

interpretation

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interpretation

Volume 13 number 1

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Book Review

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Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. By Richard Rorty. (Princeton University Press, 1979. 401 pp.: cloth, \$33; paper, \$8.95.)

When you offer him your answer in such terms, if you speak of something to be found in mirrors or in sculpture, he will laugh at your words, as implying that he can see. He will profess to know nothing about mirrors or water or even eyesight, and will confine his question to what can be gathered from discourse.—Plato, *Sophist*, 240a

... Every realm of nature is marvellous: and as Heraclitus, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, is reported to have bidden them not to be afraid to enter, as even in that kitchen, divinities were present —Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, A5, 645^a17
[quoted by Martin Heidegger in *Letter on Humanism*]

I

The principal argument of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is that philosophy as it has developed in the West must be either diminished or abandoned so that genuine human conversation might continue. Philosophy's, and *a fortiori* the philosopher's, claim to be *the* cultural overseer, the argument goes, is wedded to two interrelated "delusions" (my word, not the author's), namely, the notion of the mind as "the mirror of nature" and the notion of philosophy as epistemology, that is, the discipline which provides foundations and justifications or is the inquiry into first principles. The initial "delusion" is formulated in a variant manner in the course of the book as the notion of the essence of man as the knower of essences. The second is likewise alternately expressed as the notion of philosophy as essentially concerned with truth and certainty. The argument carries, it would seem, a step further, indeed toward the final step, the philosophic enterprise known variously as the "elimination" of metaphysics or its "destruction." The recent efforts of such philosophers as Carnap, Heidegger, Husserl, and Wittgenstein come readily to mind. But so do those of the neo-scholastics among whom we might mention Gilson and Maritain with whose criticisms of Cartesian and post-Cartesian accounts of the concept, the argument is consonant. The target of Professor Rorty's book, however, is not just a part of philosophy, that is, metaphysics, but whatever residue that was supposed to remain when metaphysics was eliminated or destroyed. Nor is it epistemology but philosophy

understood as *epistemology* (or logic) which is the target, that is, philosophy itself, as it has developed in the West, and as Rorty understands it.

The argument resembles Michael Oakeshott's withering criticism in his essay *Rationalism in Politics* of a rootless theoretical reason as the proper mode to understand and confront the practical domain of politics. The resemblance even reaches to Oakeshott's point about the "spring" that feeds the "placid lake of Rationalism."

This spring is a doctrine about human knowledge. That some such fountain lies at the heart of Rationalism will not surprise even those who only know its surface; the superiority of the unencumbered intellect lay precisely in the fact that it could reach more, and more certain, knowledge about man and society than was otherwise possible; the superiority of the ideology over the tradition lay in its greater precision and its alleged demonstrability. Nevertheless, it is not, properly speaking, a philosophical theory of knowledge, and it can be explained with agreeable informality (*Rationalism in Politics*, London, Methuen, 1981 reprint, p. 7).

Oakeshott leaves both theory and philosophy alone. His concern is with the misapplication of theory to politics and with a corrupted form which he maintains *modern* philosophy to be. Rorty, on the other hand, if I have understood him correctly, is more profoundly radical. His criticism is of theory itself and it extends to both Ancient and Medieval philosophy, in fact, as I have already said, to philosophy itself. He urges the reader to view and accept theoretical reasoning as a species of practical reasoning (*phronesis*), or rather of technology (*techne*), and thereby appears to accept a major supposition of the very modern philosophers he criticizes in other respects.

The book, however, is no mawkish genuflection toward the East. The toughness and acuity of the arguments, both major and minor, preclude *that* alternative. Rather, it is a radical and daring attempt at philosophic liberation from philosophy's enchantments and in the end a Catoic call for its destruction—*philosophia delenda est*—so that what the author, borrowing a phrase from Oakeshott, speaks of as "the conversation of mankind," free from pretension, might live.

It is a book that deserves not only to be read but to be reread, grappled with, and, if possible, answered. For not only is its main argument challenging and controversial in a profound manner, but its subarguments are all worthy in their own way of attention, even of admiration for the way they cling to the principal theme while relentlessly importuning assent from the reader. All this is achieved without a hint of parochialism. For, although the author candidly admits as part of his training his use of the vocabulary of contemporary analytic philosophers, he draws inspiration for his arguments from a wide range of philosophical writers. He aims his criticisms, moreover, at an equally wide range of writers, methods, and postures, including especially the analytic tradition from which he stems.

The body of the book is divided into three parts which are entitled "Our Glassy Essence," "Mirroring," and "Philosophy." Within this tripartite structure, there are eight chapters each with either a clever or informative heading: "The Invention of the Mind," "Persons Without Minds," "The Idea of a 'Theory of Knowledge,'" "Privileged Representations," "Epistemology and Empirical Psychology," "Epistemology and Philosophy of Language," "From Epistemology to Hermeneutics," and "Philosophy Without Mirrors." The introduction and last chapter are fairly accessible in style and content to the educated reader whereas the other chapters require familiarity and patience with intricate and sometimes prickly philosophic argument. There is a minimum of jargon as well as of the stylistic mannerisms of analytical philosophers. The two quotations which serve as epigrams for the book are taken from Wittgenstein's *Vermischte Bemerkungen* and are appropriately cryptic when one begins reading and appropriately prophetic when one finishes.

If the aim of this book is as I have asserted, then it would seem that the readers towards whom it is directed, in view of its logic and its rhetoric, are, as Husserl once described them, those who learn "to know the despair of one who has the misfortune to be in love with philosophy." If Rorty's argument is what I have said it is and if it is sound, then their despair and their misfortune might have been averted had they been in love with *wisdom* rather than with philosophy.

Actually the aim of the book is not so much a matter of interpretation as I may have suggested, for the author states it simply and clearly in the introduction.

The aim of the book is to undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations" and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant (p. 7).

Nor is it a matter of interpretation to say that the last two words of the quotation should read "since Plato," since the object of Rorty's criticism is not just modern philosophy but the entire tradition of Western philosophy after the Sophists, as an unambiguous statement found on page 157 makes clear. He does not suggest, however, that the *history* of philosophy should not be studied. On the contrary it has archaeological use, inasmuch as it illustrates, what he claims to be the historicist and relativist nature of philosophy itself.

If the reader takes the explicit aim of the book seriously, he cannot help concluding that *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is political in nature. If he likewise takes seriously what the author regards as the function of language which throughout the book is talked about as the instrument by and with which man "copes" with the world, then such a conclusion recurs like an insistent refrain. Take the following passage as an example:

It is so much a part of "thinking philosophically" to be impressed with the special character of mathematical truth that it is hard to shake off the grip of the Platonic Principle. If, however we think of "rational certainty" as a matter of victory in argument rather

than of relation to an object known, we shall look toward our interlocutors rather than to our faculties for the explanation of the phenomenon. If we think of our certainty about the Pythagorean Theorem as our confidence, based on experience with arguments on such matters, that nobody will find an objection to the premises from which we infer it, then we shall not seek to explain it by the relation of reason to triangularity. Our certainty will be a matter of conversation between persons, rather than a matter of interaction with nonhuman reality (pp. 156–157).

