhn that we cannot so hold "language and world, theory and evidence apart." (R I 65) We cannot so stand outside of history and culture. In this way at least we must be historicists.

Hook's Deweyian pragmatism stresses the claim "that there is only one reliable method of reaching the truth about the nature of things anywhere and at any time." (Hook 185). This method "comes to full fruition in the methods of science." (Hook 185). This Rorty takes to be scientism and, as such, something which is off the mark. (R I 65) One can and should, Rorty argues, be naturalistic without being scientistic: without this reliance on—indeed this fetishing of—scientific method. (R I 65-66) There is no way, Rorty contends, of showing that rationality or reasonability requires such a commitment to scientific method. There is no way of establishing the claim that Hook makes that "all knowledge men have is scientific knowledge" where religious utterances by contrast with scientific ones are not thought to be utterances which can be truth-yielding or truth-apt but are thought of instead as comforts that the tender minded must available themselves of. (Hook 181)

In setting out, à la Peirce or Dewey, such general methodological principles—principles for an allegedly universal method for fixing belief which for them, as it is for Hook and Nagel following them, is the scientific method. But, Rorty claims, all one actually gets, rhetoric aside, is "a string of platitudes, hooked up to look like an algorithm." (R I 67) What post-positivist philosophy of science has shown us (e.g., Kuhn, Hesse, Harre, Toulmin, Feyerabend) is that one cannot isolate the method used by the "New Science" and show what it is to have a reliable way of fixing belief. And that just

comes to scientific belief. But stress on confirmation just gets in the way, Rorty claims, of understanding how science has been operating. We "only know what counts as being 'scientific' in a given area, what counts as a good reason for theory-change, by immersing ourselves in the details of the problematic situation." (R I 68) The "wielder of an ahistorical scientific method—a method for judging 'validity' rather than mere 'strength'—is on par with the ideal wielder of practical syllogisms. The person who knows in advance what results he or she desires and has no need to adjust his or her ends." (R I 68) We are, as Thomas Kuhn has stressed, sometimes in circumstances where we do not have to choose between which of several alternative hypotheses best explains the facts but instead we need to decide whether we should adopt a redescription of the situation in a new or partially new vocabulary, where the adoption of the new vocabulary would cut so deeply as to change for us what is to count as a fact or as evidence. The redescription of the problem, that is, changes the observation language used to describe the evidence. And with this what gets described as the facts or a "fact of the matter" also gets changed.

Rorty resists Dewey's claim that there is something called *the* scientific method which has been identified by careful research as the best way of thinking. (R II xi) Dewey, like Peirce, thought "we can survey ways of thinking and discriminate the better from the worse." (R II xii) Rorty claims, strangely for Rorty I think, that Dewey's account of scientific method, which Dewey identifies with reflective thinking, is "marked by an ambiguity—the same ambiguity between the descriptive and the normative which plagues his metaphilosophical account of his own activity." (R II xii) Rorty remarks:

> Sometimes it seems as if Dewey is telling us that the seventeenth century discovered not only the true layout of the solar system and the laws of motion but a new method of inquiry, one with spectacular advantages over previous methods. Dewey recommends that we try this method out in areas where it has not been previously applied—that we "generalize the experimental side of natural science into a logical method which is applicable to the interpretation and treatment of social phenomena. When Dewey writes in this vein, it sounds as if he were saying, "All of us, no matter whether we would prefer a more religious or a more secular culture, or whether we are politically radical or politically conservative, naturally want to

> use the best possible tools in our work. The method discovered in the seventeenth century is a better, unfortunately neglected tool. A study of the nature of thought, of how we think, will make the virtues of this tool clear to us. (R II, xii)

Whatever we would or would not "naturally want to use", Dewey is saying, following Peirce's famous essay "The Fixation of Belief", that in the rough and tumble of life when we try to figure out how to fix our beliefs, how to resolve problems that life throws in our way, when we are faced with real doubt about what to think and do, we will gradually come to recognize that only the use of the scientific method is genuinely effective in practice. All the other methods break down, Peirce and Dewey claim, in practice. This, as we have seen, Rorty takes to be scientism and a mistake.

