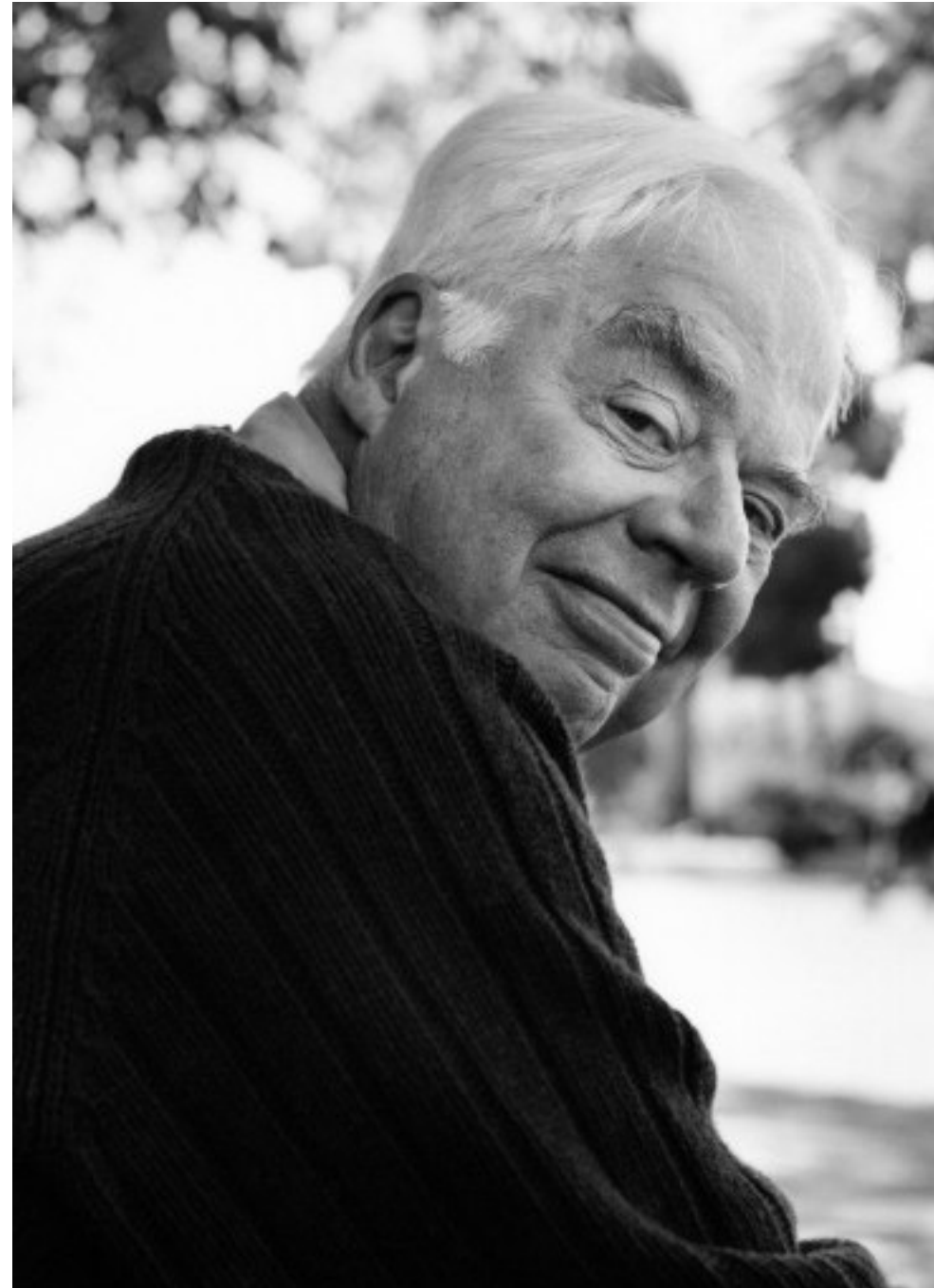**Richard Rorty on Naturalism**