This passage, along with others, discloses the political character of the book, inasmuch as the subservience of logic to rhetoric is transparent. What we have here is an echo of the Machiavellian teaching that discourse itself is political and that the greatest dominion is rule over minds. On page 368 we read, with respect to Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, the three figures whom the author calls the “heroes” of the book, that

They hammer away at the holistic point that words take their meanings from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character, and the corollary that vocabularies acquire their privileges from the men who use them rather than from their transparency to the real.

It would seem that, for Rorty, the various sorts of discourse, such as history, science, philosophy, poetry and religion, not to speak of ordinary discourse, are the human ways of “dealing” or “coping” with reality (p. 375). Philosophy is but one voice in “the conversation of mankind” and not, as Oakeshott put it, the “symposiarch,” “arbiter” or “doorkeeper” (p. 391).

It may be that mirror-imagery and “mainstream,” systematic philosophy will be revitalized once again by some revolutionary genius. Or it may be that the image of the philosopher which Kant offered is about to go the way of the medieval image of the priest. If that happens, even the philosophers themselves will no longer take seriously the notion of philosophy as providing “foundations” or “justifications” for the rest of culture, or as adjudicating *quaestiones juris* about the proper domains of other disciplines (p. 394).

Although Rorty does not develop the point, he does give the reader a hint about the intimate connection between philosophy and classical antique virtue, which is at once aristocratic and republican. This connection must be, for Rorty, the political side of philosophy’s arrogance—the correlative of a hierarchial order in ontology and epistemology which is the butt of Rorty’s arguments in the middle chapters of the book. Such arrogance would have to be insupportable from a democratic–egalitarian–pragmatic stance. Some readers will worry that someone so deeply impressed by pragmatism, as Rorty is, can give only a limited commitment to liberal education—the pursuit of that “useless” kind of thing done for its own sake which is unmistakably hierarchical and aristocratic in nature—and which is in mortal danger. His exhortation, therefore, in the concluding sentence of the book must be regarded as half-hearted.

The only point on which I would insist is that the philosopher's moral concern should be with continuing the conversation of the West, rather than with insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of modern philosophy within that conversation (p. 394).

Once again I must repeat that Rorty's criticism is not only aimed at modern philosophy but at philosophy itself. The philosopher might wonder, moreover, what remains to be talked about if he is warned against insisting upon a place for the traditional problems of philosophy, and who it will be to defend the "conversation of mankind."

II (A)

In order to better understand the principal argument of this unusual book, it is necessary to examine its varied sources of inspiration and the many subarguments which support it. The body of this review will be devoted to such an examination or "deconstruction" as one current fashion in philosophical technique has it.

In the introduction Rorty says that "philosophers usually think of their discipline as one which discusses perennial, eternal problems—problems which arise as soon as one reflects" (p. 3). He regards this to be an illusion which is intimate with two other illusions, namely, (1) that there is such a thing called "the mind" which is sometimes regarded as "the mirror of nature" or "our glassy essence" and (2) that knowledge is "accuracy of representation" (p. 13). The conjurers of these illusions—the "villains" of the book are philosophers as such, in their theoretical moments rather than in their "wise" moments. They are the Merlins (or Ziegfelds) who are responsible for such enchantments as a hypostasized *res cogitans*, a dualistic innerness of mind and outerness of body, the coronation of epistemology, the attempt to set philosophy on "the secure path of science," and other such twaddle which Rorty could hardly mind my calling in his name "the philosophy follies."

Rorty's heroes, on the other hand, are Dewey, Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the later stages of their philosophical careers. All three, he says, regretted their earlier efforts as self-deceptive inasmuch as they tried to cling to the conception of philosophy as the search for foundations even though they had discarded seventeenth century conceptions of mind and of knowledge (p. 5). Their later work—which Rorty calls "therapeutic" rather than "constructive," "edifying" rather than "systematic"—is intended to be a questioning of the very motives for philosophy itself and not to supply new philosophical doctrines (pp. 5–6). A "common message" in all three, he says, is historicist in nature—an admonition that traditional philosophy's vision of breaking free from history is a delusion (p. 9). Furthermore, he is inspired (*a*) by what he takes to be Dewey's conception of

knowledge wherein “justification” is “a social phenomenon instead of a transaction between the ‘knowing subject’ and ‘reality’” (p. 9), (b) by what he regards as Wittgenstein’s conception of language wherein it is “a tool” instead of “a mirror” as well as a prevention for the temptation to look for “the necessary conditions of the possibility of linguistic representation” (p. 9), and (c) by what he understands to be Heidegger’s interpretation of the history of philosophy as the “domination” of Western thinking by “ocular metaphors” or “mirror-imagery” (p. 12).

Bolstered by their inspiration, Rorty performs, in mounting the siege of *cas-tellum philosophicum*, an impressive feat of scholarship. He employs with dexterity not only the standard figures of Ancient, Medieval, and Modern philosophy but he moves with ease and authority among the ranks of positivists, pragmatists, analysts, phenomenologists, existentialists and hermeneuticists, treating with respect the work of writers, aside from those already mentioned, as varied in character as that of Carnap, Sartre, Quine, Gadamer, Sellars, Apel, Davidson, Husserl, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Derrida and Foucault. Some readers will find the ecumenical aspect of his effort an interesting feature of the book.

Ecumenism is, however, primarily a vehicle for his principal argument which in the first chapter is supported by a challenge to contemporary philosophy’s concept and problem of mind. The manner in which the challenge occurs is by way of a “deconstruction” or a “reliving” of the levels or epochs of the history of philosophy so as to expose the “language games” at each level or epoch (p. 34) and to illustrate how the problem of the mind and the “mind” itself—man’s “glassy essence” as Shakespeare puts it in *Measure for Measure*—were “invented.” Rorty reconstructs the “language games” from each level to show how they differ from one another and how they all contribute to the effort of fabricating theoretical fictions which are misleading expostulations “on the irrelevance of traditional philosophy to the rest of culture” (p. 37). He gives examples of such problems when he says:

The problem of consciousness centers around the brain, raw feels, and bodily motions. The problem of reason centers around the topics of knowledge, language, and intelligence—all our “higher powers.” The problem of personhood centers around attributions of freedom and of moral responsibility (p. 35).

He gives examples of such concepts when he talks about “mind as the grasp of universals” as Plato’s contribution, or Aristotle’s “separable intellect,” Thomas Aquinas’ “active intellect,” Bacon’s “mind of man” and Descartes’ *res cogitans* (pp. 38–45). Rorty regards both the concepts (or models of mind) and the problems as belonging to the language game of their time and therefore optional (p. 46).

The way in which the changes of concept and problems take place according to Rorty is through revolutionary deconstruction. Yet it is also by virtue of this method that the fictional character of theoretical philosophy is uncovered. The

case of Descartes is instructive. For Rorty is engaged in the same kind of effort he attributes to Descartes.

Descartes himself was forever trying to hold on to standard Platonic and scholastic distinctions with one hand while deconstructing them with the other (p. 59).

Whereas, however, Descartes's "sleight of hand" was "unconscious," Rorty's does not seem to be so.

