

Scientism, Pragmatism, and the Fate of Philosophy

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I assume here, what I have argued elsewhere, that Rorty's dissolution of the Tradition is in the main well taken. Foundationalist epistemologically based or metaphysically oriented philosophy, including systematic analytical philosophy, is not a viable enterprise. I then argue that Rorty's replacement is itself not plausible and I further argue that, his affinities with pragmatism to the contrary notwithstanding, his 'aestheticized pragmatism' misses (a) the key social functions of philosophy (a reconstructed philosophy) articulated and practised by Dewey with his conception of philosophy as a criticism of criticisms and as social critique and (b) that Rorty's 'pragmatism without method' misses what is most distinctive in pragmatism, namely its conception of the expanded role in fixing belief for a flexible and non-scientistic conception of scientific method in the stream of life. Rorty fails to see here the possibility for some form of critical theory as a successor subject to philosophy which still carries on some of its critical functions. More generally, Rorty, in properly reacting against scientistic images of philosophy and conceptions of the omnipotence of science, treats science too much as a text, as just one language-game among other language-games, and fails to appreciate its impact on our knowledge of ourselves and the rest of the furniture of the universe.

Edifying philosophers can never end philosophy, but they can prevent it from attaining the secure path of science.

– Richard Rorty

I

Many have taken the real object of Richard Rorty's attack on systematic philosophy to be an attack on analytical philosophy. That is a mistake.¹ He is ranging much wider than that. Husserl, in his estimation, has taken a wrong turning as much as Russell or Popper, and (coming to our time) Habermas as much as Dummett, to the extent that the former, as much as the latter, relies on transcendental arguments or takes a transcendental turn. It is the very taking of any transcendental turn and turning philosophy into a distinctive discipline with a specialized form of knowledge that Rorty sets out to undermine. Richard Bernstein puts it well when he remarks that 'Rorty's primary object of attack is any form of systematic philosophy which shares the conviction that there are real foundations that philosophy must discover and that philosophy as a discipline can transcend history and

adumbrate a permanent neutral matrix for assessing all forms of inquiry and all types of knowledge'.²

What if there is no defending the tradition, and systematic analytical philosophy and its Continental cousins along with their historical ancestors must be given up? We will then want to know 'what function, if any, philosophers can perform and what type of self-understanding of philosophy emerges if we give up the various "self-deceptions" that Rorty exposes'.³

From a reading of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* it is very easy to get the impression that Rorty is telling us we should go from epistemology to hermeneutics, from systematic philosophy to edifying philosophy.⁴ This is a mistake but a revealing mistake. The phrase 'edifying philosophy' is, I think, unfortunate but not the concept – a concept borrowed from Kierkegaard – which underlies it.⁵ The phrase suggests that philosophers are to pour on the sweet syrup of consolation or moral encouragement (perhaps even moral rearmament) urging us either to accept life as it is or to go on, Faust-like, to still greater heights of achievement. Rorty has nothing like this in mind. Nor, for that matter, did Kierkegaard. For Rorty, 'edifying philosophy' is reactive, debunking philosophy – the sort of thing done with genius in the nineteenth century by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and in the twentieth century by Wittgenstein and (Rorty says) by Heidegger. It is always a reactive philosophy parasitic upon the pretensions of systematic philosophy. Edifying philosophers direct an assorted battery of *reductio* arguments against systematic philosophy. They mock, satirize, scorn – in various ways – the tradition. They are the masters of indirect discourse. With such techniques they mock the grand Either/Or: 'Either there is some basic foundational constraint or we are confronted with intellectual and moral chaos.'⁶ But they do not offer us a new method or new foundations; instead they produce a mocking critique of both the need for a method or foundations and, beyond that, of the very possibility of there being foundations or a new method, or indeed any kind of method, which would give us the rationale for a critique of culture. Systematic philosophy purports to give us a more rational picture of the world and an Archimedean point for the critique of our institutions. Edifying philosophy with its hermeneutical turn sees philosophy not as rational inquiry but as conversation, as one of the many voices in the conversation of mankind. Philosophy should no longer be seen as argument and attempted proof but as conversation that can 'be civilized, illuminating, intelligent, revealing, exciting'.⁷ We move from a scientific style (or at least an attempted scientific style) to something like a literary style. Philosophy is no longer to be viewed as an inquiry into truth or an attempted discovery of foundations. Yet it is not the case that considerations of truth simply drop out. They enter, along with many other elements, into the conversation, for Rorty does think that there is something called practical wisdom, the having of which is necessary

to participate effectively in the conversation, that philosophy is partner to.⁸ But the attainment of this practical wisdom means abandoning the persistent philosophical illusion that really good philosophers are people who know 'something about knowing which nobody else knows so well'.⁹

II

This alternative conception of Rorty's is not clearly or perhaps even consistently articulated. There are philosophers who, generally in agreement with Rorty's critique of the tradition, find his alternative unpalatable.¹⁰ Richard Bernstein is one of these. Indeed he believes that 'Rorty himself does not quite see where his best insights and arguments are leading him' and that, more like Wittgenstein and less like Dewey, he remains too obsessed with the very tradition he would reject.¹¹ Indeed, claims Bernstein, a version of the Either/Or still haunts him: 'Either we are ineluctably tempted by foundational metaphors and the desperate attempt to escape from history *or* we must frankly recognize that philosophy itself is at best a form of "kibitzing"'.¹² Bernstein, using a technique that is Rorty's, prods us to ask:

Suppose, however, that Rorty's therapy were really successful; suppose we were no longer held captive by metaphors of 'our glassy essence' and 'mirroring', suppose we accepted that knowledge claims can never be justified in any other way than by an appeal to social practices, suppose we were purged of the desire for constraint and compulsion, then what?¹³

He thinks that, if that were so, the cultural scene and the voice of philosophy in the conversation of mankind would look very different from those Rorty proposes.¹⁴

Dewey sees further and deeper, Bernstein argues, than does Rorty or Wittgenstein, what a reconstructed philosophy would look like on the other side of a liberation from the tradition and its eternal 'problems of philosophy'. For Dewey philosophy reconstructs itself when it turns the problems of philosophy into the problems of men.¹⁵

Dewey would certainly agree with Rorty that all justification involves reference to existing social practices and that philosophy is not a discipline that has any special knowledge of knowing or access to more fundamental foundations. But for Dewey this is where the real problems begin. What are the social practices to which we should appeal? How do we discriminate the better from the worse? Which ones need to be discarded, criticized and reconstructed? Dewey sought to deal with these problems without any appeal to 'our glassy essence', 'mirroring', or foundational metaphors. According to Rorty's own analysis, these are genuine problems, but Rorty never quite gets around to asking these and related questions. He tells us,

of course, that there is no special philosophical method for dealing with such issues and no ahistorical matrix to which we can appeal. But accepting this claim does not make these issues disappear. Whatever our final judgment of Dewey's success or failure in dealing with what he called the 'problems of men', Dewey constantly struggled with questions which Rorty never quite faces – although his whole reading of modern philosophy is one that points to the need for reflective intellectuals to examine them. Sometimes Rorty writes as if any philosophic attempt to sort out the better from the worse, the rational from the irrational (even assuming that this is historically relative) must lead us back to foundationalism and the search for an ahistorical perspective. But Rorty has also shown us that there is nothing inevitable about such a move. Following Rorty, we do not have to see this enterprise as finding a successor foundational discipline to epistemology, but rather as changing the direction of philosophy, of giving the conversation a different turn. Ironically, for all his critique of the desire of philosophers to escape from history and to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, there is a curious way in which Rorty himself slides into this stance. He keeps telling us that the history of philosophy, like the history of all culture, is a series of contingencies, accidents, of the rise and demise of various language games and forms of life. But suppose we place ourselves back into our historical situation. Then a primary task is one of trying to deal with present conflicts and confusions, of trying to sort out the better from the worse, of focusing on which social practices ought to endure and which demand reconstruction, of what types of justification are acceptable and which are not. Rorty might reply that there is no reason to think that the professional philosopher is more suited for such a task than representatives of other aspects of culture. But even this need not be disputed. We can nevertheless recognize the importance and the legitimacy of the task of 'understanding how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term'.¹⁶

