

## **WHY NOT ALLIES RATHER THAN ENEMIES?**

### **DEWEY AND RORTY ON KANT**

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In my paper I shall investigate Rorty's claim how Kant's philosophy is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the traditional object-subject distinction. I shall argue that most of the common arguments against Rorty's philosophy are based on the same mistake as some of the common arguments against Kant (shared by Dewey and Rorty as well). Though their philosophies differ in several aspects with no doubt, in their anti-skeptical and hence Anti-Cartesian strategy, central to all three of them, they follow the same sort of argumentation.

First I shall make some methodological remarks, distinguishing my sort of critique from traditional Anti-Rortyan strategies. Then I shall identify the two main distinctive features between Dewey and Rorty as the latter's return to certain idealist issues. Third, I shall investigate three Kantian topics in pragmatism: the denial of the subject-object dualism, constructivism, and transcendental argumentation. Finally, I shall focus on the question how transcendental idealism could help a Rortyan in order to avoid the same critique as by which Rorty, following Dewey, attacked Kantians.

#### **1. Methodological remarks**

##### **1.1. How not to argue against Rorty**

Richard Rorty is one of the most criticised contemporary philosophers. In order to avoid a misleading reading of my paper, according to which my purpose would be similar to the most common critiques of him, I must say a word or two why my present line of thought is a radically Rortyan one.

In contrast with Rorty, one of his most cited heroes, John Dewey has received quite a few recent critique. Pragmatists are even tempted to argue against Rorty on Deweyan grounds. It seems to follow (falsely in my view) that if Rorty's philosophy is subject to critiques but not Dewey's, there must be a significant difference between them. Not surprisingly, Rorty is often criticised that his reading of Dewey overwhelmingly abuses the method of "ironic redescription" - the strategy of interpretation that supplies the (contingent) purposes of the interpreter instead of the (contingent)

purposes of the author himself (Brodsky 1982).

However, Dewey's (almost) uncontroversial philosophical authority has lacked recent attention seriously. The reason why those few Deweyans could celebrate a comeback of their master was precisely Rorty's controversial re-interpretation of him. American philosophers had seemed to think of Dewey as simply out of date for decades; their reason why they re-read his works was to find a ground against Rorty's frustrating arguments against the possibility of epistemology.

A common Anti-Rortyan strategy claims that even a comprehensive attack on the set of answers to a philosophical question cannot be a conclusive refutation of the meaningfulness of that question. Following this argument, Rorty can only prove that epistemology has not fulfilled its goal yet, and following philosophers like Dewey who reached similar Anti-Cartesian conclusions but went further constructively on epistemological routes, one can invent new ways of doing epistemology (Rockwell 2003). Actually, this would precisely be the best option for epistemologists since in this case their discipline would be proved to face with challenges and open questions that would justify the importance of their attempts to answer them and so would justify receiving their salaries.

This critique seriously misunderstands the method of transcendental argumentation - an issue central to the present paper. A transcendental argument - often applied by Dewey and Rorty as well - does not refute the answers of a question. It demonstrates if the contradictory answers for a yes/no question have the same common ground. Therefore, abandoning that common ground results in rejecting the *possibility of* an answer to the original question. It does not affect, of course, asking the original question in another context that makes the question different from the original one.

Nevertheless, there is also some injustice in the claim against Rorty because he never asserted, nor ever tried to suggest, that an end of the Plato-Kant canon would also mean the end of philosophy in general. But where there is smoke there is fire. Truly, after presenting his destructive philosophy, he turns to questions of political philosophy and literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> He also makes claims that echo the banal 'end of philosophy' vision of philosophers who thought they had written the last pages of a 'final vocabulary' after which nothing can be said about philosophical topics. However, these objections are as superficial as Rorty's interpretation of Dewey is claimed to be. Pápay (2010) convincingly argues that "[a]lthough Rorty is often carried away by his own rethoric, for him 'the loss of the world' does not mean that there is no world in the everyday sense and there are no things independent from us and our linguistic practices." An 'end of philosophy' can only be announced in the possession of the final philosophical truth. From a Rortyan point of view, such statements cannot be taken seriously. From this, only a narrow-minded critic might conclude that

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1 It still is only a semi-truth; he attended hard core philosophy conferences and wrote papers about questions of truth and knowledge all over his life, though his position was rejective towards these questions.