Rorty contends that Dewey has other moods where he reasons rather differently and not at all scientistically. But it is this allegedly "scientistic Dewey" that has traditionally been at the forefront of discussions of Dewey and pragmatism and it is this conception that I wish to tease out and see if Rorty has undermined it along with is undermining of foundationalist epistemology.

Dewey, again like Peirce, does not believe à la Carnap that we can give a formalized and precise general characterization of scientific method which will reveal the very logic of the method. Nothing so precise can be or needs to be delivered. Scientific practice is too varied for that. But he also wants in his characterization of scientific method to do something more determinate than to yield a cluster of platitudes about being "open-minded, undogmatic, critical, and experimental", platitudes enjoining us "to think hard, gather lots of data, try out different theories, etc." (R II, xiii) Rorty believes that these platitudes are all that Dewey and pragmatism can give us in the way of characterizing scientific method as the sole right way of fixing belief. We should conclude from this, as Paul Feyerabend has concluded, "that the way to encourage experimental thinking is to give up the very idea of 'method' as an outdated shibboleth." (R II, xiii-xiv and Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method,* New Left Books, 1975)

Dewey, again like Peirce, wants to broaden the conception of logic to include abduction and induction as well as deduction and he did not (*pace* Rorty) conceive of it as something which just describes or studies the nature of thought, but as a normative science which tells us how we ought to think. However, Dewey's account, Rorty believes, fails both descriptively and normatively. Descriptively it fails because many people in our culture and in other cultures and even in our period of time have not thought that way and have not, by at least by any generally agreed on criteria of rationality or reasonableness, been thought to be irrational. It fails normatively as well, Rorty claims, for it will not sort out, except in an arbitrary and tendentious way, who is being reflective and reasonable and who is not. Presumably, given Dewey's contrast between the laboratory scientists and medieval schoolman, Charles Darwin was being reflective and reasonable and thinking correctly and Duns Scotus was not. But to say Darwin was any more or any less reflective or reasonable than Duns Scotus is absurd and to say that Darwin had a grasp on the correct method while Duns Scotus did not is question-begging and in effect does what Dewey wanted to avoid doing, namely, it ethnocentrically hypostatizes "the vocabulary and practices of a certain period or of a certain preferred area of culture." (R II, xiii)

Often Dewey's thinking is very historicist but as we have seen, he, like Peirce, also wants, and I believe rightly, to in some way transcend a historical relativism and (as we have also seen) Hook's and Nagel's Dewey most certainly does. But Rorty, who resolutely takes a historicist turn, perceptively remarks, "Any thinking who is historicist enough to question the traditional conception of truth as a relation between the human mind and an unchanging reality is going to be challenged by the same dilemma: is your historicism ahistorically true or are you saying merely that historicism is an appropriate attitude in our present historical circumstances?" (R II xi) Dewey sometimes attempts to articulate the scientific method as a way of really standing—or I would say trying to stand—free from one's particular place in history and in a particular culture. It is an attempt on the part of the pragmatist to say, as I would put it, "No, what I characterize here is a

method which is not culturally and historically determinate and particular. Thinking in this way certainly arose in a given time and place, indeed perhaps it could not have arisen without the coming on stream in at least a somewhat scientific culture, but it can retrospectively be seen to be cross-culturally and cross-historically justified."

Rorty argues *au contraire* that either we get platitudes, something which will not allow us to show how Darwin reasoned correctly and Duns Scotus did not, or we get something more determinate but which is ethnocentrically question-begging. In either event appeal to the scientific method for fixing belief leads us down the garden path. Scotus, of course, accepted a lot of beliefs which we retrospectively with the development of science and of the Enlightenment more generally we can see that Scotus would have done well to question. But we can see that only *retrospectively*. Darwin, too, just accepts many beliefs, some of which are characteristic of Enlightenment thought—a thought that was crucial for his culture but not crucial for all cultures or for all people in his own culture. Perhaps in time another people, as some individuals (including Darwinian biologists, if that is not a pleonasm) will come to see that he would have done well to question some of them. But that is principally for the future, Darwin's future; it is for a somewhat different people differently situated and enculturated than Darwin was. Similar things are true of all of us at any time. But these things differ over time and place. There are a whole host of background beliefs that we do not question and *holus bolus* could not question if we are to think at all. This is true of any culture.

