Foundationalism, Representationalism, and Truth

The Debate Between Haack and Rorty

Alistair Kitchen

Faculty of Arts, The University of Sydney

Word Count: 30,784

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

Alistair Kitchen

Abstract:

This thesis defends Rorty's neo-pragmatism from the criticism of fellow pragmatist Susan Haack. Rortian neo-pragmatism threatens to undermine Haack's own theory of justification, foundherentism, which Haack argues is superior to foundationalism and coherentism. Haack claims that Rorty, first, has no good arguments against epistemology and, second, proffers an unappealing alternative. I suggest that Rorty does have a good argument against epistemology, and that that argument is illuminated by a closer look at Haack's notion of "ratification". Ratification is shown to be an unachievable and yet self-imposed standard. Understanding the motivations which cause Haack to pursue ratification requires an investigation of truth. I explicate in some detail Rorty's conception of truth and contrast it with Haack's interpretation of his position. I develop this reading by marrying Rorty's earlier and later discussions on the matter, and conclude by suggesting ways to develop Rorty's approach further. The result is a minimal account of truth that avoids the pitfalls of Haack's reading, and an approach to epistemology that bypasses the need for ratification and the worries of the epistemological sceptic.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented 'knowing'. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of 'world history', but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.[1]

Nietzsche

---

[1] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: And the Case of Wagner*, 1st Vintage ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 1.

I

The task at hand is to adjudicate upon a debate in pragmatism over the fate of epistemology. If we decide that we should do away with the epistemological tradition, then we will likely have been convinced by Richard Rorty's particular version of neo-pragmatism. If we decide that we should not, then we might well have been convinced by Susan Haack's pragmatist defence of it. This thesis is driven by the view that by reviewing the debate between these two philosophers, we will find ourselves closer to answering this question – closer to understanding philosophy itself.

Richard Rorty's central contribution to philosophy was an assault on the conception of philosophy as seeking to discover *what* we can know, and under what conditions it can be said *that* we know. This conception takes the study of such questions, and the development of a "theory of knowledge", to have primacy in philosophy. So understood, the pursuit of these questions is meant to separate philosophy from other subjects – philosophy is supposed to reveal the foundational conditions of inquiry itself. The study of these questions is known as epistemology.

Central to this mode of philosophy is "representationalism". Representationalism begins with the view that we have minds independent of the external world which can hold beliefs and produce sentences, and then holds that our job is to make those beliefs and those sentences accurately represent, or reflect, the world. In Rorty's work, representationalism is an integral but misguided presupposition of epistemology. It is closely associated with a correspondence theory of truth, in which sentences are made true by their relationship with the world, and a realism about truth, in which truth is a property independent of human social behaviour. He

calls this representationalist picture the "mirror of nature." The task of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, his crucial work, is to encourage the reader to leave just such a picture behind, and in so doing, abandon the possibility of epistemology, traditionally conceived.[2]

It should be no surprise then, that Rorty is among the most controversial of the 20th century philosophers. Since the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* his work has polarised the philosophical community, provoking both criticism and praise. Indeed, in their introduction to *Richard Rorty*, Charles Guignon and David Hiley observe that 'no American philosopher in the second half of the twentieth century generated such an intense mixture of consternation, enthusiasm, hostility, and confusion.'[3] Unenthused readers have often responded with unflattering appraisals – as a result, Rorty's work can be reduced to caricature or misread in uncharitable, unreceptive, ways.

The cause of this uneven response is not merely that his work undermines the labour of a great many philosophers. Rorty must take much of the blame; his attitude was often that of provocateur. His writing, while often remarkably perceptive and able to synthesise vastly disparate traditions in philosophy, was characterised by a tendency to under-describe key concepts, make bold proclamations, and give heterodox readings of major philosophical texts. Both in interviews and in print he approached the questions of truth, knowledge, and reality with a tone of insouciance. This attitude had a possibly deleterious effect on his work: it certainly kept many potentially-sympathetic readers at bay. The result is a body of important philosophical work home to both strident rhetoric and over-casual terminology. This thesis concerns itself with redressing examples of both.

---

[2] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, vol. 30th anniversary (Woodstock;Princeton, N.J;: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[3] Charles B. Guignon and David R. Hiley, *Richard Rorty* (New York;Cambridge, U.K;: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

To get the most out of his work, Rorty must be approached with a sensitivity to and awareness of these shortcomings. Allowing for these traits will allow us to be better, more charitable, readers. Doing so is also in our interest – regardless of whether we eventually agree with Rorty that we should disregard epistemology, there is real value in the pressure he puts philosophy under. We might, as Haack does, come to agree with Rorty on some points and not others. Or we might disagree with Rorty entirely and, in doing so, learn more about why we do. Neither should we be afraid, I think, to read Rorty in the way he told us to read Wittgenstein: rather than yoke ourselves to a strict, literal reading of the text, we should read actively, charitably, creatively.[4] The Rorty that I will be presenting will be the Rorty stripped of his provocations and read with, perhaps, undeserved charity. Crucially, this will involve taking Rorty's most flagrant claims to be more like taunts to the epistemologist than philosophical commitments. They are suggestions that the epistemologist drop her realist convictions about the nature of reality and focus instead on what matters – the interpersonal, phenomenal, and pragmatic functions of "truth", "knowledge", and "justification".

II

Since the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty has been subject to criticism from all corners. But many of his critics share much in common with him. Charles Taylor, for instance, phrases his difference with Rorty in these terms:

---

[4] Richard Rorty, "Keeping Philosophy Pure: An Essay on Wittgenstein," in *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

'…we both see ourselves as getting out from under the Cartesian, representational epistemology – and within this is a difference… for Rorty we escape…by getting rid of certain traditional distinctions and questions…while I think that these distinctions and questions have to be recast.'[5]

Hilary Putnam, too, has a longstanding dispute with Rorty. In that debate, Putnam, like Haack, approaches Rorty's brand of pragmatism with caution. Putnam sees himself as less radical than Rorty, and much of the debate centres around the nature of realism.[6] Despite the fact that Rorty considers his view to be 'almost, but not quite, the same as [Putnam's]'[7], Putnam wonders if Rortian neo-pragmatism is not a self-refuting relativism.[8]

Rorty's critics are united by a fear that his approach to truth and knowledge leaves us without a basis by which we can proclaim some theories better than others. This fear will reappear in the following pages, but the critiques above are not the subject of this thesis. Instead, this project responds almost entirely to the work of Susan Haack, a philosopher who has sought to hold the epistemological tradition and pragmatism in a single vision. Her work aims to retain what philosophers have long found compelling about epistemology – a realism about truth, a representational picture of belief, and the thought that justification is good if and only if it ensures that we are being "truth-indicative", i.e., that we are representing the world correctly.

---

[5] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," in *Richard Rorty*, ed. Charles B. Guignon and David R. Hiley (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158.
[6] For an able account of this debate, see Paul D. Forster, "What Is at Stake between Putnam and Rorty?," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 3 (1992).
[7] Richard Rorty, "Subjectivity or Objectivity?," in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. Cornell West John Rajchman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 3.
[8] Hilary Putnam, "Two Conceptions of Rationality," in *Reason, Truth and History*, ed. Hilary Putnam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Haack provides a worthy opponent to the Rortian project in a similar way to Putnam – she takes him seriously, but brings a cautionary, conservative voice to the debate.

These challenges to Rorty have value because the stakes are so high. If Rorty is right, then we will be forced to drop notions like "the intrinsic nature of reality". The picture of knowledge as "the state in which our beliefs accurately represent the world" will be of no use to us. The picture of "truth" as "the property held by sentences that accurately represent the world", similarly, will have to go. Epistemology will cease to be defined by the search for the conditions of knowledge – philosophy, conceived of as the attempt to ground inquiry, will cease to exist.

But if Haack successfully discredits the Rortian perspective, then epistemology, or some form of it, will have a chance to re-emerge. For Haack, Rorty's neo-pragmatism is a threat to her way of doing philosophy. The consequence of a successful *Philosophy of the Mirror of Nature* pragmatism is the invalidation of Haack's own brand of epistemology, *foundherentism*, which depends on a representationalist vision of truth and knowledge. Designed in response to the failure of foundationalism and coherentism, foundherentism exists to provide us with a working theory of knowledge and justification. To that end, it is valuable to Haack only to the extent that it provides criteria of justification that direct us toward the truth; in her eyes, theories of justification made useful by their truth-indication. They must give us good reason to think that our criteria of justification are helping us to represent the world in increasingly accurate ways. From the Rortian perspective, such notions are of no use to us.

Haack's critique of Rorty is of particular value to us for the way it exposes some of the major fault lines of philosophy. It reveals a set of attitudes that face off across a divide: realist and anti-realist, philosophical and non-philosophical, representationalist and anti-representationalist,

metaphysical and quietist. The debate between these two philosophers touches on each of these binaries and more, with the result that we are granted a glimpse into the nature of each dualism. We learn, for example, that some of these dualisms frame the dispute over epistemology better than others, and while some philosophers might be willing to commit to one side of each binary, others might find the binaries themselves unhelpful. But all will find themselves better versed on these issues after having attended to the Haack/Rorty debate. The fact that both Haack and Rorty call themselves pragmatists only makes this discussion more widely interesting – for while Rorty wants to use pragmatism to rid philosophy of epistemology, Haack uses pragmatism to defend epistemology. In this way, Haack becomes a useful proxy for the epistemological tradition. Because she is positioned so close to Rorty, she becomes the first line of defence against Rorty's radical protestations. Traditional philosophers will find Haack provides a welcome conservative defence in the battle over the soul of philosophy.

In her book *Evidence and Inquiry*, Haack rightly identified Rorty as a challenge to her foundherentist project and was provoked to actively defend representationalism from Rorty's attacks. The result is an explicit complaint, on behalf of epistemological realism, about what Haack calls "vulgar pragmatism". Her chapter, 'Vulgar Pragmatism: An Unedifying Prospect', makes for the first of Haack's many volleys in this direction (a series of volleys that includes a dialogic play, composed by Haack, comprised solely of quotes from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce and Rorty)[9]. But by returning Rorty's opening salvo in full force in *Evidence and Inquiry*, Haack has made a valuable contribution to the question of epistemology's place in philosophy. This thesis seeks to use Haack's contribution as a wedge into an often-fraught argument. By grappling with Haack's impassioned assault on Rorty's "vulgar pragmatism", we are granted ample material to help adjudicate the integrity of Rorty's position.

---

[9] Susan Haack, ""We Pragmatists..."; Peirce and Rorty in Conversation," *Agora* 15, no. 1 (1996).

III

This thesis has two chapters. The first introduces Rorty's assault on epistemology and Haack's response to it. The second seeks to understand the fundamental difference between them: truth.

In the first chapter I sketch the Rortian approach to which Haack takes exception, and then dig towards the core of the problem by using critiques of each philosopher to better understand their respective positions. The immediate task is to use Haack to better grasp, and then rehabilitate, Rorty. By oscillating between the perspectives of the pair, we can strip the debate from a generalised and irreconcilable difference of opinion to something discrete and identifiable. In doing so we will come to see Haack as playing host to an admirable position that hopes to retain a core realist motivation while fully cognisant of the challenges associated with that ambition. Rorty, meanwhile, will cease to be a dogmatic and incomprehensible relativist and will instead be revealed as something subtler – someone who wants to abstain from, rather than defeat, the concerns of epistemology. The conflict between the two may be no more reconcilable, but it will, at least, be understandable.

The way into that conflict is an investigation of the work of two analytic philosophers, Wilfred Sellars and W. V. O Quine. Their insights form the heart of Rorty's argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – together, Rorty says, they dismantle the epistemological tradition. Haack's central response to Rortian neo-pragmatism is to deny that they do. Though Sellars and Quine demand a fundamental rethinking of epistemology, she says, the heart of that tradition remains. Haack calls that heart "FOUNDATIONALISM". Her view is that the representational picture of epistemology is untouched even after the notions of "the Given" and the "analytic/synthetic"

divide dissolve. Foundherentism, her own theory of justification, is offered to give us reason to endorse FOUNDATIONALISM even after the classical approaches to epistemology are jettisoned. The difficulty for Haack is that a commitment to FOUNDATIONALISM demands "ratification", or "truth-indication". By adopting a representationalist picture of epistemology, Haack tasks herself with demonstrating that foundherentism does indeed direct us toward the truth. But her difficulty in providing this final, self-imposed, requirement casts doubts on the representational epistemological project at large.

This final discovery – that Haack sets herself a standard which she is unable to reach – reveals a crucial feature of the debate. The perspectives of these two philosophers cannot be reconciled without unearthing their core disagreement on the nature of truth. Understanding the Rorty/Haack debate requires the adjudication of a series of opposing positions on interrelated topics. Having investigated Rorty's critique of epistemology, Haack finds the debate to really be about FOUNDATIONALISM: similarly, after investigating FOUNDATIONALISM we will find that question to depend on ratification. The desire for ratification, however, hinges on the nature of truth. We will not seek ratification, nor endorse FOUNDATIONALISM, nor pursue epistemology, unless we conceive of truth in one particular way. More importantly, we will not understand Rorty's rejection of epistemology until we understand his relationship to truth.

Haack does not – her critique of Rorty's approach to truth fails to draw out the subtleties of his position. For that reason, chapter two seeks to redress this imbalance by providing a rehabilitated reading of "truth" in the Rortian perspective. To do so, I marry Rorty's discussion of truth in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* with his later work on the subject. That way, we are afforded a fully-developed perspective that avoids the type of reading offered by Haack.

Ultimately, we find that Rorty's position seeks to differentiate two ways of understanding the word "truth". (He refers to these as two different "senses" of the word.) The first half of chapter two is therefore dedicated to understanding the two senses and their consequences. The nature of those two senses and our ability to separate them becomes crucial to the Rortian project. Haack, at least, denies the possibility of distinct senses of the word "true". In her reading, Rorty can only be understood as advocating an anti-realism about truth, and such a reading is fatal to his broader position. The second half of chapter two is therefore committed to denying such a charge and endorsing Rorty's preference for one of the senses in our truth talk. Two potential objections to Rorty's approach to truth – which I call the overextension objection and the suitability objection – then help us to better understand how that position can be seamlessly adopted into our current practices.

What I hope will emerge in place of Haack's interpretation of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is a rehabilitated Rortian vision that is preferable to the epistemological alternatives – including Haack's own, foundherentism. That vision, stripped of some of Rorty's most strident vocabulary, is not at all as destructive to inquiry as Haack would have us believe. Instead, the survival of *an* epistemological project in the wake of Rortian neo-pragmatism is signal enough that a role for the study of knowledge remains, even if we find that epistemology was never quite what we thought it was.

Chapter One

Susan Haack's rejection of Rortian neo-pragmatism

What sort of thing is it that should be burdened with the task of blocking scepticism, thus doing the job we had always hoped epistemology would do?[10]

Rorty

---

[10] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 288.

Introduction

In this chapter, I open an investigation on the skirmish between two valiant but incommensurable visions of philosophy. I first introduce the anti-epistemological, radical vision of Richard Rorty. Next, I bring forth Susan Haack's central objection to that vision. Third, I discuss Haack's alternative, and take the opportunity to draw out the core disagreement between the two figures. Full exploration of that point of contention – the disagreement over ratification – requires a discussion of two competing conceptions of truth, which comprises chapter two.

Richard Rorty's opposition to epistemology has attracted criticism from fellow pragmatists and non-pragmatists in equal parts. Among his pragmatist critics, Susan Haack has argued that Rorty's is a pragmatism undeserving of the name: that it is a 'vulgar pragmatism'.[11] Haack holds that Rorty mischaracterises the epistemological landscape as a choice between two extremes, fails to provide a compelling argument against the epistemological tradition, and proposes an alternative to epistemology that is guilty of both relativism and cynicism. Rortian neo-pragmatism is in turn 'an unedifying prospect'.[12] As such, Haack's view is that the image of pragmatism presented in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* distorts the ideas of James and Peirce by pressing them into the service of an extreme and unrecognizable anti-realism. Instead, Haack argues, the superior and more faithful pragmatist response to epistemology is her own, 'foundherentism',[13] which combines elements of foundationalist and coherentist theories of truth.

---

[11] Susan Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology* (Cambridge, USA;Oxford, UK;: Blackwell, 1993), 182.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 4.

So, Haack's critique of Rortian neo-pragmatism is designed to clear the ground for her own answer to the problems of epistemology. Her hope is that by removing Rorty's position as a legitimate option, foundherentism will be the last philosophy standing. We should note that in doing so, Haack opts to depict Rorty's position as *unappealing* rather than *incoherent*.[14] We are invited to side with foundherentism because Rortian neo-pragmatism, in Haack's view, fails to dismantle, and then pales in comparison to, the epistemological tradition it seeks to replace. Writing against both Rorty and the philosopher Stephen Stich, Haack notes that her objection is intended to

> show that neither has any good arguments against epistemology; and that, since Rorty's 'edifying' philosophy masks a cynicism which would undermine not only epistemology, but all forms of inquiry…the poverty of these revolutionaries' post-epistemological utopias indicates just how indispensable epistemology really is.[15]

Hence, Haack's

> major theme is that neither Rorty nor Stich has any good arguments that the familiar epistemological projects are misconceived. A secondary theme [is] that…the 'edifying' philosophy into which Rorty wants the exepistemologist to put his energies masks a cynicism which would undermine not only epistemology, not only 'systematic' philosophy, but inquiry generally.[16]

---

[14] Haack's choice is a consequence of a crucial matter in this debate. Haack and Rorty philosophers apparently agree that neither of these competing pictures of epistemology has a unique claim to internal coherency. Instead, they simply comprise competing internally coherent modes of understanding this concept.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

This chapter looks in detail at these charges. They are informative to Rorty's readers, friend and foe, for the way in which they are emblematic of a widespread discomfort with both his conclusions and methodology. As a fellow pragmatist, Haack is positioned closer to Rorty than most of the philosophical community, and yet, even in her reading, Rorty is an extremist who has lost sight of common sense. Though this debate is internal to pragmatism, these are objections that might have come from across the philosophical spectrum.

The aim of this chapter, then, is to unearth the source of this localised conflict and in turn learn something about two contrasting approaches to the project of epistemology. In doing so, the chapter will address Haack's criticisms seriatim, and diagnose each of the causes of her disagreement. In some cases, those diagnoses will reveal immature and confused Rortian positions that invite misunderstanding and confusion. But the larger, unifying theme will be that Haack's reading of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is intermittently either uncharitable to, or wholly divergent from, the text. Her commitment to the epistemological tradition means that Haack is unable or unwilling to read Rorty's critique in the spirit it demands. This uncharitable interpretation, I suspect, is emblematic of the widespread critical response to Rorty's neo-pragmatism.

This chapter has three key phases. First, I sketch the anti-epistemological project found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Second, I discuss Haack's major criticism of it – that Rorty's invocation of Sellars and Quine fails to defeat the core of epistemology, which Haack calls "FOUNDATIONALISM". I tentatively decide in favour of Haack, but it is a pyrrhic victory for epistemology. The third phase of the chapter introduces Haack's own epistemology, foundherentism, and raises real doubts about its ability to ensure FOUNDATIONALISM.

