10

What was Epistemology?

BARRY ALLEN

Epistemology is not something which results from a natural desire to answer a natural question. (Richard Rorty)

The concern of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, is to draw normative lines around its subject, to deduce the formal conditions of knowledge, and define the terms of justification. The result may be Hume’s natural history of knowledge or Kant’s transcendental project, Fichte’s Wissenschaftslehre or the reconstruction of science by the logical positivists. The questions these different projects pursue may not be natural ones. Rorty thinks they are questions we do not need to take up anymore, if we ever did. They involve optional assumptions which we can and should drop. These assumptions include the idea of mind as the mirror of nature, of knowledge as “privileged representations,” and philosophy as knowledge about knowledge, its “transcendental conditions of possibility” or its “scope and limits.”

Not to credit these ideas is no doubt to bid adieu to epistemology. But the significance of this gesture depends on the implicit philosophy of knowledge which evaluates and dismisses the assumptions of epistemology: Rorty’s positive, pragmatic, “holistic approach to knowledge” (PMN, p. 181). He says he does not want “to substitute one sort of account of human knowledge for another, but ... to get away from the notion of ‘an account of human knowledge’” (PMN, p. 180). Yet his writings articulate a number of claims which obviously add up to a substantial (if controversial) account of knowledge. The following passages sound the main themes:

Knowledge ... [is] what we are justified in believing ... [and] “justification” [is] a social phenomenon rather than a transaction between “the knowing subject” and “reality”. (PMN, p. 9)

Justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice (PMN, p. 70). Conversation [is] the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood (PMN, p. 339). The community [is the] source of epistemic authority (PMN, p. 188). Everything which is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding the justification of human knowledge. (PMN, p. 186)

Pragmatism views knowledge not as a relation between mind and object, but, roughly, as the ability to get agreement by using persuasion rather than force (ORT, p. 88). Insular as

pragmatists make a distinction between knowledge and opinion, it is simply the distinction between topics on which such agreement is relatively easy to get and topics on which agreement is relatively hard to get. (ORT, p. 23)

Rorty likes Wittgenstein’s point that any knowledge philosophy may have cannot be more than a platitudinous reminder about how we use words, and knowledge is first of all a word, not a thing-in-itself about which we should expect an interesting theory. In particular, there is nothing behind the word which, if only we knew it better, could spell it out in a formula, would make us better knowers. From this perspective, the problem with epistemology is that its subject-matter – knowledge “itself” – is illusory and does not exist. Yet in the remarks I cited, Rorty goes beyond the platitude of ordinary language, and it is this implicit philosophy of knowledge which concerns me. I shall steer around Rorty’s critique of traditional epistemology (briefly discussed in the next section), and concern myself mostly with the substantial conception of knowledge which it presupposes.

Pragmatism and Epistemology

In Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature Rorty criticizes a number of ideas that have found a home in philosophy’s “epistemological project”:

“Knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation”. (PMN, p. 6)

Epistemological skepticism, and the project of refusing the skeptic. (PMN, p. 114)

Locke’s idea of “learning more about what we could know and how we might know it better by studying how our mind worked.” (PMN, p. 137)

The idea that armed with a theory of knowledge, philosophy can define a “permanent neural matrix” for the adjudication of any claim to know. (PMN, p. 211)

A common thread among these is the idea of knowledge as “cognition,” by which I mean a mental state that qualifies as knowledge by having been caused “in the right way.” Whatever is defined as the right way becomes our source of “privileged representations,” which are the best knowledge, uniquely deserving the name of science (episteme). Rorty seems to assume that epistemology in any usual form presupposes this “cognitive” concept of knowledge, presupposing that knowledge is distinguished from non-knowledge by its being caused in an appropriate way. That is why “the notion of a ‘theory of knowledge’ will not make sense unless we have confused causation and justification” (PMN, p. 152). If epistemic quality depends on causal provenance, then we are dealing with the epistemology of “privileged representations,” that is, mental states “which are certain because of their causes rather than because of the arguments given for them” (PMN, p. 157).

The idea of knowledge as “cognition” animates philosophy’s oldest analogy for knowing – seeing something clearly and distinctly, more so than you could with the eye of the body. This is Plato’s purely intellectual gaze, directed upon immaterial forms, whose abstract changelessness lets us see them steady and whole. Aristotle’s hylomorphism was an effort to replace the optical analogy with something technical
and precise. Later philosophers rang changes on Plato and Aristotle. Medieval thinkers worked Aristotle's notion of phantasia (without which there is no thought) into a theory of mental representations, or what they called objective (that is, subjective) ideas functioning in cognition as rational signs of extra-mental reality. Descartes and Locke popularized this scholasticism. Their "idea idea" combined the Platonic assumption that knowledge is a kind of vision with Aristotle's idea that knowing requires some sameness, an isomorphism or formal correspondence between a psychical item (Cartesian idea) and the external presence (Platonic idea) it re-presemits. Hume exposed the unfortunate implications of this view of knowledge. If an idea is the first or immediate object of understanding, then obviously there is nothing with which we may compare an idea except another idea. So we have no right to call ideas "representations." We are presented with them, but they do not "present" anything other than themselves. True and false, therefore, like good and evil, must consist entirely of relations among ideas, including the sentiments and passions they provoke. Perception, understanding, knowledge, meaning, and value are all limited to ideas, to subjective patterns, feelings, and habits.

Kant absorbed and transformed Hume's subjective internalism. He agrees that it makes no sense to think of ideas or Vorstellungen as quasi-pictures whose truth depends on their resemblance to the things they are about. Unlike Hume, however, who (like Rorty) abandons the whole idea of representation, Kant comes up with a new theory about how ideas are amenable to epistemic evaluation as objective, veridical, true, and so on, without anybody having to lift a veil and compare an idea with a thing-in-itself. Ideas, perceptions, experiences are not pictures of independently present things. They are logical judgments, propositional components of the theory through which we understand and become conscious of what we know. These components (the content of empirical knowledge) acquire significance from their place in the theory, and are justified as knowledge by their logical coherence. The idea of resemblance plays no role in Kant's theory of empirical knowledge. Concepts are rules for connecting sensations rather than abstractions from sense, and representations are rational constructions driven by human need, not a disinterested imitation of being.

