

# ***Is there any such thing as post-analytic philosophy?***

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## ***1. The course of analytic philosophy***

John Stuart Mill said: "All great movements go through three stages: ridicule, discussion, adoption." He was, of course thinking about utilitarianism. But the same applies to analytic philosophy in the XXth century. It is now generally agreed that analytic philosophy is born, at the end of the XIXth century, at the virtual center of a triangle: in Cambridge, England, with Russell and Moore, in Iena with Frege, and in Central Europe with the Brentano school and its ramifications. The thinkers who created it were often solitary. They had to fight against their contemporaries, against the Hegelians in England, against the Neo-Kantians in Germany and in Austria, and they were often ridiculed. Frege never got tenure, Oxford resisted the Cambridgians almost until the second world war, the Viennese were confined in Vienna, the Poles in Poland, and Wittgenstein, although he loved to be solitary, was indeed solitary. The first analytic philosophers had to struggle against the main trends of their time in order to promote their views and their approach to philosophical problems. They were first ridiculed as being dogmatic rationalists, simple minded conventionalists, and narrow-minded logicists. The stage of discussion and the agglomeration into a school was reached only during the thirties, when people started to talk about "analytical realism" in England, "Viennese positivism" in Europe, the "Lwow-Varsovia School" and when the Nazis pulled out of Germany and Austria many thinkers who went to the States. Adoption came in the fourties when Oxford started to think Cambridgely, and when logical positivism spread all over the great American universities. By the 1950, analytic philosophy was a dominant tradition in many countries, including Australia, Sweden and Finland. At least partly from these difficult origins analytic philosophy got its culture of discussion, of argumentation, of permanent criticism. When the analytic style has been definitely adopted, towards the mid-century, in various countries, in Europe and in America, the culture of discussion and of argument did not disappear, for it forms the core of the analytic style of inquiry, and probably is its most distinctive mark. Nobody would deny today that it is a major tradition in philosophy. Being a tradition means having classical texts and writers (Frege's *Über Sinn und*

*Bedeutung*, Russell's *On Denoting*, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and *Investigations*, Carnap's *Aufbau* and *Meaning and Necessity*, Quine's *Word and Object*, and so on), stylistic habits, institutions such as journals, publisher's series and societies, standard curricula for students, etc. The reaching of the stage when a group of philosophers becomes a "school" has, however, its price: the main assumptions are no longer criticized, there are many things which are taken for granted, unspelled premisses, and arguments from authority. When a child is adopted, it takes some time before complete recognition by the parents arrives: in the end they consider him or her as their own. When the origins are lost, the process of adoption has come to an end. The sources are no longer questioned. In a sense this a good thing, since it allows people to go ahead, without asking themselves too much where they come from, they can practice their discipline just like scientists, who do not question their procedures and postulates, at least during the time of what Kuhn calls "normal science". But on the other hand it is a bad thing, since one of the very tasks of philosophy is to put into question its own basic assumptions all the time.

This is what happened to analytic philosophy in the XXth century. Now that analytic philosophy has become a well-established tradition, some of its practitioners have been willing to step backwards, to consider its historical origins, and the sources of what are taken to be its main "dogmas", such as, say, the sense/reference distinction, the analytic-synthetic distinction, the role of logic in philosophical inquiry, certain forms of reductionism, and so on. This is all normal and sane. Criticizing dogmas is, so to say, the usual job of analytic philosophers: much of their work, as they conceive it, consists in describing and destroying "illusions of understanding". For some analytic philosophers this critical task is the main business of philosophy: Wittgenstein, Moore, Ryle, Austin, Strawson, Kripke, for instance, set this main critical objective to philosophy. For other analytic philosophers, on the other hand, the critical move is not separable from a positive undertaking of theory building: Russell, Carnap, Quine, Davidson, Dummett, David Lewis, Fodor and Dretske, for instance, set to philosophy a more constructive task. Whether or not the "theories" they want to promote are supposed to be like scientific theories, they consider that the main job of philosophical analysis is to put forward theses, justified by intuitions and examples (and thought experiments), tested against counterexamples, countertheses, and possibly revised after several waves of criticism. I want to suggest that this oscillation between a mainly *critical* enterprise and a mainly *theoretical* or *positive* enterprise is the normal course of analytic philosophy, the one which has produced most of the interesting efforts and results in this tradition during this century. An appropriate balance of criticism and theory-construction is, to my mind, the best course that a philosophical school can take.

But some people do not see things that way. They consider that analytic philosophy has gone too far in accepting certain dogmas, and too far in the task of theory-construction. So they put all the emphasis on the critical enterprise, which

according to them should bear on the whole tradition. Against the normal course of analytic philosophy there exists today a new trend, which one might call *hypercritical*. Its line of thought is radical. It suggests that much of analytic philosophy is based on false dogmas and illusions, but it does not attempt to produce counter-dogmas, or countertheses. It questions not only the doctrines but the style of analytic philosophers, and their main objectives. This view is characteristically proposed in a semi-historical way: it is suggested that analytic philosophy, as a philosophial tradition, has come to an end, and is more or less "dead" in its main doctrines an practices. Such critics usually talk of a "post-analytic" philosophy. The phrase is subtly ambiguous: it suggests that either analytic philosophy *has* actually been replaced, in this end of the century, by a new historical figure, which does not allow us to think any more in terms of the "old" way of thinking, or that we *should* think in this new, "post-analytic" way. This ambiguity between a descriptive and normative reading of the word "post" can be found of course in all uses of this phrase: "post-modernism", "post-structuralism", "post-liberalism", etc. To my knowledge, the style of reasoning implicit in the use of such phrases has been paradigmatic in Foucault's version of the history of ideas. In the (in)famous *Order of Things*, Foucault described various "discursive formations", which he called *epistemai*. Each of them is supposed to correspond to characteristic theses and practices, to obey various rules and to reign uniformly over a whole period of time. At a certain moment, one *episteme* "dies", and is replaced by another. The transition between them is never really described, nor are the causes of the transition precisely described. Suddenly we find ourselves immerged into a new *episteme*, and unable to criticise it. So with philosophy. According to those who coined the phrase "post-analytic philosophy", we have now left the stage when analytic philosophy was reigning, and we have entered a New Age. Analytic philosophy is dead. Any attempt to defend it is bound to be like resurrecting it from its ashes, a desperate move which is just ridiculous, because the fate of ideas has led us to a point of no return. So we reach again the stage in which analytic philosophy was at its beginnings, the one which Mill called the stage of ridiculousness. No wonder if one of the main proponents of the "post-analytic" idea, Richard Rorty, calls himself an "ironist". An ironist neither demonstrates nor argues: he just shows how things are, he does not criticize his adversaries, he ridicules them.