Doing so requires ratification, which I find to be out of reach of foundherentism. FOUNDATIONALISM finds itself on shaky ground.

1. Rortian Neo-Pragmatism

Rorty sees philosophy as a failed attempt to answer the suite of questions provoked by one particular conception of knowledge. That conception of knowledge has a history that starts with Plato, is aided by Descartes and Kant, and ends with philosophy today; the series of canonical problems around which no consensus has emerged known as *epistemology*. On this picture, the philosophical tradition as we know it is the result of the way in which we view knowledge. But Rorty thinks that rather than fundamental to our thinking, philosophy's current conception of knowledge is optional, and happily so. The questions provoked by this conception are intractable and fruitless; we would be better not to have been led to ask them at all.

The conception Rorty is talking about is the conception of knowledge as *accurate representation*. It is the view that we achieve knowledge when our minds comprise an unclouded "mirror of nature". Related concepts like Truth, Reality, and Objectivity are also needed for this way of understanding our relationship to the world. They are required to make sense of the gulf between ideas or sentences on one hand, and the external world on the other. "Knowledge", as understood by the epistemologist, is our attempt to span this gulf – it is supposed to describe a state in which an accurate internal mental reproduction of an external world is achieved. Once we have achieved that state, and once we can describe the conditions under which that state occurs, we will have unearthed foundations on which to build inquiry. Together, Rorty argues, this suite of concepts comprises epistemology; the defining mark of modern philosophy. This is the thinking by which philosophy comes to be understood as a search for foundations

and certainty – an attempt to find firm ground for the relationship between our beliefs and the world.

The aim of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is to convince us that we can go without such a conception of knowledge and, in turn, such a conception of philosophy. Indeed, in the introduction to that book, Rorty signals his intention to

> undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical view", in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations", and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant.[17]

Rorty thinks we can, and should, think about these issues in a different manner, and forego what the Western philosophical tradition has taken to be its central pursuit. Because philosophy is distinguished by its search for foundations – for its epistemological project – going without this conception will require doing away with the notion of philosophy as a discipline distinct from other fields of inquiry. Philosophy will be continuous with poetry and anthropology.

The motivation for such a radical departure finds its root in the perceived failure of the epistemological tradition. That tradition, to Rorty's mind, can list among its accomplishments a proliferation of philosophical papers and scholarly debate, but not, crucially, any advancement of practical consequence. As Alan Malachowski has put it, Rorty's view is that the traditional concerns of philosophy 'are pragmatically unfruitful, tend to lead to stalemate situations and depend, in any case, on hopeless, vainglorious 'representational' assumptions.'[18]

---

[17] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 7.
[18] Alan R. Malachowski, *Richard Rorty* (Chesham: Acumen, 2002), 38.

After all, the position of the epistemologist is unenviable; she is tasked with giving an account of the preconditions of knowledge which both aligns with our practices and, ideally, blocks the sceptic. No consensus has emerged in the literature to suggest those criteria have been, or can be, met. Instead, Rorty takes the failure of the epistemological programme to demonstrate progress *by its own standards* to be reason enough to seek a new way.

But the real targets of Rorty's negative project are the "vainglorious representational assumptions" Malachowski has in mind. Arguments of this variety are not limited to worries about the paltry profits of epistemological practice: they comprise a concerted effort to destabilise the structure on which the project is built. Indeed, as we will see, a whole chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is devoted to detailing the ways in which the ideas of two 20th century philosophers, Sellars and Quine, ought to erode our confidence in some of the hard dualisms of philosophy. Those dualisms, Rorty insists, are exactly the distinctions epistemology needs to prop itself up. Once our faith in that traditional structure has been undermined, we will cease to have faith in philosophy writ large, conceived of the programme through which foundations are sought. We will be encouraged to look elsewhere for guidance on such matters; to try new methods when approaching issues like "knowledge", "truth", and "reality".

Rorty's method for circumventing epistemology is epistemological behaviourism, or, in more familiar terminology, pragmatism.[19] Pragmatism of the Rortian variety is supposed to quell the sceptical fears and epistemological urges that take primacy of place in modern philosophy. It is characterised by a handling of philosophical questions with an ear to their practical ramifications. The epistemological behaviourist will not think it does much good to ask

---

[19] Rorty came to embrace this terminology, and as Huw Price and David Macarthur have shown, he is an archetypal practitioner. Huw Price and David Macarthur, "Pragmatism, Quasi-Realism, and the Global Challenge," in *New Pragmatists*, ed. C. J. Misak (Oxford University Press, 2007), 95-97.

questions the answers for which transcend our practices. He will take the view that such non-pragmatic queries are hardly worth talking about. Instead, he will recommend that we examine our actual practices of testimony, belief, and justification. Only on such terms, he insists, will we get any payoff from philosophy. The important point here is that epistemological behaviourism is a methodological approach and not itself a theory of knowledge. It is a way of relating to the questions at hand. As Michael Williams rightly notes,

> As an epistemological behaviorist, [Rorty] examines human thought and knowledge from a public, third-person standpoint, treating language as communicative and knowledge as the result of argument and discussion. Differences lacking practical import have no theoretical significance either.[20]

The result, as we will see, is Rorty's commitment to the claim that 'we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation.'[21] This view comes from the thought that we can never escape our linguistic practices, nor achieve the transcendent perspective required to measure our beliefs against the world. Instead, Rorty thinks we should see knowledge as a matter of "conversation" and not, as he puts it, "confrontation". We should see justification as interpersonal and holistic rather than asocial and atomistic. And we should see philosophy as a project which has nothing do with the quest for certainty and everything to do with the quest for finding ever more articulate ways for describing and manipulating our experiences.

---

[20] Michael Williams, "Introduction," in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, ed. Richard Rorty (Woodstock; Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[21] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 170.

If Rorty is right, then we will do better to pack up the epistemological project than to continue to pursue the same tired questions of philosophy. We will be motivated to change direction both by the tradition's failures and by the promise of a new, robust way of relating to knowledge. The result is a path that claims to bypass scepticism and return knowledge to the interpersonal and to the functional, leaving the search for epistemic foundations alone.

2. Haack: Rorty has no good arguments against the tradition

This view calls for a radical re-conception of the project of philosophy. But Susan Haack thinks the view premature: she thinks Rorty has failed to successfully undermine the tradition he seeks to replace. In opening that claim, Haack repeats an accusation common to many critics of Rorty: that his neo-pragmatism relies upon a false binary. This amounts to a complaint that Rorty is too ready to rid philosophy of epistemology; that his rhetoric extends beyond his reach; that there are less-destructive possibilities at hand. This, I claim, is the quintessential critical reaction to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Haack suggests as much in her exegesis of Rorty's position:

> [Rorty's call to replace *confrontation* with *conversation*] bears on its face the characteristic stamp of Rorty's This-or-Nothingism: *either* we accept this particular composite, a certain conception of the role of philosophy within culture, of the role of epistemology within philosophy, of the role of 'foundations' within the structure of knowledge, this 'neo-Kantian consensus', *or* we jettison the whole lot and take 'carrying on the conversation' as our highest aspiration.[22]

---

[22] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 183.

As we will see, Haack's foundherentism is supposed to provide a moderate third way between these radical positions. Denying the most demanding varieties of epistemological realism will not force us, Haack suggests, to abandon the project at large. But Haack thinks that Rorty fails even to dismantle the most extreme epistemological position. This criticism amounts to a claim that Rorty 'has no good arguments against the legitimacy of epistemology', and that accordingly, he has no argument against foundherentism.[23] The negative, destructive project of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* fails to clear the ground for its positive, constructive ambition.

According to Haack, Rorty's negative argument is founded on the view that, in combination, Sellars' assault on the Myth of the Given and Quine's assault on the analytic/synthetic divide are enough to necessitate rejection of the epistemological tradition.[24] But for Haack, this dual assault pulls up short. Rorty never successfully makes the leap from demonstrating that our epistemological tradition is *optional* to demonstrating that it is *misconceived*. Haack's realist preferences remain on the table, and for avoiding the vices of relativism and cynicism, she says, they ought to remain the default.

To make this argument, Haack seeks to disambiguate the terminology of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Doing so, she hopes, will make it easier to see that Rorty never delivers a final blow to the epistemological tradition. The target here is the word "foundationalism", which, Haack says, is used by Rorty without an ear to three distinct meanings. For the sake of consistency, I reproduce here Haack's method for distinguishing the three in her own words:

---

[23] Ibid., 189.

[24] See W. V. Quine, "Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 1 (1951); Wilfrid S. Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1956).

a) (experientialist) foundationalism: theory of justification distinguishing basic beliefs, held to be justified, independently of the support of any other beliefs, by experience, and derived beliefs, held to be justified by the support of basic beliefs [i.e., which postulates basic beliefs justified by experience as the foundations of knowledge];

b) *foundationalism*: conception of epistemology as an a priori discipline – of the explication of criteria of justification as an analytic enterprise, of their ratification as requiring a priori proof of their truth-indicativeness [i.e., which regards a priori epistemology as founding *science*];

c) FOUNDATIONALISM: thesis that criteria of justification are not purely conventional but stand in need of objective grounding, being satisfactory only if truth-indicative [i.e, which takes criteria of justification to be founded by their relation to truth].[25]

What this disambiguation suggests is that 'it is on FOUNDATIONALISM, not *foundationalism* or foundationalism, that the legitimacy of epistemology depends.'[26] Haack's aim is to demonstrate that, though Sellars and Quine repudiate a) foundationalism and b) *foundationalism*, Rorty's target is, in fact, c) FOUNDATIONALISM, which neither Sellars nor Quine threaten. As such, Haack hopes to show that a FOUNDATIONALIST epistemology might be neither foundationalist (if our criteria of justification are coherentist or foundherentist) nor *foundationalist* (if our criteria of justification are revealed a posteriori). Instead, defending FOUNDATIONALISM allows Haack to maintain a representationalist picture of knowledge. This explains why she thinks Rorty too hasty in ridding himself of all epistemology – a "moderate" theory can do away with epistemology's ancillary claims while retaining its FOUNDATIONALIST core. Indeed, she says, a foundherentist theory of knowledge achieves exactly that.

---

[25] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 186. This typographical mode of disambiguation would not have been my first preference.
[26] Ibid.

One further terminological note. As we will explore in the following chapter, we must understand FOUNDATIONALISM in terms of an epistemological realism about truth. Only on these grounds can we read the concept as something which Haack wants to retain and Rorty wants to be rid of. This is because our reading of the terms in Haack's definition of FOUNDATIONALISM will determine our understanding of the concept. "Truth", "objective", and "grounding" are, after all, exactly the words at the heart of this debate. Haack's definition of FOUNDATIONALISM will be uncontroversial unless these terms read from the perspective of the epistemologist.

2.1   Rorty's view of Sellars and Quine

Before we can see in detail how Haack's disambiguation of "foundationalism" is designed to neuter the combined threat of Sellars and Quine, we should first explore how Rorty hopes these two thinkers will erode our confidence in epistemology. For Rorty, Sellars and Quine are simply the most recent in a line of ingenious, rebellious thinkers that sought to undermine philosophy's dominant presuppositions. Since Kant, philosophers as various as Nietzsche, James, Bergson, and Dewey have delegitimised the conception of philosophy as a project in search of something apodictic in character. But in the second half of the 20th century, it was Sellars and Quine who were driven to press back against the core beliefs of the tradition, which were then being expressed through the mode of analytic philosophy. The unique move of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* upon its release in 1979 was to take these two 'heretical followers of Russell'[27] and to suggest that together they were even more dangerous to the orthodox conception of philosophy than had hitherto been realised. Rorty's central move was to claim that 'these two challenges

---

[27] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 167.

were challenges to the very idea of a "theory of knowledge," and thus to philosophy itself, conceived of as a discipline which centres around such a theory.'[28] The central claim is that the very notion of a "theory of knowledge", the very epistemological tradition, is predicated on the twin pillars of the Myth of the Given and the analytic/synthetic divide. Without these presuppositions, Rorty says, there is no way to ground epistemology as a specifically "philosophical" discipline. This, he says,

> …is equivalent to saying that if we do not have the distinction between what is "given" and what is "added by the mind," or that between the "contingent" (because influenced by what is given) and the "necessary (because entirely "within" the mind and under its control), then we will not know what would count as a "rational reconstruction" of our knowledge. We will not know what epistemology's goal or method could be.[29]

Further, Rorty adds, neither Sellars nor Quine themselves realised the damage their combined work would cause to epistemology because neither was willing to embrace both views simultaneously. Instead,

> [e]ach of the two men tends to make continual, unofficial, tacit, heuristic use of the distinction which the other has transcended. It is as if analytic philosophy could not be written without at least one of the two great Kantian distinctions, and as if neither Quine nor Sellars were willing to cut the last links which bind them to Russell, Carnap, and "logic as the essence of philosophy."[30]

---

[28] Ibid., 169.
[29] Ibid., 168, 69.
[30] Ibid., 171.

The crucial point, however, is that Rorty believes that Quine and Sellars are united not solely by their simultaneous assault on the tradition, but in a shared

> commitment to the thesis that justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice… Quine and Sellars invoke the same argument, one which bears equally against the given-versus-nongiven and the necessary-versus-contingent distinctions. The crucial premise of this argument is that *we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation.*[31]

The image Rorty draws for us is of two philosophers who, by coming at the analytic tradition from a holistic and behaviourist understanding of truth and justification, were led to threaten the coherency of that tradition. Without the distinctions that each philosopher dissolves, there is nothing left for the epistemological tradition to be based upon.

2.2 Haack on Sellars and Quine

Haack's disambiguation therefore serves as a crucial contribution to the discussion. It opens the possibility of a post-analytic epistemology – a way of being representationalist about knowledge and realist about truth without relying on either the analytic/synthetic divide or a conception of the Given. In this way, epistemology survives with its realist, representationalist, core intact and sheds the extraneous trappings of the tradition.

---

[31] Ibid., 170. My emphasis.

Remember, Haack thinks that neither Sellars nor Quine nor their powers combined do anything to threaten the legitimacy of the epistemological tradition. That is because she reads Russell's two heretical followers not as together challenging FOUNDATIONALISM, but only foundationalism (Sellars) and *foundationalism* (Quine). Rorty thinks FOUNDATIONALISM requires both a distinction between the given and the postulated (Sellars) and a distinction between the analytic and the synthetic (Quine). Haack thinks that FOUNDATIONALISM can do without both, and, in fact, does so. Her claim that Rorty has "no good arguments against the legitimacy of epistemology" therefore amounts to the claim that Rorty has no good arguments against FOUNDATIONALISM.

Because Haack thinks FOUNDATIONALISM is immune from the Sellars/Quine dual assault, she takes the impact of Sellars and Quine to be significantly more modest than Rorty does:

> The appeal to Sellars' critique of the given… is relevant to foundationalism; the appeal to Quine's critique of analyticity, to *foundationalism*; and only Rorty's remarks about the unintelligibility of truth-as-mirroring to FOUNDATIONALISM.

Now, I think Haack is right in the strict sense that one can be a FOUNDATIONALIST and not a *foundationalist* or foundationalist. It is not clear how the works of Sellars and Quine could by themselves threaten an *a posteriori*, post-analytic, but fundamentally *representationalist* picture of epistemology. That position is not incoherent. But as we will see in the following section, the victory is short-lived – FOUNDATIONALISM will come to be criticised on its own terms. And more immediately, by insisting on FOUNDATIONALISM, Haack downplays the significance of the denial of *foundationalism* and foundationalism. Even if FOUNDATIONALISM remains, Sellars and Quine have eroded two central tenets of the epistemological tradition. To be a

FOUNDATIONALIST but not a *foundationalist* or a foundationalist is nonetheless to have an epistemology that radically diverges from that of the tradition.

Let's review the consequences of Haack's position. In the first case, Haack agrees with Rorty that Sellars' critique of the given rules out foundationalism – that is, theories of knowledge that postulate the existence of basic beliefs. Sellars demonstrated that to be "given" or "basic", a belief must be both epistemically independent (that is, known without recourse to other beliefs) and epistemically efficacious (that is, capable of supporting the epistemic status of other beliefs). But, as Sellars demonstrated, no known cognitive state is a candidate for both criteria. For Haack, this is of little concern – she thinks that her own theory, foundherentism, is not a foundationalism. Indeed, foundherentism is designed to accommodate exactly the types of criticisms Sellars proposed. But the assault on foundationalism is enough to dissolve one of the underlying hopes of the tradition – that we might establish apodictic grounds for our knowledge. As we will see in the next section, for all Haack's talk of "objective grounding", proof of "truth-indication" will be impossible without a foundationalist epistemology.

In the second case, Haack again agrees – this time with Quine's assault on the analytic/synthetic divide. But she thinks that assault neither necessary nor sufficient to dismiss *foundationalism*, the conception of epistemology as an a priori discipline. It is not necessary, she says, because the falsity of *foundationalism* follows from the repudiation of the synthetic a priori alone (because, Haack says, any ratification of criteria will require synthetic assumptions.) And it is not sufficient because the repudiation of analyticity does not necessitate the repudiation of the a priori – the synthetic a priori remains. For our purposes, the point is moot - Haack is willing to accept that epistemology is not an a priori, analytic, discipline.

Haack is unworried by epistemology's non-a priori, non-analytic nature, but the point is not trivial. To cede this point is to cede one of Rorty's most controversial claims – that philosophy is continuous with other disciplines. Whatever claim philosophy had to call itself a unique realm of inquiry will have been eroded. But Haack remains sanguine. She notes, rightly, that the dissolution of the border between philosophy and science does not cause us to deny that there is a difference of degree between the two. I don't intend to arbitrate this dispute here, except to suggest that once the categorical distinction disintegrates, the degree of difference in some sense becomes trivial. The inclusion of philosophy to the spectrum of synthetic inquiry is enough to wonder just how different it is from the genres of biology, philosophy, chemistry, and poetry.

All the same, Haack is right to diagnose the core disagreement between herself and Rorty as the disagreement over FOUNDATIONALISM. But as we will see in the following section, one cannot be a FOUNDATIONALIST, nor have their FOUNDATIONALISM confirmed, in anything like the way the epistemological tradition promised. To be an epistemologist after Sellars and Quine is to adhere to representationalism as a matter of faith. For the resources for such a person to ground or establish the veracity of FOUNDATIONALISM will have been stripped; all that will remain is the intuitive force of the concept.

3. Haack's alternative: FOUNDATIONALISM, Foundherentism, Ratification

So far, I have said that Haack's disambiguation of "foundationalism" successfully distinguishes the core of epistemology from its *foundationalist* and foundationalist characteristics, and opens the possibility of a non-analytic, non-foundationalist approach that preserves the realist core of

epistemology. The rest of the chapter considers the plausibility of such an approach by using Haack's alternative, foundherentism, as an example.