Both Dewey and Hook follow Peirce in rejecting Cartesian methodological doubt and accepting instead some (what Peirce called) acritical beliefs as part of his own critical commensensism. They regard, as did Peirce, such Cartesian doubt as at best a pointless exercise and at worst an incoherent one. But then—or so it would seem at least—we can no more fault Scotus in his method of thinking than we can Darwin. Rorty pointedly asks, "Is there any 'method' by which Scotus could have known *which* beliefs he should have questioned?" (R II xvi) Moreover, his cluster of acritical beliefs differs to a certain extent from Darwin's as ours do from both. Do we

have a significant rational kernel of beliefs for a non-question begging through cross-cultural critique? For both Scotus, Darwin and also us, there will be among our acritical beliefs where we will not know which ones to question or have a general method for finding out. Classical pragmatism went astray in thinking we do.

Rorty's response is that there certainly does not seem to be one and that at the very least the pragmatists have not shown us how, or even that, there is. Rorty concludes that "it seems evident that there can be no general procedure for deciding which of the beliefs one has picked up from 'tradition, instruction, and imitation' to treat skeptically and which to leave alone." (R II xvi) To think there is such a methodological fix, he has it, is methodolotry. There is no strategy which "will help one be skeptical about all and only the right things." (R II xvii) There just is no (*pace* Descartes, Locke, Peirce, Dewey and some analytical Marxists such as G. A. Cohen and speculative ones such as Alain Badiou) useful and sound "general abstract characterization of a better way of thinking." (R II xviii) To think so is to fall prey to the rationalistic metaphysical way of thinking that Dewey spent so much of his life resisting. We should not make the scientist the model for the rest of culture, and we should not believe that what science cannot tell us humankind cannot know. Moreover, we should engage in these nay-sayings without, as a kind of compensation, once again trying to make philosophy or anything else into a superscience, creating new idols to replace the smashed old ones, as Wittgenstein put it. That is to ape the scientism one that we should reject.

What we need to take to heart, Rorty argues, is not only Dewey's *sometimes* historicism but as well his thoroughgoing contextualism, anti-formalism and non-foundationalism. Rorty puts it thus:

> The enduring residue of Carnap's "formal mode of speech" is that we can now feel content with saying merely, "Chemical inquiry is into the behavior of what we call 'molecules', paleontological inquiry is into the behavior of what we call 'fossil remains', etc.", without going on to say something about what "science" as such is about. We can let the fallibility of inquiry, and what Dewey thought of as the indeterminacy of the situation, be expressed by the phrase "what we call" and by the quotation marks. We do not need any sentence that begins by "Inquiry is…" or

> "Science is…" or, for that matter, "Language is…". All that is needed is the realization that we shall never have a language, either scientific or philosophical, which does not make reference to the situation we are in at the moment. We will never have, nor do we need, a map which is more than a set of jottings in the field. (R III 43)

