# After Metaphysics: Eliminativism and the Protreptic Dilemma

'the reductive and eliminative versions of the identity theory are both merely awkward attempts to throw into current philosophical jargon our natural reaction to an encounter with the Antipodeans… they should both be abandoned, and with them the notion of the mind–body identity.' Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

'If as I was assuming people really could see someone else's nervous system working, and adjust their behaviour toward him accordingly, then, I believe, they wouldn't have our concept of pain (for instance) at all, although maybe a related one. Their life *would simply look quite different from ours*.' Wittgenstein, MS 169

## 1. Naming, of Necessity

An early review (Nehamas 1982) of works characteristic of "mid-period" Rorty (1979; 1982) sets the latter's opposition to the philosophical tradition against the backdrop of a most traditional response to anti-philosophical sentiment. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's Topics*, Alexander of Aphrodisias attributes the following argument to the *Protrepticus*:

> if someone should say that one should not do philosophy, then, since "to do philosophy" means to investigate this very thing, whether one should do philosophy or not, and it also means to pursue philosophical study, by showing each of these to be appropriate for a human, we will entirely eliminate the proposal[i].

The question Nehamas goes on to pose is 'whether Pragmatism can avoid the Protreptic Dilemma' (p. 401) in its attacks on traditional epistemology and metaphysics. More specifically, he asks if Rorty is successful in his attempt to bring about a 'shift' (p. 402) from "Philosophy" with a big "P", to "philosophy" with a small "p": from a genre named for 'the study of certain definite and permanent problems' (Rorty 1982, 31) to one that attempts to 'see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term' (Sellars quoted at 1982, xiv, 29, 226). While acknowledging that Rorty takes these self-referential challenges 'seriously' (p. 401), Nehamas announces himself 'rather pessimistic about the chances of… pragmatism escaping from… Philosophy,' albeit 'quite optimistic about its place within it' (p. 408).

The influence of Rorty's "late-period" works outside philosophy departments and their relative neglect inside them is evidence perhaps for the converse of Nehamas' prophesy. In part this is because Rorty has empowered those located outwith the discipline narrowly construed to simply ignore the sort of "big" technical issues that still serve to orientate many working within it. If, in response, the latter are inclined to judge the practises of these other intellectuals unworthy of the name of even a decapitalised version of "Philosophy", a natural response might

be: "Who cares? What's in a name?!". This chapter is motivated by the conviction that the name is worth preserving because the work of Philosophers is important, albeit *understood as contributions to philosophy*. Correlatively, it's claim is that Rorty's "place" within Philosophy should be understood in terms not of someone who strived and failed to "avoid" the Dilemma but of someone who endeavoured successfully to mount a proleptic vindication of its practice by redescribing it as part of that larger intellectual enterprise "philosophy".

Before proceeding there are two further points arise from Nehamas' appraisal. Firstly, Nehamas is not drawing attention to the likely failure of Rorty's attempt to change the conversation within—as it were—his own lifetime. Initially, his pessimism takes the form of an observation that Rorty's use of terms like "scientific vocabulary", "abnormal discourse", "social practices", and the related tendency to treat discursive activities as genre-variants of something univocal called "literature," invite essentialising questions *because* they are themselves expressive of 'a residual metaphysical commitment on his own part' (p. 405). But it transpires that the inescapability of metaphysical thinking has a more elusive cause: 'a very profound need indeed' (p. 408). Nehamas doesn't dilate on the nature of this "need", nor on its relation to the compulsion to generalise expressed in metaphysical thinking, but it recalls Alexander's formulation of the Dilemma. Accordingly, it is not the formal matter of Rorty's purportedly "residual metaphysical commitments" that provokes pessimism but rather the diagnosis that the reflexive investigation into "whether one should do philosophy" is expressive of a profound need that is both "appropriate for a human" and which 'is constantly pushing us' (p. 408) towards the sorts of generalising practices that eventuate in such commitments.

The second point relates to what Nehamas characterises as a 'serious continuity in Rorty's… intellectual development' (p. 402) between the "eliminative materialism" of the late 1960s ("early-period" Rorty) and the attempt to make the "shift" from Philosophy to philosophy. That "serious continuity" has been remarked by others subsequently. Brandom (2000) thematises Rorty's contributions to philosophy from the "early-period" onwards as so many iterations of the original insight that drives his eliminativism; namely, that 'any normative matter of epistemic authority or privilege… is ultimately intelligible only in terms of social practices that involve implicitly recognizing or acknowledging such authority' (p. 159)[ii]. Despite the "serious continuity", however, Nehamas discerns what we might call a "shift" in the understanding of shifts in play here, for he sees the movement from early- to mid-period Rorty as a one that discloses the contrast between seeing such transitions in our patterns of linguistic usage as precipitating solutions to traditional problems of Philosophy (like the Mind-Body problem) to one that issues in a refusal to take them seriously. If we regard the latter refusal as

expressive of the attempt to replace Philosophy with philosophy, the unstated implication is that the shift in "shifts" marks the track along which we see Rorty's thought being "pushed" into the sort of metaphysical thinking that we noted above.

