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VULGAR PRAGMATISM:
AN UNEDIFYING PROSPECT

Susan Haack

SHE: For the last time, do you love me or don’t you?
HE: I DON’T!
SHE: Quit stalling, I want a direct answer.
—Jane Russell and Fred Astaire, “carrying on the conversation”

The main target of this paper is Richard Rorty, since the publication of Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature probably the most influential critic of the epistemological enterprise in contemporary English-speaking philosophy. The secondary target is Stich, who has of late shifted his allegiance from the scientific to the “pragmatist” camp.

There are significant differences between Rorty’s and Stich’s arguments, and in the conclusions they reach. But they have in common at least this: both repudiate the idea that criteria of justification should be judged by their truth-indicativeness. Rorty thinks the idea makes no sense; Stich, that it is narrow-minded and parochial.

Referring to Rorty and Stich as “vulgar pragmatists” is intended as an implicit challenge to their claim to be the philosophical descendants of the classical pragmatists, a challenge that will be made explicit in the closing paragraphs of this paper. But the main goals here are epistemological rather than historical. The major theme is that neither Rorty nor Stich has any good arguments that the familiar epistemological projects are misconceived. A secondary theme will be that both Rorty and Stich fail to grasp that to believe that p is to accept p as true; with the result that the “edifying” philosophy into which Rorty wants the ex-epistemologist to put his energies masks a cynicism which would undermine not only epistemology, not only “systematic” philosophy, but inquiry generally; and that the liberated post-analytic epistemology which Stich envisages turns out to consist in a search for more efficient techniques of self-deception. As my title says: not an edifying prospect.

Still, the hope is, by revealing the poverty of the revolutionaries’ post-epistemological utopias I can begin to articulate why, in my view, epistemology is indispensable—and to sketch some of the contours of the problem of ratification, of the relation of justification and truth.

Rorty wants, he says, to replace confrontation with conversation. This sounds like a plea to stop the bombing and get around the conference table. But it means something more like: we should abandon the conception of philosophy as centered in epistemology, as seeking “foundations” for knowledge in “privileged representations,” and accept that there is nothing more to the justification of beliefs than local and parochial convention, our practices of objection, response, concession. This bears on its face the characteristic stamp of Rorty’s This-or-Nothingism: either we accept this particular composite, a certain conception of the role of philosophy within culture, of the role of epistemology within philosophy, of the role of “foundations” within the structure of knowledge, this “neo-Kantian consensus,” or we jettison the whole lot and take “carrying on the conversation” as our highest aspiration.

According to Rorty, the idea that there is such a discipline as epistemology, as a distinctively philosophical theory of knowledge which is to inquire into the foundations of science, and a fortiori the idea of philosophy as centered in epistemology, is quite a recent one. It could arise only in the context of a perceived distinction between science and philosophy, an idea implicit in the work of Descartes and Hobbes, which came to seem obvious only since Kant. Locke, learning from Descartes to look inward, conceived of the theory of knowledge as the science of the mind; then Kant’s Copernican revolution made this “science of the mind” distinctively philosophical by raising it to the a priori level (131–64).

The philosophical theory of knowledge has developed, furthermore, under the influence of a variety of perceptual or ocular metaphors, an anal-
ogy of knowing with seeing, which encourages a confusion of knowledge that p with knowledge of x, of justification with causation, and of which the idea of “foundations” of knowledge is a product. This conception of epistemology and its role in philosophy, and this set of metaphors, are “optional” (146, 159, 162–63).

That this “foundationalism” is fundamentally misconceived has been revealed, Rorty argues, as the epistemological tradition has worked itself out in analytic philosophy, by the combination of Quine’s and Sellars’s critical arguments. Between them, Sellars’s critique of the notion of the given, and Quine’s of the notion of the analytic (and hence, by implication, of the a priori) combine to undermine the whole conception of epistemology as foundational. Sellars’s critique unmasks the confusion of justification with causation; Quine’s reveals the hopelessness of seeking foundations of an a priori character (169ff.).

Neither Quine nor Sellars, Rorty thinks, fully appreciates the revolutionary impact of their combined work, but he is convinced that it makes the conclusion inescapable that justification is nothing more than a matter of social practice. To say that A knows that p is to say “something about the way human beings interact” (175). For a belief to be justified is for it to be defensible against “conversational objections.” “[W]e understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief,” Rorty writes, “and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation” (170).

The last clause is an indication of just how radical Rorty’s position is. The differing criteria of different times or cultures or communities, he holds, are “incommensurable”; no agreement can be expected about which standards of defending beliefs are correct. And neither does it make sense to seek to ratify these or those criteria of justification by arguing that beliefs which satisfy them are likely to be true; for this requires the idea of truth as correspondence, as faithful picturing—another legacy of the ocular metaphor, and covertly unintelligible. Justification is not only a social, but also an entirely conventional, matter: it makes no sense to suppose that our practices of criticizing and defending beliefs could be grounded in anything external to those practices (178).

Rorty urges the repudiation of the idea that the abandonment of epistemology leaves any gap that needs to be filled. Still, he thinks there remains a role for the ex-epistemologist; but it is to be “hermeneutic” rather than epistemological, “edifying” rather than systematic, rather poetic than philoso-

phical in the traditional sense, a matter of “carrying on the conversation,” of seeking new vocabularies instead of persisting in a hopeless attempt to commensurate incommensurable discourses (315ff.).

Well, no, certainly one wouldn’t want to waste one’s time doing that. But while pondering the futility of trying to commensurate incommensurable discourses may have convinced some to abandon epistemology, it leads me to suspect that the tautological is being transmuted into the tendentious: e.g., that we judge by the standards by which we judge, into, it makes no sense to ask what the basis of our standards might be; or: that we can’t describe anything except in language, into, there is nothing outside language for our descriptions to represent accurately or inaccurately.

But I digress. The question at issue is: does Rorty have any arguments that establish that it makes no sense to suppose that criteria of justification need, or could have, objective grounding?

Fortunately, it is not necessary to engage in detailed discussion of Rorty’s claims about the history of epistemology. (This is fortunate because there are significant difficulties in determining just what Rorty’s historical story is. Is the enterprise he repudiates supposed to have begun with Descartes? with Locke? with Kant? Does he gloss over the relevance to Descartes’ project of the then recently-discovered writings of the ancients? Is it not the slightest tendency to show that “epistemology” is just a term for a bunch of pseudo-problems. It is, surely, a fact familiar from the history of the sciences as well as from the history of philosophy that reformulating, refining and refocusing problems is one way of making progress. I would go so far as to say that a discipline in which problems had ceased to evolve would be dead.