Rorty self-refutingly says something *about reality* by this statement. As the truth value of his sentences are defined in terms of his goals, he rather tries to call an attention of philosophers in the ivory tower to the need that they should increase their attention to a new approach to "soft sciences" of the humanities that are better described in his Nietzschean perspectivistic terms than in terms of an unmatched application of scientific method to would-be-science topics. If it were recognised that Rorty took seriously what he said about final vocabularies (not regarding their truth but their usefulness), these critical points of his thinking would be seen as contingent shifts in his personal interests; gestures towards the wider, non-philosophical public; or simply abbreviations for serious philosophical thoughts that cannot be understood but only in their depth. It would not simply be unphilosophical to be tempted by the fact that a philosophical view can be refuted on its surface. Furthermore, it would precisely be that sort of attitude of which Rorty is constantly accused - it would be a superficial ironic redescription of Rorty that could only serve as an easy win over the shade of a great dead philosopher.

### **1.2. How to argue against Rorty (if still necessary)**

A consequent critique of Rorty can follow two directions. On the one hand, if his critic is a realist thinker, a realist reading of him can be followed, but in this case, his interpretation requires no less attention and preciousness than an interpretation of any top class philosophers in the history. It would be no less controversial to argue against Rorty on Rortyan grounds in order to support realist principles than arguing on realist grounds in order to support an allegedly Rortyan claim of the end of philosophy. However, a realist way of argumentation is not valid from a Rortyan perspective since one of Rorty's main reasons why he gave up the traditional philosophical enterprise was precisely that its argumentative, scientific method had been proved to be defeated in his opinion. It can serve as an explanation to realist fellows why Rorty's views are out of their scope of acceptance, but it cannot serve as an argument that could convince a Rortyan to be a realist.

On the other hand, one can provide a less close reading ("close to what?", a non-realist might ask) if one is able to be "Rortyan enough" in order to present arguments in Rorty's style. In this case, some of Rorty's views can be used to supply the interpreter's own purposes - but it is exceptionally rare if one can meaningfully support a point of view by criticising it (instead of choosing a more effective weapon for the same purpose), especially by more or less unjustified and superficial, *ad hoc* arguments.<sup>2</sup>

If a Rortyan point of view is accepted, based on which one can effectively criticise Rorty's views, the "critique" will be, however, rather something like an ironic redescription than a set of

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, there can be further ways of criticising Rorty but they must be built on neither Rortyan nor realist grounds at least in some of their part, in order to avoid the difficulties mentioned above.

counter-arguments: a reconstruction that improves Rorty's view rather than trying to destroy it. By and large, that will be attempted to be exemplified in the present paper, where I shall contrast Dewey's and Rorty's reading of Kant with one of the many faces of those great pragmatists, presumably the most Kantian one.

## **2. Dewey and Rorty on the notion of pragmatism**

### **2.1. Common grounds**

Rorty's understanding of pragmatism is mainly based on Dewey's. Regarding epistemology, pragmatism is an anti-skeptical strategy that identifies the roots of skepticism in the Cartesian scenario. That is why Cartesianism is the main target of them from Peirce to Rorty and beyond. In order to avoid skepticism, they claim, we should give up the Cartesian mind-body dualism around which several other unsupportable dualisms - like the appearance-reality, intellect-sense, theoretical-practical, etc. oppositions - are formulated. This affects several central topics in theoretical philosophy, e.g. it implies a rejection of the correspondence theory of truth and a rejection of the representation theories of perception and knowledge.

They are not only in agreement regarding what they reject but also what they offer as an alternative to a large extent. According to Kremer (2007), Rorty follows classical pragmatists in claiming that human activities, including human theories, are basically practice, in accepting a naturalistic approach in which everything is relational, and therefore accepting the view that we have no access to absolute justifications. In short, they offer a practice-oriented, naturalistic, anti-essentialist and fallibilist approach.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2. Difference I: Experience vs. Language**