Leibnitz's ideal, as well as that of Russell, Carnap and of those who think of themselves as doing "exact philosophy" is that of a contextless, ideal, logically perfect language or system of thought: something that Wittgenstein saw through. The notion of such a method, Rorty goes on to say, "is stretched too thin if we try to make it cover both what Galileo did and Darwin did." (R III 44) Dewey, he claims, is at his worst when he says things like "…the demand for the reform of logic is the demand for a unified theory of inquiry through which the authentic pattern of experimental and operational inquiry of science shall become available for regulation of the habitual methods by which inquiries in the field of common sense are carried on." (R III 43; John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1938, 98) There is, Rorty claims, no such general methodology that can help us fix belief in all domains. What it is important for us to learn to do is, instead of celebrating the scientific method, to Foucault-like come to see that what makes Dewey really important is not in giving us a new methodology, a setting out of a general theory of inquiry, but in his redescriptions of American life and of the history of ideas and for, like Foucault, having "a very sharp nose for what was going on and a genius for describing it in terms which cut 'the cake of convention'." (R III, 44) Dewey helped us to see in an incisive way "how the dregs of old philosophical and religious ideas were still part of the common sense of the American public." (R III 44) What Rorty thinks, standing where we are now, is that we need to see how the dregs of some characteristic Deweyian thought—all that stuff about scientific method—have permeated the common sense of the American public of our own day and have themselves become "a 'cake of convention' which needs to be pierced." (R III, 44) What in Dewey's time and Peirce's may have been useful ideological rhetoric, breaking through the cake of convention, is by now for many of us merely the conventional wisdom of a complacent scientistic age. Philosophy should instead become

much more like literature than like science. It should be poetic rather than experimental. It should not positivist-like seek to draw distinctions between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, the literal and the metaphorical, the performative and the constative or between science and non-science. There are no good demarcation lines here. We no more have criteria for these things than we have criteria for a distinction between the analytic and synthetic as Quine well saw. But we can have good reasons to believe there are such distinctions and they are important as Quine came to realize.

Scientistic pragmatists such as Hook and Nagel, like the logical positivists, "tried to load some meaning into the term 'experimental' by spelling out the nature of testability, and thus of the difference between science and non-science, but their failure has become notorious." (R III 46) We should give up the very idea of locating something called the experimental method which will provide us with a litmus paper test for what is to count as genuine knowledge and a reliable way of fixing belief or marking something called the growth of knowledge that goes with the Enlightenment. This is, Rorty claims, little more than scientistic ideology. (R III 46)

We should, as well, Rorty has it, give up the idea that there is something called philosophy which has a distinct disciplinary matrix, even as a humanistic discipline, which "needs to be revised and revitalized by new ideas in the rest of culture" and particularly from the sciences. We should not think of science or of philosophy as being natural kinds where, when we finally come to see just what they are, we will be provided with a key to the critique of the mélange of notions and practices that constitute our life-world. We should also not see philosophy as another natural kind, which in becoming informed by science, indeed in finally becoming itself scientific, giving us at long last a map for how our lives, individual and social, should be ordered and something that we can reasonably believe if we would live non-evasively. To think anything like this is to fall prey to scientistic illusion.

II

The classical pragmatists, particularly C. S. Peirce, John Dewey, Sidney Hook and Ernest Nagel, would be very much opposed to much of Rorty's account. They would regard "a pragmatism without method" as an oxymoron. Reasoning in accordance with what they called not irresponsibly but perhaps—indeed very perhaps—mistakenly, *the* scientific method was central for them as well as their taking of a scientific attitude. Such matters were crucial to their thinking and ways of proceeding philosophically, even in ways they took to be distinctively philosophical. This was clear for the last three ant it was true for Peirce as well in his famous articles "The Fixation of Belief", "How We Make Our Ideas Clear" and "Critical Commonsensism", articles which very much influenced—and rightly so—Hook and Nagel. Peirce himself, by contrast, strikingly with his conceptions of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness, became entangled in metaphysics and that clouded his scientific image and in effect got in the way of his seminal "The Fixation of Belief."

In the conflict between classical pragmatism and neo-pragmatism Rortyian style, Peirce, and in a different way James, did not proceed in the strict scientistic manner of Dewey followed by Hook and Nagel. Rorty's movement is important here and is in no way scientistic. I shall try to sort things out here though in certain respects I am pulled in both directions. In doing this I shall examine Sidney Hook's important but now forgotten article "Scientific Knowledge and Philosophical 'Knowledge'" published in 1956 in *The Partisan Review* and which in some respects he more thoroughly rounded out in his *The Quest for Being*.

