

TRUTH IN PHILOSOPHY AFTER RORTY AND DEWEY

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In the title of this paper Dewey should come first, since he lived earlier and influenced Rorty. But in my paper I would like to analyze the relationship of Rorty's thought to Dewey's philosophy, and in that, as a disciple of Rorty, my interpretation of Dewey and also the interpretation of the relationship will be strongly influenced by Rorty's views and interpretations.

Rorty once said to me after long discussion, "You should not read more of my stuff, but read Dewey. Dewey has already said everything what I am saying." I contested this suggestion, and I continue to contest it, because there are significant differences in style, and also in substance between the two thinkers. In this paper I wish to show the main difference between Dewey and Rorty. Whereas Dewey believed in philosophy, in a kind of metaphysics with the method of experience, Rorty refuted this. He showed that even Dewey's radical empiricism as experimentalism remains in philosophy, and that this should be overcome, since the traditional problems of philosophy do nothing good for our culture and democratic society.

The traditional main questions or problems of philosophy are truth, goodness and beauty. Whatever kind of philosopher you want to be, you define it or you show it via your understanding and interpretation of these notions. In the relationship of the two thinkers, I will focus on the similarity and the differences of their concept of truth, metaphysics and epistemology. Before I look at that, let me explain briefly what kind of concept of truth I have in mind here.

Truth in Metaphysics

There are at least two kinds of truth theories. These are the metaphysical and the epistemological theories, and they are frequently mixed up and not really separated in philosophical works. The source of both lies in the origins of philosophy. The metaphysical truth theorist asks: how is the world in itself, what is its origin, what kind of structure does it have? He asks for absolute, timeless givenness, fundamental structures, ever-existing entities. The metaphysician is convinced that the world is somehow. He also maintains that with a kind of strong or methodological thinking, he can discover these structures as they are in themselves. Metaphysical truth theorists have difficulties when they are asked how they can reach the eternal structure, how they can prove that they are "there" and whether it is such as they suppose it to be? Since their thinking happens and their language functions in time, they cannot show when they have reached any atemporal entity. They can only say, "Our words touch reality as such (let us capitalize it: Reality)", or "The meaning of our expressions has immediate contact with Reality".

It can be asserted that our words can touch Reality in two ways.

(1) It can be maintained that words are different from Reality, and they touch Reality in a manner similar to the way a human hand touches an object. In this case something essentially different touches another entity, something of another kind. As hands are loaded by nerve endings and by concepts and theories, so words are loaded by contexts and theories. The touched objects are not loaded by all these in the view of metaphysicians (not quite so in the view of epistemologists). In this case the metaphysician has to convince their adversaries that although the two encountering entities (words-expressions and Reality) are of different kind, words can undoubtedly stand for not-words and somehow touch nonworldly reality. They have to prove that something with grammatical and logical structure can represent,

without residues, something which is not grammatical, and not logical, but of another kind: perhaps causal, perhaps not. And this is what arguably cannot be the case, as Davidson and Rorty have shown. Independent of humans, Reality does not have the grammar of human language, does not have the meaning of language, and has no logical structure. Reality does not speak, Reality does not think as we do. It speaks only if we ourselves are supposed to be embedded in Reality. But in that case there is no question that we ourselves are Reality.

(2) It can also be affirmed, that words are within Reality, they are part of Reality, there is no question of touching or being in contact of words or expressions with Reality, because they are *in it*. Metaphysicians of this school have nothing to explain in the nature of touching in the relationship of words and Reality, but do have to explain why and how they can maintain their supposition that they can speak about eternal metaphysical truths. Our words and expressions in this case are in a Reality which is changing continuously, as do our words and meanings.

The difficulties lead many scholars to the conviction that we can only prove the existence of temporal structures that we can reach via experience, and that all the discovery of truth about the world is the business of natural sciences. Although there is a revival today of metaphysics, it is not clear whether metaphysics can become relevant to urgent questions of the moment.