Nor is it necessary to engage in detailed consideration of Rorty’s claims about the influence of ocular metaphors. (This is doubly fortunate, because there are significant difficulties here, both in reconciling Rorty’s stress on the importance of a style of metaphor which was at least as predominant in
Plato as in Descartes or Locke or Kant with his claim that the disputed conception of the philosophical theory of knowledge is recent, and in reconciling it with the resolutely non-cognitivist theory of metaphor he elsewhere defends.) For, once again, the point on which I want to insist is simple. I don’t deny the epistemological importance of metaphors—how could I, given my concern to replace the model of the mathematical proof by an analogy with a crossword puzzle as better representing the structure of justification? But it has yet to be shown that ocular metaphors have led to a preoccupation with problems which, cleared of their metaphorical accretions, would be seen to be misconceived.3

The arguments considered thus far amount to little more than an inference from “optional” to “misconceived,” obviously a non sequitur.

The focus must be on Rorty’s arguments that “foundationalism” is not just optional, but misconceived. It is impossible to assess these arguments, however, without disambiguating “foundationalism” and “epistemology as foundational.” Sometimes Rorty uses these expressions to refer to experiential versions of the foundationalist style of theory of justification;4 sometimes to refer to the idea that epistemology is an a priori enterprise the goal of which is to legitimize the claim of the sciences to give us knowledge; sometimes to what might less confusingly be called “epistemic objectivism,” the thesis that criteria of justification require objective grounding. The required distinctions may be marked as follows:

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

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

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

FOUNDATIONALISM does not imply foundationalism, nor foundationalism foundationalism. It could be that though criteria of justification stand in need of ratification (as FOUNDATIONALISM holds), ratification is not to be achieved a priori (as foundationalism holds) but within, or with the help of, empirical knowledge. Or it could be that the way to ratify criteria of justification is (as foundationalism holds) a priori, but that the correct criteria are not foundationalist, but coherentist or foundherentist.

The allegation of a confusion of justification with causation, like the appeal to Sellars’s critique of the given, is relevant to foundationalism; the appeal to Quine’s critique of analyticity, to foundationalism; and only Rorty’s remarks about the unintelligibility of truth-as-mirroring to FOUNDATIONALISM. So I shall comment only briefly on the first two lines of argument, since clearly it is on FOUNDATIONALISM, not foundationalism or foundationalism, that the legitimacy of epistemology depends.

Sellars’s critique of the idea of the given does damage the experiential foundationalist style of theory of justification—though strong more than weak versions.5 And Rorty is right, experientialist foundationalism is not defensible, even in its weaker forms. The allegation of a confusion of justification with causation, however, can be answered, indeed, has been answered in my account of the interaction of the causal and the evaluative aspects of justification. This is important because, like experientialist foundationalism, foundherentism insists on the relevance of the subject’s experience to the justification of his empirical beliefs, and thus acknowledges a causal element.

This last observation throws another point into sharp relief: that experientialist foundationalism fails is quite insufficient to oblige one to accept anything like Rorty’s conversationalist alternative. One might, like Davidson (who agrees with Rorty that experientialist foundationalism rests on a confusion of justification with causation), opt for some form of coherentism; or, like myself (disagreeing with Rorty and Davidson on this issue), for foundherentism.6

Rorty is right, also, in thinking that foundationalism is not defensible. But the appeal to Quine’s critique of analyticity is neither necessary nor sufficient to establish this.7 Not sufficient: because even if there are no analytic truths it follows that there is no a priori knowledge only on the assumption that only analytic truths can be known a priori; more importantly, not necessary: because, given that the ratification of criteria of empirical justifica-
tion will require synthetic assumptions (assumptions about human cognitive capacities), that foundationalism is false would follow from the repudiation of the synthetic a priori alone.

Rorty is also rightly critical of Quine’s attempt to turn epistemology into psychology. Given the significance he attaches to the fact that the distinction between science and philosophy is relatively recent, it seems likely that he has in mind some such further argument as this: once the idea is abandoned that philosophy deals with the sphere of the a priori, science with the a posteriori, the idea of a distinctively philosophical theory of knowledge is seen to be untenable. But if this is what he is thinking, it misses a significant subtlety: giving up the idea that philosophy is distinguished by its a priori character encourages a picture of philosophy as continuous with the sciences, as part of empirical inquiry; but this does not oblige one to deny that there is a difference of degree between the sciences and philosophy. So it by no means follows that all legitimate questions about knowledge must be answerable by the sciences; nor, therefore, that (as Rorty may be thinking) any question about knowledge not answerable by the sciences is not legitimate.

So the whole weight of Rorty’s case against epistemology, to repeat, rests on the repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM, which depends on considerations about truth. And here one finds less argument than assertion. (Also a rather neat piece of strategy: though section 5 of chapter VI of Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature is entitled “Truth Without Mirrors,” and section 6 “Truth, Goodness and Relativism,” there is no entry under “truth” in the index! Rorty is, I take it, letting us know the importance he attaches to the concept.)

A key passage is this one, from one of the sections with unlisted telephone numbers:

[T] here are . . . two senses apiece of “true” and “real” and “correct representation of reality,” and . . . most of the perplexities in epistemology come from vacillation between them . . . [C]onsider the homely use of “true” to mean “what you can defend against all comers.” . . . It is [this] homely and shopworn sense of “true” which Tarski and Davidson are attending to . . . The skeptic and Putnam switch to the specifically “philosophical” sense of . . . “true” which, like the Ideas of Pure Reason, [is] designed precisely to stand for the Unconditioned . . . (308)

This is (especially coming from a philosopher who likes to align himself with Dewey) a stunningly untenable dualism. We seem to be offered a choice between identifying truth with what is defensible against conversational objections, and taking it to be—well, something else, something not specified but hinted at in the allusion to Kant and to Putnam’s distinction of metaphysical versus internal realism; something, anyway, rather pretentious, something aspired to despite, or even because of, its inaccessibility.