Hook believed, as did the other classical pragmatists, that all knowledge is scientific. Anything that is not scientific or not based on scientific knowledge is not, indeed cannot be, genuine knowledge. There is, they had it, no scientifically non-dependent philosophical knowledge, e.g., metaphysics, epistemology, normative ethical theory, normative political theory, theology

("natural" or "revealed"), meta-ethics or meta-politics that could yield substantive knowledge. We must fix our belief, if we would be rational and reasonable, exclusively by the scientific method. This was central for classical pragmatists.

Sciences sometimes can be very different, for example chemistry and social anthropology. Unlike chemistry, social anthropology has no place for test tubes. Still, Hook had it, as did all classical pragmatists, that all the sciences had basically the same method, to wit the scientific method of experimental observation, direct or indirect, as exhibited somewhat differently in the various sciences and testable hypothesis construction (something which was, and rightly, pleonastic). All substantial knowledge is evidential; "empirical evidence" also is pleonastic. There is no such thing as non-empirical evidence or non-empirical substantive knowledge. This was a fundamental belief of the classical pragmatists. Substantive knowledge "must rest either directly or indirectly upon judgments gained by observation and upon such other judgments as may legitimately or logically be inferred from them." (Hook 219)

Hook, following Russell, Dewey and Quine, argued that "all knowledge that men [sic] have is scientific knowledge." (Hook 219) As Russell once put it, "What science cannot tell us, mankind [humankind] cannot know." This has been called, properly enough, *scientism* and, like Wittgenstein, I oppose it. We have, the classical pragmatists argued, no primitive moral or otherwise normative knowledge which is not dependent on scientific beliefs. But classical pragmatists believed there was a rational kernel of beliefs which were common to all justified beliefs. I shall argue that this classical pragmatist view is mistaken. Consider this extreme but still an exemplary solid example. We human beings, if we are at all normal, know that it is wrong to torture someone just for the fun of it. We can, and most of us usually do, know that independently of any philosophical, religious, anti-religious or scientific beliefs or methods. We can and usually do reject any belief that would reject or even question such a convictions . We not only know or say it was problematic for some that torturing just for the fun of it is evil but we know that as one of our *unquestionables*. (I don't

mean by this that it is logically unquestionable but that it is humanly unquestionable.) Even Dick Cheney who believes that in certain circumstances we should torture takes it to be unquestionable not to torture just for the fun of it. Such a belief is, of course, not anti-scientific or unscientific. It is non-scientific. Dr. Strangelove's belief can be scientific but the above knowledge about the wrongness of torture is not scientific. It is not logically or even causally dependent on scientific beliefs or anything like them. We need not or perhaps should not call it a knowledge of our own natural rights or a natural law. We might talk that way without linguistic deviation, but we know without such philosophical beliefs or conceptions that torturing for the fun of it is evil. It may be what Peirce called one of our acritical beliefs. But the fundamental point is, philosophy or not, theory or not, it is unquestionable.

There are many other examples of moral or otherwise normative matters that without philosophy, science, political theory, religion or anti-religion we know to be plainly wrong, for example, in June/July 2014 the killing of both Jewish and Moslem children in hate crimes in Israel and Palestine. We do not need to know a moral theory or to have any religious orientation or a philosophical understanding or a scientific understanding or attitude to know that this is evil. An illiterate peasant can, and very likely will, understand that. Most spectacularly, we know that of the killing of a teenager, this time a Moslem, by burning him while still alive to death is vile. We know this and things like it without any theory at all including scientific, philosophical or religious. This was known to be evil as was the killing of three teenage Israelis was also so known to be evil. We, for theoretical reasons, may have doubts about talk of natural rights or natural law. We may even think they tend to be swords of empire. But such hate crimes are known to be evil without any theory or appeal to natural rights or natural law. The same thing is true for honor killings. That we have evil here is not dependent on theory, though it may be true of ideology. The only ones who believe we need to engage in theorizing in such cases will be *certain* religious people who are ill-educated and deeply ignorant and prejudiced. They are people with an enculturation that goes with

ignorance and having ignorance-rooted prejudices. We should not make a mystery of this. There may be some very unrealistic rationalistic philosophers who think they who do these things do not do evil. But they belong with the external world doubters.