Rorty is obviously conscious about their main differences that he attributes to the historical distance between them. He claims that classical pragmatism holds two views that cannot be accepted for a late 20th-century philosopher: the primacy of experience in philosophical investigations on the one hand, and the primacy of the scientific method over other forms of inquiry (Rorty 1999, p. 35). In the former claim, he is in agreement with most of the contemporary pragmatists (as well as most of the contemporary philosophers in general). Applying Brandom's terminology to a wider context, neopragmatism can be straightforwardly labelled as linguistic pragmatism. This is of course an effect of a general linguistic turn in philosophy (that can be recognised on both sides of the analytic-

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<sup>3</sup> Though one might find my parallels between fallibilism and pragmatism odd, the difference between them is only about truth and not justification that does not affect the present problems. Moreover, even that distinction can only be identified from a God's Eye View, which is clearly claimed to be a "view from nowhere" by both approaches.

Continental division).

Rockwell (2003) argues that the linguistic element in Rorty's pragmatism is "reactionary positivism" that forces Rorty to see philosophy as a therapy by which philosophical problems can be analysed out of their contexts, making them meaningless. This Wittgenstein-Carnapian view is, however, not independent of William James (1907)'s pragmatist methodology of which Wittgenstein was certainly aware (Goodman 2002). Linguistically or not, pragmatists used to apply therapeutic methods to classical problems of philosophy. The difference between Rorty and less radical pragmatists lies in their "post-therapeutic" attitude: whether human existence needs any philosophical explanation after therapy. Classical pragmatists from James to Dewey and Wittgenstein thought it does; Carnap, Quine and Rorty thought it does not. In this sense Rockwell is right that an all-out linguistic reductionism regarding philosophical problems is not a neopragmatist but neopositivist credo (and even not the *only* neopositivist one), and Rorty follows the Carnap-Quine approach to this question.

Nevertheless, Kremer (2007) goes as far as claiming that it "follows from the linguistic turn that we cannot know the final reality". Even if there are some trends within the linguistic tradition that attempt to prove the ontological existence of, and our epistemic access to, reality, at least in the sense of 'linguistic turn' which Rorty used to allude to does in fact exclude the possibility of an access to reality. This seems to result in a closure of Rorty's philosophy into the prison of (linguistic) idealism - a problem to which I shall come back in details after mentioning the second difference between classical and neopragmatism.

### 2.3. Difference II: Scientism

Regarding their relation to the scientific method, there is a wide disagreement among both classical and neopragmatists. James and Rorty does not share Peirce's, Dewey's and Putnam's commitment to science as having something unique to offer for human society. While arguing against the primacy of science, Rorty sometimes *seems to* argue, unintentionally in my view, against the utility of it. This might be an impression justified by his antipathy toward scientific *philosophy* only - i.e., the analytic sort of philosophy which follows the Enlightenment tradition in holding that in order to legitimise the philosophical enterprise as an honourable activity, philosophers must imitate what (hard) scientists do. Rorty would prefer seeing philosophy on the side of humanities, alongside with literature first of all,<sup>4</sup> therefore, not surprisingly, he rejects this maxim.

Rorty as a good pragmatist would never deny the practical consequences of the scientific

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4 Unlike literature (or religious studies), some of the humanities disciplines that were close to philosophy like sociology, psychology, or education theory also tried to imitate hard sciences. Paradoxically enough, that movement *increased* the distance between them and philosophy since they chose natural sciences as their ideal, while philosophy chose mathematics, and therefore their standards tended to be divergent. All the same, a bad replica of mathematics is of no more use than a bad replica of experimental physics.

inquiry that well justifies its important role in human societies. Nor does he deny that the best approach to everyday reality is a naturalistic one, offered by the sciences. But his reason not to do so is a Quinean one: namely, that a naturalistic approach is more elegant and economical than its alternatives. For a pragmatist, science does not describe how the world is better than religion or art. This statement seems to be a denial of the utility of science only if one thinks that science is useful *because* it says something true about reality.<sup>5</sup> For a pragmatist, it is sufficient to say that the reason why we claim science to be true is that it is useful for certain purposes. By the dethronement of science as the holder of a privileged access to reality, Rorty does not deny the values of it. The only difference between scientism and Rorty's view is a metaphysical one - namely whether we can certainly know that science is a true description of the world or we are not interested in such claims.