Truth in Epistemology

Epistemological truth theorists recognize these difficulties, and they think that the question of truth is not metaphysical but epistemological. The truth is not a question of "What is there?" or "What is Reality really like?", but a question of the discovery of the discovering structures of the world, of cognition or language. This approach always remains in a certain sense relativist, since all knowledge about the world depends from the linguistic, logical or psychological structures of discovery. If someone does not want to be relativist, he has to

reject the epistemological paradigm. But, as history shows, in the case of refusing epistemology, one has to reject also the metaphysical paradigm: no metaphysician could show us the eternal Structures of the world, and most metaphysicians change their views from time to time, not to speak about developments in metaphysics. If metaphysics can develop, and if it does develop, then as yet it has never attained absolute and eternal Reality. That means that so-called metaphysics is not yet metaphysics. But if there will be a real and total metaphysical understanding, then we would be at the end of all inquiry, it would be the end, as a matter of fact the dead end of all philosophical inquiry.

Pragmatists developed their concept of truth or their aversion against truth precisely as a reaction to these difficulties. As Rorty emphasizes, "Pragmatists are saying that the best hope for philosophy is not to practise Philosophy. They think it will not help to say something true to think about Truth, nor will it help to act well to think about Goodness, nor will it help to be rational to think about Rationality."¹ This is the neopragmatic view of Rorty. But contrary to Rorty, Dewey still works in metaphysics.

In what follows, as a first step I briefly sketch Dewey's metaphysics in his *Experience and Nature*, I present the critique of Rorty, and then I go over to Rorty's theory. As we will see, whereas Dewey remains in a "naturalized metaphysics", and as such is delivered to all critiques of metaphysics I have mentioned, Rorty makes efforts to escape all philosophy. Rorty tries not to be a metaphysician, and he argues generally against epistemology. This is the fundamental difference between the two thinkers; that is why it is not enough to read Dewey when someone is interested in Rorty's work. Finally I would like to ask the question, "What possibilities and limitations exist in the overcoming of philosophy by Rorty?"

¹ R. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1982. xv.

The main thesis of Dewey in his Experience and Nature²

For Dewey, it is also impossible to get outside of our skins and to build up any theory of truth or metaphysics. For building up knowledge about the world, we have only one way, experience. Experience is not something metaphysical or transcendental, which foregoes any relationship of humans with nature, as their presupposition; it is not only of, but in nature: “experience is *of* as well *in* nature. ... Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced”.³ In this view humans as organisms are just one kind of entity in nature which interacts with other natural objects. In that way, “experience ... reaches down into nature”⁴. Experience is in nature, an event of nature, and there is no transcendental or metaphysical mystery around.

Although natural scientists almost never use the notion of experience, experience is the fundament of those sciences. Similarly, they never use the word “causality”, since causality is not a physical or scientific notion, but is the presupposition of all scientific work. They start by experience, and they get back to it, to control the rightness of the theorizing about the experienced objects and relationships. Traditional, pre-Deweyan philosophy had not the possibility of testing the results of its deliberations on the experience. Philosophy could not show the rightness of its method, because there exists no test of the results with the help of the experienced world. Whereas natural sciences can produce real results, a better understanding of and a better dealing with the world, philosophy has not this option. Philosophy does not help to discover the world, but it sometimes blocks it: as Dewey says: “the problems to which non-empirical method gives rise in philosophy are blocks to inquiry, blind alleys; they are puzzles, rather than problems, solved only by calling the original

material of primary experience ‘phenomenal’, mere appearance, mere impressions, or by some other disparaging name.”⁵ Philosophers who do not apply the experience or experimental method, never solve real problems; their problem solutions never have real contact with the world, to the everyday life of the people, to their culture or civilization.

Dewey presents his view with the help of questions about the task and achievements of philosophy. “a first-rate test of what the value of any philosophy which is offered us” is to ask whether philosophy has changed our life, whether it changed our view of the world. “Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in ‘reality’ even the significance they had previously seemed to have? Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in everyday affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be what they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own? It is the fact, I repeat, that so many philosophies terminate in conclusions that make it necessary to disparage and condemn primary experience, leading those who hold them to measure the sublimity of their ‘realities’ as philosophically defined by remoteness from the concerns of daily life, which leads cultivated common sense to look askance at philosophy.”⁶

For Dewey there is no sense in practicing a philosophy which does not care about human life, society and civilization, when there is no return from philosophy to the life of people – as science returns with its results to society and makes the life of people better. Dewey

² J. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, J. A. Boydston (ed), J. Dewey, *The Later Works*, Vol. 1: 1925.

³ J. Dewey, op. cit. 12.

⁴ J. Dewey, op. cit. 13.

⁵ J. Dewey, op. cit. 17.

⁶ J. Dewey, op. cit. 18.

supports the view common to Aristotle and Kant that philosophy should have consequences on the lives of philosophers, and he enlarges on this, following the Plato of the *Republic*, that the ideas of philosophers should have impact on the life of the society.