Haack's attitude is that a realist and FOUNDATIONALIST epistemology is not only the incumbent but the default view. Positions to the contrary are not merely unedifying but untenable – they endanger inquiry. To reiterate, she defends c), the 'thesis that criteria of justification are not purely conventional but stand in need of objective grounding, being satisfactory only if truth-indicative',[32] while happily denying that a) basic beliefs form the foundations of knowledge, and b) epistemology is an a priori discipline. She chooses not to cast off the final bowline. One reason Haack is motivated to defend FOUNDATIONALISM is that she can name two epistemological theories that reject (a) and (b), but embrace (c). Those options are coherentism and foundherentism. Both positions, she thinks, demand that criteria of justification be founded by, and grounded in, a relation to truth without requiring a) basic beliefs or b) analyticity.

Haack rejects coherentism in favour of foundherentism because coherentism 'cannot allow the relevance of experience to justification.'[33] It provides no assurance that our beliefs are, to use Haack's word, "anchored" in the world. (As we'll explore in the next chapter, Rorty declines the coherentist position for his own anti-FOUNDATIONALIST reasons.) But foundherentism, too, has FOUNDATIONALIST, epistemological, critics. They argue that foundherentism never makes good on its promise to provide a third way for epistemology. It cannot be properly novel; it can never be more than a variation of either coherentism or foundationalism.

---

[32] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 186.
[33] "Double-Aspect Foundherentism: A New Theory of Empirical Justification," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 1 (1993): 113.

These FOUNDATIONALIST criticisms remain internal to epistemology. More pertinent to our purposes is the trouble that causes Rorty to reject foundationalism, coherentism, and foundherentism at the same time. For the question at hand is not how to form an appropriate epistemological theory of justification, but whether it is appropriate to do so. The trouble for Haack is that ensuring FOUNDATIONALISM requires providing *ratification*, i.e. making plausible the claim that epistemological criteria of justification really do, after all, point us in the right direction. In Haack's terms, foundherentism must give adequate reassurance that those criteria are "truth-indicative". That promise, the Rortian worries, is a bridge too far.

The rest of this chapter is devoted, first, to explicating her theory of knowledge, foundherentism, and, second, to showing that that theory cannot make plausible its FOUNDATIONALIST presuppositions. That involves glossing the problems of foundherentism that are internal to epistemology and investigating the meta-epistemological question of ratification – the final hurdle that epistemology cannot seem to clear.

3.1   Foundherentism

In foundherentism, Haack claims to have made a radical breakthrough in epistemology. Her theory purports to achieve what no other epistemology has managed: a plausible account of how our beliefs might be justified in such a way as to ensure that they accurately represent the world. And as a theory developed inside of the epistemological tradition, i.e., faithful to FOUNDATIONALISM, the ambition of foundherentism is no less than the provision of the necessary and sufficient conditions for our criteria of justification, where justification is understood as ensuring the correct relationship between our beliefs and the world. It aims to

provide not only justification but also *ratification* – the assurance that our criteria of justification direct us to "the truth".

It is critical for Haack that foundherentism achieves this goal. As she notes, anti-epistemological projects, are

> encouraged by the conviction that the traditional problems have not been resolved either by foundationalism or by coherentism. I share that conviction. The pessimistic conclusion, however, is obviously too hasty if the traditionally rival theories do not exhaust the options.[34]

So, the failures of foundationalism and coherentism to provide ratifiable criteria of justification provide the motivation for foundherentism. In Haack's mind, the foundherentist project is crucial if the traditional problems of epistemology are to be resolved. Neither foundationalism nor coherentism will do the job alone – Haack's view is that they might have more success together.

Foundherentism is a portmanteau of (empirical) foundationalism and coherentism. Accordingly, it takes justification to be a combination of the two, such that a belief is justified by a combination of experience and mutually-supportive other beliefs, but never experience or other beliefs alone. Indeed, the reason foundherentism is not a coherentism is that it demands that justified beliefs be supported at least in part by experience; beliefs that get their support solely from other beliefs are considered unjustified. Conversely, the reason foundherentism is not a foundationalism, Haack claims, is that it does not require that any beliefs be supported solely by experience. Foundherentism, 'does not require that any beliefs be justified exclusively

---

[34] Ibid., 113, 14.

by experiential C-evidence, nor, *a fortiori*, that all other justified beliefs be justified by the support of such beliefs.'[35]

Haack uses an analogy of a crossword puzzle to demonstrate her theory in action. The notion is that justification is gradational rather than binary and grows alongside the satisfaction of factors like a) how well my belief fits the evidence and my other beliefs, b) how justified those other beliefs are, and c) how well the evidence accounts for, or discounts, all the other explanatory beliefs that could arise. In a crossword puzzle, similar factors arise: we wonder i) how well our answer fits the clues and the other filled-in words, ii) how sure we are of those other filled-in words, and iii) how much of the puzzle has already been completed; how close we are to being finished; i.e., maximally justified.

The result is a theory that purports to provide the epistemological security of empirical foundationalism (the assurance that our beliefs are latching, appropriately, onto the world itself) and the comfort of coherentism (the relief that we will not be asked to explain the infallibility of basic beliefs.) But if the suspicions of Lawrence Bonjour and Peter Tramel are right, then what foundherentism gives us is not a theory that sits *between* foundationalism and coherentism, but one that at best sits at the weakest end of foundationalism. Both Bonjour and Tramel claim that if foundherentism is to avoid the charge of coherentism, it must commit to a form of foundationalism; there is no space between the two to occupy. The coherentist Paul Thargard agrees with this final point – but instead he goes the other way and subsumes foundherentism within coherentism.[36] For the sake of brevity, I'll limit my attention to fragility of the

---

[35] Ibid., 123.
[36] Paul Thagard, *Coherence in Thought and Action* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 44.

foundherentist/feeble foundationalist border. Enough to say that foundherentism is attacked from both sides.[37]

The foundationalist worry was first given voice by Bonjour in his 1997 review of *Evidence and Inquiry*:

> The more or less standard conception of weak foundationalism, after all, is one in which basic beliefs have some relatively weak initial degree of justification, which is then enhanced by something like coherence to a level sufficient for knowledge.[38]

Such weaker forms of foundationalism are nonetheless forms of foundationalism. Following Haack and Tramel, I'll call them *feeble* (they reserve "weak" for a separate discussion). Non-feeble empirical foundationalisms take beliefs to be basic when they are justified and owe all their justification to experience. Feeble foundationalisms take beliefs to be basic when they are justified and owe some – but not all – justification to experience. The partial justification sourced from other beliefs reinforces the justification sourced from experience. The key point is that strong foundationalisms preclude the possibility that basic beliefs can be justified by other beliefs, while feeble foundationalisms allow that possibility. They are nonetheless united in the claim that there *are* basic beliefs and that those beliefs owe (at least some of) their justification to non-beliefs.[39]

---

[37] Haack recently responded to this climate in unambiguous terms: "[S]ome of those who tried to shoehorn me into some more familiar category—perhaps resentful of my trespassing on what they took to be their turf— probably, consciously or otherwise, had an agenda: namely, to put paid to the idea that there was anything really new or important in my epistemological work. So on the present occasion, the first thing I need to do is make it unmistakably clear, once and for all, that *foundherentism is not a form of foundationalism*." From Julia F. Göhner, Eva-Maria Jung, and SpringerLink, *Susan Haack: Reintegrating Philosophy*, 1st 2016. ed., vol. 2 (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 159.

[38] Laurence Bonjour, "Haack on Justification and Experience," *Synthese* 112, no. 1 (1997): 16-17.
[39] A detailed and exhaustive account of the commonalties between feeble and strong foundationalism can be found in Peter Tramel, "Haack's Foundherentism Is a Foundationalism," ibid.160, no. 2 (2008).

To Tramel, foundherentism is just one such feeble foundationalism. Haack thinks that foundherentism's emphasis on the role of mutually-supportive beliefs in justification puts it beyond the scope of foundationalism. But Tramel thinks that Haack must embrace foundationalism if she is to avoid coherentism. The dispute comes down to one point: to ensure that foundherentism is not a coherentism, Haack denies that coherence alone is enough to count as justification, and for Tramel, this move necessitates a distinction between derived and basic beliefs. In his words, Haack's view 'entails that if there are any justified beliefs then there are some beliefs that possess justification that they do not owe to any other beliefs; and thus it entails the feeble foundationalist basic/derived belief distinction.'[40] Put another way, if coherence with other beliefs does not alone count for justification, then beliefs must be otherwise justified. And if they are otherwise justified, then they are a form of feeble foundationalism. For as Bonjour has objected, weaker forms of foundationalism are already on board with the view that basic beliefs can be made more justified by the proliferation of other mutually-coherent beliefs. Foundherentism appears to have given us a novel feeble foundationalism, but not a new brand of epistemology altogether.

Haack's most powerful counterpoint to this objection is also that which makes foundherentism most plausible: she holds that foundherentism dissolves the dualism of basic and derived beliefs. Feeble foundationalism provides us with a picture of a few tentative initial beliefs that become increasingly justified as a web of derived beliefs is spun around them. Foundherentism, on the other hand, provides a picture in which no beliefs are fully basic and no beliefs are fully derived – rather they support each other on an interconnected platform. Tramel thinks that allowing beliefs to be justified by non-beliefs presupposes a basic/derived distinction – but this would

---

[40] Ibid., 223.

follow only if other beliefs could possibly be derived from them. Because foundherentism rules out the notion of purely derived beliefs, it also rules out the notion of basic beliefs – for if all beliefs are basic, then none are.[41] Foundherentism claims that all our beliefs are supported by both experience and coherence, and that any belief lacking support from either is unjustified. This holistic way of thinking allows us to see foundherentism as avoiding the foundationalist trap after all, for no beliefs remain which we can comfortably call wholly basic.

Haack is right – the basic/derived distinction doesn't come into play, and foundherentism is not a foundationalism is the classical sense. But a deeper point can yet be extricated from Bonjour and Tramel's worry. While it may indeed follow that the absence of derived beliefs makes all beliefs basic, the dissolution of the distinction does not also dissolve what it is about basic beliefs that worried us originally. Those worries will continue to apply. Take an example by analogy - imagine we are empirical foundationalists. Now, imagine we took the strongest form of foundationalism (for which basic beliefs are justified wholly by experience) and then claimed, with Haack, that there were no justified derived beliefs. Our basic/derived distinction would dissolve, certainly, and we would be left with a narrow, select group of remaining justified beliefs. But the dissolution of the basic/derived dualism would not make our commitment to the remaining basic beliefs any less "foundationalist" in the relevant sense. We would encounter the same problems now as we might have before we dissolved the basic/derived distinction – we must still turn and face the sceptic, we must still explain how non-beliefs can be reasons for beliefs, we must still answer to Sellars' assault on the Myth of the Given, and so forth. The standard critical response to strong foundationalism, after all, is to undermine confidence in

---

[41] This is the distinction on which Haack insists in her response to Bonjour's criticisms in Susan Haack, "Reply to Bonjour," ibid.112, no. 1 (1997).

the infallibility of basic beliefs. But the dissolution of the basic/derived distinction does nothing to redress the salience of that complaint.

Analogously, foundherentism may dissolve the basic/derived distinction, but it must nonetheless face many of the same challenges of feeble foundationalisms. Only instead of demanding that experience help justify *some* of our justified beliefs (as in feeble foundationalism), foundherentism demands that experience play a hand in all of them. It generalises the phenomenon of feeble foundationalism, in which a few tentative beliefs are reinforced by experience, such that all beliefs take that status. Subsequently, to the extent that we have concerns about the role of experience in feeble foundationalism, we will have equal concern about the role of experience in foundherentism.

This, I think, is a description Haack will readily accept. And whether foundherentism escapes the charge of being a mere variation of feeble foundationalism or not, the theory comprises a welcome contribution to the field. Indeed, there is little in the theory itself that Rorty would take exception to. For Haack's work does provide an anti-foundationalist and anti-*foundationalist* account (that is, a kind of taxonomy) of how humans develop networks of belief. It is only her further insistence that we understand these networks as representative, as truth-indicative, that directly contradicts the arguments found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Between Rorty and Haack, the question that matters most is: What reason do we have to call a theory of knowledge *ratified*?

3.2   Ratification

Haack is insistent that ratification is integral to a successful epistemology. Ratification is the

task of ensuring that criteria of justification are truth-indicative. Haack is committed to the view that a theory of justification is inadequate if 'the criteria it offers are such that no connection can be made between a belief's being justified, by those criteria, and the likelihood that things are as it says.'[42] After all, she thinks, 'the goal of inquiry is substantial, illuminating truth; the concept of justification is specifically focused on security, on the likelihood of beliefs being true…truth-indicative is what criteria of justification need to be to be good.'[43] Foundherentism must therefore deliver on the promise of ratification – it must show us how a holistic mix of coherence and empiricism could ensure that we are in fact saying the right things, that our theories are progressing towards the truth. If it does not, we will have no way of knowing if our criteria of justification are good. I have agreed with Haack that the core of this meta-epistemological debate is FOUNDATIONALISM. Now I will say: the crux of the debate over FOUNDATIONALISM is ratification.

Foundherentism promises that the more our experiences confirm our beliefs, and the more such beliefs we have, the more our belief set will come to accurately reflect the world. The underlying claim is that a growing and self-reinforcing network of beliefs backed by experience will be enough to provide us with ratification. But for this to hold, Haack needs to further explain how we might evaluate the truth-indicativeness of the beliefs we have. She needs to show that these foundherentist criteria of justification are in fact truth-indicative. They must cause us to represent the world accurately. The challenge for Haack, as we will see, is her commitment to ratification in the face of her rejection of the notion of an Archimedean point. Lacking the ability to get outside our practices and check, objectively, whether they are ratified, she must establish the plausibility of ratification from "inside" inquiry.

---

[42] *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 204.
[43] Ibid., 203.

An awareness of this challenge means Haack does not believe she will able to give us anything like a "proof" of ratification. Instead, Haack thinks there are 'limits, not only to what [she] can do, but to what can be done, in this direction.'[44] This modest appraisal is to the credit of her theory – any higher bar would certainly be unreachable. Though she is a FOUNDATIONALIST, Haack at least recognises Rorty's point that the ambition of conclusively demonstrating ratification was the true victim of Sellars and Quine. As Rorty has written,

> if we do not have the distinction between what is "given" and what is "added by the mind," or that between the "contingent" (because influenced by what is given) and the "necessary (because entirely "within" the mind and under its control), then we will not know what would count as a "rational reconstruction" of our knowledge.[45]

Rather, Haack promises

> …only to give reasons for thinking that, if any truth-indication is possible for us, the foundherentist criteria are truth-indicative; reasons, furthermore, which are not conclusive, nor comprehensive, nor, since they depend on our theories about the world and ourselves, fully secure.[46]

The qualification, "if any truth-indication is possible for us", moves the goalposts in range of Haack's kicking tee. What might have been an argument to the effect that foundherentist criteria are indeed truth-indicative has been transmuted into an argument to the effect that foundherentism is a better candidate than foundationalism or coherentism. In consequence, all

---

[44] Ibid., 209.
[45] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 168, 69.
[46] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 205.

her arguments in favour of the ratification of foundherentism are directed to fellow epistemologists: philosophers who already accept that ratification is plausible, if not conclusively demonstrable. But for our purposes, ratification is just what is in question. The reasons in favour of ratification that Haack gives to her fellow epistemologists must therefore be the grist to our mill – she gives no others. This section surveys those reasons and raises doubts about how comforting those suggestions can be.

Haack's reassurances that foundherentism provides ratification are twofold. The first approach comes "from above" – it appeals to an imagined, ideal position of knowledge. This mode of thinking argues that an occasion of "COMPLETE" justification, as she calls it, would represent a decisive indication of truth, and that the hypothetical existence of that occasion is enough to reassure us of ratification.[47] The second approach comes "from below" – it abandons the notion of a COMPLETE theory and instead seeks to map degrees of justification to grades of truth-indicativeness.

A terminological note: Haack's capitalisation of "COMPLETE" signifies a privileged point on the scale of justification. It is distinct from mere "complete" justification, which refers 'to a context-dependent area somewhere vaguely in the upper range of the scale of justification.'[48] COMPLETE justification instead requires nothing less than evidence that is 'conclusive and maximally comprehensive'.[49] A belief that is COMPLETELY justified 'would have to be optimally supported by experience and all other relevant propositions, themselves optimally supported by experience and all other relevant propositions…. etc.'[50] COMPLETE justification represents, I take it, the best case of justification.

---

[47] Ibid., 213. The representation of "COMPLETE" in capitals is Haack's choice.
[48] Ibid., 88.
[49] Ibid., 89.
[50] Ibid., 214.

Approaches of the first variety – "from above" – rely upon conceptions of truth like Peirce's: truth as the ultimate, if hypothetical, theory. This thinking takes truth to be the convergence of thought on an ideal theory capable of withstanding all scrutiny. It's not important to this view that no one currently possesses such a theory – instead, the hypothetical ultimate theory is invoked to bring us within reach of "truth' by equating the best-case scenario of inquiry to it. Arriving at such an ideal theory would therefore would signal the *end* of inquiry, and the hypothetical possibility of this event is intended to bolster our confidence in the concept of ratification. Haack's central claim here is that the beliefs of someone who is COMPLETELY justified would also belong to hypothetical ideal theory. And, subsequently, if both Haack and Peirce are right, and achieving COMPLETE justification provides us with the best theory we are capable of, then we will have a decisive indication of truth. This approach suggests that if justification is gradational, and if COMPLETE justification ensures truth-indication, then we will be motivated to seek ever higher degrees of justification in the pursuit of this final, decisive moment.

This view aligns closely with what I take to be the prevailing standard scientistic conception of empirical inquiry. By describing a theoretical instance in which justification decisively indicates truth, Haack seeks to make plausible the thought that justification generally provides truth-indication. This picture is seductive but illusory. The approach fails to settle worries about the concept of decisive truth-indication and instead re-raises fears about the divide between justification and truth.

To see these difficulties in full colour, let's return to Haack's crossword example. As Haack herself realises, her crossword analogy isn't much help on the issue of ratification, 'since there is no analogue of the possibility of checking my solution against the one published in the next day's paper.'[51] That would require, as various philosophers have put it, a "god's eye view", or an Archimedean point – a possibility that both Rorty and Haack reject. So, to align our analogy, imagine that this afternoon the newspaper is sold off, shut down, and tomorrow's crossword answers remain forever inaccessible.

Remember, Haack's Peircean move defines truth as the hypothetical ideal theory, and seeks to describe an occasion of decisive truth-indication. In the crossword analogy, our answers will be COMPLETELY justified once all the clues have been answered and filled in and all our tentatively "solved" words fit together. Foundherentism's two yardsticks of justification, experience (crossword clues) and explanatory integration (other tentatively "solved" words), allow us to finish the puzzle and provide us with the confidence that we have done so correctly. Doing so COMPLETELY should give us a set of answers that mirror those in the hypothetical ideal theory.