Such unconscious sleight-of-hand when practiced by men of Descartes's boldness of imagination, is an occasion for gratitude rather than censure. No great philosopher has avoided it, and no intellectual revolution could succeed without it. In "Kuhnian" terminology no revolution can succeed which employs a vocabulary commensurable with the old, and thus none can succeed by employing arguments which make unequivocal use of terms shared with the traditional wisdom. So bad arguments for brilliant hunches must necessarily precede the normalization of a new vocabulary which incorporates the hunch. Given that new vocabulary, better arguments become possible, although these will always be found question-begging by the revolution's victims (footnote 28, p. 58).

If this is so, the reader will not know what to make of some of Rorty's assertions. For example, is it fictional or optional to say that "the problem of personhood is not a 'problem' but a description of the human condition [such] that it is not a matter for philosophical 'solution' . . ." (p. 37). Is it just a moment in the revolution to claim that "knowledge [is] a relation between persons and propositions" (p. 152), or "An 'account of the nature of knowledge' can be, at most, a description of human behavior" (p. 182), or still "the application of such honorifics as 'objective' and 'cognitive' is never more than an expression of, or the hope for, agreement among inquirers" (p. 335)? Are they statements of "normal" or "abnormal" discourse—a distinction that he makes in the seventh chapter? Are they neither, that is, belonging to no special period of history? He seems to state them as if they were merely and simply true.

While the argument in the first chapter attempts to persuade the reader of the mythological invention of the mind in philosophical literature, the argument in the second chapter employs a myth of its own. It is a kind of science-fiction story about beings who lived on a planet on the far side of the galaxy from Earth. These beings are much like Earthlings (Terrans) in language, life, technology and philosophy, with the exception that neurology and biochemistry were the first disciplines wherein technological advances occurred. Their conversation, consequently, was concerned in great part with the state of their nerves. Instead of Terran first or third person utterances about pains, "raw feels," and minds, their talk was about stimulated C-fibers and neurons.

In the middle of the twenty-first century, an expedition from Earth carrying representatives from every learned discipline, including philosophy, visited the planet. The cultural exchanges went on well except that the Earth philosophers who were divided into two camps—the toughminded who sought truth and the

tenderminded who sought meaning—were puzzled that these beings had no concept of mind. Recalling a forgotten school of philosophers centering in Australia and New Zealand, who in the previous century has revolted against Cartesian dualism, the Terran philosophers called the planet Antipodea and the inhabitants Antipodeans.

What follows this charming introduction is a minutely argued discussion which *periti* of the genre will recognize as a marvellous synopsis of the literature on “the problem of the mind” by analytic philosophers since the publication of Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind* (1949). The temptation to enter into that discussion is strong. For it is hard to resist asking such questions as those raised by Kenneth Gallagher in his paper “Rorty’s Antipodeans: An Impossible Illustration” with regard to what Rorty could mean by the Antipodeans having a “science” of neurology and biochemistry. Gallagher insists that what we Terrans mean by the Antipodeans having such a science must be settled by what *we* mean by “science” as we have it, inasmuch as there is nothing else for us to mean by the word “science.” If, asks Gallagher, the Antipodeans are to speak of nerves or fibers instead of thoughts or feelings, must they not be understood by us as doing so? Must they not be acting as we would, if we were to speak about nerves or fibers?

The reader will labor arduously both to follow the turns of the discussion which terminates in a forthright defense of materialism and physicalism and to resist, if not altogether successfully, the temptation to be drawn into it. He must realize that by the end of the book, this “careful” and “closely argued” (quotes mine) discussion is, on the one hand, a *parody* of the literature, and on the other, an effort to show that the philosophical “problem of mind” makes no sense without the deluding cluster of metaphors (glassy essence, mirror of nature, etcetera) invented in the seventeenth century (p. 123; cf. p. 373 and p. 379).

This invention of the mind was also the occasion for the transformation of philosophy into theory of knowledge, or as Rorty puts it, for “the epistemological turn.” At the same time philosophy and science begin divorce proceedings. It is Rorty’s contention that the rebellion of Descartes and Hobbes against medieval scholasticism led to the reestablishment of philosophy as “an autonomous, self-contained ‘scholastic,’ discipline” (p. 136). This occurs by means of Locke’s making Descartes’s new concept of mind into the content of a “science of man”—moral philosophy rather than natural philosophy, and by means of Kant’s placing philosophy “on the secure path of a science” (p. 137).

The “epistemological turn” wed philosophy to other “problems” (quotes mine) which became paradigms for modern philosophy but were uncharacteristic of either Ancient or Medieval philosophy. There was, for example, the “problem of the external world”—the “problem” of how the “inner” mind comes into contact with the “outer” world (p. 139). There was Locke’s confusion of explanation with justification (pp. 139ff.), Kant’s confusion of predication with synthesis (pp. 148ff.), and Kant’s influence in creating the “standard version” of the his-

tory of modern philosophy as the struggle between Rationalism and Empiricism (p. 148).

The point in attending to the “epistemological turn” on Rorty’s part is to illustrate how (a) philosophy became epistemology, that is, how philosophy became expressed at the time, (b) epistemology came to be thought of as the foundational science where philosophy holds court on the other disciplines, (c) philosophy became professionalized and specialized over a “special” department of knowledge, (d) philosophy became impressed with the issue of “privileged representations,” and (e) the “epistemological turn” led to the “linguistic turn.”

Here again the reader will be perplexed about how Rorty himself understands such assertions as “Certainty is a matter of conversation between persons” (p. 157); or “Rational certainty” is to be thought of as “victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known” (p. 156).

II (B)

Although more honor is paid to Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, more space is devoted to Sellars, Quine, Davidson, Putnam, and Kuhn, who do the commando raids around philosophy’s castle but are not in on the final assault because of some reservation or other on their part and because analytical philosophy in general turned out to be a “successor subject” to philosophy as epistemology.

Analytical philosophy is one more variant of Kantian philosophy, a variant marked principally by thinking of representation as linguistic rather than mental, and of philosophy of language rather than “transcendental critique,” or psychology, as the discipline which exhibits the “foundations of knowledge” . For Analytic philosophy is still committed to the construction of a permanent, neutral framework for inquiry and thus for all of culture (p. 8).

Nevertheless Rorty’s final assault is profoundly indebted to those commando raids. He calls his fourth chapter the “central chapter of the book” (p. 10). In it he acknowledges his reliance on Wilfrid Sellars’ attack on “givenness”—the notion that there is some basic datum or privileged representation of which men are directly aware in some prelinguistic and nondiscursive way. This fiction, which Sellars calls “the myth of the given,” blocks recognition, according to Rorty, of the fact that “assertions are justified by society” or by social practice “rather than by the inner representations they express (p. 174). Knowledge, truth, goodness, and justice are a matter of what “society lets us say” and do (p. 174). It is not that some transfixed notions of knowledge, truth, goodness, and justice are the foundations of what society says or does. “Epistemological behaviorism,” a posture, says Rorty, common to Dewey, Wittgenstein, Sellars and Quine as well as to himself is a “species” of the “holistic” endeavor. As such it “is not a matter of

antifoundationalist polemic, but a distrust of the whole epistemological enterprise" (p. 181). "Epistemological behaviorism," which has nothing to do with Watson, Skinner, or even Ryle,

is the claim that philosophy will have no more to offer than common sense (supplemented by biology, history, etc.) about knowledge and truth (p. 176).