All the same, if even science does not have a privileged access to reality, it also seems to imply some undesirable consequences. Relativism is just one thing, since Rorty denies that he is a relativist (convincingly in my view). But another objection, namely that of idealism, is less emphasised and therefore has more potential in the lack of an appropriately developed Rortyan counter-argument. If there are only descriptions which describe nothing but only other descriptions - a view that can be well applied e.g. to literature but seems to be rather strange in the case of physics -, there is nothing beyond the realm of the mental. As in the case of recently unpopular philosophers like Berkeley, Kant, or Hegel, Rorty has to say that everything is a product of our own. The only difference lies in his linguisticism, allowing him not to allude to an obscure mental construction but a linguistic one. A linguistic idealism is but still an idealism. It seems that naturalism without scientism implies something like what empiricism without a correspondence theory implies: a metaphysics lacking an explanation of reality unaffected by humans.

### **3. Pragmatism and Kant**

#### **3.1. Idealism in general**

By idealism I mean the thesis that there are no things or facts in themselves but only descriptions. It is a metaphysical claim based on epistemological premises. Idealism argues that we have no epistemic access to mind-independent reality. Since an epistemic access is the mind's access to its intended target, it can only be mind-dependent. From this tautology, two different conclusions can follow. First, skeptics say that there is an unbridgeable gap between our beliefs and facts. Second, idealists argue that in order to avoid the skeptical scenario, it is better to assume that there is

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<sup>5</sup> In the case of mathematics or formal logic, truth claims would still require a complex Platonist ontology that could hardly be made compatible with naturalism.

nothing behind the sphere of appearances.

There are basically four types of (modern) idealism. In its most pure form, Berkeley holds an antiessentialist view regarding physical beings that denies the existence of the material substance but not the mental one. In Kant's version, the mental substance is also dissolved into an epistemological presupposition. For him, there is thing in itself but only in an epistemological sense; things as they appear to us are identical with the thing in itself under different descriptions. Hegel identified the thing in itself with the Self-in-advance by temporalising them. Things for us created by humans means the development of human existence via a teleologically closed socio-historical process. Finally, Nietzsche denied the teleological closure, claiming that there are only indeterminate descriptions.

Pragmatists are conscious about their idealist roots. Dewey, just like Peirce, started doing philosophy as a Hegelian, and Rorty claims that Dewey's philosophy is practically a marriage of Hegelianism with Darwinism (the latter adding the naturalisation of the Spirit, and therefore removing the teleological order from the metaphysics of history - a point that is often neglected by allegedly Darwinists as well). Nevertheless, Dewey and Rorty think that their Darwinism prevents them from holding the undesirable consequences of idealism. They cut off the obscure parts - namely, the supranatural mental substance - in the hope that a set of pure idea-like entities (linguisticised in Rorty's version) without any mental substance which bears them is something radically different from Berkeleyanism. Their attempt resulted in a Nietzschean metaphysics of contingency, that always tempts to be accused of relativism. Still, it is by no means more desirable to suffer from this accusation than idealism but as I have mentioned, relativism is a relatively easily negligible issue for a Rortyan but Nietzsche well fits into the development of modern idealism as well.

### **3.2. Kant's heritage in general**

A heritage of idealism brings a different sort of problems to the surface than a temptation to relativism. These sort of problems do not start with Nietzsche but still with the transition of idealism from its Berkeleyan stage to the Kantian one. For my purposes, Rorty's desire to shift analytic philosophy into a Kantian, and, later, a Hegelian phase might suggest a removal of the realist-relativist debate in favour of a realist-idealist one.

In an ironic redescription of the history of pre-pragmatic philosophy, Kant deserves a central place in at least three aspects. First, his rejection of the subject-object dualism makes it possible to change a way of speaking about knowledge as contemplation to a way of speaking about knowledge as edification. Second, his constructivist epistemology opens up the possibility of a practice-oriented approach to knowledge acquisition supposing an active mind that is a central part of the

pragmatist Anti-Cartesian strategy. Third, the transcendental method is a preliminary step to James's pragmatist method, being methodologically closer to pragmatism than even therapeutism. The transcendental method is the source of the Hegelian argumentation against binary oppositions, a central topic in Dewey's and Rorty's thinking. In this sense, it was Hegel who was only an episodic figure in the pre-history of pragmatism whose role is overemphasised only because of some historical contingencies like, as I shall shortly explain, Dewey understood Hegel's philosophy deeper than Kant's - and Rorty followed him blindly in his mistake.