There are people who are blinded by their enculturation—not literally blinded, of course, but culturally blinded. They are people of diverse beliefs who are not so prejudiced and who are reflective without much of an education. But there are plenty of the others. There are the people with hatred of Moslems and a hatred of Jews and some with a hatred of both, and there are people with hatred of unbelievers. There are unfortunately not a few people with primitive and irrational hatreds, including Jews who think that the only good Moslem is a dead one and Moslems who think the only good Jew is a dead one. There is a lot of that in both Israel and Palestine. But to recognize that such killing as I have alluded to above is very wrong indeed requires no theory, scientific, philosophical, or otherwise, and is anything but problematic. There can be, as it is for me, a determination to stop ISIS without a hatred of their adherents. Sometimes it is very hard to repress one's hatreds. It is hard for me not to hate billionaire capitalists who use their vast wealth to repress and exploit others. But that is something I should not do, hard as it is for me. But that is quite different from standing in robust opposition to them and giving oneself to their opposition. These are different matters.

Similar things obtain between the Neur and the Dinka in South Sudan, between Moslems and Christians in Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Kenya, and rather more lingeringly between whites and blacks in Mississippi and even more lingeringly, but still not completely absent between Texans and Mexicans in Texas and between New Mexicans and Mexicans in New Mexico. Such utterly prejudiced and evil beliefs and actions between some Buddhists and some Moslems in Myanmar and between some Christians and some Moslems in some considerable parts of the Philippines. All of these conflicts seem to me, and to not a few others as well, unnecessary, irrational and unreasonable and for many of us our convictions here are quite independent of any

religious or philosophical orientations or sympathies. Or where such matters are at work here we can realize that such beliefs need not be grounded on them. However, it will not unreasonably be replied, they are not independent of any distinctive enculturation—something we all have in one way or another. In all these places mentioned above there is no universal or even near universal consensus concerning these matters and all these human beings have been enculturated in some way or another.

Do I and the many like me have any enculturation-free ground to stand on that will show these things to be unnecessarily evil (even as the lesser evil), irrational or unreasonable (or both)? Do we always, or even usually, gain cross-cultural consensus here? We plainly do not. How are we to react to this? Hook, and indeed many people in many places, would say quite unequivocally concerning the above matters that with the slightest attention to science people will recognize them to be unreasonable and indeed irrational. But there were Nazi scientists, including anthropologists, who were competent scientists who did not. There are competent but strongly brutal members of Isis who are, unfortunately, scientifically and technologically informed. They are still brutes but not uneducated brutes. It is a myth to think if you are educated you can't be a brute or that without education you are brutish.

There are also a lot of social myths around that are harmful, sometimes very harmful, that harm some innocent and decent people who are caught up by them. Masturbation will not stunt your growth and cancer is not contagious, though in times past many ignorant people thought these things were true. Ebola can be effectively protected against with the proper means. It is not like the bubonic plague of times past. These things are decisively known to be false by anyone who is reasonably informed. (Is this the right thing to say about anyone in any culture? It is not.) Premarital intercourse will not render you infertile, no matter what some people think. The same thing obtains for the belief that certain peoples are chosen peoples. That is plainly not true, no matter what some people think. This is also true of the belief that boys are just naturally brighter

than girls and should have a different and superior education. Again, this is not true, no matter what is thought in some cultures. This is just gross sexist ideology. That most blacks are just naturally less intelligent than most whites is also just not true, no matter what some people may think. We could go on and on with other examples. Even a minimal scientific education would show such beliefs and the moral judgments that go with them are plain falsehoods.

