Naturalism in the Philosophy of Richard Rorty

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
by Sam Cloake: Thursday, 02 March 2023

In memory of Richard Harrickey (1981-2021)

Your reading and intellect merited more than a Doctor of Philosophy.

A unique and wonderful person, always missed.

Abstract

Rorty's naturalism consists in the idea of a single universal framework of cause and effect, multiply-redescribable and encompassing human cognition. This naturalism informs a particular strand of argument found in his work against the meaningfulness of the 'representationalist' concerns of traditional philosophy. Rorty's naturalism binds human beings, as cognitive agents, to the rest of the universe; it therefore problematizes the division of that universe into human representings and their representational ideal, nature 'as it is in itself'. His argument is advanced principally through discussions of the thought of Donald Davidson and of Darwin. Rorty's argument from naturalism broadly coincides with his endorsement of Davidson's rejection of the 'dualism of scheme and content,' while the idea of naturalism as a single universal causal framework enters Rorty's thought in 'non-reductive' form through Davidson's 'anomalous monism'. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, meanwhile, clears a path to incorporating human beings into the same causal framework as the rest of nature, thereby making naturalism plausible. I attempt to square the argument from naturalism, a conventionally philosophical one, with Rorty's view that ideas are recommended by the desirability of their envisioned social consequences. Given the difficulty in doing this, I recommend that naturalism constitute a 'modest,' minimal, form of metaphysics characterised by its ontological monism. This minimal metaphysical naturalism is proposed as an amendment to Rorty's position – one of which he would not have approved – rather than as an interpretation of his thought. Nevertheless, the resulting view still recommends Rortyan neglect of traditional philosophical topics and poses a challenge to the cultural hegemony of science.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, who have supported me throughout, and who have always been sensitive enough not to ask too frequently how the thesis is going. Anything that I've achieved is down to them. *Cảm ơn*, Trang, for inspiring me in so many ways: I wouldn't have got to this point without you. Thank you Richard and Daniel, for going above and beyond as supervisors: for your friendship and patience, for the many immensely rewarding discussions and comments on drafts, and for letting me choose my own path intellectually.

I also want to thank all my other friends and family for their support and encouragement over the years. I have met so many great people studying at the University of Liverpool, especially during reading groups: Asami, Pei, Suzanne, David, Robert, Jonathan, Michael, Xiaoyan, Sirui, and of course Richard. I have received exceptional support and understanding from the University; in particular, Alex from MHAS, you are great at your job. Dr White, thank you also for your assistance. There are various other people, besides those already mentioned, who have shaped my thought in some way, and thus the thesis: Greg Miller, Rachel Handley, Andy Yeah, Garrett Mindt, Seyed Ashrafi, Simon Hailwood, Marco Perale, Barry Dainton, Daniel Whistler, Marco Bertamini, Attila Tanyi, Jannine Jobling, Rebecca Davnall, Stephen McLeod, Kelvin Everest, and Christopher Bartley.

I would like to thank the examiners for their many helpful and stimulating comments on the original submission, which have improved the final product considerably.

Lastly, my profound thanks to the North-West Consortium of the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding this research – I appreciate being given the opportunity.

List of Abbreviations Used

All works by Rorty:

AOC: *Achieving Our Country* (1998)

CIS: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989)

CP: *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982)

EHO: Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2 (1991)

ORT: Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1 (1991)

MLM: *Mind, Language, and Metaphilosophy: Early Philosophical Papers* (eds. Leach; Tartaglia) (2014)

PCP: *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4* (2007)

PMN: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)

PSH: Philosophy and Social Hope (1999)

TP: *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (1998)

Contents

Introduction

Rorty's thought is increasingly being viewed in the historical context of the Enlightenment[1], which is to say as a possible continuation of the subversion of traditional sources of authority that took place in Western Europe between approximately 1650 and 1800. This recontextualization has been encouraged by the recent posthumous publication of Rorty's 1996 Girona lectures as *Pragmatism as Anti-authoritarianism* (2021) – lectures on the titular theme that were (mostly) subsequently dispersed among later published papers, but which Rorty had hoped someday to turn into a book. As Robert Brandom outlines in his 'Introduction', the lectures, and their author's unrealized plans, confirm the suspicion – already aired by the likes of Björn Ramberg, John McDowell, Carl Sachs, and Brandom himself – that *anti-authoritarianism* is the ultimate leitmotif of Rorty's thought.

Rortyan and Enlightenment anti-authoritarianism find shared expression in their 'humanism'[2]: the idea that the human species has nothing on which to depend but itself, and thus that what matters above all else is, in Rorty's words, 'our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark' (1982, p. 166). The original *philosophes* were humanists because they challenged traditional religious notions of a *non-human source of authority* – specifically a provident, anthropomorphic one – whilst at the same time seeking to subvert the inequitable political structures that were based on such notions. Rorty, however, seeks to take things further. Developing an idea that he originally finds in John Dewey, he suggests that philosophy itself, ironically humankind's emancipator in the original Enlightenment, introduces pernicious non-human sources of authority into Western thought, in the form of such equivalent ideas as 'Reality,' the 'truly real,' and the 'way that things are "in-themselves,"' all of which Rorty takes to be 'another of the obsequious Names of God' (2007a, p. 134). The idea that moral or technological progress requires increasingly accurate cognitive representation of 'The Way The World Really Is,'[3] contends Rorty, engenders a conformist intellectual culture that constrains the magnificent pluralism of the human imagination.

This study points out that, besides their anti-authoritarianism and humanism, Rorty and – at the very least a significant group of – the original Enlightenment thinkers share a specific form of *naturalism*.

[1] According to Brandom, Rorty 'thought that the biggest contribution philosophers had ever made to the culture more generally was the Enlightenment' (Brandom, 2013, p. 23). He was 'finally led to call for a *second* Enlightenment: one that would extend to our *theoretical* conception of *knowledge*, the same insight that animated the first Enlightenment's constructive criticism of traditional ways of construing the *practical* sphere' (ibid, p. 24 – original emphasis). Tartaglia has observed that 'Rorty sees himself as advocating something like a second enlightenment' (Tartaglia, 2016, p. 310). Sachs: 'With the passing of Richard Rorty our global intellectual culture has lost one of the most eloquent and passionate defenders of the Enlightenment' (Sachs, 2013, p. 682).
[2] For helpful discussions of Rorty's humanism, see Bernstein, 2008 and Rey, 2017.
[3] Nelson Goodman's expression, which Rorty is fond of employing.

Rorty and the likes of Spinoza, Diderot, Helvétius and d'Holbach[4] (as well as, later, Dewey himself) agree that the universe comprises a *single nexus of mechanical, or quasi-mechanical, causes-and-effects.* Human existence, these thinkers hold, can be integrated into the same causal explanatory nexus. Moreover, precisely this fact makes it more than just a platitude to say that human beings are 'natural creatures,' or that they 'belong to nature'. It is not platitudinous to say this because integrating psychological phenomena into the same web of causal interaction as suffices to explain everything else in the universe plausibly jeopardizes common notions of free will and moral responsibility. As the original Enlightenment *philosophes* well appreciated, positing a sole causal explanatory nexus credibly turns occurrences of thought and action into the effects of primordial factors over which the hypothesized 'agent' lacks control. On this assumption, treating *human belonging to nature* sufficiently rigorously turns free agency into something as supernatural as ghosts or religious miracles.

The present thesis offers a detailed study of the theme of naturalism – thus understood, as the subsumption of human activity into the causal framework of nature – in Rorty's work. I argue that Rorty's naturalism underpins his anti-representationalism, the iconoclastic treatment of the Western philosophical heritage for which he is best known. At the same time, I advocate that the most promising way of preserving this anti-representational is by means of a minimalist metaphysical naturalism that Rorty undoubtedly would not have accepted. This metaphysics restricts itself to ontological monism: the idea that the universe, all that there is, consists of a single kind of substance (whether this be matter, mind, or any other alternative).

It is more than coincidental, I suggest, that naturalism and humanist anti-authoritarianism are juxtaposed in both Rorty's thought and in that of the radical Enlightenment. *Already belonging* to a certain environment – being there *naturally* – I suggest, goes a long way toward absolving one of the need to conform to that environment's dictates or authority structures. More than anything, this is because the idea that one's environment is something distinct from oneself – and thus logically capable even of having its *own* demands or expectations – is challenged from the outset by naturalism.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. In Chapter 1, I outline Rorty's anti-representationalism, and in particular his Deweyan construal of that position as a form of 'anti-authoritarianism'. Chapter 2 starts by discussing the general concept of 'naturalism,' focussing on the 'core,' or 'ordinary language,' senses of the term, before considering its predominant meaning in contemporary analytic philosophy (2.1). The chapter considers the role of the term 'naturalism' in Rorty's thought, and the degrees by which his understanding of the term diverges from analytic orthodoxy (2.3). It also offers an overview of how Rorty's naturalism has been interpreted in the secondary literature (2.4). A core exegetical

[4] The intellectual historian Jonathan Israel treats these thinkers and their followers as comprising a distinct 'Radical' branch of the Enlightenment, separate from its 'Moderate' or 'Mainstream' manifestations; see Israel 2001; 2006; 2012.

consensus emerges which aligns with Rorty's self-conception of his naturalism, according to which, as already indicated, naturalism is a view about causality and causal explanation – one that amounts to the idea of a single causal nexus, or explanatory 'web'. In 2.2, I speculate on the Deweyan heritage of this naturalism, particularly as it can be seen to feature in Dewey's *Experience and Nature*.

Chapter 3 possesses primarily negative import with respect to the thesis' central contention that Rorty's naturalism motivates his anti-representationalism. It holds that the purportedly central fourth chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), on Quine and Sellars, fails to provide a fully convincing philosophical argument for anti-representationalism, despite its claiming, and perhaps superficially appearing, to do so. The Chapter paves the way for it to emerge that the only sound anti-representational argument of a conventional, logical or philosophical, kind in Rorty's body of work is one stemming from his naturalism and engagement with the work of Donald Davidson and Darwin.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the argument in question, which I call the 'argument from continuity'. They make the case that naturalism underpins in particular the anti-representationalism of Rorty's work after *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982). In Chapter 4, I show that this line of thought presents itself most clearly in Rorty's treatment of the work of Donald Davidson, through his adoption of Davidson's critique of the 'dualism of scheme and content' – beginning as early as 'The World Well Lost' – and of Davidson's philosophy of mind in the form of 'non-reductive physicalism,' or 'anomalous monism'. Davidson's critique of 'scheme and content,' I suggest, highlights the way in which the canonical metaphysical and sceptical philosophical problematics hinge on a deep dualism between human beings and nature. Rorty, the Chapter goes on – above all in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (1991d) – utilises Davidson's 'anomalous monism,' a form of naturalism, in order to dissolve this dualism and thereby to advocate anti-representationalism.

Naturalism also comes to the fore in Rorty's engagement with the intellectual legacy of Charles Darwin, frequent allusions to whom are characteristic of his later works, from *Truth and Progress* (1998e) onwards. In Chapter 5, I make the case that Darwin is so important for Rorty because the former's theory of evolution by natural selection bolsters naturalism by providing a plausible general means of incorporating the ostensibly exceptional case of complex life into the scope of a single causal-mechanical explanatory framework.

In the final, sixth, Chapter, I address metaphilosophical questions about how best to interpret the dialectical route envisaged between naturalism and anti-representationalism (by means of the 'argument from continuity'). I pursue the idea – already explored by Brandom, Sachs, and Tartaglia – that it might be possible and advantageous to read Rorty in a quasi-metaphysical way. I ask whether one can assign some, minimalist, degree of absolute or universal status to the naturalism that I claim lies at the heart of Rorty's thought, without thereby rendering his position incoherent or lapsing back into the kind of cognitive 'authoritarianism' he opposed. In the end, I cast naturalism as a form of

metaphysics insofar as I depict it as a commitment couched in permanently indispensable vocabulary and approached by attempting to abstract from the particulars of the human situation. Nevertheless, I propose, it can only be a ‘modest’ metaphysics because it stands in tension with the presuppositions of that project as standardly construed.

Chapter 1. Rorty's Anti-representationalism

1.1. Anti-representationalism – Rorty's 'one idea'

Towards the end of his career, Rorty said the following of himself, alluding to Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction between intellectual 'hedgehogs' and 'foxes':

> I am a hedgehog who, despite showering my reader with allusions and dropping lots of names, has really only one idea: the need to get beyond representationalism, and thus into an intellectual world in which human beings are responsible only to each other (2010b, p. 474)

Rorty's one idea is his so-called 'anti-representationalism'. In this thesis I explore the way in which a specific kind of *naturalism* underpins and motivates Rorty's anti-representationalism. This is a naturalism that places emphasis on *human beings' belonging to the natural world*, rather than on ontological or methodological acclamations of the natural sciences. In this initial chapter I set out the notion of 'anti-representationalism' as it features in Rorty's writings.

At the broadest level, anti-representationalism can be framed as a particular way of thinking about scientific and philosophical knowledge, one with implications for how we conceive of other areas of culture such as the arts and humanities. At the same time, it is also a metaphilosophical stance and an attitude to the history of philosophy – a view about the worth and meaning of the writings grouped under that name. According to Rorty, once again writing towards the end of his career,

> The premise of philosophy is that there is a way things really are – a way humanity and the rest of the universe are and always will be, independent of any merely contingent human needs and interests (2007a, p. 93)

Rorty rejects this traditional presupposition of philosophy, and thus anti-representationalism consists approximately in an opposition to the notion that we can and should try to give a single correct interpretation of reality. Insofar as we conceive of philosophy as the quest to attain such an interpretation, the philosophical tradition has been an 'incubus' upon humanity (Rorty, 1982a, p. xxxvii), a 'useless encumbrance' that Rorty hopes will 'wither away' (2005a, p. 143).

> 'If I were asked to name the "underlying moment" of my own thinking, I would reply that it is a deep distrust of the tradition that stretches from Plato to Kant – a grim determination not to waste any more time with the pseudo-problems with which that tradition has struggled. It is not a stance toward the universe. . . but toward the history of philosophy' (Rorty, 2010g, p. 268).

In Rorty's view, Western philosophy has been excessively concerned with discovering the ultimate nature of reality, or the purpose-independent truth about a given topic. Instead, Rorty thinks, 'The point of philosophy. . . is not to find out what anything is "really" like, but to help us grow up – to make us happier, freer, and more flexible' (2007a, p. 124). To be anti-representationalist is to say, then, roughly, that 'there are many descriptions of the same things and events, and . . . there is no neutral standpoint from which to judge the superiority of one description over another' (Rorty, 2016a, p. 79).

Although Western thinkers have expressed anti-representationalist ideas in the past – most notably the Classical American pragmatists William James and John Dewey, and the German philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger – Rorty is arguably the clearest and most consistent proponent of anti-representationalism. He unequivocally endorses anti-representationalism and identifies it as his principal theme, going to greater lengths than any of the other figures just mentioned to acknowledge and confront the difficulties – above all the self-referential paradoxes – that it raises. Moreover, Rorty has been able to absorb and synthesize the scattered 'anti-representationalist' elements in the works of the aforementioned thinkers, as well as in those of figures such as Robert Brandom, Donald Davidson, Thomas Kuhn, Hilary Putnam, W.V.O Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, to name but some. In typically self-deprecating manner, Rorty describes himself as an 'unoriginal syncretist', whose life's work has been to 'fus[e] horizons' and 'link together the products of original minds' (2010a, p. 4).

1.2. Anti-representationalism as anti-authoritarianism

Dewey is another important influence on Rorty. The role played by a recognisably Deweyan naturalism in motivating Rorty's anti-representationalism is the topic of this thesis[5]. An additional influence of Dewey's upon Rorty's conception of anti-representationalism, however, is the idea that the view constitutes a form of *anti-authoritarianism*. Rorty takes from Dewey the thought that anti-representationalism frees us from a kind of *obligation* to think one way rather than another in order to represent the world (or reality, nature, the universe etc.) correctly. Representation, as far as Rorty is concerned, is a normative concept. Plausibly, it may be done more or less accurately, and thus, in the context of human cognition, implies a way that thoughts or utterances *ought* to be in order to achieve accuracy of representation. The representational conception of knowledge therefore views 'Reality as it is in itself, the object accurately represented by true sentences. . . as an authority we must respect' (Rorty, 1999d, p. 8). It offers

[5] I treat Dewey's naturalism in section 2.2, below. For critical overviews of the relationship between Dewey and Rorty, see Voparil, 2014a; Hildebrand, 2020.

> an image of the relation between people and nonpeople that might be called "authoritarian" – the image of human beings being subject to a judgment other than that of a consensus of other human beings (Rorty, 1998e, p. 135).

The problem with representationalism from Rorty's point of view is that it introduces an obligation – specifically, an obligation upon how we think – that may override or obscure moral obligations to our fellow human beings. Therefore, for Rorty, 'we would be better off if we dropped the idea that we have a duty to represent reality accurately, and replaced it by the idea that our only duty is to our fellow inquirers' (2010d, p. 584).

The idea that we are responsible, or answerable, to something non-human in our thinking is anathema to Rorty. He draws numerous parallels between the idea that there is one way that things really are, to which the intellect must conform, and the familiar religious idea that human behaviour should conform to the dictates of a God, or gods. Indeed, Rorty views 'reality' as a secular substitute for the notion of 'God', and regards his own anti-representationalism – 'a continuation of atheism by other means' (Rorty, 2010i, p. 444) – as a contribution to the Enlightenment project of liberating humanity from subservience to harmful forms of authority, particularly those justified by appeal to putative higher, non-human, sources of power. According to Robert Brandom, a former student of Rorty's, the latter's aim is

> nothing less than to complete the project of the Enlightenment. . .; to bring humanity out of its adolescence into full maturity, by taking *responsibility* for ourselves, where before we had been able only to acknowledge the dictates of an alien *authority* (Brandom, 2000a, p. xi – original emphasis).

Brandom suggests that, over the 'arc' of his philosophical career, Rorty has consistently sought to re-distribute epistemic authority in the direction of communities of people; in the one case – that of the incorrigibility of mental self-ascriptions – having taken that authority from individuals, and in the other – that of anti-representationalism – having taken it from non-human nature (Brandom, 2013, p. 26). Bjørn Ramberg, meanwhile, has suggested that 'pragmatism, in Rorty's hands, finds its deepest expression as anti-authoritarianism' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 446), and that 'Rorty is first and foremost an anti-authoritarian thinker' (Ramberg, 2013b, p. 69). Similarly, Michael Bacon observes that 'the core of Rorty's pragmatism is a rejection of any authority over and above that of human agreement' (Bacon, 2006, p. 865).

In this thesis I treat 'anti-authoritarianism' as the core of Rorty's anti-representationalism. I take Rorty to be making a negative point about the *absence* of certain *normative* constraints on thought: about the absence of normative constraints that apply to thought universally and permanently, irrespective of changing human needs and interests. Treating anti-representationalism in this way has the advantage, I hope, of avoiding fixating on the word 'representation' itself, thereby helping us avoid

misconstruing the issue as that of whether or not *some form* of the notion of 'representation' may respectably be salvaged and applied to thought in certain contexts (because Rorty would of course grant that it can be; see Ch. 4, section 4.7, below). 'Representationalism' and 'anti-representationalism' are helpful ways of labelling and evoking the key metaphilosophical issues, but they have the potential to mislead.

1.3. Philosophy as 'cultural politics'

Framing anti-representationalism as anti-authoritarianism, as a normative issue about the source of the constraints on what we ought to think or believe, has the advantage of bringing to the fore a further pivotal aspect of Rorty's philosophy, one with major implications for the evaluation of his work – namely, Rorty's blurring of what would traditionally be regarded as moral as opposed to metaphysical, practical as opposed to theoretical, issues. In short, since Rorty rejects the idea that reality, nature, or the universe exacts an unconditional requirement upon us to think in a certain way, the issue of philosophical theory choice becomes, for Rorty, at a sufficiently abstract level, decidable solely upon a consequentialist basis. Thus philosophy, for Rorty, is '*cultural politics*': a matter of trying to develop and further refine effective ways of thinking and speaking.

Rorty often writes as though the only thing that matters when it comes to choosing between his views and those of his philosophical opponents are their cultural and socio-political consequences. Indeed, it would be fair to say that this is Rorty's considered, 'official,' position[6]. According to Rorty, to argue in favour of a certain philosophical position is 'to argue that the balance of advantages and disadvantages dictates a certain decision' (1998e, p. 9), and there is only one question philosophers need to answer: namely, 'will human life be better in the future if we adopt this belief, this practise, or that institution?' (1999d, p. 16). Moreover the only way of answering this question is by 'experiment'. With respect to anti-representationalism specifically, Rorty has said that 'only experiment – trying out intellectual and moral life as it would be lived without the familiar Platonic/Kantian intuitions – will decide the matter' (2000e, p. 63). The best argument against representationalism, he thinks, is simply that 'the traditional Western metaphysico-epistemological way of firming up our [moral and political] habits simply isn't working anymore. It isn't doing its job' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 33). The basis of this latter claim, in Rorty's view, is that historically people have sought to justify customs and institutions by appeal to absolute, non-perspectival, facts, about such things as human nature or moral reality; whereas Rorty thinks that, outside of philosophy at least, intellectuals, and perhaps people in general, have become increasingly sceptical of such appeals, and thus willing to countenance some degree of cultural relativism in moral and political matters.

[6] Christopher Voparil notes that the socio-cultural consequences of ideas receive particular attention in Rorty's later writings, thus speaking of a 'political turn' in Rorty's thought (Voparil, 2011); see also Voparil, 2014b. Ramberg (2008) comments on what he sees as the 'radicalization' of Rorty's thought following *PMN*, whereby it becomes framed increasingly in ethical and aesthetic terms.

It follows, then, at least ostensibly, that anti-representationalism is put forward 'merely' as a practical suggestion about what to do, about the kind of terms in which it might be beneficial for us to talk, rather than as 'a' or 'the' 'right answer', an account of how things really are. Rorty makes this point when he says:

> Claims of the sort I have just made. . . are often interpreted in terms of the reality-appearance distinction. . . But pragmatists do not intend these as claims about what is *really* going on. . . Rather these claims are practical recommendations on what to talk about, suggestions. . . (Rorty, 1999c, p. 85 – original emphasis).

The same point had already been made in 'Science as Solidarity':

> Pragmatists avoid [the contrast between "our beliefs and what those beliefs are trying to get right"] by instead contrasting our beliefs with proposed alternative beliefs. They recommend that we worry only about the choice between two hypotheses, rather than about whether there is something which "makes" either true. To take this stance would rid us of questions about the objectivity of value, the rationality of science, and the causes of the viability of our language games. All such theoretical questions would be replaced with practical questions about whether we ought to keep our present values, theories, and practices or try to replace them with others (1991d, p. 41).

Indeed – or at least so it would seem – Rorty *cannot* consistently claim that his views about mind, language, or the history of philosophy, *inter alia*, reflect what is '*really going on'*, because those views themselves repudiate the very notion of a need- and interest-independent, 'absolute', reality: of a '*what is really going on*'. Were Rorty to claim something to the effect that, for example, 'the fact of the matter is that there really is no fact of the matter' he would be guilty either of hypocrisy or performative self-contradiction, perhaps both: either he would simply be doing something he had expressly forbidden others from doing, or, even more strongly, he would have demonstrated, through the decision to give voice to his own assertion, the *falsity* of his claim that that such universalising, 'metaphysical', speech acts were devoid of legitimate aspiration to authority or utility. Accordingly, backed into this corner, Rorty tends to make it clear that he is merely *recommending* ways for people to think and talk:

> In short, my strategy for escaping the self-referential difficulties into which "the Relativist" keeps getting himself is to move everything over from epistemology and metaphysics to cultural politics, from claims to knowledge and appeals to self-evidence to suggestions about what we should try (1998e, p. 57).

1.4. The spectre of metaphysics

Nevertheless Rorty was raised, intellectually speaking, as an academic philosopher, in a tradition – the 'analytic' one – that tends to regard conflicting viewpoints as competing to discover a single context-independent truth about the matter at hand. And many commentators have noted that Rorty often writes in ways that seem to suggest that he is 'right' not just in a utilitarian, pragmatic sense, but also in a more absolute way – that he simply has the correct view of things, which others lack. Many commentators feel that, despite his protestations to the contrary, viz., his official 'cultural-political' stance, Rorty's position is in fact metaphysical: that it includes accounts – descriptions or interpretations – that are supposed to exert a need- and interest-independent normative claim to acceptance on the part of thinkers or speakers. For some, this implies that Rorty's anti-representationalism is inconsistent or self-refuting; there are also commentators more sympathetic to Rorty's aims who observe a degree of metaphysics in his work without taking this to invalidate his position. In addition, several writers have noted the importance of distinguishing between different ideas of 'metaphysics' and have gone on to associate Rorty with one particular conception of the term in contrast with others. I consider instances of all these types of views in more detail in Chapter 6, below.

The question of whether Rorty's views are metaphysical (and, if so, to what extent) is important because its answer shapes our view of the putative relation in Rorty's work – to be established throughout the course of the thesis – between naturalism and anti-representationalism. It forces us to choose whether to regard Rorty's appeals to 'naturalistic' ideas, such as Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, or Donald Davidson's 'anomalous monism', as having been made ultimately on the basis of considerations of practical advantage – such as cultural-political benefit, or perhaps theoretical simplicity – or whether to regard them as possessing a more categorical, *binding*, argumentative force that obtains independently of any particular person or culture's agenda. In this thesis I take the view that Rorty's 'naturalistic' ideas should be treated in the latter way. Hence I agree in broad outline with those commentators who consider Rorty's works to have acquired a degree of metaphysical 'residue' from their extensive contact with the philosophical tradition and from some of Rorty's influences. In Chapter 6, below, I will argue that Rorty would have been able to make a more effective case against representationalism had he explicitly construed his naturalism in a metaphysical manner.

1.5. Rorty's treatment of other philosophers

Before examining this naturalism more closely, in Chapter 2, it is helpful to consider briefly the question of the 'accuracy' of Rorty's readings of his philosophical influences, whose views he has frequently been accused of misrepresenting (see e.g. Farrell, 1995; Baghramian, 1990; Quine, 1990). As will become apparent in Chapters 3-4, Rorty mostly expounds his naturalism through the mouthpiece of such figures as Davidson, Dewey, Sellars and Quine. Rorty's engagement with the

thought of Davidson is particularly relevant to the topic of naturalism and the latter's posited role in motivating anti-representationalism (see Ch. 4). If Rorty's interpretations are perceived to be inaccurate, does that fact compromise the soundness of his anti-representational arguments?

Rorty's own answer to the question is clear-cut. It stems from his Wittgensteinian conception of language as a set of tools[7], of philosophical texts as cultural and political instruments. A succinct expression of Rorty's stance on the issue of exegetical accuracy is his reply to Frank Farrell's criticism concerning the alleged (in-)accuracy of his reading of Davidson. He says:

> Farrell is quite right that I often take a Davidsonian doctrine and extrapolate from it in directions Davidson does not go, and in which (for all I know, and for all my readers should care) he may not wish to go. . . But I do not think it matters whether Davidson would or would not be sympathetic to such an extrapolation. If you borrow somebody's good idea and use it for a different purpose, is it really necessary to clear this novel use with the originator of the idea? (Rorty, 1995c, pp. 189-90)[8].

Rorty, that is, readily accepts the charge that sometimes his interpretations deliberately disregard the author's original intentions. But his goal in writing is to promote the long-term benefit of society (see 1.12), rather than accurately to paraphrase a given philosopher. Thus he thinks the fact that in some instances he fails with respect to the latter aim is irrelevant to the merit of anti-representationalism. He concludes: 'My account can, I should like to think, stand on its own feet, and be judged on its own' (ibid, p. 190).

I take Rorty at his word, then, in this respect, and aspire to appraise his intellectual contribution as he would have wished – 'on its own feet'. That is to say, in the chapters that follow I evaluate his ideas and arguments as far as possible solely in terms of their independent merit. I do this because I view Rorty as being more original than he makes out. His self-effacement and habit of continually invoking famous names sometimes make him appear little more than a commentator on the great historical philosophers. But I take it as axiomatic that Rorty has created a significant *Weltanschauung* of his own, even when he appears merely to be offering exposition of Davidson and Dewey. Rorty's

[7] See 5.6, below.

[8] Rorty develops the point later in the same paper: '[T]here is little point in trotting out. . . competing texts, or in either of us trying to wrap ourselves in Davidson's mantle. The two of us admire Davidson equally, and we can both employ Davidsonian ideas as we debate the question of whether we should enhance or suppress the realist intuitions to which Farrell appeals. We can do so without worrying about whether Davidson himself would take sides, or would remain neutral' (Rorty, 1995c, pp. 190-1).

propensity for listing names, rather, reflects his exceptional erudition, syncretism[9], and transparency regarding influences.

In the next chapter, I turn to the concept of *naturalism*. I consider Rorty's own understanding of the concept, surveying, in particular, those passages in his writings that make use of the term 'naturalism'. I then ask how Rorty's naturalism has been perceived in the secondary literature.

[9] C.f. Rorty 2010a, p. 4. Rorty's syncretism corresponds to what Sellars called the goal of philosophy – 'understand[ing] how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term' (Sellars, 1963, p. 1).

Chapter 2. Naturalism

This chapter sketches Rorty's naturalism against the backdrop of contemporary discussions of the subject (2.1) and the naturalism of his classical pragmatist influence, John Dewey (2.2). It sets the scene for the examination of the relationship between Rortyan naturalism and anti-representationalism that follows in later chapters.

In the chapter, naturalism is considered both as an explicit theme taken up by Rorty – where this include his occasional comments concerning the aptitude (in philosophical discourse) of the term 'naturalism' itself (2.3) – and as a position attributed to him by others. Despite divergence over the details, a broad degree of consensus concerning the basic character of Rorty's naturalism emerges in the works of such figures as Brandom, Sachs, and Ramberg (2.4).

Rortyan naturalism, the chapter argues, posits the existence of a *single causal order*, from which no entities or phenomena are exempt. Rorty's conception is noteworthy in that it departs from, without necessarily contradicting, the general notion of naturalism prevalent in 'analytic' philosophy: that according to which naturalism constitutes either an ontological or an epistemological endorsement of the natural sciences.

Despite its heterodoxy on the contemporary scene, Rorty's conception of naturalism possesses two key virtues. First, it suggestively echoes such influential historical doctrines as Spinozism and the thought of the Enlightenment, Darwinian evolutionary theory (see Ch. 5, below), and Deweyan pragmatism. Second, it brings Rorty into fruitful dialogue with important contemporary thinkers outside the analytic mainstream – philosophers such as Huw Price (see 5.7, below) and John McDowell, both of whom are influenced by Rorty and share his suspicions of the 'scientism' of contemporary philosophy and culture.

2.1. Naturalism as a concept

Mario de Caro and David Macarthur, in their introduction to the volume *Naturalism In Question* (2004), note that an overwhelming majority of contemporary analytic philosophers identify themselves as naturalists. 'Naturalism,' they argue,

> has become a slogan in the name of which the vast majority of work in analytic philosophy is pursued, and its pre-eminent status can perhaps be appreciated in how little energy is spent in explicitly defining or explaining [it], or in defending it against possible objections (De Caro, p2).

As De Caro and Macarthur observe, in contemporary analytic philosophy 'naturalism' nearly always denotes some kind of endorsement or recommendation of the natural sciences. This 'acceptance of a

scientific philosophy' (ibid, p. 3) tends to take one of two directions: it may be 'ontological', wherein naturalism becomes the view that the natural sciences determine the kinds of entities that 'really exist'; or it may be 'methodological' (equivalently, 'epistemological'), wherein the natural sciences are held up as being in some sense methodologically exemplary with respect to other forms of inquiry[10].

Whilst these forms of De Caro and Macarthur 'scientific naturalism' constitute the primary interpretations of the notion of naturalism within Anglophone philosophy, a number of high profile figures – including De Caro and Macarthur themselves – advocate a conception of naturalism both more permissive and less directly tied to science. By examining the role of the idea of naturalism in Rorty's philosophy, I hope to be able to contribute to the same project by illustrating the philosophical force that such a 'liberal' or 'pragmatic' naturalism, to use Richard Bernstein's expressions, can exert (Bernstein, 2020).

That 'naturalism' need not denote a view concerning modern Western physical science ought to be evident from the term's etymology and use(s) in so-called 'ordinary language'. The English word 'nature' derives from the Latin translation of the Greek term *phusis*, opposed to *nomos* meaning 'law' or 'convention'[11]. In ordinary usage, 'nature' and its derivatives, such as 'natural', are contrasted with the overlapping spheres of the 'human', the 'cultural', and the 'artificial'[12]. Thus it seems plausible to assert that, from the beginning, 'nature' and the 'natural' have designated – *and continue to designate, outside of analytic philosophy* – the opposite of what arises from free, conscious human decision, whether the latter be the product of individual decisions, such as those of a legislator, or of the multitude of decisions that constitute a community's pattern of behaviour.

On this basis, it would be intuitively compelling to construe naturalism as a philosophical position concerned with the relation of the human to the non-human, rather than with the metaphysical or epistemological significance of the natural sciences. If the notion of the *human* is developed in the suggested manner – viz. in terms of the notion of free, conscious decision – then the counterpart notion of *nature* comes to denote all those features of the universe that have not been freely brought about by human beings.

The naturalism that motivates Rorty's anti-representationalism, I propose, is best understood in this manner, in terms of the *distinction between the human and the non-human*. Nicholas Gaskill (forthcoming) illuminatingly points out that whilst Rorty repudiates many of philosophy's traditional dualisms his thought still frequently evinces a radical conceptual separation between human beings

[10] C.f. De Caro, pp 3-4.

[11] See Lovejoy, 1909; Woodbridge, 1901, pp. 366-74; LeClerc, 2014, Ch.7.

[12] The one meaning of 'nature' in ordinary English of which this is not true is that whereby 'nature' refers to an object's intrinsic character or properties – for an illuminating discussion of the meanings of the words 'nature' and 'natural' see C. S. Lewis' *Studies In Words* (Lewis, 1990, pp. 24-74)]. For a history of the philosophical concept see R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of Nature* (Collingwood, 1945).

and nature. Gaskill suggests that not only is this traditional dualism retained by Rorty, but that it plays a crucial role in his thought – since, as already observed[13], Rorty promotes his anti-representationalism as an anti-authoritarianism that seeks to re-appropriate normative authority from the 'non-human' on behalf of human beings.

The distinction between the human and the non-human therefore constitutes a cornerstone of Rorty's thought, providing, as it does, the conceptual basis for his framing of anti-representationalism as anti-authoritarianism. At the same time, as I shall show below, Rorty displays a tendency to depict human beings as part of, or continuous with, nature. It is this latter view that I would wish to characterise as 'naturalism', thereby employing the latter term in a sense diverging from the prevalent, 'scientific,' interpretation criticized by De Caro and Macarthur, and broadly aligning with the naturalism of Dewey, one of Rorty's heroes. In the sections that follow I shall consider, first, Dewey's notion of naturalism (2.2); second, Rorty's direct engagements with the theme of naturalism (2.3); and, third, discussions of the theme of naturalism in Rorty's work in the secondary literature (2.4). It will emerge that Rorty's mature thought interprets the idea of naturalism, thus conceived as the 'Deweyan' doctrine of human continuity with nature[14], in terms of the *notion of causality.* Specifically, this naturalism is articulated as the idea that nature constitutes a single, all-encompassing causal order. In later chapters I will then examine the way in which this naturalism underpins Rorty's anti-representationalism. The intriguing element of tension in his position, vis-à-vis naturalism, can thus be expressed by saying that Rorty retains the vocabulary of a dualism between human beings and nature at the same time as he attempts to collapse the corresponding doctrine.

2.2. Dewey's Naturalism

The locus classicus of Dewey's naturalism is his *Experience and Nature*. In the first paragraph Dewey tells the reader that, 'the philosophy here presented may be termed either empirical naturalism or naturalistic empiricism, or . . . naturalistic humanism' (1958, p. 1a). The book's overarching goal is to demonstrate the continuity between a domain that is regarded as typically human (whether this be 'experience', 'humanism', or, as Dewey later suggested, 'culture') and its opposite domain, 'nature'. Indeed, Dewey frankly acknowledges the difficulties that are likely to arise in this regard, 'so engrained is the notion of the separation of man and experience from nature' (Dewey, 1958, p. 1a). Dewey, continuing the efforts of his earlier *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, wants to help us escape from what he sees as being the harmful effects of the intellectual tradition we have inherited [15]. In particular, in

[13] See 1.2, above.

[14] Bernstein (2020) has suggested that a strain of variously, 'pragmatic,' 'liberal,' or 'Deweyan,' naturalism is currently (re-)emerging as a viable – indeed, Bernstein thinks, superior – alternative to the scientific orthodoxy. Many of its most prominent contemporary exponents, he points out, recognize Dewey's influence.

[15] 'An empirical philosophy is in any case a kind of intellectual disrobing. We cannot permanently divest ourselves of the intellectual habits we take on and wear when we assimilate the culture of our own time and place. But intelligent furthering of culture demands that we take some of them off, that we inspect them critically to see

EN, this effort concentrates around what Dewey consider to be the excessively narrow and restrictive conception of 'experience' handed down to us by the philosophical tradition. The conception, he contends, is one that unfairly privileges the cognitive or intellectual dimensions of experience, those embodying knowledge as detached contemplation or reflection, rather than experience as it pertains to values, desires, and action. Thus Dewey thinks the notion of the 'ubiquity of . . . cognitive experience,' 'results . . . in setting up a hard and fast wall between the experiencing subject and that nature which is experienced' (Dewey, 1958, p. 24). According to Dewey, this is because all values, all non-cognitive objects, are 'excluded from the "real" world, and . . . compelled to find refuge in the privacy of an experiencing subject or mind' (Dewey, 1958, p. 24). In his view, the exclusion of values from nature that occurs in the Modern era leads to a radical division between human beings and nature[16], so that 'the self becomes not merely a pilgrim but an unnaturalised and unnaturalizable alien in the world' (Dewey, 1958, p. 24). Therefore Dewey thinks we need to alter our conception of experience in order to bridge the gap between mind and world, subject and object, and other such damaging dualisms that 'from the day of Descartes to the present dominate the formulation of philosophical problems' (1958, p. 15). Fundamentally this involves recognition of the fact that all aspects of human mentality and experience are inherent in and emerge out of nature[17].

> The only way to avoid a sharp separation between the mind which is the centre of the processes of experience and the natural world which is experienced is to acknowledge that all modes of experiencing are ways in which some genuine traits of nature come to manifest realization (Dewey, 1958, p. 24).

Hence, for Dewey, 'nature' itself takes on those qualities and attributes that might previously have been seen as being exclusively 'our' contributions to the experience of existence. According to him, need, desire, and emotion arise out of natural processes: 'nature itself is wistful and pathetic, turbulent and passionate' (1958, p. 64), and we ought to regard the 'use and enjoyment of things as natural, as belonging to the things as well as to us' (1958, p. 108)[18]. Likewise for the so-called 'secondary qualities':

> It is as much a part of the real being of atoms that they give rise in time, under increasing complication of relationships, to qualities of blue and sweet, pain and

what they are made of and what wearing them does to us' (Dewey, 1958, p. 37). This foreshadows the logical positivist Otto Neurath's infamous 'boat' metaphor: the analogy of scientific advance to the gradual 'plank-by-plank' improvement of a vessel during the course of a journey. See also: '[L]ife experience. . . is already overlaid and saturated with the products of the reflection of past generations and by-gone ages. It is filled with interpretations, classifications, due to sophisticated thought, which have become incorporated into what seems to be fresh, naïve empirical material' (ibid).

[16] 'When intellectual experience and its material are taken to be primary, the cord that binds experience and nature is cut' (Dewey, 1958, p. 23).

[17] 'What is experienced. . . is a manifestation of nature' (Dewey, 1958, p. 19).

[18] '*Things* are beautiful and ugly, lovely and hateful, dull and illuminated, attractive and repulsive. Stir and thrill in us is as much theirs as is length, breadth, and thickness' (Dewey, 1958, p. 108).

> beauty, as they have at a cross-section of time extension, mass, or weight (1958, pp. 109-110).

The same is true for other faculties or phenomena – for example, language, thought, and the human personality and self – that might be thought to justify the assumption of a firm metaphysical distinction between human beings and nature. Dewey, for instance, encourages us to recognize the 'full place' of 'thinking and knowing. . . as events falling within natural processes' (1958, p. 120); he argues that previous philosophies have lacked a naturalistic conception of the origin and status of language (1958, p. 163). They have failed to appreciate that

> interaction, operative relationship, is as much a fact about events as are particularity and immediacy. Language and its consequences are characters taken on by natural interaction and natural conjunction in specified conditions of organization (Dewey, 1958, p. 185).

Indeed, for Dewey, communication is 'the very culmination of nature' (1958, p. 202). The self and subject, in turn, are also things that emerge out of complex interactions between constituents of nature – 'personal individuality,' he holds, 'has its basis and conditions in simpler events' (Dewey, 1958, p. 208).

In general, Dewey in *Experience and Nature* is critical of the idea that experience or cognition *belong* to human beings in any significant sense. This particularly comes across in Chapter 6 of *EN*, where he contrasts the modern notion of 'experience' with that of the ancient Greeks. In Dewey's view, the Greeks held there to be nothing 'merely personal or subjective' about experience: on their conception, 'experience was not some person's; it was nature's, localized in a body as that body happened to exist by nature' (1958, p. 231)[19]. By contrast, he decries as 'absurd' the assumption in the philosophical tradition since Descartes 'that experience by its very nature is owned by some one; and that the ownership is such in kind that everything about experience is affected by a private and exclusive quality' (ibid). Dewey equates the sense in which we might be said to own experience with property ownership – the latter in its metaphysical or ontological status evidently remaining something completely objective and public. 'Experience', he argues, 'when it happens, has the same dependence upon objective natural events, physical and social, as has the occurrence of a house' (1958, p. 232). Indeed, 'There is nothing in nature that *belongs* absolutely and exclusively to anything else' (1958, p. 234 – original emphasis). Dewey goes to extreme lengths to press this point, suggesting, even, that it would be more appropriate to use third- rather than first- person pronouns when describing mental occurrences: 'in first instance and intent,' he claims' 'it is not exact nor relevant to say "I experience"

[19] Cf also: '[For Greek thinkers] experience was considered to be a genuine expression of cosmic forces, not an exclusive attribute or possession of animal or of human nature' (Dewey, 1958, p. 354).

or “I think”. “It” experiences or is experienced, “it” thinks or is thought, is a juster phrase’ (1958, p. 232)[20]

Hence Dewey considers it imperative to discriminate between a form of taking-ownership that consists in adopting an attitude of moral responsibility towards ‘mental’ occurrences – the performance of what Dewey calls ‘an adoptive act’ (1958, p. 233) – and one that places the self or the mind over and against natural processes as a cause of what has occurred. ‘Natural events, including social habits,’ he holds, ‘originate thoughts and feelings’. Thus

> [t]o say in a significant way, “*I* think, believe, desire, instead of barely *it* is thought, believed, desired” is to accept and affirm a responsibility and to put forth a claim. It does not mean that the self is the source or author of the thought and affection nor its exclusive seat (1958, p. 233)

The self, for Dewey, then, can at best be a provisional, functional demarcation of a subset of natural events. It is not something distinct from natural events, something supernatural; and neither can an analysis of self exclusively in terms of ‘mental’ events ultimately prove satisfactory, since these latter always turn out to be causally dependent upon ‘physical’ ones (1958, pp. 234-5).

For Dewey, then, there is only nature – distinctions such as those between human beings and nature, subject and object, or between the physical and the mental, are entirely conventional and instrumental, rather than reflective of an absolute difference in the order of things: ‘[w]e have after all,’ he points out, ‘only parts of one and the same original history’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 275). In this respect, Dewey foreshadows Davidson’s anomalous monism, which Rorty co-opts as ‘non-reductive physicalism’ (see 4.3, below). The difference between what Dewey calls the ‘physical’, the ‘psycho-physical’ (marking an intermediate stage between inanimate matter and the full-fledged intentionality of linguistic organisms), and the ‘mental,’ is ‘one of levels of increasing complexity and intimacy of interaction among natural events’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 259) – ‘”matter”, or the physical, is a character of events when they occur at a certain level of interaction. It is not itself an event or existence . . .’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 262)[21]. The point of our use of such terms as these, according to Dewey, resides simply in the fact that it enables us to deal more successfully with our surrounding environment. Indeed,

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[20] Cf: ‘The qualities never were “in” the organism; they were always qualities of interactions in which both extra-organic things and organisms partake’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 259). This observation by Dewey recalls Georg Lichtenberg’s (1742-1799) famous objection to Descartes’ supposed proof of the existence of the self – expressed immortally by the latter in the dictum *cogito ergo sum*. Lichtenberg’s objection was to the effect that Descartes’s initial premise consisted merely in the fact of the bare occurrence of ‘thought’ (‘*cogitatio*’), which did not of itself entail anything further concerning the provenance of the ‘thought’ in question – its origin, for example, as Descartes supposed, in a distinct self or thinking subject.

[21] Cf: ‘[C]onsciousness is not a separate realm of being, but is the manifest quality of existence when nature is most free and most active’ (Dewey, 1958, p. 389).

> [t]he notion that the universe is split into two separate and disconnected realms of existence, one psychical and the other physical, and . . . that these two realms of being, in spite of their total disjunction, specifically and minutely correspond to each other . . . presents the acme of incredibility (Dewey, 1958, pp. 267-8).

As he goes on to say,

> every "mind" that we are empirically acquainted with is found in connection with some organized body. Every such body exists in a natural medium to which it sustains some adaptive connection . . .' (Dewey, 1958, p. 276)

Thus Dewey emphasizes not just the causal dependence of mental phenomena on activity in the brain and nervous system, but the causal dependence of the activities of the latter two complexes upon events in the wider body and the wider environment – what he calls 'the intimate, delicate and subtle interdependence of all organic structures and processes with one another' (1958, p. 295). 'To see the organism *in* nature,' he continues, 'the nervous system in the organism, the brain in the nervous system, the cortex in the brain, is the answer to the problems which haunt philosophy,' and 'when thus seen they will be seen to be *in*, not as marbles are in a box but as events are in history, in a moving, growing, never finished process' (ibid – original emphasis)[22].

In Dewey's eyes, it is the experimental approach to inquiry characteristic of modern science in particular that enables us to uncover hitherto unsuspected causal connections between what were once seen as separate physical and mental phenomena. In this respect, he employs the metaphor of mental phenomena as islands that were previously thought to exist in isolation but which are actually found to form part of a single body of land, 'projections of the very earth upon which we walk' (1958, p. 138). Modern science, by developing new experimental instruments, new means of producing effects, puts itself in a position systematically to unearth new relations of cause-and-effect that could not have been observed by the comparatively more passive, contemplative science of antiquity[23]. In so doing, it enables us to perceive human consciousness and cognition as arising out of the very same natural processes as account for the rest of the universe, rather than as something 'supernatural'. As Dewey puts it in *A Common Faith* (*CF*), : 'psychology is already opening up to us natural explanations

[22] Nevertheless Dewey is not asserting that everything is interrelated in the same manner and to the same extent: '…while there is no isolated occurrence in nature, yet interaction and connection are not wholesale and homogenous. Interacting events have tighter and looser ties, which qualify them with certain beginnings and endings, and which mark them off from other fields of interaction' (Dewey, 1958, pp. 271-2).

[23] 'To re-establish a connection of histories within a longer course of events and a more inclusive state of affairs, requires delving, probing, and extension by artifice beyond the apparent' (Dewey, 1958, p. 138).

of phenomena so extraordinary that once [i.e. at one time] their supernatural origin was, so to say, the natural explanation' (1962, p. 31)[24]. Likewise, for Dewey in *The Quest for Certainty* (*QC*):

> the idea which connects thinking and knowing with some principle or force that is wholly from connection with physical things will not stand examination, especially since the whole-hearted adoption of experimental method in the natural sciences (Dewey, 1929, p. 9)

Moreover, in uncovering hitherto unknown relations of cause and effect, science provides us with ways of exerting a greater degree of control over human emotional and cognitive life than was previously possible. Psychology and the neurosciences, if used in the right way, are tools that can be used to create a better future and a more fulfilling state of human existence. 'Every discovery of concrete dependence of life and mind upon physical events', Dewey argues, 'is an addition to our resources' (1958, p. 263). In his view, it is much better to recognise the natural – physical, environmental – conditions on which our mental life depends, in order to be able to change it and them, than to remain ignorant of these hidden factors and suppose that we are acting freely:

> Just where connections and interdependencies are most numerous, intimate and pervasive, in living, psycho-physical activity, we most ignore unity and connection. . . which signifies that in action we commit ourselves to the unconscious and subconscious, to blind instinct and impulse and routine, disguised and rationalized by all sorts of honorific titles (Dewey, 1958, pp. 296-7).