Returning to our theme, Nehamas is correct to identify a shift in Rorty's thinking about "shifts". Rather than being the key to his failure to address the Dilemma, however, I will argue that the reappraisal of his own "eliminativist" response to the Mind-Body problem is crucial to understanding his vindication of the practice of Philosophy (as philosophy). In other words, Rorty's response to his failed attempt to defend materialism highlights his awareness of the very determinants that Nehamas raises against his "revisionary" project for philosophy in the name of the Dilemma. From this perspective, the levelling that Brandom insists on in his retelling of the story of the continuity in Rorty's thinking deprives us of the opportunity to identify the considerations which led the latter to problematise (what comes to be seen as) the "shift" from Philosophy to philosophy. But those considerations are what leads to the vindication of Philosophy (as philosophy), so their neglect lends support to the view that Rorty's post-Philosophical culture has no place for traditional problems. That is a mistake. Rorty's "mid-period' works are important because they allow us to think of the work of Philosophy as part of something that is culturally significant. As such, they offer possibilities for pragmatism that are not constrained by Rorty's own 'blind impress' (1989, 23).

With that unaccustomed plea for the relevance of Philosophy in plain view let's turn to the details of Rorty's eliminativism, the problems it gave rise to, and the change it brought about in his thinking about the lure of metaphysical thinking.

## 2. The Metaphilosophical Significance of Eliminativism

For Brandom, Rorty's eliminative materialism was 'the first genuinely new response to the traditional mind-body problem that anyone had seen in a long time' (2000, 157). Rorty's version of the identity theory, and corresponding defence of materialism, contrasts with the "translation" or "reductive" variety associated with Smart, Armstrong, *et al.* A proponent of a (mind-body) identity theory *simpliciter* maintains something like the following. It is 'sensible to assert that empirical inquiry will discover that

(I) *Sensations…* are identical with certain brain-processes' (MBIPC, 106)[iii].

According to the "disappearance" or "eliminative" theorist, the identity in question is not one whereby specific properties of sensations are redeemed as properties of brain-processes; rather, *the very existence* of sensations is impugned, as when we identity unicorn horns with narwhal horns in order to eliminate any genuinely referring use of "unicorn" from our vocabulary. Writing two decades before Brandom, Rorty is less encomiastic about his achievement. Both versions of the

identity theory are, he notes, 'merely awkward attempts to throw into current philosophical jargon our natural reaction to an encounter with the Antipodeans… they should both be abandoned, and with them the notion of the mind–body identity' (1979, 119)[iv]. The moral Rorty appears to draw from his earlier work, then, is that in striving to 'vindicate[d]… materialism' (IMM, 169) he was being "pushed" along a particular track by the "current philosophical jargon". This reflection is enlightening because MBIPC is presented as a 'case-study' (p. 106) in removing objections to (broadly) reductionist theories like materialism, the diagnosis being that these are motivated by categorical distinctions that appear inviolable only because our ordinary ways of speaking are as they are; that is to say, they do not reflect (how could they?) how we might talk in the light of future empirical discoveries. The "shift" implied by Rorty's retrospection suggests that his attempt to present such distinctions in a more contingent light was itself framed in a vocabulary that was insufficiently alert to its provisional status and therefore prone to being construed metaphysically (or Philosophically).

To appreciate the broader significance of that "shift" is our task, so the first thing to note is that (I) is not a prediction that science will one day succeed in this endeavor; rather, the aim is to show that such a prediction 'makes sense' (ibid., fn. 1), which involves removing the salient obstacle to such a view: the linguistic philosopher's conviction that any "identification" of mental entities, properties or predicates with physical entities etc. involves conceptual confusion[v]. Since that in turn requires that one is able to distinguish changes in meaning from changes in belief, the argument for eliminativism offered in MBIPC is that a proposal like (I) appears to lack sense only because it is being judged from the perspective of a (current) vocabulary that could be changed by empirical inquiry. But if the current vocabulary enshrines the categorical distinctions that render expressions of (I) senseless, how in the absence of the actual discovery that would shape it can we conceive of that (future) vocabulary from the standpoint of which (I) is truth-apt?

To get a better grip on the challenge here, recall the perceived shortcomings of the "reductive" version of the identity theory. When Smart asserts that 'Sensations are nothing over and above brain processes' (1962, 56) the thought is that although the identity in question is 'strict' (ibid., 57), since it is (or would be) an empirical discovery (like the water/$H_2O$ and material objects/clouds of molecules identities) it is nevertheless contingent—unlike purportedly synonymy-based identities. Now, in order to make the sort of empirical discovery required one must have, as it were, distinct and non-synonymous *routes* to the thing identified, as when one infers that:

(II)     Scott is the author of Waverley

However, if identity is indeed "strict" then it would conform to Leibniz's principle, according to which if two objects are identical then any property ascribed to one must be ascribable to the other. The concern is that in (I) the first- ("reporting") and third- person routes to the referent are in terms of properties that seem ill-suited to apply to each other. The putative conceptual confusion arises, then, because if my sensation can be nagging or dull or acute then the brain state with which it is identical must also be describable in those terms; and if a brain-state can be located spatiotemporally and specified in terms of its neural complexity then so can the corresponding mental state. But as Cornman notes, in describing a brain-state as dull 'we have predicated predicates, appropriate to one logical category, of expressions that belong to a different [one]. This is surely a conceptual mistake' (Cornman 1962, 77). Despite suggestions that specifications of the reporting/"mental" side could be given in "topic-neutral" terms (cf. Smart 1962, 61), variations on what is sometimes referred to as the 'irreducible-properties objection' (IMM, 147) are generally regarded as 'decisive against' "reductive" identity (Rosenthal 2000, 10).