If the ironist is right, it would not make any sense, today, to become an analytic philosopher. It would not make sense to join a band which has already parted some time ago, and which will neither meet again. It's like hoping to bring back the Beatles in Hamburg, or the Montparnasse school of painting into today's Montparnasse. I am struck by the fact that the post-analytic stance is nowhere so influential and attractive than in countries were analytic philosophy has never become a "tradition", and hence never been "adopted", such as France, or (to a lesser degree) Germany, to quote only situations which I know. Today in France a lot of people, who can't help realize that analytic philosophy *exists* and is a real philosophical movement which nobody can simply ignore (which is already a

progress as compared to the previous period when analytic philosophers were simply like Meinongian non-existent objects), tell us that although analytic philosophy existed, it no longer exists. Hence (*Q.E.D.*) there is no need to do analytic philosophy or take an interest in its methods or doctrines. These people want to throw the baby out with the bath water. Should we go back to ridicule? I want to suggest here that there is no reason to do so.

## **2. The Rorty club.**

The term "post-analytic philosophy" has been coined recently, mostly by Rorty and his associates<sup>1</sup>. It's a handy term indeed, or a nice *concept*, as the people from marketing would say. Here again the word *post-* plays a double duty. On the one hand, post-analytic philosophy supersedes analytical philosophy and goes beyond it. In this sense it *not* a brand of analytic philosophy. But on the other hand, it is still analytic philosophy, just as post-reformation Europe still retains some of the features of the reformation period, or post-communism countries still bear some features of the communist era. Although many others seem to have joined the bandwagon, Rorty is the main proponent of post-analytic philosophy. He is also a master in the art of registering other philosophers into his own club. Dennett once talked about the "Rorty factor": take what Rorty says of another philosopher, and subtract 90 % of it: the rest is what these philosophers have actually said. Be it as it may, I shall therefore use his views as representative of the post-analytic trend. His story, and the one which underlies various trends of the same stripe, seems to be the following. (I do not pretend to give an accurate picture of a movement which is by nature rather vague (and meant to be such), but I guess that most of the picture is right.)

"Analytic philosophy is more or less positivism. But the positivistic dogmas have been dropped by analytic philosophers themselves. Quine has shown that the positivist distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, which is more or less the same as the distinction between *a priori* and empirical knowledge, is unjustified. He has shown also that traditional epistemology, which rests on foundationalism, is a mistake, and that Neurath's boat floats upon the open sea, unable to be rebuilt on the shore. Sellars has criticized the "myth of the given". Davidson has gone further in showing that there is no distinction between "scheme" and "content", between the conceptual structure with which we think of reality, and reality itself, as opposed to this scheme. He has shown that truth is not an explanatory concept, which can be used for metaphysical purposes. Therefore Quine and Davidson have undermined both epistemology and metaphysics. Putnam has shown that the fact-value distinction, which was so important both for Moore and for the positivists, is ungrounded, and that even factual statements about empirical matters carry normative assumptions. Putnam has also defeated metaphysical realism, the view that there is a "ready-made world", outside us, which lays independently of our inquiries and practices, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ref Rachman and West, the American philosopher

he has claimed that all our claims about the so-called world are relative to our human point of view. Goodman has taken a similar move: he has shown that the world splits into a plurality of "worlds", which are all of our making. In the realm of the mental, Quine, Davidson, Putnam and possibly Dennett, have shown that intentional phenomena are relative to our interpretations and ascriptions, which are indeterminate, and therefore that intentional realism is false, and hence again that physicalistic reductionism, which purports to reduce intentional phenomena to physical ones, is also false. The "world", the "facts", our "values", the "mind" are "well lost". This is the negative phase, and it has been achieved by philosophers who themselves belong to the analytic tradition."

Very few among today's analytic philosophers are convinced that Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Putnam, Goodman or others, have *shown* or *established* that these grand claims are true: these are contested claims, which even their proponents are not certain of having established, as the discussion about their claims within the analytic journals and books testify. I shall later give some examples of this. But Rorty does not mind: he just takes it for granted that these negative claims have been definitively established, and that these are the actual claims of the authors he enrolls in his band.

Rorty is also a philosopher who reads a lot. He has been quick to realize that many of these claims, as he interprets them, have been made by writers from a different philosophical tradition than the analytic tradition in which he has been brought up. That meaning is indeterminate, that epistemology cannot rest on sure foundations, that truth is but a mistake, that the world and the mind are not "out there", but are a product of our practices and discourses, are, to a large extent, claims which many "post-structuralist", "post-modernist" or "post-Nietzschean" Continental philosophers (the holy trilogy of the "post-x", as one might call it) have been prone to make during the last two decades, and which have been popularized by the culture of literary criticism and of "pop-philosophy" in Europe and later in America. Derridean deconstruction starts from the fact that meaning is not "pure presence", and is indeterminate. Foucauldian genealogy claims that truth is purely an effect of power and power strategies. That there is no distinction between fact and value, and that even scientific discourse is valuational discourse in disguise is also a major theme of modern cultural relativism or protagoreanism: your views are just as good as my views, it's just that your views are *yours* and mine are *mine*: we like our views, because they are *our views*. Has not Nietzsche "shown" that truth is the product of value? The alliance of post-analytic philosophy with literary criticism is by no means purely conjonctural. One of the main claims and complaints of contemporary literary criticism of "French" origin is that philosophy today — and in particular analytic philosophy — has become too technical, too "scientific", and estranged from broadly cultural issues. Philosophers do not address the ordinary questions raised by the layman. They are unable to come to terms with the main "great problems" of their age, and take refuge into abstraction, jargon and scholasticism. It is the job of the New Alliance between philosophy, literature and art to counter this obnoxious move and to