Before I discuss this Peircean approach in more detail, let's apply the crossword analogy to a more strictly-realist position on truth. As Haack recognises, and any experienced puzzler will know, there is no replacement for checking the solution. For even when our answers do fit all the clues and all the squares, we can never preclude the fear that we have made an error. In consequence, we can easily imagine a COMPLETELY justified theory that is false. Until we check the answer, we will not have a decisive indication that we are correct – no amount of justification can preclude the possibility of fallibility. The consequence is a gap between the best

---

[51] Ibid.

case of justification and truth itself, and that gap makes the notion of justification being truth-indicative useless. This, crucially, is why Haack relies upon a Peircean conception of truth. A strongly-realist conception equates truth to the answers in tomorrow's paper – lacking access to the answers, Haack's Peircean move shifts truth to the hypothetical ideal solution of the puzzle. It is moved in reach of COMPLETE justification.

So, the "from above" approach is designed to 'relate COMPLETE justification to decisive indication of the truth'[52]. And at first glance, the Peircean approach to "truth-indication" appears sufficiently pragmatic about truth to ward off Rortian concerns. But this is illusory. Instead, Rorty's pragmatist worries are shifted away from the gap between justification and truth and towards the possibility of "COMPLETE justification". The problem with "truth" is replicated at the level of justification.

The problem stems from the indistinguishability of (i) theories that are true and (ii) theories we take to be true, but are false: we don't know how recognise the moment of COMPLETE justification. This worry is born, once again, from our inability to get outside of our justificatory practices and check from the outside that they are "truth-indicative". Specifically, the fear is that, mired as we are *in medias res*, we lack the ability to know when what we say is COMPLETELY justified, or part of the hypothetical ideal theory, or "true", *even when it is*. It is not clear that we could tell a COMPLETELY justified belief set from an incompletely justified set, because to be COMPLETELY justified is to have no evidence left to ponder. To know we are COMPLETELY justified would require knowing that we had taken on all the evidence there is, and that would require discounting the possibility of new evidence. So here is a second disanalogy with the crossword puzzle – the world does not provide us with a discrete list of

---

[52] Ibid., 213.

clues. Instead, experiences are developed in succession and without end, and the notion of COMPLETE justification requires that we gather all the evidence. Knowing that we are so justified therefore requires something we can never provide – the knowledge that the future does not hold disconfirming evidence. Without the ability to recognise the end of inquiry, we will be unable to discount the possibility of contradictory evidence yet to be discovered. We will lack even the ability to recognise the moment in which we do in fact achieve that best case of justification.

This point shows the difference between possessing a theory that accurately represents reality and knowing that we possess a theory that accurately represents reality: a difference that should be most appreciated by pragmatists, but is not appreciated by Haack. COMPLETE justification, after all, was designed to make plausible a hypothetical moment of decisive truth indication. But the notion of COMPLETE justification will only have value if we can recognise an instance in which we possess it. For if we are fated to find indistinguishable moments of COMPLETE justification and moments of incomplete justification that we take to be complete, we will not know that inquiry has ended. In Rorty's words, 'Peirce's idea of 'the end of inquiry' might make sense if we could detect an asymptomatic convergence in inquiry, but such convergence seems a local and short-term phenomenon.'[53] We cannot, and so the "from above" approach will fail. Our instance of "decisive truth-indication" will not indicate much to us at all, for incomplete moments of justification will seem equally as "indicative" as the COMPLETE theory. Haack has not provided us with a method of distinguishing theories that are considered "COMPLETE" *because they haven't been disconfirmed lately* from theories that are *actually* COMPLETE.

---

[53] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest LePore (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986), 157.

Haack indicates that she is sensitive to, or at least aware of, difficulties associated with the notion of a hypothetical ideal theory. So, to reinforce the "from above" approach, Haack provides a strategy for bypassing those concerns. She suggests that even if it is not appropriate to equate the hypothetical ideal theory to truth, or, even if there is not one hypothetical ideal theory, then COMPLETE justification is nonetheless our best bet. Because it represents the best case of justification, COMPLETE justification is all we have as a goal of inquiry. 'Unless COMPLETE justification is truth-indicative,' Haack adds, 'inquiry would be futile… if we are to inquire at all, we can only proceed in the hope that our best *is* good enough.'[54]

This last claim is crucial to the entire debate, and comprises something of a keystone in Haack's thinking by making the notion of COMPLETE justification integral to the defence of FOUNDATIONALISM. Haack's intention is to defend the "from above" strategy whether the Peircean theory of truth is correct or not. Her claim is that even where the hypothetical ideal theory is removed or found to be defunct, the "from above" approach ensures truth-indication. That's because she thinks COMPLETE justification can, and must, ensure ratification all by itself. Her argument is that because COMPLETE justification is the best-case scenario for inquiry, if it is not an instance of truth-indication, then nothing is. The consequence of such a state, says Haack, is that inquiry would be futile.

This conclusion is supposed to imply that something has gone wrong with our distrust of COMPLETE justification. Haack takes the view that inquiry cannot be futile to be a foundational premise. Because inquiry cannot be futile, she thinks, truth-indication must be possible. And if truth-indication is possible, then COMPLETE justification must provide truth-

---

[54] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 215.

indication. If COMPLETE justification provides truth-indication, then COMPLETE justification must provide a decisive moment of ratification.

The problem with this argument is not that COMPLETE justification can never indicate truth. The problem with the argument is that it still gives us no confidence that we could ever achieve, or know when we have achieved, COMPLETE justification. The problem is that these notions are useless to us. Rorty does not want to argue that our best-case scenario of justification would fail to indicate truth – he wants to argue that this thought tells us nothing. Because we have no use for the notion of COMPLETE justification, we have no use for the notion of truth-indication.

But Haack has argued that the failure of truth-indication requires that inquiry is futile. In fact, the lynchpin premise of her argument is that inquiry *cannot* be "futile". By using this thought to insist that justification is truth-indicative, the premise becomes the foundational claim of Haackian epistemology. So everything depends on what she means by "futile". If, by "futile", Haack means "incapable of letting us know, decisively, that we are representing the world correctly", then she is right. Inquiry *is* futile. For I have been arguing that the dream of COMPLETE justification – foundherentist, coherentist, or foundationalist – never was capable of letting us know such a thing. Understood this way, Haack's defence of ratification amounts to the claim that an inability to show that our practices of justification direct us toward the truth would make the notion of representationalism useless. And this, of course, is Rorty's point. Rather than a defence of FOUNDATIONALISM, Haack's "from above" approach reads more like a capitulation. Representationalism demands ratification, which is defended by the claim that ratification is integral to representationalism. The Rortian will say that by invoking this variation of the "from above" approach, Haack is hoist by her own petard. Read this way,

the "from above" argument shows why we should do away with concepts like "truth-indication".

But Haack seems to mean something else, something more, by "futile". She seems to think that inquiry will be "futile" in the sense that we may as well stop inquiring. The reason is that Haack cannot conceive of inquiry without truth-indication, ratification, and FOUNDATIONALISM. Remember, Haack insists that 'truth-indicative is what criteria of justification need to be to be good.'[55] "Good", here, means not just "ideal" or "handy", or "useful", but something more serious. Without truth-indication, Haack thinks that inquiry has no purpose whatsoever.

This fear − that our beliefs *must* represent the world in some way for there to be in purpose in forming, changing, and challenging beliefs is, to my mind, a worry without a cause. For as Rorty noted in his own reply to Haack, 'inquiry − fitting whatever comes down the pike into our previous experience and beliefs as best we can − is something nobody can help doing.'[56] Whether or not we should care if something is "futile" should depend on whether or not there exists any alternative to the matter. But more importantly, giving up the dream of representing the world correctly does not at all suggest that inquiry bears no fruit. For even once we stop talking in terms of "truth-indication", it is clear that some theories are better than others, and that many newer theories are better than the ones they replaced.

But the claim that they are "better" is not the claim they "more accurately reflect the intrinsic nature of reality" − it is the claim that our lives are improved, by our own judgement, when we use those theories as rules of action. A cursory glance at the progress of civilisation tell us that

---

[55] Ibid., 203.
[56] Richard Rorty, "Response to Haack," in *Rorty & Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995).

inquiry – independent of our ability to measure its results against the world – is the opposite of futile. Adopting this new way of speaking doesn't cause us to give up on thought and experimentation, it just helps us realise that concepts like "representing the world" don't add to our process of inquiry. Lacking an appropriate opportunity to employ them, these standards don't us much good. And so the failure to provide a decisive instance of ratification merely suggests that we understand civilisation's progress in terms of *progress measured against our own standards*. Haack's fear that Rortian neo-epistemology will lead to a cynical devaluation of inquiry, that the failure of ratification will be "futile", is unearned – the view that we have no use for the concept of FOUNDATIONALISM does not entail the view that we have no use for asking and answering questions about our world. One wonders what it might be like to stop.

This last point throws into relief one of those most common complaints made about Rortian neo-pragmatism – that it leaves us with a cynical and relativistic picture of inquiry. As well as thinking that Rorty's position implies the futility of inquiry, Haack thinks that it has the effect of making all beliefs equal. Without a realist standard of truth against which to measure our theories, we have no reason for thinking that one set of epistemic standards are better than any other. Rorty is forced, Haack says, to 'treat the epistemic standards of any and every epistemic community as on a par.'[57] Where Rorty does avoid this sort of relativism, Haack thinks, he slides into tribalism – a dogmatic insistence in the standards of his own community.

The Rortian response, in some sense, swallows this pill. Rorty will agree, happily, that he is forced to 'treat the epistemic standards of any and every epistemic community as on a par'[58], if '"epistemic standards" means what [Haack] calls "standards as evidence"'.[59] That's because

---

[57] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 136.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Rorty, "Response to Haack," 153.

Rorty agrees with Haack that standards of evidence do not – cannot – differ between communities. But Rorty will deny the charge if by "epistemic standards" Haack means "background beliefs". In this case, he will treat the epistemic standards of his own community better than others. Haack wants to call this tribalism – but that seems a touch critical. After all, by making this claim Rorty is merely saying that he will agree with those he agrees with more than those he disagrees with. And that just seems like modest way of describing his beliefs. Such a thought does not require him to insist that he is representing the world better than the others. It merely requires him to say that he prefers his beliefs; that they seem to produce better results and more happily describe his experiences better than the beliefs of those that disagree. When Haack agrees with her like-minded community, she adds to these endorsements the claim that her friends are representing the world better than the others. But in the absence of a successful product of ratification, this new claim opens up a world of problems. Not least does it smack of a kind of dogma: the claim also makes room for the epistemological sceptic. As Rorty concluded in his own reply to Haack,

> I cannot see the difference Haack sees between prizing these communities for their greater like-mindedness and prizing them for their greater truth-indicativeness (any more than I see the difference between praising myself for having achieved a really tight fit between all my beliefs and experiences and praising myself for being a good truth-indicator). The two compliments seem to me not to differ in their pragmatic implication, except that the latter gives the epistemological skeptic (the person who asks, "How do you *know* they are truth-indicative?" an opening that the former does not. That seems to me an excellent reason for restricting ourselves to the former compliment.[60]

---

[60] Ibid.

While the "from above" approach fails, and while (by Haack's own admission) the failure of COMPLETE justification to provide ratification is fatal to the notion of decisive truth-indication, it is worth investigating her second approach. That second approach, "from below", emphasises degrees of justification, and seeks to link those matters of degree to degrees of truth-indication. This approach comes to the aid of the first approach exactly where it was found vulnerable: in the worry that we might never be, (or never know when we are), COMPLETELY justified. Where the concept of "COMPLETE justification" requires comprehensive, decisive evidence, the "from below" approach holds that some theories, being more comprehensively justified than others, are *more likely* to be truth-indicative. Haack's central claim is that as evidence grows more comprehensive, it increasingly excludes opposing theories. Specifically, she holds, 'if E is conclusive it leaves no room for alternatives to p, and if it is favourable but not conclusive it is the more supportive the less room it leaves for alternatives to p.'[61] Put simply, the more justified we become, Haack says, the fewer alternative explanations will be at hand, and the more confident we can be that our theory achieves the truth. '[D]egree of justification,' she argues, 'looks to be as good an indication of truth as one could have.'[62]

At a first glance, the explanation gives a plausible picture of why, in truth-indicative terms, we might favour one "more comprehensive" theory over another, less comprehensive theory. Justification helps us disconfirm alternative explanations, and greater justification seems to imply a smaller likelihood of being wrong. Once again, the model is science – theories backed by more evidence are preferred to those backed by less evidence on the grounds that the

---

[61] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 82.
[62] Ibid., 217.

possibility of their fallibility has been reduced. Having ruled out fewer alternatives, the less comprehensive theory is simply less likely, in a mathematical sense, to be true.

There is something right in this model. We *do* prefer more justification to less justification. But the triviality of this revelation might suggest that something has gone wrong. Haack is relying on us taking as uncontroversial the notion of "more" justification. But on a closer look, the language of volume to tells us nothing about what makes some justification better than others. As a foundherentist, Haack thinks that beliefs supported by more of her two criteria, experience and explanatory integration, will be more truth-indicative than beliefs supported by less. But she has taken it for granted that we can sensibly compare, as if by volume, "more" or "less" experience and explanatory integration. It seems that the only way to do this is to make judgements on the relevance of some types of justification over others, and doing so requires, at the very least, a claim about the truth-indication of that justification. It might be true that there are individuals far more justified, and therefore, truth-indicative, than everyone else – the trouble is that we lack the appropriate means to recognise them. The trouble for Haack is that if degree of justification mirrors the likelihood of truth-indication, answering the latter question in the affirmative will require an account of degree of justification *outside of* its truth-indication.

The challenge is that there is no way to make sense of, or identify, "degrees" of justification without describing those degrees in terms of their truth-indication, and doing so will make Haack's defence of ratification trivial. Avoiding this trap would require some other way of "measuring" justification. But there seems only to be two ways of "measuring" degree of justification. Either we measure justification against our own justificatory practices, or we measure it against truth-indication. If we measure it against our own justificatory practices, we align with Rorty and say that justification is a social, interpersonal phenomenon. But if we

describe degree of justification in terms of truth-indication, we beg the question and in turn make a triviality of ratification. For the concept of truth-indication will have been surreptitiously carried within the notion of "better" or "more" justified. We will find ourselves insisting that degree of justification tracks truth-indication because more justified beliefs are more truth-indicative than less justified beliefs.

Let me flesh out this last point further. The concept of degree of justification begs the question because it takes "truth-indication" to not be a consequence of but a mere synonym for "comprehensiveness".[63] Haack herself argues powerfully against this style of error in her response to reliabilism:

> [R]eliabilism misrepresents the connection between justification and truth. Our criteria of justification are, indeed, what *we take to be* indications of the truth, or likely truth, of a belief. Reliabilism, however, identifies the criteria of justification with whatever *is in fact* truth-indicative, whether or not we take it to be… The effect is to trivialise the question, whether our criteria of justification are really truth-indicative: the solution of the problem of ratification is already trivially contained in the reliabilist response to the problem of explication.[64]

Haack wants to say that better justified beliefs are more likely to be true than worse justified beliefs. But if our criteria of justification are supposed to indicate truth, this is a mere truism. For those criteria of justification were chosen on their ability to indicate truth. So, to paraphrase Haack, the effect is to trivialise the question, whether our criteria of justification are really truth-

---

[63] Variations of this worry have been raised in Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism : Essays, 1972-1980 / Richard Rorty* (Minneapolis :: University of Minnesota Press, 1982)., and in Alan C. Clune, "Justification of Empirical Belief: Problems with Haack's Foundherentism," *Philosophy* 72, no. 281 (1997).
[64] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 141.

indicative: the solution of the problem of ratification is already trivially contained in Haack's notion of "degree" of justification. Haack is defending foundherentist criteria on the grounds that they are truth-indicative, and defending the notion of truth-indication on the grounds that foundherentist criteria will ensure it. The result is tautologous, and still does nothing to express the relation of truth-indication in non-circular explanatory terms.

This final fear directly expresses the motivations of Rortian neo-pragmatism. The resources provided by epistemology do not seem adequate to make the notions of *ratification* or *accurate representation* useful. Despite commendable efforts, foundherentism, like foundationalism and coherentism before it, does nothing to help us understand when or how our criteria of justification are ratified. What ratification requires is not only a plausible set of criteria of justification, but the ability to step away from, step outside, our epistemic practices. It requires us to see from an objective perspective – a God's eye view – whether those criteria are really working. These comments, in some sense, are all variations on the warnings of the sceptic. Rorty is not so much denying that criteria of justification are working as denying that it makes sense to say so. Epistemology is unable to close the gap between the things we believe, our reasons for believing them, and the world itself.

Haack's project of ratification represents a valiant attempt to make plausible the hope of accurate representation without relying on a transcendental appeal to realism, but neither the "from above" approach, which its reliance on COMPLETE justification, nor the "from below" approach, which maps degree of justification to degree of truth-indication, manage to achieve that ambition. The consequence, crucially, is that FOUNDATIONALISM is *both* optional and misconceived. Haack is mistaken in her view that Rorty is right only to claim the former – the

failure of ratification means that we are mistaken to employ epistemological notions like "truth-indication". Epistemology requires us to invoke standards that we will not be able to achieve.

3.3   FOUNDATIONALISM revisited

To review the landscape, note that to a Rortian mind the denial of FOUNDATIONALISM is nothing more than the denial of foundationalism and *foundationalism*. Denying the latter pair while embracing the former is not incoherent, but it is unhelpful – it becomes a kind of faith whose major consequence is the provision of an opening for the epistemological sceptic. Instead, once the myth of the given is dissolved and the notion of necessary truths discarded, the Rortian sees the epistemological toolbox as empty. That's because without a foundationalist or *foundationalist* conception of epistemology, it is unclear how to ground a notion like FOUNDATIONALISM. We lack the resources to do what Haack and epistemology want; to give our criteria of justification "objective grounding" through ratification.

But to a non-Rortian mind, giving up this hope will not seem realistic, let alone possible. The notion of "objective grounding" is integral to what Haack thinks we do when we engage in inquiry. This is what causes Haack to insist that inquiry without truth-indication is futile. So we should not be surprised that Haack prefers foundherentism to Rorty's wholesale rejection of the project of ratification. FOUNDATIONALISM, and, therefore, ratification, is simply central to Haack's thinking. Rejecting it would require the embrace of a radical new way of doing philosophy – an embrace of a wholly new perspective about which philosophical questions should be taken seriously.

To return to Rorty's invocation of Sellars and Quine - a more productive reading, I think, is to see Rorty not as arguing that their conclusions are simply devastating to FOUNDATIONALST epistemology, but that their shared methodology is one in which the classical arguments of epistemology do not arise. This is a way of building an appreciation for the overlapping philosophical strategies of those figures that have sought to bypass epistemology and its intractable problems. Taking Rorty in this way provides an opening for Haack to access Rorty's diametrically opposed perspective. Quine and Sellars can only be taken seriously when the unspoken premise of their arguments is embraced, and that premise, crucially, comprises a reorientation of justification away from a relation between beliefs and the world and towards a social, intersubjective, activity. Rorty commends Quine and Sellars not because they together defeat the epistemological tradition, but because they begin speaking in a way which bypasses, and refuses to engage with, it altogether. One way to put this is that their shared holism is part of a new way of approaching the traditional concerns of philosophy, and that this new way lets us think of philosophy as the rearticulation of our experiences and not, as it were, the search for the conditions of certainty, or the ratifying of justification.