Rorty praises "Kant's advance in the direction of taking knowledge to be of propositions rather than of objects - his step away from the attempts of Aristotle and Locke to model knowing on perceiving" (PMN, p. 154). Kant is the first philosopher "to think of the foundations of knowledge as propositions rather than objects" (PMN, p. 160). Yet Kant only "advanced half of the way toward a conception of knowledge as fundamentally 'knowing that' rather than 'knowing of' - half way toward a conception of knowledge which was not modeled on perception" (PMN, p. 147). Kant still wanted to deduce the "scope and limits" of knowledge, and to do so in terms of a "framework of causal metaphors - 'constitutions,' 'making,' 'shaping,' 'synthesizing,' and the like" (PMN, p. 161). Kant thus remains caught in the assumptions of the epistemological or "cognitive" conception of knowledge, defining a mental state as knowledge because of its cause (transcendental conditions) rather than because of the arguments that can be given for it.

What would a full-blown conception of knowledge as fundamentally "knowing that" look like? Sentences replace experiences and justification is carefully distinguished from causation. Conversation, the exchange of statements, replaces the contemplative monologue of mimesis and the mentalism of transcendental synthesis. This is Rorty's anti-epistemological argument: Hume without the subjectivism, Kant without the monologism or the pseudo-problem of transcendence, the objectivity of knowledge being achieved dialogically, through the publicity of language. Knowledge has to be true, of course, but there is no significant practical difference between a true belief and one which passes for true because it is so well justified. ¹ "True" does not have the same logical meaning as "justified," but the logical distinction between them makes no difference in practice and can be dropped. Knowledge is "what we are justified in believing" (PMN, p. 9). The justification of belief is the dialectical defensibility of statements of belief. Knowledge chases agreement up the tree of conversation.

Rorty "goes all the way" from presence and representation to an entirely linguistic and anti-representational view of knowledge. Knowledge does not require that a Real Something transcend belief and measure the cognitive quality of our conversations. Knowledge revolves entirely within discourse. It is entirely a matter of sentences people believe true, the statements they make, the interlocutors who receive and criticize such statements, and the standards they go by. In the eighteenth century it was said that nothing but an idea can be like an idea. Rorty transcribes this insight in the register of language. Nothing but a sentence can justify a sentence. Showing that a sentence is warranted (or true) means showing its connection with other sentences assumed to be warranted (or true). Furthermore, since a perception is evidence for a sentence only when it is described or interpreted with a sentence, verification revolives entirely within language.

**Knowledge and Conversation**

Rorty identifies as his "crucial premise" in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* the assumption that "we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representations." The social justification of belief, he says, is "not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice" (PMN, p. 170). This premise entails a number of consequences. Some are negative; for instance that "there is no such thing as a justified belief which is nonpropositional," nor "justification which is not a relation between propositions" (PMN, p. 183). Also that "everything which is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding the justification of human knowledge" (PMN, p. 186). More positively, conversation is said to be "the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood" (PMN, p. 389). Justification is relative to the different conversations we can have. "Alternative standards of justification" (PMN, p. 380) make knowledge depend on what "a given society, or profession, or other group, takes to be good ground for assertions of a certain sort" (PMN, p. 285).

Hasty critics assume Rorty has reduced justification to de facto agreement, anybody's agreement reached any way. Bernard Williams rhetorically asks why, if all you need to establish something as knowledge is agreement, Crick and Watson might not "have economised on all that trouble with the x-ray photographs . . . and just spread some gossip about the helix?" The answer is because it wouldn't have worked, would not have persuaded those who mattered. The agreement that defines knowledge cannot have been produced in any old way. Knowledge is (only) what we agree is justified by our standards, our methods, concepts, evidence, and styles of reasoning. The difference between "relativism" and Rorty's ethnocentric pragmatism has misled more than one critic. Putnam thinks he is taking a stand against Rorty and relativism when he defines knowledge as belief which has attained ideal rational acceptability. But take the idea one step further. How do we assess rational acceptability? As Putnam says, it is by
referring to traditions, to historical styles and paradigms of rationality, or in other words, ethnocentrically. There is no misunderstanding when Rorty says to Putnam that he "cannot see what 'idealized rational acceptability' can mean except rational acceptability to an ideal community... or how, given that no such community is going to have a God's eye view, this ideal community can be anything more than us as we should like to be." Or when he adds that "identifying 'idealized rational acceptability' with 'acceptability to us at our best' is just what I had in mind when I said that pragmatists should be ethnocentrics rather than relativists."

The source of Rorty's ethnocentric view of knowledge runs deep in pragmatism, linking Dewey and Peirce to Hegel. Dewey believed that "inherent in all social life is an intimation of what it would be at its best." Rorty makes explicit the implication that "our only useful notions of 'true' and 'real' and 'good' are extrapolations from practices and beliefs" (PMN, p. 377). To extrapolate our use of the word "true," say, would require that we use it in new cases with the same normative meaning as in the past. Such "extrapolation" is not going to be predictable from information about a past pattern of agreement — unless, of course, the predictor is one of us, a member of our community, following our rules, attuned to our way of going on. As far as knowledge, truth, and rationality are concerned, there is as Hegel said know it and separate it. By which they are measured. They are ours or not for us. In the words of another Hegelianism-pragmatist, "the theoretical attempt to track down the 'source' of the normative dimension in discourse leads us right back to our own implicitly normative practices. The structure of those practices can be elucidated, but always from within normative space, from within our normative practices of giving and asking for reasons."

Ethnocentrism is supposed to be bad. No one ever calls himself "ethnocentric." We reserve this term for our opponents; it is always someone else, with whom you disagree, who is ethnocentric. But Rorty is not advocating the fallacy that anthropologists (and others) love to denounce — the colonialist assumption that unlike the savage our way of doing things is especially favored by reason, nature, or God. It is, however, especially favored by us, and Rorty thinks the difference is important. This point has been missed. His endorsement of ethnocentrism does not make sense without liberalism; without liberalism, ethnocentrism would be awful. But Rorty sees nothing objectionable about ethnocentrism when the ethos at the center is a liberal democratic society that makes openness to others central to its own self-image (ORT, p. 204). Our ethnocentrism is different from everybody else's. When we are ethnocentric, we are not ethnocentric. When we are true to our traditions, we are open to other traditions, when we are interested in ourselves, we are interested in what is new and different, happy (as at best) to accommodate and learn from it.

Let me return to the "crucial premise" of Rorty's argument in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. It is that there is nothing more to knowledge than "the social justification of belief," and the corollary, that conversation is "the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood." Why buy this premise? Reading *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* with this question in mind drew my attention to four lines of argument.