Rorty does indeed leave conceptual space for these problems, but he does not grapple with them himself or, like Dewey, direct philosophers, at long last free from the tradition, to grapple with these problems, let alone indicate how they might successfully do so. His own account, unlike Dewey's, remains an 'aesthetic pragmatism'. That there are no ahistorical standards of rationality or objectivity providing us with ahistorical reasons for acting, reasons that can be seen to be good reasons independently of time, place, and circumstance, does not imply that there are no historically determinate reasons – 'historical reasons' if you will – which, relative to a distinctive cultural and historical context, can be established to be good reasons for doing or not doing one thing rather than another.¹⁷ Moreover, the issues *cannot* be resolved simply by appealing to existing social practices, for 'the heart of the controversy is the genuine and serious conflict of competing social practices'.¹⁸

There may be very good reasons indeed – at least on some readings – for accepting Rorty's historicism and for claiming that all justification, scientific and moral, is social and historically determinate. What else, it is natural to ask, could it be? In that way there is no escaping history. Still, we can accept this quite unequivocally while quite consistently believing

that, as human beings, acting at a particular time and place, with a historically conditioned consciousness, we still need, firmly *in situ*, to determine (if we can) among conflicting social practices, which ones are to be acted in accordance with or which to be modified and in what way so that we can attain, in a determinate context and for a determinate time, a rational consensus. The method of wide reflective equilibrium is, I think, a very good general characterization of how we are to go about achieving such a rational consensus – and it squares very nicely with what Rorty commends as a ‘pragmatism without method’.¹⁹

In so reasoning here, we are going to get, if anything, *phronesis* (a type of practical reasoning which doesn’t attempt to appeal to ultimate foundations, eternal standards or algorithms) rather than the foundationalist’s *noesis*. The rationality that is available to us, within this contextualistic fallibilism, ‘is always a form of rational persuasion which can never attain a definitive ahistorical closure’. (The rationalist’s search for such a closure is a further flight from reality – a dreaming of the dream of the Absolute.) But reflective understanding and assessment of our situation does not require such an Archimedean point. Rather than searching for foundations, we should see philosophy as reflective conversation, playing its part in a larger conversation, in which we attempt to hammer out for a particular time and place a rational consensus concerning how to realign conflicting social practices so that they form a more reasonable social whole.

III

Rorty takes not only talk of conceptual foundations but talk of methodology as his nemesis. Such talk, he believes, will always lead us down the garden path. There are, however, ways and ways of raising methodological considerations and of stressing the importance of method. Isaac Levi shows, in a way that is commensurate with, but still importantly distinct from, Bernstein’s remarks about Dewey and Rorty, that Rorty badly misappropriates one of his three great heroes here, i.e. Dewey.²⁰ For Dewey (*pace* Rorty), considerations of method were central. He sought to articulate something he called ‘logic, the theory of inquiry’ which showed the social activity of science, construed broadly and flexibly, to be continuous with ways of common-sense reasoning which are cross-culturally pervasive. This picture of how to fix belief – or so I would claim against Rorty – was not scientific and did not fix scientific method in stone as something called the hypothetico-deductive method. But it did afford the general outlines of a way in which the institutions of society – including its moral stances – and various forms of life could be understood and rationally criticized, and

it did firmly stand against what we would now call Kuhnian or Winchian incommensurability claims – claims Rorty takes over holus-bolus. Levi is at least as thorough an anti-foundationalist as Rorty, yet he does not accept incommensurability theses. ‘Opposition to foundationalism’, Levi remarks, ‘ought to be the philosophical equivalent of resistance to sin.’²¹ But, he argues, Rorty confuses ‘anti-foundationalism, anti-representationalism and opposition to glassy essences’ – all good things, in Levi’s view (as well as mine) – with the Kuhnian doctrine of ‘anti-commensurabilism’, and all of these ‘with opposition to recognizing truth as an important desideratum in inquiry’.²² Levi thinks that if we think through key aspects of what Dewey says about method we will come to see that we can be, and indeed should be, anti-foundationalists, while all the while rejecting Kuhnian and Rortyan incommensurability theses, and recognize, without the mystification of the correspondence theory of truth, the importance of the search for and indeed the attainment of some measure of truth or warranted assertability in our struggle to see how things hang together in the most inclusive sense of that word. Rorty’s stress on literary sensibilities, and a literary rather than scientific style in the writing of philosophy, is a good antidote to *scientistic* thinking and styles of philosophical writing, but it also underplays the role of what Dewey called scientific inquiry in all domains of our life. In rightly reacting to scientism, Rorty is too inclined, in the way of Wittgenstein, to see science as but one form of life among others.²³ Dewey, we need to remember, construes ‘science’ very broadly. ‘Rational deliberative inquiry’ might be a better phrase for what Dewey has taken scientific method to be. But perhaps not much turns on this beyond the fate, shifting in different cultural contexts, of ‘science’ as an *honorific* term. (More of this later.)

Levi argues, applying certain Deweyan ideas, that there are ‘no incommensurable abysses worth bridging’. We are not caught up in various incommensurable hermeneutical circles or, at the very least, it has not been shown that we are so trapped, let alone that we must be so trapped. Rorty, it is important to remember, generalizes Kuhn’s incommensurability theses not only to different scientific paradigms or disciplinary matrices but to different political and economic arrangements, aesthetic stances, conceptions of philosophy, religions, worldviews, and the like. What Levi seeks to undermine is the claim that rival points of view concerning the truth or falsity, warrantability or unwarrantability, of scientific theories, the propriety of political arrangements or the aesthetic qualities of works of art are incommensurable in the sense that they are incapable of being, as Rorty puts it, ‘brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached or what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict’.²⁴

Levi, roughly following Dewey, sets forth a procedure (a method, if you will) for avoiding the block to inquiry in incommensurability claims. Prima

facie when one finds oneself in the sort of situation where Rorty or Kuhn would claim we have incommensurability claims, what we should do is bracket those claims and conceptions which at least seem to be incommensurable and essentially contestable and seek to isolate, between the contending parties, 'those assumptions and procedures which are non-controversial in the context of the controversy and move to a point of view where only these assumptions and procedures are taken for granted in the inquiry, deliberation or discourse'.²⁵ We bracket or suspend judgment on the contested issue for the nonce and, working with and from the issues on which we agree, see if by drawing implications from them we can ascertain, working from that consensus and by considering how it can be unconsciously expanded, which of the contested positions or courses of action ought to be adopted. By proceeding in this way, we can avoid begging questions at the outset, blocking the road to inquiry, and finding ourselves trapped with two distinct theories or practices with no rational grounds for adjudicating between them.

However, there is, as Levi is fully aware, an evident enough objection to such a procedure: 'it is not always sensible to suspend judgment in the face of disagreement in order to give other views a hearing.'²⁶ As Levi puts it, 'Feyerabend to the contrary notwithstanding, it is silly to give a serious hearing to every fool proposal that comes along'.²⁷ Must astronomers pay attention to flat-earththers? Ideological struggles aside, should scientists pay any attention at all to creationists? If, standing where we are, someone tries to start a movement in *physics* with the slogan 'Back to Aristotle', should we pay any attention at all? It was relevant for Galileo but not for us. We may find it difficult to define criteria for scientific advance. But at least in the hard sciences, isn't there plainly such an advance?²⁸ I do not think it is undue dogmatism – or indeed dogmatism at all – on my part to say that these questions are all rhetorical and that it is plainly not the case that everything goes. We should not, because of some philosophical or ideological dogma, pretend to doubt what we do not really doubt after careful and knowledgeable reflection.

What bothers me here a little as a philosopher – though I don't lose much sleep over it – is that I do not know how in any very comprehensive or even satisfactory way to explain *why* this is so. And I think it *may* be a worthwhile task to do so, though it no doubt has a lower order of priority than not a few philosophers are wont to believe. But in the interim, while we are awaiting such an account, if indeed we ever get one, I would take a Moorean turn and say of any philosophical account which says there has been no scientific development or claims that 'anything goes', that it is far more reasonable to reject it than it would be to reject careful claims of the ordinary sort to scientific development and claims such as Levi's that some views are just too silly to deserve a hearing. Christian Science would be a

case in point. Must we solemnly study Mary Baker Eddy? It is an unserious sort of relativism that tells us we must.