The epistemological behaviourism of Rorty, Sellars, and Quine offers no ratification. It does not direct us towards "the truth". Accordingly, Haack will continue to insist, rightly, that 'the whole weight of Rorty's case against epistemology…rests on the repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM, which depends on considerations about truth.'[65] I think that Haack's inability to deliver ratification is reason enough to abandon FOUNDATIONALISM, but this divergence of methodology will ensure that no debate about ratification will convince Haack to do so. Instead, she will repeat that to be anti-FOUNDATIONALIST is to be anti-truth, relativistic, and cynical with regards to the pursuit of inquiry.

---

[65] Ibid., 188.

I said earlier in this chapter that the debate for epistemology is the debate for FOUNDATIONALISM. Next, I said that the debate for FOUNDATIONALISM comes down to the possibility of ratification. Then I said that ratification can't be achieved. Here I will say: whether we hope for ratification will hang upon our approach to truth. Haack's insistence on the centrality of truth-indication and its insurance via ratification can therefore be traced to this issue. Her fundamental resistance to Rortian neo-pragmatism stems from her conception of the matter of truth. It is what makes her insist, exasperated, that 'to believe that p is to accept p as true.'[66] To do justice to this central dispute, I devote the next chapter to articulating Rorty's divergent approach to truth and Haack's forceful critique. As it turns out, Rorty's repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM does not so much depend on his considerations about truth as his considerations about truth *comprise* his repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM. We will not find ourselves in a position in which we logically demonstrate that human knowledge has no foundations: rather, the question we will ask is 'whether it makes sense to suggest that it does – whether the idea of epistemic or moral authority having a "ground" in nature is a coherent one.'[67]

---

[66] Ibid., 192.
[67] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 178.

Chapter Two

Truth

Old ideas give away slowly, for they are more than abstract logical forms and categories.

They are habits, predispositions, deeply ingrained attitudes of aversion and preference…

We do not solve them: we get over them. Old questions are solved by disappearing…[68]

John Dewey

---

[68] John Dewey, *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought* (New York: Henry Holt, 1910), 19.

Introduction

FOUNDATIONALISM therefore hangs on our conception of truth. Whether we reject the epistemological tradition, like Rorty, or hope to preserve it, like Haack, will depend on competing interpretations of the word. Accordingly, this chapter seeks first to explicate and then assess those interpretations. The result, I hope, will be a rearticulation of Rortian pragmatism that lets us do with FOUNDATIONALISM what we did with foundationalism and *foundationalism* − leave it behind. My primary claim in this section is that Haack fundamentally misreads Rorty's position on truth. My secondary claim is that Rorty is often to blame − the discussion of truth to be found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is immature and inconsistent. To make sense of the Rortian approach to truth, we are aided by Rorty's later, mature comments on the matter − best exhibited in his book chapter 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth'.[69] Only by marrying this later work with the sympathetic reading I have been championing can we come closer to understanding how, after all, Rorty comes to reject the epistemological tradition.

This chapter seeks to make Rortian neo-pragmatism more attractive to readers like Haack by redescribing Rorty's relationship with truth. To make this possible, I want to develop a concept first found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and heavily critiqued in Haack's *Evidence and Inquiry*. In excavating this disagreement, I will expand upon Rorty's claim that there are, in fact, two senses of the word "true", and try to link that claim to his later, matured perspective. Importantly, Haack takes this claim to mean that one sense is realist and the other anti-realist, and that we should stop using the realist sense and start using the anti-realist sense. She is mistaken. By turning to his later writing, we can see that Rorty's two senses are not realist and

---

[69] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth."

anti-realist by theoretical and non-theoretical. Users of the first sense seek to provide a theory for what truth *is*, users of the second sense limit themselves to what the word *does*.

Toward the end of his career Rorty left behind the "senses" distinction and instead limited himself to talking about the "uses" of the word. The conviction undergirding this chapter is that Rorty's choice to limit himself to the bare uses of the word "true" without leaning upon the notion that it denotes some extrasocial property is simply a manner of employing his favoured, non-theoretical sense. Epistemologists employing the philosophical sense might well agree that "true" has the uses described by Rorty, but they will add that those uses stem from a designation of a relationship between language, or beliefs, and the world. The story of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is told to dissuade the reader that employing this theoretical sense bears any fruit. Instead, adopting the sense preferred by Rorty leads to a commitment to the following four tenets:

1) 'True' has no explanatory uses.

2) We understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world when we understand their causal relation with the world; our knowledge of how to apply terms such as 'about' and 'true of' is fallout from a 'naturalistic' account of linguistic behaviour.

3) There are no relations of 'being made true' which hold between beliefs and the world.

4) There is no point to debates about realism and anti-realism, for such debates presuppose the empty and misleading idea of beliefs 'being made true'.[70]

---

[70] Ibid., 154.

This chapter is intended to aid readers like Haack by providing a bridge between Rorty's "two senses of true" and the above four tenets he describes in 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth'. Together they provide are more detailed Rortian picture of truth than either can alone.

1.   The Dispute

The origin of Haack and Rorty's dispute about truth is a passage in *Mirror* in which Rorty attempts to describe dual uses for the word "good" in order to 'make plausible the suggestion that there are two senses apiece of "true" and "real" and "correct representation of reality"'.[71] His aim is to demonstrate that there are two competing senses of the word "true", and that 'most of the perplexities of epistemology come from vacillation between them'.[72] On one hand, he suggests, there is

> the homely use of "true" to mean "what you can defend against all comers"…it is [this]
>
> homely and shopworn sense of "true" which Tarski and Davidson are attending to.[73]

And on the other hand, there is:

> the specifically "philosophical" sense of…"true" which, like the Ideas of Pure Reason, [is]
>
> designed precisely to stand for the Unconditioned.[74]

It is the "homely and shopworn" sense of "true" that Rorty's epistemological behaviourism favours. The goal of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is to show that doing away with the

---

[71] *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 308.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

"philosophical" sense will let us escape the quagmire of epistemology and return us to a more natural notion of truth. By doing so we will cease to demand "ratification". Haack takes the binary between these two sense to be representative of Rorty's 'This-or-Nothingism'[75] and is uncompromising in her criticism:

> This is…a stunningly untenable dualism. We seem to be offered a choice between identifying truth with what is defensible against conversational objections, and taking it to be – well, something else, something not specified but hinted at in the allusion to Kant and to Putnam's distinction of metaphysical versus internal realism; something, anything, rather pretentious, something aspired to despite, or even because of, its inaccessibility.[76]

Her view is that Rorty has asked us to adjudicate between two vague but nonetheless extreme theories of truth – one heavily anti-realist ('what you can defend against all comers'[77]) and one strictly realist ('the specifically "philosophical" sense of … "true"' [78]), without mention of any of the intermediate, moderate positions. In turn, Haack recommends that Rorty's "homely and shopworn" truth theory be rejected in favour of a moderate theory of truth – ideally one commensurate with foundherentist ratification (like, for instance, Peirce's notion of the hypothetical ideal theory).

To demonstrate the paucity of the dualism, Haack creates her own spectrum by listing a series of intermediate truth theories (she cites Peirce's, Ramsey's, Tarski's, Wittgenstein's, Russell's, and Austin's) that are meant to fit between Rorty's binary pair.[79] For Haack, this new spectrum

---

[75] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 183.
[76] Ibid., 182.
[77] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 308.
[78] Ibid.
[79] For Haack's spectrum of available truth theories, see Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 189.
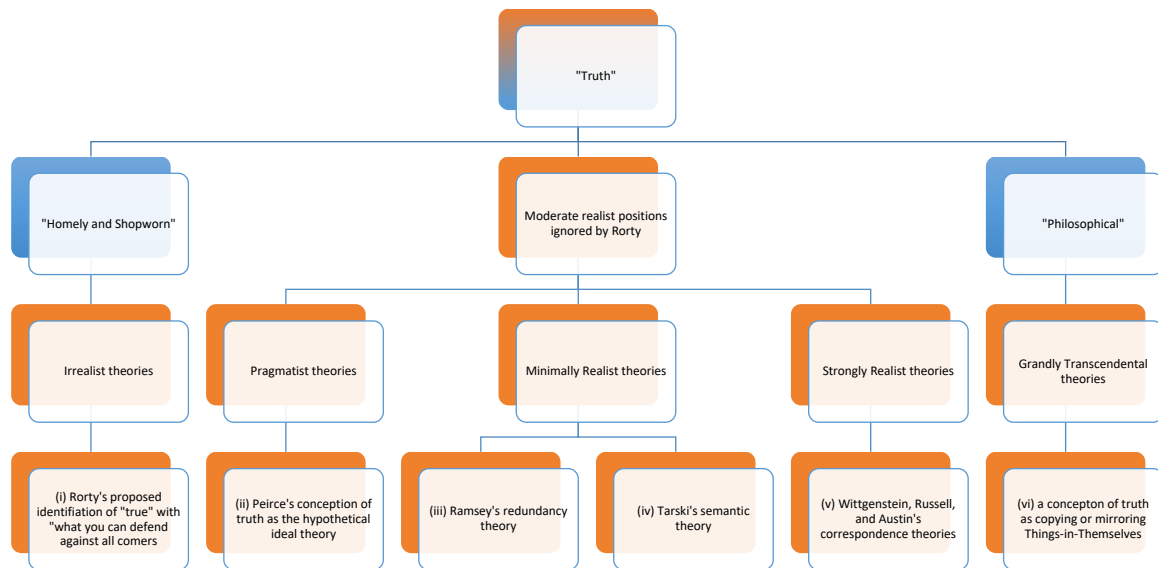
is divided into two groups – irrealist and realist. Under "irrealist" there is only 'Rorty's proposed identification of "true" with 'what you can defend against all comers.'"[80] But under "realist", there is everything else – the whole range of theories that span, in her words, "pragmatist" to "grandly transcendental". Only "realist" theories, as we will see, are plausible to Haack. As we saw in the previous chapter, her own theory of truth is of the Peircean variety. She takes truth to be identifiable with the hypothetical ideal theory that we might discover at the end of inquiry. But what all these "realist" theories have in common, Haack thinks, is a commitment to the thesis that "truth" connotes an accurate representation of reality.[81] They have at their heart a notion of correspondence and describe truth as a relation between ideas and the world. They are all, ultimately, FOUNDATIONALIST. I have represented Haack's spectrum graphically below, with her contributions in orange and her account of Rorty's binary in blue.[82]

---

[80] Ibid., 188.
[81] There is plenty of room to disagree with this characterisation – indeed, I would consider it even a stretch to call the Peircean theory of truth "realist". That debate, however, is for another time.
[82] I do not endorse any of Haack's characterisations – I merely replicate them.

Diagram 1


```
                                    "Truth"
          ┌───────────────────────────┼───────────────────────────┐
   "Homely and Shopworn"    Moderate realist positions        "Philosophical"
                                ignored by Rorty
          │         ┌──────────────┼──────────────┐              │
   Irrealist      Pragmatist    Minimally       Strongly    Grandly Transcendental
    theories       theories   Realist theories  Realist theories    theories
          │         │         ┌────┴────┐          │              │
 (i) Rorty's    (ii) Peirce's  (iii) Ramsey's  (iv) Tarski's  (v) Wittgenstein,  (vi) a concept0n
 identifiation  conception of   redundancy      semantic       Russell,          of truth as
 of "true" with truth as the    theory          theory         and Austin's      copying or
 "what you can  hypothetical                                    correspondence    mirroring
 defend against ideal theory                                   theories          Things-in-Themselves
 all comers
```

Her new spectrum, represented in the bottom rung of the diagram,

> 'enables us to struggle free of the wool Rorty is trying to pull over our eyes. Rorty hopes we will choose his first option as obviously more palatable than his second … We can, and most certainly should, decline to choose either of the options Rorty offers us.'[83]

On the picture Haack has given, Rorty has certainly created a reckless and unjustifiable binary. This depiction of Rorty's position suggests that he has ignored a century's worth of moderate epistemological realism in the hope, presumably, of leading us to choose between two radical options. And if we accept Haack's spectrum as an appropriate renovation of Rorty's binary, we will be forced to conclude with Haack that 'Rorty is relying on our being repelled by the grandly

---

[83] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 189.

transcendental instead of supplying arguments against pragmatist … or minimally realist, or strongly realist conceptions of truth.'[84] Once we have returned the intermediate positions to Rorty's binary, an irrealist position on truth loses its appeal as an alternative to the grandly transcendental. We will naturally be lead to elect a moderately realist notion of truth, and the epistemological tradition will survive.

2. Senses and Theories

I do not think that this is an accurate depiction of Rorty's position on truth. It is inaccurate simply because Rorty should not be read as providing a "theory of truth". Rather, he should be read as describing a second, hitherto unacknowledged, way of using the word. That second way, as we will see, cannot be explained in theoretical terms. My diagnosis is that Haack mistakes the register and intent of Rorty's use of the phrase 'senses of the word "true"',[85] and therefore conflates Rorty's two *senses* of "true" with two *theories* of truth. This is troubling, because the error causes the two philosophers to begin talking about different subjects. Haack reads Rorty as adjudicating on two opposing theories of truth, but Rorty takes himself to be disambiguating two common but differing uses of the word "true". He takes himself to be suggesting that one of those ways invites explanatory analysis and one of them does not. In consequence, when Haack understands Rorty's two *senses* of the word "true" to be two philosophical *theories* of the concept "truth", she reads Rorty's claim as categorically different to the way in which it is intended. The two begin to talk past each other; they are simply not speaking on the same level.[86]

---

[84] Ibid.
[85] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary.
[86] Hence, I have chosen to represent this dispute graphically – to realise the metaphor "not on the same level" in illustrated form.

To illustrate my suggestion that Haack's conflation of "sense" and "theory" causes her to speak at a different conceptual level to Rorty, let me say something about what I take those words to mean in this case. A *theory* comprises a commitment to the nature of a single subject, but a *sense* is a manner in which a word is to be understood. A sense might well differ from the word's lexical meaning – it suggests a variation on how we can take a word to be meant. (Rorty could have said "there are two *meanings* of the word 'true'…", but I suspect it was just a word like "meaning" that Rorty was trying to avoid by using the word "sense". "Meaning" suggests that a word like "true" is analysable, which, as we will see, is exactly the suggestion Rorty rejects.) In consequence, senses are not in competition the way theories are – senses refer to different subjects, rather than feature jostling interpretations of the same subject. Senses take the structure of homonyms.

To see this difference, take an analogic example from "meaning". Standard homonyms provide two distinct meanings of one term. Homonyms like "pole" (i.e. a street pole) and "pole" (i.e. Antarctica) are two different (if uncontroversial) senses of the word. Their co-existence does not cause us to debate which of the stop sign or the antipode is the *real* "pole" – it does not make sense to ask. Nonetheless, either meaning can be explained by a range of competing theories – for instance, there might be multiple theories about what defines a geographic antipode. To extend this point further, note that while two theories may well make use of the same meaning, two meanings cannot be used by the same theory. Once we know we're talking about geographic poles, we still might find plenty of competing theories as to what makes geographic

poles, "poles". But all the theories we develop about these geographic locales will make use of the same sense of the word "pole".[87]

Rorty's binary is designed to suggest that something similar happens with the word "true". But Haack has read the binary not like a homonym but as a competition between two theories for the same concept, "truth". This observation leaves us in a position where we can begin to track the divergent perspectives of the two philosophers. The consequence of Haack's misinterpretation is that, in the diagram displayed above, Rorty's binary operates only at the second level (the level of senses) but Haack's spectrum operates only at the fourth (the level of theories). Their concepts are simply not of the same kind.[88]

The purpose of Rorty's binary is to ward off exactly the type of misreading to which he is here subject. Our failure to disambiguate these two competing understandings of the word "true", Rorty says, is an ongoing source of confusion for epistemologists. For if we fail to understand senses as analogous to homonyms, we will fail to recognise that there exist divergent senses of the word "true". And if we are unable to disambiguate the word, we will fail to recognise when we use the two senses interchangeably.

It is that very confusion which causes Haack to misinterpret Rorty's claim. For Haack, there is no competing sense of the word true – there is only one sense, and many possible theories about that sense. She does not agree that 'true' behaves anything like a homonym. So, from Haack's perspective, Rorty can only be offering his own theory of truth. And if we, like Haack, read the

---

[87] In this way senses can comprise a useful way of classing, or grouping, theories. But we won't think to group our many theories about "poles" into their relevant senses, because disambiguating stop signs and antipodes has never been much trouble. "Truth" has proved a trickier subject.

[88] Therefore, Rorty never bothers (to Haack's dismay) to list the many theories that can be generated by the different senses in which we use the word "true". His picture is no more detailed than a binary because a) that binary can generate all possible theories of truth, and b) doing so is not his purpose.

binary pairs of "homely and shopworn" and "philosophical" as polar philosophical theories, then we will have no choice but to accuse Rorty of ignoring intermediate, "moderate", alternative theories. But if we read "homely and shopworn" and "philosophical" as two *senses* of the word, then we will see theories as categorically different. We will see that theories are, at best, attempts to explain certain senses, rather than senses themselves.

The difference is significant - Haack's interpretation is radically divergent from Rorty's intent. It collapses an account about two different subjects into a claim about two analyses of the same subject. But by returning Rorty's binary to its original purpose, we can see that there are two senses of the word "true" and that failing to disambiguate the senses is confusing for philosophers. The two senses are not, after all, an untenable binary, but a reconstruction of extant language usage. And by comparing this way of thinking with the one I depicted graphically, we see more easily the categorical error that causes Haack to take a (relatively) uncontroversial point about a variance in language usage to be a controversial commitment to an untenable binary. Haack's "intermediate" truth theories simply cannot fit *between* Rorty's two senses; they can only be generated *beneath* them. They can be generated by the binary by asking which theories make use of which senses of the word "truth". And Rorty's claim is exactly that a great many philosophers unknowingly make use of *both* senses in developing their theories. They unwittingly attempt to create a single theory that accounts for two different subjects. And by mistaking senses for theories, Haack's diagram fails to reflect, let alone acknowledge, this claim. Rorty's view that 'most of the perplexities of epistemology come from vacillation between' the "homely and shopworn" and the "philosophical" is ignored.[89]

---

[89] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 308.

Haack's immediate concerns with the two senses are therefore unfounded. But if my redescription of Rorty's position has been right, and indeed there are two senses of the word "true", then it will be important for us to say, in detail, what those two senses are. Even if they don't comprise an untenable binary, we are yet to learn how Rorty's two senses differ in content, or, indeed, if they do at all. But here Rorty lets us down. We have a classic example of what in the introduction I called "strident rhetoric" and "casual terminology". Let me now add to that list "under-described concepts". What, exactly, is the "homely and shopworn" sense of true? How does it differ from the "philosophical" sense? What could it ever mean for a word to be "homely", "shopworn", or "philosophical"? *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* provides too few clues to these questions, and the ambiguity of this passage is to the detriment of the text. Indeed, Rorty's failure to provide an uncomplicated disambiguation of his two senses bears much of the responsibility for the negative attention *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* has received.