Here Dewey's comments foreshadow and inform Rorty's late suggestion that

> [t]he need for a metaphysics was undermined by the ability of modern science to see the human mind as an exceptionally complex nervous system and thus to see itself in pragmatic rather than metaphysical terms. Science showed us how to see empirical inquiry as the use of this extra physiological equipment to gain a greater mastery over the environment, rather than as a way of replacing appearance with reality (Rorty, 2007a, p. 104).

Hence in the foregoing discussion it has emerged that Dewey's naturalism consists principally in the notion of the *continuity* with the wider natural order of what was previously assumed to be a distinct domain of human psychic phenomena. Moreover, this continuity is explicated in terms of the idea of causality: namely, as the causal interdependence of mind, brain, body, and environment. What is more, it is a continuity that is in the process of being uncovered by the experimental method of modern natural science. As such, Dewey takes

[24] Cf: ''When there is no insight into the cause of unusual events, belief in the supernatural is itself "natural"' (Dewey, 1962, p. 70).

experience, thought, and language, to be manifestations of nature in a radical sense that threatens to deprive human beings of 'ownership' of such phenomena. In the next section, it will be seen that this conception of naturalism bears many resemblances to Rorty's own account.

2.3. Rorty's account(s) of 'naturalism'

As Eleonora Cresto has noted, 'Rorty's position on naturalism is rich and complex, and not easy to pin down' (Cresto, 2014, p. 27) The fact that Rorty defined and discussed 'naturalism' in several different ways during his career complicates the task of attributing to him a single position going by that name. Not only did Rorty *use* the term 'naturalism' differently as his thought developed, but his opinion also changed concerning the term's propriety in a philosophical context. Nonetheless, I hope to show that there is a common conceptual core running through all of Rorty's discussions of the topic.

Rorty was for the most part happy to use the term 'naturalism' to characterise his own philosophical position. The concept first emerges as an object of explicit concern in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979, henceforth *PMN*), where Rorty endorses naturalism 'negatively', so to speak, through his contention that "anti-naturalism" loses its appeal once naturalism is dissociated from reductionism (1979, p. 387). He goes on to suggest that

> [e]very speech, thought, theory, poem, composition, and philosophy will turn out to be completely predictable in purely *naturalistic* terms. Some atoms-and-the-void account of micro-processes within individual human beings will permit the prediction of every sound or inscription which will ever be uttered. There are no ghosts (ibid – emphasis added).

At this point in the development of his thought, it appears Rorty equates naturalism with the kind of homogeneous microstructural explanation characteristic of physics, as well as with some form of determinism. Whilst he is opposed to 'anti-naturalisms' – and therefore presumably a naturalist to some extent '*by default*' – the precise extent to which he would press possible claims to naturalism remains unclear. Naturalism, Rorty seems to be saying, is only dangerous if interpreted in a reductive manner; but if the latter temptation can be avoided and equal value accorded to scientific and non-scientific descriptive vocabularies, then 'super-natural' alternatives to science are superfluous, and naturalism is something desirable or advantageous. In his discussions of the topic in *PMN*, Rorty appears to accept the conventional, 'analytic', notion of naturalism according to which it constitutes a form of recommendation of the natural sciences.

By the time of the publication of the anthologies *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (1991d) (*ORT*) and *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (1991a) (*EHO*), however, Rorty's understanding of naturalism has

shifted; the concept has acquired enough prominence in his thought for him to venture two separate definitions. In *ORT*, Rorty writes:

> To be a naturalist. . . is to be the kind of antiessentialist who, like Dewey, sees no breaks in the hierarchy of increasingly complex adjustments to novel stimulation – the hierarchy which has amoebae adjusting themselves to changed water temperature at the bottom, bees dancing and chess players check-mating in the middle, and people fomenting scientific, artistic, and political revolutions at the top (1991d, p. 109).

It is now part of Rorty's conception of naturalism that the idea involves an affirmation of *continuity* between simple and complex life-forms, up to and including human cognition and social practices. Rorty acknowledges the influence of Dewey on his thought in this regard. Furthermore, he equates such a doctrine of continuity with 'antiessentialism,' or the view that nothing possesses an intrinsic nature. The latter view can be thought to entail anti-representationalism on the basis that representationalism – or the idea of knowledge as accurate representations of 'things-as-they-are-in-themselves' – requires that reality itself possess an intrinsic nature. Nevertheless the connection between the continuity of biological species and anti-essentialism, or anti-representationalism, is not set out in detail at this point. At most, the connection might be thought to stem from an analogy between biology – specifically, its 'blurring' of the Aristotelian notion of *species* – and reality or the universe more widely.

In 'Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language,' Rorty defines 'naturalism' thus:

> I shall define 'naturalism' as the view that *anything* might have been otherwise, that there can be no conditionless conditions. Naturalists believe that all explanation is causal explanation of the actual, and that there is no such thing as a non-causal condition of possibility (1991a, p. 55 – original emphasis)

Whilst Rorty does not explicitly endorse naturalism here, the context of the wider essay nevertheless suggests that the view is indeed his own. Rorty's definition in 'Wittgenstein. . .' links naturalism to historicism[25], to causality, and to the acceptance of a radical form of contingency. In the first instance, naturalism thus defined consists in a rejection of the supernatural, where the latter is understood as the possibility of 'conditionless conditions': Rorty regards the supernatural as that which serves as the condition for another occurrence, whilst at the same time lacking conditions itself – appearing magically, or *ex nihilo* so to speak, and going on to influence the course of events. Along with its anti-supernaturalism, the naturalism of this passage also contains a rejection of 'non-causal', *transcendental* explanations or arguments purporting to demonstrate the *necessity* or *impossibility* of

[25] 'Historicism is a special case of naturalism, so defined' (Rorty, 1991a, p. 55N8).

a given state-of-affairs or event. Such explanations or arguments end up placing *a priori* limits on the realm of the possible. Rorty, on the other hand, considers there to be nothing necessary or inevitable about the world in which we live: '*anything*,' he emphasises, 'might have been otherwise'[26].

This ties in with Rorty's noting, at a similar time, the 'intuitive appeal' of 'the naturalistic thesis. . . that there is nothing more to be known about the relation between beliefs and the rest of reality than what we learn from an empirical study of causal transactions between organisms and their environment' (1991d, p. 135). In *CIS*, he writes that the 'Wittgensteinian attitude. . . naturalizes mind and language by making all questions about the relation of either to the rest of the universe *causal* questions, as opposed to questions about the adequacy of representation or expression' (Rorty, 1989, p. 15 – original emphasis).

> It makes perfectly good sense to ask how we got from the relative mindlessness of the monkey to the full-fledged mindedness of the human, or from speaking Neanderthal to speaking postmodern, if these are construed as straightforward causal questions (ibid).

These latter evocations of naturalism clearly foreshadow Rorty's mature view, in that naturalism is held to consist in an exclusive theoretical focus on causal relations, and an unwillingness to countenance other kinds of explanation.

Nevertheless, the definition of 'naturalism' that Rorty offers us in 'Wittgenstein. . .' is moderately problematic, I suggest, because it runs together two distinct, albeit related, ideas. Roughly speaking, Rorty offers us naturalism as anti-supernaturalism, and naturalism as anti-transcendentalism. The stipulation that all causes themselves have a cause is designed to exclude the supernatural – it ensures that, in principle, we can always give an account of the history, the causal antecedents, of a given occurrence. But Rorty fails to explain why this anti-supernaturalism compels one to reject transcendental explanations. The fact that there are 'no conditionless conditions', that every cause itself has some other cause, does not, it would seem, entail that 'anything might have been otherwise' and that 'there is no such thing as a non-causal condition of possibility,' the latter being the ideas that constitute Rorty's anti-transcendentalism. Rorty might object that the fact that there are 'no conditionless conditions' renders transcendental explanation superfluous – all phenomena can be explained in terms of actual relations of cause and effect, so there is no role left for transcendental

[26] Rorty's critique of transcendental arguments goes right back to some of his earliest published papers – see in particular 'Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments' (1971; reprinted in Rorty, 2014b).

arguments to play. But of course this is not the same as Rorty's anti-supernaturalism positively excluding the possibility of transcendental philosophy[27].

Thus it is telling that Rorty goes on to define 'naturalism' less ambiguously five years later in the essay 'Charles Taylor on Truth' (1994, reprinted as 1998a). In what is an important passage in the context of this thesis – one I shall consider in more detail in Chapter 4 – Rorty says the following:

> I see myself as a whole-hearted naturalist, but one who is as anti-reductionist as Taylor himself. I define naturalism as the claim that (a) *there is no occupant of space-time that is not linked in a single web of causal relations to all other occupants* and (b) that any explanation of the behaviour of any such spatiotemporal object must consist in placing that object within that single web (1998a, p. 94 – emphasis added)

Here Rorty echoes the passage from *PMN* insofar as he emphasizes the importance of avoiding reductionism in the context of naturalism – of not letting science dictate which entities can and cannot be said to exist. However, in 'Charles Taylor' he also offers a definition of 'naturalism' in causal terms, as the idea of a 'single causal web' encompassing all entities and events. This idea of a 'single causal web' is central to the interpretation of Rortyan naturalism offered in this thesis, and is thus worthwhile elaborating. All phenomena, Rorty suggests, have exclusively *natural* causal origins, and as such are to count as wholly natural. The sum total of phenomena in the universe can thus be said to constitute a single natural 'web', connected to one another by the relations of cause and effect in which they stand. Clause (a) of Rorty's definition holds that *everything is natural*, and that this is so in virtue of the causal relations that obtain between entities. Where this constitutes the 'ontological' or 'metaphysical' dimension of Rorty's naturalism in 'Charles Taylor. . .,' the epistemological or methodological dimension of the same naturalism, expressed by clause (b), consists in the fact that valid explanations of phenomena must appeal exclusively to the causal relations in question. Rorty therefore maintains the association established in 'Wittgenstein. . .' between naturalism and the repudiation of the 'transcendental' explanations or arguments characteristic of certain branches of philosophy but not of natural science.

For another decade Rorty continues to identify his position as, amongst many other things, a form of naturalism. In 'Response to Simon Critchley' (1996c), for example, he uses the phrase 'we naturalists' and once again echoes the account of 'Wittgenstein,' according to which naturalism mandates causal, as opposed to transcendental, explanation:

[27] Were it to do so, it would itself constitute a form of transcendental argument. Indeed, Rorty takes a transcendental approach insofar as he frames part of his original definition – specifically, the stipulation that 'there can be no conditionless conditions' (1991a, p. 55) – in modal terms.

> We naturalists insist that no transcendental conditions of possibility need be found for language, nor, *a fortiori*, for any other human activity. Banal causal conditions of actuality are enough (Rorty, 1996c, p. 46).

Earlier on in the same essay, Rorty describes the Enlightenment as having 'cleared the way' for 'naturalism. . . in the sense of an account of human beings which makes the only big difference between them and giraffes the ability to use language' (1996c, p. 45). Here Rorty adopts, for the first time, a more Darwinian, biologistic, notion of 'naturalism', in the manner of Dewey. This Deweyan naturalism emphasizes what he takes to be the absence of a significant metaphysical or spiritual difference between human beings and other animals. The supposed absence of what Rorty sometimes called a *human 'special ingredient'* implies that, according to the notion in question, human beings are to be regarded purely as manifestations of nature, the product of a *continuous* sequence of developments leading back through various stages of animal life to the inanimate world[28].

In 'McDowell, Davidson, and Spontaneity' (1998c), Rorty uses John McDowell's term 'bald naturalism' – for McDowell (1994), the designator of a pernicious trend in modern thought – to describe his own outlook, unabashedly acknowledging that he was 'led to a baldly naturalistic view' (p. 389) by the influence of Sellars and Davidson. Indeed, Rorty suggests that pursuing Davidson's 'anomalous monism' to its proper conclusion leads to 'the following baldly naturalistic view: reality does not have an intrinsic character, but can be described in any way. . . that language-users find useful' (p. 390).

Hence Rorty regards anti-representationalism as a corollary of 'bald naturalism'. His characterisation of 'bald naturalism' in the quoted passage is deliberately provocative, deviating as it does substantially from McDowell's use of the expression[29]. Furthermore, Rorty does not attempt to justify his radical inferential leap between the two construals of the term. Nevertheless, I suggest, the passage is telling insofar as: it implies a connection between naturalism and anti-representationalism; and it implicates Davidson – specifically, his anomalous monism – in the logical route between the two positions[30].

At the time of writing 'McDowell. . .,' Rorty clearly still considers his own position to be a form of naturalism. Besides the re-appropriation of McDowell's phrase, 'bald naturalism,' Rorty's labelling Brandom a 'fellow-naturalist' in his 'Response to Brandom' constitutes further evidence for this assertion (2000b, p. 189)[31]. Moreover, Rorty highlights the importance of naturalism to the classical

[28] I discuss the relationship between Rorty's naturalism and Darwinian evolutionary theory in more detail in Chapter 5, below.
[29] See McDowell, 1994, pp 72-3.
[30] I consider Davidson's influence on Rorty's naturalism and anti-representationalism in Chapter 4, below. For the significance of 'anomalous monism' for Rorty's naturalism, see especially 4.3.
[31] C.f. also (Rorty, 2007a, p. 158), in which Rorty suggests Brandom is an exemplary naturalist, despite Brandom's reservations about the term ('naturalist').

pragmatists, and to the pragmatist movement as a whole, in various papers of the 1980s and 1990s (1999c, p. xx; 1998d; 1991d, p. 66).

However, by the time of his 'Comments and Responses' to *Richard Rorty: His Philosophy Under Discussion* (2005a), Rorty has seemingly somewhat changed tack. He writes:

> I now think that 'naturalistic' is too overworked and confusing a term to be serviceable. So instead of taking sides between strong and weak naturalism, I would prefer to just drop the topic (2005a, p. 139).

Despite this apparent repudiation of the term 'naturalism' late on in his career, there are nevertheless signs, in other publications, that Rorty still considers himself to be a philosophical naturalist. In one of his last papers, 'Naturalism and Quietism,' Rorty draws attention to Huw Price's distinction between 'subject-' and 'object-' naturalism, stating that he finds it 'useful' (2007a, p. 159) and 'very helpful' (p. 151). In the same paper, 'Naturalism and Quietism,' Rorty also approves of Bjørn Ramberg's 'pragmatic naturalism,' which he feels marks out similar ground to Price's 'subject naturalism'. Such positions as Price's and Ramberg's, observes Rorty, emphasise the natural status of human beings, but, unlike conventional naturalisms, refuse any form of ontological primacy to the natural sciences (2007a, p. 151). Again, Rorty suggests a role for such views in motivating anti-representationalism (2007a, pp. 156-7). In addition, Rorty offers his own concise construal of Price's 'subject naturalism', emphasising the theme of continuity. 'Subject naturalism,' says Rorty, rejects the supernatural as it occurs in the form of 'sudden discontinuities' in our accounts of the emergence of human linguistic and cognitive behaviour (2007a, p. 154). I will consider Price's 'subject naturalism' in more detail later on, in Chapter 5[32].

At the very end of his life, in 2007, writing in his 'Reply to Albrecht Wellmer,' Rorty once again appears happy to characterise his philosophical outlook as a version of naturalism – specifically, one that is '"affirmative"' and 'bifocal':

> My "affirmative", bifocal, naturalism amounts to little more than the claim that thinking of ourselves as animals – as having no extra immaterial ingredient and enjoying no privileged relation to the universe as a whole – is entirely compatible with rejoicing in our own imaginative cultural achievements (2010c, pp. 344-5).

As I shall explore in more depth in Chapter 6, Rorty's use of the term 'bifocal' here denotes simultaneously his anti-representationalism and his repudiation of reductionist or scientistic naturalisms that aspire to subjugate ordinary human modes of self-understanding to the vocabularies of the natural sciences; naturalism should not carry the implication that any one area of discourse

[32] See 5.7, below.

supplies the single correct means of conceiving of reality. Rather, what Sellars called the 'Manifest-' and 'Scientific-' 'Images' stand on an equal footing and should be viewed alongside one another.

The passages appealed to in this section give some indication of the way in which Rorty understood the notion of naturalism. Consideration of them indicates that, for the most part, he regarded 'naturalism' as an apt characterisation of his own philosophical position. In the next section I will demonstrate that a number of commentators have followed Rorty in casting his thought as a species of naturalism.

2.4. Rorty's naturalism in the secondary literature

The fact that *some form* of naturalism plays an important role in Rorty's thinking has been widely noted and discussed. However, there is little agreement concerning the precise character of this 'naturalism'. The lack of consensus would appear, at least partly, to reflect the term's notorious ambiguity in philosophical discourse. Furthermore the idea that there might be a connection between Rorty's naturalism and his anti-representationalism has received relatively little attention.

Of all those to have noted the significance of naturalism to Rorty's thought, Robert Brandom, his former student, has most explicitly propounded a link between this naturalism and anti-representationalism. In his 'Introduction' to the anthology *Rorty and his Critics*, Brandom argues that 'Rorty's pragmatism is, like its classical antecedents, itself a form of naturalism', and that the 'background' to Rorty's anti-representationalism is the idea that different language-games are tools 'employed by natural creatures in a natural world' (Brandom, 2000a, p. xiv). Moreover, for Brandom, Rorty's naturalism consists predominantly in the latter's advocacy of the idea that 'our relations to our environment. . . are purely causal' (ibid). He notes:

> In taking this line, Rorty insists that he is being more resolutely naturalistic than the fans of natural science among analytic philosophers. From his point of view… they have allowed normative notions of authority and responsibility, correctness and incorrectness, evidence and justification to intrude into what should be a purely naturalistic causal story about our causal transactions with our environment (Brandom, 2000a, p. xiv)

Shortly after making this claim, Brandom goes on to contend that

> like his mentors James and Dewey, Rorty is trying to rigorously think through the consequences of a naturalistic approach to human beings. And from his point of view, contemporary philosophers who pursue a naturalistic explanatory agenda suffer from a failure of nerve that prevents them from pushing it to its logical

> conclusion. . . [since] the picture of reality as authoritative for the correctness of our representations is incompatible with that naturalism (Brandom, ibid).

Thus the core of Rorty's naturalism, for Brandom, is the former's exhortation for philosophers to offer exclusively *causal* analyses of human cognitive and linguistic behaviour. What is more, this is not just a naturalism, but a 'thorough-going naturalism' (Brandom, 2000a, p. xv). According to Brandom, that is, Rorty is more naturalistic than are conventional, 'representationalist' philosophers adhering to methodologies or ontologies based on the natural sciences; he is more concerned than they are with 'taking natural science sufficiently seriously' (Brandom, ibid).

Crucially, in Brandom's eyes, naturalism is not just an innocuous 'background' to Rorty's thought, so to speak, but something positively *'incompatible*' with representationalism. He implies that Rorty's naturalism plays a central, foundational role with respect to the latter's critique of the philosophical tradition: it is precisely Rorty's naturalism that leads to the radical philosophical heterodoxy that is anti-representationalism.

Regrettably, Brandom has not expanded on these suggestive observations made in the form of passing remarks; he has not given substance to the idea that 'naturalism' – conceived of as the idea that 'our relations to our environment. . . are purely causal' – motivates Rorty's anti-representationalism.

Besides Brandom, another of Rorty's former students, Michael Williams, has drawn attention to the role of naturalism in his mentor's thought. Williams, writing in the 'Introduction' to the 2009 Edition of *PMN*, notes that 'Rorty's pragmatism incorporates a kind of naturalism' (Williams, 2009, p. xv). This latter conception, he goes on to say, resembles Huw Price's 'subject naturalism' (Williams, ibid).

Carl Sachs, in his paper 'Natural Agents: A Transcendental Argument for Pragmatic Naturalism' (2009)[33], offers what is arguably the most thorough account of Rorty's naturalism, splitting this aspect of his thought into two distinct chronological phases. Initially, says Sachs, came the 'non-reductive physicalism' that Rorty, in his post-*PMN* writings of the 1980s, derived from the work of Davidson, specifically the latter's 'anomalous monism' (2009, p. 15). He proceeds to analyse this 'non-reductive physicalism' as the conjunction of two theses: namely, i) the *continuity* of human beings with animals and the rest of nature, and ii) the *irreducibility*, with respect to one another, of different descriptive vocabularies. However Sachs argues that Rorty ultimately abandoned non-reductive physicalism in favour of what he terms 'pragmatic naturalism'. The catalyst for this switch, he contends, is Rorty's renowned exchange with Bjørn Ramberg concerning Davidson in *Rorty and his Critics*[34]. 'Pragmatic naturalism', Sachs suggests, is Rorty's final, considered view: compared to non-reductive physicalism, it is less 'physicalist', emphasising the 'basically Wittgensteinian point that there is a plurality of

[33] Sachs, 2013 also stresses the importance of naturalism for Rorty's thought, tracing Sellars's naturalistic influence on Rorty (see esp. p682).
[34] Brandom, 2000b, pp. 351-377. See 5.5.1, below.

discursive practices within the life of a certain kind of animal' (Sachs, 2009, p. 16). In this respect Sachs, like Williams, can be said to attribute to Rorty something like Price's 'subject naturalism'. In 'Rorty's Debt to Sellarsian Metaphysics' (2013), meanwhile, Sachs, like Brandom, explicates Rorty's naturalism in terms of the notion of causation. 'As a naturalist,' he suggests, 'Rorty regards causation as extending universally – there are no noncausal relations between items in the natural order, and the natural order is all there is' (Sachs, 2013, p. 693). On Rorty's view, contends Sachs, 'there is no epistemic relation between us and the world; that relation is brutally and merely causal' (ibid).

Another influential figure to have drawn attention to Rorty's naturalism is Ramberg himself. Whilst his exposition of the topic is less transparent than Sachs', it is evident that Ramberg regards Rorty's naturalism as differing from conventional notions. Indeed Rorty's thought, he claims, actually changes that in which philosophical naturalism can be said to consist. In his paper 'Naturalizing Idealizations,' Ramberg writes:

> Rorty's thought represents a dialectical transformation of naturalism. As he brings naturalism to bear fully on the project of philosophical reflection itself, Rorty finds himself fundamentally changing the requirements we impose upon our thinking whenever we seek to assume a naturalistic philosophical stance toward some subject matter… Rorty's naturalistic critique of philosophy alters the nature of naturalism itself (Ramberg, 2004, p. 2).

Ramberg, like Sachs, appears to be emphasizing the fact that Rorty's naturalism need not be, and ought not to be, conceived in the 'reductive' manner typical of mainstream analytic philosophy, wherein naturalism entails something akin to the view that only the fundamental entities of physics '*really*' exist (or that the natural sciences monopolize knowledge). Instead, Ramberg sees Rorty as offering a '*non-reductive*' form of naturalism that refuses to valorize natural science ahead of other areas of cultures[35].

Similarly, Jürgen Habermas – besides noting the 'Hegelian' character of Rorty's naturalism, which is to say its focus upon the historical continuity of the emergence of human thought and culture – has described Rorty's naturalism as a 'soft naturalism', meaning by this to contrast it with forms of naturalism that, in his view, jeopardize our 'self-understanding. . . as autonomous, creative, and learning actors' by reducing human agency to the law-governed interactions of fundamental physical particles (Habermas, 2013, p. 13)[36].

[35] Tartaglia, in a similar vein, characterises Rorty's naturalism as 'non-ontological' (Tartaglia, 2010, pp. 617-8).
[36] The latter is what Habermas calls 'hard' naturalism: it crosses the 'boundary of a naturalist self-objectification of man, beyond which we can no longer grasp ourselves as the authors of our actions, discoveries, and inventions' (Habermas, ibid).

Lastly, Kalle Puolakka echoes Brandom in noting the importance of the idea of the theoretical sufficiency of causal relations to Rorty's naturalism. Like Brandom, he hints at the role that this aspect of Rorty's thought plays in motivating the latter's anti-representationalism. According to Puolakka, the 'basic tenet' of Rorty's naturalism consists in the fact that 'a human's relationship to his or her surroundings is constructed purely causally in the sense that it does not contain any kinds of mediating elements, such as mental representations.' (Puolakka, 2011, p. 2). Such a 'naturalistic outlook,' Puolakka notes, 'serves as a foundation for Rorty's critique of empiricist conceptions of knowledge' (ibid). Furthermore, 'central' to the 'naturalistic outlook shared by both Rorty and Dewey,' suggests Puolakka, 'is the emphasis that. . . different forms of life form a continuum without determinate breaks (Puolakka, 2014, p. 231).

Puolakka also characterises Rorty's naturalism as 'negative', insofar as he is reluctant to advance, or at least be seen to be advancing, any philosophical system or theory. He observes:

> One of the central features of Rorty's naturalism is that, in Rorty's hands, naturalism turns into a purely negative view, in the sense that it rejects certain traditional ways of thinking about the relationship between human beings and their surroundings without, however, offering a detailed positive view in their place (2011, p. 3)[37].

This observation of Puolakka's captures an important dimension of the way in which Rorty conceives of naturalism in terms of the explanatory sufficiency of causal relations: namely, his wish to avoid being seen to be presenting a rival framework to traditional representationalist notions. Instead, Rorty calls into question the utility of these notions, making the case both that they *can* and *should* be dispensed with. However this raises the question whether the representationalist 'package' of notions *can* be abandoned *without offering a detailed, 'positive' alternative.* Thus there has been extensive debate in the literature concerning the extent to which Rorty ought to be read as holding a 'positive', or 'metaphysical,' position. In Chapter 6, below, I depict Rorty's naturalism as offering the materials for a form of 'positive' view[38].

Three underlying themes emerge from this survey of the secondary literature on the concept of naturalism in Rorty's work. First, Rorty's naturalism is characterised by the *continuity* it espouses between human beings and nature[39]. Second, it is marked by the significance it attributes to the

[37] See also Puolakka, 2014, pp. 229-31.

[38] Although undoubtedly Rorty would have wanted his naturalism to be construed – in Puolakka's terms – 'negatively'.

[39] The theme of continuity between human beings and nature was a characteristic feature of the thought of John Dewey. At the same time, Dewey was also a celebrated critic of traditional philosophical dualisms and what he regarded as their pernicious effects upon society. Rorty inherits from Dewey the idea that human beings lack

concept of *causality*: specifically, by the scope of the explanatory power it grants the notion, and the explanatory sufficiency it attributes to causal relations in the context of the relationship between human beings and their environment. Third, many commentators note the 'anti-reductive' or 'non-reductive' character of Rorty's naturalism, tracing this element of Rorty's naturalism back to the influence of Donald Davidson. Unlike most conceptions of naturalism prevalent within analytic philosophy, Rorty's conception declines to accord any ontological privilege to the natural sciences.

We have therefore seen that according to Rorty's naturalism there is only one kind of causation – *natural* causation – in terms of which *everything*, including human thought and action in its entirety, can be explained. Natural causes, that is, form the 'single causal web' in terms of which Rorty expressly characterises his naturalism in 'Charles Taylor on Truth'. The fact that such naturalism explicitly invokes only the concept of causation, and not that of natural science, ensures that Rorty's naturalism is non-reductive: natural-scientific descriptions of the causal forces in question possess no primacy beyond their utility for certain tasks.

Moreover, and as I seek to elaborate in the following Chapters, Rorty's naturalism supports his anti-representationalism by dissolving the cluster of philosophical dualisms that accrue to the distinction between human beings and nature. The dualism between human beings and nature has served as the basis for various distinctions between, on the one hand, representations (representing entities), the product of free human thought, and, on the other hand, the 'objects' of such representations. As we embrace Rorty's naturalism, I suggest, we lose our grip upon absolute, universal, notions of accurate and inaccurate representation, since these are founded upon an absolute dualism between humankind and nature; we cease to be able to distinguish 'representation' (representor) from 'represented', other than temporarily and locally, in the service of contingent interests and values.

I shall go on to examine this dialectical path between Rorty's naturalism and his anti-representationalism in more detail. In particular, in Chapter 4, I shall do so by considering Rorty's engagement with the work of Donald Davidson. However, I am also concerned to show that the argument from naturalism is the principle argument of a certain kind – namely, one that does not appeal to predicted socio-cultural consequences – that Rorty offers in favour of his anti-representationalism. To this end, in the next Chapter, I argue that Rorty fails to offer a cogent argument of the required kind in what many still consider to be his magnum opus, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979).

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something quasi-divine, such as 'soul' or 'reason', which fundamentally distinguishes their species from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Chapter 3. Anti-representationalism in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

In this chapter I argue that Rorty does not mount a fully convincing case against representationalism in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (*PMN*). This stems from the implausibility of his account in that book of the origins of the representationalist tradition, which he locates in the Modern era and the Cartesian conception of mind. Instead, as a number of figures have pointed out, representationalism would appear to stem primarily from Greek philosophy, and I show that in his later writings Rorty increasingly came to accept this alternative account of representationalism's origins. *PMN*'s dubious identification of representationalism with Cartesianism leads Rorty to characterize Quine's and Sellars's anti-representationalist contribution as consisting in their having discredited the notion of a so-called '*privileged*' class of epistemic representations. However this achievement of Quine and Sellars, I suggest, only undermines epistemic *foundationalism*, not representationalism. I suggest that Rorty would have been better off casting Quine's and Sellars's ideas as undermining the very idea of ('absolute', or 'metaphysical' conceptions of) representational content. As a result, the main effective arguments against representationalism in Rorty's corpus turn out to derive from his naturalism and renewed engagement with the thought of Davidson and Darwin in the period after *PMN*[40], as elaborated in the next two Chapters (4 & 5).

In 3.1, I review Rorty's account of Descartes's 'invention' of the concept of mind in *PMN*. I argue that Cartesianism is a complication and 'exacerbation', so to speak, of the representationalist paradigm, rather than its source. In 3.2 I then address the pivotal fourth chapter of *PMN*, where Rorty draws on the thought of Quine and Sellars in order to attack representationalism. I refute this characterisation of the chapter's significance, and offer an alternative construal that points ahead to the anti-representationalist role played by naturalism in Rorty's thought.

3.1. The archaeology of representationalism

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979) is the work in which Rorty first offered a sustained critique of the Western philosophical tradition and its central notion of knowledge as accurate representation. There, he argues that the pernicious root of representationalism is the Cartesian concept of mind, characterised by the *infallibility* it ascribes to mental self-knowledge. Due to this infallibility, Rorty

[40] As I show in Chapter 4, below (see in particular 4.3.2), Rorty's championing of the work of Davidson did not by any means commence after *PMN* – Davidson receives attention in Chapter 6 of that book, on 'Language as a Mirror of Nature,' as well as in the influential earlier essay 'The World Well Lost' (1972, reprinted as 1982c). But I think it can be argued that it did increase in frequency and intensity after that point, never subsequently diminishing.

suggests, Cartesian 'mind' is able to serve as the original[41], titular, 'mirror of nature' – to contain, that is, representations of the world 'as it really is in itself'. As Rorty puts it in the book's 'Introduction':

> The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations – some accurate, some not. . . Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself (1979, p. 12).

Rorty continues to hold that the concept 'mind' is responsible for representationalism throughout *PMN* – such as when he claims that the idea of knowledge as 'an assemblage of accurate representations' is 'a product of the seventeenth century' (1979, p. 136). In a further indication of the close bond Rorty envisages between 'mind' and representationalism, the book's three exemplary anti-representationalists, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey, are all held to 'set aside' both i) the 'notion of "the mind" common to Descartes, Locke, and Kant. . . as a special subject of study, located in inner space, containing elements of processes which make knowledge possible,' and ii) 'the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes' (1979, p. 6)[42]. All three figures, according to Rorty, attack the Cartesian concept of mind and representationalism; and representationalism is itself underpinned by the functioning of mind.

The principal way in which Rorty challenges representationalism in *PMN* is by emphasizing the fact that the Cartesian 'mind' and the traditional problems of philosophy it occasions are, as he sees it, both *optional*. 'The moral of Part II [Chapters 3-6 of *PMN*] as a whole', he writes, 'is that the notion of knowledge as the assemblage of accurate representations is optional – that it may be replaced by a pragmatist conception of knowledge' (1979, p. 10). Rorty regards representationalism and Cartesianism as contingent, rather than permanent, inescapable, features of thought. Once we recognize this, he thinks – achieving 'historical. . . awareness of the source of all this mirror-imagery' (Rorty, 1979, p. 12) – we shall recognize that they may be discarded or replaced.

3.1.1. Rorty's genealogy of 'mind' in PMN

In *PMN*, Rorty contends that Descartes 'invented' the concept of mind with which we are now familiar by grouping together a wide range of phenomena – *inter alia* experiences, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings – and treating them as diverse instances of a single metaphysical type, viz., '*thought*' (*pensée*, *cogitatio*). The resulting conception differs from earlier notions such as *intellectus* and *nous*, he says,

[41] 'Original' because, for Rorty, the problem is precisely that representationalism has outlived Cartesian dualism *stricto sensu* (see, esp., Chapters V and VI of *PMN*).

[42] According to Rorty, the notion that philosophy studies the epistemological workings of the mind, which 'mirrors' the way things are 'in themselves,' is used by philosophy to justify its presumption to judge the warrant of the knowledge-claims of other areas of culture. Philosophy, Rorty claims, has always sought 'some permanent neutral framework for all possible inquiry', and 'the mind as Mirror of Nature [is] the Cartesian tradition's response to the need for such a framework' (ibid, pp. 211-12).

because it introduces, at least implicitly, an 'inner-outer' distinction absent from its predecessors. On Rorty's reading, Descartes treats 'thought' as the "inner" representation of an "outer" world, and in doing so gives rise to representationalism. Descartes modified the Greek idea of a quasi-sensory faculty similar to vision – an 'Eye of the Mind' – responsible for human knowledge of universals, and transmuted it into the notion of an *observer* occupying a unique vantage point over 'inner' phenomena. According to Rorty's account:

> Descartes provided Locke with the image of the mind as an inner theatre – a room equipped with a screen on which immaterial representations are displayed. An immaterial viewer of this screen [would] then decide what the extra-mental world is like on the basis of the clarity or the coherence of those representations (Rorty, 2007a, p. 178).

Descartes' pictorial-representational model of knowledge, Rorty suggests, differed from its Aristotelian, 'hylomorphic,' predecessor – a model according to which intellect (*nous*) functioned as a quasi-material (*hyle*) tablet receiving imprints of objects' general forms (*morphe*) – because the former model restricted the knowing subject's immediate sphere of epistemic acquaintance to *representations* of objects and properties, rather than those things themselves[43]. As such, he argues, Descartes made epistemological scepticism pressing in a way that it had not previously been. 'We should distinguish', he insists,

> traditional Pyrrhonian skepticism about our ability to attain certainty from the new veil-of-ideas skepticism which Descartes made possible by carving out inner space. Traditional skepticism had been troubled principally by the 'problem of the criterion' – the problem of validating procedures of inquiry while avoiding either circularity or dogmatism. This problem… had little to do with the problem of getting from inner space to outer space – the 'problem of the external world' which became paradigmatic for modern philosophy (1979, p. 140).

Within Descartes' new framework, thinks Rorty, the human subject could be wrong not just about particulars, on occasion, but also comprehensively, including about reality's most basic features. The spectre of this comprehensive form of scepticism, he argues, led to the age of 'philosophy as epistemology', during which the discipline's principal objective became to refute scepticism by providing 'foundations' for knowledge. 'The Cartesian mind' thus 'simultaneously made possible veil-of-ideas skepticism and a discipline devoted to circumventing such skepticism' (1979, p. 140).

According to Rorty's account in *PMN,* Descartes grouped together under the rubric *cogitatio* what had previously been discrete phenomena because of the *incorrigibility* of self-reports concerning them –

[43] In the hylomorphic model, these were deemed, in some sense, to enter directly into the intellect.

the fact that, in practice, said reports were not normally challenged or refuted[44]. On Rorty's account, Descartes' yearning for certainty[45] led him to construe this discursive incorrigibility as *infallible knowledge* of a *metaphysically distinct* ('*mental*') realm of objects, creating in the process his celebrated dichotomy of mental and physical. In constructing the novel ontological category *mind*, suggests Rorty, Descartes built on the pre-existing notion of a unique human property, or 'glassy essence'[46], that already combined the Greek idea of a quasi-sensory faculty of reason (*nous*) with the Christian notion of the immortal soul. Descartes' doctrine of the infallibility of the mental – encapsulated in the dictum *cogito ergo sum* – Rorty proposes, arose from Descartes's literalizing the metaphor of the 'eye of the mind'. This metaphor implied that the mind knew itself more reliably than anything else, in virtue of being 'closer' to itself than to the 'external world' and thus able to 'see' itself more clearly[47]. On the other hand, the Cartesian model made it difficult to see how the epistemic subject could confidently affirm the existence of a world 'outside' the mind, given that it only ever directly observed a 'veil' of ideas or phenomenal experience. As a result, the emergence of the concept of 'mind' made epistemological scepticism the central problematic of philosophy.

3.1.2. Rorty's later revisions to the historical narrative of *PMN*

Rorty's later writings display an ambivalent attitude to *PMN's* historical narrative. At one point he suggests that portions of the book constitute 'amateur cultural history' (Rorty, 2000i, p. 214). Yet, on another occasion, he reflects: 'I still believe most of what I wrote in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. . . [b]ut that book is now out of date' (2010a, p. 13).

There are already, it must be emphasized, several parts of *PMN* itself that strain against, or add nuance to, the book's dominant narrative of representationalism as a product of Modernity, and in particular of the thought of Descartes. These are the concessions Rorty makes there to the view that representationalism is rooted in ancient Greek philosophy. Discussing Descartes' 'inner-outer'

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[44] 'My answer', he says 'to the question "Why do we tend to lump the intentional and the phenomenal together as 'the mental'?" is that Descartes used the notion of the 'incorrigibly known' to bridge the gap between them' (Rorty, 1979, p. 69). However, Rorty accuses Descartes of failing to give an explicit account of his rationale for grouping the various *pensées* together under that name (for 'permitting them to be packaged inside of one substance' (Rorty, 1979, p. 56)). Descartes, he alleges, 'allowed most of the work. . . to be done under the table, not by any explicit argument but simply by verbal manoeuvres which reshuffled the deck slightly' (ibid, pp. 57-8).

[45] Stephen Toulmin discusses the attraction of certainty for Descartes' generation in the context of the doctrinal contention that precipitated the Thirty Years War in *Cosmopolis* (Toulmin, 1990) – cf also *PMN*, p139.

[46] Rorty takes this expression from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (2.2.120) where the phrase "man's glassy essence" carries deliberately ambiguous connotations of fragility, translucency, and perhaps also of reflectivity – in particular, the possibility that human beings might mirror something of the nature of God. However Shakespeare's use of the term does not appear to accord humankind the capacity to mirror nature or the world. This latter notion, Rorty thinks, emerged only in the thought of Descartes. Rorty's invocation of the Shakespearean phrase is intended to demonstrate merely that the *raw materials* required to develop the idea of the human intellect mirroring nature were present in the popular (and hence philosophical) consciousness at the dawn of the seventeenth-century – albeit the idea itself was not.

[47] '. . . nothing, as Descartes said, being closer to the mind than itself' (Rorty, 1979, p. 143).

dichotomy, for example, he notes that Plato had already 'toyed' with '"inner space" metaphors,' 'at times approximat[ing] Descartes's imagery of the Eye of the mind inspecting various. . . inner pictures' (Rorty, 1979, p. 158). More generally, Rorty is prepared to concede the Greek provenance of perceptual, 'ocular,' metaphors of knowledge. The current 'historical epoch, he notes,' is one 'dominated by Greek ocular metaphors' (ibid, p. 11), with the same 'perceptual' imagery 'underl[ying] both Platonic and modern discussions' (ibid, p. 159).

But ultimately, in *PMN*, representationalism remains a product of Cartesianism. Although the Greeks undoubtedly already had concepts of appearance and reality, Rorty claims, Descartes's 'inner-outer' distinction superseded the Greek dualism and led to the idea of the 'mirror of nature':

> After Descartes. . . the appearance-reality distinction began to slip out of focus, and was replaced by the inner-outer distinction. The question "How can I escape from the realm of appearance?" was replaced by the question "How can I escape from behind the veil of ideas?" (1979, p. 160)

Whilst it is true that 'epistemology-centered philosophy as an episode in the history of European culture. . . goes back to the Greeks,' and, as such, 'cannot simply be identified with "modern philosophy",' he argues, nevertheless the 'standard textbook sequence of philosophers leading from Descartes to Russell and Husserl' is the period in which 'the search for foundations of knowledge is most explicit'. Thus most of Rorty's 'attempts to deconstruct the image of the Mirror of Nature have concerned these philosophers [the canonical figures from Descartes on]' (1979, p. 390)[48].

Hence insofar as one understands the idea of the 'Mirror of Nature' as being equivalent to that of representationalism, Rorty in *PMN* recognizes Greek contributions to the formation of the latter paradigm, but considers the paradigm not to have assumed its complete, highly pernicious, form until the Modern era, as a result of the influence of Descartes[49]. Crucially, no doubt due to the association with Descartes, *PMN* associates the notion of philosophy and science mirroring nature with that of 'the search for foundations of knowledge'.

In his publications after *PMN*, however, Rorty increasingly attributes the bulk of responsibility for the formation of the representationalist paradigm to the Greeks. In his 'Intellectual Autobiography', in which he retrospectively surveys his philosophical career, Rorty recounts studying the later

[48] C.f. also the 'Introduction' to *PMN*, where Rorty refers to '. . . the beginnings of the Cartesian imagery in the Greeks and the metamorphoses of this imagery during the last three centuries' (p. 12).

[49] Critics have picked up on what is arguably this lack of clarity in Rorty's historical narrative in PMN. For example, Susan Haack: '[T]here are significant difficulties in determining just what Rorty's historical story is. Is the enterprise he repudiates supposed to have begun with Descartes? with Locke? with Kant? Does he gloss over the relevance to Descartes' project of the then recently-rediscovered writings of the ancient skeptics because to acknowledge its importance might lead us to perceive the disputed conception as much older, much less "recent" than he would have us suppose' (Haack, 1995, p. 129)? C.f. also Williams, 1990, p. 27.

Heidegger's writings more closely after *PMN*, noting their convergence with Dewey's ideas in *The Quest for Certainty* (1929). This study, Rorty explains, had a significant impact on his understanding of the incipience of the Western philosphical consciousness. He writes:

> [T]he story Heidegger told was… sufficiently persuasive to transform my sense of the relation between ancient and modern philosophy. I now saw Cartesian and Kantian descriptions of the human situation as minor variants on the Platonic "otherworldliness" that Nietzsche and Dewey had both lamented' (2010a, p. 14)[50].

Thus, after *PMN*, Rorty is more and more inclined to view representationalism as something fundamentally *Greek* rather than as something Cartesian, a shift in narrative emphasis informing much of his work from the 1980s onwards. For the later Rorty, therefore, Parmenides and Plato, rather than Descartes, are the principal architects of the representationalist paradigm. 'Parmenidean presuppositions', he suggests, underlie representationalism, in the form of 'the Parmenidean need to feel that reality has constrained us, or is in the process of constraining us, to pick the One Right Representation of itself' (1982, p. 111). We should, he enjoins, avoid succumbing to the 'Parmenidean need to be constrained to truth, [to be] compelled by things to call them by their proper names' (1982, p. 132).

Influenced by Heidegger's and Dewey's histories of Western philosophy, Rorty increasingly ventures a historical 'master-narrative' of his own, according to which Cartesianism features essentially as a late embellishment of an originally Greek artefact. We should not, he suggests,

> have raised this bad question [viz., that of whether "our knowledge is about reality"] had Plato not encumbered us with the notion of "the really real," and had Descartes not made things worse by inventing "the mind" as something set over and against "reality" (2010g, p. 266).

Elsewhere Rorty describes the philosophical common sense of our own time as being 'simply the habit of using language inherited from the Greeks, and especially from Plato and Aristotle' (1999c, p. 51), the implication being that a recognisably representationalist problematic was already in place by the end of the fifth-century B.C. In particular, Rorty comes to see representationalism as deriving from a combination of three Greek ideas: i) the 'Parmenidean' notion of 'Reality'; ii) 'Plato's appearance-reality distinction' (Rorty, 2016b, p. 69); and, significantly for the theme of *naturalism* in Rorty's work, iii) the *nomos-physis* distinction.

[50] C.f. also 'Trotsky and the Wild Orchids' (Rorty, 1999c, pp. 3-22): there, Rorty treats *PMN* as a 'quasi-Heideggerian story about the tensions within Platonism' and suggests that in writing it he had successfully 'articulated [his] historicist anti-Platonism' (1999c, p. 12). The emphasis is now firmly on the Greeks, on Rorty as combatting a tradition rooted in Plato.

Parmenides, Rorty observes,

> jump-started the Western philosophical tradition by dreaming up the notion of Reality with a capital R. He took the trees, the stars, the human beings, and gods and rolled them all together into a well-rounded blob called "the One". He then stood back from this blob and proclaimed it the only thing worth knowing about, but forever unknowable by mortals (2007a, p. 105).

Plato, on the later Rorty's account, then interpreted Parmenides' amalgamated entity, 'Reality' (*to ontōs on*, 'the really real'), in quasi-visual terms. Knowledge (*epistēmē*) came to be a matter of the intellect's *seeing* Reality correctly[51], whilst 'mere belief' (*doxa*) was conceived analogously to visual illusion[52]. Knowledge, for Plato, was a matter of 'penetrating behind appearances to reality' – honing the intellect in order to circumvent the false, because transient, impressions of unchanging Reality conveyed by the physical senses (Rorty, 1999c, p. 72). Moreover Plato, unlike Parmenides, taught the attainability of knowledge of Reality, making such theoretical knowledge the goal of intellectual activity, and synonymous with philosophy and wisdom.

According to the later Rorty, an important contribution of Greek thought to the representationalist paradigm was its 'problematic of humanity's relation to the non-human (of *nomos* vs. *physis*)' (1991d, p. 152): the 'fateful distinction. . . between *nomos* and *phusis*,' which has 'haunted the West' (1982, p. 136). In Rorty's later thought, this *nomos-physis* distinction underpins both the original Platonic appearance-reality distinction and its later incarnation as the Cartesian dualism of 'inner' mind and 'outer' ('external') world. The Platonic aspiration to ascertain the unchanging reality 'behind' ephemeral appearances, he suggests, is a manifestation of human beings' desire to 'get in touch with something from which they ha[ve] somehow become estranged – something. . . not itself a human creation, but [which] stands over and against all such creations' (2007a, pp. 117-8). The Platonic appearance-reality distinction and the Cartesian-Lockean 'veil of ideas' are therefore both

> part of the history of affirmative answers to questions like: Is there something non-human out there with which we need to get in touch? Are we ever going to get in touch with it? Are we so constituted as to be unable to get in touch with it? (2000i, p. 215)

These two most paradigmatic embodiments of the representationalist tradition, in other words, share a common logical basis in the form of the felt need of human beings to establish some form of contact or acquaintance with 'nature,' or the non-human portion of the universe.

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[51] C.f. Plato's famous 'cave' allegory in book VII of *The Republic*.

[52] I use 'illusion' in a broad sense, to encompass both illusions and hallucinations, as they are standardly distinguished in cognitive science or the philosophy of perception.

In his 'Response to McDowell', Rorty even goes as far as to criticize McDowell, the classicist, for adopting his own position of *PMN* – namely, that the problems of modern philosophy began in earnest with Descartes in the seventeenth-century (Rorty, 2000f, p. 123)[53]. For the later Rorty, a partial 'culprit' of representationalism is 'Plato's idea that the varying *nomoi* are. . . a symptom of separation from the thing with which we ought to be in touch' (2000f, p. 123). Plato's 'fear of the plurality and contingency of *nomoi*' (ibid) – of conventions and linguistic practice – according to Rorty, led him to exalt Parmenidean 'Reality' as a source of human unity and potential immortality.