To deal with this false dichotomy I need, first, a more discriminating and less confusing classification of concepts of truth. At the strongly irrealist end, there is (i) Rorty’s proposed identification of “true” with “what you can defend against all comers.” Between this irrealist conception and anything that would appropriately be called “realist” is (ii) Peirce’s conception of truth as the hypothetical ideal theory, the “ultimate opinion” that would survive all experiential evidence and full logical scrutiny. If realism with respect to truth is taken, as seems appropriate here, as requiring a conception which is non-epistemic, i.e., which allows that even a hypothetical ideal theory might be false or incomplete, then the realist category would include (iii) Ramsey’s redundancy theory, according to which “it is true that p” is just an elaborate way of saying that p; (iv) Tarski’s semantic theory, which makes truth a relation between closed formulae and infinite sequences of objects; (v) Wittgenstein’s and Russell’s Logical Atomist correspondence theories, which make truth a structural isomorphism of proposition to fact, and Austin’s correspondence theory, which makes truth a relation of conventions linking statements to states of affairs; and (vi) a conception of truth as copying or mirroring Things-in-Themselves. I will sometimes refer to (i) as “irrealist”; (ii) as “pragmatist”; (iii) and (iv) as “minimally realist”; (v) as “strongly realist”; and (vi) as “grandly transcendental.”

Simple as it is, this classification enables us to struggle free of the wool Rorty is trying to pull over our eyes. Rorty hopes we will choose his first option as obviously more palatable than his second; but, to repeat, the dichotomy is false—grossly false, in fact. It is not just that we are being maneuvered into a choice between extremes (the irrealist versus the grandly transcendental), but also that the maneuvering consists in part of tendentious reclassification of the intermediate positions. We can, and most certainly should, decline to choose either of the options Rorty offers us. It cannot be said too plainly that there is no sense of “true,” homely or other-
wise, in which it means "what you can defend against all comers"; neither does Tarski, or Davidson, think there is. Declining the irrealist option does not oblige us to go grandly transcendental. We may opt, instead, for a Peircean pragmatist, for a minimal, or for a stronger realism.

Nor should we allow Rorty's grossly false dichotomy to disguise the fact that he is relying on our being repelled by the grandly transcendental instead of supplying arguments against pragmatist (for reasons to be explained below, I am strongly disinclined to give Rorty the word), or minimally realist, or strongly realist, conceptions of truth. Indeed, he hasn't really any arguments even against the grandly transcendental.

The present goal, remember, is to show that Rorty has no good arguments against the legitimacy of epistemology. Since only his repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM is relevant to the legitimacy of epistemology, the issue is whether he has any good arguments against FOUNDATIONALISM. And since his repudiation of FOUNDATIONALISM depends on his views about truth, I conclude that, since he has no arguments against pragmatist, minimally realist, strongly realist, or even grandly transcendental views of truth, he has, a fortiori, no good arguments against them, nor, therefore, against FOUNDATIONALISM, nor, therefore, against epistemology.

This is not, of itself, sufficient to establish the legitimacy of epistemology. But I think that a closer look at the post-epistemological future Rorty envisages, and the conception of justification that motivates it, will begin to make it apparent that abandoning epistemology is not an appealing prospect.

Rorty's conversationalist conception of justification takes justifying a belief to be a matter of social practice or convention, variable both within and between cultures, and nothing more. A natural interpretation, and one which comports with Rorty's frequent admiring references to the later Wittgenstein, would take conversationalism as a conjunction of two theses: contextualism at the level of explication, conventionalism at the level of ratification.

Contextualism is a style of theory of justification; it contrasts with foundationalism, coherentism, foundherentism. Its characteristic thesis is that "A is justified in believing that p" is to be analyzed along the lines of "with respect to the belief that p, A satisfies the epistemic standards of the epistemic community to which A belongs."

Conventionalism is a meta-epistemological thesis, a thesis about criteria of justification; it contrasts with epistemic objectivism, i.e., FOUNDATIONALISM. Its characteristic thesis is that epistemic standards are entirely conventional, that it makes no sense to ask which criteria of justification (those of this or that epistemic community) are correct, which are really indicative of the likely truth of a belief.

Though contextualists sometimes make observations about the structure of justification which have a vaguely foundationalist air ("contextually basic beliefs are those which stand in no need of justification within the epistemic community; all other justified beliefs are justified by reference to these contextually basic beliefs") contextualism is distinct from foundationalism, for (i) it insists on the addendum "in the epistemic community to which A belongs," and (ii) it does not posit beliefs justified otherwise than by the support of further beliefs. And though contextualists maintain, as coherents do, that justification is a matter of relations among beliefs, contextualism is distinct from coherentism too, for (i) it insists on the addendum "in the epistemic community to which A belongs," and (ii) it does not make relations of coherence sufficient for justification.

So contextualism has sometimes been welcomed as a third alternative to the traditionally rival theories—and some readers may have been wondering why I didn't consider it more carefully before proposing my "third alternative." The reason can now be made clear. Contextualism may appear a harmless, even attractive, option with respect to the problem of explication, but it leads to a radical, indeed revolutionary, attitude to the project of ratification—to conventionalism, the second element in Rorty's conversationalism.

Contextualism is pointless unless (a) different epistemic communities have different epistemic standards and (b) there is no distinguished epistemic community, C*, such that the standards of C* are, while those of other communities are not, truth-indicative. For if (a) were false the characteristic contextualist addendum would be vacuous; and if (b) were false the status of the epistemic standards of C* would be so distinguished relative to the standards of other communities as to oblige one to concede that for A to be really and truly justified, he should meet the standards of C*. Rorty is a little coy about what exactly the "incommensurability" to which he appeals amounts to (though he is quite concerned to distinguish it from the meaning-variance thesis with which, in Kuhn's work, it is associated); but the likeliest interpretation seems to be: that there is no higher court of
appeal in which agreement could be reached among the different epistemic standards of different communities—i.e., that it is an amalgam of theses (a) and (b).

Since contextualism contrasts with foundationalism (as well as coherentialism and foundherentism) and conventionalism with FOUNDATIONALISM, this makes it even less surprising that Rorty, qua conversationalist, should fail to distinguish foundationalism and FOUNDATIONALISM. But doesn’t it suggest that Rorty has a reply to one of the arguments used earlier, that a refutation of foundationalism is irrelevant to the standing of FOUNDATIONALISM? No: because, although contextualism indeed provides strong motivation for conventionalism, the falsity of foundationalism does not provide strong motivation for contextualism; the options of coherentialism and foundherentism remain.