### 3.3. The subject-object dualism

Dewey mostly criticises Kant because the former thought the latter based his philosophy on several binary oppositions like the existential vs. logical, subjective vs. objective, laws vs. sensations, nature vs. morals, thing in itself vs. appearances. Dewey perhaps forgets that Kant *inherited* these dualisms and if Hegel did not have to deal with some of them, the main reason was precisely that they had been appropriately eliminated out of the discourse by Kant.

I shall mention only the most important one regarding anti-skepticism and Anti-Cartesianism: the subject-object dualism. Dewey's main problem with Kant regarding this issue is Kant's dubious concept of the thing in itself. Dewey believes, falsely in my view, that Kant "assumes at the outset that there is something external to Reason by which it must be excited" (Dewey 1884, p. 40). This invokes the idea of the subject-object dualism at the level of ontology and the contemplative/representative idea of knowledge that would involve transcendental realism, rejected by Kant. Dewey is right that *if* thing in itself were an ontological entity then Kant's idealism would collapse back to a Cartesian dualism but the thing in itself is just an epistemological presupposition, referring to the same thing that appear to us. With some ironic overtones in my interpretation I might say that thing in itself is the Berkeleyan unperceived idea that only God perceives - without the introduction of God into the system. It really serves as the Lockean matter (namely, establishing mind-independent continuity in the presence of objects) but without supposing its metaphysically distinguished existence from its appearances. Thing in itself does not bear its perceivable properties like the Lockean matter. It *consists of* the properties that has been constructed by the experience. Kant's empirical realism says that in-itself world exists only so far as it is perceivable but it would be a conceptual contradiction to claim that there are appearances without something that appears to us (A256/B312).<sup>6</sup>

In Rorty's opinion, Kant's philosophy is only a willy-nilly mediate step from Humean

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<sup>6</sup> I myself does not find this solution satisfying, being *too* idealistic for my taste. But I do not find how it falls back to a dualistic approach. Anyway, if there is at least one possible interpretation of Kant that holds anti-dualism in this respect, for a pragmatist, it must be followed. Removing the idealist overtones by the transition of mental into practical activities is just a matter of supplementary work that can be outlined in another essay.

dogmatic empiricism to Hegelian socio-historicism. One of the few contexts in which he *seems to* celebrate Kant is as follows: "Kant was a turning point in the history of Western philosophy because he was a *reductio ad absurdum* of the attempt of distinguish between the role of the subject and the role of the object in constituting of knowledge" (Rorty 1999, p. 49). This celebration is illusory though. A *reductio ad absurdum* for Rorty seems to really be an absurd development of something rather than a conclusive refutation.<sup>7</sup>

On the very same grounds I shall argue for the opposite: following a *reductio ad absurdum* argument, it was Kant who demonstrated that from the supposition of the subject and the object isolated from each other, a *denial* of the ontological existence of them follows on transcendental grounds. Hence I claim that Kant founded the metaphysics that is suitable for arguing against the realist-relativist debate, namely, the transcendental framework.

Undoubtedly, Rorty is uninterested in arguing for or against any particular metaphysics. Instead of joining to the trendy criticism of him, claiming that his views presuppose some implicit metaphysics (which would be just as uninteresting for an orthodox Rortyan as for my own purposes), I shall argue that it is practically better for a Rortyan to see Kant as one of our comrades who made significant progress into the direction we wish to follow. My main reason is the well-known moral of historical consciousness, namely, in order to avoid mistakes of the past, it is useful to be aware of them.

One of the most Unrortyan marks in Rorty's thinking is that he sees transcendental presuppositions as stony necessities of human experience like a pre-Kantian would see them. A straight Rortyan way of reading Kant, in accordance with a Rortyan understanding of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as a fiction, would be a final satirical *adieu* to necessities: a real *reductio* that sees necessary preconditions as something that has nothing to offer us but only serving as immovably secure grounds of nothing for a useless enterprise. This would make Kant to be one of the best comrades of a Rortyan instead of making him one of the worst enemies as Rorty actually thought.