Although it is not clear that Rorty agrees with Sellars that "science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is; and of what is not that it is not" (p. 199), he does concur with Sellars that science is rational

not because it has a *foundation*, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once (p. 180).

At this point the reader is urged to face down the Medusan stare of relativism emanating from the gate of philosophy's castle. He is encouraged by Rorty to meet the challenge in the following way. In Sellars' and Quine's account of epistemology

to say that knowledge and truth can only be judged by the standards of the inquirers of our own day is not to say that human knowledge is less noble or important, or more "cut off from the world," than we thought. It is merely to say that nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and that there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our languages so as to find some test other than coherence (p. 178).

The argument continues by reminding the reader that saying that "the True and the Right are matters of social practice," leads, all by itself, to relativism is another example of the "epistemological" booby-trap of thinking in terms of reductions or foundations. But the trap is turned on itself, for relativism, says Rorty, either of the epistemological or moral kind, does not, as we might suspect, emerge from *disagreements* within a society, or between societies, or even from the *differing* viewpoints of our masters, but from the fact that the philosophical tradition had placed its transcendental hands on the ordinary words "true," and "good," and has constructed a moat around the castle, that is, between the eternal and the spatio-temporal (pp. 306–307). It is from the invention and construction of the platonic notion of transcendental or absolute turrets that make "current practice" (the best moral and scientific thought of the day) "seem relativistic" (p. 374). No one need be reminded that

We shall, in short, be where the Sophists were before Plato brought his principle to bear and invented "philosophical thinking" (p. 157).

Willard Quine's contribution to Rorty's argument is his attack on necessary truth (p. 10), on the "two dogmas of empiricism" (that is, (1) the reduction of meaningful utterance to immediate sense experience, and (2) the separation between truths which are *analytic* or grounded in language independently of things and truths which are synthetic or grounded on things), and on the "'idea' idea,"

the view that “language is the expression of something ‘inner’ which must be discovered before we can tell what an utterance means” (p. 193). Quine, according to Rorty, has scruples about the final demolitions that must be carried out. Recalcitrantly, he is not prepared to detonate what the argument of “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” commits him to (p. 201). He wants to preserve the belief which, along with Sellars, he inherited through Carnap from the early Wittgenstein, the view that “the world can be ‘completely described’ in an extentional language” (p. 204). He wants to leave standing, accordingly, the privileged status of “truth-functional” discourse and the superiority of *Naturwissenschaften* over *Geisteswissenschaften*. Nor, finally, does he wish to abandon the notion that philosophy is the “discipline which guards against ‘irresponsible reification’” (p. 208). Rorty wonders about Quine’s reservations.

Why do the *Naturwissenschaften* limn reality while the *Geisteswissenschaften* merely enable us to cope with it? What is it that sets them apart, given that we no longer think of any sort of statement having a privileged epistemological status, but of all statements as working together for the good of the race in that process of holistic adjustment made famous by “Two Dogmas of Empiricism?” Why should not the unit of empirical inquiry be the whole of culture (including both the *Natur-* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*) rather than just the whole of physical science? (p. 201).

There should be no faltering nor turning back—no hankering for the old myths or the old mythmakers.

Quine’s strictures against Carnap’s attempt to divide philosophy from science are just what is needed to help us realize that there is no such discipline (p. 208).

It is just this kind of reactionary nostalgia, Rorty says, that prompts attempts to enthrone empirical psychology or philosophy of language as “successor subjects” to epistemology (p. 11). With respect to the first attempt, the fifth chapter of the book argues relentlessly and persuasively that empirical psychology will fare no better in formulating and answering properly and naturally what epistemology formulated improperly and unnaturally. Quine’s proposal—that empirical psychology study the “relations between theory and evidence” which were once the subject matter of epistemology—is sanguine (p. 220). He seems, in Rorty’s opinion, to want to hold on to empiricism *sans* dogma (p. 223). The effects of Quine’s recalcitrance can be seen in his “loose” use of such terms as “input” “evidence,” “information,” “testimony,” and in the use of peculiar sentences such as “the nerve endings . . . are the place of input of unprocessed information about the world” and “It is simply the stimulations of our sensory receptors that are best looked upon as the input to our cognitive mechanism” (p. 224). In response to such talk Rorty asks the appropriate rhetorical question, “Could psychology discover that the input to the cognitive mechanism is not at the retina, but rather halfway down the optic nerve?” (p. 245).

Rorty considers in the fifth chapter a proposal made and defended by Jerry Fodor who argues

that the analogies between program states of computers and psychological states of persons and between ‘hardware’ states of computers and neurophysiological states of bodies give a new and interesting sense to the notion that our knowledge consists of an ‘inner representation’ of the world (p. 220).

It is the ambiguous notion of representation that, according to Rorty, illustrates the backsliding character of this proposal. Both Quine’s and Fodor’s proposals reflect, however, the more primordial illusion of the notion of knowledge as “accuracy of representation” (p. 11). In other words, the mirror imagery surrounding philosophy has wrought its illusionary magic.

When Rorty considers the attempt to make philosophy of language the “successor subject” to philosophy as epistemology, he finds the arguments in its favor different from those in favor of empirical psychology but the hope of its proponents the same. So too is the result. The hope is that philosophy of language will succeed where traditional epistemology failed. The result is a reversion to the “accuracy of representation” view of knowledge (p. 11). This stage of the argument, as found in chapter six, employs, among others, the services of Donald Davidson and Hilary Putnam. Some archaeological tunneling is required on the claims of some philosophers of language that epistemological questions are finally being formulated correctly within a general theory of meaning and that they are doing properly what earlier philosophers had done clumsily and improperly (p. 263). It is just such claims as these that invite Rorty to call them “Whiggish”—a term frequently used in the last third of the book.

This need to say that talk about something we don’t recognize is “really” talk about something we do recognize used to be gratified by simply assuming in “Whiggish” fashion that our misguided ancestors had “really” been talking about whatever our best-approved contemporary inquirers claimed that they were talking about (pp. 267–268).

Davidson’s efforts are regarded by Rorty as a continuation of Quine’s attempts to jettison the dualism between questions of meaning and questions of fact. Davidson addresses himself to the so-called “third dogma” of empiricism, the dualism of conceptual scheme and sensory content, or of organizing system and something to be organized—of *a priori* and *a posteriori*—of language and the world (p. 259). Such a dualism, according to Davidson, however it be formulated, severs the relationship between truth and meaning and must, therefore, fail (p. 301). Rorty concludes that denouncing the dogmas leads to the renunciation of a special territory for a theory of meaning so that we are left with the modest and traditional territory of the grammarian whose ways of describing sentences help to explain how sentences are used (p. 261).

The point of constructing a “truth theory of English” is not to enable philosophical problems to be put in a formal mode of speech, nor to explain the relationship between words and the world, but simply to lay out perspicuously the relation between parts of a social practice (the use of certain sentences) and other parts (the use of other sentences) (p. 262).