1 How Else? Assuming it is not "by virtue of relations of 'acquaintance' between persons and, for example, thoughts, impressions, universals, and propositions" (PMN, p. 177), how else would a claim acquire the authority of knowledge? Knowledge is not an impossible transaction between the mental mirror and things-in-themselves. So what else could it be if not just what you can (appropriately) get interlocutors to agree with? "We can only come under epistemic rules when we have entered the community where the game governed by those rules is played" (PMN, p. 187). "All matters concerning epistemic status... are a sociological rather than metaphysical concern" (PMN, p. 219).

But isn't that really the question — whether ruling out the epistemology of mirrors as good as proves the pragmatism of conversation? Have we an exclusive choice to make between metaphysics and sociology, mimesis and conversation, Platonism and Pragmatism? Isn't the real question whether Rorty makes a good case for knowledge as ethnocentric consensus? Why is rejecting "the pseudo-explanation of epistemic authority through the notion of 'direct acquaintance' by the 'Eye of the Mind' with mental entities such as sense-data and meanings" (PMN, p. 209) supposed to favor the claim that "the community is the source of epistemic authority" (PMN, p. 188)? Rorty's discussion of knowledge is faced with dichotomous reasoning which avoids outright fallacy only on the unargued assumption that we face an exclusive choice between two well-defined alternatives:

We can think of knowledge as a relation to propositions, and thus of justification as a relation between the propositions in question and other propositions from which the former may be inferred. Or we may think of both knowledge and justification as privileged relations to the objects those propositions are about. (PMN, p. 159)

Can we treat the study of "the nature of human knowledge" just as the study of certain ways in which human beings interact, or does it require an ontological foundation...? Shall we take 'S knows that p'... as a remark about the status of S's reports among his peers, or shall we take it as a remark about the relation between subject and object, between nature and its mirror...? To choose between these two approaches is to choose between truth as "what it is good for us to believe" and truth as "contact with reality." (PMN, pp. 175-176)

The "how else?" argument is not as strong as it needs to be. The oppositions Rorty presents are not logically exclusive, so no objection against one side favors the other, and no argument can prove the negative proposition that there is no understanding of knowledge apart from the antithetical ones Rorty considers. It is not for a critique to defend a third option (though I will do so later); the arbitrariness of the dichotomies argues against shifting the burden of proof. The question is not "how else?" It is why saying so to the epistemology of privileged representations is supposed to be as good as saying yes to Rorty's pragmatism.

2 Ockham's Razor. "Once we understand (as historians of knowledge do) when and why various beliefs have been adopted or discarded, there is [not] something called 'the relation of knowledge to reality' left over to be understood" (PMN, p. 178). To posit an unverifiable difference between "true knowledge" and what seems well justified and thus passes for known would be superfetuous, redundant, a source of pseudo-problems. Yet only someone already convinced of Rorty's dichotomies will think it is simpler to explain knowledge in terms of conversation.

3 "Justice is public" (PMN, p. 254). Frege taught analytic philosophers to make a sharp distinction between norm and causation. Attend to the sentences of public language, not subjective ideas or private mental representations. Since the concern to hold justified beliefs or to justify statements is a concern with how one stands in
another's eyes, the difference between knowledge and error is to be sought not in a solitary transaction with mute reality but in a normative difference between sentences realized in actual or possible conversations. Again, though, I am unhappy with the implicit dichotomy. Do we really have to choose between private mental events and public discourse? What about public things, like artifacts, whose use is as social as a conversation though there need be nothing linguistic or conversational about it. Later I shall argue that knowledge figures in any and all our transactions with artifacts. The artifacts of language and what we do with them are not unique in the expression of knowledge. That is why I am unsatisfied with Rorty's idea that conversation is where the difference between knowledge and non-knowledge is ultimately decided.

4 Meaning Holism. Rorty agrees with "the holistic point that words take their meaning from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character, and the corollary that vocabularies acquire their privileges from the men who use them rather than from their transparency to the real" (PMN, p. 368). Why do vocabularies acquire epistemic privilege from the men who use them? Apparently it is because once we "drop the notion of correspondence for sentences as well as for thoughts," we see that sentences are "connected with other sentences rather than the world" (PMN, pp. 371-372). The argument seems to be that since words acquire meaning by relations to other words rather than to things, things cannot enter into the rationale for anything that we say or mean. Perhaps meaning-holism implies that words are not representations, which may further imply that justification has nothing to do with a representation's adequacy to the thing it represents. But from these (again) entirely negative inferences nothing follows about what justification is. The holistic criticism of knowledge or truth as "a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects" does not prove Rorty's crucial premise that justification is nothing but "a matter . . . of conversations, of social practice."

The Biases of Epistemology

I think Rorty needs a better reason than he has explained for choosing to see knowledge as he does, and not only because of the inconclusiveness of the arguments I have discussed. His pragmatism shares a number of biases with the epistemology it seeks to overcome, and consequently surreptitious some of epistemology's presuppositions and deficiencies.

(a) Propositional bias. The most important knowledge, or the knowledge that most really philosophical consideration, is propositional knowing, that knowledge of truth, of a proposition that is true, or is suitable for evaluation in terms of true and false.

(b) Belief-plus. The presumption that knowledge begins with belief, which rises to knowledge through the addition of extra factors. Most epistemologies add justification, many add truth. For Rorty, knowledge is ethnocentrically justified belief, which pragmatically entails its passing-for-true among the interlocutors who matter. The shared assumption concerns the continuity of knowledge and belief, the idea that knowledge is some form of belief-plus (whatever).

(c) Discursive bias. Knowledge as claims, as linguistic, discursive, dialogical expressions of belief, as statements, appropriate objects for dialectical challenge and defense. The best knowledge is consequently logical, rational, discursively articulated, its value realized in rational discourse. There may be no privileged representations, but Rorty blantly privileges discourse in the wide sense that includes discussion, demonstration, dialectic, and dialogue or conversation.

(d) The misplaced good of knowledge, and a posture of indifference toward Nietzsche's question concerning this good. Why care for knowledge? Why prefer it over ignorance, error, or fantasy? Rorty's pragmatism is no more help in understanding this preference than any of the traditional theories of knowledge, while the suggestion that we merely drop the preference is empty.