### **3.4. Constructivism**

Idealism implies a far-fetched emphasis on the role of the Self - be it substance-like or not. What Rorty celebrates in Hegel's philosophy - beyond his historical awareness - is his transformation of knowledge acquisition into self-creation. Though Hegel himself still calls it self-knowledge, as Rorty rightly put, in a temporal context it should be understood as a progress of one's becoming oneself and in a historical level, it should be understood as a progress of humanity. An Emersonian

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<sup>7</sup> It is so at least in the light of one of his remarks on logical positivism. He claimed that "logical empiricism had been the *reductio ad absurdum* of a tradition, not the criticism of that tradition from the standpoint of magisterial 'logical' neutrality which it had thought itself to be" (Rorty 1982, p. 75).

self-reliant scholar, a Nietzschean *Übermensch* or a Bloomian strong poet (Hegelian heroes re-individualised on Kantian grounds) are the most powerful emperors of their world in the history of philosophy: regarding their ontological status, they are straightforwardly identical with the Christian God who creates his universe *ex nihilo* simply by *logos*, i.e., thinking of it.

In this aspect, the turning point was again Kant's philosophy within the history of idealism. Kant held transcendental idealism in order to support empirical realism which is clearly denied by previous idealists who, thinking within the framework of transcendental realism, could not overcome the epistemic gap between the subjective and the objective. By dissolving the difference, Kant was able to claim that what a subject creates within its empirical elbow room is a construction of an *objective* entity - where 'objective' means the widest possible sense of the word for a non-realist - namely, 'intersubjective'. Hence, it is possible to ontologically construct entities on pure epistemological grounds.

Pihlström (2004) agrees that there are some Kantian themes in the work of James, Dewey, Putnam and Rorty.<sup>8</sup> For Kant as well as pragmatists, the "empirical world as a construction based on human activities". Kant clearly rejects the picture of knowledge as "the mirror of nature". His own view might be labelled as constructivism: a view according to which knowledge is constructed rather than acquired. The main difference between Kant and pragmatists is that while Kant thinks that the "constructor" is the transcendental subject - finally, a pure epistemological presupposition of a point of view -, pragmatists emphasise the role of practice in construction.<sup>9</sup>

If something created is publicly accessible, it is real in an empirical and/or practical sense. Human knowledge is thought to be publicly accessible in that very sense by Kant. Unlike Rorty, Dewey thinks it is Kant who called philosophers' attention to the importance of self-knowledge in knowledge acquisition. Citing him, Dewey claims that "Kant, the founder of modernist philosophy, [...] 'calls upon Reason to undertake the most difficult of tasks, self-knowledge, and establish a tribunal to decide all questions according to its own eternal and unchangeable laws.' This self-knowledge of Reason, then, is the Method and criterion which Kant offers" (Dewey 1884, p. 34). Self-knowledge by Hegel is what Rorty identifies as the source of transforming terms of contemplation to those of edification. Rorty's problem with Kant in this context is of course the "eternal and unchangeable laws" he mentions (a point that was eventually not worth to notice for Dewey). All the same, the self-directedness of investigations, a turning from the discussion of the relation between things and ideas to the discussion of mental capacities themselves is an important aspect in which Kant seems to be Hegelian enough to judge him as a precursor of pragmatism.

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8 Of course they would protest against their identification as transcendental idealists, with the only exception of Putnam who thinks that at least his early internal realism is analogous to Kant's transcendental idealism (Putnam 1980).

9 This difference is extremely important but it cannot be discussed within the scope of the present line of thought.

### 3.5. Pragmatism and Transcendentalism

A further connection between Kantianism and pragmatism is only indirectly affects the problems of idealism, being a pure methodological approach, but it might be worth to be noticed. Pihlström (2004) refers to it as seeing philosophy as a critical method. I would prefer calling it therapeutism which is but a more fashionable word for the same attitude. Kant's critical philosophy was pervaded with the wish to overcome the rationalist vs. empiricist debate. It is hard to understand how Dewey and Rorty underestimate Kant's pioneer work in the Anti-Cartesian campaign as his theoretical philosophy was all about fighting against dualistic thinking. Not only in his famous doctrine of antinomies which served as the prototype for Hegel's philosophical method but his triadic epistemological account in general. By dividing his main epistemological categories into three main sets (I do not mean the sensations - understanding - reason setup but the thing in itself - appearance - transcendental unity of experience triad), he was able to eliminate the Cartesian extremes from his ontology, claiming that they are only the transcendental presuppositions of the metaphysically homogeneous existence of empirical reality.