propose a philosophy for our age, which could Speak to Everybody. (It does not matter if the actual products of deconstructive literary criticism and post-modern thought turn out to be more jargonizing and technical than the writings which they purport to oppose). Indeed Rorty and his associates have claimed that philosophy is "a kind of writing", closer to literature than to science. Stanley Cavell, one of the other heroes of the post-analytic camp, promotes literary writing against scientific writing. Thus post-analytic philosophy turns out to be close to Continental Philosophy and to many themes in post-modernism, to a large extent the official philosophy of Continental Europe, at least in France and in Germany, its leaders<sup>2</sup>. This meeting of minds is a promise of a new ecumenism in thought over the Atlantic: post-structuralists join forces with post-analytics. "*Sign-(posts ) along which the (un)reason went.*"<sup>3</sup>

So far I have described mostly the negative or critical side of post-analytic philosophy. But there is a positive side of the coin. It is the "pragmatist" outlook. According to Rorty, pragmatism is the view that knowledge does not require foundations, that truth is not to be defined as correspondence with facts but as what promotes human interests and practices, and that most philosophical dualisms (realism/antirealism, fact/value, the mind/the world, etc.) are false and misconceived. The justification of knowledge is only relative to particular contexts and particular interests; there is no absolute or definitive foundation, no "discourse" which could dominate other discourses. Truth is but "a compliment which we pay to our assertions" when we approve of them, and there is no general, external standard of approval. Traditional pragmatism, i.e mainly Peircian pragmatism, does not fit Rorty's purposes: it insists on the disinterested search for truth, defined as what is the "limit of scientific inquiry" of ideal observers. In other words, it is still committed to the image of a correspondence between our beliefs and reality, and to the image of science as the proper "fixation of belief". Rorty's brand of pragmatism is more of the Deweyan and Jamesian kind. Truth is not a matter of our beliefs fitting reality, but a matter of our beliefs being useful, and thus of being willed because of their efficiency and productiveness. Thus it is not very surprising that this form of vulgar pragmatism (as opposed to the sophisticated pragmatism of Peirce, who called his views "pragmaticist" in order to distinguish them from the "kidnappers") should end up into something which is close to vulgar relativism. Rorty tells us that there are only "discourses", which fight against one other, with no standard to demarcate between them, no consensus to be gained from their confrontation. Philosophy

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<sup>2</sup> See my paper "The Decline and Fall of French Post-Nietzschean Structuralism", in B. Smith ed. *French Philosophy in the American Academy*, Open Court, La Salle, Ill. 1994.

See also K. Mulligan characterisation of Continental Philosophy in "Post-Continental Philosophy: some nosological notes", in *Stanford French Review*, 17, 2-3, 1993 "The analytic-continental Divide" (ed. P. Engel).

<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase Rorty. Jean François Lyotard, one of the heroes of post-modernist thought, has welcomed the post-analytic movement; see his preface ("Aller et retour") to the French translation of Rachman and West's book, and my review of this book in *Revue Philosophique*, 1993.

cannot be a search for truth, which is an illusion; it can only be a "conversation of mankind", an "hermeneutic enterprise" through which discourses interpret one other, but can never agree on anything. The only proper attitude, in theoretical matters, is irony, the respect for the contingency and context-boundedness of all discourses and the proper critical distance to be observed about them. In ethics and politics, it is "solidarity", the feeling of a community of conversationalists and actors, as against "objectivity", the fanciful ideal of the realists and foundationalists.

So much for a general description or paraphrase of Rorty's "post-analytical" views. I have painted it broad strokes, in a way which is no doubt partly unfaithful to Rorty's actual sophisticated prose, which is full of references to both the American and the European tradition, to literature, art, and politics, and which tries to encompass a lot of things, pretty much in the style of current Continental philosophy. But I do not think that I have misrepresented the upshot of his message. I shall not attempt here to try to refute these various claims. I shall rather try to focus on some specific points in order to show that Rorty's strategy and his followers is unjustified. But before I come to that, some more general comments are in order.

The cleverness of the post-analytics has been to suggest that there is a convergence of these themes in analytic philosophy itself, either explicitly or implicitly. It is suggested, on the one hand, that when analytic philosophers have gone on doing their usual work — producing philosophical theories of the world which purport to be objective, argumented, and critically ascertained, they have fallen into the trap of the metaphysical realist picture of philosophy as theory building, and therefore that they are still under the illusions of the Old Age of the Mirror of Nature. It is suggested, on the other hand, that when analytic philosophers have become conscious of the shortcomings of their style of inquiry — when, like Quine, Davidson, Sellars, Nagel, Putnam, Cavell, etc. they have thrown away the "dogmas" of analytic philosophy — and therefore that they should join forces with the "post-analytics", that indeed they are post analytics themselves. A curious feature of Rorty's rhetoric, which he shares with many "post-modernists", is the fact that, in spite of his distaste for strong dichotomies, he actually relies very much on such dichotomies, on what Susan Haack has called "This-or-Nothingism"<sup>4</sup>. Rorty writes as if there were no other alternatives than two kinds of attitudes: *either* we accept a foundationalist epistemology, a realist and metaphysical picture of the world, a conception of philosophy within culture which makes it akin to science, *or* we jettison this picture and "carry on the conversation" and espouse the neo-pragmatist picture. *Either* we are realists, anti-realists, epistemologists in the traditional manner, *or* we are pragmatists, ironists, solidarists, etc. Now I agree with Rorty and others that much of current