Rorty believes that Davidson's "holistic" account of meaning preempts the quixotic attempts of philosophers, especially those of neoempiricists and realists, to look for ostensive definitions, of constructing "objective" theories of reference which are related to a single "observation" language common to all alternative theories, and of clinging to what Paul Feyerabend calls "meaning invariance." For support on this issue of whether or not there are any permanent meanings, Rorty relies not only upon Feyerabend but also upon Thomas Kuhn's concept of "normal science" (pp. 270–275).

If it is so, says Rorty, that as a result of a discovery in some domain of inquiry, that "change of meaning" or "shift in conceptual scheme" signifies a "shift in especially central beliefs" (Aristotle's and Newton's discussions of "motion" are used as examples), then there is nothing for the philosopher to do (such as "analyze meanings") over and above what the historian does in showing the change in conceptual scheme, and why it is "rational" for an intellectual of the time to accept it (p. 272).

Just as the second chapter containing the Antipodean myth is an imaginative account of discussions of "the mind-body problem" on the part of analytical philosophers after Ryle, so too Rorty's sixth chapter is a skillful replay of their discussions of "meaning" after Frege and Russell. Hilary Putnam's role in those discussions constitutes the latest stage in the development of "the theory of reference" out of the "so-called problem of conceptual change" (p. 277). Putnam is presented as indulging a brief sympathy for a reconstruction of philosophy by trying to make a case for "realism," for "hard facts" which are independent of discourse. He soon discovers, however, that his sympathy is misplaced. Naturally this discovery serves well the cause of dephilosophization.

Putnam's recantation comes down to saying that there is no way to make some empirical discipline do what transcendental philosophy could not do—that is, say something about the scheme of representations we are employing which will make clear its tie to the content we wish to represent. But if there is no such way, then we can fall in with Davidson's claim that we need to drop the scheme–content distinction altogether (p. 295).

It also comes down to saying that "the attempt to get a set of nonintentional relationships" (relationships that are independent of discourse) is in vain because "those relationships are simply further parts of the theory" of the current world (p. 298).

The argument which Rorty aims at "realism" is addressed to skepticism as well. For the pseudoquestions as to whether or not an external world exists or again whether or not we ever get to know the "real causes" of things presuppose a world somehow *outside* of or *independent* of discourse which we must explain in order to explain (p. 309).

Rorty completes his criticism of analytical philosophy with a discussion between "referring" and "talking about" on one hand and the translatability of languages on the other.

We cannot *refer* to Sherlock Holmes but we can *talk about* him, and similarly for philogiston. “Talking about” is a common-sensical notion; “reference” is a term of philosophical art. “Talking about” ranges over fictions as well as realities and is useless for realist purposes (p. 289; cf. pp. 300–301, footnote 34).

On the issue of translation, the reader is faced with an argument similar to the one offered concerning “relativism” and “skepticism.” If someone believes that understanding a language involves two processes, linking individual words to the world through ostension, and then building up meaning with other words around the core through usage, then he will be held hostage by the belief that others

will have “cut up” the world differently in their original acts of ostension and thus given different meanings to the individual words in the “core” of their language. The rest of their language will thus be infected by this divergence from our way of giving meaning to the “core” of English, and so there will be no way for us to communicate—no common points of reference, no possibility of translation (p. 304).

What we have here is a defense of the possibility of translation of one language into another. The belief that translation is not possible depends upon the trapped beliefs that basic points of reference lie outside of discourse and that these are not common. A “holistic” account of discourse, suggests Rorty, would avoid such traps.

II (c)

The last two chapters (VII and VIII) of the book are to be construed as a final assault on philosophic imperialism. In them, Rorty employs a generalized version of Kuhn’s distinction between “normal” and “revolutionary” science. He proposes that philosophy should abandon its “epistemological” pretense and become hermeneutics, not as a “successor subject” to epistemology, but as

an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled—that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt (p. 315).

The demand for constraint and confrontation is understood by Rorty as the demand for a common ground—for a set of rules that will make possible rational agreement when there is disagreement. This “epistemological” quest for rational agreement is called “commensurability,” a term which appears frequently in these last two chapters. It is a term which describes one facet of philosophic delusion (p. 316 *passim*). Rorty suspects that epistemological philosophers and their successors believe in commensurability in order to avoid the slippery slope toward “the war of everyone against everyone” (p. 317). According to him they confuse two types of philosopher. The first is the “informed dilettante, the poly-pragmatic Socratic intermediary between various discourses” (p. 317). Through

such an intermediary “disagreements are compromised or transcended in the course of the conversation.” Rorty does not mention anything, however, about how the compromises are made or on what grounds transcendence is possible or about how the “conversation” can continue if it is so that truth is “what society lets us say” (or warranted assertability) and if it is so that the difference between the views of Galileo and Bellarmine is that Galileo won the argument (p. 331).

The second type of philosopher is the “cultural overseer” who knows everyone’s common ground. He is the “Platonic philosopher-king who knows what everybody else is doing whether *they* know it or not, because he knows about the ultimate context” (p. 317).

Although there will be readers who will carp at differentiating Socratic types and Platonic types in this way, the issue is a trans-scholarly one. Rorty’s conception of the Platonic philosopher-king does not reach Karl Popper’s level of misunderstanding of the text of the *Republic*, but it does invite unnecessary peripheral criticism. Frankly I am more annoyed by Rorty’s use of the words “polypragmatic,” or just plain “pragmatic,” as words of praise. I hear echoes of those sententious journalists who also use “pragmatic” as an honorific in such sentences as “Mao was an ideologue but Chou was a pragmatist.” “Pragmatic” has opposites other than “ideological” or “fanatic”—such as “principled,” or “restrained.” The persistent use of the term in this way throughout the book is neither illuminating nor edifying.

About philosophers, be they king or citizen, *pontificating* (in the primal Latin sense of bridge-building) about common ground, one should hardly complain. For by interest and training, they come to care about whether or not some common ground exists. They also become aware that those who do not care about the existence of common ground but solely about the preservation of their private ground must employ publicly the rhetoric of care for the common ground. Why then Rorty’s complaint?

Nor can I understand the antagonism related to that between the “polypragmatic Socrates” and the “Platonic philosopher-king,” namely, that between *universitas* and *societas*. Here again he borrows some terms of Oakeshott’s. But Rorty’s *pax hermeneutica* calls for a denunciation of *universitas* in favor of *societas*. He defines *universitas* as “a group united by mutual interests in achieving a common end” and the *societas* as “persons whose paths through life have fallen together, united by civility rather than by a common goal, much less by a common ground” (p. 318). Rorty again adapts Oakeshott’s criticism of misguided thought about practical matters for his criticism of *theoria* itself. One is forced to ask why, if hermeneutics is routine conversation (pp. 315–319), could it not get around to issues such as that of the common ground or of the nature of things? If modern epistemology and its successors have been broken-backed, does it follow that the original sources of old-time ontology could not shoulder the continuance of the conversation? Why must the possibility of *universitas* be

antagonistic to, and therefore, excluded from the possibility of the *societas*? Is either the search for a common goal or a common ground divorced from civility? Does not the effort that goes by the name of liberal education unite them? Does not “civility,” rooted as it is in *logos*, already presuppose *the* common ground and the common goal—*arete*?