Propositional bias

The principal reason for the propositional bias in epistemology is the assumption that the unit of knowledge must admit of evaluation in terms of true and false, which is a functional definition of a proposition. Even if Rorty does not distinguish between a proposition's "really being true" and its merely passing or being well justified, he does assume that the unit of knowledge is something believed-true, which ensures that his pragmatism shares epistemology's propositional bias.

Why must knowledge be true (or even believed-true)? "Well, (it may be said), if we discover that something we thought we knew is wrong, that it is an error and is false, we revoke our belief and speak no more of it as knowledge." That is right as far as it goes. What it shows is not that knowledge must be true, but that something we consider an error is not, of course, something we are going to count as knowledge. Certainly knowledge cannot be false. But "true" and "false" are contrary, not contradictory, terms. Knowledge does not have to be one or the other. From the mere fact that no knowledge is false nothing follows about truth as a logical ingredient of knowledge.

Consider this inference: (1) Socrates knows that p; so, (2) p. Many find the inference valid, and it might occur to a philosopher to adduce it as proof that knowledge has to be true. On the face of it though, the inference is contrived. Who would reason this way and to what purpose, especially since it is no easier to determine when somebody (really) knows that p than it is to determine whether p is true? Perhaps the intuitive validity of the inference reveals what Wittgenstein called logical grammar. Attributing knowledge to another usually carries an implicit claim to know the same yourself. But that does not show that a logical property of being true partly constitutes knowledge, or that knowledge could not be what it is were it not knowledge of the truth?

If knowledge must be true, then a claim to know must be a claim to know that something is true. Not that it is warranted, reasonable, or justified -- those would be different claims -- but that it is knowledge and as such is the very truth. But knowledge that has to be true cannot be fallible. The only claim you could reasonably assert as knowledge would be one that (you suppose) could not possibly be incorrect. So the more implausible it is to believe in infallible truth, the more doubtful it should be that truth is a condition on knowledge. But why fallibility? What recommends this attitude toward knowledge? As Hume and Kant argued, knowing is not to enjoy a specular representation of a thing-in-itself apart from its relation to anything else. Instead, as Nietzsche and Dewey say, it is to know the relations, to know some cross-section of
relations among an entire ensemble of things (including sentences). Since such relations are constantly changing, so must knowledge change to confront novelty without loss of reliability. The structure and content of knowledge can be no more immutable than the environment in which it makes sense. This inherent flexibility distinguishes knowledge from belief, doctrine, or genetic hard-wiring. But it also means that merely to retain empirical reliability the practice of knowledge requires what Peirce called the attitude of contrite fallibilism.

The assumption that knowledge has to be true, or that the most important instances of knowledge are propositional, makes the distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how seem greater than it is. Of course propositions, sentences, statements are all artifacts, things we must know how to make before we can know that they are true. Also the knowledge it takes to know that a proposition is true is not itself propositional knowledge. To know, say, that Australia lies in the Southern Hemisphere is true, you have to know how to check and assess evidence, weigh plausibility, consult authorities, refute objections, and so on, including perhaps knowing how to get there from here. All knowledge is like that, building on operational, effective know-how, and the artifacts (including but not limited to those of conception and communication) that we know how to use.

Belief-plus

The propositional bias in epistemology stands on two legs. One is the conviction that knowledge has to be true. The other is that belief (conceived as a kind of propositional registration) is a necessary ingredient of knowledge, that knowledge is some sort of belief-plus. Most disputes in epistemology concern the factors that raise belief up to knowledge. No-one (Rorty included) questions the assumption that knowledge not only begins in belief but never leaves it behind.

How could it? "Surely if I know that p, I must believe that p!" Or at least not disbelieve it. But what continuity between knowledge and belief does that prove? Not that knowledge is a logical complex of which belief is a logical element. Belief is what we have to fall back on when we want knowledge. Only those who must knowledge believe in God. A dentizen of the equatorial zone may believe snow is white, but those for whom winter is a fact of life do not believe snow is white. They know it. Anybody who believes snow is white does not know much about snow, and those who know it at all know it is white (as they know it can be other than white). Such knowledge is not an impeccably justified belief. It is not a belief at all. It is non-propositional, perceptual, kinesthetic knowledge.

The difference between belief and knowledge is a difference between the sources and limits of competence. If your belief arises not from your own experience, but from reading someone in a book, and if all that your belief allows you to do is speak plausibly, then it is just a belief, not knowledge. If with experience, you are reliably able to do something well, you do not have a terrifyingly well-justified belief — you have knowledge. As for talking plausibly, the communicative skills by which someone makes a case and persuades others are certainly knowledge, however sophistical or erroneous the claim defended may be.

Rorty sounds one of pragmatism's founding ideas when he says that beliefs are not mental representations but rules for action.9 Does this idea diminish the argument against belief-plus conceptions of knowledge? I don't think so. Peirce says that "the whole function of thought is to produce habits of action," which is his definition of belief. But since a belief is also something that can be true or evaluated for truth (as Peirce insists, calling it a tautology), the upshot of this pragmatism is a logocentric propositionalization of action and habit rather than a de-propositionalizing or anti-representational account of belief.10

Can the belief queried and attributed in what Quine and Davidson call radical translation or interpretation be a "rule of action"? It has to be a disposition to assert to a sentence, which makes it a rule of speech-action, a habitual response to linguistic prompting. If that is what belief is, then belief shrinks to what you can have a conversation about, and if knowledge is belief-plus (whatever), then knowledge is an even smaller part of what you can have a conversation about. At this point knowledge has become confused with prestigious talk.11

Combining the pragmatic conception of belief as a rule or habit of action with a belief-plus conception of knowledge assumes that knowledge is rule-like or habitual, when it is precisely the distinction of knowledge that it can deal with cases at the limit of rules, where habitual responses break down. The difference between knowledge and belief shows up clearly when success in an endeavor calls for action that is not rule-governed or habitual, not following mechanically from anything we have already seen. The most important knowledge is always knowledge of (and at the limits of rules. If belief is a rule of action, knowledge (or at least the best knowledge) cannot be a belief at all. It is not the same sort of thing as belief only better, improved by the addition of a further factor. Belief is font de mœurs, something we may have a right to (as James argued) when we badly must knowledge we do not have. When we have it, however, knowledge has lost this and every other characteristic of belief.