Rorty perhaps fails to appreciate this because (naturally enough, he does not consider the foundherentist option, and) he shows the occasional tendency to describe his position as “coherentist” (178). But he does that for no better reason than that his position is opposed to “foundationism”—thus compounding his indiscriminate use of “foundationism” with a correspondingly undiscriminating use of “coherentism.”

Conversationalism, on the present interpretation (= contextualism + conventionalism), is quite a tightly-knit conception, since contextualism, as we saw, provides strong motivation for conventionalism. It is, however, both relativist and cynical.

It is relativist, because contextualism makes justification depend on the epistemic community to which the subject belongs, and, since conventionalism precludes the possibility of any higher-minded conception of really-true-indicative justification* (justification by the standards of C*), it must treat the epistemic standards of any and every epistemic community as on a par.

And it is cynical, because if one really believed that criteria of justification are purely conventional, wholly without objective grounding, then, though one might conform to the justificatory practices of one’s own epistemic community, one would be obliged to adopt an attitude of cynicism towards them, to think of justification always as in covert scare quotes. The problem is not that, in general, one cannot engage in a practice one regards as wholly conventional. It is that, in particular, one cannot coherently engage fully—non-cynically—in a practice of justifying beliefs that one regards as wholly conventional. For to believe that p is to accept p as true.

(This is not a sophisticated remark about truth, but a truism about belief.) And, since to believe that p is to accept p as true, for one who denies that it even makes sense to suppose that there is any connection between a belief’s being justified according to our practices, and its being true, it is impossible to see why a belief’s being justified, conforming to those practices, should be thought to have any bearing on whether one should hold it.

From time to time, however, Rorty protests against the accusations—which, you will gather, I am not the first to make—that he is “relativist” or “cynical.” His defensive remarks have more than a little of the flavor of Berkeley’s protests that he is not denying the reality of physical objects. (“I’m not a relativist, I believe in objectivity— you just have to realize that objectivity is a matter of social agreement, not correspondence to some supposed ‘reality’”). But the real reason he thinks the accusation of relativism can be brushed off is to be found elsewhere. Even in the Mirror, there is evidence against, as well as evidence for, the interpretation of Rorty’s conversationalism as combining conventionalism with contextualism. Sometimes, at least, Rorty sounds less contextualist than, as I shall say, tribalist; for example, “The Quine–Sellars approach [i.e., the Rorty approach] to epistemology . . . say[s] that truth and knowledge can only be judged by the standards of inquirers of our own day” (178). This suggests not contextualism but tribalism: “A is justified in believing that p iff A satisfies the criteria of our epistemic community.” And by the time of Objectiveity, Relativism and Truth (1991) Rorty’s commitment to tribalism (“solidarity”), rather than relativism, seems clear.

This enables Rorty to answer the criticism that he is relativist, but does not get him off the hook; on the contrary, it reveals just how deep his difficulties are. Tribalism is entirely arbitrary and unmotivated unless one thinks that the criteria of one’s own epistemic community are better than those of other communities; that is, it pulls against conventionalism, to which, however, Rorty is unambiguously committed. Hence conversationalism is either (first interpretation, = contextualism + conventionalism) both relativist and cynical, or (second interpretation, = tribalism + conventionalism), no longer relativist, but still cynical, and incoherent to boot.

This begins to explain why Rorty’s own modus operandi seems so odd, and why his accounts of the post-epistemological philosophy he envisages are so puzzling.

* We have (“as a matter of social practice,” Rorty would say) criteria for
what counts as good reasons, as flimsy evidence, as jumping to conclusions, and so forth. And Rorty apparently aspires to conform to those criteria when he tries to persuade us that those criteria are wholly without objective grounding, entirely conventional. If he really believes that those criteria are entirely conventional, however, he can’t be fully engaged in this enterprise; he must, rather, be abiding by those standards only as a ploy to persuade others less enlightened than himself by playing the game by their rules. He must be a cynic.

In the introduction to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, no doubt as a preemptive strike against the charge of cynicism, Rorty tells the reader that he will be not so much arguing against more traditional conceptions as suggesting an alternative vision of what philosophy might better be. But in fact much of the body of the book is taken up with arguments against “foundationalism” (though, as I have said, it is hard to find arguments, as opposed to rhetoric, against FOUNDATIONALISM). By the time of Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Rorty has a different defensive strategy: he describes those who, like himself, have grasped the “contingency” of language, the conventionality of justification, as “ironists.” Ironists, he tells us, use the “final vocabulary” they find themselves with, but, realizing there are no objective grounds for choice between vocabularies, are “never quite able to take themselves seriously.”

I shall not pause to protest the skillful insinuation that non-ironists are humorless prigs, nor to press the point that acknowledgment of the possibility and the importance of linguistic innovation is most certainly not the exclusive privilege of Rorty’s ironists. The important point for now is to see that this re-description does not mitigate, though it does quite cleverly disguise, the cynicism on which I have been dwelling. The cleverness lies in suggesting that the ironist is simply more aware than the rest of us of the possibility that our criteria of justification may turn out to be in need of revision, and hence is less dogmatically committed to them. But this suggestion is thoroughly misleading: Rorty’s ironist is no fallibilist, he is a cynic hiding behind a euphemism. He engages in “our” practices of justifying beliefs only at arms’ length not because he thinks they might need revising, but because he thinks it makes no sense to ask whether they are or aren’t really indicative of truth.

This reinforces the diagnosis suggested earlier, that construed—as Rorty’s earlier work allows, and his later work encourages us to construe it—as combining conventionalism and tribalism, Rorty’s conversationalism is incoherent. Tribalism requires “solidarity” with “our epistemic practices”; “irony” reveals that Rorty’s supposed solidarity is no more than pro forma, cynical conformity with those practices.

It also reinforces the impression one gets from the Mirror, that Rorty’s conception of the tasks to which the newly enlightened ex-epistemologist is to turn his energies is less edifying than baffling. (One is entitled to wonder, in any case, why, if the problems of epistemology really are misconceived, one should expect there to be any work conveniently awaiting the ex-epistemologist.) The edifying philosopher, one is told, will compare and contrast the incommensurable discourses which, as epistemologist, he confusedly hoped to commensurate (343); what does this mean, one asks oneself, if not that he is to turn sociologist of knowledge? One is told that he will study “abnormal” discourse (320); what could an abnormal discourse be, one asks oneself? If an attempted conversation between participants from incommensurable discourses, what more illuminating conclusion could the ex-epistemologist hope to reach than that there is irresolvable disagreement? And one is told that he will “carry on the conversation” of Western culture (377–78); but what, one asks oneself, if the various discourses which constitute Western culture really are incommensurable, could this be but participation in what he already knows must inevitably be mutual incomprehension?