Yet Rorty’s criticism of *universitas* and its unifying discipline, philosophy, is consistent and multisided. Complementing his radicalized (not merely generalized) version of Kuhn’s distinction with a recycled version of the distinction between “systematic” and “edifying” philosophy, he amplifies the relativist and historicist character of his argument. Kuhn’s “normal” and “revolutionary” science becomes “normal” and “abnormal” discourse.

“Normal” science is the practice of solving problems against the background of a consensus about what counts as a good explanation of the phenomena and about what it would take for problem to be solved. “Revolutionary” science is the introduction of a new “paradigm” of explanation, and thus a new set of problems. Normal science is as close as real life comes to the epistemologist’s notion of what it is to be rational. Everybody agrees on how to evaluate everything everybody else says. More generally, normal discourse is that which is conducted within an agreed-upon set of conventions about what counts as a relevant contribution, what counts as answering a question, what counts as having a good argument for that answer or a good criticism of it. Abnormal discourse is what happens when someone joins in the discourse who is ignorant of these conventions or who sets them aside (p. 320).

This distinction, we learn, arises out of the pragmatic approach to knowledge upon the suggestion of epistemological behaviorism. Normal discourse produces “knowledge” which is what speakers, who regard each other as “rational,” agree upon to be “true.” Abnormal discourse produces anything from nonsense to new ideas which no existing discipline can describe, since there is no discipline which “studies” what is creative or unpredictable (p. 320). Abnormal discourse, moreover, is studied by hermeneutics from the standpoint of some normal discourse. Hermeneutics tries to understand things at the point when they are not yet clear in order to initiate “an epistemological account” of them. The difference is not like that between the “sciences of nature,” and the “sciences of man,” nor between fact and value, nor yet between the theoretical and the practical but simply a difference of *familiarity*. Epistemological accounts occur at the point when things are fairly well understood and there is a desire to classify them so as to extend, strengthen, teach, and “ground” them. Hermeneutics may take some standard for granted and as such will be “Whiggish” but inasmuch as it investigates nonreductively, in the hope of discovering something new, it can transcend its Whiggishness (p. 321).

Rorty’s discussion at this point appears to be addressed to those Positivists (or Enlightenment types) who invent and then insist upon the dogmas of the analytic–synthetic and the fact–value distinctions, who believe, moreover, in science as currently understood as the only authentic knowledge, and who scorn-

fully regard philosophy before Positivism as either unscientific or a surrogate for religious superstition.

The paradigm case, however, for the distinction between normal and abnormal discourse is the Galileo–Bellarmine controversy. Rorty doubts that a “neutral observation language” wherein adversaries would offer evidence of their differing theories is either helpful or even possible in deciding between the theories (p. 324). He recalls Kuhn’s own doubt about the possibility of the philosophy of science to formulate an “algorithm” for such decisions (p. 322). What is possible, to Kuhn and to Rorty, is a hindsight or “Whiggish” algorithm, one which formulates a conception of knowledge on the grounds of “the vocabulary or assumptions of the winning side in a scientific dispute” (p. 324). Accordingly the notion of rationality as opposed to that of superstition in the Enlightenment depends on Galileo being completely right and Bellarmine completely wrong (p. 328). Rorty’s argument, however, more than suggests that Bellarmine was not being “illogical” or “unscientific” in trying to limit the “scope” of the Copernican theory. The claim that he was illogical and unscientific rests on whether or not there exists some antecedent way of determining what evidence there could be for statements about the movements of planets (p. 330) and whether or not we do know how to distinguish science and theology “such that getting the heavens right is a ‘scientific’ value and preserving the Church and the general cultural structure of Europe is an ‘unscientific’ value” (p. 329). Rorty’s point is that the criterion of being scientific which developed in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not available in the early seventeenth century.

No conceivable epistemology, no study of the nature of human knowledge, could have “discovered” it before it was hammered out. The notion of what it was to be “scientific” was in the process of being formed. Galileo, so to speak, won the argument, and we all stand on the common ground of the “grid” of relevance and irrelevance which “modern philosophy” developed as a consequence of that victory. . . . We can just say that Galileo was *creating* the notion of “scientific values” as he went along, that it was a splendid thing that he did so, and that the question of whether he was “rational” in doing so is out of place (pp. 330–331).

I believe that Rorty’s point is correct. Yet it is from a spirit of agreement that I suggest that if it *is* hermeneutics that made both the “hammering out” and the acceptance of Galileo’s theory possible, then it would seem that both “normal” and “abnormal” discourse have a common ground—discourse itself, as philosophy would have it, or the “conversation of mankind,” as Rorty would have it. If such a common ground exists, then among civilized men, victory is not the issue.

The seventh chapter of the book concludes with a discussion of two kinds of confusion. The first is that which exists among various notions of “subjectivity” and “objectivity”; the second between the Romantic notion of man as self-creator, the Kantian notion of man as constitutor of a phenomenal world, and the Cartesian notion of man as the habitation of a special immaterial ingredient (p.

346). These confusions are, according to Rorty, bound up with the propaganda about the *Natur-* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The way to see through the confusions and the propaganda, he suggests, is to distinguish between epistemology and hermeneutics “as a contrast between normal and abnormal discourse” (p. 346). The result will be that epistemology and hermeneutics will not be in competition but will assist each other so that the gaps between the subjective and objective elements of human endeavor will be bridged. There will be no need to believe that persons should be more difficult to understand than other things. It is just that persons talk whereas other things do not, and that hermeneutics is needed in the case of incommensurable discourses (p. 347). The nature–spirit controversy lasted long after there was no point to it, as did the realism–idealism controversy. Such controversies merely did guard duty for a notion of philosophy that was conceived in epistemology. They were dedicated to a notion of spirit as transcendental constitutor—a notion bearing dualistic and romantic implications, yet a notion not reducible either to *Geisteswissenschaft* (sociology of knowledge) or *naturwissenschaft* (psychophysiology). The fact which fed the nature–spirit controversy is that sounds are not meanings.

The fact that we can predict a noise without knowing what it means is just the fact that the necessary and sufficient microstructural conditions for the production of a noise will rarely be paralleled by a material equivalence between a statement in the language used for describing the microstructure and the statement expressed by the noise. This is not because anything is in principle unpredictable, much less because of an ontological divide between nature and spirit, but simply because of the difference between a language suitable for coping with neurons and one suitable for coping with people (p. 355).

Correspondingly, hermeneutics is not “another way of knowing,” namely “understanding” as opposed to predictive explanation in the sciences. It is rather another way of coping, as it relinquishes the notion of knowledge to predictive science (p. 356).

The last chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, whimsically entitled “Philosophy Without Mirrors,” proposes to philosophy’s defenders the terms of surrender and survival. Utilizing another of the book’s crucial distinctions, that between “systematic” and “edifying” philosophy, Rorty offers to philosophers the alternatives of either accepting a scaled-down version of the “discipline,” participating as equal members in the conversation of mankind or continuing self-deceptively in their quest for common ground, essences or foundations, thereby facing irrelevance, exclusion from the conversation, and ultimately extinction.