The bias of discourse

The epistemology of propositional belief-plus offers an entirely discursive conception of knowledge. Knowledge is limited to propositions that stand up to methodological, logical, or conversational tests. Such propositions withstand objections and triumph in debate by the unforced force of the better argument. But like the concepts of truth, proposition, and belief, those of argument, logic, proof, discursive articulation, and verbal justification are less central to knowledge than logocentric philosophers from Parmenides to Rorty assume.12

The reduction of knowledge to a discursive value may only be a scholar's implicit assumption that words are the most important things in the world. Yet there is more to sapiens than logos. Lots of knowledge is never discursively articulated, not translated into sentences, or defended with reasons, and it is usually doubtful that it could be. No amount of true sentential knowledge enables one to use a tool well, and trying to translate such know-how into sentences is largely pointless. The knowledge itself is the capacity to perform well with some range of (mostly non-linguistic) artifacts. Sentences with which somebody might describe the action or its upshot do not take us closer to the essence of the knowledge.

The privilege of discourse is no more defensible in the form of Rorty's pragmatic conversations. He claims to extend "wholehearted acceptance to the brute, inhuman, causal stubbornness" of things (OR, p. 83) But he also wants to say that "there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones — no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow inquirers" (CP, p. 165). How stubborn can inhuman causality be if it can't even constrain an inquiry or what inquiry
misplace good of knowledge

Why prefer knowledge? Rorty has nothing to say to this question except perhaps that we do prefer it. We prefer knowledge because of who we are — children of Platonism and the Enlightenment, of Socrates and Locke, Mill and Freud. Solidarity with this heritage counts for more than the (platitudinous) reasons we could give for preferring knowledge.

Is that really the best we can do? We are those children, but our forebears thought there was an excellent reason for preferring knowledge: knowledge is truth and, if not divine, truth is at least “the most valuable, [and] pleasantest thing in the world” (Locke). Take away this reason and you threaten the coherence of the preference for knowledge. For it is hardly true that we esteem knowledge unconditionally. We are also the inventors and lusty practitioners of advertising and propaganda. We have more secrets, more strategic non-knowledge, more floridly rhetorical communication than ever before. Merely because in some of our moods we have honored knowledge does not provide us with a coherent understanding of this preference today, nor if we think about our commitment, and do not merely cling to it without reasons.

What is lacking from Rorty’s pragmatism is some idea of why, if all there is to knowledge is belief-plus-(ethic)consensus, we should prefer it. Why should one want to believe what others readily accept? Why not shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with the many, as Nietzsche recommended? To come at the same point from another direction, were knowledge as Rorty describes it, would be difficult to understand our preference for it. As difficult, ironically, as it was for William James to understand the good it would do knowledge to copy a transcendental reality. Rorty reduces the value of knowledge to no more than what the Irishman got from being carried to the banquet in a sedan chair with no bottom. “Faith! If it wasn’t for the honor of the thing, I might as well have come on foot!” So with knowledge after Rorty. But for the honor of being agreed with, we might as well remain ignorant.

Why prefer knowledge? An obvious answer is, prudence, of course. Rorty might like this answer. He seems to have adopted what Charles Taylor calls “the prudent strategy.” This is “a stripped-down secular outlook, without any religious dimension or radical hope in history” — advising us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision — “and remove the burden of impossible aspirations.” The question is whether thinking about knowledge in terms of ethnocentric consensus is wise or even prudent.

Of course prudence has something to do with the value of knowledge. When we do not act with knowledge success is no more likely than chance. Yet this much prudence cannot entirely motivate our doing what has to be done to make new knowledge or keep knowledge we have. To be reproduced without loss and survive another generation knowledge must not only be in constant use, but used well. Such use requires action that goes beyond the utilitarian preoccupation with prudence, requiring the peculiar indifference to prudence or utilitarian rationality that Nietzsche called the daring of the lover of knowledge. The result is work whose aesthetic quality has left the calculations of prudence and utility far behind. The continuing existence of knowledge requires both the capacity and the desire to attain such fineness, and that is why prudence is not wise or even ultimately prudent. It is a terminally short-term strategy, whose long-term effect is not to preserve knowledge but to lose it, waste it, forget it.

Rorty banalizes technical or artificial practice by redescribing it in his relentlessly linguistically terms. Superiority becomes essentially rhetorical, innovation reduces to the appearance of a new vocabulary. Yet the knowledge mostly responsible for present- day technological civilization does not have this rhetorical, linguistic, verbal character. Our best examples of structural art, such as Hagia Sophia or the Brooklyn Bridge, do not have that character, nor do inventions as far-reaching as the wheel or as singular as the clothesbutton. Nothing is clarified, and a lot is made obscure, by the suggestion that innovations in reinforced concrete were really just a new way of talking. We learned a new way of talking as a result of living with Maillart’s concrete bridges, but to confuse a new language-game with the artificial innovation that gives it a point and material reference is to confuse a parasite with its host and make a mystery of both language and techniques. We do not get a truer account of what is really going on by redescribing the reliability or effectiveness of artifacts or the knowledge that they express and presuppose in terms of beliefs, sentences, or linguistic dispositions. Of course a vocabulary is an artifact and description can be a tool. I do not want to forget about language, only to question Rorty’s assumption that there is practically no difference between words and things, a thing is as good as a description, as well as the assumption that sentences are the units of knowledge, descriptions the artifacts that matter most. As if the more material artifacts and techniques upon which we daily depend were byproducts of language and not, as is likely, the other way around.

Knowledge and Human Existence

Were knowledge as Rorty supposes — ethnocentric, conversational, agreeable belief - its superior value (in contrast to opinion, doctrine, conviction, error, myth, and the like) would be a mystery if not a mistake. Is the appropriate attitude toward knowledge one of “less is more” — ask less from knowledge, cultivate lower expectations, then we cannot be let down? What if the only way to ensure that knowledge does not disappoint us is by expecting a lot from it? That is our plight — let me explain why. Homo sapiens is one of several overlapping hominid mutations of Homo erectus, and the only one to survive. Knowledge, embodied in superior artifacts, seems to have figured in our success at the expense of competing hominids. Passing for true does not make a statement true, but then for Rorty (as for Davidson) nothing “makes” a statement true. See Donald Davidson, Inquiries Concerning Truth and Interpretation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 194. Rorty thus departs from the pragmatic tradition of a “theory of truth.” I discuss this tradition in Truth in Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). One thing paleoanthropology has shown is the superiority of the artifacts associated with the first sapiens over other contemporary hominid species. Since artifacts are worthless without the knowledge that attends their use, superior artifacts and superior knowledge are two aspects and descriptions of the same existential reality for evolving hominids, and may have made the competitive difference between us and unsuccessful species in other ways very like
being reliable and what even well-informed or qualified opinion agrees is so. When first built, practically all American structural engineers would have agreed that the Tacoma Narrows Bridge was twentieth-century engineering at its best, the work of a master designer. Some continue to believe this, despite the fact that the 150-meter bridge collapsed in 1940, four months after it was opened. It collapsed for a reason that the designer could and obviously should have taken into account. But the entire profession of structural engineering in America had adopted a simplistic aesthetic of slimness in bridges, rationalized by a faulty doctrine and spurious mathematical analysis, which obfuscated known lessons concerning the effect of wind on the suspended deck.