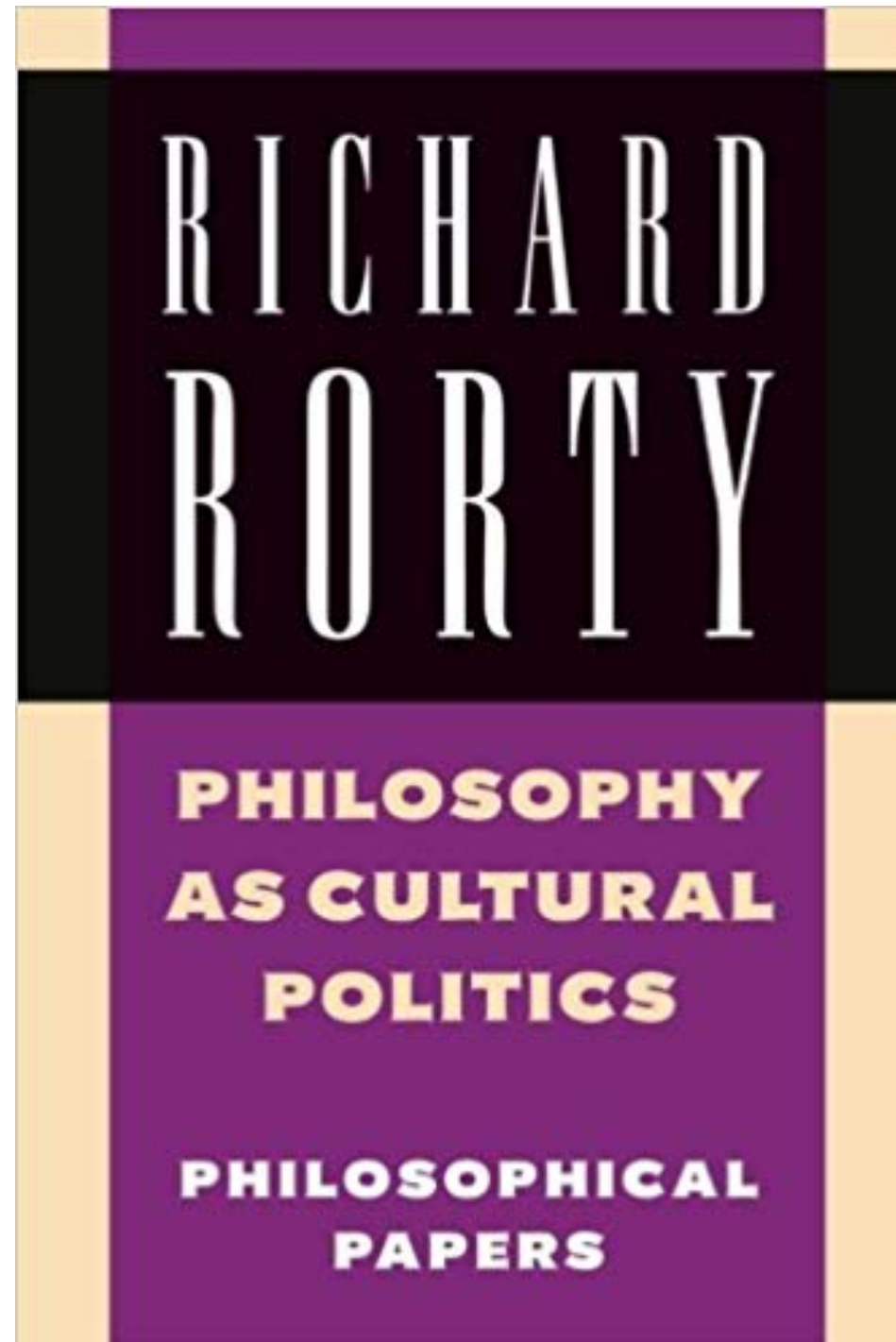
Emil Višňovský