It's worth noting that the sort of theoretical identifications that Smart has in mind are not obviously in conformity to Leibniz's principle.

(III)    Tables are clouds of molecules
(IV)    Water is $H_2O$

It seems "sensible" to maintain that while water is wet, slakes the thirst and can look inviting and material objects can be dropped from great heights, cut in two and sat upon these properties are inaptly applied to their complements. If asymmetries of this sort don't undermine the intelligibility of the identity then what the identity theorist needs to provide are not "topic neutral" translations but some assurance that the property-asymmetries that characterize mind-brain reductions are of this (metaphysically) benign form. Now compare (II) with the identity that defines the theory (I). If the latter is taken as "strict" we confront the "irreducible-properties objection". But if we understand the identity in (III) and (IV) as "loose" rather than "strict" we might then argue that since a variant of the same "objection" could have been raised against them in the past, they should be the model for giving sense to (I).

As we'll see, there is a connection here with Rorty's approach; but on the face of it at least he proposes a more radical alternative to the "translation" form of the identity theory. Compare:

(V)    Unicorn horns are narwhal horns.

Echoing Quine (1960, 241), Rorty suggests that in these cases the identity in question designates

the sort of relation which obtains between… existent entities and non-existent entities when reference to the latter once served (some of) the purposes presently served by some of the former. (MBIPC, 108)

The identities are elucidated accordingly:

(I')      *What people used to call* "sensations" are certain brain-processes.
(V')      *What people used to call* "unicorn horns" are narwhal horns.

On this form of explication the relata of what are strict identities can belong to different "logical categories" without engendering the need for "topic-neutral" translations. Whilst first-order unicorn-talk involves the ascription of properties (purifying water, curing diseases, etc.) we wouldn't ascribe to narwhals, the semantically ascendant version makes no such commitments. Similarly, the experiential properties reported in first-order sensation talk will be the ones that disappear. And since these just are evidence of the mental on this account the mind will disappear along with them and with it any opposition to Materialism. To return to the question that precipitated this philosophical flashback, the suggestion is that (I) appears nonsensical only if we insist on evaluating from within our current practices. To propose a future use is to affiliate the associated standpoint with the retrospective evaluation (I'), much as we now regard unicorn-talk.

Now, *the very form* of the explication

- *What people used to call* "Xs" = Ys

is used to signify an '*in principle*' elimination of X-talk in favour of Y-talk that would 'leave our ability to describe and predict undiminished' (MBIPC, 114). As it stands, then, the argument in MBIPC turns on the intelligibility of *explanatory equivalence*. If in the future we could account for behaviour at least as well by referring to brain states as by referring to putatively mental items then reference to the latter might disappear from the language and we would conclude that—like demons and unicorn horns—there never were such things. However, the whole point of (V') is to impugn the existence of unicorns *and* the legitimacy of corresponding beliefs. But if the referring use of "sensations" disappears the obvious consequence—contrasting with our "loose" sense of identity—is that 'people who have reported sensations in the past have (necessarily)… empirically disconfirmed beliefs' (MBIPC, 113). What distinguishes Rorty's eliminativism from Quine's (cf. 1960, 264) and Feyerabend's, then, is his rejection of this implication: 'people are not wrong about sensations in the way in which they were wrong about "unicorn horns"' (ibid.).

Although contemporary critics (cf. Cornman 1968, 17) commended this line for its relative subtlety, Rorty emphasises its provenance: 'all my new line amounts to is the suggestion

that the reporting role of sensation-discourse could be taken over by a neurological vocabulary' (2014, 203. Fn. 13). In this respect, what differentiates the argument in MBIPC from the competition is that it extends explanatory equivalence beyond the sort of description-prediction associated with the third-person to incorporate first-person uses of sensation-terms. Accordingly, his proposal is that under the empirical change envisaged the referring use of "sensation" will in the future be taken over by the associated brain-talk. The "association" in question connotes the continuity of function: the brain-talk does all the describing and predicting that sensation-talk once did, but sensations qua *sensations* are eliminated. However, if sensation-talk does not commit us to necessarily false beliefs because we were unknowingly using it to refer to brain-processes; and if narwhal-horn-talk fulfills some of the purposes now served by unicorn-horn-talk; why not conclude that folk had some true beliefs about narwhal horns even if they were using the term "unicorn horn"? That is to say, rather than risk vitiating the cognitive status of sensation-talk, isn't the (relativistic) concern here that we render respectable unicorn-talk? Consider a further example:

(III')    *What people used to call* "tables" are clouds of molecules.