Still there are problems here about the boundaries. I was about to write 'Must we listen to Nazis?', when I reminded myself that there are chaps in our culture – even educated chaps – who would have as readily used as an example, 'Must we listen to Communists?'. And, as Noam Chomsky has forcefully brought to our attention, those who are thought to be beyond the pale of academic responsibility (particularly when social issues are discussed) and those who are thought to deserve a hearing in the domain of politics get defined very conservatively and very ideologically indeed.²⁹ So while it is clear enough that some things are beyond the pale – something we recognize *ambulando* – and it is silly to seek a consensus that would bring everyone under the net, it remains, as Levi puts it,

an interesting and important question when one should and should not open up one's mind to rival points of view concerning the truth of scientific theories, the rightness or wrongness of actions, the legitimacy of political constitutions or the qualities of works of art. It is just as indefensible to answer 'always' as 'never'; and no alternative context independent principle applicable on all occasions and regardless of the nature of the dispute and its participants will prove better.³⁰

It looks – at least in the meantime – that what we have to do is rely on our judgment – indeed our very fallible, sometimes ideologically distorted, judgment – aided, of course, by our background knowledge, affected by where we stand in history and in the society in which we live, and dependent on our capacities both to empathize *and* to distance ourselves. Sometimes, for some of us, that can put us in a very fine ideological pickle indeed.

In trying to find some viewpoint from which we could criticize social institutions or practices, or even whole ways of life, in some non-question-begging manner, we do not need to find a point of view neutral to *all* controversies – that indeed is an impossibility – but a point of view neutral to the particular issues under scrutiny, even when those issues are as broad as comparing the relative merits of capitalism and socialism in the twentieth century.³¹ To transcend an ideological treatment of the matter, it is important to find such a neutral ground if we can. And there is no good reason, in advance of inquiry, not to think that if we work hard we can find such a neutral ground. It might, in this instance, depend on there being a consensus on the possibility and (if possible) the importance of such holistic assessments, or on what good explanations in the social sciences would look like, or on at least some of the conditions necessary for there to be undistorted communication. But to do these things and feasibly to engage in social critique, or use this Deweyan method in such critique, we do not have to be able to give a coherent account of what is probably not itself coherent, namely the idea of moving to a point of view which is neutral

vis-à-vis all controversies.³² In attempting to solve the problems of people (real life problems, when the engine isn't idling) and when faced with seemingly intractable conflict, we only need, to keep reasoned argument alive and not block inquiry, to be able to move to 'a point of view neutral for the issues under scrutiny. . .'.³³ We do not have to be able to move to 'a point of view neutral for all controversies'.³⁴

There may very well be no way to prove the non-existence of incommensurables. But failure of proof here does not even remotely mean that we should assume that there are incommensurables, so that there are some issues concerning which there just is no possibility of reasoning through to a better or worse conclusion. Still, even granting that (for the sake of continuing the discussion), we should not become too optimistic about the actual powers of reason and critical inquiry to provide the engines of sound social critique and the critique of ideology. We may always be able to suspend judgment for the sake of argument over some genuinely contested issue without begging questions, but, as Levi well puts it, this will itself not 'guarantee that enough will survive [when we set aside the contested issues] in the way of noncontroversial assumptions and methods to secure resolution in a reasonable and definite manner'.³⁵ However, faced with such possibilities we may always reasonably *hope*, as the pragmatists stressed, that 'proceeding with inquiry will yield resources for resolving disputes'.³⁶ The resolution may not be immediate and sometimes may be only resolution in the longer run, but, even so, we need not, and indeed should not, assume that we just run up against stark incommensurabilities concerning which we can only take a stance.³⁷ We do not have to assume, nor is it the direction in which reason pushes us, that there are situations in which our intellects cannot give us guidance and decision becomes king. Such decisionalism is Kierkegaardian, Harean, Sartrean, Popperian romanticism, not something a realistic understanding of our lot forces us to accept. There are times when the practicalities of the situation simply require action under great unclarity. Any revolutionary knows the pathos of this. But if, counterfactually, we had the time for further deliberation and investigation, nothing in the nature of the case tells us that we will run up against situations in which we can *know* that nothing more is to be said and we must just plump one way or the other without justification. Such secular Lutheranism has not been established, though we can of course have no guarantees that there will always be a determinate solution either.

To view things in this manner is not a touching or benighted faith in reason, but just a refusal to place roadblocks in the path of inquiry. If we are thorough anti-foundationalists, we will not postulate incommensurable conceptual frameworks, or even assume any sharp distinction between issues concerning conceptual frameworks and those concerning non-

conceptual frameworks. That should go with the rejection of any sharp, non-relativized distinction between the analytic and synthetic.

Following Kuhn, Rorty rightly sees, Levi claims, that controversies in the sciences do not differ in kind from controversies in politics and morals. But, according to Levi, Rorty gives this the wrong twist. The reason they do not differ in kind is rooted in the implications of the fact that actual 'scientific inquiry is goal or problem oriented'.³⁸ This being so, what constitutes an optimal solution in science, as well as politics, 'depends on the nature of the problem and, hence, on the aims and values of the inquiry'.³⁹ This makes scientific discourse in certain important respects like practical deliberation. *Phronesis* rather than *noesis* applies here as much as in the art of politics or in morality. Between these different forms of life our canons for rational goal attainment are not very different, let alone incommensurable.

Dewey does not exaggerate when he speaks of the 'fundamental unity of the structure of common sense and science'.⁴⁰ Without reducing, or attempting to reduce, values to facts or factual claims to normative claims, there can be a common method for their rational resolution without its being the case that morals and science have the same subject-matter, or that normative claims and factual claims have the same subject-matter, or that normative and factual claims have the same logical status. Moreover, recognizing the importance of this claim of a fundamental unity of the structure of common sense and science, yielding a common method of inquiry, is perfectly compatible with the acceptance of a reasonable reading of Antonio Gramsci's claim that what is common sense at any particular time is certain bits of the ideology of the ruling class of that time.

While bracketing any consideration concerning the various philosophical contenders for the best analysis of what 'true' or 'truth' means, we can take truth, or at least warranted assertability, quite seriously as something to be judged relative to the development of what Dewey calls, treating the term very generally, scientific method.⁴¹ When we look at the various belief-systems strewn around over cultural and historical space and time, we are not caught with incommensurable, fundamentally unarguable distinct world-views. In this context it is particularly important to keep in mind Levi's contention that neither Rorty nor Kuhn, or for that matter neither Winch nor Wittgenstein, have given us anything like adequate reasons for believing 'that incommensurability ever has obtained or does obtain'.⁴² Morals, the arts, politics, and science may very well be different forms of life with different ends and distinct rationales, but they are all in important respects goal-oriented, and because of this they share some common norms of rational inquiry and thus are not incommensurable activities with incommensurable norms of appropriateness.⁴³

Without reducing ethics and politics to science, or engaging in any kind

of reduction either way, we can (*pace* Rorty) still stress the availability of a common method of inquiry and common norms of rationality. And these norms and that method undermine nihilism and at least certain forms of relativism.

However, even here, Levi stresses, following Dewey, both the centrality and the strategic nature of scientific inquiry. The fruits of scientific inquiry 'serve as resources for further information gathering inquiry, as standards for judging possibility in guiding policy and furnishing technologies for policy and for the arts'.⁴⁴ Truth (rational investigation) here (*pace* Rorty) takes priority over style. What is crucial to recognize is that our moral and political conceptions – including our values – can be made 'subject to critical control in inquiries which bear marks of rationality similar to those exhibited by properly conducted scientific inquiries'.⁴⁵ It isn't that we can rely, without supplementation, on these general standards of rationality and methods for resolving all, or even most, of the various problems of men. The 'method must be supplemented by additional assumptions and rules, by special objectives which differentiate branches of scientific inquiry from one another and these from activities focused on problems of "use and enjoyment"'.⁴⁶ But there is an underlying, commonly required method, with common standards of rationality, and this undercuts incommensurability claims and extreme forms of relativism.