There could be no honest intellectual work in Rorty’s post-epistemological utopia. Unless there is such a thing as better and worse evidence for accepting this or that proposition as true—objectively better or worse evidence, that is—there can be no real inquiry of any kind: epistemological . . . or scientific, forensic, historical, mathematical. Since not even Rorty himself accepts this conclusion, and since his argument for abandoning epistemology rests, at bottom, on nothing more than a manifestly false dichotomy of extreme realism versus extreme irrealism about truth, the legitimacy of epistemology seems pretty secure.

II

Or seemed pretty secure; but now, with The Fragmentation of Reason we have Stich’s new critique to deal with.

Stich doesn’t deny that it makes sense to ask whether these or those epistemic standards are truth-indicative, he only insists that it is parochial and
narrow-minded, a kind of “epistemic chauvinism,” to care whether one’s beliefs are true; and he doesn’t want to abandon epistemology altogether, but to revolutionize it, to shift its focus away from these narrow-minded concerns and onto the really important questions: how to improve cognitive processing so as better to achieve the things people really value—such as survival, fame, fortune, power, etc., etc. Stich is also unlike Rorty in welcoming, rather than resisting, the description “relativist.” (But in the shifting kaleidoscope of Rorty’s contribution to the conversation one finds this description of “the tradition in Western culture” from which he would have us turn away: “[t]he idea of Truth as something to be pursued for its own sake, not because it will be good for oneself, or for one’s real or imaginary community . . . .” 12 The sentiment, though not the prose, could be Stich’s.) To avoid any confusion, it should be said that now Stich admits that people do, after all, have beliefs. It should also be said that he now conceives of beliefs along the lines of “sentences in the head” (109ff.). This may be partly responsible for some of the difficulties I shall diagnose. At any rate, someone who thinks it illuminating to imagine the subject’s head equipped with two boxes of sentences, one labeled “beliefs” and the other “desires,” runs the risk of failing to notice that assert, acknowledgment of truth, is part of the concept of belief. It should also be noted that Stich’s critique is informed by certain preconceptions about what epistemology does, specifically, by Goldman’s conception of theories of justification as giving criteria of rightness of systems of rules of belief-formation, and his framework of deontological versus consequentialist theories, and, within the consequentialist, category of reliabilist versus explanationist versus pragmatist accounts. This may also be partly responsible for some of the difficulties I shall diagnose. At any rate, someone focused exclusively on processes of belief-formation runs some risk of losing sight of the connection of justification and evidence, and someone assuming that justification must be tied to truth either as directly as reliabilism ties it or not at all runs the risk of choosing the latter option for no better reason than the implausibility of the former. Stich presents himself as arguing against “analytic epistemology,” which he means “any epistemological project that takes the choice between competing justificational rules or competing criteria of rightness [note the use of Goldman's terminology] to turn on conceptual or linguistic analysis” (91). This Stich describes as parochial, chauvinistic: epistemic standards, he argues, are culturally acquired and vary from culture to culture, and so do the evaluative epistemic concepts embedded in everyday thought and language. And “[u]nless one is inclined towards chauvinism or xenophobia in matters epistemic, it is hard to see why one would care much that a cognitive process . . . . accords with the set of evaluative notions that prevail in the society into which one happened to be born” (94). Unlike Rorty, Stich is rather repelled than attracted by tribalism. But what if it could be shown that satisfaction of these or those epistemic criteria is an indication that one’s belief is true? This, according to Stich, is still parochial; it assumes that having true beliefs is something to be valued. And this, he maintains, is “for most people . . . very dubious indeed” (98). In fact, according to Stich truth is neither an intrinsically nor an instrumentally valuable property for a belief to have. A belief, according to the 1990 time-slice of Stich, is a brain state mapped by an interpretation function onto a proposition which has a truth-value, and which is true just in case the proposition onto which it is mapped is true. Stich proposes a “causal/functional account of our commonsense interpretation function,” i.e., of the function mapping brain states on to propositions. He then points out that there are many possible alternatives to this function. The “standard” function, Stich continues, maps the belief he would express by “There is no water on the sun” onto the proposition that there is no H2O on the sun, but an alternative function might map it onto the proposition that there is no H2O or XYZ on the sun. He describes the standard function and the possible alternatives as generating different notions of reference (reference, REFERENCE*, REFERENCE**, . . . etc., and truth (truth, TRUTH*, TRUTH** . . . etc.). Truth, he concludes, is just one among many possible truth-like values a belief might have (110ff.). Once one grasps this, Stich thinks, one will come to doubt that truth is intrinsically valuable, realizing that valuing truth for its own sake is “a profoundly conservative thing to do” (118). And, he continues, one will also realize that it is no less questionable whether truth is instrumentally valuable. Consider, for example, poor Harry: he believed that his flight left at 7:45 A.M., and this belief was true; unfortunately, the plane crashed, and Harry died. An alternative interpretation function would map the belief Harry would express by “my flight leaves at 7:45 A.M.” onto the proposition that Harry’s flight leaves at 8:45
A.M., and so make Harry’s belief TRUE**** (though not, of course, true). Harry would have been better off with this TRUE**** belief than the true one he had. And this kind of argument, Stich continues, generalizes to lots of other goals that people take to be valuable. So “[t]rue beliefs are not always optimal in the pursuit of happiness or pleasure or desire satisfaction . . . or peace or power or love.” Hence, “the instrumental value of true beliefs is far from obvious” (123, 124).

Urging, therefore, that we break out of the old, parochial, conservative, truth-oriented mould, Stich offers a “pragmatic” account of cognitive evaluation. Cognitive processes are to be evaluated as tools for achieving whatever it is that the subject actually values. The formula would presumably be something like: P is a good cognitive process, for A, iff P produces beliefs which conduces to whatever A values. This account is, as Stich notes, both relativistic and pluralistic: “in general it will not make sense to ask whether one system is better than another (full stop) . . . [I]t may well turn out that one system is best for one person or group, while another system is better for another person or group” (135–36).