Although no one would conclude on this basis that tables don't exist, let alone that beliefs about tables are false, the only difference that makes a difference between (I') and (III') and (V') is one of degree. To account for the different elaborations of the basic eliminativist formula, then, Rorty offers a six-step schema (p. 116) by which linguistic practices might shift in such a way that an observation term might cease to have a referring use. Applied to (I') and (III'), the key steps are from:

(I'-2) Sensations are identical with certain brain-processes, to
(I'-6) There are no sensations
and from
(III'-2) Tables are clouds of molecules, to
(III'-6) There are no tables,

In the schema for (III') "table" retains its referring function because no transition from (2) to (6) takes place. The 'explanations formulated in terms of' tables are so good, 'on the ground which they were originally intended to cover,' that we 'feel no temptation to stop talking about them… it would be monstruously inconvenient to do so' (p. 117). And since "table" maintains its (inferential and noninferential) referential use, talk of tables remains true. This contrasts with (V'), wherein as narwhal-talk diverges from unicorn-talk it becomes increasingly inconvenient to think of them as the same thing, so while our linguistic practices might temporarily have

sustained something like Donnellan's (1966) referential use of "the unicorn horn" (*reply*: "it's not a unicorn horn but I can see what you're talking about") that too will disappear (*reply*: "sorry, but I've no idea what you're talking about!"). Here the loss of the referential usage means there were no true beliefs about unicorns. What, then, of (I')? Rorty offers as the explicit reason we don't move from (2) in (I') the same sort of pragmatic considerations as for (III'). But if "table" retains its referring function at stage (2) despite the "in principle" nature of the elimination outlined in the six-step, then why does "sensation" lose its referring use? Or conversely, if the in-principle nature of the elimination is all that counts, why doesn't table lose its referring function?

We'll return to these concerns below, but let's reflect briefly on why they arise. As noted, the originality of Rorty's eliminativism is to affirm a reporting role for sensation terms, albeit as unwitting reports of brain-processes. But the intuition that drives the "irreducible properties objection" is that the reporting role of sensation-terms has uses supplemental to any explanatory role. Now, if it is to vindicate materialism eliminativism must make sense of (I') by pinning-down each side of the strict identity. In MBIPC the identity itself is asserted on the grounds of explanatory equivalence, but that doesn't give us any way of capturing the distinctiveness of the left-hand-side. Although Rorty recognizes that there is an epistemic 'peculiarity' (MBIPC, p. 120) about first-person reports of sensations, then, his response is intended more as a diagnostic appurtenance, aimed at removing an obstacle to explanatory completeness. To that end he deploys Wittgensteinian considerations to show that attempts to hitch the concept of the mental to the authority of sincere first-person reports through the notion of their "private subject matter" simply begs the question about the intelligibility of such a subject matter. That is to say, since epistemic authority (for example, about one's being in pain) is the gift of concept-mastery, and such correct usage is a matter of meeting public criteria, one cannot be right or wrong about what is private. However, it's to IMM that we must turn for Rorty's full account.

Rorty acknowledges that the commonsense view of the mental—'the concept actually built into our language'—is 'irredeemably Cartesian' (IMM, 154, fn. 16) in holding that it 'must contain properties incompatible with properties of physical entities' (op. cit.). The challenge confronted in IMM is thus to make sense of the mental-physical distinction by capturing the supplementary "peculiarity" of first-person reports and asserting thereby the required identity. But this must be done in such a way that it is evident how pragmatic concerns alone ensure that that it doesn't disappear, and along with it the referring use of sensation terms. The question is what is that "peculiarity" and how does its identification serve to vindicate materialism? The story here is much more familiar. Drawing on Sellars' (1997) claim that 'all awareness… even of… so-called immediate experience… is a linguistic affair' (p. 63) and the "Myth of Jones"

wherein theoretical terms can take on a noninferential reporting role, Rorty concludes that the "criterion" of the mental—what makes the mental *mental*—is the epistemic property that certain reports have of being held incorrigible. But since "being held" thus and so simply nominates the "awareness" that members of a linguistic community have of the correctness of certain sorts of (contingent) linguistic moves, the normative authority invested in "being held" incapable of error is neutral with respect to content. If a community maintained that what variety of beetle a member had in her box[vi] was invulnerable to the scrutiny of entomologists then "I have a whirligig" would be a (noninferential) report on a mental event (cf. IMM, 167). Likewise, if there were no linguistic practices that invested reports with such authority there would be no mental contents. According to IMM, then, the supplementary epistemic "peculiarity" of first-person "route" to the asserted identity is elucidated as the contingent property of "incorrigibility". But since their status as "mental" is vouchsafed first-person reports by the linguistic practice rather than that practice merely representing an antecedent ontological order, there is nothing nonnatural about such contents.

Of course, the fact that they are not *non*natural doesn't quite get us to the full-story. As we noted above, the aim is to vindicate materialism by showing that a proposal like (I) appears to lack sense only because it is being judged from the perspective of the present and not some (possible) future standpoint brought about by an (imagined) empirical discovery. Rorty purports to offer the materialist two proposals for thinking about that future:

(ξ1) The argument from MBIPC: It might come to pass that we are able to explain behaviour 'at least as well' without reference to mental-states/features.

(ξ2) The argument from IMM: It 'might turn out that there are no entities about which we are incorrigible'. (IMM, 169)

Whereas in the event of ξ2 we would continue to use sensation terms but in the absence of the authority that marked them as "mental", in ξ1 such terms might disappear from the language altogether and brain-process talk be used instead. But since 'either of these changes would give the "eliminative" materialist the right to say that it had been discovered that there were no mental entities' (IMM, 169. Emphasis added) both ξ1 and ξ2 purportedly vindicate materialism.