There is, it is not unnatural to argue, a dual role for philosophy here, after the demise of the tradition. It is (a) one voice among others in the very carrying out, in this goal-directed way, of this inquiry and in the critique of the problems of men, and (b) a critical reflection on this very ongoing inquiry – a kind of criticism of criticisms – designed incrementally and in a fallibilistic manner to sharpen, improve and, where desirable, systematize our problem-solving abilities. This reconstruction of philosophy or, if you will, this successor to philosophy, is neither systematic or unsystematic analytic philosophy nor edifying philosophy, though on occasion it will use bits and pieces of both for its own purposes. And it will be philosophy, if that is the right name for it, more closely interlocked with the human sciences than the philosophy coming out of the tradition, or Rorty's aestheticized pragmatism. It also nicely meshes, on a more general level, with the Deweyan conception of philosophy viewed as social critique defended by Bernstein.

IV

There are three changes – all moving in the direction of Dewey, one of his heroes – that I have urged on Rorty. Recognizing that 'philosophy' is not a word standing for a natural kind, I have argued (1) that Rorty fails to

recognize the role, after the death of epistemology, of philosophy as social criticism or criticism of ideology in the service of the problems of men, (2) that Rorty too readily follows the trendy and rather uncritical acceptance of incommensurability theses, and (3) that Rorty does not see, construed now in a wide sense of 'science', the import of the Peircean-Deweyan conception of the role of scientific method in the fixing of belief.

Rorty has shown a remarkable and, to my mind, commendable flexibility in response to criticisms, and a readiness to rethink positions and abandon claims without losing the profound, and to some unsettling, underlying conception he is spinning of the development of philosophy and its role in our intellectual and social history. It seems to me that if Rorty were to go in the more pragmatist direction gestured at here, nothing would be lost of his overall conception of the non-specialist, non-disciplinary conception of how philosophy should develop after the demise of the tradition, and of what the role of this 'new philosophy' should be in our intellectual life. At most he would, though in an utterly non-scientistic way, have to give science more weight, and a somewhat different weight, in the conversation of humankind than he at least seems now to be willing to do. He – or so it seems to me – could, with these emendations and without abandoning historicism, deflect frequent charges of nihilism and relativism, charges he in fact wants to deflect.⁴⁷

There are, however, some remarks in his important and revealing 'A Reply to Six Critics', as well as in his 'Pragmatism without Method', which might indicate grounds for resistance about incommensurability and scientific method.⁴⁸ In the former he faces Alasdair MacIntyre's challenge that, to write the kind of narrative about philosophy that Rorty intends, he must have available standards of objectivity and rationality beyond anything which he thinks is available to him. Rorty responds to this in two passages:

As I see it, those who, like MacIntyre and myself, write revisionist history in the form of what MacIntyre has called 'dramatic narratives', no more appeal to 'standards of objectivity and rationality' than novelists appeal to 'standards of good novel writing' or than Newton appealed to 'standards of scientific inquiry'. Typically a new history or a new theory or a new novel succeeds by striking its readers as 'just what we needed'. Later, perhaps, somebody may come and construct some 'standards' which the latest successes satisfy, but that is just *ad hoc* pedagogy. If there were such things as 'standards of objectivity and rationality' which determined what counted as a good argument about the nature of objectivity and rationality, then they would either be forever immune to change, for their critic would be convicted either of self-referential inconsistency by invoking them, or of irrationality by not invoking them. So I take it that there are no such standards. There are just communities of informed readers who are open to persuasion.⁴⁹

Here we can recognize the same artificial problem as came up in connection with MacIntyre's 'objective and rational standards'. If there were such standards, or if

there were a vocabulary the employment of which constituted rationality, then they would be uncriticizable: There would be no way 'rationally' to substitute some new standards or some new vocabulary. I call this an artificial problem because I think that it is solved everyday, *ambulando*, by people gradually becoming bored with old platitudes, beginning to treat as 'literal' what they had once treated as 'metaphorical' and conversely, and insensibly ceasing to discuss *Q* not because they doubt its presupposition *P* but merely because they have found better things to discuss. The changes from pagan to Christian, from Christian to Enlightenment, and from Enlightenment to Romantic and historicist ways of speaking cannot be analyzed as 'rational', if that means that a speaker of 4th century B.C. Attic would 'in principle' have been able to formulate the arguments for and against making these changes. But nobody wants to say that this sequence of changes in the Western mind was 'irrational'. The opposition between 'rational argument' and 'irrational persuasion' is simply too coarse to describe what happens in intellectual history.⁵⁰

Rorty is right in claiming that a variety of specific and diverse contextually embedded factors are what in the main determine how at any specific time it is reasonable to proceed.⁵¹ He is also right in claiming that very specific putatively contextless conceptions of substantive canons of rationality would, if treated seriously as rational guides, hamstring the development of thought. But Levi's pragmatist conceptions are procedural and would not so block thought. Indeed they make conceptual space for openness in a way that should be congenial to Rorty. Even substantive canons of rationality need not have either the self-defeating features characterized by Rorty or the anti-fallibilistic features he ascribes to them. They can and should be put forth as putative canons of rationality and as such, along with more contextual factors, they guide without hobbling. We have a sense that not everything goes and we can specify, if pressed, why a given view is in Cloud-cuckoo-land without putting our alleged standards beyond criticism.

Rorty might well counter that, so construed, they are harmless enough but also useless because they are always being corrected by our concrete practices. But there is no warrant for saying that, or rather for saying just that. Rather, correction goes both ways, as it does in relation between considered judgments and general principles in seeking wide reflective equilibrium. Sometimes the specific considered judgments give rise to an alteration or abandonment of general principles, and sometimes general principles (particularly when taken in conjunction with other considered judgments) give rise to a modification or an abandonment of certain considered judgments. We shuttle back and forth here, making adjustments at either end and indeed often in the middle. And here there is no algorithm telling us what we must always do. It seems to me that the relations between particular practices and general canons of rationality are the same. And such a method of reflective equilibrium is fully in the spirit of the fallibilism that Rorty, like Levi, rightly prizes. It is not that when people write

revisionist history they must appeal to such standards. They may or may not do so. But in subsequent justificatory arguments the standards are among the considerations that can relevantly be brought to bear, as can Levi-type standards of procedural rationality.

We have incommensurability problems and problems about the limits of rationality when adherents of large and comprehensive points of view have systematic disagreements which extend, not only to how these disagreements should be resolved, but more fundamentally to how they are to be correctly characterized. The problem that Rorty, following here Kuhn and MacIntyre, feels – and feels as the problem of incommensurability – is how is it possible, if indeed it is possible, rationally and objectively, without something like ideological distortion, to adjudicate such rival claims, including the comparative appraisal of such claims – claims embedded in contexts so different that apparently no neutral criterion or standard of argument is available? Because of these (putative) incommensurabilities there appear at least to be vital, large-scale disagreements in many domains that are rationally irresolvable. The power of Levi's suggestions is to show that if we follow his procedures, as it is always open for us to do, we have no good grounds for denying, at least in advance of determined and repeated attempts, that at some relevant level we will be able to find neutral criteria which, if we have the will, will give us the bases to adjudicate the rival claims of any putative incommensurability. There may be all sorts of practical reasons why we will not, and indeed should not, always so reason things out. But that is not because reason is wanton and we do not have the intellectual resources for such reasoning.

V

Rorty may balk at this Deweyan conception of philosophy as criticism of criticisms, for Rorty (a) is wary of methodological turns, (b) rejects claims that philosophy can provide an Archimedean point to assess the rest of culture, and (c) rejects the claim that the term philosophy 'names a natural kind – a distinctive sort of inquiry with a continuous history since the Greeks'.⁵² He neither laments that fact, if it is a fact, nor feels that it deprives philosophy, now to be construed more broadly, of a useful cultural function.