Significantly, for the later Rorty, Descartes's thought *itself* can *also* be understood in terms of the distinction between *nomos* and *phusis,* or the human and the non-human. Descartes, claims Rorty, offered a 'new way of maintaining the pathos of distance between the human and the non-human', which, as the New Science emerged, 'shoved aside the older [Greek] problematic of Appearance and Reality' (2000i, p. 216). Rorty considers Descartes to have tried 'to preserve an enclave of nonmechanism' amid the inexorable advance of mechanistic explanation. The father of *mind*, that is to say, wanted 'to keep the world safe for nonmechanism,' and the enclave he created 'became the preserve of a subject called "metaphysics"' (1991a, pp. 155-6).

For the later Rorty, the Greek *nomos-phusis* distinction underpins a different, non-Cartesian, kind of epistemological scepticism. This '*Kantian*' brand of epistemological scepticism articulates the *nomos-phusis* dualism by way of its contrast between the various different, 'merely human,' forms of language and the notion of a single way that the world is 'in itself'. Rorty differentiates 'the "professional" philosopher's skepticism created by what Reid called "the theory of ideas,"' which he identifies with the thought of Descartes, from 'the Kantian. . . worry about whether the words *we use* have any relation to the way the world actually is *in itself*' (1982, p. 179 – emphasis added). He criticises Stanley Cavell for conflating the two forms of scepticism, which, Rorty suggests, 'have all sorts of historical connections, but. . . are dialectically independent' (ibid). In other words, only three years after *PMN*, Rorty has separated the crucial representationalist notion of the 'way the world is in itself' from the thought of Descartes. Seeking to clarifying this new direction of his thought, he argues that

> [t]here is no logical connection between the "in the mind/outside the mind" contrast and the "for us" vs. "in itself" contrast. "For us" means, roughly, "inside our language-games, our conventions, our form of life, our standards of legitimations". "In the mind" is an uncashed and probably uncashable metaphor (1982, p. 183)

[53] Or, as Rorty puts it, for holding that 'the rot began to set in only in the seventeenth century' (ibid). McDowell is an admirer of Rorty, and in particular *PMN*: in the 'Preface' to *Mind and World*, he recalls his '. . . usual excited reaction to a reading – my third or fourth – of Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*' (McDowell, 1994, p. ix).

For Rorty, then, principally after *PMN*, Descartes's contribution to the Western philosophical tradition is to have *exacerbated*, *rather than instigated*, representationalism and epistemological scepticism. Descartes implied that 'our knowledge of the world passes through a representing medium which may or may not distort what the world is really like' (Rorty, 2000i, p. 216). His creation of *cogitatio* ('thought', 'ideas', 'mind') meant that the epistemological subject never directly encountered things themselves, only the afore-mentioned substance, interposing between us and reality in the form of a 'veil of ideas'.

Rorty's post-*PMN* account of the origins of representationalism thus differs in important ways from the one offered in *PMN*, without the two being completely disparate. The later Rorty places less emphasis on the philosophical significance of the Cartesian dichotomy between an 'inner' mental realm and an 'external' world, at least as far as representationalism itself, as opposed to scepticism, is concerned. In addition to the contributions of Parmenides and Plato, Rorty attributes an increasing significance, in the context of the genesis of representationalism, to the general Greek cultural contrast between *nomos* and *phusis*, which traces the contemporary distinction between the 'human' and the 'non-human'.

Prior to this shift in emphasis, I suggest, Rorty was liable to confuse a specifically *Cartesian* version of representationalism – in which *pictorial*, '*mirroring*', metaphors, played a significant role – with the more neutral idea of a single correct interpretation of reality. The latter, more general, notion was the version of representationalism that Rorty was to oppose for the rest of his career. In the next section, I shall argue that Rorty's failure in *PMN* sufficiently to distinguish between representationalism *per se* and its specifically Cartesian incarnation led him to misconstrue the anti-representationalist significance of two of his foremost influences: Quine and Sellars.

3.2. 'Privileged representations': representationalism vs. foundationalism

In *PMN*, Rorty presented the work of Quine and Sellars primarily in the context of epistemological scepticism and the attempt to answer this challenge to the possibility of knowledge by means of foundationalism. Rorty considered Chapter 4 of *PMN*, in which he engaged with the thought of Quine and Sellars, to be the most important of the whole book (Rorty, 1979, p. 10). The chapter portrayed the ideas of the two analytic philosophers as undermining representationalism by challenging the notion that the mind contained 'privileged representations' – ones which were 'automatically and intrinsically accurate' and which could therefore serve as 'foundations' for the rest of knowledge (1979, p. 170). Quine did this, argued Rorty, by undermining the orthodox notion of fixed, discrete linguistic 'meanings' intuitable by the epistemic subject. Traditionally, such meanings would have formed the basis for infallible knowledge of 'analytic' truths. Sellars, on the other hand, criticised the so-called 'Myth of the Given' – the idea that certain cognitive states could justify beliefs without

standing in need of further justification themselves, thereby serving as the indubitable foundations of entire structures of belief.

Rorty thought Quine and Sellars offered fundamentally the 'same argument' against what were different forms of 'privileged' representation (Rorty, 1979, p. 170). Their common argument was 'holistic,' stemming from their common treatment of justification and knowledge as matters of socio-linguistic practice[54], rather than as borne out of the 'confrontation' of beliefs or sentences with potentially corresponding sub-units of mind-independent or language-independent reality[55]. Moreover their respective insights, Rorty thought, complemented one another perfectly and needed to be combined in order to offer a comprehensive refutation of foundationalist epistemology and the dominant representationalist paradigm of knowledge.

In the next two sections, I consider Rorty's interpretations of Quine and Sellars in turn, demonstrating in more detail how the ideas of each are supposed to discredit a particular kind of 'privileged representation'. I focus on *Rorty's interpretations* of each thinker, placing to one side – as not relevant to the independent merit (or lack thereof) of the anti-representationalist argument supposedly obtained from their work – the question of exegetical fidelity[56].

3.2.1. Sellars and the 'given'

Rorty regarded Sellars's 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (1991) as a 'devastating critique' and 'pretty much the last word philosophers need utter about perception' (Rorty, 2000g, p. 90). There, Sellars challenged the 'Myth of the Given,' the idea that awareness of one's conscious experience could justify further knowledge claims. The root of Sellars' critique, Rorty argued, was the former's contention that '*all* awareness. . . is a linguistic affair' (Sellars, 1991, p. 160)[57, 58].

Sellars thought that '*propositional*' knowledge – the kind the content denoted by '*y*' in sentences of the form '*X* knows that *y*' – was the type of knowledge relevant to traditional philosophical issues. Moreover, it was this kind of knowledge that distinguished human beings from non-human animals. Sellars separated awareness involving such propositional knowledge – awareness *that* something was the case – from what he considered to be merely the pseudo-awareness consisting in an organism's differential response to sensory stimuli (something Rorty and Sellars thought was exhibited equally by new-born infants, single-celled organisms, and – for that matter – measuring devices). He also

[54] As is well known, Rorty at the time called the position 'epistemological behaviourism', but later came to regret this choice of name.
[55] In the case of justification, the knowing subject's relation to privileged representations, or in the case of knowledge, belief or assertion's relation to reality, the 'world itself'.
[56] Timm Triplett also takes this approach (Triplett, 1987). Quine himself disputed Rorty's interpretation of his work in various respects (Quine, 1990).
[57] Quoted in Rorty, 1979, p. 182.
[58] What Rorty elsewhere called 'thesis of the conceptualizability of experience': the thesis 'tells us that we must have some concepts in order to have any experience' (Rorty, 2014b, p. 242).

distinguished propositional knowledge from *sentience*, the latter being construed as 'knowledge of how things feel'. For Sellars, sentience was a matter of feeling or sensation in virtue of physiology – the *bare occurrence* of events (sensations, feelings) that in linguistic creatures sometimes happened to give rise to linguistic behaviour. However, treating these occurrences as instances of knowledge in and of themselves, thought Sellars, especially in the case of non-linguistic creatures, was an unhelpful *façon de parler* adopted by creatures that already possessed conceptual powers.

For Sellars, *bona fide*, propositional, knowledge emerged only with language and could only be attributed to creatures participating in the socio-linguistic practice of *assertion*, in which participants offered and asked for *reasons*. On this basis, Sellars formulated his celebrated definition of knowledge: 'In characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*,' he suggested, 'we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justifying what one says' (Sellars, 1991, p. 169). Thus knowledge for Sellars was intrinsically social – it belonged only to members of linguistic communities, with inculcation into such communities standing as a precondition of its acquisition[59].

Conscious experience could not play the role of an epistemic given, for Sellars, because it was either i) the immediate cause of linguistically mediated propositional belief – the disposition, that is, to assert a particular sentence – or ii) a 'bare' occurrence: contentless, ineffable, and having no bearing on epistemology. Rorty himself was inclined to treat it as the former. The 'Sellarsian' conception of perceptual experience, he wrote, was 'a matter of physiological events triggering a disposition to utter various non-inferential reports' (2000b, p. 186). Insofar as conscious experience was only a causal precursor to propositional belief, it could not justify belief or assertion – in Sellars's view, only something with the character of a proposition could play that justificatory role. Sellars considered normativity to be a socio-linguistic phenomenon; the simple *having* of an experience or sensation, in his view, was, in the absence of the appropriate social conditioning, just an occurrence: capable of being neither right nor wrong, correct nor incorrect.

In its turn, propositional belief could not, for Sellars, constitute an epistemic given owing to its inherent fallibility as a result of its tight connection to language. In Sellars's view, the conditions of appropriate language use were dynamic and socially determined; they were beyond the exclusive control of any one individual, implying that an individual speaker always ran the risk of being incorrect in virtue of not having grasped the public rules of the language-game in play.

Sellars's key premises were thus his socio-linguistic conception of mind and the *holistic* idea that justification is always a relation between propositions. As Rorty put it, Sellars taught that '[t]here is no

[59] Rorty retained this conception of the mind as a set of socio-linguistic skills, a 'cluster of capacities' (2007a, p. 179) rather than as a substance or 'non-material mechanism' (ibid), throughout his career. In 'The Brain as Hardware, Culture as Software' (2005c), he claims that the only helpful meaning of 'mind' is 'the set of social skills that we call "culture"' (2005c, p. 28).

such thing as a justified belief which is nonpropositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions' (Rorty, 1979, p. 183).

Overall, then, Sellars disputed the infallibility of knowledge of sensation and experience[60]. In Rorty's view, he 'succeed[ed] in prying raw feels and justified true belief apart and depriving raw feels of their status as privileged representations' (Rorty, 1979, p. 192). In so doing, Rorty thought, Sellars dissuaded philosophers from turning to sensation or experience to try to 'ground' human knowledge in the face of epistemological scepticism.

3.2.2. Quine and 'meanings'

Quine – via the holism and pragmatism of 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (Quine, 1951) – was the philosopher that Rorty, in *PMN*, thought perfectly complemented Sellars's attack on the epistemic relevance of experience[61]. 'Holism,' thought Rorty, 'takes the curse off naturalism' (1991d, p. 109). In his celebrated paper, Quine used holism to attack the conventional philosophical distinction between 'analytic' truths, true solely as a result of the *meanings* of their constituent terms, and 'synthetic' truths, whose truth supposedly depended on both their terms' meanings and extra-linguistic facts. The 'analytic-synthetic' distinction, in Rorty's view, was merely the newer, 'linguistified', version of the Kantian distinction between *a priori* truths – necessarily true because of the fixed structures of the human mind preconditioning experience – and contingent, *a posteriori* truths, the truth of which was partially determined by the world[62]. Like phenomenal experience, analytic truths had traditionally constituted another area of infallible knowledge, since it was thought that one could not be wrong about concepts or the relations obtaining between the meanings of linguistic terms. Thus Rorty saw Quine and Sellars each as attacking one of two different forms of 'privileged representations'.

Quine's starting point in 'Two Dogmas' was the idea that the truth-values of statement are not determined *individually* in the light of empirical evidence, but, rather, *holistically*. The minimum unit of comparison of language with experience was, for Quine, a *theory*, or s*et* of sentences, since *individual* sentences could in a given case be found to be either *true or false* depending on the truth-values one attributed to various other pertinent statements. This was so, Quine insisted, even for those 'perceptual', or 'observation', statements that seemed directly judicable on the basis of sensory

[60] As Rorty puts it in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Sellars is not opposed to the nonpropositional *per se*, but merely '*argumentative appeal* to the nonpropositional' (Rorty, 1989, p. 123N4 – original emphasis). He wants to disallow 'the attempt to be nonpropositional. . . and at the same time claim that one is getting down to something primordial' (ibid).

[61] As Timm Triplett (1987) notes, Rorty's discussion in section 4.4 of *PMN* is, curiously, largely critical of Quine. Rorty's section assumes on the part of the reader a general understanding of Quine's thought, meanwhile taking Quine to task over alleged inconsistencies that Rorty thinks risk compromising his anti-representationalist legacy.

[62] '[T]he linguistic reinterpretation of Kant's distinction between the receptivity of sense and the a priori concepts given by spontaneity' (Rorty, 1979, p. 261).

experience. Influenced by the work of the French philosopher of science Pierre Duhem, Quine argued that one could adjust one's overall 'theory' to accommodate new evidence in numerous possible different ways, each of which would be empirically adequate. Furthermore, the Quine of 'Two Dogmas' imparted an additional pragmatist spin to his holism, holding that the only factors guiding theory choice were such arguably practical considerations as convenience, simplicity, and efficacy.

Quine thus deployed his holism to undermine the analytic-synthetic distinction, which, thanks to the legacy of logical positivism, was a prominent feature of Anglophone philosophy at the time. The converse of the fact that it was impossible to identify purely 'synthetic' truths – true entirely in the light of sensory evidence – he argued, was that it was equally impossible to identify 'analytic' truths, whose truth has nothing to do with such evidence and everything to do with the meanings of their constituent terms. For Quine, all truth-candidates were, in principle, on a level playing field in respect of the relevance (or irrelevance) of empirical evidence, combining to form a single 'web' of belief. The only differences – reflecting the considerations that had led philosophers to formulate the original analytic-synthetic dichotomy in the first place – between statements was that some were nearer the 'centre' of the web, others whilst others were nearer its 'periphery'. The truth-values of the former were, *in practice* – due to the aforementioned 'pragmatic' criteria – less likely to change in the light of new experience, whereas the truth-values of the latter were more susceptible to revision. In this way, Quine undermined the notion of a rigid distinction between meanings and facts. Beliefs about linguistic 'meanings' were, for Quine, just another variety of 'factual' belief, being formed on the basis of evidence concerning the linguistic behaviour of speakers. Although Quine sometimes expressed this as the idea that there are 'no such things as meanings,'[63] the more precise implication of his view, according to Rorty, is that linguistic meanings change subtly but continuously with each speaker's every fresh utterance.

3.2.3. 'Privileged representations' and foundationalism

In *PMN,* Rorty considers Quine's and Sellars's dual-pronged attack on the notion of 'privileged representations' to be an attack on representationalism itself. For example, in the 'Introduction' to *PMN*, he tells the reader that in the book's 'central' fourth chapter he will interpret

> Sellars's attack on "givenness" and Quine's attack on "necessity" as the crucial steps in undermining the possibility of a "theory of knowledge". . . [W]hen extended in a certain way they let us see truth as. . . "what it is better for us to

[63] Rorty is keen to emphasize that Quine's holism does not imply there are no such things as 'meanings' or 'concepts'. For Rorty, such notions are perfectly useful and valid in order to explain and predict linguistic behaviour. Quine's zeal in drawing the conclusion that there are *no such entities* only demonstrates his failure to take on board fully the pragmatist, anti-reductionist implications of his own holism.

> believe," rather than as "the accurate representation of reality"' (Rorty, 1979, p. 10).

The idea of 'knowledge. . . conceived of as accurate representing – as the Mirror of Nature,' he writes, later on in the book, '*requires* a theory of privileged representations, ones which are automatically and intrinsically accurate' (1979, p. 170 – emphasis added). That is to say, Sellars's and Quine's philosophical significance, according to Rorty in *PMN*, lies in the critiques they offer of different kinds of privileged representations; and this is so because privileged representations in some way underpin the broader representationalist paradigm.

Yet, in the view of several authors, Rorty fails to make clear the envisioned link between the notion of privileged representations and that of representationalism. Jaegwon Kim (1980) suggests that there are two dimensions to the traditional philosophical framework Rorty is challenging in *PMN*: viz., an epistemological dimension centring on foundationalism as a response to Descartes's sceptical legacy, and a broader Platonic, metaphysical dimension, arising merely from the notion of knowledge as accurate representation of things 'in themselves'. Kim points out that representationalism is logically independent of the foundationalism to which Rorty in practice devotes more attention. He accuses Rorty of conflating the two – 'Platonism alone cannot be blamed for begetting epistemology,' he writes, '. . . and it is dubious that Platonism is even *necessary* for the emergence of epistemology' (Kim, 1980, p. 592).

Other responses to *PMN* offer similar expressions of sympathy for Rorty's attack on Cartesianism, whilst demurring at his broader critique of representationalism and the correspondence theory of truth. Amongst these is Michael Devitt's (1988), which argues that 'skeptical concerns play no role' in philosphical debates about truth and the representational paradigm of knowledge. '[I]n insisting that [skeptical] concerns are central to correspondence truth,' Devitt argues, Rorty, 'shows all the zeal of a convert: having rejected sin, he sees it everywhere' (1988, p. 169); 'Rorty sees the skeptical problematic under every correspondence theorist's bed' (Devitt, 1988, p. 166). Susan Haack (1995) also considers Rorty to have conflated distinct philosophical issues, suggesting that he attacks 'foundationalism' in at least three different senses of the term. Two of these senses, Haack argues, are broadly epistemological in character, and concerning which Rorty's anti-foundationalism may be said to be warranted. But the third sense is equivalent to representationalism – and Rorty leaves his repudiation of this latter position unmotivated: it is 'hard to find arguments, as opposed to rhetoric' (Haack, 1995, p. 138) against representationalism in *PMN*, Haack claims; moreover, Rorty is inclined to present his readers with false dichotomies where intermediate positions can and should be taken (Haack, 1995, p. 127). In a similar vein, Malachowski also criticizes Rorty for assuming that what 'tells against foundationalism tells against the notion of "theory" in general,' where, by 'theory,' Malachowski appears to mean something close to the kind of need- and interest-independent representation of the world aspired toward by representationalism (Malachowski, 1990, p. 144).

I suggest that these commentators have a point, and that there are two basic ways in which one can construe Quine's and Sellars' anti-representationalist significance. One way is to take Rorty at his word in *PMN* and to view the pair as attacking representationalism by attacking the following things: the Cartesian conception of 'mind', the idea of *privileged* representations, and epistemic foundationalism. The other way is to see them as having attacked representationalism *directly* by attacking the idea of a mental or linguistic state's possessing an absolute, human-interest-independent form of representational content. This is the interpretation I pursue in the next section, 3.2.4, below.

As already indicated, the problem with the first approach is that Rorty does not in *PMN* (or anywhere else) do enough to explain why the representationalist paradigm itself should depend on the idea that there are privileged representations – representations, to repeat, that are 'automatically and intrinsically accurate,' and that, as such, can provide 'foundations' for the rest of knowledge (Rorty, 1979, p. 170).

Rorty thinks the 'mental' entities that Quine and Sellars target with their critiques are uniquely placed to play the role of *representing entities.* This is because they have a different ontological status to the rest of the universe. Rorty sometimes expresses this as the idea that mind is able to constitute an 'inner' medium capable of representing an 'outer,' or 'external,' world. As I shall argue in the next Chapter, the reason their being a different ontological class or type is significant is because it makes it more plausible that they should possess the degree of causal independence from what they represent that characterises the notion of representation relevant to the philosophical tradition (see in particular 4.4, below). However to answer the question why they should have a different ontological status in the first place, on Rorty's account, one needs to turn to epistemology.

As already seen in 3.1.1., above, Rorty thinks the reason Descartes grouped certain phenomena together under the rubric of 'the mental' in the first place was because a class of utterances describing the occurrence of such phenomena (viz., the class attributing them to the speaker) were not routinely contested. He thinks this socio-linguistic property of incorrigibility was then construed as the property of being infallibly known, which was a sufficiently distinctive property to warrant ontological or metaphysical segregation. This, then, appears to be the reason Rorty in *PMN* thinks that a representational 'medium' need have a different epistemological status from what it represents, as, for instance, when he invokes 'the image of the Mirror of Nature – a mirror more easily and certainly seen than that which it mirrors' (1979, p. 181).

The specific anti-representational use of Quine and Sellars that Rorty makes in *PMN* is entirely based on this assumption: that an *epistemic* difference between representation and represented necessarily grounds the entire representationalist paradigm. If one declines to make it, then Quine's and Sellars's critiques of different kinds of privileged representations only tell against the Cartesian conception of mind (and the sceptical worries and foundationalist projects it births), and not representationalism

itself. That one does *not need* to make the assumption is attested to by the fact that Rorty devotes the next two chapters of *PMN* to combatting *non-Cartesian* forms of representationalism.

Rorty is preoccupied with Descartes in *PMN*, and this leads him to conflate representationalism and Cartesianism. His preoccupation is understandable, in some respects, on the grounds that the Cartesian conception of 'mind' leads to a particularly acute form of epistemological scepticism, in which we are 'screened' from things as they are in themselves by a 'veil' of mental entities. What Rorty calls 'epistemology' – misplaced concern about, and efforts to vindicate, the possibility of knowledge – is, in his eyes, one of the worst things about representationalism. However, in 3.1.2, above, I showed that Rorty himself came to realise that these concerns and efforts are not the same thing as representationalism itself, and thus to revise *PMN*'s account of representationalism's emergence, by attributing more significance to Plato and the Greeks.

As far as *privileged representations* themselves are concerned, it should be evident that the notion conceptually presupposes the general idea of representationalism, and not the other way round. One surely needs to assume the truth of representationalism in the first place in order for it even to begin to make sense to talk of such things as 'privileged representations'.

In addition, there is also an important ambiguity concerning Rorty's exposition of the notion of privileged representations themselves. This concerns whether privileged representations, as representations 'which are automatically and intrinsically accurate' (Rorty, 1979, p. 170), are things that *represent* (other things) intrinsically and accurately, or things that *are represented* intrinsically and accurately, since the term 'representation' can be understood either way. It is more natural, arguably, to understand the term in the former way; but, it turns out, Rorty actually intends the latter. By 'privileged representations,' Rorty means 'meanings' and 'sense data'; and what these have in common, to repeat, is the apparent *infallibility* with which they are apprehended by the epistemic subject. As such, it transpires that, for Rorty, privileged representations are 'automatically and intrinsically accurate' representations insofar as *they themselves* are things which are automatically and intrinsically represent*ed* accurately.

3.2.4. Quine and Sellars as attacking representationalism directly

Therefore, I propose, it would have been more effective for Rorty to have omitted discussion of 'privileged representations,' and to have explicated the anti-representationalist significance of Quine and Sellars in a different way.

Rorty could have argued that the considerations Quine and Sellars adduce foreclose the possibility of absolute, human-interest-independent, representational content. Quine and Sellars ultimately converge, I suggest, on the idea that we must *already be involved* in particular practices, leading to particular interpretations of reality, or theories comprising sets of beliefs or statements accepted as

true, before the non-human world can favour some beliefs or descriptions over others. In this way, the two figures support anti-representationalism, or the view that non-human reality does not impose normative constraints on cognition independently of particular, interest-directed frameworks or practices.

Sellars focuses on a certain category of beliefs or descriptions: those most closely associated with the notion of *experience*, and which could be deemed expressible by means of 'perceptual-' or 'observation-' statements. For Sellars, experience has no intrinsic meaning, no preferred interpretation, prior to someone's having acquired group-interest-directed dispositions to think or speak in particular ways in response to stimuli. Sellars's point, broadly speaking, is therefore that perceptual judgment, or 'observation,' is underdetermined by possible prior sets of shared, group interests manifesting in linguistic practices.

Quine can then be seen as extending Sellars's underdetermination from the 'observational' to the 'theoretical' case, so that, together, they ensure a form of underdetermination applies to the totality of one's beliefs or to the totality of statements one holds to be true. Quine emphasizes that there is no single correct route from evidence (where, unlike with Sellars, this notion itself is itself taken for granted[64]) to *theory*. For the Quine of 'Two Dogmas,' there is no 'right,' non-pragmatic, answer to the question of how to theoretically accommodate a piece of evidence, such as an experiment or a speaker's utterance. Significantly, Quine takes the ideas we have about the meanings of various pieces of *language* to be determined theoretically, as opposed to being intuitively grasped.

Thus, for both Quine and Sellars, even simple, seemingly incontestable facts, such as observations of visual properties or suppositions about the meanings of the most basic of an interlocutor's terms, inevitably depend for their normative force-to-assent on a number of contingent prior (linguistic) dispositions, and could therefore conceivably be otherwise. Since this casts doubt upon the ideal of infallible items of knowledge, Rorty is able to characterise Quine and Sellars – unhelpfully, in my view, in the context of his anti-representationalism (see 3.2.3, above) – as attacking different kinds of '*privileged*' *representations*.

What I have described as the idea that we must already be involved in particular practices, directed toward particular goals, before the non-human world can normatively constrain belief and assertion might be termed – following Heidegger (1962, section 32) – Quine's and Sellars's common advert to underdetermination due to hermeneutic holism. Quine and Sellars are pointing out, it could be argued, different ways in which the propriety of an interpretation – our willingness to believe or verbally affirm *that X* – depends on a myriad of factors from which one cannot abstract, nor extract oneself. One way of looking at the phenomenon in question is in terms of the wider set of beliefs one possesses, which impact upon the propriety of holding another belief (doxastic holism). Another is in

[64] As Rorty complains when discussing Quine's idea of 'Naturalized Epistemology' in Chapter 5 of *PMN*.

terms of one's dispositions to say certain things in certain circumstances. Either way, this common feature of Quine and Sellars, which I am calling their 'hermeneutic holism,' is why Rorty can treat them as making fundamentally the same point or argument. It is clear that the pair can be construed as supporting his anti-representationalism: his rejection of the idea of non-human normative constraint on cognition, prior to the adoption of particular human-interest-serving vocabularies. It is just that they do not do so for reasons to do with privileged representations.

Chapter 4. The Argument from Continuity

In this chapter I argue that there is a line of thought in Rorty's work leading from naturalism-as-causal-monism (from, that is, the causal dependence of human cognition upon wider nature) to anti-representationalism. In order to do so, I consider Rorty's engagement with the work of Donald Davidson (1917-2003). Two of Davidson's ideas in particular are relevant to anti-representationalism: i) Davidson's repudiation of what he, and afterwards Rorty, refer to as the dualism of 'scheme and content', which Rorty equates with anti-representationalism; and ii) Davidson's doctrine of 'anomalous monism'. I suggest that 'anomalous monism' serves as the basis of an argument against the 'scheme-content' dualism, hence against anti-representationalism.

In section 4.1 I note that Rorty frequently draws parallels between Davidson and Dewey, treating the pair as exemplary naturalists because of their exclusively causal analyses of human beings' relations to nature. Rorty considers Davidson and Dewey to have pursued the implications of a 'purely causal' outlook more rigorously than other philosophers and on that basis to have drawn attention to the incompatibility of such outlooks with representationalism.

In sections 4.2 and 4.3, respectively, I examine Rorty's treatment of the scheme-content dualism and anomalous monism. In 4.2.1, I examine some of the specific forms that the former notion has taken in the history of philosophy. I argue that the scheme-content dualism aligns with the historically influential dualism between human beings and nature that was the subject of the previous chapter. Rorty considers the scheme-content dualism to be interchangeable with the concept of representationalism, I point out in 4.2.2, which he sees as being in turn exemplified by the notion that we might one day discover 'Nature's Own Language'.

Over the course of sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4, I make the case that Rorty derives two seemingly different arguments against the 'scheme-content' dualism from Davidson's work. The first (4.2.3) is based on Davidson's development of the theme of Quinean holism in the philosophy of language. The second, which I term the 'argument from continuity' (4.2.4), is perhaps more general and abstract; it casts doubt upon the possibility of separating 'scheme' from 'content,' given the pervasive causal dependence of the former on the latter. The 'argument from continuity' against the scheme-content dualism, which mirrors that between human beings and nature, 'blurs the line' between the two poles of the dualism, emphasizing their mutual continuity in a Deweyan fashion.

In 4.3, I turn to anomalous monism, outlining the position, which Rorty appropriates as 'non-reductive physicalism'. Anomalous monism, I argue, is the form in which the causal monism that entails the *causal dependence* of 'scheme' upon 'content', of human thought upon nature, enters Rorty's thought, 'cleansed' by Davidson of potentially reductive implications. As such it serves as a key premise in the 'argument from continuity' against scheme-content dualism or representationalism.

In section 4.4 I consider the 'argument from continuity' in detail, focusing on the expression of the argument that occurs in 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth' (Rorty, 1991e). There Rorty appeals to the idea of so-called 'non-causal *tertia*' – things that serve as epistemic intermediaries between, on the one hand, human beings, and on the other hand, nature. '*Tertia*', Rorty claims therein, are such things as are able to serve as representations within the representationalist paradigm; what enables them to do so is their putative causal independence (from nature). In 4.5 I briefly raise the question of the metaphilosophical status of the argument from continuity[65], linking the expression of the argument in terms of the notion of *tertia* to consonant passages in Rorty's wider corpus, thereby building a picture of a recurrent theme running through his work. I introduce the idea that there are two ways of interpreting the status of the relationship between naturalism and representationalism. One way, which Rorty seems to favor, has naturalism enable but not compel one to reject representationalism – rendering it theoretically superfluous but still an option – whilst a second holds that the two positions cannot be held concordantly.

4.1. Davidson as heir to Dewey

In Rorty's eyes, 'Davidson is as naturalistic as you can get' (Rorty & Ragg, 2002, p. 391). Rorty regards Davidson as Dewey's successor in the task of coming to terms with what the natural sciences, and Darwin's theory of evolution in particular[66], imply about our relationship as human beings to the rest of nature. Rorty depicts Dewey and Davidson as starting out, intellectually speaking, from such reflections, and ultimately arriving at partially overlapping critiques of the Western philosophical tradition. He describes the pair as 'the paradigmatic pragmatists', the philosophers who, in his view, best embody the critique of representationalism begun by classical pragmatism (Rorty, 1999c, p. 24).

In Rorty's eyes, Davidson's philosophical merit surpasses that of Dewey, because the former clearly perceives and applies to his work the advantages of the 'linguistified' approach to philosophy which flourished in the twentieth-century[67]. Davidson, unlike Dewey, discusses philosophy primarily in terms of *language* and such related concepts as *concepts*, *sentences, utterances, marks, and noises*. Dewey, on the other hand, remains, as Rorty sees it, within the limits of the 'mentalistic' framework that fosters representationalism. Much of Dewey's work therefore appears to Rorty to consist in attempts to re-conceptualize notions such as 'experience' and 'mind' – for example, as in *Experience and Nature*, which Rorty wishes Dewey had never written (Rorty, 1995d, pp. 97-8). By contrast, Rorty admires Davidson's aversion to metaphysical system-building, his tendency simply to stop using problematic terms rather than attempting to reinterpret them. At the same time, Davidson's written corpus is composed primarily of a series of self-contained papers, perhaps in part in due to this very

[65] Considered in more detail in Chapter 6, below.
[66] 'Donald Davidson is the philosopher of language whose work is most reminiscent of the classical pragmatists' attempts to be faithful to Darwin' (Rorty, 1998e, Section 3). Chapter 5, below, offers a detailed exploration of the significance of Darwin for Rorty's work.
[67] See 5.4, below.

methodological preference. Thus 'it falls to Davidson's admirers', Rorty argues, 'to attempt a synoptic summary of his work' (1991d, p. 113). His own efforts to do so make up the central portion of *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Rorty, 1991d).

Steven Levine (2020, p. 372) has pointed out that Rorty regards Davidson's work not just as 'the culmination of the holist and pragmatist strains in contemporary analytic philosophy' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 117)[68], but instead as possessing a far broader cultural, bordering on world-historical, significance. Holism and pragmatism constitute, in Rorty's eyes, 'the culmination of a long struggle. . . against Platonic and religious conceptions of the world' (ibid). Thus Rorty allots Davidson a prominent role in the most recent chapter of his narrative of humanity's gradual emancipation from pernicious, representationalist conceptions of the non-human. Davidson, in Rorty's view, is the thinker best suited to freeing us from what, in 'Philosophy as a Transitional Genre,' he characterises as the 'Philosophical' stage in world-history, at which human beings conceive of the non-human realm as 'Reality', an authority dictating the absolute 'correctness' and 'incorrectness' of assertions and beliefs (2010b, p. 477). Rorty ends his obituary of Davidson in the *Boston Globe* (2003) by predicting that, 'a couple of centuries from now, historians of philosophy will be writing about the changes in the human self-image that Donald Davidson's writings helped bring about'.

Davidson's influence upon Rorty, and the latter's perception of his affinity to Dewey, go back a long way. In 'Davidson Between Wittgenstein and Tarski', Rorty notes that he has been 'attempt[ing] to synthesize' (1998b, p. 51) Davidson and Dewey ever since his early 1972 paper 'The World Well Lost' (reprinted in 1982, pp. 3-18). Rorty extols the pair's shared naturalism, in the traditional 'analytic' sense of the term: although they share his misgivings about the philosophical tradition, both remain cognizant of and responsive to developments in the natural sciences – the pair, in Rorty's view, help counteract the scientism of the Enlightenment without veering towards what Rorty regards as the 'anti-scientism' of the German Idealists (1991c, p. 113).

In 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth' (1991e), to which I return below (see section 4.4), Rorty claims that both philosophers, Davidson and Dewey, jointly oppose a 'certain picture' that has 'held captive' the philosophical tradition (p. 129). He explains that the picture is that 'which Davidson calls "the dualism of scheme and content" and which Dewey thought of as "the dualism of Subject and Object"' (ibid). Thus both philosophers, on Rorty's view, have separately identified and critiqued a fundamental dualism of the philosophical tradition, albeit expressed in different terms. Although Rorty favours Davidson's terminology, he clearly sees the dualism between 'subject' and 'object', and between 'scheme' and 'content', as one and the same.

[68] Specifically, Davidson is 'deepening and extending the lines of thought traced by Sellars and Quine' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 1) – those that Rorty explored in Chapter 4 of *PMN*.

I argue below that this dualism is also fundamentally that between *human beings*, regarded as cognitively autonomous agents, and the rest of *nature* (see section 4.2.1). For Rorty, Dewey and Davidson are unique thinkers due to the degree of emphasis both place upon the *causal dependence of human beings upon nature*. The pair are therefore not just naturalist philosophers in virtue of their respect for and attention to the natural sciences, but naturalist philosophers in the causal-monist sense defined in Chapter 2. Rorty lauds what he sees as the restriction of Dewey's and Davidson's philosophical subject matter to causal relationships between human beings and their environment, and their corresponding rejection of such seemingly 'non-causal' and metaphysically-loaded notions as 'reference' and 'representation'. Summarizing the argument of 'The World Well Lost' (1982) in 'Davidson between Wittgenstein and Tarski,' Rorty writes:

> I pointed out that both [Davidson and Dewey] were attacking the Kantian distinction between receptive sense and spontaneous intellect, and doing so for similar reasons. Furthermore, both were suggesting that *all links between the mind and world are causal and non-representational. These suggestions, I claimed, dissolved a great many of the problems about the relation of mind or language to the world… which had been bequeathed to philosophy* (1998b, p. 51 – emphasis added).

I explore the idea of a dichotomy of 'causal' and 'representational' relations between human beings and nature throughout the remainder of the thesis. How exactly, in Rorty's view, does Davidson's and Dewey's supposed central insight – the fact that 'all links between mind and world are causal and non-representational' – dissolve 'a great many of the problems. . . bequeathed to philosophy'? In order to answer this question, I shall consider Davidson's bipartite intellectual legacy to Rorty: his rejection of the so-called 'scheme-content' dualism, and his doctrine of 'anomalous monism' in philosophy of mind.

4.2. The 'scheme-content' dualism

Davidson first introduces the idea of 'scheme-content' dualism in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' (2001c), in which he laments the prominence of various dualisms whose binary components in each case seem to separate into the categories of 'scheme' and 'content'. Extending the scope of W.V.O. Quine's seminal paper 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' Davidson argues that the resulting scheme-content 'meta-', or 'master-,' dualism constitutes a pernicious '*third* dogma of empiricism' (2001c).

As he presents the idea, instances of the dualism provide: i) a whole (the 'content'), for example 'experience' or 'the world,' divided into parts by mind or language; and ii) the combined elements of mind or language, for example concepts or linguistic expressions, which do the dividing (the 'scheme') (Davidson, 2001c, pp. 191-2). Davidson describes the relationship between scheme and content as

being that of either: 'an organizing system [scheme] and something waiting to be organized [content]' (ibid, p. 189); or scheme as something meant to *fit* content (ibid, p. 191). Either way, he claims, the notion 'cannot be made intelligible and defensible' (2001c, p. 189).

Davidson employs two different argumentative strategies in order to undermine the idea of scheme-content. On the one hand, he interprets the notion of 'scheme' linguistically, so that it becomes equivalent to the idea of a 'conceptual scheme' or 'language'[69]. This enables him to argue against the possibility of there being radically different conceptual schemes – and thus, he thinks – against the scheme-content dualism generally, by arguing that there can be no such thing as a wholly untranslatable language (Davidson, 2001c, pp. 185-6). On the other hand, Davidson takes the two ways in which 'scheme' can relate to 'content' – viz., organizing and fitting – and attempts to demonstrate that on closer inspection both notions fail to make sense, arguing at length that the idea of a (mental or linguistic) scheme *organizing* or *fitting* a separate content is unintelligible.

From Rorty's point of view, Davidson's critique of 'scheme-content' in 'On The Very Idea' is 'epoch-making' (Rorty, 1998b, p. 51) – a 'turning point' in the history of twentieth-century philosophy (Rorty, 1999b, p. 575). Rorty recalls the 'transformation' in his own thinking brought about by reading an early draft of Davidson's paper (ibid). In the 1980s he suggests that 'Davidson's attack on scheme-content. . . is the best current expression of the pragmatist attack on the philosophical tradition' (1991a, p. 14).

Rorty ascribes such importance to Davidson's critique of the dualism of scheme and content because he thinks the dualism encapsulates, and presents a convenient way of simultaneously referring to, a number of other philosophical binaries. For Rorty, that is, Davidson's notion stands for an entire group of interrelated concepts: 'the ideas that metaphysics wove together to form the scheme-content dualism,' which form a 'large, mutually reinforcing, network' (1991d, p. 148). The 'scheme-content' rubric is taken to include such historically influential pairs of terms as 'reason-experience', 'mind-matter', 'language-world', and the Kantian distinction between 'spontaneity' and 'receptivity', which Rorty considers a 'paradigmatic' instance of scheme and content (1998c, p. 389)[70]. Arguably the most significant dualism to fall under the rubric is the dualism of 'subject' and 'object,' the frequent target of Dewey's anti-dualist critique (see 2.2, above). In the paper 'Michael Williams versus Donald Davidson,' Rorty criticizes his former student, Williams, for 'not adequately appreciat[ing] the most

[69] 'We may identify conceptual schemes with languages, then, or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages' (Davidson, 2001c, p. 185). But, indicating that he sees his theme as ultimately consisting in broader intellectual and cultural history, Davidson adds: 'Languages we will not think of as separable from souls; speaking a language is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought' (ibid).

[70] In each case, with respect to the dualisms listed here, the first-listed member of the pair corresponds to 'scheme,' while the latter corresponds to 'content'. There are, no doubt, other philosophical dualisms that could be included under the rubric of scheme-content.

radical recent criticism' of the 'dualism of subject and object. . . Davidson's attack on the scheme-content distinction' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 157).

The dualism of scheme and content relates to representationalism particularly through the notion of *fitting*, one of the two basic forms potentially taken by the scheme-content relation. The dualism can be understood as dividing cases of knowledge into separate contributions made by distinct human and non-human (or natural) components, parallel to the binaries listed in the previous paragraph. The binaries tend to be used in such a way as to imply that the *human* contribution to knowledge is a matter of *creation, or production*, whereas the non-human contribution is a *representational standard* against which the human creation can be compared. A necessary condition of knowledge then becomes the human component's standing in the correct relationship – viz., fitting, adequacy, correspondence etc. – to the non-human component. On this basis, Rorty treats the scheme-content dualism as more or less co-extensive with representationalism, noting that 'the distinction between scheme and world. . . goes together with the notion that the progress of inquiry consists in an increasingly tight "fit" with the world' (1998e, p. 151).

4.2.1. Naturalism and the 'scheme-content' dualism

Hence the most important characteristic of the scheme-content dualism is that it separates knowledge into (a product of) *human cognitive activity* and a *non-human standard*. As such, it invariably expresses the immemorial distinction between human beings and nature. More precisely, it serves to express a division between i) autonomous human cognitive agency – for example, mind, reason, or Kantian 'spontaneity' – as the cause of *inter alia* beliefs, ideas, theories, and conceptual schemes, and ii) the other causal forces in the universe.

Rorty glosses the scheme-content dualism in precisely this way in 'Charles Taylor on Truth'. There, the notions of scheme and content distinguish, respectively, 'our own' contributions to knowledge from those contributions for which we are *not responsible*. Addressing Taylor, a representationalist, he suggests that the only way of productively continuing their argument concerning the merits of representationalism is for Rorty to 'put the burden of argument' upon his opponent 'by asking [him] to answer two questions':

> (1) Can you find some way of getting between language and its object… in order to suggest some way of telling which joints are *nature's (part of the content)* and which are *merely "ours" (just part of the scheme)*?
> (2) If not, can you see any point in the claim that some descriptions correspond better to reality than other? (Rorty, 1998a, p. 91 – emphasis added)

Rorty equates the idea of 'nature' with that of 'content', and 'scheme' with what is '*ours*' – *our* collective contribution to language as human beings. He does this a second time when he criticizes

philosophers who retain the 'presumption that there is some sort of inviolable "metaphysical" break between the formal and the material, the logical and the psychological, the non-natural and the natural – between, in short, what Davidson calls "scheme and content"' (1991d, p. 168). Rorty again associates 'content' with 'nature', and this time 'scheme' with the idea of the 'non-natural'.

The link between 'scheme-content' and 'humanity-nature' is further evinced by Rorty's association of the 'humanity-nature' distinction with representationalism. In *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), Rorty suggests that the latter distinction is a source of the traditional philosophical problematic – that occasioned by 'Cartesian dualism. . . the problems created by thinking of man as somehow categorically distinct from the rest of nature' (1982, p. 31). Philosophy after Descartes, that is, uncritically assumed that 'there was *something* of central importance which needed to be said about the relation between man and nature: some bridge to be built, some dualism to be transcended, some gap to be closed' (pp. 32-3 – original emphasis). These comments develop a theme in Rorty's thought that emerges – albeit expressed in terms of a dualism of subject and object – as early on as 'Cartesian Epistemology and Changes in Ontology' (1972, reprinted in Rorty, 2014b), There, he contends that '[i]n the great systems of the Cartesian period, the primary task of ontology was to get the Subject and the Object back together' (2014a, p. 213)[71]. According to Rorty, all the great metaphysical 'system-builders' of the Modern period – figures such as Spinoza, Leibniz, Berkeley, Kant, and Whitehead – were, whether they knew it or not, ultimately offering 'a redescription of the Object… according to which the Subject and the Object turned out to be much the same' (ibid). Therefore Rorty quickly comes to see the Western philosophical tradition – at least since the Modern era[72] – as being founded on a dichotomy between human beings and nature[73].

He then develops this interpretation over the course of his career. In 'Science as Solidarity,' he lambasts the 'bad seventeenth-century contrasts between being "in us" and being "out there", between subject and object, between our beliefs and what those beliefs. . . are trying to get right', identifying these 'contrasts' as the source of representationalism (1991d, p. 41). In 'A World Without Substances and Essences,' he advocates describing the universe as a flux of continually changing relations, in order to allow us to:

[71] See also *PMN*: 'The veil of ideas epistemology which took over philosophy in the seventeenth century. . . g[ave] rise to a new philosophical genre – the system which brings subject and object together again. This reconciliation has been the goal of philosophical thought ever since' (1979, p. 113).

[72] The idea that the most objectionable elements of the Western philosophical tradition emerge with Descartes informs *PMN*. In Chapter 3, above, I argued that Rorty's preoccupation with Descartes and the threat of epistemological scepticism in *PMN* undermines the book's case against representationalism.

[73] Rorty studied with Richard McKeon at Chicago and with Paul Weiss at Yale, who helped shape his appreciation for the history of philosophy – see Rorty, 2010a, and Neil Gross' *The Making of an American Philosopher* (2008, esp. 95-7; 106-8; 132-8).

> put aside the distinction between subject and object, between the elements in human knowledge contributed by the mind and those contributed by the world, and thereby. . . put aside the correspondence theory of truth' (Rorty, 1999a, p. 47).

Thus, again, 'subject' or 'mind' provide the *human* component of knowledge, in contradistinction to nature in the form of 'object' or 'world'.

The distinction between what is '*ours*', as autonomous thinkers, and what originates or belongs elsewhere, also underpins Kant's distinction between how things are '*for-us*' or '*to-us'*, and what is so '*in-itself*'. Rorty thinks that this distinction is the source of contemporary interest in the question of 'realism'. Arguments about whether a group of entities – such as universals, or scientific posits – are *real* only take off, he suggests, 'when we supplement plain speech and common sense with the "in itself" versus "to us" distinction' (Rorty, 1998a, p. 94). That is to say, the urgency, and perhaps the intelligibility, of a question such as "Are electrons real?" presupposes a rigid, mutually exclusive, distinction between 'we, ourselves,' and (the rest of) nature, or the universe. The question is appropriate within the context of such a framework because it can be parsed as that of whether the notion of *electrons* corresponds to some aspect of the way that the universe is 'in itself'. Rorty, however, thinks that the distinction itself should be rejected. 'We who agree with Davidson,' he explains, 'think that the whole project of distinguishing between what exists in itself and what exists in relation to human minds. . . is no longer worth pursuing' (1998e, p. 73).

4.2.2. "Nature's Own Vocabulary"

The close conceptual connection envisioned by Rorty between representationalism and the dualism of human beings and nature also emerges in his suggestion that traditional philosophical problematics presuppose some form of the idea that nature has a 'language of its own'. In 'Method, Social Science, and Social Hope' (1982b), for example, Rorty suggests that the notion of an 'absolute conception of reality' is best understood as that of 'reality conceived as somehow represented by representations which are not merely ours but *its own, as it looks to itself, as it would describe itself if it could*' (Rorty, 1982b, p. 194 – emphasis added). Efforts to develop an absolute, perspective- and interest-independent theory of the universe, he thinks, stem from the felt need of philosophers to 'penetrate beneath the appearances and see nature "in its own terms"' (1982b, p. 192), which goal he regards as the 'fantasy of discovering. . . Nature's Own Vocabulary' (p. 194)[74].

Notoriously, Rorty thinks that '[t]he world does not speak. . . [o]nly we do' (1989, p. 6). The idea that science discovers the language nature itself uses is a 'charming but uncashable metaphor' (1982b, p. 191). The world, he holds, 'can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to

[74] Rorty glosses the distinction between the 'subjective' and the objective' as that between, respectively, those 'notions. . . expressible in *our* vocabulary but not in nature's' and those belonging to nature's vocabulary (1982, p. 194).

hold beliefs,' but it 'cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that' (1989, p. 6). This point is restated by Rorty in his discussion of John McDowell's *Mind and World*, in which Rorty argues, *pace* McDowell, that the world is not a 'conversational partner' but rather something that 'thrusts beliefs on you' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 147). Further, the suggestion that 'nature's own language' is a bad idea reflects Rorty's anti-authoritarianism and humanism[75]. Our sense of community, he thinks, is 'heightened' when viewed as 'ours rather than nature's, shaped rather than found' (1982, p. 166). Likewise, vocabularies are 'human creations, tools for the creation of such other human artifacts as poems, utopian societies, scientific theories, and future generations' (1989, p. 52).