Though there is a *distinction* between the ought and the is, there no *dichotomy* between them and no dichotomy between fact and value (Putnam). For a long time it was widely believed that to spare the rod was to spoil the child. There is no dichotomy here making it impossible to think that such moral beliefs are false. This once common moral judgment, a part of our inherited common sense, but not of all common sense, has been completely discredited on empirical grounds. It was never common sense among Pollyannas and this is no longer taken as plain common sense with us. Rather, it is plain ignorant ethnocentrism. It could not be true of what Peirce called *our* critical commonsensism, even along with its acritical beliefs.

Sometimes a little scientific knowledge shows that many commonly accepted moral beliefs are superstitions. Still, *scientism* is not justified. Not everything we know can be scientifically justified. There are common moral beliefs—such as unnecessary suffering is unjustified, torture for the fun of it is a terrible evil, respect for people is a good thing, concern for fellow humans being is desirable—that very well may not be scientifically establishable. But they are moral matters that we can know to be true without the aid of science, philosophy or religion. We know that torturing someone just for the fun of it is vile. We need no theory or an articulated belief system to know that, though we need some practices or forms of life. But that we need that for anything we deliberately do. There could be no human understanding without that. And no theory can show us that we are mistaken here.

We are not justified in believing that everything we can know must be scientifically knowable or must be testable against the bar of science. Consider my first gruesome example.

There are sadistic people around who gruesomely and pointlessly torture and then murder those they torture and then, as in one notorious example, chop up the body parts and mail them around. Such sadistic people, of course, are doing something very evil and plainly so. Almost everyone knows that is so without a second's doubt or reflection. But a very tiny minority do not know this. These are the very sadistic people. Some of them may say, 'So what that the vast majority of people indeed have the reaction that these acts are utterly evil? So what if a lot of gratuitous and needless suffering is caused?' It is not that suffering that counts, they believe, but their pleasure that counts. Sadists like doing things like that. How, if we respond at all, do we respond to that gruesome remark? It is not, it should be responded, just or perhaps at all that numbers count. Non-sadists vastly outnumber sadists. It is not numbers, or not crucially, but the pointless suffering caused by such acts that decisively counts.

Can we give an *a priori* reason, a pure practical reason, that that is so? No. But life is generally so ordered that that is something we human beings vastly but not entirely all of us reject with or without theorizing or asking the rational basis for our reflection. (Does that mean that, after all, numbers count? No, not just like that. But what then?) But causing such suffering is just plainly morally intolerable. No theorizing can gainsay that. We can only relevantly say that to inflict such suffering is evil. That is where we stop. It is just plainly beastly and not to be tolerated. There is no need for rumination or reflection there. These is a place where justification and toleration come to an end. Without stopping like that, there wouldn't be justification. And here is a crucial place where justification comes to an end and no considerations can undermine it or put in into question.

This is plain for the case of the utter intolerability of burning someone to death just for the fun of it, as a Moslem boy was murdered by some Israelis, though I would conjecture not just for the fun of it but at least principally because of an irrational hatred. We can reasonably be skeptical that this will ever go away, though in some places there is more like going away than in others.

Sweden more than Haiti, for example. I have been more optimistic in the past than I am now that with more social wealth and better education these things will go away, or at least lessen. Look at the Nazis rising out of Weimar. Look at Israel with a well-educated and reasonably affluent population and the horrors inflicted on the Palestinians. Look at the United States with its brutal wars and its treatment of blacks with police killing them and sometimes killing them without reason in the streets and its terrible prison system and for all its wealth tolerating that a third of its population live just a little above or on or below the official poverty line. This latter is tolerated with a great song and dance as something that must be put up with rather than eradicated as it readily could be. These things are genuinely and grossly evil if anything is. And evil of various sorts is flourishing with government officials condoning it.

However, things like that go on in the world and not infrequently. This, of course, does not justify or excuse them or in any way make them acceptable. But it is part of the evidence of how horrible our world is in varying degrees. It is nothing like the wonderful world of Louis Armstrong's song. Is all that we can say of the inducement of such suffering is that it is irrational, beastly and intolerable? What are we to say if someone asks why? Is there a place for why here? Is all that we can do is to in effect firmly stomp our feet, so to speak, giving to understand that that is intolerable and unquestionably so? But unfortunately, it is true that some people not only tolerate it but engage in it.