I think Rorty is right, and indeed deeply and insightfully right, in his rejecting the tradition and the tradition's conception of philosophy as expressed in (b) and (c) above. I also think he is right to be wary of methodological turns. They often just reduplicate, in a foreign jargon, familiar problems at a meta-level and serve as an excuse – often an ideologically convenient excuse – for failing to come to grips with pressing

substantive problems. Philosophy conceived as a 'criticism of criticisms' and Dewey's talk of method can take various readings, but I do not think the reading Levi puts on it offends against the rejection of the tradition pressed by Rorty. 'Philosophy', on this conception, does not name a natural kind that is part of a professional discipline: a discipline which perspicuously displays the 'foundations of knowledge' and gives us the rational basis for the adjudication of cultural claims.

Dewey always linked philosophy closely to the social sciences and to social criticism and the reflective activity of socially engaged human beings. Rejecting bifurcations as he does, Dewey would not think of philosophy as sharply distinct from social science or social criticism. And his intellectual practice did not differ much in kind from that of Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, Erich Fromm, and C. Wright Mills. Indeed what both to many traditional philosophers and to analytic philosophers seemed perplexing, and to not a few mistaken, was that he often did not appear even to be trying to do philosophy. He did and said some sensible things but they did not seem to be philosophical or of any particular philosophic interest. His work in ethics, for example, looks very different in type from that of Henry Sidgwick or G. E. Moore, on the one hand, or R. M. Hare or Philippa Foot, on the other.

Dewey was quite self-conscious about this. He did not think that there is, or even could be, anything distinct from common-sense knowledge or scientific knowledge (something he took to be continuous with common sense) that would give philosophers an Archimedean point from which to assess culture. A 'criticism of criticisms' had no such exalted or specialized role. It was rather an on-site reflexive activity where the philosopher, concerned with the problems of men, reflected, as part of a continuous operation, on what he was doing and used any general critical categories and norms that were germane to the human problem at hand. The methodological component is so integrally linked to the practical critique that it is hardly the eviscerated methodological turn that Rorty found evasive.

VI

However, in making these points I have ignored another remarkable and revealing essay by Rorty, 'Pragmatism without Method', in a *Festschrift* for Sidney Hook.⁵³ There Rorty seems in effect to say things about scientific method contrary both to what I have argued and to what Levi argued. My surmise is that Rorty would regard our reading of pragmatism as being as scientific as he sees Sidney Hook's, for in respect of what is at issue here our views are very similar. What we say about pragmatism and the scientific

method is very close to what Hook says, as well as to Levi's mentor Ernest Nagel.⁵⁴

What exactly does Rorty find wrong with such pragmatism? Rorty, while agreeing that this stress on scientific method was a deeply embedded side of Dewey's many-faceted thought, still thinks Hook mistaken in opting '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'.⁵⁵ Peirce's programmatic 'The Fixation of Belief' is the prototype and the model here. The scientific method, and methods continuous with it in common sense, are the sole way of gaining knowledge or reliable beliefs. Cartesian a priori methods will gain us nothing. There is no distinctively philosophical way of coming to know anything, and there are no such things as 'philosophical knowledge' or philosophically-grounded justified belief, though there is, of course, historiographical knowledge of philosophy. Rorty agrees with this latter claim about philosophy but, that notwithstanding, he argues that Hook is being too positivistic in stressing, as Dewey did too, that scientific method (broadly construed) is the sole reliable method of fixing belief and that the creative use of intelligence in all cognitive domains requires such a commitment.⁵⁶ This, Rorty believes, entirely misses the force of those developments of post-positivist philosophy of science which criticize the idea that there is anything very determinate called the 'scientific method'. Hook, and Nagel as well, and by implication Levi, give us, as Rorty sees it, a scientific pragmatism against which Rorty poses a 'pragmatism without method'. Recent developments in the philosophy of science, Rorty contends, show that we cannot hold theory and evidence apart in the relatively sharp way that Hook and Nagel require.⁵⁷ There is no theory-independent objective *given* that we can just take as the evidence to confirm or disconfirm competing theories. One should not think of pragmatism, Rorty argues, in this scientific, positivistic way as a view that has shown that the scientific method is the one reliable method for reaching the truth about the nature of things. Rather, Rorty argues, one should take pragmatism, in Quine's way, and *sometimes* Dewey's, as a holistic and syncretic theory, the core conception of which is an attempt to replace the notion of true beliefs as representations of 'the nature of things' with a conception of successful rules of action.⁵⁸ We must come to recognize that appealing to evidence or citing evidence is not a 'very useful notion when trying to decide what one thinks of the world as a whole'.⁵⁹ We need instead, in all kinds of different ways, from time to time to make adjustments in the intricate fabric of our web of belief. And, in dropping the claim that there is something called 'the evidence' that is our common ground for adjusting our beliefs, we do not need to conclude that one person's web or even one culture's web is as good as another's.⁶⁰

What Rorty takes to be a scientific form of pragmatism assumes that we have 'a duty to have a general view about the nature of rational inquiry and a universal method for fixing belief'.⁶¹ Rorty rightly doubts that we have any such *duty*. We have a duty to talk to one another, to listen to arguments and the like, and to converse, but it is far from clear (to put it minimally) that we have a duty to adopt such a methodological principle for fixing belief. But, *contra* Rorty, what might not be a duty might still be a good thing to do.

Rorty claims that we very seldom have, by way of methodological principles, anything more than platitudes here, gimmicked up to look like an algorithm. We cannot, he says, isolate anything useful from science and common sense called 'the scientific method' for fixing belief. We can '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'.⁶² It is this, rather than an ahistorical contextless appeal to that *ersatz* something called 'the scientific method', that is vital in appraising our practices, but if we go this way we will have no method or principle or set of principles for determining what to do. We will have nothing like the hypothetico-deductive observational method to fix for us in all domains what is reasonable to believe or to do. A thorough-going fallibilist will avoid this methodological fix – this methodological short cut – just as definitely as he will avoid a metaphysical fix; he will unequivocally abandon 'the metaphysical urge to find some ultimate, total, final context within which all our activities could be placed', and with that he will abandon philosophy as traditionally conceived.

VII

I agree that this nostalgia for the Absolute, this waiting for Godot, this longing for some ultimate, total, final context in which our deepest hopes and perplexities will be met, is something pragmatists have long since set aside, and I agree that this is a good thing. Indeed I am inclined to think such a fallibilistic attitude would be part of the attitude set of anyone who had thoroughly ingested the attitudes of modernity. But, to return to a Deweyan criticism of Rorty cited earlier from Bernstein, someone who had thoroughly accepted such a fallibilism might still wish to recognize that there are big human problems (Dewey called them the problems of men) which still stand before us, with or without the end of philosophy as a professional discipline, in every bit as demanding a way. Without metaphysical comfort they may seem to some even more demanding. Even with the demise of the tradition, philosophy, as social critique and ideology critique, would still be very much to the point in setting out to answer such

problems. There remain, that is, the problems of abortion, euthanasia, pornography, privacy, the rights of children, animal rights, exploitation, imperialism, the ideological uses of science and the media, nuclear threats, sexism, racism, questions about inequality and autonomy, and broad questions about the choice between socialism and capitalism, reform and revolution, the ethics of terrorism, questions about what democracy can come to in our industrial society, and questions about the coherence, approximate truth, and social import of historical materialism and other theories of social change.

These, and related human questions (clearly the problems of men), remain in need of both penetrating and rational treatment. It would indeed be desirable if we could say some true things about these matters. And there may very well be some telling and relatively objective things that can indeed be said about these matters, even if the realism and anti-realism debate and debates of that sort require, as Rorty believes, dissolution rather than resolution. And it may be that some ways of approaching these human problems are more reasonable and fruitful than others. It may be that some answers come closer to being the right ones than others, or even that some of the answers for some of these questions or facets of these questions are the right answers and some are the wrong answers – period. Rorty ought to be quite willing to assert that we can have no a priori or general philosophical guarantees here, that we *cannot* have such answers to such questions. And it is premature to say that research programmes organized around such questions have not panned out. Moreover, reasonably to assert that there can be answers to such human questions, that important true or false statements about them can be made, we need not have any views about how truth is to be characterized or defined, or as to what, if anything, truth adds to warranted assertability. Like Rorty we may regard these as bad questions, comparable to ‘What does moral rightness add to being the best thing to do in the circumstances?’.⁶³

I doubt that Rorty would deny that some answers to these human questions are more reasonable than others, though sometimes he sounds as if he were denying that anything with any argumentative rigour could be done here by way of the resolution of such questions. But that is not something which is embedded in his position. It is perhaps (to be deliberately *ad hominem*) a defence reaction on his part to preserve his rather easy-going conservative liberalism from critique.⁶⁴ But Rorty would no doubt reply that, still, a sense of how to go about things here requires specific contextual responses and not broad generalizations about method, including scientific method.