In Rorty's eyes, the attribution of linguistic 'preferences' to the world or nature has religious undertones. Representationalism, insofar as it insinuates the existence of such preferences, is still mired in religion. The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature,' he argues, is a

> remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind, who Himself spoke some language in which He described His own project. Only if we have some such picture in mind, some picture of the universe as either itself a person or as created by a person, can we make sense of the idea that the world has an "intrinsic nature" (1989, p. 21)[76].

One interpretation of the idea of 'nature's own language,' popularized by Galileo, construes nature as a text written in a particular language by a deity. But even if one abjures traditional theism, the legacy of the 'attempt, characteristic of the Enlightenment' to explicate wisdom and knowledge in terms of human acquaintance with an anthropomorphized 'Nature' – 'to make,' that is, '"Nature" do duty for God,' – means, according to Rorty, that Western philosophy still projects human characteristics onto the non-human (1991d, p. 87). On this basis, he holds, it is easy for the representationalist to come to see truth as 'something identical with God or with God's project' (1989, p. 5). Representationalist truth – which is to say, attainment of the single correct account of things 'as they are in themselves' – is implicitly the task set humanity by either god or an anthropomorphized nature. Rorty urges us to reject this religious heritage by assimilating the ideas of authors like Davidson, who allow us to 'de-divinize the world,' or 'get to the point where we no longer worship *anything,* where we treat *nothing* as a quasi-divinity' (Rorty, 1989, p. 22 – original emphasis)[77]. The resulting 'culture of liberalism,' if

[75] C.f. Rorty in *CIS*: '[A]ll vocabularies. . . are human creations, tools for the creations of such other human artifacts as poems, utopian societies, scientific theories, and future generations' (1989, p. 53)

[76] C.f. also: 'The suggestion that truth. . . is out there is a legacy of an age in which the world was seen as the creation of a being who had a language of his own' (Rorty, 1989, p. 5)

[77] C.f. 'De Man and the Cultural Left,' in which Rorty describes a 'gradual and continuous shift in human beings' sense of their relation to the rest of the universe – a change which led from worshipping Gods to worshipping sage to worshipping empirical scientific inquirers. With luck this process will end by leaving us unable to *worship* anything' (1991a, p. 132 – original emphasis).

achieved, would be 'enlightened [and] secular through and through,' one in which 'no trace of divinity remained' (ibid, p. 45).

Rorty's association of representationalism with the idea of 'Nature's Own Vocabulary' has been criticized by a number of writers. Charles Taylor considers the latter notion to be a 'bizarre idea,' a 'distant caricatural relation of Plato's theory of Forms' that is entirely optional to what Rorty calls representationalism. For Taylor, the imputation to the representationalist of such views is dialectically an 'absolute non-starter' whose most charitable interpretation is as a rhetorical device on Rorty's part (Taylor, 1990, p. 262). Tom Sorrell, in 'The World From Its Own Point of View,' devotes more time to rebutting the suggestion that the world need be anthropomorphized or linguistified in order for it to be able to possess an intrinsic character (Sorell, 1990). His principal argument is that Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel offer us ways of comprehending notions like 'absolute reality' and 'intrinsic nature' without attributing linguistic preference to the non-human (1990, pp. 12-15).

Echoing Taylor, Kate Soper (2001) claims that there is 'no reason at all' to subscribe to Rorty's 'theological' account of representationalism, repeating Taylor's charge that Rorty caricatures the position of his opponent (Soper, pp. 117-8). In her discussion of the theme of humanism in Rorty's work, she accuses Rorty of being a humanist primarily in undesirable, 'atheistic' and 'Promethean' senses of the term (ibid, pp. 117-121), characterisations of his own view that Rorty embraces in his Response (2001b, p. 131).

In this and the previous section, it has been suggested that the idea of 'scheme-content' dualism that occurs in Davidson's work is equivalent to Rorty's principal target, representationalism. Moreover, the pair 'scheme' and 'content' are contemporary expressions of the age-old dualism of human beings and nature. This section has seen how Rorty associates representationalism – the idea that there is a single correct way that things are 'in themselves' – with the idea that nature, the non-human, speaks or possesses a language 'of its own'. If the association is warranted then mainstream philosophy would not yet have outgrown religion, despite – in a lot of cases – having thought that it had. Now I shall return to Rorty's engagement with Davidson, who challenges the scheme-content dualism in two principal, ostensibly different but potentially interrelated, ways: through his work on meaning and language, which Rorty regards as improving upon the 'semantic holism' of Davidson's former teacher, Quine (4.2.3); and through what I call the 'argument from continuity' (4.2.4).

4.2.3. Davidsonian philosophy of language

'Davidson, in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,"' writes Rorty, 'carrie[s] through on the good work begun by [Quine's celebrated paper] "Two Dogmas"' (Rorty, 1999b, p. 590). Rorty champions what he calls the 'Quine-Davidson' approach to language (1991a, pp. 13-14), which, he suggests, 'carr[ies] through Quine's dissolution of the distinction between questions of meaning and questions

of fact' (Rorty, 1979, p. 261)[78]. He identifies Davidson as one of three figures, together with Quine and Wittgenstein, jointly responsible for – as he puts it – the 'death of meaning'[79] (1991a, p. 52). The 'semantic holism' of Quine and Davidson is the 'doctrine that the meaning of an expression is constituted by all of its inferential relations, hence by all of its roles in a language' (Rorty, 2005c, pp. 18-19). These inferential relations are in constant flux as a result of the continually changing linguistic behaviour of language-users. According to Rorty, the holist account of linguistic meaning replaces the previous philosophical orthodoxy, which took the meanings of linguistic expressions to be self-subsistent entities existing independently of the contingencies of actual language use. By the lights of the superseded conception, meanings are susceptible to being investigated and established by so-called 'conceptual analysis,' independently of empirical data. In the context of semantic holism the subject matter of philosophy of language shifts from what Rorty sees as being 'extra-linguistic' relations, such as 'reference,' to '*intra-linguistic*' relations between the marks and noises that feature in linguistic behaviour.

Quine and Davidson together offer a radically new, 'empirical', perspective from which to theorise about language – that of the 'field linguist' – which casts doubt upon the viability of 'conceptual analysis'. Davidson's message, according to Rorty, is that 'if we are serious in renouncing an a priori knowledge of meaning, then the theory of meaning is going to be an empirical theory' (Rorty, 1979, p. 261). According to Davidson and Quine, study of the behaviour of a linguistic community is both a necessary and sufficient basis from which to theorise about the 'meanings' of specific terms in the language. Questions about meaning or knowledge become a matter of 'the study of certain ways in which human beings interact' (Rorty, 1979, p. 175). Moreover, this is as much the case with respect to one's own native language as it is to any other – no-one possesses innate, necessary knowledge of the meanings of terms. Insofar as we opt to construct theories of linguistic meaning, thinks Rorty, the contents of such theories are necessarily provisional, requiring continuous amendment in the face of evolving linguistic practice. Thus a key corollary of the Quine-Davidson methodology is that linguistic meanings are directly tied to language use, *contra* the traditional view of 'meanings' as stable entities, subsisting independently of linguistic behaviour.

Rorty argues that Quine and Davidson's approach to the philosophy of language contains the materials for an argument against the scheme-content dualism, and thus, implicitly, against representationalism. 'Carrying through on Quine', he suggests, 'brings one to Davidson: to the refusal to see either mind or language as standing to the rest of the world as scheme to content' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 51). 'Full-strength holism,' that is, 'produces the radical antidualism espoused by Davidson' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 110).

[78] See 3.2.2, above, for a summary of Quine's achievement in this regard.

[79] 'Meaning' as Rorty uses the term in this expression denotes something quite specific: he has in mind linguistic or conceptual meaning, as opposed to meaning in the broader sense of 'significance'.

Rorty presents Davidson's argument from linguistic holism against the scheme-content dualism in Chapter 6 of *PMN*, developing his earlier exposition of the same argument in 'The World Well Lost' (1982c). Rorty, in *PMN*, places particular emphasis on Davidson's equation of a scheme of concepts radically different from our own with an untranslatable language, and the latter's subsequent argument that such an idea proves to be deeply problematic. As such, Davidson concludes, the very opposition between the world itself (content) and a mental or linguistic scheme fitting or organizing the world is untenable and ought to be abandoned. Davidson's argument (2001c), expounded by Rorty in *PMN*, is rooted in the perspective of the 'field linguist' interpreting an alien language, and is broadly verificationist in character. An untranslatable language – expressing a substantial body of truths couched in concepts we do not ourselves possess – is not something we could ever recognize as such, Davidson claims. This is so because, as field linguists, attributing linguistic meaning to a series of foreign noises 'from scratch,' so to speak, we are obliged to adopt what Davidson calls the interpretational 'principle of charity' by assuming that a basic subset of the noises in question are assumed to be about, in virtue of having been caused by, the same kinds of occurrences as we ourselves recognize. We are obliged, that is, to assume that we share a certain number of core beliefs and concepts with the creatures whose language we are interpreting, since otherwise there is no non-arbitrary way to begin attributing meaning to utterances, and the project of interpretation can never get going. Given that we cannot meaningfully entertain the possibility of an untranslatable language, Davidson continues, neither can we make sense of the possibility of encountering 'alternative' conceptual schemes, radically different from our own yet still capable of expressing truths about the world. And in the absence of this latter idea, he concludes, with all conceivable and recognizable schemes possessing a common core, it no longer makes much sense to posit a principled separation between a world and an assortment of different schemes for its representation: both notions perish. As such, Davidson, writes Rorty,

> brings to its logical conclusion the naturalism, the holism, and the anti-dualism characteristic of both Dewey and Quine. He gives up the idea of "a language" as a structured medium of representation, capable of standing in determinate relations to a distinct entity called "the world" (1992b, pp. 373-4).

This, then, is the manner in which Rorty, in *PMN*, depicts Davidson as following up Quine in order to undermine the representationalist tradition. The argument against the scheme-content dualism seen here is perhaps fundamentally the same as the one 'from continuity' that I identify in Rorty's work post-*PMN*, and which I discuss in the next section (4.2.4, below), since it seems to amount to the idea that – because of relations of causation between the two – we cannot sufficiently separate schemes of representation from the world they are purportedly about in order to fulfil the 'requirements' of the philosophical tradition (according to which, for all we know, we may be radically wrong about the world, to the extent that we lack appropriate concepts for many of the things it contains). As shall be seen, both arguments target the idea that representations are to some extent causally independent

of that which they represent, of the idea that 'scheme' is to some degree causally independent of 'content'. Both, moreover, can be seen to stem from the fact that, in philosophizing about language *qua linguistic behaviour*, Quine and Davidson treat language as simply one more sector of the environment, of nature, thoroughly causally interdependent with all other sectors. Within the framework these two figures adopt, language is an aggregate of inscriptions and utterances, in each case causally conditioned by the physiological and neurological states of linguistic organisms and conditions in the wider environment.

The apparent problem with the version of the argument that explicitly appeals to the notion of radical interpretation, however, as Rorty himself observes, and as James Tartaglia has pointed out in his helpful discussion (Tartaglia, 2007, pp. 169-176), is that it is ostensibly verificationist. Seemingly, it shows only that we can *never apprehend* a radically different conceptual scheme as such, not that such a scheme cannot exist. As such, it is worth considering the expression that Rorty gives to some of the same ideas in his later writings on Davidson.

4.2.4. The argument from continuity

'The problem with representationalism, for Rorty and Davidson alike,' observes Ramberg, 'is the very idea that we should explicate "reality" with reference to an epistemic framework of interpretation at all, to "our" contribution' (Ramberg, 2013a, p. 403). The argument from continuity, which develops this suggestion, is encapsulated by the passage already quoted in 4.2.1 earlier in the chapter, at which point I argued that Rorty and Davidson's 'scheme-content' dualism aligns with the dualism of human beings and nature. In that section, I quoted part of 'Charles Taylor on Truth' (Rorty, 1998a), in which Rorty asks Taylor, and representationalists generally, whether they can 'find some way of getting between language and its object. . . in order to suggest some way of telling *which joints are nature's (part of the content) and which are merely "ours" (just part of the scheme)?*' 'If not,' he continues, 'can you see any point in the claim that some descriptions correspond better to reality than others?' (Rorty, 1998a, p. 91 – emphasis added)[80].

Here, then, one finds the fundamental objection to representationalism that Rorty formulates on the basis of Davidson's work. It is not obvious, he thinks, how to go about splitting up the universe, all that exists, into the respective parts of the various dualisms upon which representationalism depends. 'We cannot draw a line between the object and our picture of the object' (Rorty, 1998a, p. 96). This difficulty in turn stems from the difficulty to be had in distinguishing the *human* contribution to truth

[80] Tomáš Marvan (2011, pp. 278-9) also highlights this strain of argument – appealing to the same passage from 'Charles Taylor on Truth' – calling it the 'argument on inextricability'. Marvan frames the argument epistemically, as one concerning our inability 'to *distinguish* between two situations, viz. between: I) a situation in which we trace, with our words and concepts, a structure inherent in nature; and II) a situation in which we bring with these words and concepts a structure into the world, a structure which isn't there without them' (Marvan, p. 278). Marvan seems to think that the argument's implication that 'debates between realists and their opponents are pointless' (p. 279) contradicts Rorty, who he insists on reading in terms of such debates.

or knowledge from the contribution made by *non-human nature*. The absence of an obvious way of making the distinction undermines representationalism because the representing entity within the representationalist paradigm – for example, mind, language, or thought – is commonly held to be a causal product of human agency, whereas the different incarnations of the 'object' of epistemic representation – for example, 'the universe', 'world', 'reality', or 'nature' – express, by contrast, the idea of the non-human.

Rorty has, in fact, already confronted Taylor with the same rhetorical challenge earlier in the paper. He asks Taylor, and his anti-representationalist opponent more generally:

> [C]an we distinguish the role of our describing activity, our use of words, and the role of the rest of the universe, in accounting for the truth of our true beliefs (Rorty, 1998a, p. 87)?

How is it possible, that is, to distinguish language from the rest of the universe, given that the two seem to be so intimately causally connected? How can this be done in anything other than a way that is ultimately *arbitrary* – reflecting specific, contingent human concerns – as opposed to being done in a way capable of satisfying the tradition's demand to know things 'as they are in themselves'? Rorty answers his own question:

> I do not see how we can. To say that we cannot is to say, with Davidson, that we need to drop "the third dogma of empiricism," the distinction between scheme and content. This means dropping the attempt to sort out propositions by whether they are "made" true by "the world" or by "us" – dropping the problematic of realism and antirealism by dropping the representationalist presuppositions of that problematic (1998a, p. 87)[81].

Thus Rorty sees the difficulty of cleanly separating human cognitive and linguistic activity from the rest of nature as being a compelling reason for following Davidson in rejecting the dualism of scheme and content. Dropping this "Third Dogma", Rorty goes on to say, amounts to 'dropping. . . representationalist presuppositions' that are the basis of many of the traditional problems of philosophy (ibid, p87). Henceforth I shall refer to this line of argument as the 'argument from continuity.' The argument, as I have just indicated, tells against both the 'scheme-content' dualism and – insofar as there is any difference between the two – against representationalism.

[81] Rorty continues: 'On my view, if we drop that distinction and that problematic, we cannot explain what we mean by "correspondence" [in the phrase 'the "correspondence" theory of truth'] unless we posit something like "the world as it is in itself" or "the features a thing has intrinsically, independent of how we describe it". That is why I think that when the thing-in-itself goes, correspondence goes too (ibid).

Rorty makes use of the argument from continuity at various points. '[T]he notion that we know *a priori* that nature and man are distinct sorts of objects is a mistake,' he writes early in his career, in *CP* (1982, p. 203). 'There is no way,' he urges, separately,

> to divide language from world in such a way as to resolve the question at issue between correspondentists and coherentists: is it the world itself, or other beliefs, which is the truth-maker? Nor is there any way to answer the question 'Is it the object in itself, or the object under a description, which is represented?' Davidsonians, who reject the scheme-content distinction, reject both questions, and the notions of "making true" and "representing" along with them (Rorty, 1995d, pp. 98-9).

Again, Rorty identifies the argument with the work of Davidson. Given the difficulty in dividing language from world, one must reject both the scheme-content dualism and the notion of representation of things 'as they are in themselves'. In 'Response to Frank Farrell' (Rorty, 1995c), he poses a similar set of rhetorical questions, stressing what he perceives as the futility and absurdity of trying to answer them.

> Which comes first, subject or object?... Whose contours were there first? Language's or the world's? Whose contours are reflecting whose?... Rejecting such questions seems to me the cash value of rejecting what Davidson calls 'the dogma of scheme and content' (Rorty, 1995c, p. 192).

'We err,' suggests Rorty, 'if we think we can divide up the contributions of world, language, and interpreter, so as to specify what the contribution of one of those would be, in independence of the others' (1995c, p. 192). It is 'pointless' to ask whether we are 'discovering or inventing, making or finding' because an organism's interactions with its environment can be divided up either way, and there is 'no point' to either (Rorty, 1999c, p. xxvi).

> Lately I have been trying to mark out a position that does not take sides between subject and object, mind and world, but that instead tries to erase the contrast between them. I have, so to speak, been trying to lose *both* us and the world. . . I want to stop using the us-world contrast, and thus to get rid of the realism-antirealism issue (Rorty, 1995c, p. 191).

What is at issue is the very possibility of demarcating the boundaries of world and language, or of the various binaries – such as 'subject' and 'object' – encompassed by Davidson's notion of scheme-content dualism. 'Davidson's theoretical diagnosis,' he claims, 'says:'

> stop drawing a line across the universe and contrasting something called "our beliefs about the world" or "the subject" with something on the other side of the line called "the world" or "the object" (Rorty, 1998e, p. 161)[82].

Rorty sees himself as 'adopting a metaphilosophical outlook that will prevent us from worrying about whether we are dealing with questions of meaning or with questions of truth – questions about where "we" stop and "the world" begins' (2010h, p. 247).

To summarize: in Rorty's eyes, Davidson's other major critique of scheme-content – besides that deriving from his philosophy of language – centres on the difficulty to be had in meaningfully forming, in the first place, the various historically significant dualisms falling within its scope. From a certain perspective, that is, the separation of the original unity into contrary parts appears problematic because it is, in a sense, *arbitrary*. This perception of arbitrariness, in turn, is problematic because the philosophical tradition seems to require an absolute, categorical separation between the components of its dualisms. I have called Rorty's Davidsonian argument to this effect the 'argument from continuity'. In 4.4, below, I introduce Rorty's concept of causally independent '*tertia*' in order to continue making the case that the argument from continuity tells against representationalism. In the next section, 4.3, I suggest that the argument from continuity depends on the existence of specifically *causal* continuity between scheme and content, representation and represented. This causal continuity enters Rorty's thought in what is for him a palatable form by means of Davidson's 'anomalous monism'.

4.3. 'Anomalous monism': Davidson's philosophy of mind

Rorty adopts Davidson's 'anomalous monism', re-naming it 'non-reductive physicalism' (Rorty, 1991c). In 'Mental Events' (1980), the paper in which he first advances the view, Davidson postulates that 'both the causal dependence, and the anomalousness, of mental events are undeniable facts' (1980, p. 207). He goes on to offer a 'version of the identity theory of the mental and the physical', according to which 'mental events are identical with physical events' (Davidson, 1980, p. 209). However, events, in Davidson's eyes, are mental or physical only insofar as they are *described as such*[83]: non-reductive physicalism, according to Rorty, therefore 'amounts to the claim that a given event can be described

[82] Occasionally, it is true, Rorty reverses the order of inference, implying that continuity between the components of the various dualisms of the tradition is what one gets once one adopts anti-representationalism, as in the following case: '[R]efusal to draw a philosophically interesting line between nature and culture, language and fact, the universe of semiosis and some other universe, is where you wind up when, with Dewey and Davidson, you stop thinking about knowledge as accurate representation. . . For you also stop thinking that you can separate the object from what you say about it, the signified from the sign, or the language from the metalanguage, except ad hoc, in aid of some particular purpose' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 140).

[83] 'The principle of the anomalism of the mental concerns events described as mental, for events are mental only as described' (Davidson, 1980, p. 215) '[W]e may say that an event is mental if and only if it has a mental description. . . Physical events are those picked out by descriptions or open sentences that contain only the physical vocabulary essentially' (Davidson, 1980, p. 211)

equally well in physiological and psychological, non-intentional and intentional, terms' (Rorty, 1991c, p. 114). For the anomalous monist, the vocabularies of the 'mental' and 'physical' are two different ways of talking about what are ultimately the same thing, as Rorty acknowledges when he suggests Davidson taught us, 'to be satisfied with token-token identities between entities differently described' (1998e, p. 96). A further corollary of the view is that all mental occurrences, states, or processes[84] are susceptible to physical description. Thus anomalous monism, says Davidson, 'resembles materialism in its claim that all events are physical [i.e. can be described as such]'; the view, by his own admission, contains an 'ontological bias' to the extent that 'it allows the possibility that not all events are mental, while insisting that all events are physical' (1980, p. 214). This explains Rorty's decision to recast Davidson's theory as form of *physicalism*, which latter position he defines as the view that 'every event can be described in micro-structural terms, a description which mentions only elementary particles, and can be explained by reference to other events so described' (1991c, p. 114). Davidson, on the other hand, does not invoke 'elementary particles', but evidently still regards his position as a form of *monism* – a 'bland monism', as he describes it (1980, p. 214). It is this 'physicalist' or 'monist' dimension to Davidson's view that Rorty draws on when making the 'argument from continuity' against representationalism. Whilst some form of physicalism or monism is, of course, common to all versions of materialism, Davidson's rendering of such a position appeals to Rorty because it comes without representationalist or reductionist commitments.

It comes without such commitments because the 'anomalous' aspect of anomalous monism is the idea that law-like generalizations expressed in terms of 'mental' and 'physical' vocabularies are not guaranteed to be inter-translatable. Anomalous monism, that is, implies that laws formulated using the familiar 'mental' language of beliefs, desires, intentions, and the like, are irreducible to 'physical' laws and are therefore not in danger of being replaced by them[85]. '[W]e may talk about actions and beliefs', says Rorty, glossing the 'anomalous' element of Davidson's position, 'or about movements and neurons, but not (comprehensively) both at once' (1979, p. 206)[86]. The position is non-reductive because, despite the asymmetry between the scope of 'mental' and 'physical' vocabularies, the vocabulary of agency, belief, intention, and related notions remains indispensable as a means of co-ordinating and predicting human behaviour; for Davidson, the former vocabulary could not, in

[84] Davidson uses the term 'event' in a broad manner, so as to encompass various characterisations of the phenomena in question: 'Events are taken to be unrepeatable, dated individuals such as the particular eruption of a volcano, the (first) birth or death of a person, the playing of the 1968 World Series, or the historical utterance of the words, "You may fire when ready, Gridley"' (Davidson, 1980, pp. 209-10).

[85] Davidson, in 'Mental Events', expresses the idea via the terminology of 'heteronomic' and 'homonomic' laws: whilst some empirical generalizations can be equivalently expressed in a different ('homonomic') vocabulary, that is not the case with respect to the vocabularies of the mental and the physical, which are 'heteronomic' with respect to one another (1980, p. 219).

[86] He continues to expound Davidson's view: 'But there is an obvious sense. . . in which we are talking about *the same things*, whichever set of predicates we choose. . . The difference in choice of vocabularies is not a mark of the difference between the real and the ontologically disreputable. . . but is on all fours with the difference between talking of nations-as-such and talking of the activities of ministers or generals, or between talking of mitochondria as such and talking of the elementary particles they contain' (1979, p. 206).

principle, ever be replaced by law-like generalizations couched in the language of physical science without loss of functionality.

'Anomalous monism' appeals to Rorty for two main reasons. To begin with, it can be regarded as dissolving the 'mind-body problem' by reconceptualizing that problem's foundational premise. The mind-body problem treats talk about mind and related concepts, on the one hand, and talk about physical reality, on the other, as indicating the possible existence of two distinct ontological-metaphysical categories; it then goes on to ask whether and how these categories can co-exist. Anomalous monism, on the other hand, implies that the mind-body problem is something like a *pseudo*-problem, arising simply from a failure to appreciate that we can describe things in different ways for different purposes[87]. According to Rorty:

> 'Mental Events' [Davidson's paper] seems to me to lead to the following, baldly naturalistic, view: reality does not have an intrinsic character but can be described in any way. . . that language-users find useful. None of these ways is more faithful to what is described than any other (1998c, p. 390).

Besides its felicity with respect to the mind-body problem, the second source of appeal of anomalous monism for Rorty is that it offers him the opportunity to be monist or naturalist without thereby being reductionist or scientist. Anomalous monism, in treating the notion of *physical* as essentially one way amongst various other possible ways of describing underlying events, takes away from natural science – as has already been noted – the right to determine what does and does not 'really exist'. The picture that Davidson offers us, claims Rorty, is one of 'the relations between the human self and the world which, though "naturalized" through and through, excludes nothing' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 113). By this, Rorty means that Davidson's philosophy of mind neither eliminates nor marginalises what Wilfrid Sellars called the 'manifest image' – namely, descriptions of human behaviour in terms of volitions, intentions, and beliefs – because it does not characterise such descriptions as less accurate representations of 'reality as it is in itself', or the terms of such descriptions as denoting 'less real' entities.

Davidson's anomalous monism is therefore, for Rorty, the 'culmination' of a line of American thought which 'aims at being naturalistic without being reductionist' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 113). Davidson has shown us, Rorty thinks, 'how to distinguish what is alive in naturalism from what is dead in reductionism' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 96). In this respect, Davidson is, for Rorty, superior to either Quine or Sellars, since 'unlike both Quine and Sellars, [Davidson] has no special interest in physical science' (Rorty, 1991f, p. 155). Davidson thus lacks the 'reductionist impulses' of Quine and Sellars, having 'no

[87] On Davidson's stance, 'the difference between mind and body. . . is thus no more mysterious than. . . the relation between a macro-structural and a micro-structural description of a table' (Rorty, 1991c, p. 114).

preferred vocabulary in which to describe the world, no particular regard for the vocabulary of unified natural science' (ibid)[88].

Nevertheless anomalous monism takes the entities or events differently described by mental and physical vocabularies to belong to the same universe. The law-like generalizations offered by natural science, and those offered by our 'everyday' way of understanding the world and human behaviour, each pick out patterns within the same causal nexus. 'Causality and identity,' writes Davidson, 'are relations between individual events no matter how described' (1980, p. 215). Furthermore, the 'ontological bias' favouring the physical vocabulary – the fact that, unlike the mental vocabulary, its scope of application is universal – means that it can be used to describe *all* events in the single causal nexus. Thus, by the lights of anomalous monism, what we describe as mental states or episodes always have i) alternative physical descriptions, and ii) physically describable causes. Davidson's anomalous monism and Rorty's non-reductive physicalism therefore entail '*causal monism*' – that idea that all phenomena can be incorporated into the same, all-encompassing network of cause-and-effect. If one then identifies this all-encompassing network of cause-and-effect with the idea of '*nature*', then anomalous monism and reductive physicalism entail the kind of philosophical 'naturalism' considered in Chapter 2, above.

Therefore Davidson's 'anomalous monism', re-styled as 'non-reductive physicalism,' is the source of Rorty's naturalism. It entails that even human thought and experience have wholly natural causal antecedents.

4.4. The notion of '*tertia*'

In 4.2, above, I showed that all that was required to move from Davidson's scheme-content dualism to representationalism was to treat the 'scheme' side of the dualism as 'representing' or 'fitting' the 'content' side. The first Davidsonian argument against representationalism, in 4.2.3, used semantic holism and the perspective of the 'field linguist' to dispute the intelligibility of the notion of a 'conceptual scheme' constructed out of self-subsistent 'meanings'. Rorty used Davidson's extrapolation of Quine on radical translation in order to undermine the idea of a scheme of 'representations' – entities to some degree independent of *nature* and linguistic behaviour. The second Davidsonian argument, in 4.2.4, which I called the 'argument from continuity,' challenged the dualism of scheme and content dualism in an even more direct manner, raising the question of *how*

[88] Faced with the choice between Sellars' 'manifest' and 'scientific' images of reality, Rorty observes that Davidson would choose the option that 'Sellars thinks childish: . . ."both"' (Rorty, 1991f, pp. 155-6). Davidson 'use[s] whatever image is handy for the purpose at hand, without worrying about which is closer to reality' (Rorty, 1991f, p. 156). He 'represent[s] a strain of philosophical thought which makes philosophy no more the ally of science than any other culture, and which frees analytic philosophy from the familiar charge of "reductionism"' (Rorty, 1991c, p. 113).

and *where* one was meant to draw the line between either 'scheme' and 'content,' or 'representation' and 'represented'.

Both arguments have *causal continuity* in common. In the case of semantic holism, more tenuously, continuity enters the picture secondarily, as a corollary of the fact that language – as linguistic *behaviour* – is regarded as a manifestation of nature, a natural phenomenon. One adopts what can variously be described as an 'external', 'disengaged', or 'disinterested,' perspective from which human linguistic behaviour is, in principle, treated no differently to the *aurora borealis* or to the behaviour of a semi-conductor. Crucially, one treats the phenomenon – in this case, language – as something 'foreign' that one does not identify oneself with, nor exert control over. Both on the part of the individual observer and the community of inquirers, one treats language, linguistic behaviour, entirely as the effect of a set of causes from which one is absent.

In the case of the 'argument from continuity,' causal continuity between the constituents of traditional philosophical dualisms is a premise of the argument. Representationalists are required to separate the causally continuous universe into 'subject' and 'object' parts in a way that carries absolute, interest-invariant assent. Naturalism, understood as causal monism, therefore grounds both Davidsonian anti-representationalist arguments.

Rorty, then, thinks representationalism depends for its intelligibility upon some entities' being able to possess (a degree of) *causal independence* from the rest of the universe. This line of thought receives its clearest and most sustained exposition in the paper 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth' (Rorty, 1991e). There, Rorty introduces the concept of '*tertia*'[89] (singularly, '*tertium quid*') – his collective name for anything playing the role of an 'epistemic interface,' or *third* thing, between humans and the non-human world (the universe, nature etc.). As Rorty uses the term, '*tertia*' are precisely those things that facilitate representationalism by being to some extent causally independent from the rest of nature, a property he calls '*non-causality*'. He writes:

> Davidson's favourite characterization of the picture which the skeptic should abjure is "the dualism of scheme and content". A common feature of all the forms of this dualism which Davidson lists is that the relations between the two sides… are non-causal. Such *tertia* as a "conceptual framework" or an "intended interpretation" are non-causally related to the things which they organize or intend. They *vary independently of the rest of the universe*, just as do the sceptic's notions of "correspondence" or "representation". The moral is that if we have no such *tertia*, then we have no suitable items to serve as representations, and thus

[89] The term does not appear elsewhere in Rorty's ouevre.

> no need to ask whether our beliefs represent the world accurately (1991e, pp. 138-9 – emphasis added)

Rorty suggests that we will become anti-representationalists 'automatically,' so to speak, if we are able to rid ourselves of *tertia*. The latter are the only 'suitable items to serve as representations' (in the absolute, interest-invariant sense required by the representationalist tradition[90]), because of their non-causality: the fact that they 'vary independently of the rest of the universe'.

Rorty develops his account several pages later in the same paper. 'The function of the *tertia* which Davidson wishes to banish,' he explains, 'was precisely to provide a mechanism outside the causal order of the physical world, a mechanism which could have or lack a quasi-causal property' (1991e, p. 141). Again, *tertia* are depicted as possessing a measure of *causal independence* from the rest of nature. At the same time, they potentially retain ('could have or lack') the capacity to affect the nature from which they are independent. Entities such as 'beliefs', 'ideas', 'conceptual schemes', 'theories,' that is, besides representing reality 'as it is in itself,' also produce internal changes in the beings in which they arise, and, through those beings' subsequent actions, changes in the wider universe. Moreover, in virtue of being 'outside the causal order of the physical [natural],' *tertia* are, quite literally, *super-natural* – their being is not wholly determined by natural law(s)[91].

Thus Rorty uses the term '*tertia*' as a way of referring to the '*representations*' within the representationalist paradigm. The concept is, to repeat, designed to focus attention on the *causal independence* it would appear those representations enjoy with respect to what they represent. 'Davidson is insisting,' writes Rorty elsewhere, 'that having beliefs about things cannot swing free from the way things are, because such beliefs are part of a web of causal interactions with those things' (Rorty, 1998e, pp. 160-1). One should insist, 'with Davidson. . . that human belief cannot swing free of the nonhuman environment' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 32). The 'only way to get rid of the dualism of subject and object,' he continues in the first instance, in another restatement of the argument from continuity, 'is to say that the purported gap between the two is an arbitrary line drawn across this web' (ibid).

Evidently, the anti-representationalist's task is to demonstrate either that in some sense *there are no tertia*, or that we should not incorporate *tertia* into our theories. As Rorty presents the notion, the primary instances of *tertia* are '*mental*' entities, including beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. The Cartesian construal of the concept of 'mind' is the target of the first Part of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

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[90] See 5.5, below, for indications that Rorty believed thought and language could be representational in more innocuous senses.

[91] In Rorty's view, science does not have 'deep philosophical implications' – its philosophical, as opposed to technological, significance stops at ghostbusting: 'the successive achievements of modern science exhausted their philosophical significance when they made clear that there are no spooks – that a causal account of the relation between spatio-temporal events did not require the operation of non-physical forces' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 100). See 5.3.2, below, for an account of how Rorty sees Darwin as particularly important in this regard.

(Rorty, 1979), as well as of his earlier 'eliminative materialism'. As seen in Chapter 3, above, *PMN's* historical narrative depicts the concept of *mind* as a uniquely human attribute – 'our glassy essence,' the seat of abstract reason and the immortal soul – that Descartes transformed into an epistemic 'mirror' ontologically distinct from the rest of the universe[92]. Rorty therefore regards all developments weakening the hold of the Cartesian conception of mind as also helping to eliminate one of the principal categories of *tertia*, thereby undermining representationalism. '[T]he benefit of going linguistic,' he writes in 'Pragmatism. . .' is that

> getting rid of the Cartesian mind is a first step toward eliminating the *tertia* which, by seeming to intrude between us and the world, created the old metaphysical issues in the first place (Rorty, 1991d, p. 148).

The trend toward new, 'linguistic,' characterisations of philosophical problems in the twentieth-century, which Gustav Bergmann called 'The Linguistic Turn'[93], is therefore an important development in Rorty's eyes, because it weakens the grip of the original *tertium quid* over Western philosophy. Yet Rorty is clear that, even were the Cartesian mind to be eliminated, this would only be a 'first step' towards dispensing with *tertia* and representationalism altogether, since language, treated in a certain way, can also play the role of a *tertium quid*. Language, that is to say, may function as a representational, epistemic interface if it too is accorded the same kind of causal independence from nature that was accorded to Cartesian mind.

Rorty is adamant that in much philosophical discussion it already does so. Language acquires causal independence from the rest of nature, he thinks, given certain conceptions of such notions as *meanings* and *conceptual schemes*. These are the conceptions of such notions that Quine and Davidson, through their adoption of the stance of the field-linguist, and their ensuing attacks on the notion of fixed, determinate linguistic meanings, oppose[94]. Much of Rorty's admiration for Davidson stems from his having, in Rorty's eyes, extruded *tertia* from language. Davidson's philosophy of language, that is, denies linguistic entities such as meanings and conceptual schemes any kind of causal freedom from the rest of nature, and as such they are unable to play the role of *tertia*, and thus to serve as the kind of absolute, interest-invariant epistemic representations characteristic of representationalism. His philosophy of language does this, I have been suggesting, because it is informed by his anomalous monism, which imports naturalism-as-causal-monism into his outlook.

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[92] In Chapter 3, above, I showed how Rorty, after *PMN*, placed less of an emphasis on Descartes in accounting for the emergence of representationalism.

[93] A term also strongly associated with and popularized by Rorty, due to his edited anthology of that name; see Rorty, 1967.

[94] See 3.2.2 and 4.2.3, above, for more on Quine's and Davidson's philosophies of language, respectively.

4.5. Theoretical sufficiency?: *tertia* and external-world scepticism

In the final section of this chapter, I am going to suggest that there are two possible readings of the relationship between Rorty's Davidsonian, causally monistic, naturalism and his anti-representationalism.

On the first, 'weaker,' reading of the relationship between the two sets of ideas, naturalism does not directly contradict representationalism, but it renders the traditional preoccupations of philosophy less urgent and interesting; representationalism, on this reading, becomes *superfluous* as a result of causal monism. The second reading is the 'stronger' of the two. It maintains that naturalism and representationalism are *incompatible*, or that they *contradict one another* – so that it is not possible consistently to hold both views[95].

The two conceptions reflect different metaphilosophical outlooks. A key difference concerns whether one can hold, at different times and for different purposes, sets of beliefs that contradict one another. On the one hand, if one has reservations about the Wittgensteinian idea of using ideas and theories as 'tools', then one is likely to see a contradiction between representationalism and causal monism as compelling one to choose one or the other position. This complements a 'metaphysical' interpretation of Rorty's proclamation that 'if we have no. . . *tertia*, then we have no suitable items to serve as representations,' according to which 'having no *tertia*' is less an outcome of choice – of 'deciding' not to introduce 'non-causal' relations – than it is the discovery that there are *no* tertia *to be found*.

On the other hand, if one considers it to be possible to 'pick up' and 'put down' ideas and theories for particular uses, then *even if* causal monism and representationalism contradict one another, one will likely think it possible to adopt the two frameworks at different times, for different purposes. In that case, one seemingly requires a separate, pragmatic, moral, reason for rejecting representationalism, beside what is potentially its logical incompatibility with causal monism[96].

I will consider these two potential interpretations of the anti-representational role of Rorty's naturalism – respectively, as facilitating socio-culturally desirable change, and as bespeaking some form of universal, context-independent truth – in greater detail in Chapter 6, below.

On the balance of textual evidence, Rorty undoubtedly favours the first way of conceiving of the relationship between naturalism and representationalism. According to this way, to repeat, representationalism should be rejected simply because it is *superfluous* in the presence of causally monistic naturalism. Rorty's attack on '*tertia,*' and in particular his suggestion that *'*if we have no. . . *tertia*, then we have no suitable items to serve as representations,' becomes the idea that one *does*

[95] As, for instance, when Rorty notes 'the apparent incompatibility of the correspondence theory of truth with a naturalistic account of the origin of human minds' (2007a, p. 55).
[96] See 6.1, below.

not need to, and one should decide not to, countenance what he calls 'non-causal relations,' such as representational or correspondence relations, rather than the idea that they do not exist. Such relations are unnecessary, on this account, because naturalism does all the necessary explanatory work, including securing us in our relation to a wider world by establishing the right kinds of causal relations between ourselves and nature[97]. Rorty attributes to Davidson the following view:

> If we have causal relations. . . holding between the World and the Self, as well as relations of justification. . . internal to the Self's network of beliefs and desires, we do not need any further relations to explain how the Self gets in touch with the World, and conversely (Rorty, 1991d, p. 120).

Thus relative to a particular objective – viz., that of avoiding a form of collective solipsism – no further purpose is served by introducing (the traditional philosophical kind of) representational relations, since the objective in question is satisfied through the causal relations underwritten by naturalism. '[C]entral to Davidson's philosophical strategy,' (1991d, p. 157) Rorty argues, '. . . is the idea that the 'desired "relation to the world" which representationalists fear may be lacking is. . . *built into* the fact that these are *our* practices – the practices of real live human beings engaged in causal interaction with the rest of nature' (pp. 156-7 – original emphasis). The 'way out of both Cartesianism and Platonism,' he notes elsewhere, 'is to view human *nomoi* – human languages and practices – as as natural as the beaver's teeth, and equally in touch (causal touch, rather than any sort of "answerability" touch) with the world' (2000f, p. 123)[98].

Indeed, the theme of anxiety concerning the prospect of 'losing contact with' the world, or 'the real' – the fear that we are 'wandering about among our own creations rather than being constrained to truth' (Rorty, 1982a, p. 134), which Rorty thinks is 'definatory' (ibid, p. 130) of the Western philosophical tradition[99] – recurs frequently in his treatment of Davidson, whose anti-scepticism he considers to have been one of Davidson's most valuable philosophical legacies[100]. According to Rorty,

> Davidson and Sellars agree that what shows us that life is not just a dream, that our beliefs are in touch with reality, is the *causal*, non-intentional, non-representational, links between us and the rest of the universe (1991d, p. 159).

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[97] As I argue in 5.7, below, Huw Price's work also takes this broad approach to motivating anti-representationalism from the perspective of a form of naturalism (specifically, his 'subject naturalism').

[98] C.f. also: 'We shall fear that the world is on the verge of absconding as long as we think that causal connection with the world is not a tight enough way of bonding with it' (Rorty, 2000f, p. 124).

[99] 'I see metaphysics and skepticism as two sides of the same coin, one that I would like to take out of circulation' (Rorty, 2005a, p. 143).

[100] For instance, in Rorty's obituary of Davidson, 'Out of the Matrix' (Rorty, 2003), he argues that Wittgenstein and Davidson are the two most important anti-sceptical philosophers, Davidson making explicit what Wittgenstein had previously only sketched with regard to external-world scepticism.

For Rorty, the causal relations between ourselves and the world are – or, at least, should be – sufficient to reassure us that we are not radically deceived or 'out of contact with reality' in any other sense. A Davidsonian 'truth theory for a natural language' is 'nothing more or less than an empirical explanation of the causal relations which hold between features of the environment and the holding true of sentences,' contends Rorty, and this way of understanding the idea of truth 'guarantee[s]. . . that we are, always and everywhere, "in touch with the world"' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 33). 'As Davidson teaches us,' he explains, 'you and your peers and the world are always bouncing off each other in causal ways. That causal interaction – that perpetual triangulation – is as intimate as connection with either world or peers can get' (Rorty, 2000f, p. 127)[101]. Rorty thinks that Davidson's account of the philosophical concept of 'truth,' appealing as it does to causal relations between linguistic behaviour and the wider environment, ought to make it seem unnecessary for us, as an epistemic community, to try to ascertain whether our beliefs 'accurately represent' or 'correspond to' reality. However, representationalist notions potentially serve other purposes besides alleviating anxiety about loss of 'contact' with the world – such as explaining the utility of thought and linguistic behaviour – and so this is not yet the full picture of the 'moral' argument from naturalism to anti-representationalism[102].

[101] C.f.: 'All sides to . . . these disputes agree that the world . . . is mostly causally independent of us: that is, most of it would be as it is had we never existed. To get an interesting further degree of causal independence we should have to imagine a situation in which it was no longer case that our beliefs changed as our causal relations with the world changed, or perhaps a world where we had no causal relations at all to anything we have beliefs about. But has not Davidson shown that the latter situation cannot obtain?' (Rorty, 2000a, p. 264).

[102] See 5.6, 5.7, and 6.1, below.

Chapter 5. Darwinian Naturalism

In this chapter (5.1-5.6), I argue that the significance of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection for Rorty's anti-representationalism is the fact that it encourages us to expect to be able to explain the emergence of human cognition and consciousness in exclusively causal mechanical terms. Darwin thus provides a concrete explanatory framework by means of which to implement naturalism, insofar as the latter is conceived of as a form of causal monism as outlined in Chapter 2. This fact, I suggest, underlies Rorty's frequent invocations of Darwin in his later writings. On the other hand, Rorty's occasional inclination to explicate Darwin's philosophical significance in terms of the contrast between the notion of language as a system of representations and language as a tool has the potential to mislead and, as such, requires significant qualification.

In the final section of the chapter (5.7), I briefly consider the work of Huw Price (1953-), who has attempted to argue that a form of naturalism resembling Rorty's – Price's 'subject naturalism' – motivates anti-representationalism. Price has been strongly influenced by Rorty, and his approach is firmly rooted in the neo-pragmatist tradition to which Rorty belongs, one stressing the philosophical significance of language over and against 'mentalistic' notions such as *experience*. Consideration of Price's anti-representationalist strategy helps to place what I have been claiming is the significance of naturalism for Rorty's thought into a wider context. It provides evidence that important contemporary thinkers, coming after Rorty, have also envisioned a strong link between naturalism and anti-representationalism. In addition, it provides one possible example of a direction in which Rorty's thought concerning naturalism might be developed – one that, insofar as Price's approach grants a form of epistemic priority to the natural sciences, may be more likely than the original to appeal to mainstream analytic philosophers.

5.1. Darwin against representationalism

Darwin features as a crucial theme and reference point in Rorty's writings from the 1990s onwards, particularly in the volume *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers Volume 3* (*TP*) (Rorty, 1998e). In *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Rorty remarks:

> It seems to me that philosophy has still not caught up with Darwin – still not faced up to the challenge which he presents. There is still, I think, a lot of work to be done in reconciling the precious values embedded in our traditions with what Darwin had to say about our relation to other animals. Dewey and Davidson seem to me

> the philosophers who have done most to help us accomplish this reconciliation (1999c, pp. 65-66)[103].

Rorty perceives a tension between Darwin's intellectual legacy and traditional 'representationalist' philosophical notions of human thought and its relation to the world. According to him, Darwin's 'narrative' is 'so convincing,' that, 'once its details have been filled in by Mendelian genetics and by an explosion in palaeontological research', it threatens 'the entire Western theological and philosophical tradition' (1999c, p. 264).

In fact, Rorty thinks that many non-philosophers have already rejected representationalism due to the influence of Darwin. Commenting on the 'perceived loss of unity' in academia associated with the term 'postmodernism,' he notes that there has been, among non-philosophical intellectuals, a widespread 'renunciation of the traditional theologico-metaphysical belief that Reality and Truth are One – that there is One True Account of How Things Really Are'; a shift in attitude which 'began', he claims, '. . . with Darwin's explanation of where we came from' (1999c, p. 262).

Hence Rorty considers Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection to count against the representationalist philosophical paradigm. The focus of this chapter is the question why this might be so. What, exactly, is the connection Rorty envisages between Darwin and anti-representationalism?

There are, I suggest, two broad strands to Darwin's anti-representationalist significance, for Rorty; two factors which culminate in ideological tension between Darwinian biology and the philosophical tradition. Moreover, both of these factors, I shall show in section 5.3 below, stem from the way in which Darwin's theory extends the scope of causal-mechanical explanation so as to encompass complex, cognisant life forms.

Firstly, thinks Rorty, Darwinian biology depicts the emergence of life and thought as something *unplanned*: on the Darwinian model, the universe comes to be the way that it is as the result of a series of individually meaningless mechanical interactions between smaller constituent parts. Second, Darwinian biology undermines traditional philosophical dualisms insofar as it bridges the *prima facie* explanatory gap between inanimate matter and animate life, encouraging us to think that we will eventually be able to bring distinctively human traits like language, reason, and consciousness, into the ambit of a causal-mechanical explanatory scheme. That is to say, it promotes and underwrites *naturalism*, understood as the idea that the universe is *causally monistic*.

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[103] Rorty also links the same philosophers when he speaks of 'the Darwinian terms that Dewey, Davidson, and Dennett use to describe themselves' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 109). For the connection between Dewey and Davidson, see 4.1, above.

5.2. Darwin as a theme in 'classical' pragmatism

Rorty proposes that we 'follow up on Dewey's suggestion that Darwin has made Descartes and Locke obsolete' (1998e, p. 20). The proper place for the modern-day pragmatist and anti-representationalist philosopher, in his view, is,

> … working at the interface between the common sense of their community, a common sense much influenced by Greek metaphysics and by monotheism, and the startingly counterintuitive self-image sketched by Darwin, and partially filled in by Dewey (Rorty, 1998e, p. 41).