To make sense of this passage, begin with Rorty's analogy between the word "good" and the word "true". Rorty hopes that his suggestions about "good" will encourage us to say the same about "true". The word "good", says Rorty, has two senses. One is a "philosophical" sense subject to G. E. Moore's naturalistic fallacy,[90] and the other is an ordinary sense which is not. Moore's naturalistic fallacy demonstrated the unbridgeable gap between "good" and whatever necessary and sufficient conditions we seek to give for it. So the philosophical sense is 'a *focus imaginarius*, an Idea of Pure Reason whose whole point is not to be identifiable with the

---

[90] G. E. Moore and Thomas Baldwin, *Principia Ethica*, vol. Rev., with pref. to the 2nd and other papers (Cambridge [England];New York, NY, USA;: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

fulfilment of any set of conditions.'[91] It is subject to Moore's naturalistic fallacy because, by definition, it remains out of reach of any set of necessary and sufficient criteria we imagine. 'Words like "good,"' Rorty says, '*once they have been handled in the way that the philosophical tradition has handled them*, acquire a sense in respect to which this is so.'[92]

But there is also a second sense, he says, in respect to which this is not so. This sense, as should be apparent, is the analogue of the "homely and shopworn" sense of truth. This is the sense of "good" that signals approval, the sense used 'to commend – to remark that something answers to some interest.'[93] The search for the necessary and sufficient conditions of this sense will also fail, but for reasons that differ to the philosophical sense. It never occurs to ask for an analysis of the homely sense of "good" because it is not clear what explanatory use this sense of the word could serve. So, where the philosophical sense evades necessary and sufficient conditions for the reasons given in Moore's naturalistic fallacy (it always remains an open question whether our conditions for "good" together comprise a satisfactory definition), the everyday sense does not evade these conditions so much as wholly lacks them. When using this homely sense, it does not make sense to ask what such conditions could be. As such,

> 'In the homely and shopworn sense, the reason why "good' is indefinable is not that we might be altogether wrong about what good men or good apples are, but simply that no interesting descriptive term has any interesting necessary and sufficient conditions. In the…philosophical sense of "good," the term is indefinable because anything we say about what is good may "logically" be quite irrelevant to what goodness is.'[94]

---

[91] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 306.
[92] Ibid. Rorty's emphasis.
[93] Ibid., 307.
[94] Ibid., 306.

To press this distinction further, I take Rorty's suggestion to be that the homely and shopworn sense of "good" lacks necessary and sufficient conditions simply because it is not a compound concept reducible to other necessary and sufficient concepts, but a linguistic tool that provides a social function. It is an interpersonal tool of affirmation and approval, and not an extra-social ethical property. The philosophical sense of "good", on the other hand, lacks necessary and sufficient conditions exactly for the opposite reason – as a philosophical evaluative ideal it cannot be broken down into non-ideal descriptive features.

One way of framing this distinction is to say that there is a purely *performative* sense of "good", one that is nothing more than a social tool of commendation, and a *descriptive* sense of "good", which suggests that there exists an intrinsic property of goodness that we recognise in our speech.[95] (Rorty, as we will see shortly, himself does not endorse the performative/descriptive distinction, but I take it as a useful entry point into our two senses.) This is like saying we sometimes use the word in a way that does not presuppose that "good" is a property, and other times in a way that does. In the first (homely and shopworn) sense, "good" is a tool that we do something with. In the second (philosophical) sense, "good" is a property independent of our social behaviours. Why, then, does Rorty call the "homely and shopworn" sense of "good" an 'interesting descriptive term'?[96] This makes it seem like even Rorty's non-philosophical sense of the word insists on ascribing a property to whatever is called "good". But this is misleading. Homely and shopworn uses of the word "good" *are* descriptive – but only to the extent that they describe the relationship of the speaker to a fact. Though they replicate the grammar of property-description, they are not descriptive in the way that the "philosophical" sense demands – they do not describe a property that is independent of social practice. The difference

---

[95] This terminology is favoured by, and better explicated in Robert Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1988).
[96] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 306.

is that things (subjects; facts; acts; etc.) that have been deemed "good" in the homely and shopworn sense achieve only the status of *having been deemed good* – not the recognition of a transcendental property of goodness.

I think this distinction between the homely and philosophical senses, along with the additional binary of performative versus descriptive characteristics, expresses something right about the duelling ways in which we use the word "good". It is plausible to me that when philosophers talk about "good" they are often doing so differently to how laypeople talk about good.[97] The philosophical talk presents "good" as an ideal property; common talk uses "good" merely to signal approval. Only the philosophical sense can be subject to theories – no one would ever think to give a theoretical explanation of the homely and shopworn sense.

2.2 "True"

So too with "true". Begin with the uncontroversial claim that there exists a sense of "true" of the "philosophical" variety – this is of course the sense defended by Haack, or targeted by Putnam's re-deployment of the naturalistic fallacy.[98] Philosophers using this sense see truth as a property to be achieved – most often by the appropriate correspondence between language, or ideas, and the world. It is exactly the use of this philosophical sense that led Putnam (like Moore with "good") to acknowledge that even the most developed epistemology will leave us unable to say what it is about our beliefs that makes them "true". This is the naturalistic fallacy analogy – we cannot ensure that anything we say about "truth" is relevant to what truth is.

---

[97] This is best expressed in the need philosophers have in talking about "the Good".
[98] See "Reference and Understanding" in Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (Boston;London;: Routledge & K. Paul, 1978), 108.

Under this picture, we will have understood "truth" in terms that make explicating the conditions of its achievement impossible.[99]

The more controversial element of Rorty's argument is the suggestion that there already exists *another* sense of the word, a sense that does not lean upon the notion that "truth" is a property caused by a relationship between sentences and non-sentences. This is the analogue of the homely, performative sense of "good" I championed earlier. I think the best evidence that such a non-philosophical variety exists is revealed by a close look at our everyday uses of the word. When we approach our ordinary language with an ear to these divergent senses of the word "true", we find that we rarely make room for the philosophical sense outside of the philosophical arena. In our most common speech, "true" isn't intended in anything like the philosophical sense; instead, it is used to do one of three things. The word is used to either *endorse* a claim, ("*p* is true!"), *caution* someone ("*p* is justified, but it might not be true"), or say something *disquotational* ("*p* is true, *iff*).[100] I'll have something to say about each of these three uses later. For now, I'll limit discussion to what Rorty calls the 'endorsing' function.[101] It is the use of "true" to commend a claim: a way of providing social endorsement of a statement.

When I use this endorsing use, I only seek to put my weight behind a claim. This "merely" performative sense is the sense I use every day, over breakfast, at the pub, on the phone to my mother.[102] I use this sense whenever someone says something that I want to affirm. But unless I'm in a philosophy classroom, I rarely use the endorsing use of "true" in the philosophical sense – doing so presupposes a standard for which I have no use. In everyday speech, the

---

[99] These philosophers are haunted, of course, by Agrippa's Trilemma.
[100] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 154.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Indeed, I find it much harder to think of instances in which I use the second "philosophical" usage – outside of philosophy classrooms.

performative, functional, social, role of the word is taken to be the important component, and the descriptive and representational role of the word does not arise.

That the word "true" has *some* performative characteristics is, I take it, uncontroversial. This thought would follow from the simple claim that words not only *describe* but *act*. They communicate perspectives, beliefs, and statements from one individual to another, and in doing so alter the relationship between those individuals. They have intersocial functionality. Austin famously helped to explicate the performative, active, intersocial elements of words.[103] He noted that words like "true" and "know" not only describe, but *act* in a way that parallels the even more explicitly performative "I promise". Such words are performative in the sense that they signal to others a commitment on behalf of the speaker – their role is normative and interpersonal. In the wake of these discoveries, few philosophers would suggest that such performative elements do not exist. After Austin, performative characteristics are just another branch of philosophy to keep in mind when studying language.

But more controversial, I think, is the claim that we can use words like "truth" in *solely* these performative terms – in a way that bypasses the philosophical and property-ascribing elements of the word. Rorty is committed to this second point. When he insists on the endorsing use of "true", he is arguing that the word can be, and is, used non-philosophically. He is not merely saying that "good" and "true" have both intersocial and philosophically descriptive characteristics – this would do no damage to epistemology. He is saying that we can employ those intersocial, performative elements without ascribing philosophical properties. These are the only conditions under which the notion of "two senses" can be understood – it would not make sense to describe two separate senses if we were incapable of separating them in practice.

---

[103] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2d ed., vol. 1955 (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1975).

As we will see, the stakes are high – the discovery of two properly distinct senses of the word "true" would clear the path for us to privilege one sense over the other. It would clear a path for us to leave behind FOUNDATIONALISM.

How might the epistemologist defend the claim that the two senses are inextricable; that they are, in fact, one sense? Earlier I suggested, with Rorty, that the philosophical sense is usually absent from our everyday talk. In response, an epistemologist might suggest that, if we asked the layperson (say, a first-year philosophy student) what he *really* meant by "*p* is true", the student would, after some thought, say something like "*p* is an accurate representation of the intrinsic nature of reality." This would be a way for the philosopher to demonstrate that any notion of two distinct senses is mistaken. It would be a way for her to demonstrate that the philosophical representational picture was always embedded in the word "true" – even when the word is merely being used to endorse something. After all, the philosopher thinks the philosophical sense is *just what the word means*: the descriptively philosophical notion is integral to the word, and the performative, interpersonal elements are incidental to, or inseparable from, the word's descriptive nature. This is akin to saying that the notion of "accurate representation" is always embedded in the concept of truth, and that every time we use the word we are, whether we like it or not, invoking a correspondence between language and world. The philosopher will say that any trouble that laypeople or first-year philosophy students have in answering her question can be resolved by slowly making explicit the student's own concepts.

But to a non-philosophical mind, a student that is asked what he means by "true" will not naturally arrive at the philosophical sense upon reflection. Instead, he is more likely to blink momentarily in confusion and then list a variety of synonyms like "right", "correct", and so forth. He would not know what more the philosopher could want. Crucially, each synonym he

provides would reflect an alternative manner of endorsing the claim *p*, but *not* a commitment to representationalism. The picture of words aligning appropriately with non-words to create a property called "truth" would not be in his head. But suppose our frustrated philosopher then pressed her student further, until he did in fact develop an appropriately "philosophical" truth theory – one that makes truth a function of the correspondence of sentences and non-sentences. (This happens occasionally: philosophy students sometimes grow into philosophers.) But this would be like asking the student to stop using one sense of the word and start using another. It would be like teaching the layperson to become a philosopher. The education of first-year philosophy students is not the excavation of what words like "truth" "really" mean, or the grasping of what states like "truth" "really" are. It is the adorning of their words with new meanings. It is the provision of their mind with new concepts. As Rorty puts it, 'the only way to get a homely and shopworn mind to grasp [the philosophical] sense is to start it off with Plato or Moore and hope that it gets the Idea.'[104]

In philosophy classrooms, it's exactly that philosophical sense of "true" that most commonly rises to the surface. Philosophy routinely takes exactly such metaphysical concepts as its subject. But outside of that sceptical environment, "true" is less likely to be used as a philosophical ideal as it is, merely, to comprise a social expression of assent, or a signal that we all agree and can't foresee ever disagreeing. This is just to say that we commonly use the word in an unambitious way that has no need for transcendental resonances. The happy consequence of this story is that it seems laypeople do indeed get on perfectly well without the "philosophical" sense of true. The two senses are, in fact, separable. So, if we take Rorty's story about the dual senses of "good" to be plausible, as I suggest we should, then we should do the same for "true". We

---

[104] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 308.

should accept that at least one of our uses of "true" can be *solely* performative – it can be a force-indicating, rather than sense-expressing, locution.

2.3   What motivates the two senses?

So far I have said that Rorty's two senses mirror the two senses of good – one is theoretical and property-ascriptive, the other non-theoretical and intersocial. The motivation for disambiguating those two senses, I suggested, is to reveal a source of confusion in epistemology. But there is a second motivation, above and beyond this diagnosis, that should now be emerging. The two senses map two distinct ways of doing philosophy. Rorty wants make the "philosophical" sense (and epistemology at large) seem optional, so that he can encourage the adoption of, and return to, the "homely and shopworn" sense. He thinks that the philosophical sense does us no good, and that it is only by leaning upon that sense that the notion of "mirroring", or "picturing", or "accurate representation", can emerge. And as we saw in the previous chapter, those concepts leave us with a gap which the epistemologist will never be able to span. Read in this way, both Haack's desire and failure to provide ratification stem from her commitment to the philosophical sense of truth. Doing away with the philosophical sense therefore gives us a happier and more natural path forward. The quagmire of ratification is left behind, and new attention is turned to the interpersonal nature of conversation and inquiry – a preference natural to pragmatists. So Rorty's two senses are there to make possible a transition from the representational, FOUNDATIONALIST thinking of Haack towards less ambitious approach that provides no opening to the sceptic. By lining the homely and shopworn sense against the sense favoured by philosophy, Rorty can redescribe the non-philosophical view as natural and default instead of radical and foreign.

To best understand this move, it helps to see Rorty's two senses as coming to the aid of Dewey's attempt to reframe the way we talk about truth. Dewey developed an account of truth along the explicitly intersocial lines discussed in the previous section. He hoped that we could do away with the philosophical baggage of epistemology and reduce truth to "warranted assertibility." This was a claim that utterances of the sort "I claim that p" were equivalent to utterances of the sort "It is true that p." But as Robert Brandom notes, Dewey's claim 'is especially liable to misinterpretation as the claim that the contents expressed by these utterances are the same.'[105] Such a misinterpretation reads Dewey as saying that the claim "I claim that p" is not only equivalent with, but identical to, the claim "It is true that p". But Dewey did not think that the two utterances were the same; rather that we should replace one with the other.[106] He was providing an alternative candidate account of truth, suggesting that truth talk that thinks of itself as ascribing a property to sentences ought to be done away with in favour of truth talk that thinks of itself as doing something *with* sentences. He was suggesting that we adopt a new sense of the word "truth".

If we read Dewey in this way, then we see Rorty's two senses as reinforcements to Dewey's replacement notion. Dewey's replacement notion, however heroic, is costly. It recommends that we make a significant change to our current linguistic practices, and makes no attempt to account for the language it seeks to replace. So when Rorty develops his two senses, he is trying to make more plausible Dewey's alternative candidate notion by suggesting that, in fact, Dewey's alternative has always existed. This thinking shifts Dewey's work from the radical claim that we must substitute our current truth talk for a novel vocabulary, to the gentler claim

---

[105] Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 78.
[106] Brandom develops this account into a detailed concept that marries the pragmatist intentions of Dewey and Rorty with the prosentential work of Grover, Camp, and Belnap in Dorothy L. Grover, Joseph L. Camp, and Nuel D. Belnap, "A Prosentential Theory of Truth," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 27, no. 2 (1975).

that we already vacillate between the two and need only drop the one that does us no good. This is why Rorty is at pains to historicize the "philosophical" sense of truth. By charging that this sense exists only because of the corrupting force of philosophy, Rorty can delegitimize the opponents of Dewey. In turn, Dewey's way of talking about truth becomes not only viable, but natural. Deciding whether Rorty is right that the "philosophical" sense exists only because of philosophy is not my task here – what matters is the legitimacy and the independence of its homely and shopworn counterpart. Rorty's two senses ease the transition that Dewey recommended – we don't have to talk about truth in a "new" way, Rorty urges, we merely need to return to our natural mode.

3. Two Objections

Rorty's "homely and shopworn" sense is therefore positioned as the natural home of "truth". The "philosophical" sense is not so much thought to be *wrong* as it is *optional* (because historical and contingent). And because the "philosophical" sense forces us to choose between committing to the Scylla of scepticism or the Charybdis of an epistemology subject to Putnam's naturalistic fallacy, the pragmatist is right to bypass the transcendental resonances of this second sense and focus his attention on the "homely and shopworn" sense. Truth becomes something about which no explanatory theories can be given. We will learn more by asking the question "what uses does the word 'true' have for us?" than by asking the question "what is the nature of the property of truth?" Rorty's method of epistemological behaviourism recommends that we strip philosophy of these grand questions about properties and correspondence and focus, instead, on what the concept does for us in our day to day lives.

Brandom calls pragmatist moves of this sort "phenomenalist" for the way they emphasise the act of taking-as-true over the property-ascription of truth. In "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk", Brandom gives us reason to be wary of this movement – pragmatist moves of this ilk, he shows, are at risk of committing one of two errors.[107] First, "phenomenalist" approaches to truth are at risk of sliding into 'stereotypical pragmatism.'[108] This variety of pragmatism invites the objection that it merely recreates the error it attacks in the correspondence notion: the notion that truth can be explained as a relationship between entities. For reasons that will come apparent, I call this the *overextension objection*. Second, phenomenalist approaches are in danger of failing to account for forms of truth talk that we will not want to do without. Call this the *suitability objection*. In these sections I argue that a mature Rortian pragmatism is not a stereotypical pragmatism, and therefore escapes the overextension objection. But having survived this first wave of attack, it must yet be defended against the more general suitability objection. Happily, Rorty's newfound recognition of the three uses of "true", alongside a prosentential semantics that links those uses together, provides a full account of truth that never wanders from the homely and shopworn sense.

3.1   Overextension Objection

Stereotypical pragmatism, Brandom writes, is the 'sort of understanding of truth as a property of utility for some end, a matter of how useful, in some sense, it is to hold the belief that is a candidate for truth'.[109] It is this variation that has caused infamy for pragmatism, and this variation only that is subject to the overextension objection. If pragmatism, here understood as a broadly phenomenalist approach to truth, is characterised by a general emphasis on

---

[107] Brandom only discusses the second objection, which repudiates stereotypical pragmatism's inability to handle non-assertoric uses of "true".
[108] Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 76.
[109] Ibid.

performativity, then stereotypical pragmatism is united by a further explanatory claim about the nature of truth. Stereotypical pragmatism is central to our current purposes because it is exactly this brand of pragmatism which Haack takes Rorty to defend in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. And yet stereotypical pragmatism, as we will see, remains committed to the philosophical sense of "true". By investigating stereotypical pragmatism, we can come closer to understand Rorty's rare conception of truth, and to seeing how Haack mistakes his position.

Rorty may ultimately be responsible for his failure to distinguish himself from stereotypical pragmatism. In one example Haack draws from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Rorty identifies the "homely and shopworn" sense of truth as that which 'you can defend against all comers'.[110] This is a move that identifies truth with something like warranted assertibility in the Deweyan sense. As I noted earlier, the "homely and shopworn" sense is there to offer legitimacy to moves like Dewey's. But it is not – or should not be – there to offer a positive explanatory theory of truth. To readers committed to the philosophical sense, this example sounds like Rorty wishes to do exactly that. To those readers, identifying "true" with 'what you can defend against all comers', [111] endorses an explanatory analysis that infers from

> the view that truth cannot be defined in terms of a relation between beliefs and non-
>
> beliefs

to

> the view that truth must be defined in terms of a relation among beliefs, or persons.[112]

---

[110] Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 30th anniversary, 308.
[111] Ibid.
[112] "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 153.