The first condition of surrender is that the old-time philosophers lay down their hand weapons, i.e., the notion shared by Platonists, Kantians, positivists, et al., that human beings have an essence—namely, to discover essences (p.

357). Once this notion is set aside, then epistemologically-centered philosophy can be set aside.

Once the shift in perspective—suggested by Gadamer’s hermeneutics wherein the study of nature and history is not done for their own sake, but for what *we* can get out of them—is accomplished, then men, especially philosophers, will understand that getting the facts straight is “merely propaedeutic to finding a new and more interesting way of expressing ourselves, and thus of coping with the world” (p. 359). Educationally speaking, rather than epistemologically or technologically speaking, “the way things are said is more important than the possession of truths” (p. 359). The project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking is called “edification” (p. 360). But the desire for edification and the desire for truth are not in conflict, according to Rorty, unless one believes the “Platonic-Aristotelian view” that the quest for truth is the *only* way to be edified, instead of believing that such a quest is just one of the *many* ways in which we might be edified (p. 360).

In answer to Rorty, one might complain that Plato and Aristotle did not view the pursuit of wisdom merely as the pursuit of truth. The *Phaedo* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* stand as evidence. On the other hand, one could argue that the pursuit of truth in Heidegger’s sense—a sense which Rorty should find congenial—is the human response to the intelligibility of things. If, as Rorty says, there is no “breaking out” of discourse for men, truth then necessarily has a special place in human concerns. It is not the private preserve of philosophers. By profession, they simply pay more attention to that intimacy which exists between human discourse and truth in general. It is difficult to understand, therefore, how the pursuit of truth could be edifying in *any* way, if “the truth” merely turns out to be what society allows us to say *or* a way to “cope.” How can the liberation required by the quest for edification occur, if men cannot break out, *not* from discourse, but from convention, or if breaking the “crust of convention” only means replacing one convention with another? (p. 379). It is equally difficult to appreciate how “ways” besides the pursuit of truth could be edifying, when they are described in such psychological platitudes as “new and more interesting way[s] of expressing ourselves.” Furthermore, Rorty has little or no reservations about portraying Plato and Aristotle as the creators of the real villain of his book—the modern intellectual—when from one standpoint their work could be described as the *reductio ad absurdum* of the intellectual. Why indeed should one “escape from Platonism” (p. 378), unless it be false?

Nevertheless, systematic philosophers are, for Rorty,

those who single out one idea, one set of practices, and see it as the paradigm of human activity. In the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, this paradigm has been *knowing*. Successive philosophical revolutions within this mainstream have been produced by philosophers excited by new cognitive feats—e.g., the rediscovery of Aristotle, Galilean mechanics, the development of self-conscious historiography in the nineteenth century, Darwinian biology, mathematical logic (p. 366).

Whereas he calls edifying philosophers those

who resemble each other in their distrust of the notion that man's essence is to be a knower of essence . . . These writers have kept alive the suggestion that, even when we have justified true belief about everything we want to know, we may have no more than conformity to the norms of the day. They have kept alive the historicist sense that this century's "superstition" was the last century's triumph of reason, as well as the relativist sense that the latest vocabulary, borrowed from the latest scientific achievement, may not express privileged representations of essences, but be just another of the potential infinity of vocabularies in which the world can be described (p. 367).

Rorty cautions the reader to be aware that abnormal discourse is dependent upon normal discourse and that edifying philosophy is "intrinsically" a reaction to the "intrinsically" constructive pretensions of systematic philosophy (p. 366). To attempt abnormal discourse without the awareness of its abnormality is madness; to insist on hermeneutics where epistemology will do shows a lack of education (p. 366).

But Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophers is not the same as that which he makes between normal philosophers and revolutionary ones. The latter, he says, are of two kinds:

those who found new schools within which normal, professionalized philosophy can be practiced—who see the incommensurability of their new vocabulary with the old as a temporary inconvenience, to be blamed on the shortcomings of their predecessors and to be overcome by the institutionalization of their own vocabulary. On the other hand, there are great philosophers who dread the thought that their vocabulary should ever be institutionalized . . . Great systematic philosophers, like great scientists, build for eternity. Great edifying philosophers destroy for the sake of their own generation (p. 369).

Again Rorty forces the reader to ask whether or not edifying philosophers such as the later Wittgenstein or the later Heidegger asked perennial or eternal questions—questions of the sort, he tells us, are impossible—questions such as the question of language or the question of being. The later Wittgenstein did ask about the first; the later Heidegger about both. So did Plato and Aristotle. These points are so obvious that the reader begins to wonder whether he has failed to understand something. Yet he does not feel compelled to prove to Rorty that every philosopher in every epoch asked every question in order to show that there are fundamental and perennial philosophical questions. Indeed the asking of only one suggests the others. An appeal to historical awareness, the very standard which Rorty says shows otherwise, does *not* show otherwise, even if the historiography is done by a Kantian, a Hegelian, a Thomist, or a pragmatist. Whatever we may think of Plato's handling of the fundamental questions, those questions are the same as the ones which nag us and will be the ones which *will* nag future men provided they have *leisure* and *curiosity*. To suggest that the questions which Plato asked are either irrelevant or obsolete betrays an indifference toward

what the fundamental questions are. Historical awareness ignores at its own risk the *fact* that the fundamental questions endure throughout historical epochs whatever the variety and diversity of the answers to them may be. Indeed the variety and diversity of the answers presuppose the universality of the questions (or of the illusions). It is *philosophy* which asks the fundamental questions along with attempting the answers to them.

This distinction between the fundamental questions and the answers to them would seem to be the presupposition of Rorty's distinction between systematic and edifying philosophy. Yet both distinctions presuppose two prephilosophic distinctions, (1) that between the authority of "social practices" and finding things out for oneself on one hand and (2) that between what is natural and artificial or conventional on the other. From the standpoint of human activity, finding things out for oneself in contrast to taking them on authority as well as distinguishing what is artificial or conventional from what is natural do *not* require, both Sellers and Rorty should be pleased to hear, a breakout from discourse to a principle beyond discourse (p. 390). They do require, however, some attention to the principle *of* discourse, that is *within* discourse, and that discourse bespeaks—*being*. In our own time we have the Positivists to thank for teaching us, regardless of their motives, that *being* is not an attribute or predicate. It is rather presupposed by both subjects and predicates. It is the concept into which all concepts are resolved and deconstructed. It is neither a myth nor is it given. It simply turns up and turns out to be the foundation or the common ground of discourse. Rorty rightly seeks out and destroys the modern replacements for it. Yet his attack on modern philosophy and epistemology seems rooted in a *very* modern presupposition, namely, the self as creator and chooser, for whom knowing is a "right to believe" and an act of creation (p. 389). His notion that edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal so as "to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings" (p. 360), likewise seems rooted in the priority of what Gerald Galgan has called the "atomic-anomic self." The references to Sartre's notion of man, in this context, as creator of his world and of his values—are telling (pp. 375–378).