Life precedes philosophy: this is the slogan of Dewey, and is also taken over by Rorty. It can be contrasted with the Sellarsian expression that philosophy is finally the broadest possible effort of understanding the nature of the world and objects in the broadest sense. Philosophy is the last bulwark of reason, which itself is the chief bulwark of personhood and of being human. To search for knowledge and understanding without compromises: this is the task of philosophy. Philosophy should not allow even human life to dictate. But then, there can be a clear conflict here, and a conflict which as Dewey sees it exists between life and philosophy. Analytic philosophers answer Dewey, that his intentions may be right, but – as Davidson says -- he does not get the connections right. They say that for the life-philosophy conflict you should first clarify what life is, what society is, and what philosophy is before you decide about their primacy. Adversaries of analytic philosophy and Deweyans say that although we perhaps do not know what life is, and certainly individual life is too short to clarify completely what life is, yet we have to live our life. And since philosophers as individuals all live our individual lives, we should give a primacy to our life. Further, Dewey puts the analysis on the second place: “ ‘life’ and ‘history’ have the same fullness of undivided meaning. Life denotes a function, a comprehensive activity, in which organism and environment are included. Only upon reflective analysis does it break up into external conditions – air breathed, food taken, ground walked upon – and internal structures – lungs respiring, stomach digesting, legs walking”.⁷ First the holistic view of the folk, and only after it the analysis, but the analysis for Dewey has to end by reintegration of the results into the whole picture.

The conceptual conflict between analysts and holists is not to solve: either you make theoretical philosophy, or you are concerned with your life, with the help of philosophical concepts. If you involve yourself with professional philosophy, you analyze concepts and do not care primarily of its relevance to your everyday life. If you make philosophy for individual or social practice, then you search for connections of your concepts with life, culture and history. John Rawls wrote at the beginning of his *A Theory of Justice*: writing about justice does not require strict conceptual analysis as it is practiced in issues of linguistic philosophy, epistemology or metaphysics. On the other hand, it is possible not to view these two as opposite directions, but as complementary modes of doing philosophy. You can have, as a matter of fact, *you do have* a holistic view of your life and society, and you can be engaged in analysis of any conceptual area of your life.

What to do with Dewey's proposition about the empirical method is another question. For Dewey, experience gives us a kind of “integrated unity”, of object and subject, of world and language, without starting with the separation as most of the philosophers do. It is only after we have acquired the data of experience that we can start to distinguish the different components and to analyze them. After that we can see how the analysis leads to new knowledge and to enrichment of our total experience. The non-empirical method on the other hand starts with distinctions, such as subject-object, mind-matter, as if they were different entities. This method, then, involves the problem of how it is possible to recognize the analyzed entities and to test the results of deliberations and arguments. Testing is not possible with the non-empirical method, so we can never decide who is right in a debate about any question, whereas the experimental method offers us the opportunity to jointly check our theories – and this is the common experience. (There exist theories according to which experience is always subjective. Experience becomes common through communication, through the expression of the individual experiences

⁷ J. Dewey, op. cit. 19.

with the help of the common language and through the mutual approval of the partners in communication.)

Rorty refers to the experiment as a philosophical method, stating that “two generations of commentators have been puzzled to say what method might produce ‘a statement of the generic traits manifested by existences of all kinds without regard to their differentiation into mental and physical’⁸ while differing ‘no whit’ from that employed by the laboratory scientist.”⁹ Methods of laboratory scientists are however methods of science and not of philosophy. Rorty states that if we use Dewey’s “experimental” method self referentially on his own work, we would find that “talk of ‘observation and experiment’ is ... irrelevant to the accomplishment of the project”.¹⁰ Dewey as Hegel’s disciple urges an end to philosophy. Whereas he cannot demonstrate the validity and usefulness of the empirical method for philosophy, he tries to show that behind the narrow perspectives of logical empiricism there are no real and solvable problems.