Science can perhaps explain why some people do such things. Perhaps it can even show such actors are not responsible for the vile things they do. But we do not need science, philosophy or religion to know that these acts are evil, indeed vile, and must not be done, tolerated or accepted where we can do anything about them. Does this show that we are being arbitrary in so standing fast? *Au contraire*. To so treat our fellow human beings in this vile way is a paradigm of arbitrariness and evil. But where these things happen is in the world where we live and where we must—morally must—fight them. We can reasonably be skeptical that it will ever go away. But

that this is so is not a philosophical or religious matter. It is not so establishable or disestablishable. It is, all the same and as things stand, something we must, morally must, regard as vile.

Consider also some others things that we take to be extremely vile such as the experiments conducted on people in concentration camps where they were cruelly experimented with and sometimes to no evident purpose and with no anesthesia. Again, this is vile if anything is. That is also so where people are worked to death in gulags and concentration camps. Much less so, though still plainly evil, is that some considerable number of people live in circumstances where Coca-Cola is cheaper to drink than clean safe water and where children are brought up on it, often drinkg it instead of water. That is disgusting and social practices that allow this are evil, as it is for people to leave their pets on the streets when they are no longer interested in them. There are many such things that are plainly very wrong, some even monstrously so, and are known to be so quite independently of science, philosophy or religion. A philosophical, religious or scientific claim which purported to show that they were not wrong would be plainly mistaken.

Science, however, is sometimes able to show that some things are either more harmful or less harmful than previously thought. Sometimes they are shown to be benign. But we don't need science to establish that it is better to regularly drink water rather than Coke. But it took science to show that it is better for people not to smoke than to smoke. Moreover, for most of the monsters we do not need science to make evident their badness. And we never need philosophy.

Many of these moral matters are not unknowable. They are all too knowable. But for most of them science does not establish them or disestablish their badness. Their establishability does not require science. To believe that they must be so established or establishable is to be in error. They usually stand in no need of scientific, philosophical or religious backing. We can know, and indeed do know, that these extreme things are wrong quite without them.

It is not only the monstrosities that are in no need of such backing or such knowledge but matters like the desirability of kindliness, concern, reciprocal caring, cooperation between human

beings, tolerance, reflectiveness, understanding between human beings, the curtailing of greed, the avoidance of human misery, and the value of human flourishing. None of these need scientific understanding, philosophy or religion. *Perhaps* there is no scientific, philosophical or religious foundation for these things. But none are needed anyway. We know without any of these things that these things ought to obtain. Do we have to ask why be moral? Or what was wrong with the slave trade? Or what is wrong with its cousin, indentured labor?

Scientism rests on a mistake as does the requiring of philosophy or religion for these crucial matters. We must be on guard against things like the so-call perennial philosophy or Thomism and other metaphysical doctrines as Hook does in a masterful way in his essay under examination, but as well we must stand against the very idea of a scientific philosophy and the belief that what science cannot establish humankind cannot know. Both scientism and being unscientific should be put in the wastepaper basket. Both are myths generated by ethnocentricity. And to show this does not require another myth.

Note

[1] There are a number of places where Rorty articulates his critique of what he regards as a scientistic pragmatism and where he defends his own alternative conception of a pragmatism without method. But four separate accounts, mutually reinforcing in each other, are the most focused. When referring to them I shall cite them in the text as follows: R IV, 1-6 = Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism as Anti-Representationalism" in John P. Murphy, ed., *Pragmatism from Peirce to Davidson* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990) 1-6; R III, 40-48 = Richard Rorty, "Comments on Sleeper and Edel," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* Vol. 21 (Winter 1984), 40-48; R II, ix-xvii = Richard Rorty, "Introduction" in Jo Ann Boydston, ed., *John Dewey: The Later Works, Volume 8: 1933* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), ix-xviii; and R I, 63-67 = Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism without Method" in Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63-77. In getting a handle on Rorty's most succinct account read first R IV, 1-6.

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