Yet what is most objectionable in the employment of the distinctions between normal and abnormal discourse and between systematic philosophy and edifying philosophy is that it permits *anything at all* to be said. This is what happens when logic is subsumed under rhetoric or philosophy under poetry (p. 360). The careful listener and reader will not know what to take seriously. Such an objection is avoidable when poetry, and science too, becomes philosophical.

III

While so many arguments of *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* are congenial to me, the main one is not. One could agree that the notion of "the mind"

from Descartes on is mistaken. The epistemological turn *and* the linguistic turn have been wrong turns. But then so too is the Rortyan turn. He seems to believe that the destruction of philosophy will strengthen the conversation of mankind. I think not. In fact there is enough evidence that the sciences which the Positivists believed would replace philosophy are constructing a tower of Babel for the conversation. Indeed the various babblers—the psycho-babblers, socio-babblers, and politico-babblers—are well on the way toward completing the task, not to speak of the apostles of feeling or those for whom rational discourse, let alone the conversation of mankind, is contemptible. Rorty's suggestion that philosophy be turned into cultural anthropology (p. 381) or into archaeology (p. 391) could have a happy ring to it in those circles.

Then there are those who will be pleased to fill the philosopher's shoes. Rorty says that the dangers to abnormal discourse come from the scarcity of food and the secret police (p. 389). Only a casual optimism permits one to overlook the fact that the elements already exist to make, as Leo Strauss warned, "a universal and perpetual tyranny." There is, for example, the "ideal" of a homogeneous world state. There are ideologies with the capacity to be immediately popularized and diffused. There is the possibility of an unlimited and uncontrolled technology. The rulers of such a state would have to present themselves as philosopher-kings who, as such, could permit only the thoughts of the philosopher-kings.

Philosophy fares only slightly better at the hands of those radical pragmatists (which Dewey, James, and Peirce were not) who in the name of utility, necessity, and progress would banish it from those very domains, the universities, where it already leads a precarious existence. It strikes me as overly sanguine on Rorty's part to say that the "useful kibitzing" done by philosophers will survive because,

the need for teachers who have read the great dead philosophers is quite enough to insure that there will be philosophy departments as long as there are universities (p. 393).

Anyone who is not totally oblivious to what has happened in Western universities in the last twenty years would hardly be so confident about the survival of philosophy therein. In many of them it is clinging by its fingernails to hold a place in the curriculum, let alone retain its traditional position at the core of liberal studies.

As far as the danger of the scarcity of food is concerned, one must frankly admit that where and when human beings must struggle merely to stay alive, neither philosophy nor any other specifically human activity will germinate. But confrontation with the secret police can be brought about or hastened by the siren calls of relativism which *negates* the privileged character of liberal education, by a hedonism which mocks excellence, and by a crass pragmatism which dotes on the "cash value" of things. In this regard, I am more impressed by the cogency of James Bond Stockdale's reflections ("The Principles of Leadership," *The Ameri-*

can Educator, Winter 1981; "Dignity and Honor in Vietnam," *Wall Street Journal*, 4/16/82) on the question of the relationship between relativism and torture than those of Rorty on torture and freedom (p. 354). Stockdale resided for eight years in a North-Vietnamese prison camp, four of which were spent in solitary confinement.

Rorty's preference for *phronesis* over *episteme* and for the notion of "culture as a conversation rather than as a structure erected upon foundations" (p. 319) presupposes that there are models to be imitated and virtues to be appreciated. *Phronesis* and *episteme* are conjunctive, not disjunctive, so that a choice between them need not be proposed nor made. The life of those ordinary, plodding, decent human beings among whom and with whom conversation is possible is not the opposite of the excellent life (the philosophic goal) but "the ground from which excellence grows," as Eva Brann has said, "and the *end* for which it [excellence] goes to work." If Rorty is worried about an infelicitous coincidence between philosophic arrogance and human arrogance, then the very Heidegger whom he admires has a reminder for him. These comments were made to Ernst Cassirer in a 1929 conversation at Davos.

Man is never infinite and absolute in the creation of that-which-is itself [*des Seienden selbst*], but he is infinite in the sense of the understanding of Being [*des Seins*]. This infinity of the ontological is by its very nature bound to ontic experience, so that one must say just the opposite: This infinity which breaks forth in the imagination is precisely the most acute argument for finitude. Ontology is an index of finitude. God does not have it [i.e., ontology].

However ponderous Heidegger's prose may be, his point is clear. Human beings become aware of their nature in the act of philosophizing—in the act of searching for the infinite. They may learn of finitude from religion as well—but by way of *authority*. They may also learn of it from the sciences when, however, the sciences are thought of as part of philosophy (a very old thought) and *not* the other way round (*pace* Descartes through Husserl). As far as poetry is concerned, Rorty must be aware, if only from the Oakeshott who has taught him so much, that while the voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind is not a version of practical or scientific activity, it must be philosophical (*theoria*). If, as Oakeshott said, "the voice of philosophy is unusually conversable," then Rorty should not quarrel with "its impulse to study the quality and style of each voice, and to reflect on the relationship of one voice to another" (Michael Oakeshott, "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind," *Rationalism in Politics*, pp. 200–201). And "since philosophy is concerned," as Heidegger said to Cassirer, "with the whole of man and the highest in man, this finitude must show itself in philosophy in a completely radical manner."

The lesson, moreover, from the study of the history of philosophy is *not*, as Rorty believes, the relativism of the different standpoints, but rather the unity and root of philosophic activity in differentiating those standpoints. His com-

plaint with Analytic philosophy should not be primarily with its attempt to be a surrogate for epistemology but rather with its being *ashamed to be philosophy* in the court of science and technology, and with its professionalization to the point of trivialization. This latter transformation he has duly noted and correctly deplored (pp. 391–392). He should have added, however, that Phenomenology with its progeny has not avoided a similar descent into “scholasticism.”

It may be that the Rortyan turn has a *millennialist* twist. He is not alone among philosophers in his preference for wisdom over philosophy. Yet Alexandre Kojève who shared that preference drew, however, some noteworthy inferences about the end of philosophy.

In point of fact, the end of human Time or History—that is, the definitive annihilation of Man properly speaking, or of the free and historical Individual—means quite simply the cessation of Action in the full sense of the term. Practically, this means the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions. And also the disappearance of *Philosophy*; for since Man himself no longer changes essentially, there is no longer any reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his understanding of the world and of himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely: art, love, play, etc.; in short everything that makes man *happy* (Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, quoted in Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, New York: Cambridge, 1980, p. 27).

Although Rorty has not drawn these inferences, it does not follow that they do not lie in the entrails of his project.

The remedy, then, is not to level philosophy, but rather—as Heidegger prescribed with regard to and for “Being”—*Gelassenheit*. Let philosophy be! Let it be with all its “poverty,” its scars and its welts. Its kitchen is warm enough for anyone and for everyone who cares about the essential things. The conversation there is not only interesting, it is serious. In order for the conversation to continue and to be worthwhile, it must be or become philosophical. Philosophy *is* the Conversation of Mankind.