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<sup>4</sup> S. Haack, *Evidence an Inquiry , Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, Blackwell , Oxford, 1993, p.183

epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, in particular within analytic philosophy, has shown that a lot of traditional programs and methods have failed. For instance the positivist enterprise to reconstruct science on the basis of the analytic-synthetic distinction has failed to a large extent, attempts to "solve the problem of induction" have not been unanimously accepted, attempts to construct a "universal grammar" and semantics which would be the actual grammar of natural languages have been preposterous, attempts to reduce the mental to the physical and to "naturalize intentionality" have not encountered universal and firm agreement. But it does not follow that these are clear "failures", and that "the end is in sight for epistemology", metaphysics, etc. It may well be that some of these enterprises are bound to fail. But for that a lot of work needs to be done, and *a priori* refutations of philosophical programs are rare. And even when there are actual, recognized, failures, they are always failures *at* something, from which we can learn, and which by no means show that we have to take the opposite course and jeopardize reason, knowledge, and truth. The lesson is a familiar one: between dogmatism and scepticism or nihilism, there is always the possibility of a critical attitude, which does not burn into ashes all the planks of the boat of knowledge. After all, this is what the metaphor of Neurath's boat implies: the boat has to be reconstructed in open sea; but the fact that we cannot reconstruct it ashore does not mean that the boat has to sink altogether. In this respect, I do not see why the various criticisms of current analytic philosophy could have led to the destruction, or deconstruction of analytic philosophy itself. The rhetorical move which consists in anticipating death when a crack up appears is mere wishful thinking.

### **3. Truth complimented**

I shall now come to terms more precisely with Rorty's actual arguments for his neo-pragmatist outlook. Most of these arguments, as we have seen, are directed against the realist theory of truth and knowledge, so I will take this case first. But Rorty — and Putnam too, whose claims I shall not examine here — is careful to insist that he does not attack the realists views in metaphysics and in epistemology on behalf of a non realist, antirealist, or idealist conception. He is not taking sides within a traditional metaphysical dispute, but wants to overcome it.

There are at present, within the analytical tradition, five main views (or rather families of views) about truth, which all go with a certain conception of the *meaning* of the word "true", but not all of which rest upon the same *definition* of truth itself;

(i) the *correspondence (or strong realist) view* : truth is a genuine predicate of our assertions, which registers a certain matching or correspondence between these assertions and entities in the world (things, properties, facts, states of affairs);

(ii) the *coherence view*: truth is a matter of coherence between our assertions or representations. This can be considered as an *idealist* view.

(iii) the *antirealist* or *verificationist view* : truth is a genuine predicate of our assertions, which registers the fact they are justified, warranted or assertible; it is to be defined as warranted assertibility;

(iv) the *Peircian* view: truth is correspondence with reality "at the limit of scientific inquiry", it is *idealized warranted assertibility*;

(v) the *minimalist* view: the meaning of the predicate "truth" is given by the Tarskian equivalence condition '*S*' is true iff *p*, and the meaning of the truth predicate exhausts what we have to say about the definition or nature of truth.

These characterisations are by no means sufficient to define the various families of sub-views which fall under these our main headings, which are not exclusive of each other. There are various correspondence views, various coherentist views, various anti-realist views. The Peircian view can be considered as a species of realist view, since it defines truth as correspondence at the limit of the scientific inquiry; but it can also be considered as anti-realist, since it defines truth as warranted assertibility. Many people among those who maintain (i) or (ii) agree with the minimalist that the schema '*S*' is true iff *p* only gives the meaning of "true", but they do not agree on the fact that *there is no more to say about truth than what the minimalist schema spells out*. The theorists who advance this last claim say that truth is *only* a "disquotational" predicate or a "redundant" predicate. They call themselves *disquotationalists*, *redundantists*, or *deflationists* about truth: for them truth is *not* a genuine predicate of our assertions; it just registers that fact that we accept our assertions: to say that '*p*' is true is just to assert *p*, it is not to attribute a substantial property to the sentence, e.g the property of corresponding to the facts. The differences and similarities between these various theories of truth are subtle and complex. A wide literature exists, and the discussion about these theories is still open.

One of the merits of Rorty is that he is aware of these discussions. Unlike his Continental allies, he does not believe that the matter of the definition and of the meaning of truth is a non subject. On what side of these views will he fall?

Here I rely mostly on his paper "Pragmatism, Davidson and truth", where he discusses Davidson's conception of truth and realism.<sup>5</sup> Rorty uses a lot of Davidson's arguments against various theories of truth, and pretends that Davidson's own conception is very close to his own neo-pragmatist view. First Rorty rejects the realist or correspondence view (i): truth is not a relation between our assertions and reality. It does not make sense to spell out a confrontation between our sentences and reality. There is no way in which we can forge a notion of "act" or "states of affairs", or pieces of reality, such that these pieces of reality could "correspond" to our sentences. Rorty rejects the idealist view of truth: truth is not a coherence between our representations, because there is no way in which we could distinguish between two maximally coherent sets of

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<sup>5</sup> "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth", in Le Pore, ed. *Truth and Interpretation, Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Blackwell, Oxford 1986, pp.332-355, and in his *Philosophical Papers*, I, Cambridge, 1990., tr. fr. in *Science et solidarité*, L'Eclat.1991.

coherent sentences. He rejects also the anti-realist verificationist view(ii): truth is not warranted assertibility. Roughly Rorty's argument here rests on Quinean and Davidsonian holism: spelling out the assertibility conditions of the various sentences of a language would imply that we divide sentences into basic ones (atomic basic sentences, which are primitively justified by observation reports) and more complex ones, build out of the atomic sentences. But meaning holism precludes such a move: there is no way in which we can separate the meaning of a sentence or expression from the meaning of other sentences or expressions, hence no way in which we could pair sentences with their specific assertion or verification conditions. Rorty does not like the Peircian view either. For him it comes down to the coherentist, or to the realist, or to the verificationist view, and we have no idea of what it would be for a theory or set of beliefs to be "ideally" complete. Only one theory is left: (v), the minimalist view. The meaning of the word "true" is exhausted by the three following uses:

- (a) what Rorty calls an "endorsing" use : we use the word "true" when we want to endorse or accept an assertion;
- (b) the "cautionary" use, exemplified in such remarks as "Your belief S was justified, but not true", which remind us that justification is relative to the beliefs cited as grounds for S;
- (c) the disquotational use: "true" functions as a disquotational predicate according to the schema  $S \text{ is true iff } p$ .