As the later Rorty would himself note in his response to Davidson's ' 113

> The error is to assume that "true" needs a definition, and then to infer from the fact that it
>
> cannot be defined in terms of a relation between beliefs and non-beliefs to the view that it
>
> must be defined in terms of a relation among beliefs.[114]

The consequence of this remark is that uncharitable readings of Deweyan assertibilism, Jamesean pragmatism, and Davidsonian coherence theories each produce forms of stereotypical pragmatism. For, read as variants on the philosophical sense, such theories would each seek to identify truth with some positive theory – to give truth a definition. And it is for this reason, too, that Rorty rejects the type of coherence theory that Haack enlists as a defender of FOUNDATIONALISM. For a FOUNDATIONALIST coherence theory would have to simultaneously expect that 'criteria of justification are not purely conventional but stand in need of objective grounding, being satisfactory only if truth-indicative'[115] *and* that coherence alone could ensure such a thing. But as Haack herself notes, there are any number of coherent belief sets that will not be "truth-indicative" in the way she hopes. As it happens, the Davidson Rorty has in mind is not the Davidson Haack has in mind – Rorty's Davidson dodges this trap because he 'does not want to see truth identified with anything.'[116]

Like James, Dewey, and Davidson, Rorty's homely and shopworn sense (which was supposed to show that we can drop attempts to provide an explanatory analysis of truth) is often

---

[113] Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[114] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 153.
[115] Haack, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, 134. This typographical mode of disambiguation would not have been my first preference.
[116] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 152.

mistakenly read as providing just such an analysis.[117] This in turn makes it look as though the debate between the "homely" sense and the "philosophical" sense is the debate between realism about truth and anti-realism about truth. It is not. But by appearing to provide an analysis of truth, Rorty is easily read as committing to anti-realism. And by failing to appreciate Rorty's two senses of "true", Haack is forced to conceive of the issue in exactly this manner (in Haack's vernacular the debate is phrased in the terms "irrealism" and "realism").[118] What Rorty should have made more explicit is that anti-realism about truth entails taking a stand in the philosophical debate about the nature of truth. That is a debate on which Rorty wants to remain silent – he thinks it useless to take part. And the homely and shopworn use allows us to get by without ever staking a claim in that debate. By appropriating the account of truth found in the mature, later Rorty, and by providing a rehabilitated and charitable reading of his two senses of truth, we can begin to see how the realism/anti-realism debate never enters the picture. We can see that Rortian neo-pragmatism does not slide into a stereotypical pragmatism.

To see the phenomenon of what I am calling "overextension" in full light, take James as an archetype of stereotypical pragmatism. James cannot, by my reading, escape the fact that he was occasionally guilty of this type of overextension.[119] Rather than limit himself to the purely negative point that truth could not be used as an explanatory notion, James was at times lead to infer that truth therefore must mean something like "justifiable" or "expedient". As the later Rorty notes, this is a lot like the thinking that our inability to understand the notion of

---

[117] It should be of no wonder, then, that Haack finds it difficult to conceive of a non-philosophical sense of "true" – Rorty himself blurs the distinction.

[118] See Diagram 1.

[119] Brandom, I should note, disagrees. To his mind, 'James's intent was, rather, to mark off 'true', like 'good', as a term whose use involves the taking up of a nondescriptive stance, the undertaking of a commitment that has eventual significance for action.' Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 78.

correspondence suggests that "truth" must be explained by assertibility or internal coherence. The problem is familiar – we have no way of understanding how the relation between our beliefs one hand and "justification", "expedience", or "coherence" on the other can explain, or suitably account for, the notion we have called "truth". We are revisited by Putnam's naturalistic fallacy argument. Pragmatists err into stereotypical pragmatism when they seek to say positive things about the nature of truth. They overextend. Better to follow Davidson, who, on the mature Rorty's reading, 'does not want to view sentences as "made true" by anything.'[120]

In avoiding this error, we are returned a much clearer picture of Rorty's two senses. It shows us that the difference between "philosophical" and "homely and shopworn" is not the difference between realism and anti-realism. Instead, realism and anti-realism alike are dependent on the philosophical sense of the word. The philosophical sense demands that truth be a property identifiable with a set of necessary and sufficient conditions; that it be positively recognised with the satisfaction of some theory. Committed as they are to the philosophical sense, anti-realist epistemologies are as equally committed to this approach as the realist theories of the tradition. Even the most strident anti-realist position fails to escape the picture of the mirror of nature. But if we make use of the "homely and shopworn" sense we will not expect the word to have any of these explanatory uses – we will not think that truth can be explicated in such terms, realist or not. We will be more interested in discussing how truth functions than what truth is. The difference between the two senses is the difference between a way of using the word "truth" that invites analysis and a way in which it does not.

This distinction allows us to better understand the conflict between Haack and Rorty. For Haack's framing of the debate as between anti-realism and realism is indicative of the fact that

---

[120] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 152.

we will have use for *only* this distinction if we are committed to the philosophical sense of the word. For those committed to the "philosophical" sense, the argument can only be phrased in a debate between realism and irrealism. From the philosophical perspective, there is no other fact of the matter.

3.2   Suitability Objection

Rortian pragmatism escapes the dangers of stereotypical pragmatism by refusing to give an explanatory description of "truth". But it remains to be seen if Rortian pragmatism suitably accounts for the full colour of our truth talk. Any account of truth, after all, ought to accommodate our many uses of the word. If our approach to truth means sheering from our vocabulary common uses of "true", we will have to ask if they are uses we are willing to give up. I call this the suitability objection.

In this section I will use the criterion of suitability, and Rorty's delayed awareness of it, to address one of the core difficulties with a Rortian approach to truth. The difficulty is this: we need to see how Rorty allows for the full variety of truth talk without leaning upon the philosophical sense of "true". Rorty's answer to the suitability objection is to recognise three uses of the word and assert that those uses comprise all we need to know about truth. But this assertion will not, by itself, offset the epistemologist's "realist intuitions" – Rorty does not explain how these uses can survive once the philosophical approach to truth is abandoned. Earlier I gave reason for thinking that the "endorsing" use of true can be used non-philosophically. But to rid philosophy of epistemology, we must do the same for the full variety of "true". The "cautionary" and "disquotational" uses, in particular, pose a challenge. Rorty's

work insists *that* these uses can operate non-philosophically – in this section I seek to explain *how* they can operate non-philosophically.

To see how the suitability objection is supposed to work, note how it applies to stereotypical pragmatism. Remember, stereotypical pragmatism takes the pragmatic force – the performative, non-descriptive elements – of a truth claim to contain all we need to know about "truth". It strips "truth" of all property-ascribing characteristics. But the suitability objection shows us that such a move is inadequate if it is to account for, or even suitably replace, our current linguistic practices.[121] There are too many uses of "true" which do not quite fit into stereotypical pragmatism's anti-realist picture. Even if we opt, as Dewey did, to call our pragmatism a replacement notion, we are left with a poor replacement. Stereotypical pragmatism rules out too many important pieces of language – we require a more substantial notion of truth to get by.

This is to say that there exist uses of the word "true" which we will not want to lose from our vocabulary, but which cannot be accounted for by a pragmatism interested only in the pragmatic force of the word. In particular, we cannot reduce our truth talk to its purely pragmatic effects because, as Brandom observed, 'not all uses of "…is true" have assertoric or judgemental force.'[122] There are uses of true beyond the endorsing use, "p is true". (And because "true" is here analogous with "good", we might note that Geach has made a similar complaint about performative accounts of "good". [123] problem is that we need to be able to embed words like "true" and "good" into sentences as conditionals, and doing so seems to demand more than a purely performative account. As Brandom notes, '[i]f the essence of

---

[121] This is the shore on which Dewey's replacement notion has foundered.
[122] Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 83.
[123] P. T. Geach, "Ascriptivism," *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 2 (1960).

calling something good consisted in doing something rather than saying something, then it should not be possible to say things like "if that is good, then one ought to do it."' 124Stereotypical pragmatism provides an account of "p is true", but says nothing about the sentence "if p is true, then q."Stereotypical pragmatism provides an account of "p is true", but says nothing about the sentence "if p is true, then q."

Now, the Rortian approach to truth is not an example of stereotypical pragmatism, but it must nonetheless meet the criteria of suitability if it is to replace philosophical approaches to truth talk. By the end of his career, Rorty was fully cognisant of this worry. His later remarks on truth are designed in such a way as to respond to the suitability concern directly. His earlier comments, however, are silent on the issue. The trouble with the earlier work is that the Rortian alternative to the "philosophical" sense of truth is heavily underdescribed. Because *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is primarily focussed on establishing the possibility of an alternative to traditional epistemology, little effort is made to provide detail to that alternative. The text gives no systematic account of how the "homely and shopworn" sense of truth operates in our lexicon. In consequence, it is never clear that the "homely and shopworn" sense makes room for the full spectrum of uses of the word "true". And if we discover that we need to use the word "true" in a way that demands the philosophical sense, then Rorty's dream of leaving the epistemological tradition behind will be in vain. By tying together Rorty's earlier and later approaches, we can develop a more complete response to the suitability objection than either approach delivers on its own.

So, by the time of "Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth" Rorty lists three variants of the word "true" that help to ward off the suitability objection. He thinks that, together, they tell us all we

---

124 Robert Brandom, *Rorty and His Critics*, vol. 9 (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000), 83.

need to know about the word.[125] Dissolving the traditional problematic about truth will leave us, *simply*, with the following uses:

a) an endorsing use

b) a cautionary use, in such remarks as "Your belief that S is perfectly justified, but perhaps not true"

c) A disquotational use: to say metalinguistic things of the form "S is true iff –."[126]

As I noted earlier, the endorsing use is the use that can most easily be understood in the "homely and shopworn" sense. It is assertoric in grammar and judgemental in nature. It is easily read in a non-philosophical fashion because this use exists for no further purpose than putting our weight behind a claim, and this, crucially, is a social act. It is the endorsing use that is at play when we say things like "that's true" and seek to communicate, interpersonally, that we support one claim or another. In other words, it is a performative and intersocial use that makes no philosophical demands.

More interesting for our purposes are (b) and (c). By acknowledging these uses in 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth', Rorty heads the suitability objection off at the pass – they are the uses Brandom had in mind when he raised concerns about stereotypical pragmatism's suitability. Indeed, any approach to truth that sacrifices the ability to say, "p sounds right, but it might not be true", or, "p is true *iff* q", would surely be impoverished. We simply do need to be able to caution each other in the face of universal agreement – we need to remind each other that we

---

[125] As Brandom puts it in "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 77., 'The central theoretical focus is on…our *uses* of "true", the acts and practices of taking things to be true that collectively constitute the use we make of this expression. It is then denied that there is more to the phenomenon of truth than the properties of such takings.'

[126] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 154.

might, somehow, be wrong. So, the existence of (b) and (c) poses a real problem for the stereotypical pragmatist – they are uses which a stereotypical pragmatism cannot account for.

But they also appear to pose a problem for the approach found in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – they are largely ignored by the text, and it is never made clear how they align with the homely and shopworn sense of true. Rorty thinks that dissolving the traditional problematic about truth – i.e. leaving behind the "philosophical" sense of the word – leaves the bare uses of the word. But for this to be true, we must show how the uses can operate independently of the philosophical sense. The challenge is to reconcile the cautionary and disquotational uses with the claim that we can do without a "philosophical" sense of truth. And as Rorty himself recognised, 'many people would say that the cautionary use of "true" has a further function: that of suggesting that maybe even a splendidly justified belief may not accurately represent the intrinsic nature of reality.'[127]

3.2.1.1   *Taking the cautionary use non-philosophically*

That is to say: many people take the cautionary use in the philosophical sense of the word. For the sake of clarity, I will focus here particularly on the cautionary use, and try to diagnose what about it makes realism compelling (I will have something to say about the disquotational uses later). My view is that the cautionary use, in particular, is a major source of what epistemologists call their "realist intuitions". The reason is that the use explicitly demarcates a divide between truth and consensus. Indeed, the fact that we go around saying things like "everyone agrees with your theory, but it might not be true" suggests that a) truth is a property and that b) that property is not a mere product of our practices of justification. If the property of truth is a not

---

[127] "Response to Haack," 150.

achieved via justification, then the sole remaining candidate – a relationship with the nature of reality – takes primacy of place. We are lead to a realist theory of truth because it is the only approach which adequately gives content to *true* in the clause "but it might not be true".

So, the cautionary use of true demarcates a clear distinction between justification and truth, and this fact, I suggest, is a key motivator for epistemological realists. It pushes them to insist that truth is a property caused by something wholly independent of our social practices, and, therefore, that it is a concept that can only be analysed in terms of a relationship between beliefs and the world. The realist understanding of truth becomes the sole remaining explanation of our employment of the cautionary use. Indeed, the very structure of the cautionary use seems to presuppose the existence of just such a realist property – the realist will say the correspondence theory of truth is simply transparent in it. The consequence of these intuitions, of course, is that the philosophical sense of "true" may be harder to discard than Rorty has suggested. That which Rorty wants to remove from philosophy is, by the realist's reckoning, integral to at least one crucial use of the word.

As should be apparent, I think that something has gone wrong in this argument. But the power of this way of thinking is clear. As I see it, the force of the argument stems from two points. Firstly, the grammatical structure of the cautionary use of "true" seduces us into seeking to provide the conditions of the word. Secondly, the realist's argument is valid, if unsound. Realists are right to suggest that realism is the only theory suitable for the cautionary use of true. They are wrong to suppose that we need one.

Rorty argues for this last point by simply denying that we must take the cautionary use of "true" in the philosophical sense. Instead, he insists that we take the cautionary sense of true to be a

warning that a more compelling explanation, or a more satisfying theory, is just around the corner, and *not* an appeal to the intrinsic nature of reality. When someone says, "everyone agrees with your theory, but it might not be true", Rorty recommends that we take "but it might not be true" to be more like "but they might change their minds" than "but your theory might not accurately represent reality". He reduces the use to the force of the warning. In his words, 'I take this cautionary use to suggest that maybe somebody will come along with a better idea, a better epistemic community, a better form of life – thus reminding us that inquiry is not over yet, and, indeed, that we cannot imagine what it be like for it to be over.'[128]

But this explanation will not yet be plausible to realist readers. The grammatical structure of the cautionary use encourages us to see truth as analysable, and realism and anti-realism exhaust the options for analysis. The denial that truth is a property characterised by a relationship with the nature of reality makes it sound like it is comprised of a relationship to something else. And when Rorty insists that he understands "but it might not be true" in terms of "maybe somebody will come along with a better idea", it is all too easy to see him as equating truth and consensus. It is crucial that we do not. For this would (once again) make Rorty an anti-realist – he would be employing the philosophical sense of "true" by trying to identify it with some set of conditions. And though an anti-realist position would allow us to use the cautionary use in a way that does not lean upon notions like "accurate representation of reality", it would collapse the distinction between justification and truth, and that distinction lies at the heart of Rorty's thinking, and at the heart of the cautionary use of true. We require the distinction to keep employing the use. Rorty's approach ceases to be plausible if we take him to be arguing that, though "true" does not mean "accurate representation", it can be positively identified with something else.

---

[128] Ibid.

But the approach certainly *seems* anti-realist. Haack, of course, would insist as much, and Rorty's own attempts to clarify his position have often made things worse. Describing his reading of "it might not be true" in terms of "someone might come along with a better idea" is typical of a failure to distance himself far enough from the anti-realists. Indeed, as late as 2002, Pascal Engel was writing that, in Rorty's approach, 'there is no distinction to be made between truth and justification'.[129] Jürgen Habermas, similarly, wrote in the year 2000 that 'Rorty assimilates truth to justification at the expense of everyday realist intuitions.'[130] Rorty's opportunities to shed this caricature have rarely been taken.

To rehabilitate the Rortian project, we must read his pragmatism as a refusal to engage with the "philosophical" subject matter. Rather than take the homely and shopworn sense of "true" to be synonymous with something like "consensus", I recommend that we take it to be a concept synonymous with nothing. The fact that "truth" (and "truth" alone) gives us pause to consider the fallibility of our beliefs tells us that the word is singular in our usage. But it does not follow that the word must mean, or that we will gain anything from explicating it terms of, a relationship between mind and world. By resisting the anti-realist reading, "true" becomes a word about which little can be said. By saying little about "true", the anti-realist reading can be resisted.

Here we see why I insisted on defending and rehabilitating the Rortian distinction between the homely and shopworn sense of true and the philosophical sense of true. We need that distinction to make sense of Rorty's reading of "but it might not be true" as something like

---

[129] Richard Rorty, Pascal Engel, and Patrick Savidan, *What's the Use of Truth?* (Chichester;New York;: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6.
[130] Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn," 32.

"maybe somebody will come along with a better idea". Where the anti-realist trivialises the cautionary use by equating truth with consensus, the Rortian position is instead quietist on the nature of truth. He is willing to employ the cautionary use without providing a positive explanation for what truth is. Taking "but it might not be true" in the sense of "but others may come to disagree" is not an anti-realist claim against realism – it is a way of using the word without engaging in that debate. It is a way of employing the word at its most minimal. This approach allows us to employ the word in cautionary ways without being expected to analyse the concept in other terms. Remember, Rorty thinks that truth and justification are indeed distinct – truth is just something about which you can have no theory. And the philosophical sense is distinguished from the homely and shopworn sense in just this way. The philosophical sense places on the word the expectation that we will be able to explain what we mean by "true" in further terms. When employing the homely and shopworn sense, no such ambition emerges.

This point brings into clarity a theme from earlier. The "two senses" approach does not suggest that there is a single "correct" way of talking about truth. It shows that there are two different ways, and that one way, by Rorty's reckoning, is more useful than the other. In this case, the cautionary use *can* be read in terms of either the philosophical sense or the homely and shopworn sense – Rorty simply recommends we try the latter. The cautionary use of true, despite "realist intuitions", is best read as a mere warning of future disagreement, and not a claim about relationships between beliefs and the world. We can maintain the distinction between truth and justification – but only by refusing to comment on the "nature" of truth.

To make this last point (that we ought to avoid a philosophical reading of the cautionary use) more plausible, we should turn our attention to the practical value of either sense. When realists insist that the cautionary use of "true" demands a picture of truth as the "accurate

representation of the intrinsic nature of reality", they aren't speaking incoherently or incomprehensively. They just aren't saying anything helpful. What is useful about the cautionary sense is the reminder to take even our own beliefs with a grain of salt – but the invocation of the intrinsic nature of reality isn't necessary for this purpose. In fact, it doesn't help at all. For the gulf between justification and truth (which realists use as evidence that truth can be explicated in terms unrelated to our practices) ensures that we cannot usefully use truth as the yardstick of justification. Realists are free to read "p is justified, but it might not be true" in the philosophical sense, but doing so will not say anything useful. We cannot use "the intrinsic nature of reality" as a standard against which to measure p. Truth (understood as a relationship with the intrinsic nature of reality) is not a mere product of our social practices, so analysing those practices will not help us uncover its preconditions. Our practices of justification are all that we have access to.