Nevertheless, therapeutism, transcendental criticism and pragmatism go hand in hand with each other, being consecutive steps of the same method. The first step is of the transcendentalist's (I might call it the step of diagnosis): identifying the common presuppositions of a dual opposition that serves as a resource for a seemingly unsolvable philosophical problem. The second step is of the therapist's (step of therapy): eliminating that common presupposition, thereby making the two horns of the dilemma groundless. At the third step (let us call it the step of rehabilitation), there are divergent routes. A Hegelian follows dialectics, grounding a new philosophical doctrine on the basis of the denial of the common grounds of the contradiction identified by the transcendentalist. Dewey is definitely Hegelian in this aspect. A Jamesian or Nietzschean pragmatist offers novel and comprehensive perspectives to the varieties of possible answers, claiming that pragmatism is only an antechamber to different sorts of possible metaphysics. Rorty is Jamesian in this sense, thinking that metaphysics belongs to one's private sphere, being practically a choice of taste. But Rorty sometimes also follows Tractarian quietism which argues that if there is no definite and well justified answer to a question then that question cannot be even asked. This attitude forces Rorty to echo the 'end of philosophy' catchwords in his less deliberated moments. In these moments, he unintentionally follows Clifford (1879)'s views that James (1896) rejected on the ground that there is simply no such possibility as *not* deciding a yes/no question because refusing the decision is still a decision itself - an answer to a question that can be raised at a higher level.

Kant was aware of this; that is why he chose to be a transcendental idealist, in order to defend empirical realism. Putnam is similarly aware of this, that is why he chose to be an internal realist in

order to defend direct realism. Dewey was supposedly unaware but Rorty seems to be rather uninterested in a continuous resettlement of philosophical questions at gradually higher levels as he thinks an anti-foundationalist has no need of doing so. I also do not think that philosophers should raise the same questions at gradually higher levels. But if I am right, Rorty rejects the questions at the same level where Kant answered them and there are quite a few other philosophers who even recognise that level without falling one level down, back into the Cartesian scenario. Basic philosophical intuitions are reflected in first-order philosophical reflections that are reflected in second-order transcendental reflections. The second level is still almost impossible to be understood by non-experts of it just like second-order logic is almost inaccessible to even those non-experts who can well manage first-order logic; then beyond the second level, human capacities practically stop working. Seeing a shift of levels as a pure replication of the previous ones is a Hegelian mistake into which one falls if claiming that Kant is a subjective idealist or claiming that Rorty is a relativist "at a higher level". We are far from the danger of an infinite regress, even if we are not interested in seeing the process as an infinite progress.

I am more sympathetic with the pragmatist Rorty than the quietist one since it opens up possibilities instead of closing them down. But even the quietist Rorty wants only to give up philosophies of universal truth claims, not doing philosophy in general. Theoretically, we do not need foundations of knowledge because we can succeed well without them. But a practical need for it may occur at the level of one's private sphere that Rorty would not claim to be illegitimate precisely on the ground that it is private.

All the same, Kant was unsuccessful in dissolving all dualisms following his transcendental method but simply because he did never intend to do so. It also cannot be a purpose of a pragmatist since there are dualisms that are *useful* of which we might have a need. Whether a dualism is useful or not is relative to the socio-historical circumstances under which we live. It might be argued that for Descartes, the soul-body dualism was useful. It could be definitely argued that for Kant, it was not. Answering whether our descendants will have a need of the same dualisms as we are trying to develop is a subject of a final vocabulary I do not wish to attempt to write. But for my private vocabulary I would guess the right answer to be probably no. The good news is that they will be able to recognise this only on the grounds of the (then) useless vocabularies we and our followers will have written.

#### **4. How far the *reductio* goes**

It is crucial to see that transcendental idealism is not an opposite of metaphysical realism but transcendental realism. Metaphysical realism is only a subset of transcendental realism - just as

relativism is a subset of the same. Transcendental realism is the view according to which things exist independent of our experience. The debate between metaphysical realists and relativists lies within the scope of transcendental realism, resulting in, therefore, if Kant is right, empirical idealism on either horns of the debate.