I think this would be too antinomian. Certainly recent work in the philosophy of science and in the history of science should disabuse us of any penchant for reifying scientific procedures into something called *the*

scientific method. Sciences are very various, and even parts of the same science are often very different, employing different methodologies. While it is true that Dewey did talk, as do Hook and Nagel, about the scientific method, it was usually quite clear from how they did so that they saw it as something quite flexible and that would *in part* require a contextual, discipline-by-discipline specification. (The general things he said about incommensurability notwithstanding, this is also true of Levi.) But they also recognized that there were certain general things that could and should be said as well. Rorty in effect recognizes them too, but rather dismissively refers to them as platitudes. But what is or is not a platitude is itself very contextual. It depends on what is being denied or assumed. What Rorty calls platitudes were once important to assert against a certain kind of resistance to science and a certain kind of metaphysical or theological stance. That, among Western intelligentsia, such stances have now nearly withered away makes it boring and platitudinous to assert these things. There are more interesting things to assert than banalities. Rorty is surely right about that. But platitudes can be, and typically are, true or (where considerations of truth do not arise) reasonable to assume and to employ as guides in situations where they cannot go without saying. Faced with an extreme relativistic stance about what science can come to, or about what it commits us to, or about what its aims are, such platitudes are not infrequently worth asserting. They are also perhaps worth asserting against a certain kind of old-fashioned metaphysician who would claim a priori knowledge of matters of fact. There is reason to think that in thinking about science and our common-sense ways of knowing, there are certain ways of reasoning and viewing things that science requires. They may be platitudes, they may be banal, but we cannot just dismiss them. We cannot, for example, if we are reasoning scientifically, just ignore without good reason the results of a well-conducted experiment. Moreover, and distinctly, the 'platitudes' here (*pace* Rorty) need not come to a statement of epistemic principles.

There are certain questions that are straightforward factual questions, e.g. 'Are there bluejays in Australia?'. And there are well known ways of answering such questions. If we do not know the answer to such a question, we know perfectly well how to go about finding out the answer. If Rorty's historicist belief that our categories, no matter who we are, are a function of our era, and are essentially formed through a historically localized tradition, is meant to deny that there are determinate ways of answering such questions, then such a historicist thesis must be mistaken. Though this, of course, does not mean that anyone just situated in any culture, anywhere in history, can answer them.

There are, in this same determinate way, other questions, like 'Could German Shepherds survive outside in ordinary kennels in the Arctic in

winter?', which also afford a perfectly determinate method for grinding out answers to them. We know how to set out the hypothesis and how to test it, though hopefully, for that particular hypothesis, moral considerations would keep us from doing so. Popper may call these 'banal' rational routines, but they are routines, they are rational, and we do use them. Moreover, there are less mundane questions that could be answered as adequately using the same routine, determinate method. There is, that is, a certain determinate scientific method for a range of questions which works by amending or discarding hypotheses when the predictions drawn from them fail. Experience and evidence have an indispensable role here, as they have throughout science. That they often do not function in the simple and direct way in which they were traditionally depicted as functioning in empiricist epistemologies does not gainsay that.⁶⁵

No matter what story we tell about the theory-dependence of observations, it just is the case that there are indefinitely many facts which could be established if we were willing to use our imaginations and such techniques of discovery as we might devise, and if we employed our techniques of validation, starting with the mundane techniques I have described. There are, however, other issues which are not so straightforwardly *simply* matters of fact, no matter how we conceptualize. But in stressing this we should not forget that there are sticks and stones, hills and rivers; there is night and day, people get born and die and sometimes are in pain; and it is just the case that most people speak some language while earthworms do not. In that important way, there just is a world out there, independent of what we believe about it, and whose features are for certain sorts of belief an ultimate and objective test of what we believe. (I did not say of everything we rightly believe.) But not all matters of fact are so bluntly and uncontroversially factual. As Martin Hollis nicely puts it, there is 'a blurred edge to the idea of a matter of fact'.⁶⁶ Suppose – to use his example – the map of Alpha Centauri records 'Here be gaseous cuboids', as the map of Australia might record 'Here be bluejays'. But in the Alpha Centauri case observation may still leave undecided whether they really are life-forms, or conscious. It is no longer evident that there is a clear fact of the matter that will settle this. Much turns on questions, not settleable by just looking and seeing, as to what is to count as conscious life. What is at issue is no longer independent of our thought, as it is in the question of whether there are bluejays in Australia. We have plenty of concepts that do not function just as labels. 'Concepts', as Hobbes puts it, 'also enter into how we perceive, before we interpret and explain. Indeed, in perceiving, we are often already interpreting and explaining.'⁶⁷

Such complexities complicate the description of what scientific method will come to in some contexts. Given the present development of medicine (to take an example), there is a division of expert opinion concerning what,

if any definite thing or cluster of things, are the underlying causes of schizophrenia. Some think it is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain and others think it is caused by mental disturbances linked to our psycho-sexual histories. There are, of course, other views as well. There is no simple and unequivocal pointing to evidence to settle matters here. The evidence that we appeal to can be read in different ways, and there is a parallel dispute as to what is to count as controlling or curing schizophrenia. If a patient takes drugs and this has a calming effect, is that just a suppression of symptoms or is it a way of treating the underlying condition? Psychiatrists will disagree about this and there is no simple set of observations that will settle the matter. There is perhaps no escaping the need for interpretation here, but in assessing the various interpretations hypotheses will be formed and predictions will be derived from them and they will in turn be tested by evidence. This is not all that will go on, but it is typically a vital part of what does. There will also be a putting things together in coherent rationales, but this will go on with appeal to evidence and, where possible, experiment. Nothing will be decisive in appealing to evidence and making tests, but this does not mean that there are no methodological constraints, and that evidence and often experiment will not have a vital role.

Bas van Fraassen may well be right in claiming that scientific method cannot adequately be characterized in terms of the hypothetico-deductive observational method, but there is all the same in science a loose family of methods which constrain and help define scientific activity and distinguish it from uncontrolled speculation and various a priori and intuitive methods. Rorty's 'Pragmatism without Method' fails to see the central role that method plays in our understanding of the world and tends to treat science too much as just one language-game among others.⁶⁸ Whatever may be true of philosophy as an epistemological or a logico-semantical enterprise, science does, at least in its own self-image, aim to represent the world accurately. That is an essential part of its self-image. Philosophy, if Rorty is right, cannot do anything like that, but it has to be shown, as well, that science in certain domains cannot do it. It has to be shown that it is a naïve scientific faith to think that it can. (Surely with Rorty's Quinean beliefs about the a priori, he can hardly riposte by saying, if there is a seemingly good transcendental argument against its very possibility, then no matter what scientists think they can do they cannot do it. Rorty will not grant us such rationalist powers of reason.)

There indeed is no such thing as nature's own language or a particular privileged vocabulary in which the world demands to be described. But that by itself is not enough to make it senseless or even mistaken to speak of there being an independent world that we try to describe with varying degrees of success. Pragmatists, like positivists and other figures of the

Enlightenment, realized that there was something special about science, both in our attempts to understand the world and in our attempts to obtain reliable beliefs. Rorty in a very unpragmatist manner seems to think that there is nothing special or particularly interesting or significant about science. One need not be a science worshipper, caught up in scientific fetishes, to think that there is something not only very unpragmatist but also very fishy about that.

Even if (*pace* what I have been arguing) Rorty is right in believing that characterizations of scientific method can only give us platitudes (banal truisms) about how to go on in rationally fixing belief, still, as Bernard Williams has remarked, the very success of science invites or at least permits a description of what the success of science consists of.⁶⁹ In doing this, even if we cannot say anything very useful about scientific method, we might, as Popper believes, be able to say something non-mythological about the objective progress of science in finding out what the world is like. Perhaps Feyerabend is right and there is neither scientific method nor scientific progress in finding out what the world is like. Perhaps our scientists know no more about the world than the best informed Ancients did. (Is it really credible to believe that?) But that there is no scientific progress is very counter-intuitive indeed and would take a not inconsiderable showing. Rorty seems just blandly to assume it.