Philosophy, Poetry, and Utopian Politics: The Relevance of Richard Rorty
12 September 2019 - 13 September 2019
SG1/2, CRASSH, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge, CB3 9DT

Naturalism and quietism (Chapter 10)

2007

The problem

- The **relevance** of philosophy in contemporary intellectual life

- Secularized culture — cultural authority of science and art (in place of religion and philosophy)

- Philosophy — 2 options:

1) following Hegel — intellectual history and cultural criticism: Dewey and Heidegger

2) following Kant — autonomous academic discipline: Peirce and Frege

Philosophy

- According to Brian Leiter (*The Future for Philosophy*, 2004):

- 1) as **quietism** — Wittgensteinian therapy: philosophical problems dissolved — unreal

- 2) as **naturalism** — philosophical problems to be solved (mind, knowledge, action, reality, morality…) — real

- **Rorty**: philosophical problems — relevant or irrelevant to cultural politics

- "… what doe not make a difference to practice should not make a difference to philosophers" (p. 149)

What is naturalism?

- **A representationalist vocabulary** — mind/language representing what the world is like

- Scientific image provided by physics — the basis of metaphysical outlook and everyday manifest image

- **Rorty's philosophy**: "how we came to talk as we do?"

- **Study of culture** — to understand linguistic practices — how and why certain vocabularies came into existence

Naturalism without representationalism

- **Huw Price** (*Naturalism in Question*, 2004, p. 73):

- **"Object naturalism"**: "the view that in some important sense, all there *is* is the world studied by science".

- **"Subject naturalism"**: the view "that we humans are natural creatures, and if the claims and ambitions of philosophy conflict with this view, then philosophy needs to give away".

- The problem: the relation between "world and word" — understanding human linguistic practices

Pragmatic naturalism

- **Bjorn Ramberg** ("Naturalizing Idealizations", 2004):

1. **Reduction** — a meta-tool of science for explanation

versus

2. **Naturalization** — metaphilosophical tool for avoiding metaphysics — pragmatic naturalism = Price's subject naturalism

- **Frank Jackson** (*From Metaphysics to Ethics*, 1998):

= a paradigm of object naturalism — "serious metaphysics" needs to reply the question: "What features does the world *really* have?"

Object vs. subject naturalisms

- **Timothy Williamson** ("Past the Linguistic Turn?", 2004):

= object naturalism: the gap between the world and word — "the world as it is apart from our ways of representing it"

— the line: Kripke, D. Lewis, Fine, van Inwagen, D. Armstrong, Williamson

- **John McDowell** (*Mind and World*, 1994):

= subject naturalism (quietism): abjures the world/word relations "in favor of descriptions of the interaction of language-using organisms with other such organisms and with their environment"

- the line: Wittgenstein, Sellars, Davidson, Brandom, McDowell

Object vs. subject naturalisms

- **Jerry Fodor** ("Why Meaning (Probably) Isn't Conceptual Role", 1994):
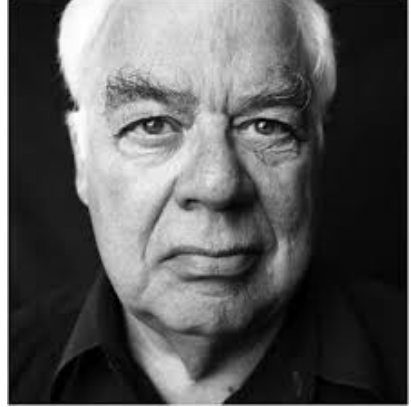
= representational semantics: language represents mental/ cognitive content

- **Robert Brandom** (*Making it Explicit*, 1994):

= inferential semantics: language is a social practice governed by social norms

Rorty's naturalism

- the line: McDowell, Brandom, Price, Ramberg

= **pragmatist subject naturalism (quietism)**:

1. "we humans are natural beings living in natural environment"

2. "we humans are natural linguistic beings using language as a tool for coping with our natural environment"

3. "our human linguistic practices are social practices governed by our social norms"

4. "how and why we use language (the way we speak) is the matter of our cultural evolution (the evolution of social practices)"

5. "the vocabularies (including the naturalist vocabulary) we have developed and use within our cultural evolution and our cultural practices are the tools for achieving our human purposes with which they have to be related rather than with the "world as it is" (the same applies to linguistic meanings)