Rorty observes that the 'classical' pragmatist philosophical movement was heavily influenced by Darwin's ideas. The philosophical implications of Darwinian ideas concerning the 'mechanics' of biological evolution were explored by Dewey and William James, as well as by Friedrich Nietzsche[104], during the second half of the nineteenth century. The 'classical' pragmatists, argues Rorty, unlike their idealist contemporaries, 'took Darwin and biology seriously', which 'gave them a . . . reason for distrusting the idea that true beliefs are accurate representations' (1998e, p. 20). 'All three of the founding pragmatists', he suggests, 'combined a naturalistic, Darwinian view of human beings with a deep distrust of the problems which philosophy had inherited from Descartes, Hume and Kant' (1998d). Indeed Rorty goes so far as to refer to philosophical Pragmatism as 'post-Darwinian American philosophy' (1999c, p. xix), arguing in his *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* article on 'Pragmatism' that the classical pragmatists were 'responding to Darwin in the same way as the great philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had responded to Galileo and Newton' (1998d). The original, 'classical,' pragmatists were in his view seeking to deal, one way or another, with the threat to cherished human values and notions conceivably presented by Darwin's theory of evolution[105]. Descartes and Kant, argues Rorty, had developed their 'mind-body' and 'phenomenal-noumenal' dualisms in order to preserve an 'enclave of non-mechanism' from which mechanical models of causal explanation were extruded. But the innovative brilliance of Darwin's theory of evolution, in Rorty's view, rendered these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century attempts implausible (1999c, p. 67):

> The antinaturalist self-images suggested to us by, among others, Plato and Kant have served us well, but they are hard to reconcile with Darwin's account of our origins. I think Dewey was right to suggest that we should try to get along without the remnants of these earlier self-images (1998e, p. 48).

[104] Rorty describes Nietzsche as 'Darwin's apt pupil' (1991d, p. 149N).

[105] C.f.: 'My hunch is that just as we see philosophy from 1630 to 1800 ("Descartes to Kant") as an attempt to come to term with corpuscularian mechanics, future historians will see philosophy from 1860 to (at least) 2060 as an attempt to come to terms with the "biological conceptions of the psyche" that Dewey found in James, and which James developed in response to Huxley and Darwin' (Rorty, 1995e, pp. 70-71).

Thus, on Rorty's account, the classical pragmatists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century pragmatists opted for Darwin over Descartes and Kant, given their apparent incompatibility. According to Rorty, they explored ways in which we might 'switch over from a Cartesian-Kantian picture of intellectual progress (as a better and better fit between mind and world) to a Darwinian picture…' (1991a, p. 3).

5.3. Universalizing causal-mechanical explanation: philosophical implications of Darwin

Rorty thinks that Darwin's principal philosophical legacy consists in his having bequeathed us a powerful explanatory framework in terms of which we might offer *mechanical* causal explanations of the emergence of complex life-forms – above all, of *ourselves*. Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection holds that, given biological trait variation amongst a group of reproducing organisms, and the shared capacity of organisms to transmit individually possessed traits through reproduction, the typical group of traits characterising a species changes with time. In other words, the species in question is liable to *evolve*. Evolution, Darwin hypothesized, occurs because traits that enable individual organisms to reproduce frequently and successfully compared to others, by producing more copies of themselves in the next generation than rival traits, *ipso facto* come to predominate within the population, whilst the opposite is true of traits having the opposite effect. Nature, via her ever-changing environment, 'selects', so to speak, those sets of traits that in combination prove most fecund.

Historically, Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, first published fully in 1859, dovetailed with Gregor Mendel's contemporaneous experiments on pea plants, which led the latter to propose the existence of 'Laws of Inheritance' explaining biological trait variation and trait inheritance in terms of 'hidden' microscopic factors. Mendel thereby offered rudimentary but seminal insight into the 'mechanics' of trait variation and transmission, the two initial presuppositions of Darwin's theory. As such, the two figures together ushered in the genetic and evolutionary science of the 20th century.

Rorty mentions Mendel frequently alongside Darwin, because he thinks the former illuminates the latter's philosophical significance. Darwin, Rorty thinks, made it possible for us plausibly to conceive of the evolution of complex life as a *mechanical process*, arising solely out of the accumulation of countless microscopic interactions. He, Darwin, provided the explanatory lynchpin, the *sine qua non*, on which the possibility of a causal-mechanical explanation of complex life depends. In Rorty's eyes Darwin's theory of natural selection is the key to understanding how the abundant purposeful complexity of life could have arisen 'automatically', so to speak, as an aggregate of small-scale interactions, rather than as the artefact of a transcendent Designer-Creator, as had previously most commonly been supposed.

By contrast, nowadays, we are at a stage where, 'although rabble-rousers can still raise doubts about Darwin among the masses, the intellectuals. . . have no such doubt' (2007a, p. 148). Before Darwin, Rorty explains, materialist thinkers such as Lucretius and Hobbes faced an uphill struggle in persuading people to accept that humanity's distinctive capabilities and accomplishments were the result of sufficient number of individually purposeless occurrences. But Darwin came up with 'the first detailed and plausible explanation of how both life and intelligence might have emerged from a meaningless swirl of corpuscles' (1999c, p. 264). It was 'Darwin's and Mendel's mechanization of biology', argues Rorty, which portrayed 'the various species of plants and animals as the temporary results of interactions between fortuitous environmental pressures and random mutations' (Rorty, 1991a, pp. 144-5), and as such the 'synthesis of Darwin with Mendel' offers us a 'purely mechanical account of biological evolution' (1998e, p. 300)[106].

In the context of Rorty's anti-representationalism, the assumed viability of causal-mechanical explanations of the emergence of cognisant life then has two important further consequences. In the remainder of this section (5.3) I am going to review Darwin's theory, considering each of these in more detail. The consequences are: firstly, such explanations' *de-teleologization* of nature (5.3.1); and, second, the sense in which they allow us to dispense with various philosophical dualisms and thereby to view *human beings as natural creatures*, or *as part of nature* – that is, the sense in which Darwin's theory makes it easier for us to adopt a Rortyan *naturalism* according to which naturalism is understood as a form of causal monism (5.3.2)[107]. I will show that Rorty draws on both corollaries in order to argue against representationalism.

5.3.1. First implication: 'de-teleologization' of nature

A causal-mechanical account is one which explains the target phenomenon as the result of a series of interactions between smaller constituent parts. Each part behaves either randomly, or according to a fixed pattern or 'law', but in either case the part lacks anything in the way of intention, choice, or purpose of its own when it behaves in the way that it does. If one endorses the type of causal-mechanical account of the emergence of complex life developed by Darwin, and if one equates the kind of microscopic mechanical explanans typically employed in such explanations with 'nature', then nature *by definition* lacks a goal or agenda. On this view, the non-human powers and forces operative in the universe in no case ever prefer, or aim for, particular 'end-states' or outcomes. Instead, interactions between the constituents of nature occur without purpose: either, randomly, indeterministically, simply 'because they do'; or, according to a way of thinking prevalent since the Modern era, because they follow patterns described, or determined, by so-called '*laws* of nature'.

The alternative to the de-teleologized viewpoint common before Darwin, on the other hand, portrayed complex life-forms as the deliberate creations or manifestations of non-human agency.

[106] See also *CIS*: 'the Mendelian, mechanistic account of natural selection' (Rorty, 1989, p. 16).
[107] See Ch. 2, above, for this conception.

Such agency might be attributed to a particular entity, or entities, such as 'God', 'Mother Earth', or a plurality of gods, or it might be attributed to the whole – to the 'Universe itself', 'Nature'. Regardless of its specific implementation, the basic idea was of one or more immense powers that nevertheless shared with us something similar to the psychological states that we term 'preferences', 'desires', 'intentions', and so forth. Such explanations, that is, all depended upon the idea of an overarching, decisive, non-human goal or purpose – a natural, plan or *teleology*. Darwinism, therefore, at least on one common and plausible construal, removed the explanatory need for natural *teleology*. Darwin *de-teleologized* nature, provided the latter was conceived of as an entity with a single coherent *telos*. His theory of evolution by natural selection admitted only the vast plurality of potentially incompatible values and purposes empirically 'incarnate' amongst the numerous various actual human beings and human cultures (and potentially animals and animal cultures).

Rorty identifies this de-teleologization, or contingency[108], of nature as a key consequence of modern evolutionary science at several points in his oeuvre. For example, in 'Dewey between Hegel and Darwin', he attributes to Dewey the view that Darwin 'finished the job Galileo began', namely that of 'eliminating from nature any purpose that transcends a particular organism's need in a particular situation' (1998e, p. 301). Later in the same article, he reinforces the point by contrasting this outlook with what he calls the 'pre-Darwinian attachment to the idea of purposes not our own' (1998e, p. 302). For Rorty, Darwin's de-teleologization of nature means that now, 'human beings have to dream up the point of human life, and cannot appeal to a nonhuman standard to determine whether they have chosen wisely' (1999c, p. 266). 'Mechanization', he comments elsewhere, had the consequence 'that the world in which human beings lived no longer taught them anything about how they should live' (1991a, p. 145). Thus the appeal, the advantage, of the de-teleologization of nature, for Rorty, is primarily *anti-authoritarian*[109]. This anti-authoritarianism can itself be treated in two slightly different senses. First, in a straightforwardly ethical and political way sense: in Rorty's view, the removal of a single overarching coherent *telos* from 'nature' amounts to the abjuration of the very idea of non-human, 'external', goals; ones which might demand precedence over those we as human beings set ourselves.

But secondly, more importantly for our purposes, Rorty regards Darwin as undermining a form of authoritarianism about what human beings think and profess *theoretically*, *intellectually*, as well as

[108] Universal contingency – the absence of universal necessity – plausibly follows from the absence of a universal *telos* given the assumption that this *telos* is being implemented by an omnipotent power (such as God, or the laws of physics). It is difficult to imagine what it would be for the universe to have a *telos* that it was incapable of fulfilling. My impression is that historically the two ideas – universal *telos* and universal omnipotence – have nearly always coincided. Therefore Rorty is justified in conflating (the absence of) teleology and contingency, in this context.

[109] See 1.12 above for Rorty's Deweyan interpretation of pragmatism and anti-representationalism as 'anti-authoritarian'

one concerning how they think and act morally[110]. Rorty sees Darwin's theory as motivating anti-representationalism, which as we have already seen (1.1.2, above), he also views as a form of anti-authoritarianism. Hence in two subtly different ways, which admittedly converge to the extent that one treats the adoption of an intellectual or theoretical position as a morally accountable action, Rorty finds Darwin's facilitation of the causal-mechanical explanation of complex life to be *liberating*, because it frees us from possible subservience to absolute, non-human purposes, from behavioural or cognitive exigencies imposed so to speak 'from without' the human community. That explains a cryptic remark in 'Freud and Moral Reflection', where he writes: 'My enthusiasm for the mechanization and decentring of the world is dictated by my assumption that the ironic, playful intellectual is a desirable character type. . .' (1991a, p. 158). Rorty approves of such mechanization, because, in his view, it frees the intellect from the categorical obligation to conform to the dictates of a non-human authority. Indeed, mechanistic causal explanation had already, before Darwin, functioned as a primary tool of the Enlightenment because it displaced, with respect to various phenomena, explanations involving non-human agency and teleology – e.g. involving God, or demons – that had proved particularly susceptible to various forms of social, political and economic exploitation. Hence one finds Rorty eulogizing 'the comforts of a clean, well-lighted, fully mechanized, Newtonian universe' (2007a, p. 189), and positioning his own work within the Enlightenment tradition. 'A shared opposition to authoritarianism links Erasmus and Shelley to Dewey', he writes: 'the motives behind Renaissance humanism, Enlightenment atheism, and pragmatism were pretty similar' (2010i, p. 444)[111]. Rorty's position is striking because he views the de-teleologization of nature, its mechanization, in a predominantly positive light, rather than – what is often the case – as an apparently nihilistic or de-humanizing phenomenon.

The thrust of Rorty's argument from Darwin's de-teleologization of nature to anti-representationalism is that the former makes the various candidate representational entities, those which the philosophical tradition has commonly held to be capable of representing 'Reality' more or less accurately, such as thoughts or beliefs, theories or sentences, *radically contingent*. By the latter expression, 'radically contingent', I mean occurring in the absence of a plan, or teleology. In the wake of Darwin, Rorty argues, it no longer makes sense for us to see nature or reality *itself* as favouring particular sentences, scientific theories, or philosophical systems, much less as ensuring that the human intellect eventually settles on some particular subset of these. Human beings and their minds are not special and 'intended' by a higher power, hence inevitable; they are accidental, contingent. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (*CIS*) (Rorty, 1989), Rorty suggests that the upshot of the

[110] Rorty would probably not approve of this distinction between action and theory (or between the moral and the theoretical), and so would probably not make the same point in exactly this way.

[111] See Rorty, 1999d, p. 7. See also: 'The switch in modern philosophy from what Habermas calls "subject-centred reason' to what he calls "communicative reason" – a change which Dewey embodies best – is a recognition of the historical contingency of philosophical problems. . . That switch is the most recent version of the revolt against authority which found expression first in the Reformation, and then in the Enlightenment' (Rorty, 1999c, pp. 110-11).

'Mendelian, mechanistic, account of natural selection' is that It 'let[s] us see mind as something which just happened rather than as something which was the point of the whole process' (1989, p. 16). Rather, he argues, 'our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches… as are the orchids and the anthropoids' (ibid). Human beings are continuous with other forms of life in this respect – they are all in the same boat (see 3.3.2 below).

Rorty makes a similar point later on in his career in 'Untruth and Consequences' (1995g), a review of Paul Feyerabend's autobiography *Killing Time*, in which the former describes 'historicist' philosophers such as himself as trying 'to find ways of preserving most of common sense while keeping faith with Darwin: with the realization that our species, its faculties and its current scientific and moral languages, are as much products of chance as are tectonic plates and mutated viruses' (1995g, p. 36). Likewise, in *PSH* he writes that after Darwin, 'it became possible to believe that nature is not leading up to anything – that nature has nothing in mind' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 266). All of these quoted passages are expressions of the idea that 'nature itself', as opposed to particular human beings or communities – when viewed through the causal-mechanical, Darwinian lens – lacks preferences with respect to the existence or non-existence of human cognitive states and linguistic acts; likewise when it comes to particular systems, theories, or beliefs.

Philosophy customarily links the idea of linguistic or mental states mirroring the 'universe itself' to the concept of truth: states that accurately mirror the 'universe itself' are accorded the accolade of truth; and, *vice versa*, 'correspondence' to the 'nature of the universe itself' is widely taken to constitute an adequate explanation of the former concept (truth). However Rorty thinks that just as Darwinism encourages us no longer to see human beings as *the*, or even *an*, 'intended outcome' of biological evolution, so it dissuades us from regarding science or philosophy, particular human artifacts, as progressing, or even coherently aiming, towards *truth* conceived of as a property of a particular subset of human mental states or sentences most apt or fitting to nature *itself*.

Rorty takes up this line of thought in the closing paragraphs of 'Truth Without Correspondence to Reality', in which he rejects the idea of truth as the goal of inquiry. Rorty accepts that we are 'inclined to say that truth is the aim of inquiry', but thinks that we must 'grasp the nettle and say that this claim is either empty or false' (1999c, p. 37). He argues that 'there would only be a "higher" aim of inquiry called 'truth' if there were such a thing as *ultimate* justification – justification before God, or before the tribunal of reason, as opposed to any merely finite human audience' (ibid, p. 38). However, he goes on to add,

> [G]iven a Darwinian picture of the world, there can be no such tribunal. … If Darwin is right, we can no more make sense of the idea of such a tribunal than we can make sense of the idea that biological evolution has an aim. Biological evolution

> produces ever new species, and cultural evolution produces ever new audiences, but there is no such thing as the species which evolution has in view, nor any such thing as the 'aim of inquiry' (p. 38)[112].

In Rorty's view, as we have already begun to see, the absence of *telos* from the 'universe itself' encourages us to create our *own* meaning and purpose. It encourages us to explore different 'vocabularies' for describing the universe, and to let nothing but their respective disadvantages, solely for us, sway us from adopting one over another. Rorty aspires not just, as the most radical Enlightenment thinkers did, to the death of a God capable of dictating how we behave, but also to the death of 'Reality' as something capable of invalidating or belittling our linguistic creations and practices regardless of the benefits they confer on us and fellow human beings. One of the most clear-cut expressions of this cultural meta-narrative, which underlies all of Rorty's mature work, occurs in 'Philosophy as a Transitional Genre' (2004). There Rorty dwells on and develops the notion that philosophy, particularly since the Modern era, has been a secular substitute for religion: it has, he argues, looked to a non-human authority as the source of 'redemptive truth', a single, universally applicable account of what exists and of how (all) human beings *ought* to live as a consequence. Philosophy has preserved from religion, Rorty thinks, and instilled in the wider culture of the West[113] the notion of thought's accountability to a non-human authority figure – e.g. Reality or Nature – while divesting, through the Enlightenment in particular, this authority of its remaining anthropic attributes. Only once we no longer feel obliged correctly to apprehend the nature of Reality in order to learn how one *ought* to live, thinks Rorty, will we be wholly autonomous and mature. In 'Philosophy as a Transitional Genre' (Rorty, 2010b), this is the point at which we make the transition to a 'literary culture', in which, to repeat, our only responsibilities become those to human beings: to ourselves and to others[114].

To conclude this section, Rorty sees Darwin – in presenting life as the contingent product of mechanical processes – as helpfully distancing us from the idea that 'nature itself' (as a coherent, unified entity) has particular aims or preferences amongst its possible states. In particular, where the philosophical tradition is concerned, Darwinism bears upon those states that are our beliefs, theories and ideas. For Rorty, if one adopts a Darwinian outlook, then one will regard such possible artifacts of the intellect as better or worse than one another only in the context of some particular *human* need or purpose. This is far from, is indeed the opposite of, saying that such notions as truth, falsity, or

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[112] Darwin plays less of a prominent role in *CIS* than he does in *PSH* or *TP*, but in *CIS* Rorty already strikes some of the same notes regarding the link he perceives between contingency and anti-representationalism: 'To say with Nietzsche, that God is dead, is to say that we serve no higher purposes. The Nietzschean substitution of self-creation for discovery substitutes a picture of the hungry generations treading each other down for a picture of humanity approaching closer and closer to the light' (1989, p. 20). Darwin influenced Nietzsche – he is, arguably, on Rorty's reading, the figure who puts the final nail in God's coffin. See also Rorty, 1989, p. 16.

[113] Tartaglia (2014) disputes Rorty's culturally specific conception of philosophy.

[114] Rorty also refers to his preferred kind of future as a 'poeticized culture' (1989, pp. 53; 68-9), and a 'postmetaphysical' one (1989, p. xvi).

justification are to be explicated in terms of the narrow self-interest of individual human beings; it is just, given that there are, and always will be, numerous incompatible human needs and interests, to reject the traditional view that the point of philosophy and science is to provide a single, 'universally' satisfactory account of the universe, or even of a particular portion.

5.3.2. Second implication: anti-dualism – human beings are not 'spooks'

One important philosophical consequence of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, then, contends Rorty, is its 'de-teleologization' of nature. But at least as important a corollary for him is the fact that, in his eyes, Darwin discredits the notion that human beings have an 'extra added ingredient' (PHS264), in the form of some such faculty as reason, free will, mind, intellect, soul, or spirit. The expression, 'extra added ingredient,' as Rorty uses it, denotes something that is not merely a manifestation or continuation of the natural causal order; rather, it denotes something rendering human beings to a degree *causally independent* of nature – making them, in the most literal possible sense, *super-natural*.

Darwin, says Rorty, 'helped us stop thinking of ourselves as an animal body in which something extra, and specifically human, had been inserted – a mysterious ingredient whose nature poses philosophical problems' (Rorty, 2005b, p. 42). His thought is significant due to its 'suggestion that we think of human beings as more complex animals, rather than as animals with an extra added ingredient called "intellect" or "the rational soul"' (1995a, p. 199)[115].

> We are still coming to terms with Darwin – still trying to rework the old, Greek, ways of speaking about human beings, ways that are dualistic through and through. We are still trying to make these ways of speaking chime with Darwin's account of human beings as complicated animals, containing no special extra ingredient. This is the sort of job that can hardly be done in less than a couple of centuries (1995e, p. 70)[116].

Darwin, through the explanatory resources his theory bestows, I suggest, and Rorty implies, leads us in the direction of naturalism, conceived of as causal monism as explicated in Chapter 2: the notion of a single interlocking 'web' of cause and effect – nature – from which no aspect of human life is exempt. He encourages us to regard human beings as arising out of the same nexus of causes and effects as the rest of nature, rather than existing as a divine anomaly. This is because Darwin required no recourse to the supernatural to explain the emergence of complex life forms. 'Galileo and Darwin',

[115] Assigning Darwin central relevance to the pragmatist philosophical tradition, Rorty describes the latter as 'an attempt to alter our self-image so as to make it consistent with the Darwinian claim that we differ from other animals simply in the complexity of our behaviour' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 72).

[116] C.f. also: '[B]etween Kant's time and ours, Darwin argued most intellectuals out of the view that human beings contained a special added ingredient. He convinced most of us that we were exceptionally talented animals, animals clever enough to take charge of our own evolution' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 174).

writes Rorty, 'expelled various varieties of spooks by showing the sufficiency of a materialist [naturalistic] account' – one without recourse to 'causal agency. . . superven[ing] on the behaviour of elementary particles' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 103).

Human beings, in all their complexity, could now be seen as arising out the accumulation of billions of years' worth of small-scale interactions. Before Darwin, thinks Rorty, only a 'nonhuman power' – typically God – could have explained the vast difference between us and other animals:

> Intellectuals took for granted that we were linked to the gods either by special divine favour, or by a connaturality with the divine made evident in our possession of the extra added ingredient which the animals lack, the soul or mind (Rorty, 1999c, p. 264)[117].

On traditional accounts, humankind's 'extra added ingredient' would have been the point of resemblance between man and a God existing outside of nature, unconstrained by temporal causal forces, yet capable of producing effects in nature – 'miracles' – by means other than natural causes. Human beings might, via their 'extra added ingredient,' have reasonably been supposed to have 'inherited' from God this property of not being constrained by natural causal patterns[118]. Thanks to Darwin, however, many people began seriously to entertain the idea that the 'extra added ingredient' might be explanatorily superfluous.

Echoing Dewey[119], Rorty notes that Darwinian evolutionary theory implies *continuity* between human beings and nature. 'Darwinism', he argues in 'Philosophy Envy' (Rorty, 2005b), 'reveal[s] previously unsuspected continuities between humans and brutes' (2005b, p. 37). It 'requires that we think of what we do and are as continuous with what amoebas, spiders and squirrels do and are' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 295). The nineteenth century was the time when 'it became possible, thanks to Darwin, for human beings to see themselves as continuous with the rest of nature – as temporal and contingent through and through, but none the worse for that' (Rorty, 1995a, p. 197).

As already seen in Chapter 4, above, the idea that human beings are continuous with wider nature becomes a crucial argument of Rorty's for rejecting the representationalist tradition, founded as the latter is on various dichotomies based on one between *humankind* and *nature*. Dewey saw continuity as militating against various problematic dualisms in the philosophical tradition. James and Dewey,

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[117] C.f.: 'Darwin [made] a tremendous difference to the way we think about ourselves, because he discredited religious and philosophical accounts of a gap between the truly human and immaterial part of us and the merely animal and material part' (Rorty, 2005b, p. 37).

[118] C.f.: 'Plato, and orthodox Christian theology, told us that human beings have an animal part and a divine part. The divine part is an extra added ingredient. Its presence within us is testimony to the existence of another, higher, immaterial, and invisible world: a world which offers us salvation from time and chance' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 263).

[119] See 2.2, above, for more on this aspect of Dewey's thought.

following in Darwin's footsteps, claims Rorty, attempted to 'naturalize our self-image by dissolving the traditional oppositions between mind and nature and between subject and object' – a project, he notes, that was resumed by means of 'Davidson's latter assault on the scheme-content distinction' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 30). Rorty follows Dewey's lead in casting Darwin as an enemy of the Western philosophical tradition. 'Pragmatism,' he argues, 'starts out from Darwinian naturalism – from a picture of human beings as chance products of evolution,' which in turn 'leads pragmatists to be… suspicious of the great binary oppositions of Western metaphysics' (Rorty, 1996a, pp. 15-16).

5.4. Darwin and the Linguistic Turn

In the light of Darwin's influence, holds Rorty, *language* – 'the *only* thing that is specifically human' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 74) – came more and more to be the focus of philosophical discussion. Unlike those faculties commonly perceived as 'extra added ingredients,' linguistic behaviour was something that could readily be explained and theorised about in terms of causal-mechanical interactions between the ontologically homogeneous entities of natural science. Darwin's influence gradually led to a shift, culminating in the twentieth century, in the idiom in which philosophers discussed problems. Philosophical problems about, for instance, 'experience', 'thought', or 'mind' began to be re-posed as ones concerning linguistic use or behaviour. Rorty himself helped popularize the phrase 'The Linguistic Turn' to describe this phenomenon through a collection of papers he edited in the 1960s, published under that title (Rorty, 1967). Later on, in *PSH*, he looked to make explicit the connection between Darwin and the shift to language as philosophy's primary topic:

> Darwin made it hard for essentialists to think of the higher anthropoids as having suddenly acquired an extra added ingredient called 'reason' or 'intelligence', rather than simply more of the cunning which the lower anthropoids had already manifested. This is why, since Darwin, essentialist philosophers have tended to talk less about 'mind' and more about 'language'. Words like 'sign', 'symbol', 'language' and 'discourse' have become philosophical buzzwords in our century. . . (1999c, p. 64).

From an anti-representationalist point of view, Rorty holds, the linguistic turn was valuable because it 'turned philosophers' attention from the topic of experience toward that of linguistic behaviour. That shift helped break the hold of . . . representationalism' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 160). Insofar as the linguistic turn made a distinctive contribution to philosophy, suggests Rorty,

> it was not a metaphilosophical one at all. Its contribution was, instead, to have helped shift from talk about experience as a medium of representation to talk of language as such a medium – a shift which, it turned out, made it easier to set aside the notion of representation itself (Rorty, 1992b, p. 373).

Broadly speaking, argues Rorty, the Linguistic Turn furthered the cause of anti-representationalism because it took place alongside a re-conception of the notion of language itself, whereby

> sentences were no longer thought of as expressions of experience nor as representations of extra-experiential reality. Rather, they were thought of as strings of marks and noises used by human beings in the development and pursuit of social practices – practices which enabled people to achieve their ends, ends which do not include "representing reality as it is in itself" (ibid).

The Linguistic Turn was important because language, unlike 'experience,' could be accounted for in causal-mechanical terms, as 'strings of marks and noises'. Precisely why this development might threaten the representationalist tradition is discussed in the next section, particularly in 5.5.3. – Rorty's remarks in the passage just quoted require significant elaboration. Ultimately I argue that the thrust of his argument comes back to what I call the 'argument from continuity'. Nevertheless, it is clear that, for all his 'doubts about analytic philosophy' (1995f, p. 53), Rorty thinks that the linguistic turn was undoubtedly a 'good thing' – 'an instance of genuine philosophical progress' (1995f, p. 53) that was 'essential if Darwin was to be taken seriously by philosophers' (1995e, p. 70).

Focus on and preference for talk about '*language*' also characterises Rorty's own writings, as exemplified, for instance, by what Robert Brandom has called his "'vocabulary' vocabulary" (Brandom, 2000b). Rorty inherits from Wittgenstein and Sellars in particular an interest in the roles played in our lives by different linguistic practices. In a Darwinian context, such an interest can be expressed in terms of questions concerning the evolutionary function of different parts of language. As we shall we see, this provides the basis for another type of argument from Darwinism to anti-representationalism, beside those already seen in 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, above. The argument in question, which Rorty indeed appeals to at times, holds simply that the (evolutionary) function of language – specifically, *assertoric* language – is something other than that of representing reality accurately, and therefore that anti-representationalism is consequently vindicated. Huw Price, one of the foremost contemporary anti-representationalist philosophers, has taken up this line of argument and developed it far more explicitly and rigorously than Rorty, and I will consider his contribution in 5.6, below. However, in any case, I'm going to suggest that the argument, whether expounded by Rorty or by Price, is ultimately ineffective – reverting back, in its most sophisticated form, to the argument from continuity.

Consideration of the function of assertoric language is not, I will suggest, a profitable way of opposing undesirable elements of the philosophical tradition, of promoting anti-representationalism. This is so because of the manifest end-relativity of the notion of *function*. The tension between Darwin and anti-representationalism lies, rather, I will claim, fundamentally in the former's facilitation of a causal-mechanical account of human life, and its consequences as set out in Chapter 4, above. Ultimately, offering a 'positive' theory of the 'actual' function of assertoric language in order then to assert that

'the function of linguistic assertion is not that of representing Reality but of *X*' is inadequate as an argumentative strategy on the part of the anti-representationalist. Rorty sometimes took this approach, additionally oversimplifying matters by appealing to a crude distinction between language as a tool and language as a picture or representation.

5.5. Two notions of representation

'Because language is a "public" Mirror of Nature, as thought is a "private" one,' Rorty wrote in *PMN*, 'it seems that we should be able to reformulate a great many Cartesian and Kantian questions and answers in linguistic term, and thereby rehabilitate a lot of standard philosophical issues' (1979, p. 211). In this section I address the question of whether, for Rorty, a naturalistic outlook implies that language ought not to be conceived of as representing something – e.g. 'Reality' – more or less accurately. Are there senses, that is to say, in which naturalism might be thought to contradict the intuitively plausible claim that language is representational? If there were to be senses of the relevant kind, then naturalism – via the topic of language – would impinge on the (meta)philosophical issue of representationalism quite directly. Rorty at times appears to argue along these lines, and therefore it is important to try to ascertain the relative significance of this strand of argument in his overall outlook. Moreover, the question is a bone of contention in the work of two influential philosophers – Huw Price and Robert Brandom – who inherit Rorty's neo-pragmatist concern with language, and seek to develop aspects of his metaphilosophical agenda. Huw Price, in particular, devotes a lot of attention to the question of the function of assertoric language, and whether this coincides with the kind of representational function customarily attributed to language and thought by the philosophical tradition.

5.5.1. Linguistic assertion can be representational in the context of specific language-games

A crucial facet of Rorty's overall position is the idea that *there are indeed respects in which assertoric language (and, by consequence, thought) is representational – albeit these respects are of limited metaphilosophical significance*. Rorty, that is, thinks there are two different senses of the word 'representation,' one of which is pivotal to the Western philosophical tradition, giving rise to its classical problems and ambitions, and one of which is not. Rorty distinguishes between 'weak' and 'strong' notions of representation, or, equivalently, between, respectively, non-philosophical and philosophical senses of the term. In his article on 'Pragmatism' in the *REP*, he articulates the distinction between these different types of representation thus:

> In a weak sense of 'represent'. . . an earthworm or a thermostat can be said to contain 'representations of the environment', since there are internal arrangements in both which are responsible for the reactions of each to certain stimuli. But it makes little sense to ask whether those representations

> are *accurate*. Philosophers who take epistemological scepticism seriously (as pragmatists do not) have employed a stronger sense of 'representation', one in which it does make sense to ask whether the way in which it best suits human purposes to describe the universe is an accurate representation of the universe as it is in itself (Rorty, 1998d).

In *PMN*, Rorty similarly distinguishes between different two senses of representation: a 'philosophical' and an 'ordinary' sense. 'There are,' he argues, 'two senses apiece of "true" and "real" and "correct representation of reality," and. . . most of the perplexities of epistemology come from vacillation between them' (1979, p. 308). What is problematic is when such concepts are removed from the role they play in specific language-games, serving specific communal needs and interests, and are instead invested with universal or absolute significance. 'The "philosophical" sense of "good" and "true",' Rorty writes, is 'designed precisely to stand for the Unconditioned – that which escapes the context within which discourse is conducted and inquiry pursued' (1979, p. 309)[120]. Discussing Jerry's Fodor's representational theory of mind, Rorty argues that Fodor 'runs together a sense of "representation" in which representations may be judged accurate or inaccurate, and another in which they may not' – these two senses, thinks Rorty, 'mark out the respective domains of epistemology and psychology' (1979, p. 220)[121].

The key issue for Rorty, then, is not whether language (or thought) is representational, but whether its being treated as such entails the sorts of philosophical questions typical of the Western tradition – viz., about the nature of reality (as it is 'in itself'), and skeptical questions regarding the adequacy of our own beliefs and theories in respect of this notion of reality. For Rorty it is very much the *consequences* of treating something as a representation that matters, as evidenced by his 'Reply to Dennett' (2000d). Rorty remarks:

> As I see it, one can describe any true assertion as a convenient tool for coping with reality, or as a good move in a language-game, or even as a reasonably accurate representation of reality, just so long as one does not make invidious distinctions between kinds of assertions (2000d, p. 102)

[120] In *PMN*, Rorty seems to regard the 'ordinary' sense of 'represent' as not worth discussing. 'Knowledge is not a matter of representations', he observes, 'in any but the most trivial and unproblematic sense' (1979, p. 126). By and large Rorty retains this attitude throughout his career – he is reluctant to employ the term 'representation', even in what he regards as its innocuous senses, for fear of being misinterpreted.

[121] The passage continues: 'Fodor's picture of mind as a system of inner representations has nothing to do with the image of the Mirror of Nature I have been criticizing. The crucial point is that there is no way to raise the skeptical question "How well do the subject's internal representations represent reality?" about Fodor's "language of thought"' (Rorty, 1979, pp. 246-7).

'Metaphors of representing and corresponding' are 'harmless', Rorty thinks, provided they 'are not pressed' (ibid). He continues:

> There is no harm in saying of good tools and good moves that they are also good representations, but nothing interesting is conveyed by this choice of idiom, and its employment should not tempt us to construct theories about how representation works (ibid)[122].

In short, therefore, Rorty thinks that it is fine to admit the notion of representation, provided this does not encourage one to make invidious distinctions between areas of culture (i.e. to succumb to scientism), or to attempt to try to understand 'how representation works' so as to refute philosophical scepticism. One is perfectly entitled to adopt what Rorty, after Dennett himself, later calls a 'vegetarian' notion of representation (Rorty, 2000d, p. 102).

In *CP*, Rorty again dismisses the importance of the question of whether or not language is representational. Rather, language may fairly be treated as representational in certain contexts. 'The question of whether language is a system of representations is not the sort of question *anybody…* knows how to answer,' he suggests, 'and so whatever is at issue, that cannot be it. The question is not whether "language is a system of representations" is a correct representation of how things are' (Rorty, 1982a, p. 104). For

> *of course* language can usefully, for many purposes, be viewed as a system of representations… All that one has to do to make [this approach] useful and productive is to take the vocabulary of the present historical period (or class or society or academy) for granted and work within it. Once one is safely ensconced within this language-game, questions about what correctly represents what, how we know that it does, and how it manages to do so will make admirable sense and will get useful answers (ibid, p. 104).

From such passages it emerges that the 'weak', or non-philosophical, concept of representation is one according to which representations occur *within the context of* specific language-games or vocabularies serving particular human needs or interests. The strong, or philosophical, concept, on the other hand, appeals to the possibility of *intrinsic*, *need-* or *interest- independent* resemblance or structural similarity between pieces of language and the world it purportedly represents.

[122] C.f.: '[A]s long as our beliefs are said to be answerable to something, we shall want to be told more about how this answering works, and the history of epistemology suggests that there is nothing to be said. . . '[A]nswering' and 'representing' are metaphors that cry out for further definition, for literalization' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 133).

Unfortunately, Rorty occasionally muddies the water by appearing – as in the passage quoted above – to be reluctant to allow a role for the concept of *accuracy* in characterizing the 'weaker' sense of representation. Moreover, he does not offer a good reason why it makes 'little sense' to describe, for example, thermostat readings as being either accurate or inaccurate. Since the weaker sense is the only form of representation that Rorty is prepared to concede to language, and since many people would regard accuracy as an integral part of the concept of representation, he thereby threatens to give the impression that in fact he is unwilling to afford to language any kind of representational role reasonably so called.

Therefore a more profitable reading of Rorty is as maintaining that language is representational in a sense that incorporates a plausible notion of accuracy, but as distinguishing between two different conceptions – one viable and one unviable – of exactly *what it is* that is supposedly being represented more or less accurately by linguistic assertions. Maintaining the analogy established between language- speakers and thermometers, it makes perfect sense (or at least is more useful[123]), according to this reading of Rorty, to ask whether thermometer readings are accurate representations of temperature, but less to ask whether the same readings accurate representations of the current state of the universe 'as it is in itself.' Indeed, the notion of accuracy with respect to the universe 'as it is in itself' is something Rorty criticizes in the passage quoted above from his *REP* entry for 'Pragmatism'.

Furthermore, interpreting the distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' concepts of linguistic representation in this way, as the distinction between, respectively, representations of the universe 'as it is in itself' and representations of some interest- and purpose- dependent aspect or slice of that universe, accommodates Rorty's retraction, in his 'Response to Bjørn Ramberg' (Rorty, 2000h), of the more contentious elements of his position on objectivity. Rorty's remarks here, it has been observed, constitute the 'fine print' (Stout, 2007, p. 29) of his anti-representationalism and arguably defuse the frequently made objection that his position fails to impose any normative constraints on linguistic propriety beside social consensus[124]. In 'Response to Ramberg' Rorty concedes the legitimacy of the notions of 'getting things right' (and, equally, that of 'getting things wrong'). According to Rorty, Ramberg shows him,

[123] By the end of his career, Rorty has rejected the idea of a widely used concept ultimately turning out to be nonsensical, incoherent, meaningless etc. See, for example: Rorty, 2007b, pp. 163-71; Rorty, 1998e, p. 45, p330; Rorty, 2010h. For the later Rorty, the mere fact that the term 'accuracy' is already widely employed in the case of thermostat readings (and in numerous other instances) confirms its meaningfulness. It is just that there is no benefit to be gained, he thinks, from asking questions concerning the accuracy of such readings construed as measurements of the '*universe itself*' (as opposed to, in this case, temperature).

[124] For influential instances of this criticism see Brandom, 2000c; McDowell, 2000; Price, 2011.

> in effect, that it was a mistake on my part to go from criticism of attempts to define truth as accurate representations of the intrinsic nature of reality to a denial that true statements get things right (Rorty, 2000h, p. 374)[125].

However this 'partial reconciliation of pragmatism and realism' (ibid) is not a climb-down from Rorty's overall metaphilosophical agenda. Instead, he concedes that the notions of objectivity and accuracy have their place, but only *within the context of particular norm-governed language games* corresponding to and serving specific needs on the part of the relevant linguistic community. There is a difference, maintains Rorty in his 'Response to Brandom' (Rorty, 2000b) in the same volume, between 'getting, for instance, snow, photons, baseball, Cezanne and the best use of the term "fact" right' and the 'further aim of getting Reality right' (ibid, p. 187). 'Inquiry' does indeed 'get things like snow and photons and baseball right' (ibid, p. 188), but, in such cases, relations of truth between sentences such as "snow is white" and snow, and of reference between "snow" and snow, 'do not hold between that sentence and what philosophers like to call "reality as it is in itself," but only between those expressions and snow' (Rorty, 2000h, p. 374).

Moreover, the reason we cannot 'get Reality right,' according to Rorty, unlike 'snow, fog, Olympian deities, relative aesthetic worth, the elementary particles, human rights, the divine right of kings, the Trinity, and the like,' is because 'there are no norms for talking about it' (2000h, p. 375). 'You can say,' that is, 'anything you like about the deep underlying nature of reality and get away with it' (ibid) – the reason for this being that the 'purposes served by the former' topics, unlike the latter, are 'reasonably clear' (ibid).

And whilst the concession is made late on in Rorty's career, there are nevertheless several precedents in Rorty's earlier writings for the idea that the notions of accuracy, objectivity and 'getting things right' might, *contra* the bulk of his rhetoric, be appropriate within the scope of specific language-games. For example, in *CP*, he points out that we are not so much interested in whether and how a simple perceptual statement such as 'this is red,' accurately represents some facet of reality, but rather in the same questions with respect to more abstract scientific and philosophical theories. But it is 'just here,' Rorty argues, that 'the vocabulary of "picturing" fails us' (1982, p. 163).

> To say that the parts of properly analyzed true sentences are arranged in a way isomorphic to the parts of the world paired with them sounds plausible if one

[125] Davidson is central to this exchange. Ramberg makes Rorty see that he ought to have understood Davidson's anti-skeptical strategy differently: 'What I should have done,' Ramberg makes Rorty realize, is 'grant Davidson's point that most of our beliefs about anything (snow, molecules, the moral law) must be true of that thing – must get that thing right. For when Davidson argues that most of anybody's beliefs must be true, he is not just saying (as I have sometimes been tempted to construe him) that most of the beliefs of anybody whom we can treat as a language-user must accord with our own beliefs. He is saying that most of what anybody says about whatever they are talking about *get that thing right*. . . I now want to agree with Davidson on this point' (2000h, p. 374 – original emphasis).

> thinks of a sentence like "Jupiter has moons." It sounds slightly less plausible for "The earth goes round the sun," less still for "There is no such thing as natural motion," and not plausible at all for "The universe is infinite" (Rorty, 1982a, p. 163).

'If we ask what objects these sentences claim to be true of,' Rorty contends, 'we get only unhelpful repetitions of the subject terms. . . or even less helpfully, we get talk about "the facts," or "the way the world is"' (ibid). Thus, for the early Rorty, the more abstract and theoretical the sentence, the more moral and pragmatic, the more fully down to the epistemic agent, the decision about whether to utter or assent to it – as opposed to the decisions' being guided by the state of the agent's environment[126].

The metaphysician, says Rorty in 'Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism,' 'confuses the relation of a vocabulary to Being with the relation of a sentence like "the sky is blue" to the color of the sky' (1991a, p. 38). 'There are criteria of correctness for deciding when to use that sentence ["the sky is blue"] to make a statement, but there are no criteria of correctness for final vocabularies' (ibid). Thus, here too, as in 'Response to Ramberg,' Rorty makes the point that although criteria of correctness and accuracy apply to individual sentences uttered in the context of specific language-games or Rortyan vocabularies[127], *in the context those linguistic practices provide*, they emphatically do not apply to decisions between language-games or vocabularies themselves. It is futile or non-sensical to ask of two vocabularies – e.g. 'folk psychology' and particle physics – which one represents reality more accurately. Rorty's underlying point is that individual vocabularies – as outgrowths of specific communal needs and interests – ought to be seen as *instigating* considerations of representation; hence that such considerations do not provide reasons for adopting vocabularies[128].

5.5.2. Effects as representations of their causes

The 'weak' or 'vegetarian' notion of representation that Rorty concedes to linguistic assertion can also be explicated causally. Thus it is a form of representation that is compatible with *naturalism* – understood, as the latter has been throughout this study, as a form of causal monism.

The weak notion of representation acknowledged by Rorty appeals to the fact that assertions, like all effects of causes, can be understood as indicating the presence of the states-of-affairs that typically

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[126] See 6.1.1., below.

[127] Particularly those associated with perception – see 5.2.2., below.

[128] In this respect, as Tomáš Marvan has noted (2011, pp. 274-7), his view has a lot in common with the 'internal realism' of the early Putnam (1981; 1990), as well as Rudolf Carnap (Putnam's teacher)'s distinction between 'internal' and 'external' questions. In *PMN*, Rorty describes Putnam's internal realism as 'uncontroversial,' characterising the difference between it and its pernicious sibling 'metaphysical realism' as being that between, respectively, 'saying that we are successfully representing according to Nature's own conventions of representation and saying that we are successfully representing according to our own. It is the difference, roughly, between science as a Mirror of Nature, and as a set of working diagrams for coping with nature' (1979, p. 298). See the next section, 5.5.2, for more on the idea of representation as something relative to convention.

cause them. In particular, this is true of the class of assertions sometimes called 'perceptual statements'. These are those assertions the utterances of which on the part of individual speakers correlate tightly with specific patterns of perceptual stimulation. As such, they can be usefully seen as indicating – i.e. representing – the occurrence of external events.

The distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' notions of 'representation,' the former being a property Rorty is prepared to grant to language and the latter a property he is not, parallels, I propose, the difference between what I suggest are the two principal senses of the word 'represent' in ordinary English. These two senses offer alternative construals of the literal, root, meaning of the word 'representation,' according to which 'to represent' is to make something present again – that is, to stand (in) for it in its possible absence or non-existence.

One key sense of the word 'represent,' I suggest, is the sense according to which something can represent something else in virtue of having been caused by the second thing. One represents one's country in international competition, for example, usually due to having been born there (or otherwise due to some other causal connection); likewise, in a democracy one represents a group of people politically due to having been elected to office by those people. Critically, it is not necessary that, in order for *a* to represent *b* according to this sense of the word represent, *a* need possess any kind of structural similarity to *b*. That is to say, the representation need not *resemble* that which it represents in any way (although of course it can). Rorty's 'weak' notion of representation, above, according to which a linguistic assertion represents the particular kind of state-of-affairs in the speaker's environment that normally causes it to be made, is thus an instance of representation in this first sense of the word. This notion of representation could be called 'indicative' representation, because the representing state or entity only *indicates*, or signals, the occurrence of a particular environmental state-of-affairs, in respect of which it may have nothing else in common.

The second broad meaning of 'represent' in ordinary usage, on the other hand, I suggest, stems from one thing's possessing a form of structural similarity to another thing. This is the sense of 'represents' according to which the *Mona Lisa* represents Lisa del Giocondo. It could be called 'isomorphic' representation[129]. In its case, the representing entity need not be causally related to the represented entity; although of course it can be, and – as in the case of the *Mona Lisa* – often is. The 'strong' notion of representation, according to which thought or language represents the world 'as it is in itself,' is plausibly isomorphic, because (at least in its most common historical incarnations) combinations of the components of thought or language are held to 'mirror' – i.e. to stand in some form of isomorphic relation to – 'Reality'.

On the surface, a problem with Rorty's 'weak' notion of representation – and by extension with the claim that what I called 'indicative' representation, based on causation, is actually a form of

[129] From the Greek word *Morphe*, meaning 'shape' or 'form'.

representation at all – is that it is difficult or even impossible to determine, from an absolute, 'neutral,' perspective, precisely which events in its causal history a given assertion ought to be conceived of as representing. Without an 'input-output function,' writes Rorty,

> we will not be able to distinguish the smooth functioning of a representation machine from its malfunction. But many input-output functions will describe the machine, and not all these functions will range over the same inputs. There are many ways to classify the flux of causal interactions in which the statement maker is involved, and each will offer a new candidate for "input"' (1998e, p. 35).

The 'problem,' he continues, is 'whether there is a way to isolate input without reference to what [Crispin] Wright calls an "evaluative point of view"' (ibid, p. 35). Rorty's 'solution' to the 'problem,' of course, is to give up the ambition of an absolutive perspective, and thus to answer that there is no way to isolate input without Wright's 'evaluative point of view'. It is true, in other words, that from an absolute, neutral, perspective, the allocation of the status of "represented object" to a given stage of a representation's causal chain *is indeed* arbitrary and unjustifiable. But causes and effects do not necessarily need to be seen as just that – as inherently meaningless sequences of events – they can also be conceived of as stages in the functioning of a system pursuing certain ends or interests. It is only from this latter perspective, Rorty would argue, that the idea of linguistic representation makes sense.

Indeed, quite crucially, for Rorty, the arbitrariness of picking out particular events, or concatenations of events, and assigning these rather than others the status of being the interest-independent objects of our linguistic or cognitive representations constitutes an important restatement of the 'argument from continuity' against representationalism presented in the previous Chapter. The essence of that argument was that, from a naturalistic, causally monistic, perspective it was not possible to distinguish between subject and object, representator and represented, in an absolute, interest-independent way. Here, the same idea recurs: namely, that one cannot discriminate the objects of representations from the wider causal flux to which they belong (including the representing states themselves) without first presupposing some end or set of ends being pursued by the system to which the representing states belong.

Rorty immediately resumes the passage quoted above on the indeterminacy of input-output functions in the absence of an 'evaluative point of view': 'This is the sixty-four dollar question: whether we can (as Dewey and Davidson insist we cannot) separate out "the world's" contribution to the judgment-forming process from our own' (1998e, p. 35). '[H]ow,' that is, 'are we supposed to separate out. . . truth makers from the flux of causal interactions in which the statement maker is involved?' (ibid). He reasserts the argument from continuity later on in the same essay:

> If, as good Darwinians, we want to introduce as few discontinuities as possible into the story of how we got from the apes to the Enlightenment, we shall reject the idea that Nature has settled on a single input-output function that, incarnated in each member of our species, enables us to represent our environment accurately. For that idea requires that Nature herself has divided up the causal swirl surrounding these organisms into discrete inputs and has adopted a particular input-output function as distinctively hers – a function whose detection enables us to offer a justification according to Nature's own criteria. . . rather than those of transitory and local audiences (1998e, p. 40)[130].