Although it was precisely this aerodynamic effect that was responsible for the Tacoma Narrows failure, one observer suggests that if the relevance of aerodynamics to the design "had been suggested by a person outside the network of leading structural engineers," the advice would have been considered an attack on the profession of civil engineering. Which is exactly what happened. Shortly after the collapse, an article in Engineering News-Record argued that the designer (Leon Moisess) took appropriate notice of a whole documented series of wind failures in similar bridges both in America and Europe he might have changed the design and prevented the further. Two weeks later the profession extracted this retraction: "The casual reader [of the critical article] may infer . . . that the modern bridge engineer, in view of the earlier failures of bridges, was remiss . . . The author . . . did not suggest or intend the reader to imply that the modern engineer should have known the details of the earlier disasters." 113

Reflection on such examples should disabuse philosophers of the notion that knowledge is nothing but the consensus of disciplinary or professional peers. There is a palpable difference between the collapse of a bridge and the collapse of engineering belief in the principles of its design. What experts agree is well done need not be so, nor need what they call knowledge be the real thing. Conversation is not the context in which it is ultimately decided what is knowledge. That is decided where the reliability of knowledge is decided, which is ultimately nothing short of the entire environment where knowledge makes us effective.

**************

What was epistemology? An exaggeration. An exaggerated importance for "science," for the value of deduction, proof, truth, and for the importance of dialectics and theory to intelligence and knowledge. Pragmatists decry the craving for certainty, finding in it the otherworldly indifference to practical life which is anathema to them. 114 Rorty suggests that apart from the metaphor of mind as mirror of nature there would be no topic for a "theory of knowledge." Only if knowledge is taken for a quasi-visual reflection of things-in-themselves would the idea arise of a project to enhance knowledge by learning more about how our cognition-causing mechanism works. Of course the mind is not really a mirror. That's just a metaphor. If it creates more trouble than it is worth, which is how Rorty judges the metaphors that sustain the impression that epistemology is possible or desirable, then drop it. You need not worry about dropping some portion of The truth, for truth is no more than what passes for true, and that changes with our historical conversations. As Dewey suggested, and Rorty concurs, intellectual progress "usually occurs through sheer abandonment of questions. We do not solve them; we get over them." 115 That is how Rorty must view the questions of epistemology. He sees a bad answer and infers that the question
must be bad too. But however objectionable the metaphors that have solidified into epistemology may be, the importance of the questions to which they were addressed remains.

What was epistemology? A bad answer to a good question. The bad answer, or at least Plato’s, was to misunderstand artisanship as copying forms that already exist in an immaterial realm which can be explored more directly by philosophical dialectic. But the question is not a misunderstanding too. It concerns the value of knowledge, its ecological singularity, the inexplicability of its and our flourishing. We do not understand that much better than the Greeks did, and in the mean time knowledge has become more complicated. Plato was not wrong to let his attention be drawn to artisanship when he thought about knowledge, nor was he wrong to let the question of what knowledge is be directed by the question why it is good. The force of either question comes from the insight, which Rorty has said nothing to discredit, that the knowledge of superior artifacts plays an incompatible role in adapting us to our environment and maintaining that adaptation in the face of ceaseless change.

To remain adaptable in the way knowledge makes us requires an appropriate ethos or ethic of knowledge, and that is where Rorty’s pragmatism is deficient. It obscures and mystifies the value of knowledge, the valuable difference between it and its pretenders, and is no help in understanding what it requires of us against the entropic tendency of time toward the loss of knowledge. My argument with Rorty’s pragmatism is an argument for the primacy of artifacts over language-games or discourse, for performative reliability over conversational consensus, for knowledge over belief-plus-whatever, and for the superior good of knowledge over hope and solidarity.

Notes

References to the following works by Rorty are parenthetically embedded:

CP Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

7 Branden observes that "attributions of knowledge are... hybrid doxastic attitudes in the sense that they involve both attributing and acknowledging commitments." "In taking someone to be a knower, one attributes a commitment, attributes entitlement to that commitment, and acknowledges commitment to the same content oneself." Making It Explicit, p. 202; see also p. 315.
9 On beliefs as rules of action, see CIS.65; ORT.65, 118. Alexander Bain defined belief as "that upon which a man is prepared to act." Peirce, who first put the point in terms of rules/habits of action, said that "from this definition pragmatism is scarce more than a corollary." The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, ed. Hartshorne and Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), vol. 5, p. 7.
11 The concept of belief, on which so much recent philosophy of mind and action uncritically depends, is treated with refreshing skepticism by anthropologist Rodney Needham. "Phenomenology in the face of everything philosophers say about radical interpretation, he observes that since "statements of belief are the only evidence for the phenomenon" and "the phenomenon itself appears to be no more than the custom of making such statements," belief "has no logical claim to inclusion in a universal psychological vocabulary." It "does not constitute a natural resemblance among men," nor does the practice of making statements of belief belong "to the common behavior of mankind." The very having of beliefs "is in no fact a conceptual capacity common to all men," and in ethnographical reports the word (and concept) "should be quite abandoned." Belief, Language, and Experience (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), pp. 108, 151, 188, 200, 193.
13 Locke, Letter to Molyneaux, January 1689. The good of truth is a theme of Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding; see for instance the Epistle to the Reader, and p. 23.
RESPONSE TO BARRY ALLEN

Barry Allen's _Truth in Philosophy_ builds on Wittgenstein's insight into the nature of identity. Wittgenstein's point was that, although every question of the form "Is X the same as Y?" (e.g., "Is it the same time on the sun as it is here?") has a sense if we give it one, it has no sense until then. Allen combines this point that identity and difference come and go with redeescription with Quine's insistence on "no entity without identity." The result is his claim that the self-identity, and thus the enactive status, of anything you can mention is up for conversational grab. In that sense, everything — including clouds and rocks — is an artifact. To deny this, as philosophers usually have, is to be committed to what Allen calls "onto-logic" — the idea that being, to on, imposes criteria of sameness and difference all by itself, and that logos (human thought and talk) simply plays catch-up.