It is open to question whether, in the relevant sense, epistemic standards really are local, parochial, culturally variable. Yes, there are scientific and pre-scientific cultures, there are cultures where the authority of a sacred text is respected and cultures where it is not; and yes, there may be, even within one culture, a great variety of theories of evidence or justification professed. But I am not sure that there is, or has been, a culture in which the fit of a proposition into an explanatory net of propositions anchored in sense and introspection (that is, explanatory integration and experiential anchoring) is not grounds for thinking it true. And I notice that the evidence Stich offers of cultural diversity is astonishingly thin: he refers to one piece of work, which he reports as claiming—contrary to the usual English-Yoruba translations—that Yoruba does not distinguish knowledge and true belief as we do, but the first— from the second-hand. Interest as it is, if true, that Yoruba speakers are equipped with something like Russell’s 1912 distinction of knowledge versus probable opinion, this is inconclusive, to put it mildly, with respect to the claim that our epistemic standards are simply idiosyncratic and parochial.

It would be unwise, however, to put much weight on this point here, because the relevance of cultural diversity to Stich’s main thesis is marginal. For one thing, he is careful to hedge his bets, as: “other languages and other cultures certainly could and probably do evoke conceptions of cognitive evaluation that are significantly different from our own” (94, my italics). But, more important, that our epistemic standards are, or could be, culturally local, features as premiss only in a relatively minor, softening-up phase of Stich’s argument. The main phase acknowledges the possibility that our standards (local or not) might be demonstrably truth-indicative, and maintains that, even so, a preference for those standards would be “chauvinistic,” depending on a “profoundly conservative” preference for truth over TRUTH*, TRUTH**, TRUTH***, . . . etc.

One can see why Stich thought the reader might need to be softened up before the main phase of the argument, though, because what he offers next is remarkably feeble. What he would need to do is to show that truth is valuable only if either intrinsically or instrumentally valuable, and that it is neither; what he offers is little more than mere assertion that it is “not obvious” that truth is either. Stich admits that his arguments are “not knockdown” (120). His strategy is dismaying familiar from his earlier work: he hints that he has arguments for a startling thesis, offers considerations which go nowhere near establishing it, disarms the reader by conceding that his arguments are inconclusive, and then, urging that it is possible that his startling thesis is true, thrusts the burden of proof on the opposition.

Just to keep the record straight: all Stich offers to persuade us that truth is not intrinsically valuable is the observation that truth is just one of a whole range of semantic properties a belief might have (truth, TRUTH*, TRUTH**, . . . etc.), the one which happens to be picked out in our culture. Frankly, I have no idea even what it might mean to say that another culture picked out, say, TRUTH* instead of truth; and I would protest the suggestion that TRUTH*, TRUTH**, etc., are truth-values. But in any case, that truth is one of a range of semantic properties of beliefs simply has no bearing on whether it is or isn’t intrinsically valuable. And all that Stich offers to persuade us that truth is not instrumentally valuable is the observation that in some circumstances, Harry’s for example, a true belief may lead to one’s death while a TRUE**** belief would have saved one’s life. This shows—what I don’t deny—that an isolated true belief may not be optimally instrumentally valuable. But it simply has no bearing on whether truth is or isn’t instrumentally valuable, period.

This establishes, I hope, that Stich has no good arguments why, because of their orientation to truth, the familiar epistemological projects are mis-
conceived. It is tempting to leave it at that—by way of parting shot, perhaps, noting that what Stich purports to do is not to show that accepting his startling thesis would conduce to whatever the reader values, not to show that it is TRUE*, TRUE** . . . or whatever, but to give reasons for thinking it true. But, as so often, there is a better view from the steeper path; or maybe I should say, benefit to be gained from the exercise of shouldering, for a while, the burden of proof Stich thrusts at those of us who value truth.

The first part of my argument will be that truth is epistemically valuable, in this sense: that each of the concepts of inquiry, justification and belief is internally connected with the concept of truth.

I speak of inquiry, in the way characteristic of philosophers, in the most general sense: inquiry-into-how-things-are, so to speak. What is the goal of inquiry, thus broadly construed? Something like: to get as much interesting and important truth about the world as possible. But the suggestion of uniqueness is misleading, since "the" goal decomposes into two elements: truth, on the one hand, and interest or importance on the other. Obviously there is potential for tension between the two components, since it is a lot easier to get truths if one doesn't mind the truths one gets being trivial. There are plenty of unimportant or uninteresting truths.

But truth is, though not the goal, an aspect of the goal of inquiry. If you aren't trying to find out how things are, to get truth, you aren't really inquiring. (There is, however, a lot of pseudo-inquiry about; that is why, when the government institutes an Official Inquiry into this or that, some of us reach for our scare quotes.)

Because inquiry has this double goal, appraisal of a person's success in inquiry has two dimensions, which might be roughly characterized as depth and security, the former being importance- and the latter truth-oriented. (Correspondingly, appraisal of a person qua inquirer has two dimensions, roughly characterizable as creativity and carefulness.)

When one focuses on questions of justification, however, one is ipso facto restricting oneself to the second of the two dimensions. Truth-indicativeness is the characteristic virtue of criteria of justification. (Goldman is quite right to insist on a connection of justification and truth—the very point on which Stich parts company with him; where he goes wrong is in making the connection too direct, attributive instead of referential.)

And to believe that p is to accept p as true.

That truth is epistemically valuable is entirely compatible with the fact that in some circumstances one may be better off not inquiring, or better off having an unjustified belief, or better off having a false belief; and with the fact that some truths are trivial, boring, or unimportant.

Stich would no doubt regard all this as no more than a quaint elaboration of my "profound conservatism." "So," he might say, "the concepts on which epistemology has traditionally focused are internally connected to the concept of truth—but why, except for a culturally-inherited bias towards truth-orientation, should we be interested in them?"

Part of the answer is that truth is instrumentally valuable. Knowledge of how things are enables us to bring about desired ends and to avoid undesired ones. Not always, of course; but when (as in Harry's case) a true belief serves us worse than a false belief would have done, more complete true beliefs could have served us better (if Harry had believed, truly, that his plane was due to leave at 7:45, and that it would crash, he could have saved not only his own life, but others' too).

The other part is harder to articulate. The best way I can put it is this: beliefs are what we have—so, since the concepts of belief and truth are internally connected, it is no cultural bias to value truth. Compared with other animals, human beings are not especially fast or strong; what we do have is a capacity to figure things out. This capacity is very imperfect, and it isn't an unmixed blessing, but who could seriously doubt that it is of instrumental value to us? The present point, though, is that it is the fact that we are animals who have beliefs and act intentionally that makes the epistemic value of truth something much deeper than a cultural quirk.