Science, independently of philosophy, has its own self-image. The sort of representationalist idioms that Rorty thinks are myth-making come not only from philosophy but from science itself. As Williams observes, 'Science itself moves the boundaries of explanation and of what is explained just as it moves the boundaries of what counts as observation'.⁷⁰ Scientific theory can create and constitute new forms of observation. A given scientific theory can, for example, explain how 'such an elaborately constructed image as an electron micrograph can be a record of an observation'.⁷¹ Science, without relying on philosophy, explains the reliability of its own observations and the truth of its conjectures. Indeed scientific theory is cumulative in that it often can explain why some of the predictions of previous theories were true and others false, and by doing this it does something to mark out the record of scientific advance. Science can even explain itself and explain how it is that creatures like ourselves understand a world that has the characteristics science says it has. It is an evasion, perhaps propped up by an incessant preoccupation with the language of language-games, to say that evolutionary biology and neurological theory are just some vocabularies among others and that it is an illusion that they contribute to a conception of the world as it is, independently of our inquiries. Representationalist epistemologies may fall to Wittgensteinian de-mythologization, but it is something else to say that the claims of science are similarly known to be illusory. Science's essential self-image, as Williams

well puts it, is that one is 'not locked in a world of books', or in a hermeneutical circle of interpretations of interpretations, but that in one's scientific work one is 'confronting "the world"', and that one's scientific 'work is made hard or easy by what is actually there'.⁷² Whatever it is appropriate to say about the social sciences, in the biological and physical sciences this belief is very central. It is, as Williams remarks, difficult to believe that science could go on without such an image of itself. Perhaps it is not true – though Rorty has not shown that (something that it would be extraordinary to show) – but if it is an illusion it sounds at least like one that is necessary to keep the activity of science going.

This conception of science and its self-image is radically different from the conception Rorty would like to see philosophy come to have of itself. The stress would be the old one of trying to see how things hang together. But the new manner of doing this would be the hermeneutical one of 'seeing how all the various vocabularies of all the various epochs and cultures hang together'.⁷³ To try to take such a turn in science, as distinct from philosophy, would, if it became institutionalized, undermine at least natural science, for its driving force is the attempt to confront the world and find out how it really works. Without that impulse there would be no physics, chemistry, biology, geology, or archaeology. (Or so it seems. It is logically possible that, operationally, science could go on in the same old way while people had different meta-beliefs about what they were doing. My point, and Williams's as well, is that it is likely that these meta-beliefs would in fact cripple the impulse to go on doing science.)

Pragmatism thought of itself as generalizing and applying in new domains – most particularly in the domains of morals and politics – scientific rationality and a number of methods that were distinctive both of common sense engaged in purposive activity and of science. Even if, viewed by someone who is thoroughly absorbed into a scientific culture, they are taken to be banal recipes of rational procedure, they still provide general constraints on how reasonable people imbued with the scientific spirit would reason and act in the purposive direction of their lives, and in trying to understand their condition. Such people would believe, when the issue was clearly and forcefully brought to them, 'that science offers one of the most effective ways in which we can be led out of the web of texts . . . in which Rorty finds himself imprisoned along with the "bookish intellectuals of recent times"'.⁷⁴ Rorty's 'pragmatism without method' hermeneutically enmeshes us in a web of words. Whatever its intrinsic merits, it should be classified as 'pragmatism' in scare quotes. The classical pragmatists, Peirce, James and Dewey, their middle-period expositors, appliers, and developers, such as Hook and Nagel, and their contemporary representatives, such as Levi and Morgenbesser, whatever their other differences, saw a central role for science and scientific method in our cultural life and in a

reconstructed philosophy. It is a way out, they believed, of the cell of words and the imprisonment in language that can result from philosophy and, in a quite different way, from cultivating a *certain kind* of literary sensibility. (It is mercifully not the case that all literary sensibility generates such a belief-set.) Pushed in a certain way, such a pragmatism can become scientific dogma. (Any intellectual stance can be frozen into dogma.) A cure for that is to cultivate the kind of intellectual sensibilities Rorty, following Wittgenstein, cultivates, but in reacting to scientism it, too, can blind itself in its turn, as it seems to in Rorty's case, to the fundamental understanding which science, with its conception of inquiry and truthfulness, can give us.

VIII

I want in this last section to turn to an examination of the relation between what I have just argued and a Deweyan conception of what post-Philosophical philosophy should look like when Philosophy, conceived as a professional undertaking which, in one way or another, is to be the overseer of culture, has finally been set aside, when we have finally given up the belief that there is a discipline which makes our ideas really clear, tells us what we really mean and what in any domain we are really justified in believing. What, we are asking, is left for philosophy after such claims have been seen through as pretensions resting on illusion? Many, including those in various ways generally sympathetic to Rorty, have thought his positive suggestions for a 'post-Philosophy philosophy' sketchy at best. Even to see it as cultural criticism for which there is no very distinctive expertise is rather empty for, given Rorty's way of conceptualizing cultural criticism, it seems to lack any critical thrust. It just sounds like a way, sometimes a rather elegant and learned way, of kibitzing.

Here is where the conception of going about things that pragmatism stresses – the real pragmatism *with* method that Rorty eschews – is vital. Firmly rejecting with Rorty any conception of philosophy as a discipline with a special knowledge, or as a discipline which somehow 'lays the foundations for life' (as if we understood what that means), pragmatism sees philosophy as a somewhat distinctive form of social critique. So conceived, philosophy, both *ambulando* and systematically, will set itself the Sisyphean task of answering, or at least coming to grips with, the problems of men. That is, it will set about answering the sort of large-scale social problems mentioned earlier. (How they get settled is, of course, a matter of social struggle, but which answers are the best answers is not. The correct resolution – where there is a correct resolution – may not be the resolution that prevails.)

By utilizing methods of conceptual analysis and the articulateness and

concern for consistency and truthfulness that goes with it, by utilizing scientific methods, by attending closely to the best-founded claims of science (particularly social science), and by engaging in careful moral reflection, using the method of wide reflective equilibrium, this non-philosophical philosophy can give us, in determinate contexts, without a thought to epistemology, metaphysics, or even meta-ethics, the critical standards needed for a critique of culture and of ideology, and for facing the problems of men with care and decent intellectual resources. In doing this, philosophers or, as I would rather put it, reflective, informed, and intellectually disciplined intellectuals, need also to recover the art, lost at least to Anglo-American and Scandinavian philosophers, of writing broad philosophical narratives, similar in type though not necessarily in content to Rorty's own *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* or MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. (I speak of intellectuals because it is to be hoped that the philosopher, as a kind of specialist, will go the way that one hopes theologians are going.) These narratives will, however, be worked into our critical theory (the successor subject of philosophy) by way of giving that critical theory a perspective, though, in turn, our critical activities may lead, and characteristically would lead, to new narratives, or to reworked narratives, of our philosophical, intellectual, and social history. (Here again we have something analogous to the method of wide reflective equilibrium.) This would mean that never again could any reflective person, who had a good understanding of what he was saying, say with Quine that there are those people who are interested in philosophy and those people who are interested in the history of philosophy.⁷⁵ It would be impossible, on this post-Philosophy conception of philosophy, to be intelligently interested in philosophy without being interested in its history. Still, this new turn in philosophy or this replacement of philosophy (this critical theory), call it what you will, would have the critical bite, the commitment to engage in rational elucidation and criticism, that was behind Quine's misguided quip.

NOTES

1 This is very clear in his interview, 'From Philosophy to Post-Philosophy', *Radical Philosophy* (Autumn, 1982), 32. See also the discussion of Rorty's views by Joe McCarney, 'Edifying Discourses', *Radical Philosophy* (Autumn, 1982), 32.

2 Richard Bernstein, 'Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind', *Review of Metaphysics* XXXIII (1980), 4, p. 760.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 763.