In his second book, _Knowledge and Civilisation_, Allen proposes that we capitalize on the realization that clouds and concepts are as artificial as beaver dams and Quinn by attempting a general theory of "superb artificial achievement" — Allen's surprising definition of the term "knowledge." His contribution to this volume echoes his criticisms of me in that book.

I agree with pretty much everything Allen says in _Truth in Philosophy_. I learned a lot from reading his very imaginative and acute summary of the assumptions about the relation between reality and language which we inherited from the Greeks. These assumptions were the target of both _Stein und Zeit_ and _The Spell of Certainty_. Reading Allen's first book is perhaps the best way of grasping what Heidegger and Dewey had in common, and thus of understanding the leitmotif of twentieth-century philosophy — the motif that links Hegel with Brandom and Nietzsche with Davidson.

I have trouble, however, with _Knowledge and Civilisation_ — perhaps more trouble than Dewey would have had. Dewey would have liked the idea of replacing epistemology with a general theory of artifacts. He might have shared Allen's doubts about the "conversationalism" Branden and I have, and, more generally, of what Allen calls our "discursive bias." He might have agreed with Allen that this bias continues the Platonic/Aristotelian preference for the mathematician over the artisan. But even the fear of being un-Deweyan cannot persuade me that Allen's redefinition of "knowledge" is a useful way to continue his criticism of the philosophical tradition. My hunch is that it will work better just to drop knowledge as a topic rather than to say that I, and other critics of the Cartesian/Kantian epistemological problematic, have gotten knowledge wrong.

One way of expressing my doubts is to urge that Allen runs together two senses of the term "belief" — the one we employ when we ascribe beliefs to organisms in order to explain behavior and the one we use when we are distinguished "mere" belief from genuine knowledge. When we try to cope with an organism or other entity whose behavior is quite complex, we often attribute beliefs and desires to it. This lets us explain portions of its behavior as actions — as the outcomes of practical syllogisms. For this explanatory purpose, we do not need the term "knowledge" at all.

But when we are making comparative evaluations of success, as opposed to explaining behavior, we need to distinguish those who know from those who do not: the beings that build tight dams from those that build leaky dams, the people who know that a certain mushroom is non-poisonous from those who merely believe that it is. The invidious sense of "believe," in which it is opposed to "know," does not have much in common with the purely descriptive sense, the one we use when we construct practical syllogisms. Belief-as-opposed-to-knowledge is not what is being attributed in the major premise of the practical syllogism. There seems no particular reason why the same term — "belief" — is used in these two different ways, any more than why we anglophones make do with a word which is ambiguous between commensurate and savoir.

I suspect that trying to bring both uses of "belief" under the same philosophical tent may be fruitless — as fruitless as trying to bring together "true statement," "true friend" and "true gold" (wahr, treu, and echt, roughly speaking). I cannot see why Allen would want to mingle the sense of "believe" in which (as he puts it) "anybody who believes that snow is white does not know much about snow" with the sense in which anybody who knows anything much about snow believes that it is white. Once we distinguish these two senses, I doubt that we need to say anything synopitic which applies to both. Nor should we favor the former as ordinary and dismiss the latter as contrived.

I also doubt that we have, or need, a "philosophy of knowledge" hovering in the background of epistemology, and perhaps capable of surviving epistemology's demise.
Allen says that I have such a philosophy, because my dismissive treatment of epistemology “presupposes” a “substantial conception of knowledge” (p. 231). He also says that my “pragmatism shares a number of biases with the epistemology it seeks to overcome” (p. 220). My suggestion that “the most important instances of knowledge are propositional,” Allen says, makes “the distinction between knowing-how and knowing-that seem greater than it is” (p. 228).

As I see it, however, that distinction remains both great and useful even after we grant to Allen that most of “the knowledge it takes to know that a proposition is true is not itself propositional knowledge” (p. 228). My pragmatism, like Dewey’s, trusts the historian’s justified belief that a certain event took place as continuous with the architect’s skill, the caveman’s spear and the beaver’s dam. A skilled architect and a disciplined historian are as reliable instruments for certain purposes as a sharp spear or a sturdy dam are for others.

Dewey, like Heidegger, spent a lot of time saying that it pays, for certain purposes (for instance, getting rid of epidemics) to view the Vorhanden as a species of the Zuhand. Perhaps I should have spent more time doing the same. If I had, I would have said that sentences, skills, and disciplines (such as historiography) can all be treated as artifacts. All three can, like the spear and the dam, be evaluated in terms of reliability. But I would also have said that, so treated, artifacts are continuous with organs: the beaver’s teeth and its dam, the human hand and the tools it grasps, can all be so evaluated.

This means that when we forget about practical syllogisms and just talk about know-how, the distinction between the human and the non-human fades out. For know-how goes a long way down the great chain of being. (Think, for example, of all those insidiously clever viruses. When we want to zero in on the human, however, we have to go propositional and start talking about knowing-that. This is because only language-users have that sort of knowledge. The linguistic turn helped preserve a Deweyan continuity between biology and culture by letting us see mind as a matter of behaving so complexly as to demand what Dennett calls the adoption of the intentional stance, rather than as the eruption of something new and strange in the midst of the protoplasm. But it also helped us emphasize the discontinuity between ourselves and the brutes by directing attention to the irreducibility of intentional to non-intentional discourse.

When one does take the intentional stance, it is natural to zero in on knowing-that, and to neglect know-how. For the advantage of that stance is that it enables us to bring in the vocabulary of inference – to talk about practical and other syllogisms. Allen sees focusing on knowing-that at the expense of knowing-how as the consequence of a bad philosophy of knowledge. I see it as just a way of highlighting the problems which are important to epistemologists, preparatory to explaining how (by getting rid of the notion of representation) these problems can be dissolved.

But Allen is quite right that a lot of things I have said sound as if they were generalizations intended to cover both knowing-how and knowing-that. When so read, they are indeed biased, and seriously misleading. If I had written “knowledge-that” instead of “knowledge,” these passages might have seemed unobjectionable. They might not have led Allen to ascribe to me “the assumption that there is practically no difference between words and things that . . . descriptions are the artifacts that matter most. As if the more material artifacts and techniques upon which we daily depend were byproducts of language and not, as is likely, the other way around” (p. 231).