Beginning with ξ1: although this is intended to vindicate materialism it can do no such thing, because the identity in question can only be asserted on the grounds of explanatory equivalence. But to take those criteria to exhaust what is relevant to establishing the identity in question *is just to assume the truth of materialism*. So the proposed future exemplifies the expectation that Peirce's[vii] "method of science" will eventuate in a standpoint from which only the forms of inquiry associated with such a method will determine what *is* and what *is not*—what can and

cannot be referred to. That future represents, as it were, the stage of thought at which the materialism that is true now comes to Geist-like "self-awareness". Now, this Hegelian spin on Quine's pragmatism is required to retain truth-talk for sensations terms, but it returns us to the concern noted above in relation to the schemas for (I') and (III'): why does "table" retains its referring function at stage (2) but not "sensation"? For Rorty, the difference here is that while the in-principle elimination of "table" would not leave what "table" would as a consequence refer to at (2)—viz, clouds of molecules—belonging to different ontological category, the in-principle elimination of "sensation" does. The identity in (I') is not a change *within* materialism but seeks to show that a whole stretch of putative reality—the immaterially *mental*—would be eliminated. We can impugn existence and retain truth because although the things we thought we were talking about (sensations; like unicorn horns) didn't exist, we were referring to something (brain-states). But since the (sensation) language we use continues to be *fit for purpose* we won't move to a point where—as with unicorns—we will displace such talk and as a consequence come to think of it as empty. But if we think of "fitness of purpose" in terms of answering to the appropriate norms for usage then it is clear that strict identity requires that these are specified in terms of prediction and control. The truth of materialism is presupposed in order to impugn the existence of the non-material.

ξ1 highlights the tension between a pragmatic account of linguistic practices and a materialism that sets apriori limits on their associated standards of correctness. That becomes more acute when one turns to ξ2. On the face of it Rorty is offering an account by which the supplementary "peculiarity" associated with sensation reports can be naturalized in terms of contingent but authority-bestowing linguistic practices. The fact that those practices might be— as it were—"de-Jonesed" without loss is thus intended to buttress the assumption of explanatory equivalence that underpins the affirmations of identity required to vindicate materialism; an approach presupposing the truth of materialism. But what Rorty's analysis of the "mental" points towards is a radical pluralism in lieu of traditional ontology. After all, materialism is nothing if not the assumption that certain terms in our linguistic repertoire derive their authority from the World by virtue of the associated methods of inquiry. But if what *makes* something mental is related to its inferential role in our linguistic practices then why not what *makes* something "material". In that sense Materialism can be contrasted with materialism (with a small "m"). We could say that in the future folk might be materialists, but the mere possibility that they speak materialese is no vindication of *Materialism*. Indeed, "materialism" is only a possibility on the basis of adopting the post-ontological pragmatist analysis of linguistic authority. And once we embrace the contention that what makes the mental *mental* and the physical *physical*

relate to the acknowledged authority of social practices then it follows that what makes something moral, aesthetic, political are to be understood likewise.

ξ2 makes evident the conflict between the pragmatist construal of normativity and the conviction that one is making a move within Philosophy (by vindicating Materialism). Purged of any association with explanatory equivalence and Materialism the eliminative explication of identities associated with ξ2 becomes otiose. On the "loose" interpretation of (III) and (IV) mooted above we rest content on the understanding that the property-asymmetries are metaphysically benignant, and so are untroubled by the notion that "table" retains its referring function. Moreoever, once we embrace the idea that the "ontological" imprimatur of a term relates only to its socially-mandated normative standing we can accept that all sorts of uses can be non-explanatory without thereby sanctioning a *non*-Material realm. And as with tables and clouds of molecules, so for the association of sensations and brain states: the inferential roles of the respective terms can diverge without that precipitating ontological anxieties. Only the Philosopher *qua* Materialist is worried about such uses.

We began this section noting Rorty's deflationary assessment of his eliminativist vindication of Materialist identity. But what he latterly dismissed in terms of the "current philosophical jargon" registers an awareness that his thinking had been conditioned by a certain metaphysical picture. Rorty's attempt to work through and out of that picture—the shift in "shifts"—can be characterised as an effort to elucidate the metaphilosophical significance of eliminativism[viii]. In any event, it characterises the shift in his work that takes place in the early 1970s and which eventuates in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Key here are two deeply related bits of that Philosophical "jargon": Reference and Truth. Recall that Rorty's eliminativism is founded on the conceit that one might *impugn* the existence of certain items—and thus of what we can refer to—whilst redeeming the normative standing (truth) of claims made in their names. What seems to underpin eliminativist identity, then, is the following:

T. "There are Xs" is true just in case what we use X-talk to *really refer to* exist

As we've seen, the trick works only if we assume the (end-of-inquiry) Materialism required to ensure that what one refers to when one uses a sensation term is identical to what one refers to when one uses the corresponding brain-state term because (i) they have the same explanatory role and (ii) that role exhausts the consequential. Without that assumption there is nothing to ensure an alignment of ontological commitments and justified statements: of what there is to really refer to and what can be said of them.

The clearest example of Rorty's development of an alternative "philosophical jargon" is his "Realism and Reference" (1976). In this he distinguishes three different uses of "reference".