Rorty's version of the minimalist view has it that truth is only a predicate of "endorsement" of our assertions: we say that a belief or assertion or sentence is true because we want to praise it in a certain way: it is a "compliment that we pay to our assertions". In no way it indicates any sort of ground, or justification of our assertions, nor any relation of correspondence between them and the facts. Rorty's view is minimalist or deflationary because it does not purport to offer any "definition" or "theory" of truth, in any significant metaphysical or epistemological sense. According to Rorty, this is the upshot of the pragmatist view, in James sense, and in Dewey 's sense. He glosses James's claim that truth is utility in this way:

"He suggested that we settle on "the true" as being "only the expedient in our way of thinking". When his critics chorused the "truths aren't true because they work, but work because they are true", James thought they had missed his point, viz. that "true" was a term of praise used for endorsing, rather than referring to a state of affairs the existence of which explains the success of those who held true beliefs."<sup>6</sup>

So Rorty does not want to define truth in the usual pragmatist manner, as what facilitates success. Success is neither the definition nor the criterion of truth. The order of explanation (but there is nothing to be explained) has to be reversed; first we have certain views, which are useful or successful, and *then* we praise them by calling them "true". "Truth registers the fact that we have adopted, accepted, or endorsed certain views or beliefs, but nothing more. Why have we

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<sup>6</sup> Rorty, *ibid.* p.334.

adopted, accepted, or endorsed the views or beliefs? Well, certainly not because they are true! It's just a fact of our "discursive practices", which has in itself no explanation or justification. In Wittgensteinian terms, it is a fact of our "language-games", a contingent fact (hence the contingency and irony). A community agrees on certain judgments, and the word "true" is just here to register this agreement. When there is a disagreement, there is indeed a conflict between the beliefs which are held true by one community and the beliefs which are held true by another. But there is no outside standpoint from which we can settle the dispute, no truth standard. There is "no final vocabulary". To suppose the contrary would mean falling back into the metaphysical picture. So Rorty's version of minimalism and deflationism collapses into relativism. In this sense, we have to take seriously Putnam's joking definition of relativism: "Relativism is true (for me)".

Rorty summarizes his neo-pragmatic picture (not theory) of truth in the following assertions:

- (1) "True has no explanatory uses.
- (2) We understand all there is to know about the relations of beliefs to the world when we understand their causal relations with the world; our knowledge of how to apply terms such as "about" and "true of" is a 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 between realism and anti-realism, for such debates presuppose the empty and misleading idea of "beliefs made true".<sup>7</sup>

And Rorty argues that these claims are, when they are well understood, exactly those that put forward by Davidson in his work on truth and interpretation. Davidson thus becomes in Rorty's hands a friend of Deweyian, Jamesian or indeed Rortyan neo-pragmatism<sup>8</sup>. I shall not here (since I have done it elsewhere<sup>9</sup>) try to see whether Rorty's appropriation of Davidson's views is legitimate. I don't think it is, and here as elsewhere the Rorty factor applies fully. My point here is not to show that Rorty is wrong in attributing to Davidson (and to many other victims of his kidnapping techniques) certain views which make them members of the Rorty club, but to point out the falsity and self defeating character of the neo-pragmatist view of truth. I cannot here discuss all the difficult issues which are linked to the meaning of "true" and to the problems about realism and anti-realism in contemporary philosophy. But a few points are in order, although I can't argue for them fully.

First, it does not follow, from the fact that one admits that "true" is a disquotational predicate, the meaning of which is spelled out by such platitudes as "to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true", or "to say that '*p*' is true is to

<sup>7</sup> Rorty, *ibid.*, p.335

<sup>8</sup> The message seems to have been caught by many others. Thus the book by M. Murphy *Pragmatism, from Peirce to Davidson*, (with a preface by Rorty), Chicago University Press, 1992 simply lists Davidson (and Quine) as pragmatists, although they have denied forcefully this enlistment.

<sup>9</sup> P. Engel, *Davidson et la philosophie du langage*, Paris, PUF 1994, in particular p.262-264.

assert (accept, grant) that *p*", that the deflationary version of minimalism about truth is correct. The minimalist platitudes are compatible with many versions of the realist, idealist, verificationist, or Peircian views. In a sense this is what Tarski meant when he said that the "semantic" definition of truth is neutral between various metaphysical conceptions of truth. Thus I don't agree with Popper that Tarski's semantic conception forces us into a realist view of truth, nor with Dummett that the anti-realist conception of truth as assertibility is incompatible with the Tarskian schema. Minimalism is correct in so far as it concerns the *meaning* of the word "true". But it is incorrect if it means that *there is no more to be said about truth* than what the minimalist platitudes capture. The debates about realism and anti-realism in a certain area are not settled once one admits the minimalist conception. Thus a moral anti-realist, for instance, can perfectly accept that truth is a disquotational predicate in the minimalist sense, and claim that moral truths are only expressions of our feelings of assent, and therefore that they register no genuine "fact" in the world. In other terms, I don't think that minimalism forces us into deflationism or *quietism*, the view that we should rest in peace with metaphysical and epistemological issues about truth.<sup>10</sup> Rorty is a sort of quietist in this sense. But quietism, like neo-pragmatism, is an instance of Rorty's *This or Nothingism*: because the traditional realist and anti-realist views encounter obvious difficulties, it follows that we should altogether repudiate an attempt to formulate a realist or an anti-realist position. The position which I have called *minimal realism*<sup>11</sup> is such a version of realism which I take to be compatible with minimalism about truth and with certain realist and anti-realist theses. So there is still a lot of space to argue for various metaphysical conceptions, even when one favours a broadly minimalist conception of truth. This is why Rorty's claim that *all there is* to say about truth is that it is an empty notion, which registers only our praise for our assertions, is unjustified.