If one does so presuppose, then one has the 'weak' notion of representation, as opposed to the 'strong', absolute notion that takes language to be capable of representing the state of the universe 'as it is in itself'.

For Rorty, representation is always relative to some or other *convention.* '[O]ne cannot be Davidsonian about language and still think of language as an interface, nor as itself as having an interface with what it "represents,"' Rorty argued, as early as 1977.

> For the behaviourism that Davidson shares with Quine . . . makes language into something people do, rather than something standing between them and something else. It can, to be sure, also be viewed as a system of representations – but then so can anything – the rings in trees or the grooves on phonograph records' (1992a, pp. 368-9).

We 'create representationality' 'by agreement' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 33) and, as such, lots of different outputs – e.g. a video recording, written notes – can count as representations of the same input (ibid). There is *no one correct* way of representing *anything*: thus the same is necessarily true of the 'world in itself,' even if one is prepared (as Rorty is generally not) to countenance the utility of the latter concept. If conventions of representation can 'vary as blamelessly as sense of humour,' Rorty argues, then the notion of representation 'is a broken reed' (1998e, p. 34). The problem with '*any* sentence-shaped nonsentence' is that 'insofar as they are nonconceptualized, they are not isolable as input. But insofar as they are conceptualized, they have been tailored to the needs of a *particular* input-output function, a *particular* convention of representation' (1998e, p. 36). Indeed, the conventionality of

[130] C.f.: The difficulty which holists see in notions like "biologically supposed to" emerges when one asks whether visual systems good at responding to bilateral symmetry are "supposed to" recognize such symmetry or are "supposed to" recognize that. . . "someone is looking at you". . . It is exactly as hard for the biologist to figure out what (anthropomorphized) Nature wants as for the radical interpreter to figure out what the native wants, and for the same reasons' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 11).

representation, the 'relativity of descriptions to purposes,' constitutes in Rorty's view the pragmatist's 'principal argument' for her or his position (1999c, p. xxvi)[131].

Rorty makes this point – albeit more obliquely – in the second section of the first chapter of *PMN*, where he discusses the phenomenon of 'intentionality'. 'Nobody wants to make philosophical heavy weather out of the fact that you can't tell merely from the way it looks what a sentence means,' he argues, 'or that you can't recognize a picture of X *as* a picture of X without being familiar with the relevant pictorial conventions'. As such, 'there is no interesting problem about intentionality' (1979, p. 25):

> It seems perfectly clear, at least since Wittgenstein and Sellars, that the "meaning" of typographical inscriptions is not an extra "immaterial" property they have, but just their place in a context of surrounding events in a language-game, in a form of life. This goes for brain inscriptions as well (ibid).

Thus representational, or 'intentional,' properties are not possessed inherently by physical states, but are rather acquired only courtesy of particular socio-linguistic practices. A given physical state – be it typographical or neurological – can represent any number of different states-of-affairs[132], until its meaning is fixed due to its serving a particular function in the interactions of a group of speakers.

In order to present Rorty's 'weak' version as a viable interpretation of the concept of representation, it is necessary to say more about how designating certain states 'ends' might introduce normativity into an otherwise 'purely causal' picture. Representation, as a concept, and especially in philosophy, is generally held to involve criteria of success and failure: that is to say, it is usually held to be a *normative* concept. If one labels something as a representation, then one is implying that – relative to its wider environment – there are certain ways that that thing out to be and ought not to be. Thus in order to count as a representation, a linguistic assertion must be capable of success and failure, accuracy and inaccuracy.

Philosophers such as Ruth Millikan and Fred Dretske[133] have offered accounts of the way in which a state's role, or function, in a biological system might confer on it this kind of representational status. Their accounts of representation (or, more or less equivalently, of the philosphical concept of

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[131] C.f. 'The multiplicity of things which predicative discourse can say shows Parmenides that such discourse depends upon *conventions* of representation, and thus is νόμῳ rather than φύσει… [W]e can see the history of epistemology and semantics as the attempt to "ground" predicative discourse on a nonconventional relation to reality' (Rorty, 1982a, p. 130).

[132] C.f. also: 'Suppose that someone who believes that brains contain representational states want to enumerate the representations present in the visual cortex of a brain attached to an eye that is focused on an approaching predator. The number she comes up with will depend on whether she treats the brain as representing colors, or shades of colors, or patterns of colors, or middle-sized physical objects, or light waves, or environmental dangers, or chemical changes in the retina' (Rorty, 2005c, p. 24).

[133] See e.g. Millikan, 1984 and Dretske, 1995.

'intentionality') seek to 'naturalise' these explanatory targets by explaining how, contrary to appearances, such phenomena can take place in the kind of mechanistic universe depicted by natural science.

From a Darwinian perspective, an organism or group of organisms interacts with its environment in ways that promote reproductive success. From this perspective, a linguistic assertion's status as a representation depends on its playing a particular role within a system – either that of the individual physical organism or of the linguistic community to which it belongs, depending on one's preferred Darwinian model. According to the Darwin-inspired teleosemantic model of language advocated by Millikan and Dretske, accurate representations are roughly those which typically produce outcomes favouring reproductive successive. Accuracy occurs when a linguistic assertion is caused by its typical environmental precursor, irrespectively of the specific assertion's particular effects in a given situation. Crucially, such 'teleosemantic' accounts, as their name suggests, pivot on the stipulation of some desirable end, or set of such ends, attributable to either the creature or linguistic community in question. The ('strong') notion of representation in play in the philosphical tradition, on the other hand, is *need- and interest-independent.*

Rorty emphasises the fact that only a restricted sub-set of linguistic assertions can usefully and non-controversially be treated as representational. These are assertions about observable physical particulars, which is to say those assertions most dependent upon speakers' perceptual faculties, or 'senses,' for their content. The admittedly widespread tendency to view linguistic assertion *generally* as representational, Rorty thinks, exhibits an undue preoccupation with *perception* on the part of our intellectual heritage and culture. It is a 'great fallacy of the tradition,' he argues, 'to think that the metaphors of vision, correspondence, mapping, picturing, and representation which apply to small, routine assertions will apply to large and debatable ones' (1982, p. 164). Rather, 'the vocabulary of contemplation, looking, *theoria*, deserts us just when we deal with theory rather than observation' (ibid, p. 163). Rorty is thus making the point that the sensory or perceptual metaphors that we use to characterise language becomes less germane, less apt, the further away they are taken from their primary, literal application in the cases of the language we use to describe the deliverances of our senses. In *PMN,* too, Rorty notes that perception, and especially observation, in fact serve as the original paradigms of representation, the latter property then being transferred to assertoric language via the intermediary case of 'perceptual statements' such as 'that triumph of mirroring, the appropriate utterance of "The cat is on the mat"' (1979, p. 335). 'The epistemologist,' emphasises Rorty, 'must worry about the respects in which more interesting statements share the objectivity' possessed by this kind of simple case (ibid)[134].

[134] Rorty's 'weak' notion of representation complements Davidson's later work, in which he outlines a causal, 'externalist', account of how mental or linguistic states acquire (representational/intentional) content. See Davidson, 2001d, pp. 45-6; 2001a, pp. 173-5; 2001b, *passim*; 2004, pp. 95-97.

The ambiguity belonging to the word 'representation' – the possibility of both 'strong' and 'weak' interpretations – likely explains why Rorty sometimes seems reluctant to endorse the term, at least in a philosophical context. This, to repeat, is despite the fact that he accepts there is a legitimate sense in which language is representational. 'Representation,' in Rorty's eyes, is a 'trouble-making entity' (1998e, p. 20)[135]. Regarding the teleo-semanticist project of rendering a constructive theory of representation on the basis of evolutionary function, Rorty suggests:

> [W]e pragmatists too want to be faithful to Darwin. But we think that the Millikan-Papineau-Dretske revivification of the notion of "representation" is an insufficiently radical way of appropriating Darwin's insight. These philosophers want to reconcile Darwin with Descartes's and Locke's "way of ideas." In contrast, we want to follow up on Dewey's suggestion that Darwin has made Descartes and Locke obsolete (1998e, p. 20).

Therefore, Rorty thinks that the teleo-semanticists make too much of the 'notion of "representation"'. Presumably, Rorty thinks there is scope for confusion, and that talking a lot about representation whilst taking insufficient pains to distinguish between the two relevant versions of the concept might risk raising both objections from those defending a more low-key, function- or end- relative interpretation – people, including biologists, psychologists and cognitive scientists, and perhaps some teleo-semanticist philosophers[136], who may not necessarily wish to perpetuate the 'representationalist' philosophical tradition – and misplaced impressions of vindication on the part of representationalists.

Rorty may well be right. But, alternatively, it could worth using some of the teleo-semanticist's ideas to fortify and clarify his position. Teleo-semantic theories might be employed to substantiate the 'vegetarian' or 'weak' version of representation that Rorty has shown himself prepared to accept. Having a clearer idea of the sense and means by which language *does* represent would surely better illuminate the sense in which *does not*. And this strategy would be better than either avoiding the topic, or attempting to make the implausible claim that language does not represent at all.

In any case, the most important point is that Rorty's recognition of the distinction between different kinds of representation, means that it is a mistake (as I remarked above, in 1.12) to think that one can dispel the metaphilosophical issues with which he is concerned merely by pointing to the existence of *some sense* in which linguistic assertion is representational. To think so is to be excessively occupied

[135] Rorty criticizes Brandom for attempting to recuperate the concept of 'representation' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 130) – pointing out that 'by the time Brandom has finished deflating it, "represents" has become interchangeable with "is about"' (Rorty, 2010f, p. 290).

[136] Of the principal teleo-semanticists, Millikan's position would seem best able to accommodate anti-representationalism. In the 'Introduction' to *ORT*, Rorty criticizes David Papineau's 'teleological theory of representation' for being 'designed precisely' to preserve the notion of 'reality as it is in itself in abstraction from the way it is represented in human judgment' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 11). Millikan, by contrast, in Rorty's view, offers 'a more detailed and sophisticated development of the notion of "biologically supposed to"' (ibid).

with the term ‘representation’ itself. As I shall show in 5.7., below, this confusion afflicts the work of Huw Price to some extent. What matters to Rorty is only whether language represents in the ‘strong’ sense.

To summarise, I have cast Rorty’s notion of ‘weak’ representation as the kind consisting in a relationship between a perceptual assertion and its relevant environmental causal antecedent, where relevance is determined by Darwinian recourse to the contribution such statements make to adaptive and reproductive success. I have distinguished such a form of representation from the primary kind at issue in the Western philosophical tradition, which Rorty refers to as ‘strong’ representation. The latter depends upon some such absolute notion as the ‘world as it is in itself’, ‘Reality’, or ‘Nature’.

I have argued that the traditional conception of philosophy conflicts with Darwin because the theory of evolution by natural selection promotes explanation in terms of mechanical cause and effect, encouraging us to apply this mode of explanation even to our most elevated capacities. Mechanistic explanation, however, leaves no room for the notion of representations of things ‘as they are in themselves’. I have claimed that representation entails criteria of success and failure – it is a normative concept. Moreover, *absolute* representation, in turn, of the ‘world *as it is in itself*’, requires *absolute* criteria of success and failure, correctness and incorrectness. Putative absolute criteria of success and failure take the form they do independently of particular human values and purposes. In a mechanical universe, however, there are no absolute criteria of success or failure because the only values and purposes to be found are the many conflicting human ones.

If one wishes to introduce representation into such a universe, I have suggested, then one must artificially introduce, so to speak, some form of more and less desirable outcome; one needs to superimpose this on to the mechanical picture. However, there are in principle many different ways of doing so. An intuitive way from a Darwinian perspective is to tie ‘good’ outcomes to human adaptive and reproductive success.

5.6. Language: tool or picture?

In the Chapter so far I have suggested that Darwin’s anti-representationalist significance for Rorty lies in the fact that Darwinian evolutionary theory licenses a causal-mechanical account of human action and cognition. As such, it is the last remaining step required in order for one to be able to adopt a fully causal, naturalistic picture. Nevertheless there is a consistent vein of rhetoric in Rorty that portrays Darwin’s significance otherwise: namely, as residing in his having encouraged us to view language as a tool rather than as a representation of things as they are ‘in themselves’. Rorty, that is, thinks that Darwin encourages us to see ourselves as, above all, *tool*-using creatures, manipulating our environment in order to survive and prosper. From this, he sometimes appears to go on to suggest that language is ‘nothing but’ a tool – in the sense of serving no ‘higher’, ‘metaphysical’, purpose. Huw Price takes this notion of the instrumentality of language one step further in the direction of anti-

representationalism by arguing, ostensibly, that linguistic assertion possesses an alternative, more mundane and causally-oriented function than that of representing the state of 'things-as-they-are-in-themselves'. However, I am going to argue that such interpretations of the anti-representationalist significance of Darwin are less compelling than is one based on the 'argument from continuity,' as well as cohering less well, from an exegetical point of view, with the wider fabric of Rorty's thought.

Rorty claims that 'for epistemological purposes' Darwin encourages us to follow Nietzsche in thinking of human beings as 'clever animals' (2007a, p. 28). According to him, this supposed implication of Darwin's theory finds particularly strong expression in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In *CIS*, Rorty endorses the 'Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools'[137]. The 'proper analogy' for imaginative linguistic change, he argues, is 'with the invention of new tools to take the place of old tools' (Rorty, 1989, p. 12)[138]. In the 'Introduction' to the volume *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, language is described as a 'set of tools rather than a set of representations' (Rorty, 1991a, p. 3). More importantly, it is a 'set of tools which. . . change their users and the products they use' (ibid)[139]. 'Nominalists' like himself, Rorty observes,

> see language as just human beings using marks and noises to get what they want. One of the things we want to do with language is to get food, another is to get sex, another is to understand the origin of the universe. Another is to enhance our sense of human solidarity, and still another may be to create oneself by developing one's own private, autonomous, philosophical language (1991a, p. 127)[140].

Elsewhere, Rorty claims that the pragmatist endorses metaphors that portray 'linguistic behaviour as tool-using. . . language as a way of grabbing hold of causal forces and making them do what we want, altering ourselves and our environment to suit our aspirations' (1991d, p. 81)[141]. 'All human language and inquiry is to be viewed as the panda's thumb or the honeybee's dance – as a means which a certain species of organism has developed for getting what it wants' (Rorty, 1991b). The same is true of philosophical language as much as it is of any other form of linguistic behaviour – 'any philosophical view', he argues, 'is a tool which can be used by many different hands' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 23).

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[137] C.f. also *PMN*, where Rorty speaks of the 'Wittgensteinian notion' of 'language as a tool rather than a mirror' (1979, p. 9).

[138] He continues: 'To come up with such a [new] vocabulary is more like discarding the lever and the chock because one has envisaged the pully, or like discarding gesso and tempera because one has figured out how to size canvas properly' (Rorty, 1989, p. 12).

[139] See also Rorty 1989, pp. 12-13: language is exceptional amongst tools in that it provides us not just with means, but with possibilities and identities, with ends.

[140] C.f.: 'We should try to think of imagination not as a faculty that generates mental images but as the ability to change social practices by proposing advantageous new uses of marks and noises' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 107).

[141] C.f.: '[O]ur beliefs, our theories, our languages, our concepts. . . are ways of putting the causal forces of the universe to work for us' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 82).

The clearest statement of his view of language as a tool, however, and subsequently of the route Rorty envisages from such a conception to anti-representationalism, occurs in his article on 'Pragmatism' (Rorty, 1998d), written for the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, which accords Darwin a position of critical significance for both 'classical' and 'neo-' pragmatism. In the course of espousing his own version of pragmatism – viz., understood as anti-representationalism – Rorty argues that

> pragmatism's strongest point [is] its refusal to countenance a discontinuity between human abilities and those of other animals. Pragmatists are committed to taking Darwin seriously. They grant that human beings are unique in the animal kingdom in having language, but they urge that language be understood as a tool rather than as a picture. A species' gradual development of language is as readily explicable in Darwinian terms as its gradual development of spears or pots, but it is harder to explain how a species could have acquired the ability to *represent* the universe – especially the universe as it really is (as opposed to how it is usefully described, relative to the particular needs of that species) (Rorty, 1998d).

Thus Rorty, at least in this particular passage, appears to argue that there is a contrast between a tool and a picture, or representation, and that language, being the former, cannot be either of the latter two things. The same idea finds expression in *PSH*. There, Rorty claims that a 'Darwinian' treatment of language involves seeing it 'as providing tools for coping with objects rather than representations of objects' (1999c, p65). The 'relation of tools to what they manipulate,' he goes on, 'is simply a matter of utility for a particular purpose, not of "correspondence"' (ibid). '[L]anguage is not a medium of representation. Rather it is an exchange of marks and noises, carried out in order to achieve specific purposes. It cannot fail to represent accurately, for it never represents at all' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 50)[142].

As I will show below, this is not quite the whole picture of Rorty's position. But it has the potential to mislead. There are two principal problems with the general line of argument presented in passages such as these. i) Firstly, one does not have to endorse Darwin's theory of evolution in order to be able to view language as a tool. ii) Second, more importantly, something's being a tool does not exclude its also being a picture or a representation. I will develop each of these objections in turn.

i) It is no doubt entirely appropriate to describe language as a tool, because it is something that – at least some of the time – assists language-using creatures in getting what they want out of their environment. What is more, it can readily be construed as something physical and external to the organism: as strings of phonemes or inscriptions. In this respect it resembles a stereotypical tool such as a hammer more than do our bodily organs or our thoughts and beliefs. But the afore-mentioned considerations apply independently of any particular reference to Darwin. Darwin's theory of

[142] The same suggestion also occurs in *PMN*, where Rorty speaks of the 'Wittgensteinian notion' of 'language as a tool rather than a mirror' (1979, p. 9).

evolution by natural selection, that is, does not by itself lend support to the idea that language is a tool.

At most, I would argue, Darwinian theory merely highlights *one particular end* in light of which language might be regarded as a tool – namely, the end of *reproductive and adaptive success*[143]. As already seen (in 5.3., above), Darwin's theory of natural selection explains the existence of anatomical or behavioural traits as in all probability[144] stemming from their having contributed to the reproductive successes of creatures bearing those traits. Darwin's theory, that is, implies that biological traits do not generally exist unless they are *useful* with respect to increasing the prevalence in the population of their bearers. But this ultimately provides only a single end for language to attain. One can just as well regard language as a tool serving some – indeed, *any* – other end. Thus there would seem to be no particular connection between Darwin's intellectual heritage and the idea that language is a tool.

ii) Furthermore, something's being a tool does not, by itself, rule out its also being a picture or a representation. This is evident from the fact that pictures – for example, in the form of maps or diagrams – are often tools. There is no *prima facie* exclusivity between the category of *picture* (let alone *representation*) and that of *tool*. So it is not dialectically sufficient to invoke a distinction between tools and pictures, or between tools and representations, in order to demonstrate the incompatibility of Darwinism with the tradition that portrays philosophy as the attempt to represent Reality accurately.

The anti-representationalist idea contained in the passage of Rorty just quoted might therefore instead be taken to be the idea that language, fulfils some 'function' other than that of representing Reality, once seen through the 'biologistic' (Rorty, 1999c, p. xxiii) prism of Darwinian evolutionary theory. On such a reading, the function of language would be not that of disinterestedly portraying 'things as they are in themselves,' but, rather, some 'baser' alternative. This is perhaps what Rorty is insinuating in the final portion of the passage just quoted from his *REP* article. He could be implying that natural science discerns the biological or evolutionary function of linguistic assertion to be something distinctly *non-representational*.

Yet, I would argue, this possibility remains unlikely. In the first place, Darwinian theory would not seem to require that a given trait possess a single, unequivocal biological function – where by 'biological' function I mean contribution to the Darwinian evolutionary end of reproductive and adaptive success. In some cases, such as that of the mammalian heart, the biological function of a trait would seem to

[143] Strictly speaking, from a Darwinian perspective, there is only one end – reproductive success – and adaptive success serves to give organisms more time to reproduce relative to their competitors for resources. But calling this end '*reproductive*' perhaps risks giving an erroneously narrow impression of the range of phenomena concerned.

[144] Since some traits might theoretically have been preserved purely by chance, or might be causal or structural by-products of other, advantageous, traits – the latter category being known as 'spandrels' in biology.

be single and obvious. But, in other cases, a trait's biological function could conceivably be ambiguous or plural (for example, the tongue, or the trachea). To 'prove', *empirically*, that a trait had performed a single specific evolutionary function, it would seem necessary to be able to *observe* how the trait had contributed to the reproductive fortunes of its bearers over many generations. But for creatures with long life spans, for whom the relevant biological developments took place up to millions of years ago, this is impossible. Therefore it seems plausible that in the case of linguistic assertion, a trait possessed only by humans, we are restricted to computer simulations and 'best guesses' – that is, to appeals to the plausibility of competing narratives. There can be no question of science's categorically demonstrating that a certain part of language either does or does not perform a certain function, such as representing 'things as they are in themselves'.

Have any specific hypotheses, any concrete narratives, been proposed explaining the kinds of adaptive-reproductive advantages conferred on speakers by the practice of linguistic assertion, as well as the mechanisms by which such advantages are conferred? If so, do any of these suggest that assertion functions in a way that is non-representational? Pursuing this line of thought would seem to be the most charitable way of interpreting Rorty's characterisation of language as a tool in the interests of anti-representationalism.

Here, Rorty defers to the respective, more detailed, theoretical proposals of his former pupil, Robert Brandom, and of Huw Price, both of whom offer accounts of how the practice of linguistic assertion benefits groups of speakers. Brandom's and Price's accounts, unlike traditional ones appealing solely to the notion of the accurate representation of reality[145], seek to explain the utility of the practice of linguistic assertion in comparatively more detailed, *causal-mechanical* terms. As such, Rorty considers Brandom to be an exemplary naturalist, even though Brandom harbours suspicions about the label. 'Brandom does not call himself a naturalist,' Rorty writes,

> but the whole point of his attempt to replace representationalist with inferentialist semantics is to tell a story about cultural evolution – the evolution of social (and, in particular, linguistic) practices – that focuses on how these practices gave our ancestors an evolutionary edge. Unless one is convinced that particles somehow enjoy an ontological status superior to that of organisms, that will seem as naturalistic as one can get (Rorty, 2007a, p. 158)[146].

[145] Rorty considers such explanations of the utility of linguistic assertion, in terms of their accurate representation of Reality, to be vacuous. He compares them to the explanation of the soporific effect of opium – in terms of its 'dormitive virtue' – offered by the quack physician in Moliere's play *The Imaginary Invalid*.

[146] Price agrees: '[Brandom's] account only looks non-naturalistic (to him) because he tries to conceive of it as metaphysics. If he had stayed on the virtuous (anthropological) side of the fence to begin with, there would have been no appearance of anything non-naturalistic' (OCR15). Moreover, he suggests that Brandom 'does not appreciate the extent to which the position we share (at least in most respects) is indeed a vindication of the radical Rortyan viewpoint' (PGR186). See also ETV18-22; PGR149.

Accounts like Price's and Brandom's – 'imaginative stor[ies] about how grunts mutated into assertions' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 178) – make it easier to see how language could have evolved out of more basic interactions, like those we can observe in the behaviour of monkeys or birds. In such primitive proto-linguistic cases, members of a group modify the behaviour of other members by making noises. For example, a monkey sees a predator approaching and makes sounds that cause the other members of the group to flee from the impending danger. As such, suggests Rorty, the 'history of language' is

> a seamless story of gradually increasing complexity. The story of how we got from Neanderthal grunts and nudges to German philosophical treatises is no more discontinuous than the story of how we got from amoebae to the anthropoids. The two stories are part of one larger story. Cultural evolution takes over from biological evolution without a break. From an evolutionary point of view, there is no difference between the grunts and the treatises, save complexity (1999c, p. 75)[147].

> Language got off the ground not by people giving people names to things they were already thinking about, but by proto-humans using noises innovative ways, just as the proto-beavers got the practice of building dams off the ground by moving sticks and mud around in innovative ways. Language was, over the millennia, enlarged and rendered more flexible (Rorty, 2007a, pp. 107-8).

Rorty remarks concerning the efficacy of language, unlike those of Price and Brandom, are at the level of the 'big picture': for the most part, he is content to observe that language – including assertion – enables its users to co-operate by co-ordinating their behaviour. Utterances that disclose our present mental or physical state 'help those around us to predict our future actions,' he notes in *PSH*, and can thus be conceived of 'simply [as] tools for co-ordinating our behaviour with those of others' (1999c, p. xxiv). The point of assertion, he repeats in 'Universality and Truth,' is 'the reciprocal adjustment of our behaviour, the strategic co-ordination of our behaviour in ways which may prove to be mutually profitable' (Rorty, 2000j, pp. 9-10). 'Language is a social practice that began when it dawned on some genius that we could use noises, rather than physical compulsion. . . to get other humans to co-operate with us' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 107)[148].

From the fact that, as just seen, the coming into existence and utility of language can, for him (as for Price and Brandom), be explained solely in causal-mechanical terms, Rorty is able to offer two related strands of argument from the idea that language is a tool to anti-representationalism, both of which

[147] C.f. Rorty on the unbroken hierarchy of life-forms (1991d, p. 109), already quoted in 2.3, above.

[148] Again, language, for Rorty, is not a way of 'naming a thing a with an intrinsic nature of its own, but. . . a way of abbreviating the kinds of complicated interactions with the rest of the universe which are unique to higher anthropoids. These interactions are marked by the use of strings of noises and marks to facilitate group activities, as tools for coordinating the activities of individuals' (Rorty, 1999c, p. 63).

are more powerful than simply the suggestion that *representation* and *tool* are mutually exclusive categories. Crucially, both can be viewed as Darwinian manifestations of the argument from continuity seen in the previous Chapter. They are, I suggest, the proper elaboration of what should be seen only as the *slogan* that language is a 'set of tools rather than a set of representations' (Rorty, 1991a, p. 3). The first is a genealogical argument concerning the *emergence* of language. It can be understood as a 'diachronous' version of the 'argument from continuity'. It starts from the premise that tool-using is something that can adequately be accounted for in terms of causal-mechanical interaction, and is then roughly as follows:

> Language started off as a series of simple causal-mechanical interactions between individual organisms
>
> It is inconceivable that such interactions constituted representations of things 'as they are in themselves' (i.e. Reality); they are more analogous to physical 'pushings' and 'pullings'
>
> If language did not start off representing Reality and it is representing Reality now – then at some point an important change, or discontinuity, must have occurred
>
> Introducing such a change into the explanatory story is problematic
>
> > Because: such a change does not appear necessary to explain the phenomenon of language we encounter today
> >
> > Because: it is difficult to know – seems arbitrary – *where* to insert such a change
>
> In the interests of explanatory simplicity and the avoidance of the introduction of arbitrary discontinuities it is preferable not to entertain the idea of language representing 'things in themselves'

As Rorty puts it, 'there was no decisive moment at which language stopped being a series of reactions to the stimuli provided by the behaviour of other humans and started to be an instrument for expressing beliefs' (1999c, p. 74). This argument essentially amounts to one for the explanatory superfluity of the notion of representation of 'things as they are in themselves'[149].

The second interrelated strand of argument is essentially the argument from continuity as it has already been encountered in Chapter 4, above[150]. It is, I suggest, a 'synchronous' version of the argument because it addresses things as they currently stand, rather than the historical question of how they came to be. In *PSH*, Rorty argues:

[149] I explore this idea as found in Rorty further in 6.1.2, below.
[150] See, esp., 4.2.4.

> Because every belief we have must be formulated in some language or other, and because languages are not attempts to copy what is out there, but rather tools for dealing with what is out there, there is no way to divide off "the contribution to our knowledge made by the object" from "the contribution to our knowledge made by our subjectivity". Both the words we use and our willingness to affirm certain sentences using those words and not others are the products of fantastically complex causal connections between human organisms and the rest of the universe. There is no way to divide up this web of causal connections so as to compare the relative amount of subjectivity and objectivity in a given belief (Rorty, 1999c, pp. xxvi-xxvii).

The 'distinction between inside and outside,' Rorty continues in the same section, '. . . is one which cannot be made once we adopt a biologistic view (1999c, p. xxvii). In the same paper, he makes a connected point in the context of epistemological scepticism[151], a threat that he takes to be negated by a certain treatment of language as a tool. 'Pragmatists,' he claims,

> start with a Darwinian account of human beings as animals doing their best to cope with the environment – doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain. Words are among the tools which these clever animals have developed' (Rorty, 1999c, pp. xxii-iii).

He continues:

> There is no way in which tools can take one out of touch with reality. No matter whether the tool is a hammer or a gun or a belief or a statement, tool-using is part of the interaction of the organism with its environment. To see the employment of words as the use of tools to deal with the environment, rather than as an attempt to represent the intrinsic nature of the environment, is to repudiate the question of whether human minds are in touch with reality – the question asked by the epistemological skeptic. No organism, human or non-human, is more or less in touch with reality than any other organism. The very idea of "being out of touch with reality" presupposes the un-Darwinian, Cartesian picture of a mind which somehow swing free of the causal forces exerted on the body. The Cartesian mind is an entity whose relations with the rest of the universe are representational rather than causal. So to rid our thinking of the vestiges of Cartesianism, to become fully Darwinian in our thinking, we need to stop thinking of words as

[151] See 4.5, above.

> representations and to start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment (Rorty, 1999c, p. xxiii).

Again, this time in the context of Darwin, Rorty's naturalism-as-causal-monism comes to the fore as the basis for an argument against representationalism. Rorty emphasizes that the organism is causally 'bound together' with the rest of its environment; as a result, he holds, no part of it can 'swing free' in the manner of the hypothetical *tertia* that play the role of representations in the philosophical tradition (see 4.4., above). He repeats the suggestion, already canvassed in 4.5, above, that treating human beings and language in this manner provides us with the kind of 'contact' with the wider, non-human, world that the epistemological sceptic worries we might lack. Adopting such a naturalistic, Darwinian, picture therefore allows us to 'repudiate' the sceptic's very question about the possibility of knowledge, rather than trying to answer it. In the first half of the just-quoted passage, the notion that language is a tool plays a prominent role. Critically, however, when one comes to the second half of the passage, one sees that Rorty has a very particular conception of tool-using in mind: as in the diachronous version of the argument, tool-using is something that can adequately be accounted for in terms of causal-mechanical interaction; but, here, it is also something that links the tool-users firmly with their environment, effectively blurring the distinction between the two.

It is reasonable to suppose, I suggest, that the 'diachronous' and the 'synchronous' versions of the argument from continuity are both made on the basis of the same underlying phenomenon: viz., naturalism, understood as causal monism. This is so because it is surely *the same causal relations* that issue in particular utterances or episodes of cognition on the part of individuals, as explain the emergence of the corresponding general faculties (language, thought) in the species. As Rorty puts it in 'Philosophy and the Future,' effectively combining the two variants of the argument – to incorporate Darwin, human activities would need to be described without 'sudden discontinuities in evolutionary development,' which would in turn mean 'blurring the distinction between Nature and Spirit' (1995a, p. 199).

In the next section, I move on to offer an overview of Price's account – more detailed than Rorty's – of the adaptive utility of language; in particular, of his arguments to the effect that linguistic assertion functions in a way that is non-representational. It is useful to consider Price because he is an important contemporary philosopher who, having been influenced by Rorty, then goes on to place even more explicit emphasis than does the latter upon the anti-representationalist significance of the concept of *naturalism*. Price propounds an idea of naturalism – viz., 'subject naturalism' – with marked affinities to Rorty's own understanding of the concept, something recognised by Rorty himself[152]. Furthermore, Price's exposition of anti-representationalism, rooted as it is in the primacy of science, seems more likely than Rorty's to appeal to representationalist philosophers working today in the analytic

[152] See 2.3., above.

tradition. It therefore offers an instructive example of a possible way in which Rorty's insights could be both developed and potentially translated into a more effective idiom. That said, I shall argue that the considerable attention Price pays to the issue of the *function* of linguistic assertion does not do what he supposes at the metaphilosophical level. It is a mistake, I suggest, to think that drawing attention to putative non-representational facets of language suffices as a means of securing Rortyan anti-representationalism.

5.7. Huw Price on the function of linguistic assertion

5.7.1. Overview of Price's anti-representationalism

Price takes philosophical naturalism, 'most fundamentally,' to be the Quinean claim 'that natural science properly constrains philosophy, in the following sense. The concerns of the two disciplines are not simply disjoint, and science takes the lead where the two overlap' (Price, 2011h, p. 184). Insofar as it starts from an endorsement of natural science, Price's naturalism resembles what, in Chapter 2, above, I described as the analytic orthodoxy concerning that notion. Yet Price thinks that natural science can take the lead with respect to philosophy in two quite different ways. The first way, which Price terms 'object naturalism,' is to view natural science as the sole arbiter of real existence or knowledge, by holding either that 'in some important sense, all there *is* is the world studied by science,' or that 'all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge' (Price, 2011h, p. 185)[153]. The second way is one Price thinks constitutes a 'different view of the impact of science on philosophy' (Price, 2011h, p. 184). By contrast to 'object naturalism,' 'subject naturalism' – 'naturalism in the sense of Hume. . . and arguably Nietzsche' (Price, 2011h, p. 186) – is the idea that

> philosophy needs to begin with what science tells us *about ourselves*. Science tells us that we humans are natural creatures, and if the claims and ambitions of philosophy conflict with this view, then philosophy needs to give way (Price, 2011h 5).

As Price writes elsewhere, subject naturalism is 'the philosophical viewpoint that begins with the realisation that we humans (our thought and talk included) are surely part of the natural world' (Price, 2011f, p.5)[154]. Price's conception of the notion of naturalism – viz., as the 'recognition that we humans are natural creatures' (Price, 2011h, p.186) – thus significantly overlaps with Rorty's understanding of naturalism, viz. as a view about causality that incorporates human beings into nature.

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[153] In 'Moving the Mirror Aside,' the introductory first chapter to *Naturalism Without Mirrors*, Price refers to the object-naturalist as the 'Naturalist,' and to the subject-naturalist as the 'naturalist'. 'The Naturalist's mantra goes something likes this: The only facts there are are the kind of facts recognized by natural science' (Price, 2011f, p.4).

[154] C.f. also: 'Subject naturalism. . . takes for granted that we humans are natural creatures, and that language is at base a natural behaviour. It seeks an understanding of the origins and functions of particular discourses on that basis' (Price, 2019, p. 139).

Subject naturalism is 'theoretically prior to object naturalism,' according to Price, 'because the latter depends on validation from a subject naturalist perspective' (Price, 2011h, p.186); subject naturalism potentially 'gives us reason to reject object naturalism' (ibid). This is so because object naturalism 'depends upon an assumption about language that might prove false, from the former's perspective' (Price, 2011f, p.5).

This assumption is the representationalist one that 'substantial "word-world" semantic relations are a part of the best scientific account of our use of the relevant terms' (Price, 2011h, p.190)[155]. Such relations, for Price, involve 'a familiar picture: on one side, the World, on the other side Mind, or Language (the medium of representation)' (Price, 2011g, p. 137), a picture which he warns is 'very tenacious and will try to reassert itself at several points' (ibid)[156]. In his eyes, representationalism appears 'innocent' (ibid) but is in fact a 'piece of proto-science. . . a proto-theory about language and the world' (Price, 2011f, p.5). What has not been sufficiently recognised so far, thinks Price, is that 'the representationalist assumption is non-compulsory' – '. . . there are other possible theoretical approaches to language in which semantic notions play no significant role' (Price, 2011h, p.195). Therefore one needs to countenance the 'possibility that a good naturalistic account of our own linguistic practice might defeat Representationalism – might reveal it to be a poor theory about the relation between language and the world' (Price, 2011f, p.5)[157]. Naturalism has no 'automatic entitlement to a substantial account of semantic relations between words and thought and the rest of the natural world. . . because, by naturalism's own lights, it is at best an empirical matter' (Price, 2011h, p.194)[158].

Thus, insofar as they have been adopted uncritically and unreflectively, Price thinks that the 'semantic presuppositions of object naturalism are bad science, a legacy of an insufficiently naturalistic philosophy' (Price, 2011h, p.199), the object-naturalist evincing a degree of hypocrisy – or, perhaps, suffering from a blind-spot – to the extent that they refrain from subjecting their own representationalist convictions to full naturalistic scrutiny[159]. The 'question of the status of the semantic properties,' thinks Price, properly understood, is therefore

[155] This seems to be Price's general view. However, in one case he suggests that 'Naturalism' becomes problematic only once supplemented by representationalism, implying that it can exist independently (Price, 2011f, pp.4-5). 'Naturalism' appears to be the same view as 'object naturalism'.

[156] 'Once this picture is in place,' observes Price, 'the path I want to take is practically invisible' (ibid).

[157] Insofar as the subject naturalist approach contradicts representationalism, according to Price, it also defuses the 'placement problems' that he thinks the latter causes (Price, 2011f, p. 6). These are doubts about the 'reality' of the subject matter of certain topics of discourse – in particular, Price singles out mind, morality, modality, and meaning (the 'M-worlds') (Price, 2011g) – that arise due to the fact that these phenomena seem to resist explanation in terms of existing natural-scientific frameworks.

[158] C.f.: '[T]o take seriously the idea that linguistic theory is a matter for empirical science is surely to acknowledge, *inter alia*, that it is an empirical possibility that mature linguistic theory will not turn out to require the folk semantic notions, such as reference and truth' (Price, 2011c, p. 209).

[159] Price sees himself 'convicting some self-styled naturalists of sub-optimal science' (Price, 2011f, p. 5).

> the watershed between two radically different conceptions of the task of a scientifically-grounded philosophy. On one side lies metaphysics; on the other, scientific anthropology and the study of certain aspects of human linguistic behaviour and psychology (Price, 2011l, p. 279)[160].

Price's subject naturalism looks to occupy the anthropological, behavioural territory thus delineated: it purportedly offers a 'sociolinguistic perspective' that 'simply enquires into an aspect of the behaviour of natural creatures (ourselves)' (Price, 2011g, p. 141). Specifically, it focuses on *linguistic* behaviour by attempting to develop accounts of 'the functions and genealogy of particular parts of language' (Price, 2011f, p. 12). Price wants to distinguish

> between what we might call a metaphysical stance with respect to a vocabulary – a stance which takes the primary question to be whether the claims distinctive of the vocabulary are true – and a genealogical or anthropological stance, which is interested in *why* creatures like us come to employ the vocabulary in the first place (Price, 2011d, p. 302 – emphasis added).

Price, consciously following Wittgenstein[161], proposes we 'retain the insight that different bits of language may serve different functions in a way which isn't obvious at first sight' (Price, 2011g, p. 135)[162]. Price's conception of *function* is 'biological' (2011c, pp. 220-1) and rooted in a Darwinian conception of evolution (Price, 2011c, pp. 220-1; 2011e, p. 47). He makes it clear that

> [l]anguage and thought are not human artefacts. No one designed them, and they have a purpose, at best, only in the *ersatz* evolutionary sense. Nevertheless, just as we can speak of the functions (in this sense) of organs and structures within the human body, at various levels of organization, and their contribution to the overall interactions between ourselves (individually and collectively) and our environment, so we can ask similar questions about the functions and contributions of thought and language, and of their various components (Price, 2011i, p. 320)[163].

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[160] Pragmatism 'replaces metaphysical questions with questions about human thought and language. . . role and genealogy. . . questions about human behaviour, broadly construed' (Price, 2011i, p. 315). See also Price, 2011l, p. 254; Price, 2013b, 148.

[161] The 'mistake Wittgenstein thinks that philosophy makes with respect to language [is] that of regarding it as one tool rather than many' (Price, 2011c, p. 200). Price's view is 'Wittgensteinian in spirit,' he claims, if not in letter (Price, 2011c, p. 202).

[162] '[Language deemed to "describe" or "represent" reality] has many different functions, in a way that is not evident on the surface' (Price, 2011c, p. 201). '[N]ot everything of interest about the functions of language lies in view on the surface where the ordinary folk can see it' (Price, 2011b, p. 123).

[163] He is interested in 'function in a sense closer to the claim that the function of thirst is to make us drink when our body needs fluids' (Price, 2019, p. 137), function 'in the first-order sense in which I say that there is a fact

Whilst, for Price, it has now become a 'platitude that language serves many different functions,' it is not necessarily easy, he admits, 'to decide how to carve things up – what the various functions of language actually are, or indeed what is meant by a function in this context' (Price, 2011k, p. 67)[164]. Thus 'we need a story about which functional differences are the important ones' (Price, 2011d, p. 293). For Price, moreover, the (*a priori*, armchair) philosopher is not in a suitable position 'to reject the suggestion that there might be important functional differences of this kind in language' (Price, 2011d, p. 294). According to Price, '[t]he issue is one for science. It is the anthropologist, or perhaps the biologist who asks, "What does this linguistic construction do for these people?"' (ibid). Such questions require for their answer 'excavations – first-order scientific enquiries into the underlying functions of language in human life' (ibid).

In Price's view, the 'threat of functional pluralism' poses, at the very least, a 'challenge to the homogeneity of the representationalist empire,' to the 'assumption that language has a single core function, viz., to "represent how things are"' (Price, 2011i, p. 305). But it becomes apparent that Price wants to go further than this. It is 'very tempting,' he suggests, 'to think that one of the main functions of language, perhaps indeed the primary one, is that of description, or the making of factual claims,' but one should 'resist this temptation, and instead regard this particular functional category as an artificial one, imposed by the structure of language itself'[165] (Price, 2011k, p. 67). Price's subject naturalist, that is, thinks

> notions such as "description" and "assertion" may be nothing more than relatively superficial labels for a linguistic category whose core properties remain to be discovered – a category *which may turn out to have a multi-functional role in language*, in the sense that its core properties serve a range of very different functions (Price, 2011g, p. 138 – emphasis added).

Not only does language do other things besides representing – an anodyne point in itself – but so does *ostensibly representational language*, seen through the proper, 'empirical,' lens, perform a number of different roles besides (or instead of) that of representing. Thus Price's 'functional pluralism' (Price,

about the function of the kidney or the spleen, or about whether there is water on Mars' (Price, 2018, p. 472). Price suggests that, 'as elsewhere in biology and anthropology, we should expect differences with respect to the depth and contingency of variations, as well as with respect to function. Some functions are likely to be basic and perhaps hard-wired; others, simply cultural fads.' (Price, 2011i, p. 320)

[164] C.f. '[I]t is far from clear how to make these rather vague ideas precise' (Price, 2011c, p. 202).

[165] By 'the structure of language,' here, Price appears to be referring to the subject-predicate structure shared by declarative sentences. The suggestion seems to be that the fact that instances of assertoric language all possess the same subject-predicate grammatical form deceives us into thinking that all such language must be performing a single function, as a result of which we concoct the very notion of 'Reality' or 'The World' as the common target of their representational efforts. 'The subject-predicate form,' Price remarks elsewhere 'and indeed the notion of an object itself, have a one-many functional character' (Price, 2011d, p. 292). Thus the representationalist picture, for Price, of the World one side and Mind or Language on the other, arises in large part due to 'failing to notice the plurality of linguistic functions, or frameworks, *within descriptive discourse*' (Price, 2011g, p. 137 – emphasis added).

2011g, p. 136) (Price, 2011c, p. 201) applies not just to language generally, but also to linguistic assertion itself.

Assertion, on Price's account, plays the role of a 'multi-purpose tool' (Price, 2011g, p. 137)[166], the 'apparent unity and cohesiveness' of which 'is superficial and overlies considerable diversity' (Price, 2011k, p. 67). As Price points out, 'this kind of explanatory structure also exists elsewhere in biology,' in the case of the human hand. The hand, he notes, can be used to perform a vast array of different tasks, but 'if we say that the function of the hand is *manipulation*, and leave it at that, we miss something very important: we miss the underlying functional diversity' (Price, 2011c, p. 223). The same is true of clothing: 'different pieces of clothing do different things, even though there is an important sense in which they are all put together in the same way' (Price, 2011i, p. 311).

Importantly, for Price, it is an empirical matter whether *any* of assertion's many functions implicate 'substantial "word-world" semantic relations' . The theoretical possibility that they *do not* is one he is keen to explore. How, then, does Price 'provide an account of what the assertoric or declarative part of linguistic practice is "for", without *presupposing* representational content' (Price, 2011c, p. 217 – original emphasis)? This, he concedes, is a 'very large project' and his aims 'are necessarily limited': 'to show simply that there is an intelligible theoretical programme in the offing' (ibid).

In offering an account of the latent biological function(s) of assertoric language, Price borrows his starting point from Brandom. He holds that 'assertion can. . . be thought of, most primitively, as a kind of expression or product of' 'psychological states construed in non-representational or non-conceptual terms – behavioural (or more broadly, functional dispositions of various kinds, or what Brandom calls "knowings how"' (Price, 2011c, p. 220). Yet this dispositional expression 'is not merely involuntary,' Price is keen to point out,

> but a kind of deliberate "taking a stand" – in Brandom's terms, a "making explicit" – of one's dispositions in the relevant respect, in a way which invites challenge by fellow speakers who have certain conflicting dispositions (ibid).

Linguistic practices of this kind, he goes on to add, 'serve to encourage useful modification of. . . commitments, in the light of conflict and subsequent resolution of conflict' (ibid). An account of the functioning of assertoric language, for Price, builds on the fact that '[f]or social creatures likes us, there are often advantages in aligning our commitments across our communities, and especially in copying the commitments of more experienced members of our communities' (Price, 2011c, p. 222)[167]. It

[166] C.f.: 'What we need is the idea that although assertion is indeed a fundamental language game, it is a game with multiple functionally-distinct applications – a multi-function tool, in effect' (Price, 2011i, p. 310).

[167] 'At its simplest, my proposal is that the assertoric language game is simply a co-ordination device for social creatures, whose welfare depends on collaborative action. It helps to reduce differences among the behavioural dispositions, or other variable aspects of speakers' situations, on which such action depends' (Price, 2013a, p. 49). See also Price, 2013b, p. 153.

would in principle be possible for groups of speakers to achieve the desired alignment by non-linguistic methods, concedes Price, such as through inference from observed behaviour, but it 'seems much facilitated by a linguistic means of giving voice to and discussing commitments' (ibid). Crucially, the initial psychological states, or commitments, that assertions are held to express, on Price's account, serve 'a wide variety of functional roles of their own,' a variety that is 'obscured in their expression, when they take on the common "clothing" of the assertoric form' (ibid). As such, Price's account 'leaves space for functional pluralism,' but 'in another sense it still treats assertion as a single tool. . . for aligning commitments across a speech community. Assertion thus becomes a multi-purpose tool' (Price, 2011c, p. 222).

Price develops this account in 'Pragmatism, Quasi-Realism, and the Global Challenge' (2011j), a paper co-written with David Macarthur. Price and Macarthur return to 'the thought that many of our proto-linguistic psychological states might be such that it would be advantageous, with respect to those states, that we tend towards conformity across our communities' (2011j, p. 248). 'Assertoric language,' they argue 'seems to facilitate and encourage such alignment' by allowing us to 'give voice to our psychological dispositions in ways which invite challenges by speakers with contrary dispositions' (ibid). On their account, 'the function of this practice of "saying how things are" is. . . the function of altering our behaviourally significant commitments much more rapidly than our individual experience in the environment could do, by giving us access to the corresponding states of our fellow (and much else besides)' (ibid).

> The suggestion is thus that "representational" language is a tool for aligning commitments across a speech community. But though in this sense a single tool, it is a tool with many distinct applications, corresponding to the distinct primary functions of the various kinds of psychological states that take advantage of it – that facilitate their own alignment by expressing themselves in assertoric form. And none of these primary functions is representation as such, in the traditional sense (Price, 2011j, p. 248)[168].