Metaphysical realism (also known as indirect realism or representationism) is the view according to which things exist independent of our experience *and* there is a one-to-one correspondence between appearances and things. Relativism also claims that things exist independent of our experience but it denies a unique one-to-one connection between things and appearances, claiming it that a correspondence is relative to the scheme applied. Relativism can be also divided into (at least) two subsets. Skepticism claims that for the reason that there is no unique way of accessing reality, we are living in a constant doubt about both reality and our connection to it. But even within relativism there is a tenable position according to which a plurality of our access to reality makes nothing with the validity of different (or at least certain) sorts of access because even if we cannot choose the one and only one valid relation to the world, we can eliminate the ones that are definitely bad and the difference between effectively identical schemes is only a matter of theory that is of secondary importance for a pragmatist.

A common misunderstanding - shared by Dewey as I mentioned above - of what Kant means by his transcendental idealism is that he is realist regarding things in themselves and idealist regarding the phenomena. One is tempted to identify thing in itself with the Lockean matter and the transcendental unity of experience with the Cartesian soul and understanding Kant's philosophy as an interaction between the two. It is clearly false if one consider that Kant is an *empirical* realist and a *transcendental* idealist. The above-mentioned view would still be pretty well realism regarding the transcendental and therefore idealist regarding the empirical: the view according to which mind-independent things are real and appearances are unreal. From this, it would shortly follow that we are imprisoned into our own illusions whereas the thing in itself is unknowable.

Kant precisely says the opposite: it is the appearances that are real and the thing in itself is a mental construction - a construction made by dualistic epistemology and what has to be managed only as a limit of our understanding how knowledge acquisition works. Regarding our practical elbow room, empirical realists Empirical realists can agree with both Lockeans and Rortyans. The difference is that unlike Lockeans, they do not think they need to carry out a metaphysics of matter in order to support their realism but unlike Rortyans, they are committed to carrying out a metaphysics of the Self in order to do so. Kantians do not the same as we Rortyans do but their step out of the Cartesian framework was decisive: it was the one that allows Rorty not to be a relativist without arguing against it.

Transcendental idealism denies the common metaphysical ground of all of the above-

mentioned transcendental realist views: it argues against metaphysical realism, relativism and skepticism at the same time. It claims that things exist only within our experience - a view denied by traditional realists - but in their existence they are still ontologically independent of any mental activity - a view denied by traditional idealists. Their mind-dependence is purely epistemological as we humans divide the transcendental unity of experience into minor pieces in order to get knowledge of them. Thereafter, one cannot meaningfully argue for or against metaphysical realism or relativism - only if one ignores or misunderstands Kant's insights.

Nevertheless, it is exactly what seems to happen in the realist-relativist debate. Rorty claims that "[r]epresentationalists often think of antirepresentationalism as simply transcendental idealism in linguistic disguise - as one more version of the Kantian attempt to derive the object's determinacy and structure from that of the subject" (Rorty 1991, p. 4). Though Kant is as antirepresentationist as Rorty himself (Boros 1999), Rorty do not want to accept this alliance because he fails to see that Anti-Kantian arguments like Dewey's remain within the empirical realism vs. empirical idealism scenario, just as Anti-Rortyan arguments cannot break out of the scope of the metaphysical realism-relativism debate.

There is an important theoretical difference between Kant's and Rorty's attitude toward the old issues - a difference which, however, makes no difference in practice. Namely, while Kant argued for transcendental idealism in order to support empirical realism within the traditional debate, Rorty argued for pragmatism in order to reject the grounds of both metaphysical realism and relativism. As I have said, this difference is of pure theoretical importance. Practically, Rorty, though falsely, but is still managed as a relativist in the very same way as Kant is falsely managed as an empirical idealist. As we know, a pure theoretical difference makes no difference for a pragmatist. That reason is sufficient to claim that they wear the same shoes.

Whether transcendentalism in a neopragmatist dressing could be more successful than it was in its idealist dressing is an open question. It would be extremely annoying, however, if Rorty's attempt to continue what Kant began would fail for the same reason why Dewey's attempt to refute him failed: namely, because of a serious misunderstanding of how closely their views have been to that great dead philosopher.

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