Second this claim is self-defeating<sup>12</sup>. Rorty's neo-pragmatist conception of truth goes hand in hand with his "conversational" or "hermeneutical" conception of the justification of knowledge. According to this conception, a belief is justified by a social practice or convention, variable between cultures and "discourses", and thus contextual. Epistemic standards are only relative to different communities and contexts of inquiry. As it is traditionally defined, an inquiry aims at truth. But Rorty does not see it that way. As we saw, we can say, if we like, that our inquiry "aims at truth", but only in the sense that it pleases us to see things in that way: "truth is what we are prepared to defend against all

<sup>10</sup> This is what I have argued in Engel, *op. cit.*, after Wright, *Realism, Truth and Objectivity*, Oxford University Press 1993. Deflationism has been defended by authors such as Field and Horwich (*Truth*, Blackwell, Oxford 1990, who calls himself, however, a "minimalist"). *Quietism* is a term which has been coined by Blackburn, *Spreading the word*, Oxford 1984, and which is close to the Wittgensteinian position, endorsed also by McDowell (see the references in Engel, *op. cit.*.)

<sup>11</sup> (Engel, *op. cit.*, ch.4)

<sup>12</sup> Here I have been much helped by Susan Haack's discussion of Rorty, Haack, *op. cit.* pp.182-194 (ch.9 : "Vulgar pragmatism: an unedifying prospect").

"newcomers". But truth is not what we are aiming at; it is not a target, but a consequence of our acceptance of a certain practice or language game. As I said, I do not see how it differs from pragmatism or relativism. Rorty, however, protests that he is not a relativist: claims to believe in objectivity, in "solidarity" within our practices. But if "objectivity" can be only ascertained "from within" our practices, how can it be *objectivity*? It can be so only if we have reasons to think that our criteria of justification of beliefs are *better* than those of other communities. But if these criteria are "conventional", how can they be better than others? Moreover, how could we engage in practices which we think to be no better than others? The whole business of calling our beliefs and theories true would amount, if Rorty were right, to a purely *cynical* move on our part: we would engage in practices of inquiry which we believe to be true by our standards, but which we would not believe to be true by any standard, including our own. Let us remark, incidentally, that this sounds as an instance of Moore's paradox: I believe that *p*, but *p* is not true. If Moore's paradox registers an inconsistency in our language use, we would be in permanent inconsistency in our use of "true": we would be all the time believing true things which we do not accept as true. Of course to believe that *p* is to believe that *p* is true. This is a truism. But on Rorty's account, even this truism would have no justification. Conversationalism and "hermeneuticism" lead to inconsistency. Contingency leads to irony, and irony leads to cynicism.

Here the Rortyan could say, like Nietzsche: "Who cares for refutations?" Who cares for coherence? These values are those of the dull, undefining philosopher, the boring ass who cares for truth and consistency. The edifying philosopher, the ironist does not care. He is not serious. He just compares and contrasts the practices, the discourses. But the comparison cannot be made from a standpoint where we could assess the practices from the outside. The practices, the "vocabularies" are "incommensurable". But if they are incommensurable, how can he compare them? How can the conversation fail to be a dialogue of deaf people? Where can there be "solidarity" between people who don't agree and cannot even say when they agree or not? Rorty, however, insists that "incommensurability", for him, does not amount to "Kuhnian" or relativistic incommensurability (he praises Davidson's arguments against relativism). "Incommensurability" does not mean incommensurability of belief systems, but incommensurability of epistemic standards or of criteria of justification. We have our standards, they have theirs. If I understand well, this means that two communities could share a number of beliefs, but that they would be unable to assess them, except as true by their own respective light. But how could they share the beliefs, and indeed know that they share them, if there is no common standard by which they can assess them as objective (or true)? What kind of "solidarity" is that? Blind faith? This leads us to our second theme: belief. Rorty's conception of truth is closely tied to a conception of belief which is, I want to claim, equally inconsistent.

#### 4. Belief at will

Rorty would probably answer to the criticisms just voiced that they fail to grasp the nodal point of the neo-pragmatist outlook: that agreement is not agreement in our *beliefs*, but in our *actions*. The pragmatist, in Rorty's sense, definitively denies that we take a *cognitive* attitude towards the world; our attitude is a *practical* one. It is only because we are still in the grip of the contemplative, Platonic attitude of traditional philosophy that we consider our relations to things as mainly a matter of knowledge. Rorty takes up the traditional pragmatist theme that belief, knowledge, and inquiry are to be assessed against our actions. Peirce defined belief as a disposition to act, and James took practical success as a criterion of truth. But, as we saw with the case of James, Rorty does not want to defend the Jamesian definition of truth as utility. He does not want to hold the Peircian view of belief either. He is of course well aware of the difficulties of these theories. Instead he emphasizes another Jamesian theme: the "will to believe"<sup>13</sup>. He does not so much take up James's arguments in this famous essay than he takes up the general idea. It is central to the pragmatist stance, as Rorty conceives it, that acquiring beliefs, taking up views or theories, can be considered as a matter of *choice*, or or *decision*.. Thus he writes:

"When the contemplative mind...takes large views his activity is more like deciding what to *do* than deciding that a representation is accurate."<sup>14</sup>

James was right against Clifford [who said that "it is wrong, always wrong, to believe against evidence"] : the notion of "proof" is of no help when it comes to decide what we think about the world considered as as whole."<sup>15</sup>

The problem raised by such claims is: can we believe at will? Can our beliefs be in some sense voluntary, or the product of some decision? Many philosophers<sup>16</sup> have argued that it is an absurdity. If a decision to believe or an act of willing to believe is to be understood on the model of a decision to perform some action —say raising one's arm— it is just impossible: I cannot, for instance, decide to believe that the Dalai Lama is a Living God, if I don't, at the present moment, believe it. Even if you paid me a lot of money for believing this, I cannot pull myself into believing such a thing. Of course, there is a sense in which it seems that I can provoke myself into believing such a thing. It is the sense in which I can take a drug or a pill which will modify my sensory apparatus (by, for instance producing in me some images of the Dalai Lama floating in the air surrounded by circles of light,etc.), or the sense in which taking certain actions will produce in me certain habits which will enhance my belief. Thus Pascal, at

<sup>13</sup> After James's famous essay, *The Will to Believe*, 1897 (Dover , New York 1956, tr.fr. *La volonté de croire*, Paris Flammarion, 1900).