[168] In Price's earlier work *Facts and the Function of Truth* (1989), he attempts, as he puts it in 'Metaphysical Pluralism' (2011e), to 'provide an account that has the potential to explain why diverse uses of language should be alike in being treated as "truth-bearing"' (2011e, p. 47). Price's proposal is that 'within each use or discourse, there is some potential utility in noting and resolving disagreements between the members of a speech community. A notion of truth encourages a community to realise this potential. . . by generating a social value that is negative when speakers disagree and positive when they agree. Disagreement thus becomes socially unstable, and argument, with its long-run benefits, is thereby encouraged' (ibid). However, in keeping with the idea that assertion is a 'multi-use' tool, Price suggests that 'there is no uniform way in which each of the many ["truth-bearing"] language games affects our well-being' (ibid). He goes on to develop this account of the social utility of the notion of truth in 'Truth as Convenient Friction' (Price, 2011m), in which he sets out his position in contrast to what he perceives as being Rorty's view that justification is the only norm required to govern inquiry. There he argues that '[w]ithout a norm stronger than that of warranted assertibility *for me* or *for us*, the idea of improving *my*, or *our*, current commitments would be incoherent. [The norm of truth] functions to create the

Like Rorty, then, Price's concern with the representational status of language centres on representation as that notion generally features in the philosophical tradition: viz., representation of reality 'as it is in itself' on the part of entire vocabularies, in such a way that it is possible for linguistic communities to be completely wrong about the 'nature of that reality' (what Price sometimes calls 'big-R Representationalism' – see e.g. Price, 2013c, p. 44). Price thinks that '[w]e should reject the metaphysical stance not by rejecting truth and representation, but by recognizing that in virtue of the most plausible story about the function and origins of these notions, they simply do not sustain that sort of metaphysical weight' (Price, 2011m, p. 166). Like Rorty (see 5.5, above), Price is inclined to think that 'representation is not a usefully univocal notion' (Price, 2013b, p. 190), and is quite prepared to accept that there are senses in which linguistic assertion is indeed representational. In his later work, for instance, he identifies two such senses – so-called 'i-representation' and 'e-representation' – both of which stand in contrast to traditional metaphysical representation (Price, 2013b, p. 170)[169]. Price's 'faithfulness to Rorty,' he observes, 'turns on the fact that neither of my two notions of representation (i-representation and e-representation) is what traditional representationalism had in mind' (Price, 2013b, p. 186).

A key issue considered by Price is whether his challenge to conventional ideas about the function of linguistic assertion (if empirically vindicated) entitles one positively *to say that the latter does not represent* in the relevant metaphysical way, or whether it is merely entitles one to forsake the traditional metaphysical vocabulary and associated practices. Price, like Rorty, seems to favour – at least in principle – the latter option, a form of quietism (Price, 2013b, pp. 169-70). Price notes 'the attractions of *metaphysical* quietism – of a deflationary approach to metaphysics' (Price, 2019, p. 142); yet he is not a quietist *tout court*, insofar as he 'insist[s] on the interest and respectability of another project – the functional and genealogical project' (Price, 2019, p. 142). The 'shift' he recommends is a matter of '*abandoning* the metaphysical questions altogether, in favour of the anthropological questions' (Price, 2013b, p. 181 – original emphasis).

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conceptual space for further improvement' (Price, 2011m, p. 174 – original emphasis). More than this, 'it positively encourages such improvement, by motivating speakers who disagree to try to resolve their disagreement. Without [the norm of truth], differences of opinion would simply slide past one another' (Price, 2011m, pp. 174-5). Price's view 'amount[s] to pointing out that the third norm [that of truth]. . . brings with it the following behavioural difference: a disposition to criticize, or at least disapprove of, those with whom one disagrees' (Price, 2011m, p. 177). 'If reasoned argument is beneficial – beneficial in some long-run sense – then a community. . . adopt[ing] this practice will tend to prosper, compared to a community who do not' (Price, 2011m, p. 175).

[169] 'E-representation' is a state's 'having the function of keeping track of' (Price, 2013b, p. 168) a certain kind of occurrence in an organism's external environment, normally due to (standardly) being caused by occurrences of that kind (see 5.5.2, above) (Price, 2013c, p. 36). 'I-representation,' by contrast, is representation in virtue of the role that a given state plays in a creature's internal 'inferential architecture' – seemingly, a state can count as representational in this sense if it bears appropriate relations to other such states and dispositions (Price, 2011a, section 6) (Price, 2013a). For Price, e- and i-representation 'are not two competing accounts of a single species of representation but two quite different beasts' (Price, 2013c, p. 38).

5.7.2. Critique of Price's approach

Price argues from the primacy of science in relation to philosophy. His point that representationalism is something that ought not to be beyond the bounds of scientific critique is ingenious. His approach widens the appeal of anti-representationalism to philosophers who see their discipline as closely allied with the natural sciences; it is likely to be much more persuasive in relation to this group of intellectuals than Rorty's rhetorical strategy, given the marked ambivalence toward the natural sciences evinced by the latter's writings and his tendency to frame the issue concerning representationalism as one of moral choice rather than fact[170].

Still, the epistemic priority of science is axiomatic and unquestioned for Price and might not appeal to philosophers who gravitate more toward metaphysics than toward physics. Despite his distancing himself from 'object naturalism,' one feels that for Price natural science still remains the 'measure of all things'. Instead, Price might have framed his 'subject naturalism' more metaphilosophically neutrally, as simply the idea that human beings are natural creatures, without seeking to justifying this assertion by appealing to the authority of science. Doing this would deprive his writings of a certain amount of dialectical leverage over scientific-minded philosophers, but, I suggest, this might potentially be compensated for by increased traction over metaphysicians.

A key question is the manner in which hypotheses about the biological or evolutionary functions of linguistic practices impinge on the question of the viability of philosophy's representationalist presuppositions. Price, in my view, is mistaken to place so much anti-representationalist weight on the notion of biological function. Price's approach amounts to noting that the representationalist philosophical tradition can be separated off from natural science and discarded. Science, that is, for Price, can explain the emergence and utility of language (equally, thought) independently of representationalist assumptions; it *does not need to* invoke representationalist notions where language is concerned. This is probably Rorty's 'official' position, too, on balance (see 6.1.2., below) – both in terms of its quietism, and in terms of its appraisal of the anti-representationalist significance of naturalism. The approach leads to the idea that representationalism is theoretically superfluous and thus optional.

But my view is that it is better to attempt to tackle representationalism 'head on', so to speak. Naturalism, as already seen in Chapter 4, and as I shall elaborate in Chapter 6, below, offers the materials for an anti-representationalist argument both more decisive and less axiomatically dependent on the importance of science. It affords chance for a more direct, 'culturally neutral,' case to be made against the representationalist tradition, identifying what is *inherently problematic* about that tradition on more or less its own terms, as opposed to merely suggesting that it does not feature

[170] See 1.3, above, and 6.1, below.

as part of our best science. Price arguably inherits too much residual scientism from Carnap and the logical positivists.

The best way to persuade anyone to accept your point of view is to show them the grain of truth in their point of view together with the reasons why that point of view ultimately needs to be revised. The target audience of anti-representationalists like Price and Rorty's efforts, I suggest, are the vast majority of philosophers who might conceivably count as metaphysicians. Rorty's considered approach amounts to telling them they are wasting their time and talents trying to discern the ultimate nature of reality and prove the possibility of knowledge. (Yet, I have sought to demonstrate that his work contains rich and hitherto untapped resources for an alternative anti-representationalist approach.) Price's anti-representationalist approach, by contrast, is to appeal to the authority of natural science to try to get representationalists to change their ways. Price and Rorty have in common the fact they both seem to regard metaphysics and representationalism as overlapping entirely, with metaphysics being something participated in on an all-or-nothing basis. The assumption that doing so would be removing the ground or ladder from under their feet seems to be what deters them from entering the metaphysician's 'world' in order to 'defeat' representationalism, by adopting some of metaphysic's aspirations and presuppositions whilst rejecting others. This strategy might be more effective in eradicating the socio-culturally problematic aspects of representationalism because it would speak to the 'problem group' *in their language*, rather than speaking past them, as Price and Rorty arguably do.

I experiment with such an anti-representationalist strategy in 6.3.2 and 6.4, below. In the next Chapter, I consider Rorty's metaphilosophy and his attitude to metaphysics in more detail.

Chapter 6. Metaphysical Naturalism

I have characterised Rorty's naturalism as a form of causal monism according to which all causes belong to a single, 'natural,' class. This causal monism, I have argued, expresses the idea that *everything is natural* by means of the concept of causation (Chapter 2). Further, I have claimed that Rorty's naturalism plays a crucial role in the overall economy of his thought, helping to justify his 'one big idea,' anti-representationalism (for details of this idea, see Chapter 1). In Chapter 3, I argued that the fourth chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty, 1979) did not offer a compelling philosophical argument against representationalism, only against epistemic foundationalism. The arguable absence of a fully effective anti-representationalist argument in this chapter of *PMN*, I suggested, left Rorty's treatment of Davidson, and what I called the 'argument from continuity,' as the principle theoretical argument for anti-representationalism in Rorty's oeuvre.

In Chapter 4 I outlined this 'argument from continuity,' showing how Rorty obtains his naturalism from the thought of Donald Davidson and uses it to prosecute an argument against representationalism, or what Davidson terms the 'scheme-content' dualism. The principal connection between naturalism and anti-representationalism emerges thus: naturalism discredits the fundamental assumption of representationalism, according to which there exists an absolute distinction between human beings, the traditional source of epistemic representations, and nature, their traditional object. Chapter 5 then went on to demonstrate the ways in which naturalism informs Rorty's engagement with the intellectual legacy of Darwin.

In this final chapter, I consider the appropriate *metaphilosophical interpretation* of Rorty's naturalism and the 'argument from continuity'. I seek to answer the questions: How, as a matter of fact, does Rorty's conception of philosophy as a form of 'cultural politics' shape his conception of the anti-representationalist significance of naturalism? How *should* its significance be understood?

In the first section of the chapter, 6.1, I show how Rorty's metaphilosophical perspective leads him to frame the considerations underlying the argument from continuity as contributing to a *moral* – specifically, a *utilitarian* – argument for rejecting representationalism. Having outlined Rorty's depreciatory attitude to metaphysics (6.2), in the remainder of the chapter I offer an alternative account, one that Rorty ultimately would have rejected, of naturalism's and the argument from continuity's anti-representationalist significance. I join a number of others (6.3) who have recently attempted to transpose at least part of Rorty's work into metaphysical form in order to try to preserve its central insights. I treat naturalism as a 'modest,' or minimal, form of metaphysics (6.4), at which one arrives by pursuing metaphysical ideas of disinterest and objectivity; nevertheless, as a view it places limitations on the intelligibility of further metaphysical inquiry. In the final section, 6.5, I note that the natural sciences, via the causal structures they uncover, and the 'external' stance they adopt in relation to human practices, continue to bolster the case for naturalism.

6.1. Rorty's 'moral' argument from naturalism to anti-representationalism

6.1.1. In the beginning was the deed: the morality of theoretical decision

In an early essay, 'The Limits of Reductionism,' Rorty draws attention to what he sees as the 'central paradox of metaphilosophy' – the fact that, whilst metaphilosophy aspires to neutrality and universality, the 'permanent possibility' of the 'appeal to practice. . . transfers the question of the acceptability of a philosophical program out of metaphilosophy and into the realm of moral choice' (Rorty, 2014b, p. 50). Thus Rorty has always been keenly aware of the sense in which *all* philosophy – and not just that conventionally regarded as moral philosophy, or ethics – constitutes a 'practical' activity; one whereby one chooses between different philosophical views in the same way as one does between courses of action. 'From the point of view of [Rorty's] radical pragmatism,' suggests Ramberg, a question such as philosophy's proper degree of 'autonomy' from the rest of culture 'is not a matter to be settled by theoretical reflection, determined by philosophical understanding. It is a question of ethical choice of direction' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 445).

In *CP*, Rorty continues to develop this conception of the practical nature of philosophical theory choice, arguing that the process of adopting metaphilosophical positions resembles *phronesis* – the Greek term for practical wisdom – more than it does the *theoria* that derives from simply 'seeing' how matters stand (Rorty, 1982a, pp. 163-4). 'When the contemplative mind,' he argues, '. . . takes large views, its activity is more like deciding what to *do* than deciding that a representation is accurate' (ibid, 163 – original emphasis). Hence Rorty's conception of philosophical theory choice as a moral exercise dovetails with his anti-representationalism, since, in the absence of the overarching aim of accurate representation of 'things in themselves', theoretical decisions are referred entirely to their social and cultural consequences. 'The effect of pragmatism,' he observes, 'is to politicize philosophy' (Rorty, 1991b); philosophical views are valuable only insofar as they produce 'success at getting a certain job done' (Rorty, 2014b, p. 50).

Rorty's later work then undergoes what Ramberg has called a 'radicalization' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 432) in the direction of this practico-moral conception of philosophy, 'as Rorty increasingly allows political, ethical, and even aesthetical terms, to bear the full weight of the claims he advances' (ibid.) – something Christopher Voparil also speaks to when he describes Rorty's 'political turn' (Voparil, 2011, p. 963). In *ORT*, Rorty characterises 'moral principles' as 'the larger genus of which epistemic ones are a species,' implying that epistemic decisions – at least at the level of vocabularies, or theories – are free choices to be deliberated about alongside other moral considerations, rather than separately answerable to non-human authority ('Reality', 'thing in themselves,' etc.) (1991d, p. 68). The political turn in Rorty's thought culminates in his final collection of published papers, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4*, in which Rorty depicts philosophy as one among many scenes of conflict concerning the merits of alternative uses of language. Philosophy, as a sub-division of culture, he proposes, boils down to 'arguments about what words to use' (2007a, p. 3).

Further, Rorty's conception of the morality of epistemic decision is a consequentialist one, wherein he endorses what he describes as William James' 'utilitarian ethics of belief' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 5). 'To say that James is basically right in his approach to truth and reality,' Rorty argues, 'is to say that arguments about relative dangers and benefits are the only ones that matter' (2007a, p. 6). Moreover, these 'relative dangers and benefits' pertain to society at large. Intellectual progress is 'a subdivision of moral progress', he claims, and the latter consists in 'progress in finding beliefs which are better and better tools for accomplishing our communal projects' (2000e, p. 63).

Whilst Rorty's moral conception of philosophical theory choice can be regarded as a corollary of his anti-representationalism in the manner just indicated (i.e. as arising from the dissolution of non-human normative constraints on theory choice), the latter idea itself is also motivated by the moral and political dimensions of Rorty's thought, in a reciprocal, circular, motion of justification. This is so because, for Rorty, anti-*representationalism itself* is not a discovery but a moral choice – for one to wield a particular tool, for particular reasons. We should adopt Rorty's 'one big idea,' according to Rorty, not because it corresponds to 'how things *really* are,' but because its envisaged socio-cultural consequences make adopting it the right thing to do. For Rorty, philosophy is moral and a matter of cultural politics, so to speak, *all the way down*. 'I want to argue,' he states at the outset of *PCP*, 'that cultural politics should replace ontology, and also that whether it should or not is *itself* a matter of cultural politics' (2007a, p. 5, original emphasis).

6.1.2. Utilitarian considerations arising from naturalism

Rorty, to repeat, thinks that questions of doxastic propriety ought to be decided on the basis of utilitarian considerations, at least in the case of 'whole-vocabulary' divergences such as that between the representationalist and anti-representationalist. I have argued at length above that naturalism, amongst Rorty's various philosophical commitments, plays a particularly significant role in motivating his anti-representationalism. However, by the lights of Rorty's own metaphilosophy, if naturalism is to retain a bearing on the question of representationalism, then this bearing must be (re-)statable in utilitarian terms. I will show here, by reference to Rorty's writings, that its significance *can be* stated in such terms, and that, stated as such, it *does* form part of Rorty's overall utilitarian case against representationalism. Nevertheless, I will argue that taking this route leaves one in a dialectically unpromising position.

From Rorty's point of view, the tension between naturalism and representationalism manifested in the 'argument from continuity' – the fact that from a naturalistic perspective there appears no obvious, non-arbitrary way to distinguish 'representations' from 'what they represent' – cannot be construed in the traditional philosophical manner, as constituting an argument to the effect that representationalism is logically incompatible with naturalism and thus false. When, as we have already seen, Rorty writes that 'naturalism. . . entails an abandonment of much of the problematic of

contemporary philosophy' (1998d), the 'entailment' in question cannot therefore be construed as an instance of *modus ponendo tollens* in the following way:

Premise 1: naturalism

Premise 2: ¬ (representationalism ∧ naturalism)

Conclusion: ¬ representationalism

Nor can 'the apparent incompatibility of the correspondence theory of truth with a naturalistic account of the origin of human minds' (Rorty, 2007a, p. 55) be construed as a case of logical incompatibility necessitating, *of itself*, that we reject one or the other view. Instead, for Rorty, the tension been naturalism and representationalism must have deleterious socio-cultural consequences in order for it to necessitate abandoning one of the two positions. Does Rorty envisage damaging consequences of this kind, and, if so, what are they?

Retrospectively examining his intellectual career in 'Response to Brandom' (2000b), Rorty considers himself to have offered three principal arguments against the idea that 'true beliefs [are] accurate representations of reality' (2000b, p. 185). The first argument is the classical pragmatist point that we have no way of determining whether or not beliefs accurately represent 'Reality,' as opposed to merely ascertaining whether or not they comply with our 'all too human' standards of justification. As a result, the argument goes, according to the principle of Occam's Razor the apparatus of representationalism is a superfluous addition to the epistemic principles we actually use to acquire new beliefs. The second argument consists in the 'evil consequences' of 'attempts to divide culture into the good fact-finding. . . and the less good non-fact-finding parts' (ibid, p. 186). Rorty's third argument[171], however, consists in the fact that, in his view, 'the story of biological evolution is helpless to explicate the coping-representing distinction, helpless to say when organisms stopped coping and began copying' (p.185). From the first and the third arguments, as listed here, Rorty concludes that 'we should give up thinking of beliefs as representations. We should think of vocabularies as tools for coping rather than media for copying' (ibid). Thus Rorty's point appears to be that the relevant notion of representation does not fit readily into evolutionary – which, ultimately, I argued in Chapter 5, above, is to say causal-mechanical – narratives, and, as such, should be rejected. But why, one might ask, should it be rejected given its incongruity? Is it, for example, because evolutionary theory offers the single (need- and interest-independently) correct account of the nature of reality, such that anything proving incompatible with it must be rejected *ipso facto*? As seen already in this Chapter,

[171] I have switched the order of the second and third arguments relative to their actual order in Rorty's text, for clarity of exposition. There is no suggestion on Rorty's part that the arguments are rank-ordered according to their cogency.

such an interpretation does not fit with Rorty's considered metaphilosophy, something emphasized by Rorty himself at various points[172].

Instead, one must suppose that the failure of traditional philosophical notions to fit in with Darwin's causal narrative furnishes a utilitarian reason comparable to – albeit made less explicit than – the 'evils' Rorty believes are occasioned by invidious cultural distinctions. So, posing the question again: what are the damaging consequences of modern science's difficulty accommodating traditional philosophical notions? And if these consequences obtain, or are likely to obtain, why should one relinquish the philosophical notions themselves, as opposed to the science?

The second question is, of course, much more easily answered. According to Rorty, in the event that science and philosophy conflict, one should retain a causal-mechanical, Darwinian, outlook and reject the representationalist tradition because thee socio-cultural consequences of each, *considered in isolation*, are, respectively, positive and negative.

Representationalism, in Rorty's view, comes with lots of problems, all of which count as independent utilitarian reasons for rejecting it. I review these in the next section, 6.1.3. On the other hand, science, despite its hegemonic tendencies, contributes much to society in the form of techonological progress. Therefore, given a choice between the two, Rorty would no doubt urge that we pick modern science over representationalism.

That we are faced with an 'either-or' decision between representationalism and science, on Rorty's view, is suggested by passages such as the following, in which he claims that

> there are two advantages to [anti-representationalism]. The first is that adopting it makes it impossible to formulate a lot of the traditional philosophical problems. The second is that adopting it makes it easier to come to terms with Darwin (1999a, p. 66).

Whilst dissolution of the traditional problems evidently counts as a distinct, inherent, utilitarian benefit of anti-representationalism (see 6.1.3, below), the fact that Rorty sees the second major advantage of anti-representationalism as residing in its allowing us to 'come to terms with Darwin' is noteworthy. This, combined with the idea of the superfluity of representationalist notions relative to 'evolutionary biology,' as mentioned in 'Response to Brandom' (Rorty, 2000b) earlier in this section, suggests that incompatibility between representationalism and natural science *might well* play a role in the utilitarian calculus dictating whether we retain the tradition. 'Darwin's account of our origins,' Rorty argues elsewhere, on similar lines, offers us a 'purely causal picture' that is 'hard to reconcile'

[172] Rorty makes it clear that this is *not* his understanding of Darwin, and of the disclosures of modern science generally. See this section, below.

with the 'antinaturalist self-images suggested to us by, among others, Plato and Kant' (1998e, pp. 48-9).

Nevertheless, the exact nature of the difficulty to be had in reconciling the two pictures remains somewhat obscure. Are they strictly incompatible, inconsistent, or is it just that one is superfluous in the presence of the other? It seems unlikely that Rorty considers causal-mechanical natural science to be demonstrably logically incompatible with representationalist tenets, such that the two outlooks directly contradict one another. Principally, I suggest, this is because Rorty does not have the notion of a single correct interest-independent description of reality available to him, with which to explicate that of logical incompatibility.

Could incompatibility, perhaps, be construed in a different way, according to which the incompatibility in question was somehow *practical*, consisting in the fact that representationalist and scientific vocabularies could not both belong to a single speaker? Yet there would still need to be some reason for this. Further, deeming it impossible for a single speaker to wield the two vocabularies – even on quite different occasions – would conflict with Rorty's Wittgensteinian conception of language as a box of tools for different purposes. Rorty would need to be prepared to hold, in effect, that the vocabularies of contemporary natural science and of the philosophical tradition were incapable of co-existing alongside one another in a single speaker's 'toolbox'. One possible reason for this might be that the two vocabularies were in fact performing the same function, such that, so to speak, they got in each other's way. But even if that were to be so, it would seem to imply merely that it was *not necessary* for the two vocabularies to co-exist*,* rather than that it was impossible. By the same toolbox analogy, one does not have to dispose of one's old screwdriver just because one has acquired a newer, better one.

Thus superfluity, or redundancy, seems to be closer to the direction in which Rorty wishes to push a 'utilitarian' argument from naturalism to anti-representationalism. On balance, that is, Rorty seems more inclined to regard naturalism as an *alternative to representationalism*, rather than as something incompatible with the latter. The availability of this alternative then *allows* us to abandon representationalism, even if it does not necessitate doing so. 'The nice thing about Darwin,' he writes in 'Just One More Species Doing Its Best,'

> was not that he got human beings right, but that he made available a way of describing human beings which enabled us to discard a lot of unfruitful questions which had been posed by other ways of describing them (Rorty, 1991b).

Darwinian naturalism, then, allows us to discard representationalism, which in turn allows us to discard futile problems. 'The particular purpose served by the reminder that language can be described in Darwinesque terms,' Rorty writes, 'is to help us get away from. . . "representationalism"' (1991a, p. 4). Darwin does not 'describe reality, or even just human beings, better than anybody else,'

Rorty insists, defending himself against John McDowell's suggestion that a '"Darwinian tone" pervades' much of his writing, but should be understood rather as offering 'a useful gimmick to prevent people from overdramatizing dichotomies and thereby generating philosophical problems' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 152)[173]. Similarly, Darwin does not show that the representationalist tradition 'is wrong. . . the only question is about which conception raises fewer problems, is more efficient to work with' (Rorty, 1991b). 'Traditional philosophical distinctions,' Rorty observes, most concisely – in 'Naturalism and Quietism' – 'complicate biological narratives to no good purpose' (2007a, p. 154). Causal-mechanical science does a good enough job of fulfilling our explanatory needs by itself, Rorty seems to be saying, without causing additional problems, whereas representationalist intuitions 'giv[e] rise to too much sterile controversy, too many fancy theories that tack epicycles. . . onto epicycles' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 120).

Thus two significant drawbacks of representationalism are its creation of what Rorty sees as being futile problems, and its explanatory overcomplication in comparison, or as an addition, to Darwinian naturalism. What both drawbacks of representationalism have in common is that they only reveal themselves as such in light of the emergence of an alternative capable of fulfilling the same function(s). However, I suggest, they benefit from being treated as distinct utilitarian arguments from naturalism to anti-representationalism.

The first – that representationalism creates futile problems, which naturalism allows us to avoid – highlights an intrinsic drawback to representationalism, which the existence of naturalism as a substitute for representationalism supposedly allows us to circumvent. Here, the suggestion is that natural science does the same relevant things as representationalism without suffering from its inherent disadvantages. There are several other supposed disadvantages to representationalism, according to Rorty, and I consider these in the following section. However, in each case, naturalism potentially plays a key role by *enabling us to let go* of the representationalist paradigm.

The second argument – that naturalism violates Occam's Razor to a lesser degree than does representationalism – is different to the first in that it compares the two positions directly by the same criteria, explanatory simplicity, and finds the former to be superior.

The utilitarian argument from naturalism to anti-representationalism, I suggest, thus consists of two parts:

i) Natural science does the same job or jobs (at least) as well as representationalism. Thus representationalism is *superfluous* given the availability of naturalism as an alternative. In Rorty's view, the former's

[173] C.f. also: 'It behooves us to give the self-image Darwin suggested to us a whirl, in the hope of having fewer philosophical problems on our hands' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 48)

inherent disadvantages outweigh its merits, and therefore it should be discarded.

ii) Natural science potentially does the same job or jobs *even better* than does representationalism. Hence for this reason alone it might be preferred.

What is it that naturalism and representationalism both do, but which the former manages to accomplish without incurring additional problematic complications? For Rorty, at the broadest level, part of the answer is likely going to be that both provide us with an identity, in virtue of telling a story about how, collectively, we became what we are. Another function performed in different ways using naturalist and representationalist notions is that of establishing a form of 'connection,' or 'contact,' between ourselves and the rest of the world or universe (see 4.5., above). A final function might be more narrowly explanatory: naturalist and representationalist notions can both be employed to explain certain phenomena, such as scientific theory change or the utility of different linguistic practices (see 5.6 and 5.7, above).

6.1.3. Rorty's other utilitarian arguments

Rorty adduces a number of other utilitarian reasons for rejecting representationalism[174], besides the suggestion that naturalism is superior in certain respects. I consider these here in order to present a relatively complete picture of his cultural-political motivations, and thus to see where considerations based on naturalism fit in overall.

In 'getting us away' from representationalism, holds Rorty, Darwinian naturalism channels traditional philosophers' efforts and intellectual talents towards endeavours – such as addressing concrete political and moral issues – more likely to benefit humanity as a whole. The naturalist strain in pragmatism, he argues in his (Rorty's) *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Pragmatism',

> the attempt to come to terms with Darwin, is thus. . . important mainly as a further strategy for shifting philosophers' attention from the problems of metaphysics and epistemology to the needs of democratic politics (Rorty, 1998d).

Representationalism, in Rorty's eyes, insofar as it gives rise to the traditional philosophical problems, consumes time and energy that could otherwise be used more effectively. There is '[n]o point in asking whether a belief represents reality. . . accurately,' he claims: '[t]hat is, for pragmatists, not only a bad

[174] At the same time, he accepts that representationalism has had socio-cultural benefits in the past and that anti-representationalism is not without risk: '[I]t is possible that critics of pragmatism are right when they predict that giving up on the appearance-reality and subjective-objective distictions would have calamitous consequences' – nevertheless, on balance, this is an 'experiment worth trying' (Rorty, 2010e, p. 105).

question, but the root of much wasted philosophical energy' (1999c, p. xxiv)[175]. Appealing to Wittgenstein's metaphor of traditional philosophical problems as collectively constituting a 'fly-bottle,'[176] Rorty implores: 'do not underestimate the effects of batting around inside that particular fly-bottle. Do not underestimate what might happen to us, what we might become, as a result of getting out of it' (1991a, p. 6)[177]. It is worth emphasizing that Rorty is not denigrating the worth of philosophy as such – defined, for example, as careful, sustained thought about a topic – but only certain manifestations that it has historically assumed.

Besides its perceived futility and prodigality, another fundamental drawback of representationalism in Rorty's eyes is the obstacle it presents to the achievement of greater human solidarity. There is, in his opinion, a dissonance between the goal of attaining the correct conception of the world as it is independently of human interests and the goal of greater co-operation between human beings in order to pursue those interests[178] – what he calls 'the act of social faith which is suggested by a Nietzschean view of truth' (1991d, p. 33). It has already been mentioned, above, in 1.2., that Rorty regards the rejection of representationalist ideals and aims as forming part of a beneficial process of secularization of human beings begun in the Enlightenment[179] – a process which also constitutes one of maturation, as humans come to rely on nothing but themselves. Rorty wants us to 'lower our sights from the unconditional above us to the community around us' (2007a, p. 77). The process, as he sees it, is one of a gradual transfer of authority from the human to the non-human.

Rorty's point transcends the cultural and political particulars of our present situation. By encouraging us to reject the traditional ambitions of philosophy – trading what Nietzsche first called 'metaphysical comfort' for a 'renewed sense of community' (Rorty, 1982a, p. 166) – he is inviting us to conceive of ourselves in a radically different way. Rorty is simultaneously urging us: i) to be satisfied with human beneficence, rather than looking to the non-human universe for goodness or kindness; and ii) to strive as humans to maximise its extent in the time available to us, rather than turning to the prospects of external intervention or a transcendent reality for comfort. A 'hyper-secularist, hyper-humanist, culture,' urges Rorty, would make it 'harder to believe that suffering was part of something like "God's

[175] C.f.: 'I should not have said that the notion of language representing reality was problematic, but rather that it was unnecessary' (Rorty, 1992b, p. 372N).
[176] Anscombe's translation of *Fliegenglass* – a fly trap exploiting the inability of flies to fly back out of the same narrow passageway into which they have been lured.
[177] C.f.: 'We who agree with Davidson think that the whole project of distinguishing between what exists in itself and what exists in relation to human minds. . . is no longer worth pursuing. This project, like the project of underwriting the sanctity of the Eucharist, once looked interesting, promising, and potentially useful. But it did not pan out. It has turned out to be a dead end' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 73). See also: '[Pragmatists's] main argument about why we should adopt this alternative will be that doing things in the new way. . . could free us to abandon some seemingly barren disputes' (Rorty, 2010h, p. 248).
[178] Rorty's concern with human needs and interests is not just geared towards those we already possess, such as food, music, sex, and tennis. It also aims at cultural evolution and the acquisition of new interests on the part of humanity. Ideally, 'we should think of human progress as making it possible to do more interesting things and be more interesting people' (1991d, pp. 27-8).
[179] See Introduction, above.

plan" or "Nature's way." It might be easier to convince our fellow-citizens that we should try to lesson suffering by experimenting with radically new practices and institutions' (2010e, pp. 104-5). In this respect, Rorty's philosophy has a strong, consistent moral-spiritual undertone. Moreover, the notion of the fluid extent and boundaries of our 'community' prominent in Rorty's work complements the theme of naturalism outlined in the present study.

Solidarity and anti-authoritarianism also have political implications. Rorty thinks that abandoning representationalism will, in the long term, help more deeply to ingrain a democratic, liberal culture. The 'suitability for democratic societies' of anti-representationalism is 'a point in its favor' (ibid, p. 133). '[T]he institutions and culture of liberal society,' he argues are '. . . better served by a vocabulary of moral and political reflection which avoids the distinctions I have listed [the dualisms of the tradition]' (1989, p. 45). Rorty endorses Dewey's conception of 'pragmatism not as grounding, but as clearing the ground for, democratic politics' (Rorty, 1991d, p. 13). Rorty sees himself as engaged in the '. . . cause of providing contemporary liberal culture with a vocabulary which is all its own, cleansing it of the residues of a vocabulary which was suited to the needs of former days' (1989, p. 55). Thus the anti-representationalist's task involves removing certain conceptual obstacles. Specifically, in rejecting the assumption that one can given an account of way things really are 'in themselves,' anti-representationalism removes something capable of competing with allegiance toward and concern for one's fellow human beings. The 'anti-authoritarian philosophical movement', he explains, is 'relevant to politics', and, in particular, conducive to the possibility of a democratic utopia, because it

> encourages people to have a self-image in which their real or imagined citizenship in a democratic republic is central. This kind of anti-authoritarian philosophy helps people set aside religious and ethnic identities in favour of an image of themselves as part of a great human adventure, one carried out on a global scale. This kind of philosophy, so to speak, clears philosophy out of the way in order to let the imagination play upon the possibilities of a utopian future (Rorty, 1999c, pp. 238-9).

Furthermore, the notion of an external, absolute source of epistemic authority, Rorty argues at various points, can be, and has frequently been, exploited by totalitarian regimes. This should not be forgotten by those who criticize anti-representationalism for taking away an absolute basis – e.g. The Moral Good, Truth, Justice, Reason[180] – from which to oppose cruelty and despotism. 'Pragmatism cannot, indeed, answer Hitler,' Rorty acknowledges (1991b), but, nevertheless, the same ideals as have motivated great acts of good are just as likely to be appealed to by perpetrators of evil. Compared to

[180] What Rorty calls 'these bits of rhetorical exuberance,' which 'are as available to the Nazi bad guys as to the democratic good guys. They can be used in the fight for injustice just as easily as in the fight for justice' (2001c, p. 52).

the 'rhetoric of realism and objectivity' characteristic of representationalism, Rorty argues, the 'rhetoric of pragmatism' is, in fact, 'harder for the bad guys to use' (2010i, p. 444)

Still, Rorty is cautious about claiming too much on behalf of anti-representationalism's liberal or democratic credentials. There is already not a 'tight weld,' between liberalism and pragmatism, he claims, and Rorty himself is 'not interested in making [the weld] any tighter' (1996b, p. 76). No 'argumentative roads,' he suggests, lead from antirepresentationalism 'to any particular brand of politics' (1991a, p. 132); rather, it is more the case that anti-representationalism's rejection of 'metaphors of centrality and depth. . . *chim[es]* with democratic politics – with the spirit of tolerance' (ibid, pp. 132-3 – emphasis added)[181]. Nevertheless, he maintains, whilst it is unlikely that there is 'an inferential path that leads from the anti-representationalist view of truth and knowledge. . . either to democracy or anti-democracy,' there is, still,

> a plausible inference from democratic convictions to such a [anti-representationalist] view. Your devotion to democracy is unlikely to be wholehearted if you believe, as monotheists typically do, that we can have a knowledge of an "objective" ranking of human needs that can overrule the result of democratic consensus (2007a, pp. 33-4)[182].

Rorty inherits from Dewey the idea that democracy stands in tension with the philosophical tradition. Dewey, he says, saw that the 'whole-hearted pursuit of the democratic ideal requires us to set aside *any* authority save that of a consensus of our fellow humans' (Rorty, 1999d, p. 7). Rorty thinks it is at least possible, if not plausible, that rejecting the representationalist notion of a single correct account of reality will lead us to be 'more tolerant,' and 'less prone to fall for various varieties of religious intolerance and political totalitarianism' (1998e, p. 57)[183]. However, any political benefits deriving from anti-representationalism are likely to emerge gradually – his own 'metaphysics-bashing' is not much use, politically speaking, he concedes, 'except in the very long term' (1996c, p. 48)[184]. 'For changes of opinion among philosophical professors sometimes do, after a time, make a difference to

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[181] C.f.: 'Dewey was wrong to suggest that all pragmatists must necessarily incline toward social democracy Considered simply as a set of views about truth, knowledge, language and the like – as a debunking of the problematic which Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant built up around these notions – pragmatism offers no guidance for political choice' (Rorty, 1991b).

[182] C.f.: 'No inferential paths lead from pragmatism to social democracy,' but 'leftist political experiments might be easier to sell' to a pragmatist audience (Rorty, 2010e, p. 105).

[183] Rorty is quoting Hilary Putnam (Putnam, 1990, pp. 24-25). Rorty thinks that this reinforcement of socio-political tolerance was also 'Dewey's pragmatic justification of pragmatism' (1998e, p. 58).

[184] C.f. the conclusion of Rorty's essay 'A Spectre is Haunting the Intellectuals: Derrida on Marx,' in which he emphasizes the long-term nature of the change effected by philosophical thought, cautioning against automatic assumptions that the 'inculcation of antilogocentrism in the young will contribute to the strength of democratic societies' (1999c, p. 220).

the hopes and fears of non-philosophers' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 45). Thus Rorty's overall conception of the political upshot of anti-representationalism is positive, albeit nuanced and heavily qualified.

A further envisioned benefit of anti-representationalism, according to Rorty, is its equalizing effect on culture. As things stand, the notion of a way that things really are, 'in themselves,' serves to lend what Rorty considers to be spurious prestige to the natural sciences, which purport to afford us a more and more accurate conception of the nature of this 'Reality'. As such,

> getting rid of the idea of "the view from Nowhere" – the idea of a sort of knowing that has nothing to do with agency, values, or interests – might have considerable cultural importance. It would probably not change our day-to-day ways of speaking, but it might well, in the long run, make some practical differences' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 45).

Therefore 'instead of asking whether the intrinsic nature of reality is yet in sight,' thinks Rorty, 'we should ask whether each of the various descriptions of reality employed in our various cultural activities is the best we can imagine – the best means to the ends served by those activities' (1998e, p. 6). Doing so would help us stop assigning one of two kinds of activities – the sciences or the arts – 'priority over others' (ibid), thereby 'chang[ing] the cultural ambience for the better' (2007a, p. 119), and engendering 'the development of an ever freer, more creative, more interesting culture' (1995b, p. 35) in which we had 'all the respect for science we need' as well as 'more respect for poetry' (Rorty, 1991c, p. 125).

6.2. Rorty's discussion of the theme of 'metaphysics'

In the previous section, 6.1, it was suggested that, despite some ambiguities, on the balance of textual evidence naturalism contributes to Rorty's *utilitarian* argument against representationalism – one appealing solely to the latter position's envisioned socio-cultural consequences – only to the extent that it serves as a substitute for representationalism, thereby allowing one to relinquish the latter. Thus, strikingly, considerations relating to the *'argument from continuity'* – the fact that naturalism jeopardizes representationalism's foundational separation of the universe into emulat*or* and emulat*ed* – do not appear to enter into Rorty's utilitarian picture. For such considerations to have a bearing on the theoretical decision between representationalism and anti-representationalism, one would to need to allow something to override societal advantage as a determinant of theory choice. To do this, I suggest, would be to allow considerations that were independent of contingent social needs and interests – hence universal, absolute, invariant – to guide the formation of belief; it would be to open the door, to some degree, back to metaphysics and representationalism.

As already seen[185], Rorty envisions his cultural-political conception of philosophy as a means of avoiding the self-referential difficulties attaching to attempts to formulate anti-representationalism in a 'metaphysical' manner. For Rorty, the idea of metaphysics is closely bound up with the *philosophical* distinction between 'Appearance' and 'Reality'. The common-sense distinction between appearance and reality, he argues, is patently useful,

> [b]ut only those who have studied philosophy ask whether real Rolexes are *really* real. No one else takes seriously Plato's distinction between Reality with a capital R and Appearance with capital A. That distinction is the charter of metaphysics (2007a, p. 105).

'In my jargon,' says Rorty elsewhere, '"metaphysical" and "Realist" are pretty well co-extensive terms' (2000c, p. 344). Moreover, he also broadly identifies 'metaphysics' and 'representationalism,' sometimes using the two terms interchangeably.

In his 'Response to Simon Critchley,' Rorty defines metaphysics thus: 'Metaphysicians,' he suggests, 'think that there is a Right Context, where things are seen as they truly are, without reference to anybody's purposes' (1996c, p. 45). He echoes this characterisation when he claims that

> [n]oting that the same thing can usefully be described in lots of different ways is the beginning of philosophical sophistication. Insisting that one of these ways has some privilege other than occasional utility is the beginning of metaphysics (2000g, p. 88)[186].

Hence, for Rorty, what sets metaphysics apart from other branches of philosophy is its commitment to the notion of an absolute – 'Right' or 'privileged' – context, transcending contingent human interests and purposes. The metaphysician, in Rorty's view, appeals to this putative context to ask supposedly disinterested questions about the ontological composition of the universe, or about the reality of entire subject matters.

Rorty singles out for criticism metaphysics' tangentiality to ordinary human concerns, which he thinks explains what he perceives as the activity's lack of intellectual rigour. In his view, human needs and interests underlie linguistic normativity. As such, metaphysics' principled insistence on transcending these factors renders it a 'playspace' in which – in the absence of linguistic norms – anyone is permitted to construct an ontology or *Weltanschauung* from amongst their 'favourite things' (2007a,

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[185] See 1.3., above.

[186] In *CIS* Rorty offers a *prima facie* different definition of 'metaphysics,' according to which the metaphysician is someone who thinks 'our present genres and criteria exhaust the realm of possibility,' in contrast to the 'ironist,' who endeavours to expand that realm (1989, p. 135). However this definition ultimately converges with those considered above insofar as it, too, associates metaphysics with the idea of a final, definitive, 'context', or 'criterion' for correct description.

p. 106). 'The trouble with metaphysics,' he argues in *PMN*, '. . . is that nobody knows what would count as a satisfactory argument within it' (1979, p. 335). In the absence of normative standards based on common interests, Rorty thinks that metaphysical speculation is inevitably shaped by what Nietzsche called 'all-too-human' urges.

Given that metaphysics and the representationalist tradition appear so entangled, it makes little sense to Rorty to countenance a metaphysical form of anti-representationalism. Whilst, in 'Response to Daniel Conway,' he concedes such a position is potentially an 'option,' he nevertheless rejects the idea that 'we anti-metaphysicians. . . try to turn metaphysics against itself', claiming he 'cannot see its attractions' (2001a, p. 90). In Rorty's view, the use of one version of metaphysics to oppose another is nothing more than a 'half-measure,' already unsuccessfully attempted by Hume and the Logical Empiricists (2001a, pp. 90-1). Rather, Rorty maintains, we must remain vigilant about the possibility of 'relapsing into metaphysics' in the manner of Dewey (Rorty, 1989, p. 107)[187]. In his opinion, it 'does not take a metaphysician to beat a metaphysician' (2001a, p. 90).

Therefore Rorty's 'more radical remedy' (2001a, p. 91) is to attempt to avoid metaphysics altogether and to recommend that his own views not be construed in such terms. It is unlikely that one would say that someone who 'has ceased to think and talk about god' has 'changed.. theological beliefs,' he argues – 'why,' then, 'should we attribute metaphysical beliefs to somebody who hopes that metaphysical issues will cease to be discussed?' (2005a, p. 145). In his eyes, metaphysics is by no means obligatory as an intellectual occupation, nor need it constitute the central chapter of philosophy. As Ramberg observes: 'Rorty conceives of pragmatism as an attitude to philosophy that opposes metaphysics. Pragmatism, in this context, is the idea of philosophy without metaphysics' (2008, p. 431)[188].

Similarly, David MacArthur, addressing Rorty's position as a form of anti-essentialism rather than as anti-representationalism, and using the same analogy to religion as Rorty himself, observes in 'Richard Rorty and (the End of) Metaphysics (?)':

> Rorty's anti-essentialism is not to be understood as a metaphysical thesis that denies, say, essentialism. Negative metaphysics is still metaphysics just as atheism is still a religious position in the argument over God's existence. Rorty is better understood as a *quietist* about metaphysics: regarding the question of

[187] Rorty quotes with apparent approval George Santayana's remark – made concerning Dewey's *Experience and Nature* – that 'naturalistic metaphysics' is a contradiction-in-terms (Rorty, 1982a, p. 73).

[188] Alan Malachowski points out that Rorty's cautions in this regard have not been heeded, noting the 'surreptitious mass renewal of licenses to practise metaphysics' that has occurred since his death (Malachowski, 2014, p. 188).

> essentialism, he rejects all talk about metaphysical "essences," whether pro or con, altogether (MacArthur, 2020, p. 165).

Rorty believes that only people who have already read a certain amount of (a certain genre of) philosophy feel compelled to acquire or to develop metaphysical views. 'Many would-be students of philosophy are unable to see why they need have views on that topic,' he suggests – to see 'why they need a metaphysics' (2005b, p. 41). Moreover, in line with his views on representationalism's socio-cultural drawbacks, the principal issue, he ultimately believes, is not that metaphysics is an incoherent project, but rather that it is a 'waste of time' (2007a, p. 165).

6.3. Metaphysical readings of Rorty

Despite this, a number of commentators propose either that Rorty's work was inadvertently metaphysical, or that it has the potential profitably to be read in such a manner. In the next two sub-sections, I consider these two classes of interpretation.

6.3.1. Rorty's thought is metaphysical despite itself

Richard Bernstein was one of the first to articulate the 'persistent suspicion among philosophers that Rorty's pragmatism undermines itself' (Tartaglia, 2012, p. 2). In his review of *PMN*, Bernstein suggests that Rorty in *PMN* shows himself not quite ready to '"let go"' of the representationalist tradition and 'accept the force of his [i.e. Rorty's] own critique' (Bernstein, 1980, p. 767). Rorty is still 'obsessed,' argues Bernstein, with the 'obsessions of philosophers' (p. 775), despite overtly repudiating them – '[i]t is as if Rorty himself has been more deeply touched by what he is attacking than he realized' (p. 767)[189]. Bernstein thus adroitly raises the issue of the tension in Rorty's thought, albeit without going so far as directly to accuse him of inconsistency. Simply, Bernstein is concerned to point out that Rorty – even if only in virtue of writing about them – is not so far removed from the traditional concerns of philosophy as he might suppose.

Other writers have gone further than Bernstein and accused Rorty of producing a metaphysics, thereby contradicting his espousal of anti-representationalism and highlighting the latter position's inconsistency[190]. Hilary Putnam (1985) thinks that Rorty 'privileges one story within the vast array of stories that our culture has produced in just the way [Rorty] criticizes other philosophers for doing.' Rorty, says Putnam, effectively 'admits that there really is such a thing as getting something *right,*' just as soon as he 'tr[ies] to persuade one that some views are misleading, that giving up some notions

[189] Kenji Kuzuu suggests Rorty's predicament resembles that of the priest in the 1973 film *The Exorcist*, who becomes possessed by the very spirit he seeks to exorcise (Kuzuu, 2017).

[190] They have suggested, that is, that, as Bernard Williams put it, Rorty's work 'tears itself apart' (Williams, 1991). Besides the commentators discussed below, see also: Susan Haack (2004, p. 32), Charles Taylor (1990); as well as Nagel (2003, Ch. 2), Williams 1990, pp. 28-32; 1991 and Forster (1998), albeit the latter account is more sympathetic to Rorty than the others.

isn't as bad as one thinks' (Putnam, 1985, p. 79 – original emphasis). In *Realism With a Human Face* (1990), Putnam gives these criticisms even clearer and more succinct expression when he claims that Rorty tries to say that 'from a God's-eye View there is no God's-eye View' (Putnam, 1990, p. 25). Putnam thus neatly encapsulates the idea that Rorty's pragmatism undermines itself as a result of Rorty's adopting the very same, 'absolute,' standpoint he encourages other philosophers not to adopt (precisely in order to encourage them not to adopt it). Putnam's view, I suggest, can be read either as the allegation that a relationship of inconsistency obtains among the propositions Rorty holds to be true, or as an allegation of hypocrisy concerning Rorty's philosophical 'conduct'.

Steven Yates offers another clear statement of the charge that Rorty's anti-representationalism contradicts itself in his essay 'Rorty's Foundationalism' (1989). Rorty's main point, Yates contends, is that no discourse occupies a privileged status. How, then, can Rorty claim any kind of privileged status for his own writings, anything distinguishing them from alternative or contrary views? Further, Yates accuses Rorty of being insufficiently troubled by this paradox. To resolve it, he argues, Rorty is forced tacitly to subscribe to a version of Sellars' 'Myth of the Given,' one according to which 'discourse itself and the social practises it embodies' provide the necessary metaphysical foundation for Rorty's anti-representationalism (1989, p. 131). Likewise, Frank Farrell (1995) suggests that Rorty's anti-representationalism is logically inconsistent, regarded as a set of propositions. Rorty's writings, Farrell argues, can thus only be understood as rhetorical instruments, designed to bring about socio-cultural change. Nonetheless, Farrell concedes that

> Rorty seems to be accusing his realist opponent of a philosophical error, not a pragmatic one, of not seeing correctly the relation between language and reality that Rorty, from his own external stance, can see correctly. But if he has been right, that stance ought not to be available to him (Farrell, 1995, p. 164).