4 He makes it clear in his revealing 'A Reply to Six Critics', *Analyse & Kritik* 6 (1984), 1, pp. 84-86, that this is not what he intends, though he freely admits that he put some of these things badly in the last part of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

5 See Rorty's remarks about this in his 'A Reply to Six Critics', *op. cit.*, pp. 78-98.

6 Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 763.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 765.

- 8 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 372.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 392.
- 10 Rorty makes plain his own dissatisfaction with some of the things he said in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in his 'A Reply to Six Critics', and he also indicates some of the lines on which he would set it straight (*op. cit.*, pp. 78-98). Some of those lines are further developed in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1982), pp. xiii-xvii, 160-90, 211-30, and in his 'Pragmatism without Method', in Paul Kurtz (ed.), *Sidney Hook: Philosopher of Democracy and Humanism* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1983), pp. 259-73.
- 11 Bernstein, *op. cit.*
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 767.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1957); *The Quest for Certainty* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1960); *Problems of Men* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), pp. 3-20, 169-79, 211-353; *Essays in Experimental Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), chs. I, XII, XIII, and XIV; and 'The Need for a Recovery in Philosophy', in John Dewey *et al.* (eds.), *Creative Intelligence* (New York: Holt, 1917), pp. 3-69.
- 16 Bernstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 768-9.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 771. Bernstein takes this to be something Rorty would deny, but it is clear enough by the time he got around to writing 'A Reply to Six Critics' and 'Pragmatism without Method' (articles Bernstein did not have available to him) that Rorty would affirm just that.
- 18 Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 771.
- 19 See my 'Considered Judgments Again', *Human Studies* 5 (1982), pp. 109-18, and my *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 13-41. See references there to Rawls and Daniels in fn. 18, p. 39 and, for a parallel notion, see 'Pragmatism without Method', *op. cit.*, p. 264.
- 20 Isaac Levi, 'Escape from Boredom: Edification According to Rorty', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* XI (1981), 4, pp. 589-602.
- 21 Levi, *op. cit.*, p. 590.
- 22 *Ibid.* See also 'A Reply to Six Critics', *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97. It is also important to recognize that this search for some measure of truth, or what we can at a given time warrantably assert, is distinct from what may be a will-o'-the-wisp, namely a search for a philosophical theory of truth. James Young seems at least to confuse these matters in his 'Pragmatism and the Fate of Philosophy', *Dialogue* (forthcoming).
- 23 Bernard Williams's critique here is to the point. See 'Auto-da-Fe', *The New York Review of Books* XXX (28 August, 1983), 7, pp. 33-36.
- 24 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *op. cit.*, p. 316. See also his 'A Reply to Six Critics' and 'Pragmatism without Method', *op. cit.*
- 25 Levi, *op. cit.*, p. 591.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 David Armstrong, 'Continuity and Change in Philosophy', *Quadrant* XVII (September-December, 1973), 5-6, pp. 19-23.
- 29 Noam Chomsky powerfully captures this ideological function in his *Towards a New Cold War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), pp. 60-114 and his *Radical Priorities*, 2nd rev. ed. (Montreal, Quebec: Black Rose Books, 1984), pp. 297-302.
- 30 Levi, *op. cit.*, p. 591.
- 31 Andrew Levine in effect does that often brilliantly in his *Arguing for Socialism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).
- 32 Levi, *op. cit.*, p. 591.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 591.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 591.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 591.

- 36 Ibid., p. 591.
- 37 Ibid., p. 591.
- 38 Ibid., p. 591.
- 39 Ibid., p. 596.
- 40 John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1938), p. 79.
- 41 For very crucial remarks about truth see Rorty's remarks about Davidson in the concluding pages of his 'A Reply to Six Critics', op. cit., pp. 96-97. See also his 'Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth', in *Truth and Interpretation*, a *Festschrift* for Davidson ed. by E. LePore (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), pp. 333-55.
- 42 Levi, op. cit., p. 598.
- 43 Ibid., p. 599.
- 44 Ibid., p. 599.
- 45 Ibid., p. 599.
- 46 Ibid., p. 600.
- 47 Bernard Williams, in a probing essay on Rorty (op. cit.), considers in a perceptive manner whether Rorty has appreciated the pivotal role of science in the conversations of mankind or the distinctive type of conversation that it does make: how it aims to talk about the world and not just about talk about the world. Unlike pragmatists, Williams believes that we should attend to the aim of science and not – or so he believes – try to isolate something called scientific method. Pragmatists, I should add, sought to talk about the aim as well as the method, and indeed believed there would be little understanding of the one without an understanding of the other. But Williams's point, like Popper's, is that there is little to understand in trying to understand scientific method. It is the aim of science we should get clear about. I think that what *in general* we would say about that would be as platitudinous as what in general we would say about scientific method.
- 48 Rorty, 'A Reply to Six Critics', op. cit., pp. 78-98, and his 'Pragmatism without Method', op. cit.
- 49 Rorty, 'A Reply to Six Critics', op. cit., pp. 79-80.
- 50 Ibid., p. 86.
- 51 Rorty brings this out in the following splendid passage in 'Pragmatism without Method'. It should also be noted how much this is like Rawls's conception of wide reflective equilibrium. Rorty writes:
- But experience does not show this, any more than it shows the opposite. Having general epistemic principles is no more intrinsically good or bad than having moral principles – the larger genus of which epistemic ones are a species. The whole point of Dewey's experimentalism in moral theory is that you need to keep running back and forth between principles and the results of applying principles. You need to reformulate the principles to fit the cases, and to develop a sense for when to forget about principles and just rely on know-how. The new fuzzies in philosophy of science tell us that the apparatus of 'the logic of confirmation' got in the way of understanding how science had been operating. This is a plausible, though not a self-evident, claim. As such, it resembles the claim Dewey made in *Human Nature and Conduct* (a book that has been ably defended by Hook against those who found it fuzzy). Dewey there urged that the traditional attempt to describe moral problems in terms of clashes between Kantian and utilitarian principles was getting in the way of an understanding of moral deliberation. His central argument was that the use of new means changes ends, that you only know what you want after you've seen the results of your attempts to get what you once thought you wanted. Analogously, post-positivist philosophy of science has been saying that 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. On this view, the wielder of an ahistorical scientific method – a method for judging 'validity' rather than mere 'strength' – is on a 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. Such idealizations may sometimes be heuristically useful, but we have no special duty to construct them. (op. cit., p. 264)
- 52 Rorty, 'A Reply to Six Critics', op. cit., p. 78.

- 53 See the reference in note 48.
- 54 The things of Nagel's that are particularly relevant here are his *Logic without Metaphysics* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956), pp. 3-18, 39-102, 143-89; *Sovereign Reason* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954), pp. 50-57, 101-40, 266-308; and *Teleology Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp. 64-94, 7-28.
- 55 Rorty, 'Pragmatism without Method', op. cit., p. 260.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 260-1.
- 57 Nagel, *Teleology Revisited*, op. cit., pp. 29-48.
- 58 Rorty, 'Pragmatism without Method', op. cit., p. 262.
- 59 Ibid., pp. 262-3.
- 60 Ibid., p. 263.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid., p. 264.
- 63 Rorty, 'A Reply to Six Critics', op. cit., pp. 96-97.
- 64 In his 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Individualism', *Journal of Philosophy* LXXX (October, 1983), 10, pp. 583-4, given to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophy Association, it sounded at times as if he were doing just that. This was particularly evident when he was pressed in the discussion by Joshua Cohen to say something about the substantive implications in such domains of his views about what it would be like for philosophers to say what should be done in any problematic situation.
- 65 Martin Hollis, *Invitation to Philosophy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 41-47. He nicely schematizes the routine in a diagram on page 44.
- 66 Ibid., p. 6.
- 67 Ibid., p. 8.
- 68 Williams, op. cit., p. 34.
- 69 Ibid., p. 34.
- 70 Ibid., p. 34.
- 71 Ibid., p. 34.
- 72 Ibid. Williams quoting Rorty.
- 73 Ibid., p. 36.
- 74 Ibid., p. 36.
- 75 This is well shown in the programmatic essays in *Philosophy in History*, Richard Rorty et al. (eds.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 17-124.

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