When we employ the cautionary use in its philosophical sense, we invoke a standard for which we have no use. Once we recognise that we are barred from access to the intrinsic nature from reality, warnings that we may not be accurately representing it will have no force. Instead, we'll listen to warnings with some practical application: warnings, for instance, that better theories are out there, and that there is always more evidence to collect. Where they invoke "truth", these will be warnings that employ it in its homely and shopworn sense – with full attention to its use, and no attention to its claim as a metaphysical, transcendental property. The unbridgeable gap between truth and justification ensures that we cannot use the cautionary use of the word as an opportunity to provide an explanatory theory of it. Rather, we must restrict ourselves to comments upon our practices if we are to say anything of substance about them.

Rorty's three uses of the word "true" relate to his two senses of the word "true" in the following way: when we use the word, we are free to employ it in either sense. In its cautionary use, as well as its endorsing and disquotational sense, we *can* opt for the philosophical sense. But as Rorty suggested in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and, as I have been trying to make more plausible, we can, and ought to, stick with the homely and shopworn variety. Using the philosophical sense will cause us to seek, fruitlessly, ratification, and in doing so will open the door for the epistemological sceptic. To the extent that we are in the habit of using the philosophical sense, Rorty recommends we stop.

3.2.2   *Expanding on the three uses*

The aim of this chapter has been a better understanding of the Rortian approach to truth by marrying the "homely and shopworn" perspective with the three uses of the word. I hope to have made plausible the view that, indeed, one can use the full spectrum of truth talk non-philosophically. But there remains plenty to be said about why this is the case, and how these uses relate to each other. This section will introduce one way of doing that by relating the compelling "prosentential theory of truth" to the Rortian project.

The best way to finish fleshing out Rorty's homely notion of truth is to marry it with the type of anaphoric account offered in Dorothy Grover, Joseph Camp, and Nuel Belnap's paper, 'A Prosentential Theory of Truth'. Their account, alongside the work done by Brandom, provides an explanation as to how the three uses of "true" fit into our everyday truth talk without the need for any philosophical considerations. Grover, Camp, and Belnap's theory follows a content-redundancy approach which respects the non-philosophical ambitions of the "homely and shopworn" sense and makes light work of the types of counterexamples I listed above. This

move builds on Ramsey's famous redundancy theory by exploring the prosentential nature of embedded truth statements.[131] As Brandom notes, 'Redundancy views such as Ramsey's accordingly provide a generalization of the pragmatist's point, one that permits an answer to the otherwise decisive refutation offered by the embedding objection.'[132] This content-redundancy move handles sentences like 'if p is true, then q', by equating them to sentences like 'if p, then q'. Beyond performative considerations (like, for example, emphasis), the "is true" predicate simply doesn't need to be there – it adds nothing to the content of the sentence.

I am suggesting that the content-redundancy approach provides a useful tool for learning more about the way Rorty's three uses of "true" function. In particular, it provides a working explanation for the many abstract variations of embedded and conditional uses of "true" by expanding the pragmatist's point beyond purely assertoric uses. Rorty merely lists the three uses of truth; Camp, Belnap, and Grover offer a theory articulating those uses. Most importantly, they achieve this feat while avoiding the traditional problematic of truth. Rorty does not explicitly endorse this approach, but there is good reason to think it marries well with his project. In a footnote to "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth", for instance, Rorty writes,

> There is much to be said about the relations between these three uses…The best attempt
> to do so I have seen is found in an unpublished paper by Robert Brandom…Brandom
> shows how the 'primitive pragmatism' which tries to define truth as assertibility is defeated
> by the use of true in such contexts as the antecedents of conditionals. But he then suggests
> a way of developing a sophisticated pragmatism which, invoking Frege and the Grover-
> Camp-Belnap prosentential theory of truth, saves Dewey's intentions. Brandom not only
> shows how 'anaphoric or prosentential theories' can, as he says, 'retain the fundamental
> anti-descriptive thrust of the pragmatist position, while broadening it to account also for

---

[131] F. P. Ramsey, "Facts and Propositions," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7, no. 1 (1927).
[132] Brandom, "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk," 85.

the embedded uses on which the primitive pragmatism founders', but suggests ways of reconciling these theories with Davidsonian disquotationalism.[133]

The prosentential theory of truth is the result of a longstanding tradition of minimalist accounts of truth. Indeed, Camp, Grover, and Belnap show in detail how the Ramseyan content-redundancy move alone makes room for embedded, conditional uses of "true" in a way that does not rely on a "philosophical" sense of "true".[134] But we require a more-nuanced account than the one given in Ramsey's breakthrough. Straightforward redundancy accounts don't accommodate more abstract uses of "true". For example, while content-redundancy happily reduces "*p* is true" to "*p*", it cannot yet reduce sentences like "the theory of relativity is true" to "the theory of relativity". Further amendments must yet be made. To account for these broader sets, the approach must be amended with a disquotational feature which takes "the theory of relativity" to be intersubstitutable with a sentence endorsing the theory of relativity. Doing so rids us of the desire to read "true" in its descriptive, philosophical sense, by taking "the theory of relativity" to be the equivalent of a much longer sentence describing that theory.

But there remains another layer of complexity – even disquotationally-amended content-redundancy theories cannot deal with examples likes "all of the things I said last night were true". These quantified examples challenge the redundancy model because they may not be substitutable with a single sentence. The quantifier "all" seems to group a range of disparate things. To handle these examples, Grover, Camp, and Belnap treat truth predicates as prosentences. Prosentences are to sentences as pronouns are to nouns – they are anaphoric. This way of accounting for truth talk continues to build from the redundancy model, as I have been suggesting, and ends with a picture of truth that aligns with the Rortian vision I earlier

---

[133] Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," 154.
[134] Grover, Camp, and Belnap, "A Prosentential Theory of Truth," 74-77.

developed. The thrust of the prosentential theory is that:

> 'Since "that is true" and "it is true" occupy sentential positions, since they are used anaphorically, both of them as prosentences of laziness and "it is true" quantificationally, since they are generic, and since the notions of antecedent and anaphoric substituend are appropriate to them, they both can be said to be prosentences.'[135]

That is – Camp, Belnap, and Grover take "is true" to work like pronouns do. The "is true" clause serves to stand in for other sentences. And further: 'In the spirit of Ramsey, our claim is that all truth talk can be viewed as involving only prosentential uses of 'that is true'.[136]

The primary virtue of such an approach is its ability to account for the sheer variety of truth talk in a single, unified system. The prosentential model lets us account for standard propositional, assertoric, truth talk *as well as* embedded, conditional truth talk; quantificational truth talk; and connective truth talk. And importantly, it does so without presupposing a property of truth that must be explained by the theory. Instead, this way of talking about truth lets Grover, Camp, and Belnap say that

> 'semantical reflection on truth talk should not cause us to think that here are sentences or statements which exemplify a property of truth. Perhaps there are language-world relations of various kinds; perhaps 'Snow is white' does somehow picture the fact of snow being white, but on our account it is just a confusion to suppose that this has anything to do with some truth *property*.'

Rorty, of course, thinks this is about right. "Truth" is not a product of a relationship between language and world; the world will not aid us as an explanatory tool. The happy consequence is that we can describe Rorty's "homely and shopworn" sense of truth in prosentential terms.

---

[135] Ibid., 92.
[136] Ibid., 83.

Those who object to the under-articulated notion in Rorty's work can be directed to the more detailed account developed by Grover, Camp, and Belnap.

The result is a redundancy theory capable of handling the full spectrum of truth talk, while undergirding Rorty's minimal account of truth. Rorty can say that pragmatism consists in the denial of that "true" requires a philosophical explanation, comfortable in the knowledge that a sophisticated account of the uses of true has been given. His recognition of the three uses of true: endorsing, cautionary, and disquotational, is supported by Grover, Camp, and Belnap's prosentential articulation of truth. It is not important that Rorty never explicitly endorsed this strategy – more important, I think, is how well the prosentential thesis expands upon the major claims of Rortian neo-pragmatism.

4. Haack

By now what should have emerged is a reading of Rorty's position on truth that sits in stark contrast to Haack's interpretation. That contrast is brought to light by three observations: first, that by conflating "senses" and "theories", Haack takes Rorty's "homely and shopworn" sense to be an explanatory, anti-realist theory of truth; second, that the "homely and shopworn" sense is instead a deflated use which provides no explanatory uses, only three functional uses; and third, that the realism versus anti-realism debate can only arise under the "philosophical" sense of truth.

By engaging only with the earlier Rorty, Haack was led astray by Rorty's provocative and underdescribed account of truth. Missing the crucial work later in his career, Haack takes Rorty to be advocating a confused anti-realism. I hope to have shown that he has in mind something more like a deflationary, quietist approach. The epistemological dream of uncovering the

criteria of truth presupposes a standard for which the Rortian has no use. The "philosophical" approach to truth has been highly productive of scholastic debate and attempted explanations of the truth-making relation. But it is not clear that any of those theories have brought us any closer to, as James put it, 'the particular go'[137] of such a relation. Instead, they lead us to fight unwinnable wars with the sceptic – setting ourselves standards like "truth-indication" and "ratification". As it happens, we nonetheless can talk about truth without invoking this kind of representationalism, and often do. Rorty recommends that we make more use of this alternative way of talking and less use of the philosophical way.

I will close this chapter where we began it – with FOUNDATIONALISM, the Haackian term for what is most at stake in this debate. FOUNDATIONALISM is the view that 'criteria of justification are not purely conventional but stand in need of objective grounding, being satisfactory only if truth-indicative [i.e, which takes criteria of justification to be founded by their relation to truth].' But we are now in a position to see why the FOUNDATIONALIST perspective will never arise to a Rortian mind. FOUNDATIONALISM has at its heart a philosophical notion of truth. The insistence that our criteria of justification be "truth-indicative", or "objectively grounded" can only understood once we take truth to be property achieved via a relationship between beliefs and the world. FOUNDATIONALISM demands that criteria of justification will only be satisfactory if they ensure that justified beliefs accurately represent the world. But once we deflate our conception of truth, we will no longer identify truth with something like "the accurate representation of reality." There will be no metaphysical property of truth to try and indicate. And without such a notion of truth, without a picture of the mirror of reality, we will have no use for FOUNDATIONALISM, nor the dream of ratification.

---

[137] William James, *Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975), 92.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this piece I expressed hope that a rehabilitated Rortian neo-pragmatism would provide a more compelling path forward than its epistemological competitor. Susan Haack's assault on the Rortian perspective was meant to convince us that this form of pragmatism was reckless, relativistic, and lacked good reason to abandon the epistemological tradition. But a closer look at Haack's position shows that a commitment to the representationalist manner of philosophy sets us up to fail. When we are representationalist about truth and knowledge we are lead, inevitably, to seek what Haack calls "ratification". But ratification seems a bridge too far – at every stage our attempts to demonstrate the link between justification and truth-indication are met with sceptical worries. So our reason for abandoning the tradition becomes this; by leaving behind representationalism, by leaving behind FOUNDATIONALISM, we cease to worry that we are failing to represent correctly. We leave this manner of thinking behind because we see it leads us into a philosophical swamp – the questions provoked by epistemology are not meaningless, but they cannot be answered. The reason representationalism is of no use to us is not because we are incapable of representation, but because we cannot see how we could know that we are representing correctly.

Whether we become foundherentists or neo-pragmatists stems from a difference of perspective. I have suggested that difference is roughly the difference between having a "philosophical" and a "homely and shopworn" sense of truth. Once that core difference is established, it manifests itself at every level of the debate. Adopting a "philosophical" perspective on truth causes Haack to see the traditional dilemmas of philosophy as fundamental – Rorty, meanwhile, adopts a perspective in which such dilemmas do not arise. The epistemological sceptic is not so much kept at bay as kept outside. Seeing that they are irresolvable, questions of truth and knowledge

are not answered, as in anti-realism, but bypassed. Rorty adopts a framework in which such questions are not asked. When others ask them, the Rortian simply remains silent, not knowing what sort of answer could do the job.

What remains of philosophy and inquiry in the wake of a Rortian neo-pragmatism was a recurring subject for Rorty in the second half of his career. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, for example, Rorty sought to marry his war on philosophy-as-epistemology with a liberal democratic political vision.[138] In *Philosophy in the Mirror of Nature* the change was expressed in the terms of replacing "confrontation" with "conversation" – a comment on the turn away from competing claims about reality and towards a dialogue that recognises the contingency of either perspective. And at various times he phrased his call to arms in these terms: "epistemology" should be replaced by "hermeneutics". I suggest that this last recommendation – the total abandonment of the word "epistemology" – is largely unnecessary. So long as "knowledge", "truth", and "justification" are central to the way in which we debate and discuss, a corresponding role for studying them will survive. Rather than Rorty's wholesale rejection of the word, I prefer to describe the consequences of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in this way: a role for epistemology remains, but that role is not what epistemologists have taken it to be.

Instead of the pursuit of the necessary and sufficient conditions of "knowledge" and "truth", epistemology becomes the study of our social practices of inquiry. Giving up on the search for extrasocial properties does not cause us to cease asking questions about their complex intersocial roles – nor does it impair our ability to explore the practical uses of our epistemic concepts. Rorty's brief notes on the three uses of "true" are the first steps in this direction. Brandom's endorsement of the prosentential theory of truth, similarly, represents a way

---

[138] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge;New York;: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

forward for epistemology that abstains from the representational assumptions of the tradition. Rather than seek the representational essence of concepts like truth and justification, we will do well to investigate how they work for us by turning our attention towards their function, social, and interpersonal resonances. This is what Rorty has called becoming a 'historian, sociologist, and moralist of knowledge.'[139]

By emphasising the social nature of justification, we will draw attention to the interpersonal characteristics of knowledge. Instead of asking about the relationship between mind and world, we will ask about the relationship between knowledge and testimony. We will ask about the function of promising, and the phenomenon of taking each other to know. We will explore how these concepts are used by individuals both to pursue their own interests and hold each other to account. Epistemology will become the study of believing, and disbelieving, each other. We will wonder about the relationship between knowledge, truth, and justice.

Susan Haack fails to defend FOUNDATIONAL epistemology from Rortian pragmatism. Doing so would require providing good reason for maintaining faith in FOUNDATIONALISM in the wake of the failure of ratification. Perhaps there are defences of epistemology that succeed in warding off the Rortian threat, but *Evidence and Inquiry* is not one of them. "Vulgar pragmatism" provides us with a way of talking about truth and knowledge that loses nothing from the Haackian perspective except the dogma of insisting that our beliefs alone accurately represent the world. This brand of representationalism is not integral to inquiry, as Haack suggests. It merely asks that we recognise that we, and we alone, are the adjudicators of our beliefs. If we could receive reports from a view from nowhere, Haack's representational picture might make sense. But lacking this position, and lacking the ability to

---

[139] From Note 11, in "Response to Haack," 225.

ratify this picture from "inside" of inquiry, we must describe our beliefs in homely terms.
Rorty's pragmatism is not relativism – it is modesty.

Bibliography

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. 2d ed. Vol. 1955, Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Bonjour, Laurence. "Haack on Justification and Experience." *Synthese* 112, no. 1 (1997): 13-23.

Brandom, Robert. "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk." *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (1988): 75-93.

———. *Rorty and His Critics*. Vol. 9, Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2000.

Clune, Alan C. "Justification of Empirical Belief: Problems with Haack's Foundherentism." *Philosophy* 72, no. 281 (1997): 460-63.

Davidson, Donald. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Dewey, John. *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought*. New York: Henry Holt, 1910.

Forster, Paul D. "What Is at Stake between Putnam and Rorty?". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 3 (1992): 585-603.

Geach, P. T. "Ascriptivism." *The Philosophical Review* 69, no. 2 (1960): 221-25.

Göhner, Julia F., Eva-Maria Jung, and SpringerLink. *Susan Haack: Reintegrating Philosophy*. 1st 2016. ed. Vol. 2, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016.

Grover, Dorothy L., Joseph L. Camp, and Nuel D. Belnap. "A Prosentential Theory of Truth." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 27, no. 2 (1975): 73-125.

Guignon, Charles B., and David R. Hiley. *Richard Rorty*. New York;Cambridge, U.K;: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Haack, Susan. "Double-Aspect Foundherentism: A New Theory of Empirical Justification." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no. 1 (1993): 113-28.

———. *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*. Cambridge, USA;Oxford, UK;: Blackwell, 1993.

———. "Reply to Bonjour." *Synthese* 112, no. 1 (1997): 25-35.

———. ""We Pragmatists..."; Peirce and Rorty in Conversation." *Agora* 15, no. 1 (1996): 53-68.

Habermas, Jürgen. "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn." In *Rorty and His Critics*, edited by Robert Brandom. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2000.

James, William. *Pragmatism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1975.

Malachowski, Alan R. *Richard Rorty*. Chesham: Acumen, 2002.

Moore, G. E., and Thomas Baldwin. *Principia Ethica*. Vol. Rev., with pref. to the 2nd and other papers, Cambridge [England];New York, NY, USA;: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The Birth of Tragedy: And the Case of Wagner*. 1st Vintage ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.

Price, Huw, and David Macarthur. "Pragmatism, Quasi-Realism, and the Global Challenge." In *New Pragmatists*, edited by C. J. Misak, 91: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Putnam, Hilary. *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*. Boston;London;: Routledge & K. Paul, 1978.

———. "Two Conceptions of Rationality." In *Reason, Truth and History*, edited by Hilary Putnam, 103-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Quine, W. V. "Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism." *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 1 (1951): 20-43.

Ramsey, F. P. "Facts and Propositions." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7, no. 1 (1927): 153-70.

Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism : Essays, 1972-1980 / Richard Rorty*. Minneapolis :: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

———. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge;New York;: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

———. "Keeping Philosophy Pure: An Essay on Wittgenstein." In *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

———. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Vol. 30th anniversary, Woodstock;Princeton, N.J;: Princeton University Press, 2009.

———. "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth." In *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, edited by Ernest LePore, 354: Cambridge: Blackwell, 1986.

———. "Response to Haack." In *Rorty & Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, edited by Herman J. Saatkamp. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995.

———. "Subjectivity or Objectivity?". In *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, edited by Cornell West John Rajchman, 3-19. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

Rorty, Richard, Pascal Engel, and Patrick Savidan. *What's the Use of Truth?* Chichester;New York;: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Sellars, Wilfrid S. "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 1 (1956): 253-329.

Taylor, Charles. "Rorty and Philosophy." In *Richard Rorty*, edited by Charles B. Guignon and David R. Hiley, 158--80: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Thagard, Paul. *Coherence in Thought and Action*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.

Tramel, Peter. "Haack's Foundherentism Is a Foundationalism." *Synthese* 160, no. 2 (2008): 215-28.

Williams, Michael. "Introduction." In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, edited by Richard

Rorty. Woodstock; Princeton; NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.