Reference$_1$ targets the casual usage according to which it means "talk about". From this relaxed stance we refer to Harry Potter when we use Harry Potter-talk and to injustice, SARS CoV-2, and Donald Trump likewise. This contrast with reference$_3$, which carries the connotations of metaphysical tub-thumping associated with claims to have identified the actually existent. Whereas from the standpoint of reference$_3$ the ontological order fixes the ("ready-made") domain of what can be referred$_3$ to in order to engage in truth-talk, from the common-sense, pluralistic standpoint associated with reference$_1$ what we say truthfully about an X is determined by social norms and so, as a consequence, is what we "talk about" when we engage in X-talk. This disambiguation makes clear what went wrong with eliminativism; namely, that Rorty— under the influence of the "current Philosophical jargon"—conflated the ordinary and Philosophical uses of reference. That is to say, where the pragmatic analysis of the norms for the correct use of terms sanctioned the association of truth with reference$_1$, (T) assumes that there must be some ontologically independent order to which one must ultimately be referring$_3$ (albeit at the "end" of inquiry).

Now, if the Philosophical use of reference$_3$ is impugned in this way, what are we to make of articulations of the eliminativist formula? After all, they were used to "make sense" of conceptual changes. Purged of the old jargon, what status are we to accord the reflective stance of such formulations? Well, we have reference$_2$. Like reference$_3$ this is used to contrast present or past or prospectively past usages in order to contradistinguish their implied object with what is taken to be its *real* referent. But here the "real" does not indicate that the standpoint that is being adopted is metaphysically/ontologically privileged, signifying instead that the linguistic practice in question is being reconfigured or redescribed in order to address inconsistencies and bring about (always temporary) coherence. So when one says

- *What people used to call* "Xs" = Ys

This is not a matter of making the Philosophical claim that:

- When people used to talk about (refer$_1$ to) "Xs" they were really talking about (referring$_3$ to) Ys

But the philosophical claim that

- When people used to talk about (refer$_1$ to) "Xs" they were really talking about (referring$_2$ to) Ys.

From this perspective it's clear what the irreducible properties objection amounts to. Recalling (I'), we now have two interpretations:

a) "Sensations" refers$_3$ to brain-processes.

b) "Sensations" refers$_2$ to brain-processes.

If we ascribe brain-state properties using the referring$_3$ term "sensation" then sensations will turn out to have the same properties[ix](a). But properties aren't commutable in this way in (b) because the norms that determine what is said truthfully about (and thus determine reference$_1$ to) sensations are not assimilable to those that serve likewise in the linguistic domain of brain-processes-talk. The metaphilosophical significance of eliminativisism is that when Philosophy undertakes analyses that presuppose the intelligibility of reference$_3$ it helps itself to the idea that it has available to it the criteria for determining the ontologically significant mode of existence (materialist; immaterialist; etc.). But the idea that what *is* is determined by social norms undermines this sense of privilege. Rallying calls for linguistic reform that express the eliminativist formula can then only be proposals for the "redescription" of current practices. With the abandonment of a "controlling" reference$_3$ and the assumption of a monistic ontology goes the rejection of the idea that what the redescriptions are intended to ramify are the narrow purposes, values, or interests that the Materialist takes to be exhaustive. Accordingly, we might propose a linguistic reform that undermines incorrigibility in the hope that it will bring about a less individualistic and more collectivist culture; or, indeed, oppose such a reform for the selfsame reasons.

"Redescription" knows no natural limits on its scope, then, but what does that tell us about philosophy as opposed to Philosophy? Before considering that question in section 3 we need to say something about truth. Intuitions relating to the Philosophical association of reference with truth go as follows:

- "There are Xs" is true$_3$ just in case we use "X" to refer$_3$

Instead we have

- "There are Xs" is true$_1$ just in case we use "X" to refer$_1$

We can associate true$_3$ with the Philosophy's "True". Likewise, true$_1$ is the pluralistic, entity-positing use associated with justification. But what about a correlate for the all-important reference$_2$, which relates to the reflective standpoint from which redescriptions are proposed? It's role requires acknowledging that since normative practices can change, the use of "truth" cannot be equated simply with justification. What is required is:

- "There are Xs" is true$_1$ but it might not be true$_2$

Rorty later (1986) nominates this the "cautionary" use of true, 'reminding ourselves that justification [of S] is relative to, and no better than, the beliefs cited as [its] grounds' (1991, 128).

But that downplays its role in philosophy. True$_2$ makes evident that to offer the sort of redescriptions associated with the eliminativist schema is to conceive of concrete communities of inquirers whose beliefs have been modified 'in the interest of greater predictive power, charm, or what have you' (1982, 12). This may be *Philosophically* innocuous, but (*contra* Rorty) it isn't 'philosophically innocuous' (p. 13).