Dewey was severely criticized by Hodgson and Santayana, who said that Dewey gives no useful method for the renewal of philosophy. Rorty agrees with their criticism, and says “Hodgson’s criticism is, I think, entirely justified. It parallels Santayana’s criticism of the possibility of a ‘naturalistic metaphysic’, and neatly singles out a recurrent flaw in Dewey’s work: his habit of announcing a bold new positive program when all he offers, and all he needs to offer, is criticism of the tradition”¹¹. Despite the criticism, Dewey did not change his view fundamentally during his long career. As a naturalized Hegelian, he held uncompromisingly that human beings as entities in nature are fully embedded in nature, and that there is no gap between the epistemological subject and the world, no gap between the ethical subject and

the society. Knowledge is what we experience, there is no further epistemological subject. The full naturalization of human beings was accepted by many philosophers, the main point of criticism being that he did not provide a method of investigation. Rorty remarks, “What exasperated Hodgson in the 1880s was to exasperate another generation of critics in the 1930s. These critics welcomed with enthusiasm Dewey’s suggestions about the cause and cure of traditional empiricisms and rationalisms, but were unable to see much point in Dewey’s own ‘constructive’ attempts to produce a philosophical jargon that was dualism-free, nor in his claim to be more ‘empirical’ in method than his opponents.”¹²

But later Rorty stated that philosophy does not have to have any method, and this idea comes from Dewey. Although Dewey spoke of an empirical method, he could not develop any method that could be followed by anyone. The difficulty with the empirical method in philosophy is that if you are not only empiricist but also wish to carry out empirical research in and with philosophy, you are no longer a philosopher but a natural scientist.

Rorty further criticizes Dewey, repeating Santayana’s criticism that “‘naturalistic metaphysics’ is a contradiction in terms. One can put this point best, perhaps, by saying no man can serve both Locke and Hegel.”¹³ But Dewey’s is not a servitude towards Locke, since Dewey does not want to explain experience, as Locke wanted to, but to make experience the only method of philosophy. For Dewey, there is a continuity between lower biological structures, causal biological processes and human introspection, knowledge and argumentation. But conversely with Dewey there is the problem that these areas are expressed in different languages or vocabularies, where there is no conceptual continuity. Later, Davidson and McDowell would emphasize that the world of logic and the world of

⁸ Rorty’s cit. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, New York, W. W. Norton, 1929, 412.

⁹ R. Rorty, Dewey’s Metaphysics, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 73.

¹⁰ R. Rorty, op. cit. 74.

¹¹ R. Rorty, op. cit. 78.

¹² R. Rorty, op. cit. 80.

¹³ R. Rorty, op. cit. 81.

causality are completely different and not reducible on each other.

Finally, Rorty's conclusion is that Dewey did not overcome idealism in his *Experience and Nature*: "its solution to the mind-body problem seemed one more invocation of the transcendental ego, because the level of generality to which Dewey ascends is the same level at which Kant worked, and the model of knowledge is the same – the constitution of the knowable by the cooperation of two unknowables."¹⁴ Rorty thinks that the effort of generalization and general explication of knowledge will lead to the transcendental destiny of Kant. For Rorty, it is not possible to explain knowledge by philosophical means. For him Dewey is a great thinker who has done a lot to free philosophy from the traditional shadows that had caused so much harm for our culture, but that he did not go far enough: rather than trying to abandon philosophy as a mode of thinking, he merely tried to answer philosophical questions with new philosophical methods. Rorty's main criticism of Dewey is that he "never quite brought himself to adopt the Bouwsma-like stance that philosophy's mission, like that of therapy, was to make itself obsolete. He thought, in *Experience and Nature*, to show what the discovery of the *true* 'generic traits' of experience could do."¹⁵ Rorty merely tried to radicalize the work of Dewey, and to show that traditional philosophical questions are obsolete, and so not worth dealing with.

***Consequences from a pragmatist theory about truth:
a metatheory***

Rorty's position is fundamentally different from Dewey's. He wants no metaphysics, not even if naturalistic. He also denies epistemology; his proposition is to abandon traditional questions of philosophy. However, as I shall try to demonstrate below, there is some possible doubt regarding the feasibility or the

¹⁴ R. Rorty, op. cit. 85.

¹⁵ R. Rorty, op. cit. 83.

success of his proposal and there are arguments for showing that even Rorty's argumentation remains in the domain of metaphysics.