<sup>14</sup> Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Harvester, Brighton, 1982, p.163

<sup>15</sup> Rorty, "Pragmatism without method", in *Philosophical Papers*, I, Cambridge 1990, tr. fr. *Objectivisme, relativité et vérité*, PUF 1994, p.62.

<sup>16</sup> e.g. B. Williams, "Deciding to believe" in his *Problems of the Self*, Cambridge, 1973. Many of my remarks here echo those o Jane Hel , Pragmatism and choosing to Believe", in *Reading Rorty*, A. Mechalas, ed. Blackwell, Oxford 1991

the end of his famous wager argument, admitting that the sceptic will not be moved by this argument in favour of the existence of God, suggest that one should "take holy water, do genuflexion, get acquainted with the devouts". He adds: "This will dull you" ("Cela vous abêtira"). One can perfectly choose to become dull, or stupidify oneself in order to be credulous. Other apparent cases of belief at will are the well known cases of wishful thinking, self deception, akrasia, and cognitive dissonance. In presence of some unpleasant thought, I may decide to ignore it, to repress it, and to believe the contrary. But none of these cases are cases of genuine decisions to believe. When I modify the evidence which leads me to believe that *p*, when I use some trick or drug to deceive my senses, when I force myself into certain habits regularly associated with the belief that *not p*, or when I self deceptively come to believe that *not p*., it is because *I believe that p* in the first place. It is precisely because I believe, in a passive state, that *p*, that I take some active step to induce me into believe that *not p*. But the "active" step which I take in no way counts as a decision to create in me the corresponding belief. The fact that I choose to change the evidence, or the cognitive channel which produces in me the information that *p* does not modify in any way the regular relationship between the belief and the *evidence* for the belief. It is the essence of a belief to be *shaped by evidence*. Far from being a counterexample to this, my attempts at tricking my senses or my habits of action in order to believe contrary to the evidence just confirm that a belief is regularly produced by the evidence which is a reason (and a cause) for it. In this sense Hume was right to say that belief is essentially a passive, not an active, state of the mind. This feature of belief is closely tied to another, which is often expressed in this way: beliefs *aim at truth*. This does not mean that we consciously target our beliefs to truth, but that there is an internal relationship between believing that *p*, and believing that *p* is true. Again, Moore's paradox indicates that the violation of this conceptual relationship produces a particular oddness: "It rains, but I do not believe that it rains". What is true of belief is also true of inquiry: Rorty likes to use the pragmatist (and indeed empiricist) notion of "inquiry" to characterise the philosophical, scientific, and broadly cultural enterprise of intellectuals. But what is an inquiry which, as he construes it, would not aim at truth?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Along with the notion of truth goes its normative character: truth is something that is *worth* looking for, or aiming at. ( see Wright , *Truth and Objectivity*, Oxford 1993, ch.1, sse also Wright , "Realism ; the contemporary debate: w(h)ither now?" in J. Haldane and C. Wright eds, *Reality, Representation an projection*, Oxford 1993, p.66). In a sense we could say that rorty grants this point when he insists that there is an evaluative use of "true", which is essential ( a compliment paid to our assertions). But Rorty oscillates between this thesis and another one: the view that the usual meaning of true is the representative (or realist, or correspondentist one), and that we value truth *because of* its representative character (since we value the representation, we value truth). But this puts things in the reverse order. The normative aspect is essential to truth *as such*, and it is not a matter of placing a value to something which would be determined independently. If truth were the latter thing, then it would be possible to describe the practice of people who would have the same concept of truth as ours, but who would not value it. Rorty supposes that it is possible, since the community of "conversationalists" is precisely such a

The pragmatist stance on the will to believe thus cannot get started, if the will to believe is understood in the previous sense. But cannot Rorty claim that he—and James—means something quite different? Maybe what he has in mind is this: although we believe various things for various reasons, we can decide to suspend our beliefs in certain cases, and accept other beliefs instead. Acceptance, in this sense, unlike belief, can be voluntary and a matter of decision.<sup>18</sup> There are many ways in which we can accept certain propositions or theories without believing them in the usual, passive, sense. For instance the lawyer may accept that his client is innocent, for the sake of the trial, while he believes, at the bottom of his heart, that his client is guilty. The scientist can accept a certain theory as true, although he does not believe that it is true, or thinks that he has not sufficient evidence to believe it. This is indeed a classical theme of instrumentalism in the philosophy of science: we accept theories although we do not believe that they are true (and cannot know that they are)<sup>19</sup>. Such cases are those that Kant called, in the *Transcendental Doctrine of Method*, "pragmatic belief": belief for the sake of a further end. Presumably this is what James meant in part when he talked about the "will to believe": we adopt a conception not because we think it is true, or can ascertain its truth, but because it answers one of our "vital interests". Religious faith is often considered to be a case at point: thus it would not be a matter of belief, but a matter of acceptance. Belief answers to evidence, whereas acceptance answers to reasons to act, or to "vitally important topics", to use Peirce's phrase. But there is acceptance and acceptance. Pragmatic belief, as Kant conceives it, is *reasoned* and *justified* acceptance, in the light of some rule of rational conduct. Even when he talked about the ungroundedness of religious faith, Kant admitted that it should be "within the bounds of simple reason". Similarly about the instrumentalist view of science. The instrumentalist insists that we do not need to believe in the truth of a theory to accept it. But he nowhere suggests that our acceptance is gratuitous or unjustified. It is justified because it "saves the phenomena", because it is empirically adequate. Let us grant, although this is by no means obvious, that empirical adequacy is a good substitute for truth, and not simply truth under a new guise. Empirical adequacy obeys certain rules, and these are the ordinary rules of scientific method. Is it what Rorty means, when he emphasizes the pragmatic stance on belief? It cannot be what he means, for there are, as we saw no objective criteria of justification. Scientific criteria are just relative to our community, our modern practice. But they are no better than the criteria of a tribe which would accept magic. Truth cannot explain the success of our scientific theories. Empirical adequacy, or the rules of scientific method cannot either, because they are "contingent": magic could do as well. Or rather: magic, agreeably, cannot do better, but we have no