Rorty's judgement that his dalliance with materialism was an 'awkward attempt[s]' to "make sense" of 'our natural reaction to an encounter with the Antipodeans' (1979, 119) is typically revealing/concealing. As Wittgenstein would have it, such a meeting would be with a community whose "life *would simply look quite different from ours*" in divers and not fully accountable terms. The temptation to conceive wholly of such an alternative form of life in terms of some future standpoint derives from the seductive appeal of that "current… jargon", which assumes that there's a neutral frame of inquiry with which one can settle matters of truth$_3$ and what's real$_3$. What Rorty comes to see, then, is that it is that jargon—the jargon of Philosophy—that has to be redescribed/eliminated. Whereas truth$_3$ promises a standpoint on our linguistic practices— *including the sentences of our Philosophical theories*—that regards them as answerable to the World, truth$_2$ concerns prophetic proposals for the sorts of sentences that linguistic norms might in the future come to sanction the use of. It nominates the standpoint from which philosophy is practiced.

## 3. Splitting the Déférance

In "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids," Rorty writes:

> I have spent 40 years looking for a coherent and convincing way of formulating my worries about what, if anything, philosophy is good for. (1995, 11)

If this appears to be at odds with my opening claim that Rorty's "mid-" period works constitute a protreptic vindication of Philosophy (as philosophy), recall two points from Alexander's formulation of the Dilemma. The first is that one cannot (as Cavell might say) mean what one wants to say if one attempts to pose the question "should we to do philosophy?" external to the practice of it. Making philosophy's self-questioning intrinsic to its nature doesn't render it immune from internal censure, of course. Since the self-questioning that is part of the way philosophy is being characterised is at the same time a source of *instability*, one might endeavour to "cure" oneself of philosophical restlessness by seeing philosophy's task as to serve as a latter-day Pyrrhonian emetic. But as Kant (1998), says, such a 'surrender itself to a skeptical hopelessness' would constitute no vindication of 'a healthy philosophy' (A407/B434). The second point is that philosophy is to be exculpated by demonstrating that its self-questioning practice is "appropriate for a human". Given the centrality of human needs and interests to

pragmatism, we can regard Rorty's "worries" as attempts to conciliate the instability that derives from philosophy's self-questioning with the requirement to satisfy some (perhaps "profound") human need. In the period under consideration, this proceeded through an engagement with three thinkers in particular, and the motivating question ascribed to them is an expression of Rorty's own "worries":

> "Given that this is how philosophy has been, what, if anything, can philosophy now be?" Suggesting… that philosophy may have exhausted its potentialities, he asks whether the motives which led to philosophy's existence still exist and whether they should. (1982, 40)

The "he" in question is Heidegger, whose views are helpfully played off against those of another member of the triumvirate, Dewey. As Rorty states, he has no 'impartially sympathetic synthesis' (p. 301) to conclude with: his sympathies are avowedly Deweyan at this point. Whereas Heidegger wishes to preserve *something* from the metaphysical tradition that we can attach the name 'philosophy' to, Dewey sees no role for a post-*ontological* successor to that tradition (p. 301).

The idea that something goes missing in this reduction of *Thought* to metaphysical thinking recalls Nehamas' criticism: Rorty's rejection of Philosophy is at the same time a rejection of a deep human need that can itself eventuate in a regression into metaphysical thinking. But just as Rorty is critical of Dewey's own lapses into metaphysics (1982, ch. 5), his sense of what "shifting" reflection away from the Philosophical picture was (in part) born from his awareness that the attempt to vindicate Materialism itself constituted such a dereliction. What's important here is the status of the "motives which led to philosophy's existence". Rorty's objection is to seeing these as *more* than expressions of contingent human need by associating them—in the guise of Philosophy—with the 'spiritual destiny of the Western world' (Heidegger 1959, 37, quoted at 1982, 53). But if we think about the "spiritual" aspects of the "Western world" and its destiny in terms of the values and achievements of which we approve; and if we likewise read the works that make up the Philosophical cannon as narrating a history of those achievements; there doesn't seem much difference here. The objection is to the notion that texts of the cannon offer us the only path to understanding "our" destiny. In other words, what Rorty rejects is the contention that they "speak" to us in the name of the truth₃ about what is "appropriate" for the anti-humanistic "we" that we are.

In their own ways, then, both Heidegger and Dewey make the same mistake: they assume that there is *truth in philosophy*. This brings us naturally enough to the third figure, who does indeed allow for some degree of synthesis: Wittgenstein. In "Keeping Philosophy Pure" (1982, ch. 2) Rorty poses the Dilemma and our related question from a slightly different angle in

response to Pears (1969). Is there any way, he asks, to avoid the stark choice between regarding Wittgenstein as either proposing 'one more dubious philosophical theory' or 'not "doing philosophy" at all' (p. 22). Crucially, he argues that only becomes pressing if one reads the *Investigations* as a contribution to Philosophy. And the hallmark of Philosophical inquiry is that it centres on 'attempts to... find something interesting to say about the essence of Truth... and... of criticisms of those attempts' (p. xiv). Without a criterion of 'philosophical truth' (p. 22)—of what we've called truth$_3$—there is nothing to return metaphysics to 'the secure path of science' (Kant 1993, Bxv). But it is the restless, self-questioning striving for that longed-for method or criterion that brings about the instability that precipitates the 'euthanasia of pure reason' (A407/B434). What is required, then, is the discovery that 'gives philosophy peace': the one that allows the philosopher to 'break off philosophizing' when she wants to *precisely because*, being 'no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question', it embraces a method according to which 'Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem' (Wittgenstein 2009, §133).