That this is right is confirmed by reflection on what Stich's post-revolutionary epistemology would do. Its task, we are told, is improvement of our cognitive processing; the goal, beliefs, whether true or false, such that his accepting them as true would conduce to what the subject values. That it must be beliefs which are produced is clear from the case of Harry; what would leave him better off is his accepting as true, i.e., believing, a proposition which is not true but TRUE****. TRUE**** is of course a magnificently misleading piece of typographical sleight of hand, as is apparent when one translates the last clause into English: Harry would be better off believing a different proposition which is not true but his believing which conduce to something he values.

There would not be much honest intellectual work in Stich's post-revolution-
thesis that the goal of science is to forward the interests of society:

I must confess that I belong to that class of scalliwags who purpose, with God's help, to look the truth in the face, whether doing so be conducive to the interests of society or not. Moreover, if I should ever tackle that excessively difficult problem, "What is for the true interest of society?" I should feel that I stood in need of a great deal of help from the science of legitimate inference ... 18

So, having carried the epistemological burden thus far, I hope I may be permitted to put it down long enough to make some brief historical comments.

The passage just quoted is absolutely characteristic of Peirce, who insists on the importance of what he calls "the scientific attitude," of "a craving to know how things really [are]," "a great desire to learn the truth"; and that the truth "is SO ... whether you, or I, or anybody thinks it is or not." 19 This could hardly be further removed from what Rorty or Stich calls "pragmatism."

Still, the philosophical tendencies known as "pragmatism" are formidably diverse; and it would be foolish to deny that there are some elements in some pragmatist writers that might seem to suggest what I have called the "vulgar pragmatisms" of Rorty and Stich. For example, in James's urging that philosophers pay more attention to concrete truths and curb their obsession with abstract Truth, 20 one might hear something akin to Rorty's impatience with anything supposedly grounding what is presently defensible. But this would be to forget that James maintains that the notion of concrete truth depends on the notion of abstract Truth, and could not stand alone. Again, in James's defense of the "will to believe," of the propriety of believing without evidence if belief will enable one to live one's life better, one might hear something akin to Stich's identification of "justified belief" with "belief that conduces to what one values." But this would be to forget that James also says, not only that this doctrine applies only to propositions, e.g., of a religious character, in principle incapable of settlement by evidence, but also that it is distinct from, and independent of, pragmatism. 21 It would also be to forget that, when he says that "the true is only the good in the way of belief," James is stressing—exaggerating—the instrumental value of true beliefs. James used to complain about critics who put "the silliest possible interpretation" on his words; 22 now, it seems, the "friends" of pragmatism are doing the same. 23
RESPONSE TO SUSAN HAACK

Susan Haack is right that my view “precludes the possibility of any higher-minded conception of really-truth-indicative justification . . .” (136). Indeed, it precludes the idea that we can, or need to, worry about whether our practices of justification are “really-truth-indicative.” But I am not sure why she thinks that this view is “cynical”—why she goes on to say that “one cannot coherently engage fully—non-cynically—in a practice of justifying beliefs that one regards as wholly conventional. For to believe that p is to accept p as true” (136). I agree with the second italicized phrase, but I do not see why Haack thinks that this fact supports the claim she makes about cynicism. I miss the force of “For.”

Haack seems to think that if I really understood what I was doing when I accepted a belief as true, I would realize that I do take my way of justifying belief to be really-truth-indicative. For the “For” in the passage I have cited suggests that once one realizes that “to believe that p is to accept p is true” one could not avoid taking one’s justificatory activities as indicative of truth. But everything turns on whether there are criteria for truth distinct from criteria for justification to the best, most critical, and most informed audience that I can imagine. If there are not, then to say that I take the latter criteria to be truth-indicative adds nothing to saying that I use them in justifying my beliefs. Unless we can provide a criterion for achieving truth different from our criterion for achieving justification, there will be no way to answer, and thus no point in posing, the question Am I using the right standards?

Haack calls the view that there is no room for this question “conventionalism.” She defines this as the view that “it makes no sense to ask which criteria of justification (those of this or that epistemic community) are correct, which are really indicative of the likely truth of a belief” (135). If one alters “it makes no sense to ask” to “you will not get anywhere by asking,” then I am, indeed, a conventionalist in her sense. The reason I think you will not get anywhere is the same as the one Haack brings to bear in arguing against reliabilism in chapter 7 of Evidence and Inquiry. She says there:

Our criteria of justification are, indeed, what we take to be indications of the truth, or likely truth, of a belief. Reliabilism, however, identifies the criteria of justification with whatever is in fact truth-indicative, whether or not we take it to be. The effect is to trivialize the question, whether our criteria of justification are really truth-indicative: the solution of the problem of ratification is already trivially contained in the reliabilist response to the problem of explication.

It seems to me that any epistemologist has to make this reliabilist-style move sooner or later, or else be out of a job. The only way to avoid becoming a reliabilist would be to find a way of picking out true beliefs by some other means than applying our best present criteria for justification. But, once again, I do not see that epistemologists could possibly find any such way.

I take it that Haack finds an ambiguity in the notion of “accepting as true” between an endorsing use of true—one which makes “to believe is to accept as true” as empty as “to approve is to accept as good”—and a “substantive” and “realistic” use of true, in which when you accept p as true you do something more than accept it as justified. But granted that true and justified are not interdefinable, any more than approved of and good are interdefinable, this ambiguity does not in itself show that there is anything substantive to be said about truth or goodness once we have finished talking about justification. Indeed, it seems to guarantee the opposite. For, as Putnam has pointed out in his “naturalistic fallacy” argument, it always makes sense to say “_______, but maybe not true,” just as it does to say “_______, but maybe not good,” no matter what you put in the blank.

The gap between either truth or goodness on the one hand, and justification on the other, is forever unbridgeable, but this unbridgeability is not a result of the fact the former notions have criteria of application distinct
from the criteria of application of the latter. On the contrary, it is a result of the fact that we have no independent criteria of application for the former.

Nor do we need such criteria in order to use true and good in their cautionary senses, as when we say “unquestionably approved of by all, but maybe not good” or “justified to the hilt, but maybe not true.” I take this cautionary use suggest that maybe somebody will come along with a better idea, a better epistemic community, a better form of life—thus reminding us that inquiry is not over yet, and, indeed, that we cannot imagine what it would be like for it to be over. But many people would say that the cautionary use of “true” has a further function: that of suggesting that maybe even a splendidly justified belief may not accurately represent the intrinsic nature of reality. I read (or, as Haack, Levine, Gouinlock, and others would claim, misread) James and Dewey as arguing that these notions of “accurate representation” and “intrinsic nature” have been more trouble than they are worth, and that we should see how things go if we discard them.