Farrell thus articulates and exploits the general difficulty faced by anti-representationalism as a philosophical position, as discussed above in 1.12, according to which it seemingly either undermines its own legitimacy or forfeits any possible claim to universal adherence, or both.

David Rondel, in 'On Rorty's Evangelical Metaphilosophy' (2011), has highlighted the 'sometimes neurotic' (2011, p. 151) extent to which Rorty, particularly in his earlier work, seeks to fortify his anti-representationalism against these 'problem[s] of methodological self-reference' (ibid, p. 155). Rondel makes it clear that Rorty avoids the crudest forms of the accusations of relativism and self-refutation – by abandoning any hope that anti-representationalism might offer a final, need- and interest-independent, view of how things 'really are'[191]. Rondel notes that Rorty's response to these charges,

[191] Rondel does, however, argue that Rorty – by framing his writings as rhetorical devices – unwittingly retains and accords a form of metaphysical status to what he [Rorty] ostensibly considers the 'untenable' classical distinction between logic and rhetoric (Rondel, 2011, p. 152). He also points out that Rorty's accordance of the

as seen in 1.12, is to concur with Farrell's construal of anti-representationalism as a rhetorical instrument, or experiment, in the hope of a better future; to embrace the idea of philosophy as a mode of 'cultural politics'. In doing this, Rorty makes himself open to the charge, levelled at him by Susan Haack, that he is a cynic and a manipulator, making disingenuous claims in order to try to mould society and culture to his preferred form (Haack, 1995, pp. 137-8).

In any case, it is not clear that Rorty escapes the general problem of self-contradiction – what in *CIS* he calls the question of 'how to overcome authority without claiming authority' (1989, p. 105) – merely by re-characterizes the metaphilosophical import of his writings 'culturo-politically'. Putnam, for example, has pressed Rorty on the details of the latter's 'ethnocentrism', particularly regarding whether, and if so how, Rorty's position can offer criteria for moral and theoretical choice that transcend the preferences of a specific community[192]. How, that is, can anti-representationalism engender scope for critical reflection upon, and thus improvement of, humanity's socio-political and scientific ideals in the absence of traditionally 'objective' standards?

6.3.2. Rorty's thought can profitably be read 'metaphysically'

Portrayals of Rorty's thought as metaphysical, or as susceptible to profitable development in this manner, have also been offered by figures more sympathetic to his anti-representationalism. They offer their readings less as a means of dismissing or refuting Rorty, and more as a way of building upon or refining his ideas.

Some of these metaphysical interpretations do not appeal directly to Rorty's naturalism. Michael Devitt, for example, takes steps in the direction of a metaphysical reading of Rorty in the first half of his paper 'Rorty's Mirrorless World' (1988). There, whilst acknowledging that he is widely regarded as an anti-realist, and that there is an 'aura of anti-realism about Rorty's discussion' in *PMN* (1988, p. 158), Devitt nevertheless maintains that Rorty is a realist. In Devitt's view 'Rorty's rejection of the correspondence theory of truth. . . does not show him to be opposed to a metaphysical doctrine of realism' (p. 162), which Devitt takes to be the idea that 'physical entities objectively exist independently of the mental' (p. 159). Rather, Rorty's view of the latter doctrine is that it is 'trivial' and 'too obvious to be worth stating' (p. 162). Presaging later developments in Rorty's thought, Devitt points to Rorty's anti-scepticism and his endorsement of Davidson's epistemology as evidence of his realist attitude with respect to ordinary physical objects.

Jonathan Knowles (2013; 2018) provides another account of what, like Devitt, he considers to be Rorty's 'realism'. In 'Rortian Realism' (2018), he argues that Rorty's anti-representationalism does not entail a total levelling of the status of academic disciplines, and that theoretical subjects such as

'final word' on particular philosophical topics to certain favoured writers – e.g., Davidson, Brandom – stands in tension with his historicism. Rondel, then, like Bernstein, depicts Rorty as inadvertently perpetuating some of the philosophical traits he criticizes.

[192] See Gaskin, unpublished.

philosophy and the sciences retain a unique position in virtue of developing new vocabularies, and expanding our existing ones, in a dialectic with what he terms the 'as yet unknown' (Knowles, 2018, p. 107). In Knowles' view, Rorty's discussions of truth and justification obscure the point that even though there is no one way that world really is 'in itself', there can still be truths – formulated in various vocabularies – which we are yet to discover.

Another set of readings holds that Rorty's thought can be characterised as 'metaphysical' in one sense of that word, but not in another. Brandom makes a distinction between 'modest' and 'maniacal' readings of the metaphysical 'enterprise' (Brandom, 2000c, p. 180). On the 'maniacal' reading, he writes, 'the project [of metaphysics] is to limn the boundaries of the sayable. What cannot be formulated in its preferred vocabulary is to be rejected as nonsensical' (Brandom, 2000c, p. 180). Maniacal metaphysics is 'objectionable' from the point of view of the more modest form of metaphysics, Brandom holds, because:

> First, it aims at sculpting a vocabulary adequate to what can be said in every possible vocabulary. Second, it arrogates to itself a distinctive sort of privilege: the authority to determine. . . what is genuinely sayable, and hence thinkable, and what would be sham saying and the mere appearance of thought (Brandom, 2000c, p. 180).

The task of 'modest' metaphysics, on the other hand, 'is still understood as the engineering of a vocabulary in which everything can be said' (ibid), but the latter notion – the possibility of saying everything – is now differently understood. Instead of creating a discourse capable of eliminating the necessity of all others, the modest metaphysician's task becomes that of preserving and interweaving extant discourses in a coherent panorama. The aim of the modest metaphysician is 'to capture her time in thought,' to construct 'a vocabulary that will be useful for the purposes of the contemporary intellectual: the one who by definition is concerned with seeing the culture whole, trying to make the vocabularies it now seems useful to employ to get various sorts of practical grips on things hang together' (Brandom, 2000c, p. 181). This, thinks Brandom, 'is not an enterprise the enlightened pragmatist ought to resist' (2000c, p. 181). Indeed, in his view, it is 'precisely the enterprise on which the most prominent and accomplished such pragmatist [i.e. Rorty] has in fact been successfully embarked for the past three decades' (2000c, p. 181).

Carls Sachs makes a similar distinction between 'Metaphysics [upper case "m"]' as the idea of a 'single correct descriptive vocabulary in terms of which all other vocabularies. . . are given a determinate sense and purpose' (Sachs, 2013, p. 702) and 'metaphysics [lower case "m"]' in the broader sense of an 'explicitly and self-consciously open-ended and provisional metavocabulary' (ibid). What Sachs illuminatingly calls Rorty's opposition to 'normative violence' (Sachs, 2017, *passim*.) is, on Sachs' account, principally a critique of 'Metaphysics' in the first sense, but not the second. But Rorty fails to

make the crucial distinction between the two senses, suggests Sachs, and ends up crudely demonising the innocent construal. In doing so, Rorty introduces the needless semblance of tension and hypocrisy into his own position (Sachs, 2013, p. 703)[193].

Most significantly for this thesis, a final group of interpretations imply that naturalism is an important component of Rorty's metaphysics. In 'Rorty's Debt to Sellarsian Metaphysics,' Carls Sachs argues that Rorty's rejection of 'explicit metaphysical theorizing' draws on the metaphysical views of Wilfrid Sellars (Sachs, 2013, p. 683). Hence Rorty's own position 'itself presupposes certain metaphysical commitments' (2013, p. 683). Although Sachs is happy to accept that 'Davidson's criticism of the scheme/content distinction' functions as the 'linchpin of Rorty's criticism of metaphysics as a whole' (p. 697), there is, nevertheless, he claims, a 'permanent Sellarsian deposit in Rorty's thought' (p. 684) comprising Sellars's 'naturalism, nominalism, and normativism' (p. 701)[194]: collectively, the 'deep commitments of Sellarsian metaphysics' (p. 684). Sellars' naturalism, according to Sachs, consists of 'ontological' and 'epistemological' dimensions, both of which it would seem he thinks Rorty inherits[195]. Sellars, that is to say, is a naturalist 'ontologically, in holding that the causal nexus of spatiotemporal events is all there is, and epistemologically, in holding that human cognitive activity is part of the natural world' (Sachs, 2013, p. 687). Thus Rorty's naturalism – the fact that he 'regards causation as

[193] Although less sympathetic to Rorty's aims than the commentators mentioned in the text, Paul Giladi has also suggested that Rorty fails sufficiently to discriminate between different forms of metaphysical project. According to Giladi, Rorty retains metaphysical positions of his own, practising what the former describes as an 'immanent' as opposed to 'transcendent' kind of metaphysics (Giladi, 2015). In a separate paper, Catherine Legg and Giladi argue that this failure to acknowledge its own metaphysical presupposition is a weakness of anti-representationalism generally, affecting the work of both Rorty and Price (Legg & Giladi, 2018).

By contrast, Ramberg (2008) introduces a tripartite distinction between: i) 'positive metaphysics' ii) 'default metaphysics and iii) and pragmatism, identifying (at least the later) Rorty with the third of these positions. 'Positive metaphysicians,' according to Ramberg, 'take seriously the idea that we could be fundamentally wrong about what kinds of things there are in the world, what kinds of beings we ourselves are, and how one is related to the other. Positive metaphysicians believe that it may be possible to alleviate this by discovering, through conceptual efforts, what it really is to be a subject, and object, a knower, an agent' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 441). 'The defining feature of default metaphysics,' on the other hand, 'is that it addresses the question of the viability of positive metaphysics as an essentially and internally philosophical question' (ibid., p. 442). Metaphysicians, then, of both stripes, 'assert' or 'live by' the notion that philosophical questions are 'questions which are properly prior to, and independent of, concern with the contingencies of human affairs' (ibid., p443). Pragmatism, by contrast, 'handl[es] philosophical questions in terms that recover them from this alienation and treats them in—and as a part of—a context of ethical, political, and esthetical choice' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 446). Thus, although Ramberg does not identify Rorty with the view, he nevertheless leaves open the possibility of a more nuanced metaphysical position, which he expressly sees as being taken up by 'varieties of naturalism that conceive of this doctrine as a philosophical response to philosophical questions' (ibid., p. 442). Later on, Ramberg deploys Brandom's distinction between 'modest' and 'maniacal' forms of metaphysics in criticism of Rorty: 'Brandom's example suggests that the opposition between therapy and construction was simply given too general a scope – perhaps the point properly ought to have been directed at a particular kind of construction only' (Ramberg, 2013b, p. 69).

[194] Sachs characterises the latter commitment, normativism, as 'the irreducibility of normative facts to nonnormative facts' (p. 700).

[195] Sachs is not entirely clear on this point because he characterises Rorty's naturalism differently at different points in the paper: 'ontologically' at p. 693 and as the 'epistemic priority of science with regard to matter-of-factual assertions' at p. 700.

extending universally. . . there are no noncausal relations between items in the natural order, and the natural order is all there is' (Sachs, 2013, p. 693) – is, for Sachs, a metaphysical commitment borrowed from Sellars.

MacArthur concurs with Sachs when he says that 'in light of Rorty's metaphysical quietism it is surprising and paradoxical to realize that there are several aspects of Rorty's own thinking that we might think of a vestigial remnants. . . of the scientific metaphysics that he officially repudiates' (MacArthur, 2020, p. 170). He goes on to note that 'there is textual and interpretative evidence for attributing to Rorty a commitment to *causal fundamentalism*, the idea that there is something called "the causal order" at the physical level of description' (ibid – original emphasis). 'What is in question here,' says MacArthur, is the idea 'that there is a single causal order in nature, namely, physical causation,'[196]. 'Physical causation,' he observes, is 'assumed to have a certain primacy' in Rorty's account (ibid).

Like MacArthur, James Tartaglia, in 'Did Rorty's Pragmatism Have Foundations?,' suggests Rorty possesses 'underlying metaphysical commitments' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 609) insofar as he appeals to 'causal pressures which remain constant throughout changes of vocabulary' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 616). Rorty's 'revisionary metaphysical position' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 614) encompasses his commitment to causal pressures that 'exist however we describe them' (2010, p. 617), and his 'pan-relationalism', which Tartaglia considers a piece of 'Heraclitean metaphysics' (p. 618). Pan-relationalism – the 'metaphysical fact that things have no essential natures of their own, only relations to other things' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 617) – beside being a 'metaphysic well suited to uniting [Rorty's] various other commitments' (p. 618), is also, argues Tartaglia, something that ensures that Rorty's conception of invariant causal relations does not collapse into the Kantian idea of causes as 'unknowable thing-in-themselves,'[197] which Rorty fiercely criticises[198]. What Rorty has, according to Tartaglia, is a 'radical metaphysical position displaying clear continuities with the idealist tradition' (ibid., p. 618). Moreover, the only reason Rorty fails to appreciate the fact that he is still practising a form of metaphysics is because he employs a 'restrictive,' 'essentialist' definition of that term (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 618).

Predictably, given his conception of and attitude toward metaphysics, as explored in section 6.2 above, Rorty rejects as calumnious such accusations in respect of his pan-relationalism. 'When I wrote. . . about "a world without substances and essences,"' he insists, 'I was not making an ontological claim. In commending what I there called "panrelationalism" I was making a practical recommendation: that we banish the distinction between essence and accident from our vocabulary' (Rorty, 2010g, p. 267). As Rorty makes clear in the same passage, 'to revert back to metaphysics' (ibid), in his view, is precisely

[196] Although it is worth noting that MacArthur, for his own part, considers this causal fundamentalism to be 'misguided' (ibid).
[197] For Kantian readings of Rorty along these lines see Hall, 1994, pp. 92-3; Boros, 2010.
[198] Rorty 1982c; 1999a.

to treat pan-relationalism as such a claim about the existence or nonexistence of certain kinds of entities. Tartaglia is therefore right, in my view, to suggest that Rorty employs a 'restrictive' definition of metaphysics, insofar as the latter is sometimes inclined to equate metaphysics narrowly with *ontology*. Whilst, of course, debate about what kinds of things 'really' do and do not exist has always constituted a large area of focus for metaphysics, figures such as Brandom and Sachs make the beginnings of a plausible case that metaphysics is defined principally by the degree of universality or need- and interest-independence with which it seeks to invest knowledge-claims. I make this point in the next section (6.4, below), in which I suggest that the idea of monism can itself be construed metaphysically in a way that remains 'neutral' with respect to different ontologies. The thought here, to which I return below, is that monism itself might be taken for a metaphysical truth – in the sense of, potentially, retaining its true status through the gradual process of abstracting from the particulars of our human situation – without this needing to have any implications for the reality or unreality of the existence of various kinds of entities.

As well as suggesting that Rorty's position is metaphysical in substance, Tartaglia also makes the case that Rorty should have embraced this aspect of his own thought. Rorty, on Tartaglia's reading, involuntarily limits the cogency, and thus the socio-cultural transformative power, of his writings by insisting on offering an entirely 'pragmatic justification of pragmatism'[199]. Tartaglia thinks that 'Rorty did not need to defend his pragmatism solely in terms of social usefulness and, in fact, was on stronger ground when he did not' (2012, p. 3). The 'social standpoint strategy' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 621) of seeking to justify anti-representationalism solely in terms of its envisaged socio-cultural benefits, he argues,

> removes at a stroke most of the argumentative force from his [Rorty's] position, for although Rorty has plenty of conventional philosophical arguments against representationalism, his reasons for thinking that abandoning representationalism would be socially useful are speculative to say the least; he certainly offers no empirical evidence. . . something that might have been expected from a serious social reformer (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 623).

In Tartaglia's view, for all Rorty has established anti-representationalism 'might have anything from mildly bad to disastrous consequences' (2010, p. 624). Granted that Rorty's position 'can be made consistent if we take his social standpoint strategy seriously,' in that case 'his pragmatism loses all support from the arguments he marhsals against representationalism and objective truth' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 624).

[199] Rorty, 1998e, p. 58 – quoted in Tartgalia (2010, p. 621). Concerning the social-standpoint strategy, see 6.1., above.

Is Rorty, then, faced with a choice between inconsistency and baseless speculation? A possible middle ground that Tartaglia explores in 'Does Rorty's Pragmatism Undermine Itself?' (2012) is the idea that Rorty should have argued for anti-representationalism on the grounds of its superior – compared to representationalism – *coherence* with other theoretical commitments, such as naturalism and holism (Tartaglia, 2012, p. 15). Rorty, he suggests, would likely have had more success in converting other philosophers to anti-representationalism had he argued in this way (Tartaglia, 2012, p. 15). Such a dialectical strategy would therefore have been preferrable to his narrower appeal to socio-cultural consequences, even for someone conceiving, as Rorty did, of philosophy as cultural politics rather than as the quest for interest-independent truth. By not availing himself of this option, Rorty 's[old] his position short' (ibid) because he ruled out possible recourse to the 'philosophical' anti-representationalist arguments of Quine, Sellars, and Davidson, that he had spent a large part of his career developing.

The possibility of arguing from theoretical coherence constitutes a middle ground between traditional metaphysics and the kind of socio-cultural considerations appealed to by Rorty because the demand for coherence *ultimately* relates knowledge-claims to specific human needs and interests – thus foreclosing the kind of interest-independence aspired to by metaphysics – but *not directly and immediately* (Tartaglia, 2012, p. 15). As Tartaglia points out, although 'it is correct to say that justification in Rorty's pragmatism is ultimately rooted in a purpose, it is nevertheless not the case that usefulness directly justifies individual beliefs' (ibid).

> To argue for his pragmatic account of justification, then, it seems Rorty has no more need to appeal to social usefulness than Galileo did [in arguing for the heliocentric model]. Rather, all he needs argue is that his account of justification coheres better with certain. . . considerations. . . than representationalism does (Tartaglia, 2012, p. 15).

Thus, in his two papers, Tartaglia opens up two different ways in which it might be possible to retain Rorty's philosophical anti-representationalist arguments in the face of his insistence that the only thing recommending his ideas is their proposed social utility: one way is to ascribe metaphysical truth to the premises of Rorty's arguments, so that their conclusions – above all, anti-representationalism – inherit the same property; another way is to construe these arguments as demonstrating inconsistencies between representationalism and other common views.

Both of these two approaches offer *stronger* ways of bringing naturalism to bear on the theoretical decision regarding (anti-)representationalism than does the one predominant in Rorty's writings, whereby naturalism is held to relate to the question of (anti-)representationalism primarily insofar as it renders representationalism superfluous for certain purposes, rather than directly contradicting it (see 6.1.2, above). The two approaches, that is, offer two different possible ways of retaining the

argumentative relevance of Rorty's Davidson-inspired philosophical 'argument from continuity' from naturalism to anti-representationalism. These ways are 'stronger' both in the sense that i) if one accepts naturalism then one is *obliged rather than merely permitted* to reject representationalism, and ii) naturalism plays a much more *central* role, relative to other potential considerations, than it does in the case where it serves as a theoretical substitute for representationalism, in that it is not just one among many relevant factors competing in a utilitarian calculation (see 6.1.3., above), but something that demands a response of the representationalist, in its own right. According to the 'stronger' ways of conceiving of the anti-representationalist significance of naturalism, that is, it becomes in principle something *sufficient* to derail representationalism.

In identifying naturalism as one of the key components of Rorty's metaphysics, Tartaglia (2010), following David Hall (1994, pp. 92-3), raises important questions regarding the significance of the notion of description-independent causal pressures in Rorty's thought. It is 'hard to see,' he argues, 'why causal pressures which remain constant throughout changes of vocabulary should not count as a single "way the world is," and thus constitute a commitment to metaphysical realism about causal pressures' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 616).

> Rorty wants to deny that causal pressures have any intrinsic nature, independent of the multiplicity of ways they can be described, but in that case, why does he insist that there are causal pressures that exist however we describe them? What would account for their guaranteed existence as causal pressures if not an intrinsic nature? (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 616).

Rorty confronts these issues himself in 'Charles Taylor on Truth'[200]. There – vindicating Ramberg's observation that 'that Rorty's *struggle with* (as opposed to a railing at and a leaving of) metaphysics is most palpable. . . in [his] grappling with arguments from Davidson' (Ramberg, 2008, p. 431) – he reflects on how best, in a manner consistent with his anti-representationalism, to make sense of 'Davidson's slogan that causation, unlike explanation, is not under a description' (Rorty, 1998e, p. 88). In Rorty's view, a more felicitous expression of the same underlying idea would be that 'causal relations *must* be kept constant under redescription' (ibid – emphasis added). He carries on:

> What Davidson should have said is that the same causal-relationship-under-a-description can be explained in many different ways, as many as there are ways of describing the things related. This amounts to saying: no matter which way you describe the things between which you are trying to find causal relations, you *should* be able to see (find, envisage, posit) the very same such relations between them under every description of them. . . In other words, Davidson's point is (or

[200] The source of both his most significant account of naturalism and of a decisive statement of the 'argument from continuity'. See 2.3, and 4.2.4, above, respectively.

> should be) not that causal relations are more "intrinsic" to things than their descriptions, or that describing things as causally related to one another gets closer to the way they are "anyway" than describing them in other ways (Rorty, 1998e, p. 88 – empahsis added).

Thus Rorty is suggesting that there is *some sort* of normative pressure upon inquirers to identify the same causal relations underlying descriptions of phenomena using different vocabularies. Yet 'people who pride themselves on being realists,' he acknowledges, 'may ask: *Why* do they [causal relations] need to be kept constant? Because they *really and truly are* invariant or merely because unity is a desirable feature of science, a useful regulative idea that would be endangered if we let causal relations vary with description? (ibid – original emphasis). He responds:

> I see this as a bad question, because it presupposes one more version of the scheme-content distinction. It is one more example of the fatal temptation to hold on to the distinction between "in itself" and "for us" (ibid).

In this manner, Rorty confronts what I suggest is the critical paradox of his naturalism, already noted by MacArthur and Tartaglia. He wants to stress the fact that there is a single causal order, describable in multiple ways. What is more, as I hope to have demonstrated in the preceding chapters, this concept of naturalism forms the basis of his most-rehearsed, most cogent philosophical argument for anti-representationalism. But, at the same time, anti-representationalism raises difficult questions concerning the metaphysical status of this single causal order itself. Is Rortyan naturalism, that is, an 'absolute,' metaphysical, need- and interest-independent description of how things stand in the universe? Yet anti-representationalism seemingly repudiates all such descriptions. If not, then presumably Rorty's naturalism is merely one more 'optional' description among many, that he utilises in order to try to get others to reject representationalism. As already seen in this Chapter, the balance of textual evidence suggests Rorty, for his part, is inclined to position his ideas in this latter way, for fear of being accused of hypocrisy or inconsistency. The problem with taking this latter route, however, as Tartaglia observes, is that, besides risking seeming cynical, Rorty also deprives anti-representationalism of persuasive force that it might otherwise have possessed.

Tartaglia suggests that one possible way out of the dilemma for Rorty is for him to hold that 'causal pressures have always so far been *treated* as the factor which remains constant throughout redescriptions, with there being every reason to expect this thoroughly embedded practices to continue' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 618 – emphasis added). According to this reading, 'causal pressures are not actually vocabulary-independent, but they always have been, and perhaps always will be, treated as if they were' (ibid). Thus Tartaglia suggest that we can 'charitably interpret' (ibid) Rorty by reading him as holding that something that appears to be a metaphysical fact is actually a product of

unchanging convention or social practice. This mirrors Rorty's treatment of the incorrigibility of self-ascriptions of mental states in his work leading up to and including *PMN*.

It seems perhaps too strong on Tartaglia's part to suggest, as he does, that in appealing to this *de facto* retention of a vocabulary of causal pressures by generations of speakers, Rorty adopts a 'radical metaphysical position displaying clear continuities with the idealist tradition' (Tartaglia, 2010, p. 618). If he were to take this line, Rorty would essentially be holding that the idea of description-invariant causes is the contingent upshot of a series of communal decisions, as opposed to being mandated by something like the nature of reality. And this seems to run contrary to metaphysics' standard interest in truths that do not depend on the outcome of particular human decisions or conventions (even if such truths concern the role of 'mind' in constituting 'reality,' for example, as in the idealist case).

But in any case, Rorty's own response, as already seen, is to try to evade the question of whether causal relations '*really and truly are* invariant' or whether we just treat them as such. Is it reasonable for Rorty to do this? Is his attempted quietism a better response than the one Tartaglia recommends for him? How *should* one construe – in terms of the extent to which it resembles a traditional piece of metaphysics – the naturalism that, I have argued Rorty demonstrates, is intimately bound up with anti-representationalism?

6.4. Modest metaphysical naturalism

In this penultimate section I am going to outline one way in which the naturalism that features in Rorty's work might be understood. It is important to clarify that the proposal is not an interpretation of Rorty's own position, since it contradicts his expressed attitude to metaphysics (see 6.2, above). Rather, it is an amendment to that position, indicating a direction in which Rorty's thought might be developed in order to preserve what I regard as being its central virtues and insights: namely, its contention that many of the traditional philosophical concerns and pursuits are misplaced; and the check to scientific pretension afforded by its critique of the notion of absolute or ultimate reality. In the end, the proposal amounts to the idea that naturalism should be construed metaphysically as nothing more or less than a commitment to ontological monism.

Rorty's naturalism, I have contended throughout this thesis, is the idea of a single universal causal framework, remaining unchanged under various possible changes of description. Given this, there are perhaps two main aspects of the view that could be considered separately as to whether they ought to be treated in a metaphysical manner. The first aspect is the view's *monism*: its stipulation of a *single*, continuous natural order, with its implication that human beings and nature are not, ultimately, distinct things. The second is the view's suggestion that there is *something* – an ontological 'constant': in Rorty's case, causal pressures – that does not change when different vocabularies are employed, and therefore which the different vocabularies should all be thought of as offering different

descriptions *of*. Although I have provisionally distinguished these two aspects of Rorty's naturalism, the two ideas converge in a way that I will come to below.

I will start with the second of the two aspects just considered: invariance under changes of description. Here, I suggest, the idea that there is *something* that performs this role is not a metaphysical fact, in the traditional sense, but a convention of paramount practical importance. Firstly, it is important to note that it does not matter, I think, that it is *specifically causation*, as opposed to any number of other possible candidates, that performs the role in question. Talk about causes and causation in this context could be replaced by other possible terms of sufficient generality: for example, 'entities,' 'objects,' 'things,' 'the world,' 'the universe,' and perhaps, if one wished, more idiosyncratic notions such as the *Ding an sich*, or Peircean 'Secondness,' or the universal Will to Power. These are all quintessentially *metaphysical* pieces of language, and I think it is an important part of Rorty's point – a part that needs preserving – that none of them are 'more right' than the others, and that we should not spend time trying to decide which one is best[201]. In this respect, it is worth noting that Rorty's objection to Kant's doctrine of the 'Thing-in-Itself' is that it is pointless, not that it is wrong. Rorty '*does not see the point*' of János Boros' claim that, in Rorty's thought, '"causation takes the place of the *Ding an sich*"' (Rorty, 2010g, p. 267 – emphasis added).

Nevertheless, to say that any of these pieces of language does the role for which it is required as well as any other is not to say that we can do without *all* of these pieces of language. One can choose any of them; but, I cautiously suggest, one has to choose *at least one*. This is because I think such metaphysical language plays a role along the lines of ensuring the 'cohesiveness' or 'integrity' of something – perhaps, roughly, *human experience* – that might otherwise fracture into as many realities as there are different linguistic practices. Unless we posit something that stays the same across different possible vocabularies of redescription, that is, it seems plausible that those

[201] It has rightly been pointed out that some of these terms – the more idiosyncratic ones especially – carry strong emotional overtones that are liable to colour their users' perception of the universe as a whole. Someone like Schopenhauer, for example, in conceiving of the noumenal as a domain of blind striving, would presumably be more likely to have a pessimistic view of life than someone like Kant or Spinoza. Thus different metaphysical vocabularies might not in fact be interchangeable in terms of their practical consequences; some might be 'better' than others, and the choice of ontological constant might be worth taking time over, contrary to what I say in the main text. Therefore it might have been strictly more accurate to have said there that the choice of metaphysical vocabulary does potentially have (significant) ramifications, but that nevertheless there is no difference between the various options with respect to the function of ensuring the cohesion of experience discussed in the text: *in this respect*, each is equally as suitable as another, each as 'right' or as good. In the function of promoting general optimism and feelings of security in the human situation, on the other hand, there may be differences. And whilst it is undoubtedly true that different metaphysical vocabularies *do*, *as a matter of fact*, as things stand, evoke different emotional responses in people – there is also the question of whether such vocabularies *should* elicit such responses, given their theoretical role in this context as the basis of a posited explanation of *all phenomena* in the universe, good and bad, evil and benevolent. Thanks to James Tartaglia for the original point.

vocabularies might 'come apart' from one another to constitute, in effect, their own separate worlds[202].

This possibility would be undesirable because it would alienate us from one another and from ourselves. The invariance of causal relations – or an appropriate metaphysical substitute – under redescription could therefore be construed not as a reflection of the nature of Reality, but, rather as something mandated by our desire for community and our need to maintain a unified psyche. Rorty writes that

> the ironist – the person who has doubts about his own final vocabulary, his own moral identity, and perhaps his own sanity – desperately needs to *talk* to other people, needs this with the same urgency as people need to make love. He needs to do so because only conversation enables him. . . to keep himself together, to keep his web of beliefs and desires coherent enough to enable him to act (Rorty, 1989, p. 186 – original emphasis).

The 'ironist,' for Rorty, is the person attempting to juggle a number of different vocabularies, different (sets of) descriptions of their world, without alighting on one in particular as the 'only true description'. The passage indicates that Rorty is aware of the problem caused by the idea that one thinks and speaks in a number of different descriptive vocabularies for different purposes: namely, that it jeopardises the notion that we live in *one world*. The 'solution' to this problem offered by the metaphysical tradition has been to insist that only one of the possible sets of descriptions is the right one and to deprecate the others. If one does not want to take this route, then in order to 'solve' the problem one needs to insist that we retain *some* metaphysical vocabulary, even if it does not particularly matter which one we choose. The difference between these two 'solutions' to what I am claiming is the problem posed by the plurality of descriptive discourses corresponds to the distinction that Rorty makes between the unity of truth and the unity of the world (1991d, p. 161).

The concept of the 'unity of the world' introduced here indicates the connection I envisage between the *monistic* aspect of Rorty's naturalism, affirming that there is a *single*, continuous universal order, and the aspect of his naturalism according to which descriptions made using different vocabularies all describe the same underlying structure. This is that both aspects express the idea of *unity*: of uniting – of binding or bringing together – ostensibly disparate domains into parts of a single whole.

I now return to the first aspect of Rorty's naturalism, its monism. The idea I would tentatively like to explore is that the monism of Rorty's naturalism is, in effect, where you get to if you pursue the ideals of metaphysics rigorously enough – but that it is also a kind of limit-point to intelligible metaphysical

[202] Analogously to the way in which Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, suggests that scientists working within different 'paradigms' inhabit different worlds.

enquiry, beyond which one cannot 'get any further' with the metaphysical project. In terms of the question of the appropriate metaphysical status of naturalism, then, the answer I would give is that – as with the invariance of causal relations – monistic naturalism is not metaphysics according to the full traditional ideal, but it is, essentially, *as much metaphysics as one can have.* As such, naturalism could be held to constitute, borrowing Brandom's terminology, a 'modest,' or minimal, form of metaphysics. This naturalism would be *ontological monism*: the idea of an ultimately *single*, continuous natural order *of some kind* (the 'unity of the world'), without there being a single correct way of describing that order (a 'unity of truth'). Nevertheless, despite there not being a single correct description of the universe, there would – as outlined above – by the lights of ontological monism be a practical use for metaphysical vocabulary in adverting to that universe's unity in the face of a plethora of heterogeneous descriptions.

The suggestion that naturalism is 'as much metaphysics as one can have' stems from a particular conception of metaphysical inquiry. That conception holds that metaphysics is the pursuit of knowledge obtained from a 'perspective' that involves us, as a group of inquirers, divesting ourselves of the needs and concerns that make us human. This perspective has variously been called an 'external' perspective, a 'God's-eye-view,' or the 'View from Nowhere'. Its desirability stems from the thought that our needs and interests instil in us a kind of narrow-mindedness – that they constitute an epistemic impediment – liable to distort our knowledge and which needs to be transcended. The absolute *ideal* of metaphysics, then, is the ideal of an epistemic position in which we no longer have *any* of these human needs and interests (nor any needs or interests of any other kind): from such a position, supposedly, we are able to apprehend things 'as they are in themselves'.

If the characterisation of metaphysics I have just offered is a fair one, then metaphysics leads to naturalism because in pursuing the former one is attempting precisely to get rid of all the things that make one *human* and which, as such, *distinguish one* from the rest of the non-human universe[203]. Therefore one is moving toward naturalism, understood as monism. The more we abstract from our human needs and interests, the more we see ourselves simply as another part of the world, or nature. Indeed, if we take away what is specifically human about ourselves, *what else can we see ourselves as*, besides as part of whatever else is held to remain? There is a sense, then, I propose, albeit somewhat obscure, in which the effort to achieve the goal of metaphysics involves arriving at naturalism.

Does this mean that monism and naturalism are the 'correct' metaphysics? I think it is better to say that ontological monism is the sort of view you *start to arrive at* if you embrace the ideals of

[203] Putnam describes the desired perspective as a "God's-eye" one, but this obscures the fact – clearer in Rorty's work – that the relevant property of the perspective in question is that it is *non-human*. It could be argued that "God" is the traditional anthropomorphic veneer we have tended to give to whatever it is that collectively we are not.

metaphysics. This way of putting things construes metaphysics as a process or an activity rather than as a way of characterising a set of propositions. I think there is a case to be made for saying that there are serious problems with metaphysics as an ultimate goal or destination. This is because the kind of 'external' perspective idealised by metaphysics requires one to put to one side all of one's particular interests and desires. And it seems reasonable to suppose that interest in metaphysics is still an interest, the desire to attain a metaphysical perspective still a desire. So in order to get to the external perspective required in principle by metaphysics this needs to be put to one side, too. As such, one might conclude that it is not possible simultaneously to aspire to metaphysical knowledge and to attain it.

This brief sketch of an argument against the intelligibility of the goal of metaphysics is not at all conclusive. It amounts to the idea that one can never fully take oneself out of the picture – thus that the 'view from nowhere' can seemingly never be fully achieved[204]. Where I think it converges with the 'argument from continuity' from naturalism is at the idea that metaphysics can only be taken to a certain point, at which the problem becomes that the thinking, philosophizing, being is inextricably integrated into what it is trying to think about. What is more, this would seem to be something that metaphysics – as an activity, an aspiration, at least – can discover, without it needing to be the case that that discovery itself completely fulfils the original definatory ideal. Metaphysics wants to achieve knowledge that is valid from all epistemic positions, and something that can legitimately be said about all epistemic positions – at least all actual positions that we are aware of (and, arguably, of which we could conceive, although this would be to beg the question) – is that they occur, 'within,' so to speak, the world they seek knowledge about. Therefore naturalism, in this sense, as a doctrine of monism or continuity, could be a 'universal' truth, or at least one of sufficient generality that it is as close an approximation to such a truth as we possess.

These are very difficult issues, but I think some of the considerations raised here potentially show that Rorty should have been less hasty in adopting the utilitarian mode of argumentation, and that he should have spent more time potentially exploring ways of using metaphysics against itself, of *attempting* to argue from a God's-eye view that there is no such thing. The issue, that is, may be 'greyer' and more complex than it appears if one simply assumes that such efforts either contradict (undermine, refute) themselves or do not.

6.5. Naturalism and neuroscience

In Chapter 2, above, I claimed that Rorty's construal of naturalism differed from analytic orthodoxy because it did not make explicit mention of natural science. Nevertheless, the natural sciences are not

[204] As I think Nagel is prepared to accept, or at least countenance. And indeed I would not go along with Rorty (1991d, p. 157-8; 2007a, p. 76) in suggesting that the ambition of 'transcendence,' the desire to 'get out of our own skins,' is inherently morally suspect and to be rejected outright.

irrelevant to a naturalism defined in terms of causation, as the notion of a single universal causal order. Rather, I want to end this thesis by suggesting that the natural sciences, and in particular the neurosciences, offer powerful testimony in favour of naturalism.

The neurosciences are constantly adding to the body of evidence suggesting that human cognition and experience depend intimately on events in the brain and its wider environment. The backdrop to the thought of a generation of philosophers, such as Davidson, Sellars, and Rorty himself, was the increasing sophistication of neuroscience. In the 1972 essay 'Functionalism, Machines, and Incorrigibility', Rorty wrote:

> [T]he reason Cartesian dualism is so unpopular nowadays is not because of any application of the powerful methods of modern analytic philosophy, but simply because we keep reading in *Life* and *The Scientific American* about cerebral localization, the production of any desired emotion, thought, or sense impression by the insertion of electrodes, and the like (2014, p. 314).

Thus Rorty, who established his professional philosophical reputation in a series of papers advocating 'eliminative materialism'[205], has always been attentive to developments in the neurosciences. What I have been contending in this thesis, in effect, is that this attentiveness continues, by means of his naturalism, to inform Rorty's mature anti-representationalism.

Neuroscience is relevant to naturalism, construed as the idea of a single universal causal order, because its results strongly point toward the conclusion that all forms of human mental life – all forms of what Rorty terms our 'extra added ingredient'[206] – are stages of causal processes originating in the wider, non-human universe. Scientific investigation could conceivably have revealed (indeed, might have been expected to reveal, given our intuitions on the matter) that certain occurrences or processes contributing to human thought ultimately originate within a separate human self or subject, perhaps subsequently mixing and interacting with inputs from the wider world. Instead, the neurosciences continually identify new correlations, new associations, between 'physical' events or states – hence ones causally connected to the rest of the non-phenomenal universe – and items of human phenomenology. Correlation does not imply causation, and there is vast disagreement about how metaphysically to characterise the latter, but I would respond in line with Rorty:

> I do not think about causality. . . as a deep matter, about which we need to develop a philosophical theory. We know how to tell what causes what: there is no mystery about how we discover that viruses cause diseases, hunger causes riots, and

[205] For some commentators, Rorty's eliminative materialism remains amongst his most enduring, valuable contributions to philosophy (Dennett, 2000, pp. 91-92).
[206] See 5.3.2, above.

> moving billiard balls sometimes cause other balls to change their position (2010g, pp. 267-8).

The same, I suggest, is true of experiments that use physical means – whether pharmacological, electro-magnetic, or otherwise – to produce particular phenomenal states. These kinds of experiments are significant in that they give us an ever-more nuanced hold on a relationship – one of intense interdependence – that has been appreciated for thousands of years: between the environment, on the one hand, and human lived experience and behaviour, on the other.

In terms of representationalism, the representationalist ideal of coming to know the way the world 'is in itself' requires that we subtract from our current conception of the world aspects that are part of how it *falsely appears be to us,* as opposed to how it is 'in itself'. In order to be able to do this we need to be able to identify those things that *we* introduce into our conception, 'artificially,' so to speak, as opposed to those things that come from the 'world itself'. In order to distinguish between what we contribute and what the world contributes to our conceptions, it is plausible to suppose that we need to understand *how it is* that we acquire conceptions, theories, and beliefs – the causal processes by which we do so. Thus the project of knowing the world as it 'is *in itself*' inevitably requires that we scrutinise *ourselves*, and with the same level of detachment that we would bring to (other) natural phenomena – that we adopt, in Price's terminology, a 'subject naturalism' (see 5.7, above). This scrutiny, this detached perspective, is a major part of what takes place in the cognitive- and neuro-sciences.

Conclusion

In this study, I have shown that a particular kind of philosophical naturalism plays a key role in Rorty's anti-representationalism, especially (but not exclusively) in his thought after *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. I would like to use this concluding section to summarise the argument of the thesis, as well as to point to some topics that the argument suggests, but which it has not been possible to incorporate into the present work, and which could potentially be the subject of illuminating further research.

Chapter 1 introduced anti-representationalism as the consistent underlying theme of Rorty's mature work. Anti-representationalism was seen to be the rejection of the idea of a single correct way that things 'really are in themselves'. In Rorty's hands this took the form of a recommendation for philosophers to stop discussing certain topics, such as the 'nature of reality' and the possibility of knowledge. It was observed that Rorty considers anti-representationalism to be an extension of the anti-authoritarianism of the Enlightenment. It was seen that Rorty's preferred conception of philosophy is as a locus of 'cultural politics,' in which different parties compete to influence the content and course of human conversation.

Chapter 2 detailed the specific kind of naturalism relevant to Rorty's thought. It outlined the naturalism of John Dewey, to which Rorty's mature naturalism bears marked resemblances. The chapter then surveyed those passages of his writings in which Rorty explicitly discusses naturalism, as well as looking at how previous studies have portrayed Rorty's naturalism. It became apparent that Rorty's naturalism is the idea of a single, 'natural,' universal causal order incorporating, above all, human cognition. In the chapter, I pointed out that Rorty's naturalism differs from the predominant conception of naturalism in analytic philosophy, which takes naturalism to be a view about the epistemic or ontological primacy of natural science.

Chapter 3 was a precursor to the two that followed. Its purpose was to demonstrate that Rorty's case against representationalism in his highly influential *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was not entirely successful. Rorty's principal achievement in that book, I suggested, was discrediting foundationalism. He did that by dovetailing Sellars's critique of the 'Myth of the Given' with Quine's critique of conventional, non-holistic, theories of linguistic meaning. When combined in this manner, Sellars's and Quine's arguments indicated that there could be no such thing as 'privileged representations' – accurate representations of reality that could be used as the inferential basis (foundation) for the acquisition of further knowledge. What Rorty's account of Quine and Sellars in *PMN did not do*, however, I argued, was show that the idea that knowledge consists in accurate representation of reality is itself ill-conceived (it is more ambiguous whether Rorty's treatment of Davidson in Chapter 6 of *PMN* achieves this). Nevertheless, at the end of the Chapter, I began to

explore ways in which Quine and Sellars might ultimately be construed as challenging the idea that mental states or pieces of language possess need- and interest-independent representational content.

In Chapter 4, I proposed that the way in which naturalism told against representationalism in Rorty's thought was primarily through what I termed the 'argument from continuity'. Rorty's point – developed out of his engagement with the work of Donald Davidson – was that naturalism problematized the dualistic presuppositions of representationalism. It was seen that binaries such as subject and object, mental and physical, scheme and content, and representations and their object clustered around the respective poles of: *human beings*, on the one hand, and *nature* on the other. The effect of Rortyan naturalism, in each case, was to collapse the binary or dualism in question into a monism. I showed that Rorty appealed to this argument in the context of Davidson's critique of the 'dualism of scheme and content'. I also highlighted the fact that the specific, 'non-reductive,' form of naturalism that Rorty espoused was Davidson's 'anomalous monism'.

Chapter 5 then went on to link Rorty's 'argument from continuity' to the interest in Darwin displayed by his later writings. It was proposed that Darwin's philosophical significance, for Rorty, lay in his having made naturalism more plausible by providing an explanatory device capable of accounting for the emergence of complex life-forms as a result of the accumulation of large numbers of simple mechanical interactions. Nevertheless, I argued, Rorty sometimes misconveyed Darwin's significance by suggesting that it consisted principally in the notion that language is as a tool *rather than* a representation of 'things as they are in themselves'. I proposed that, on closer examination, Rorty's characterization of language as a tool derived its argumentative force from the causal intimacy between a tool and the tool-user's environment, thus reintroducing considerations related to the argument from continuity.

I used the Fifth Chapter to draw attention to the fact that there are senses of 'represent' according to which Rorty is prepared to grant that language is representational. But I argued that Rorty's point was that it was inappropriate to ask whether whole language-games, or vocabularies, represent interest-independent Reality accurately. In Chapter 5, I also argued that Rorty's enthusiasm for the so-called 'Linguistic Turn' in philosophy stems from the fact that the history and utility of language – by contrast with thought, conceived of as an 'extra added ingredient' – can plausibly be explained in causal-mechanical terms. An example of such an explanatory project is Huw Price's work on the function of assertoric language, which, I suggested, as an anti-representationalist strategy amounted to the idea that representationalist notions were theoretically superfluous. The principal criticism I made of Price's approach was that arguably it gave too much precedence to natural science. Another important figure, who, like Price, offers naturalistic accounts of linguistic practices is Robert Brandom, and further research could potentially consider the relation of Brandom's work to Rorty's naturalism in more detail.

The sixth and final Chapter of the thesis examined the metaphilosophical import of Rorty's naturalism. Rorty was seen to regard naturalism as an optional philosophical tool, to be used for certain purposes. Whilst it was observed that he did not wish to afford naturalism more significance than other philosophical 'vocabularies', representationalism's apparent explanatory superfluity against the backdrop of naturalism was also seen to form part of the utilitarian rationale offered by Rorty for its rejection. I used the final Chapter to propose some amendments to Rorty's position in this regard. According to the alternative conception of the anti-representational significance of naturalism I outlined, naturalism – *pace* Rorty – was best understood as a *modest*, or minimal, metaphysical commitment to ontological monism. It could reasonably be construed as metaphysical, I suggested, because: i) there were powerful, abiding practical reasons for us to retain some kind of neutral, general metaphysical vocabulary ii) one arrived at the idea of monism – in practice, the idea that human beings are part of nature – by attempting to adopt an epistemic perspective from which we 'stood outside' our interests and practices. Yet it was 'modest' because it did not go beyond the bare requirement of monism by commending a specific metaphysical vocabulary or 'ontological constant' (a particular type of entity of which all other entities in the universe could be said to be composed). Its modesty stemmed, I suggested, from the fact that the process of pursuing metaphysics compromised the intelligibility of the original metaphysical goal, once one 'arrived' at monism. In the final section of the last Chapter, I began to explore the idea that one of the most important reasons we have for subscribing to naturalism is neuroscience, which continues to undermine the idea that human cognitive agency is something causally independent from the rest of the universe. Regrettably, it has not been possible to address the neurosciences' relevance to (meta-)philosophy to the extent originally hoped.

Another highly relevant topic that has had to be neglected is the problem of free will. I would have liked to have been able to interrogate Rorty with respect to his dismissive attitude toward the problem. It remains to be seen whether Rorty accorded sufficient attention to the issue of free will: whether he was right to group the questions in this vicinity together with other traditional representationalist concerns, supposing Humean compatibilism to be an adequate response. Rorty's failure to accord a metaphysical interpretation to his naturalism is, I think, bound up with his neglect of the question of free will. Since Rorty ultimately seemed to believe that the idea of a single, universally pervasive, causal structure was something *optional*, it makes sense to suppose that he thought the same about the problem of free will apparently raised by attempts to subsume humankind into the cosmos in this manner.

Although it would not be appropriate to try to argue the point here, the 'truth' in what Rorty had to say about free will, I suggest, was that, perhaps paradoxically, the sense in which we lack free will makes no difference to practice. The problem of free will, in other words, falls foul of William James's

'Pragmatic Principle'. For this reason[207], Rorty was probably *wise* not to think about free will. But, still, I feel that by completely disregarding the topic he was perhaps something less than wholly intellectually honest.

Finally, given that I have argued here that naturalism plays a critical role in undermining what is arguably the Western philosophical tradition, I would like to finish by commenting briefly on naturalism's affinity to *Eastern* thought. The idea that human beings are manifestations of an overarching natural order is, it would seem, more entrenched in the Eastern psyche than it is in its Western counterpart – influencing, for example, such systems of belief as Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. At the same time, the notions of fate and inevitability would appear to be more central to Eastern thought, leading to the exaltation of such virtues as acquiescence and equanimity. The point I wish to make is simply that naturalism is not anything ground-breaking or iconoclastic from an Eastern perspective; it is already part of the intellectual landscape. Rorty's linking of naturalism to the idea of anti-representationalism might therefore offer, in the long term, a means of contributing to the reconciliation of Eastern and Western thought.

[207] And also because it is a symptom of schizophrenia to believe that one's thoughts and actions arise from sources other than oneself. C.f.: 'The worst way to formulate the issue between Socrates and Kant is to ask whether free will can have wriggle room in a universe made out of physical particles. That way madness lies, or at least the silly sort of philosophy that makes the possibility of moral agency depend on recent discoveries in quantum physics' (Rorty, 1995g, p. 35).

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