Rorty writes at the beginning of his *Consequences of Pragmatism* that the essays in his book "are attempts to draw consequences from a pragmatist theory about truth".¹⁶ This is what he meant by the title of the book. What Rorty wishes to present is obviously a metatheory of pragmatism. If pragmatism and a pragmatist theory of truth itself is a theory about truth (and Peirce and James thought, it was), and about theories which are held to be true, then this book presents a theory about pragmatism, a *metatheory of truth* or the *truth theory of truth*. The initial question is, then, "Is the theory of truth true?". If pragmatists say that truth is a theory, which functions and which has consequences predicted by the theory, then the description of the consequences of pragmatism is itself the description of the pragmatist theory of truth, and as such a metatheory. This is of course not the interpretation that Rorty would give to this, but I would like to follow this line. Rorty says it transpires that there is no sense in debating about the essence of Truth, Representation or Goodness, and that it is better to recommend a change of subject. As expressed by Huw Price, "pragmatism is quietist ... about the representational character of various vocabularies".¹⁷ To be quietist toward representationalism goes hand in hand with being quietist toward such concepts as Truth and Goodness and also being minimalist in those questions.

Roughly speaking, pragmatism and a pragmatist theory of truth state that the proof of the truth of a theory is the praxis. If the theory works in some sense in practice, that means, in space and time, in the "real" world, then it is true. This is the fundamental feature of a completely timely philosophy, of a philosophy which does not

¹⁶ R. Rorty, op. cit. xiii.

¹⁷ D. Macarthur and H. Price, „Pragmatism, Quasi-realism and the Global Challenge“, to appear in H. Price, *Naturalism without Mirrors*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

accept any eternal, no-temporal and no-spatial truth. If you have a theory of physics or chemistry, it is true if it functions in reality, if it predicts in the given context and conditions what will happen next. In this sense natural scientists are pragmatists, and pragmatism is the philosophy of natural scientists. A theory is true if it is a prediction of processes in space and time, in given conditions. In this sense there is nothing more to say about truth. "True" is just a property of sentences which are held to be right, but there is no one single common feature of "truth".

When however Rorty speaks not about the consequences of a given theory, or consequences which in pragmatism give reason to decide about the truth-status of the given theory, but about the consequences of a theory of a theory of truth, that is, about the consequences of a theory of consequences, then these consequences cannot be consequences in time and space, that is, somehow causal consequences, as with natural sciences, but only consequences in theory, consequences in the relationship of ideas. And in addition to it, there is the problem of the ever changing interpretation and understanding of those ideas and of their relationships. The question is whether the theory of pragmatism is pragmatistic itself, whether pragmatism is true in the pragmatic sense of truth. Clearly, here at the meta level, the relationships cannot be any more causal in space and time, but in the space of reason. And then it can be asked what kind of consequences have a metatheory, what are the consequences of the "consequences of pragmatism", if there is no possible space-time proof of the practical success of the theory. Regarding in this way the theory of pragmatism or a theory about pragmatism or about a pragmatist theory of truth cannot be pragmatistic. But then, what can it be? It is a metatheoretical or *metaphysical* approach. This is the case for what Derrida said that if we use philosophical terms it is not possible to get outside of philosophy. I have shown in my

"Representationalism and antirepresentationalism"¹⁸ that if he uses such philosophically laden terms as truth and reality, then it is not even possible for Rorty to get outside the representationalist and relativistic paradigm.

Denial of the concept of Truth

Precisely because of its simplicity, the pragmatic theory is not really interesting for philosophers who like enigmatic puzzles. Rorty emphasizes that "this theory says that truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about. For pragmatists, 'truth' is just the name of a property which all true statements share."¹⁹ Truth is just a word, a compliment, and Rorty denies that there could be a general theory about it. It is a theory of denial of the philosophical concept of Truth. Does this denial function? Can this denial be true?

Rorty distinguishes his position from that of Peirce and James, who thought that pragmatism was the truth theory of the practical consequences of theories. For Rorty this is not an interesting point, since we all try to have theories about reality, and we always wanted our theories to describe the world as it is. Whether "True" or "good", "there is no interesting work to be done in this area".²⁰ The search for truth and its critique is as old as philosophy itself, it makes up the main point of philosophical investigations. Rorty says that we should not replace the Platonic model or tradition of truth, it is just that we should no longer ask the questions of Plato and of his followers, the philosophers. Pragmatists in his understanding "would simply like to change the

¹⁸ J. Boros, „Representationalism and Antirepresentationalism: Kant, Davidson and Rorty“, Randall E. Auxier and Lewis E. Hahn (eds.), *The Philosophy of Richard Rorty*, The Library of Living Philosophers XXXII, Chicago, Open Court, 2010. Carbondale, USA, Southern Illinois University Press, 2010. 249-265. Richard Rorty válaszával: Reply to János Boros, 266-268.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rorty, op. cit. xiv.

subject”.²¹ Pragmatists in his sense do not have any new theory about Nature or God, they “keep trying to find ways of making antiphilosophical points in nonphilosophical language”.²² Rorty is aware of the difficulty of this way of speaking and he knows that Aristotle said, we philosophize always. If you change the language, then the critics of the nonphilosophical attitude say you are changing the subject, and it is not possible to argue with or against you. If you remain within Platonic language, then it is impossible for a Rortyan pragmatist to express what he wants to say. He himself becomes a metaphysician, as I mentioned earlier.