In addition to the endorsing and cautionary uses of true, there are of course its disquotational use, its use to signify the property preserved in valid inferences, and perhaps still other uses. But none of them seems to me to offer a handle for the epistemologist who wants to judge the truth-indicativeness of our contemporary practices. My critics seem to find something more in the notion of truth than I do—if not the idea of accurate representation of intrinsic nature, then that of “referentiality” or “transcendence” or something—but I cannot get straight what this more is supposed to be. Whatever it is, spotting it makes them anxious to defend what they call our “realistic intuitions.” So perhaps the simplest thing to do is to label what they see in the notion of truth and I do not E for “extra.” E is what many people think Davidson misses when he disdains the notions of “correspondence” and “representation.” It is what Farrell, who thinks it important to defend “realism,” believes that Davidson sees, but that I miss.

To grasp E, I take it, would be to see that epistemology is not only legitimate, but something all of us automatically and instinctively engage in—at least to the extent of being reasonably confident that our justificatory practices are truth-indicative. Because I do not grasp E, I find the question of whether they are truth-indicative to be pointless, and the “For” in my initial quotation from Haack, unclear.

Despairing of shedding further light on the nature of E, and thus on the apparent divergence between Haack’s and my understanding of “accepting as true,” I turn now to an ambiguity in the notion of “justificatory practices.” In chapter 10 of Haack’s Evidence and Inquiry, she distinguishes “background beliefs” that determine what we take as relevant to the justification of a belief from “standards of evidence.” Epistemology, she says, concerns only the latter. In respect to standards of evidence, she continues, there is little divergence between periods and cultures. They all have the same epistemology. For once we put background beliefs and a sense of relevance to one side, there is not much divergence in what “counts” as evidence; in appraising the security of a belief, prescientific as well as scientific peoples, and converts to the new paradigm as well as defenders of the old, may be assessing its fit to their experience and their other beliefs. I entirely agree with this point, and am happy to grant that if epistemology says only that everybody should always assess a belief by “assessing its fit to their experience and their other beliefs,” then it says something incontrovertible.

The trouble is that saying this seems pointless, for nobody knows how to stop assessing the fit of novel data and hypotheses to their experience and their other beliefs. Commending this process is like commending the autonomic nervous system. Haack seems to think that she has looked into the concept of truth and found E, and E has told her that this is how we should assess belief-candidates in order to attain what she calls “the goal of inquiry . . . substantial, significant, illuminating truth.” Unable to spot E, I can only ask, “But how else would you assess a belief than by assessing its fit to experience and other beliefs? How could we help doing that?”

Because I do not know what it would be like to stop assessing this fit, I see no need to discuss truth-indicativeness, nor to say, with Haack, that truth is a goal of inquiry. I think inquiry—fitting whatever comes down the pike into our previous experience and beliefs as best we can—is something nobody can help doing. We do not need a goal called truth to lure us into this automatic, involuntary process of adjustment to the environment. (Further, it seems to me misleading to use the word goal to refer to something we could not recognize when we had found it, and from which we shall never be able to measure our distance.) Whereas Haack thinks it helpful to answer the question “Why should I try to get my beliefs to fit in with experience and with each other?” by saying “Doing so is conducive to acquiring true beliefs,” I cannot imagine anybody asking that question. It
strikes me as analogous to “Why should I breathe?” or “Why should I eat?” We do not, as far as I can see, have any choice about how to form beliefs. We do sometimes, under fortunate cultural circumstances, have a certain amount of choice about which epistemic community to belong to, whose background beliefs and sense of relevance to share.

Insofar as there is a choice to be made among Peirce’s four methods, it is not a choice among what Haack calls “standards of evidence.” It is, rather, a choice between considerations to be taken as relevant. To say that somebody adheres to Peirce’s “method of tenacity” is to say that she thinks the fact that everybody has always believed \( p \) more relevant to the credibility of \( p \) than the rest of us. To say that somebody adheres to the method of authority is to say, for example, that he is more inclined to take it as relevant that the Pope has proclaimed \( p \) a dogma than are the rest of us. All the interesting questions which people have hoped that epistemologists would help them with turn out, it seems to me, to be questions about what they should and should not take as relevant. None of them have to do with what Haack calls “standards of evidence.”

By setting questions of relevance to one side, Haack legitimizes epistemology by trivializing it. For relevance is where the action is. Standards of evidence would be of interest only if there were somebody around who told us to stop fitting our beliefs in with our experience and our other beliefs. But nobody does that, and anybody who tried would be unable to respond to requests for an alternative. Epistemology got a new lease on life when the New Science began to make new suggestions about what sorts of beliefs were and were not relevant to justifying belief about, for example, the movements of the heavens. These were admirable suggestions if one wanted increased predictive power, but not if one prized the Christian faith above such power. Fans of the New Science hoped to back their own choice by reference to truth-indicativeness, considered as something distinct from these various costs and benefits. But the history of epistemology seems to me to show that these hopes were vain.

I agree with Haack that the difference between scientific and prescientific cultures is “a matter of greater willingness to submit beliefs to criticism, a greater awareness of alternatives.” But I demur when she adds “and hence more openness to questions of justification.” As I have remarked elsewhere, it is hard to see Duns Scotus as more or less open to questions of justification than Darwin, even though his views about what beliefs were relevant to what other beliefs were quite different. I think that Haack here runs together openness to justification and openness with interest in the justificatory considerations which we find relevant.

Let me conclude by coming back to \( E \), the extra element in the notion of truth which I cannot seem to grasp. I am not sure whether this failure is the cause, or rather an effect, of what Haack thinks of as the vulgarity of my views. But whichever it is, it certainly blinds me to the possibility of “any higher-minded conception of really-truth-indicative justification.” Does it also, as Haack goes on to say, force me to “treat the epistemic standards of any and every epistemic community as on a par” (136)? Yes, if “epistemic standards” means what she calls “standards as evidence.” But that is harmless, because I agree with her that no two communities have ever differed on the topic of such standards. No, if “epistemic standards” includes differences in background beliefs. I prize communities which share more background beliefs with me above those which share fewer.

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