But not all the differences between Allen and myself can be ironed out by such a rewriting. For Allen thinks that we need a radically new “philosophy of knowledge,” one which takes account of the probability that “the more material” artifacts gave rise to language rather than vice versa. But I think it fruitless to ask whether non-linguistic artifacts gave rise to linguistic ones, or vice versa. That seems like asking which of two symbiotes is more truly host and which more truly parasite. On the one hand, it is hard to improve your non-linguistic artifacts unless your peers can deploy critical remarks about their design; for lack of linguistic artifacts to use in making such remarks, the beaver dams of our own day are no better than those of old. On the other hand, it is hard to have the leisure for language-building if you lack non-linguistic artifacts with which to defend yourself against the climate and the predators. One can see why the two kinds of artifacts are likely to have been produced around the same time, and to have developed in tandem.

If I understand Allen’s project, he thinks that we shall only understand “the value of knowledge, its ecological singularity, the inextricability of its and our flourishing” better than the Greeks did (p. 234) if we set conversation in the context of the production of artifacts and skills. Such understanding will, Allen believes, be blocked as long as we say, as I did, that “conversation is the ultimate context in which knowledge should be understood.” I should be happy to change “knowledge” to “knowledge-that” in that over-ambitious remark, but this would not eliminate my differences with Allen. For I do not see that there is anything about the value of knowledge and its ecological singularity that we do not already sufficiently understand.

In particular, I do not see why we need to draw any line between the knowing animals and the non-knowing animals other than the line between the sentence-wielding knowers-that and the non-sentence-wielders who only know how.

Allen seems to want the former sort of line, for he says that plants, pace Piotkin, do not know how to photosynthesize. Presumably he would also deny that beavers know how to build dams, for he suggests that “knowledge is as uniquely human as our neurology” (n. 19). Admiring the beavers as I do, I cannot see anything especially human about knowing how to get things done. Attributing knowledge-that, on the other hand, seems useful only when explaining ourselves, and perhaps our computers. We attribute knowledge-how wherever telic description seems appropriate, but knowledge-that only when intentional description does.

Allen takes seriously Nietzsche’s question “Why prefer knowledge to ignorance?” Unlike me, he thinks the obvious answers — utility and prudence — insufficient. This is because he thinks that

To be reproduced without loss and survive another generation knowledge must not only be in constant use, but used itself. Such use requires action that goes beyond the utilitarian preoccupation with prudence, requiring the peculiar indiscipline to prudence or utilitarian rationality that Nietzsche called the daring of the lover of knowledge. The result is work whose aesthetic quality has left the calculations of prudence and utility far behind. (pp. 230–1)

Many of Allen’s sentences would be more plausible if “knowledge” were replaced by “know-how” just as many of mine would be more plausible if it were replaced by “knowing-that.” In particular, Allen’s claim about reproduction without loss and inter-generational survival works only for know-how, and not for knowledge that. (We may not make use of our knowledge that a nasty event happened in the wooded in early
March of 1497 for a long time. That knowledge may reside in a dusty monument room for generations before it becomes relevant to some historian's researches.

As for the motives and attitudes of lovers of knowledge, it is certainly true that many craftpersons, like many historians, never think twice about the utility of their productions. They regard attention to that question as a boorish distraction. Allen's invocation of aesthetic quality pumps up the same intuitions as those which make scientists resent being viewed as mere predictors, mere handmaidens of technological progress. Getting control of the environment and improving man's estate, these scientists say, is not their motive. They are after knowledge and truth. In the same spirit, Allen says that indifference to utilitarian rationality is required to produce work "whose aesthetic quality has left the calculations of prudence and utility far behind."

My reaction to the resentful scientists goes like this: reference to utility will not adequately describe your motives, but it will be a sufficient explanation of why we call you "scientists." For if your work doesn't, sooner or later, help us improve our estate we shall find something else to call you ("dreamer," "pure mathematician," "crank," or "mere philosopher," for example). My reaction to Allen's parallel claim is that what Vehlen called "the instinct of workmanship" does indeed produce work with an aesthetic quality that goes beyond fulfillment of easily describable needs. Still, we should not call it craftsmanship (but rather, perhaps, "fine art") if that work does not help us improve our estate. Any human activity - the production of TV commercials, pimping, mathematical physics - can be given an aesthetic quality. But we can understand all there is to understand about both knowing-how and knowing-that without attention to this possibility.

***************

What was epistemology? A bad answer to a bad question - a question as bad as "What is the good?" Knowledge, like goodness, is a good thing. So it was thought, in both cases, that by having a theory of this good thing we might be able to acquire more of it. Neither project panned out. Allen thinks that Plato was right "to let the question of what knowledge is be directed by the question why it is good" (p. 234). But neither question seems to me likely to have an interesting answer. I quite agree with Allen that "the knowledge of superior artifacts [including, presumably, superior sentences] plays an incomparable role in adapting us to our environment and maintaining that adaptation in the face of ceaseless change." (p. 234) But I cannot see why that fact should lead us to ask the sort of question which Plato became famous for asking.

However, I am not sure that I have adequately grasped the scope and motive for Allen's project - a new philosophy of knowledge, distinct both from epistemology and from the pragmatists' dismissal of epistemology. It may be that the foregoing responses to his paper largely miss his point. But I hope that they may encourage him to explain more clearly what is likely to be gained from commingling the two senses of "belief" which I distinguished at the outset.

Notes

1 Those who hunt for inferences lurking behind behavior acquire what Allen calls a "discursive bias." For they specialize in breaking know-how down into knowing-that. Interest in such breakdown begins at the border between zoology and anthropology. Ornithologists are
Contents

Notes on Contributors vii

Introduction ix

1 Universality and Truth RICHARD RORTY 1

2 Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn JÜRGEN HABERMAS 31
Response to Habermas
RICHARD RORTY 56

3 Truth Rehabilitated DONALD DAVIDSON 65
Response to Davidson
RICHARD RORTY 74

4 Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification HILARY PUTNAM 81
Response to Putnam
RICHARD RORTY 87

5 The Case for Rorty DANIEL C. DENNETT 91
Response to Dennett
RICHARD RORTY 101

6 Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity JOHN MCDOWELL 109
Response to McDowell
RICHARD RORTY 123