Rorty emphasizes that “the best hope for philosophy is not to practise Philosophy”.²³ We cannot make our statements more true by thinking about Truth and we won’t behave better by investigating the nature of Goodness. Rorty is against Philosophy in its both platonic and empiricist senses, because these directions still maintain the traditional program of philosophy, searching for Truth. Philosophers of both lines think that pragmatism is not a philosophy, but Rorty says, “the pragmatist tries to defend himself by saying that one can be a philosopher precisely by being anti-Philosophical, that the best way to make things hang together is to step back from the issues between Platonists and positivists, and thereby give up the presuppositions of Philosophy”.²⁴ The question is whether this “stepping back” is possible.

Our language and our thinking expressed in language and not detachable from it force us to make philosophy. If you try to express yourself in an understandable, structured way, somehow rationally, you must be able to keep in mind the relationship between your concepts and notions. If you do that, and you reflect on it, then you have to deliberate upon the correct relationship of

your notions and the question of what criteria you have in order to decide about the rightness of their interpretation and use. Then, there is the question of meaning of the different notions, and the question, how you can know, what kind of meaning has a given notion. If you follow this and ask questions in this style, then you have to decide whether you think that meaning is defined exclusively via the relationship of notions, or via empiricism. If you opt for the first alternative, then you are a Platonist, rationalist or expressivist; if you decide for the second, then you are an empiricist.

To be a pragmatist in Rorty’s sense has nothing to do with this distinction. You can be a Platonist pragmatist like Robert Brandom, and you can be an empirical pragmatist, like Huw Price. Because pragmatism is an attitude towards our theories or notions about reality: if it functions, if it predicts correctly what will happen next in the relevant context, then it is acceptable and true. That is why I do not think that pragmatists should struggle for a real or correct or strong anti-Platonist position, as Rorty suggests: “One difficulty the pragmatist has in making his position clear, therefore, is that he must struggle with the positivist for the position of radical anti-Platonist. He wants to attack Plato with different weapons from those of the positivist, but at first glance he looks like just another variety of positivist.”²⁵ If the pragmatist should struggle with the positivist, then he would remain in Philosophy and this is precisely the way Rorty does not want to go. If the pragmatist position is outside of Philosophy, then it is either metaphilosophy or subphilosophy or nothing like either. It can be metaphilosophy in the sense that it investigates all kind of philosophies and asks whether their sentences or truisms make some difference to the practice or to practical life. This would be the attitude that Rorty presents in his *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, where he writes, reads all kind of philosophies, and takes them into his dialectical mill. He reads Davidson, Heidegger and Derrida, and asks

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Op. cit. xv.

²⁴ Op. cit. xvii.

²⁵ Ibid.

whether they are of practical assistance to him in developing new languages, new descriptions of himself and of the world, and in making life in a democracy richer, more interesting and full of imagination and creativity. A subphilosophical perspective would be Rorty's suggestion to leave philosophy, and look only at the consequences of one's own sentences and statements, without caring for philosophical connotations.

Rorty wants to leave traditional „platonistic“ philosophy, because the problems surrounding it are unsolvable, and they lead to aporia: truth as such cannot be found, the relationship of the epistemological subject and object is not discoverable, and the language cannot be analyzed from outside. He says, “it is *the impossible attempt to step outside our skins* – the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism – and compare ourselves with something absolute”.²⁶ This means that for him we can never reach an absolute truth, we can never reach reality as such, we always remain within our own skins, language, character, subject and personality. This is of course a Kantian anthropological position: all that we can know from the world depends on the structure of the knowing subject, its capacity and structure of cognition and its language. The only way is to look for success in our language use and in the success of our practice which is governed by our concepts and language.

²⁶ Rorty, op. cit. xix. Italics added J.B.