For Rorty that "single problem" is the problem of truth$_3$ and the metaphysical temptations that accompany it. He tops and tails his introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* with the following reflections:

> The essays in this book are attempts to draw consequences from a pragmatist theory about truth. This theory says that truth is not the sort of thing one should expect to have a philosophically interesting theory about… The question of whether the pragmatist view of truth—that it is not a profitable topic—is itself *true* is… a question about whether a post-Philosophical culture is a good thing to try for. (1982, pp. xiii, xliii)

In terms of the eliminativist formula,

- *What people used to call* "truth$_3$" is just truth$_1$ (and that's the truth$_2$)

To propose the redescription of Philosophy in the interests of a post-Philosophical culture is to suggest we replace a subject that invites metaphilosophical speculation 'about its subject and method' (p. 28)[x]. When Rorty designates the successor to Philosophy—'philosophy-as-vision' (p. 31)— "Sellarsian," the vision of "things" and how they "hang together" is of course wildly pluralistic. It designates 'the sort of writing which generalizes so sweepingly that one has no other compartment for it' (1982, 28). But it doesn't mean that involves the abandonment of whatever "profound need" or interests might be thought to have motivated Philosophy. Indeed, the proposed elimination

- *What people used to call* "Philosophy" is philosophy

is advanced in order to vindicate what we find compelling still/appropriate for a human in that need under the heading of "philosophy". But as we saw in section 2, the "shift" that is proposed

here is not metaphysically underpinned. We're still at the point where we use "philosophy" in this way in the prophetic mode of reflection associated with truth$_2$. Indeed, Rorty's proleptic vindication of philosophy ("as-vision") proceeds by proposing a standpoint for the reflective individual that expresses the human need to make sense of things in an expanded Sellarsian way but which does not suffer from the *instability* that the search for truth$_3$ provokes.

In his later writings, Rorty came to champion what we've been referring to as "philosophy" under the name of cultural politics. In his final collection of essays, he writes:

> I want to argue that cultural politics should replace ontology, and also that whether it should or not is itself a matter of cultural politics. (2007, 5)

Instead of the above, we have:

- *What people used to call* "Ontology" is cultural politics

Rorty picked his terms to suit the times, but the reflective standpoint of the post-ontological eliminativist remains the same. There is no truth$_3$, so all proposals are advanced in the prophetic mode of truth$_2$. To return to our opening point, then: Nehamas' pessimism is rooted in the assumption that Rorty fails to respond to the challenge of the Protreptic Dilemma because he is striving for an *external* standpoint on Philosophy. But it's Philosophy that demands that standpoint in the name of (a criterion of) truth$_3$. And to reject that possible use of "true" amounts to a rejection of the very idea of such an external standpoint. Rorty's erinaceousness (cf. 2004, 4) can be characterised in many ways, but this is the lesson learned from his dalliance with Materialism, and the understanding of conceptual change it gives rise to informs his subsequent work. At the risk of belabouring the point, this is not a rejection of what Philosophers *do. Pace* Heidegger, the metaphysical tradition is not redeemed because it lights a clearing in which we can see what we really are and what as a consequence is truly appropriate for us. It's a seed-bank of useful tools, a repository of wildly creative insights and proposals for how we might come to think of ourselves. Rorty's "place" in Philosophy turns on the fact that he gives us a way of thinking about the history and technical aspects of the discipline that gives it a broader significance as part of philosophy.

Writing about his "heroes", Rorty observes that few philosophers indeed have had the audacity to suggest not only that Philosophy itself resulted from a mistake but that 'we are not, even now, in a position to state alternatives to those false assumptions or confused concepts—to see reality plain' (1982, 40). The reason why Rorty's work in the 1970s is of such importance to the destiny of contemporary pragmatism is that he vindicates the role of philosophy by presenting it with a different conception of what the reality in question "is". It allows us to

envisage a post-Philosophical age in which debates within technical philosophy[xi] continue to play a role in working out a vision of the future[xii].

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# Endnotes

[i] Wallies, p. 149.9-15. Quoted in Hutchinson and Johnson, p. 4. Nehamas' source does not include reference to what is "appropriate for a human".

[ii] Likewise endorsed by Stout 2010 (pp. 27-29).

[iii] MBIPC and IMM refer to "Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories" (1965) and "Incorrigibility and the Mark of the Mental" (1970) respectively. Page references are to Rorty 2014.

[iv] The Antipodeans are Rorty's imagined race who, since they are raised to correlate verbal reports with the states of their central nervous system, have no *distinctive* role in their language-games for sensation-talk and thus appear to lack one of the *sui generis* features of mental life.

[v] The objection can be seen as a variety of "naturalistic fallacy".

[vi] Cf. Wittgenstein 2009, §293.

[vii] For an exploration of Rorty's relationship to Peirce see Voparil (forthcoming).

[viii] In Gascoigne 2008 I refer to this "working out" as Rorty's *Kehre*.

[ix] Note that " "Brain-processes" refers$_3$ to Sensations" might constitute an immaterialist expression of the same Philosophical standpoint.

[x] On the metaphilosophy-philosophy distinction in neo-pragmatism see Gascoigne and Bacon 2020.

[xi] Cf. Gascoigne 2019.

[xii] Thanks to David Rondel and Michael Bacon for comments on an earlier draft.