community of people who do not value truth as such, but only "conversation". This is just what Haack calls cynicism.

<sup>18</sup> See in particular L. J. Cohen, *An Essay on Belief and Acceptance*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> See Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, Oxford University Press, 1980, and *Laws and Symmetry*, Oxford, 1985.

way to prove it. Thus the reasons to believe in the truth of a theory, and thus to praise it, or to compliment it, are purely irrational. There could have been other reasons, or there could have been no reasons at all. Thus there is no way to distinguish ordinary belief from religious belief. Both are equally justified, or unjustified. The only thing which counts is that these are *our* reasons, in this particular place, time, and community. We are very far indeed from what Peirce called the scientific method of fixing belief, which is autojustificatory because it is intersubjective, critical, and which is regulated by an ideal of objective truth. Rorty's view is perfectly consistent with Russell's gloss on Hume's account of the failure of the justification of induction: "The mad man who believes that he is a poached egg is only wrong because he belongs to a minority." Questioning the grounds of induction is a legitimate sceptical move. But claiming that these grounds can perfectly be any one which it pleases us to have is simply a form of irrationalism or nihilism.

### **5. Is analytic philosophy dead?**

Post-analytic philosophy, as it is pictured by Rorty and others, seems to amount to nothing more than the regular variants of irrationalism and nihilism to which we have been accustomed in France and elsewhere in Europe with post-modernism, deconstruction, post-structuralism, post-nietzscheism. Although it comes to us under the guise of pragmatism, it has in fact little to do with the actual spirit of pragmatism, which was scientific, rationalist, and truth oriented. Rorty's rejection of Peircian pragmatism, his appropriation of James and Dewey's doctrines, and his claims that Heidegger, Foucault or Derrida could share a number of themes of his neo-pragmatism, should make us already suspicious of the nature of the enterprise. Equally his appropriation of Quinean, Davidsonian, Sellarsian, Goodmanian and Putnamian themes should raise our suspicions, although he is certainly right in believing that these philosophers have undermined a lot of themes of classical analytic philosophy. But there is no reason to think that the various criticisms of their peers that these philosophers have produced transport us into a new scene in which analytic doctrines and styles are abandoned. It may be a matter of degree: some of these philosophers, in particular Putnam, have been more critical of current trends in analytic philosophy than others. But as far as I can see, even Putnam, even in his most pessimistic moments, has never ceased to consider himself as belonging to the analytic community, at least in the standards of discussion, or argumentative rigour, and of clarity, which are the usual mark of the analytic style. In various ways, however, Putnam has been critical of the professional, narrow minded and academic concerns of his analytical contemporaries. But the fact that professionalism in philosophy, as it is exemplified by the ordinary practices of today's average Anglo-American philosopher, can lead to intellectual isolation and to a form of narrow mindedness, does not mean at all that professionalism itself is a bad thing. On the contrary, I think that Rorty's plea for the ironist intellectual should make us nostalgic of the virtues of the professional

philosopher, as he was, for instance, incarnated by such a figure as Carnap. Perhaps Rorty's best positive contribution to the philosophical debate is this unwilling apology *a contrario* for the traditional virtues of analytic philosophy.

This does not imply that we should not grant with Rorty, Putnam, and others, that analytic philosophy as not gone astray when, at a certain period of its history, it has practiced philosophy in a somewhat philistine way, with narrow concerns for logic, language, and knowledge (witness the *Gettierology* which is now unanimously condemned as improductive), and a neglect for traditional issues of public life, art, and such questions as those which writers like Nozick have dealt with in his book *The examined life* (e.g. the philosophy of sex and love). But here again it is a matter of degree, and not of all or nothing. Some analytic philosophers have tried to cope with such questions. Whether they have succeeded is another matter. I tend to think that they have not. But this is not a proof that another type of philosophy, more akin to the Continental type, can do better. I doubt very much that Continental writers like Foucault, Deleuze, or Derrida, and other philosophers who tend to privilege "mortal questions" in their work have really given the right kind of account. Their emphasis on literature, rather than philosophy, to deal with such questions, which Rorty himself favours, is certainly right, and I do not object to this. what is strongly objectionable, however, is the claim, implicit in all these writings, that philosophy *cum* literature is the proper course to take. They dream, as Rorty aptly says, of philosophy "as a kind of writing". But I believe that this is a dream which can never come true. Here I tend to be very Wittgensteinian: there are things that literature can show, but not say, and therefore that philosophy *as* literature cannot say either, nor wistle, as Ramsey would have said. But I can't argue for this here.

So, is there such a thing as post-analytic philosophy, as suggested by the Rorty club? It seems to me clear that the answer is: no, both because I fail to see the ghostly state of affairs referred to as the dissolution of the regular ideals of analytic philosophy in which we today are supposed to be, and because none of Rorty's claims for his neo-pragmatist outlook seem to me to make any good sense. Paraphrasing Shelley about Keats, we could say of analytic philosophy: "Peace, peace, it's not dead. It has awakened from the dream of post-analytic life."