

The Experience Not Well Lost

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According to Rorty, we can avoid the typical problems of traditional epistemology if we do not posit epistemological intermediaries between mind and world in order to explain empirical knowledge. In particular, one can do that if one considers perceptual experiences, not as mental states with representational content, but as causes of empirical beliefs. Accordingly, Rorty rejects any justificatory relation between experience and belief. Only beliefs can justify other beliefs. Experience has only a causal role in the acquisition of an empirical belief. In this article, I show how Rorty's resistance to attributing representational content to perceptual experience conspires against his attempt to overcome Cartesian epistemology.

1.

Like other great philosophers, Rorty wrote on many areas of philosophy: epistemology, meta-philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, ethics, history of philosophy and political philosophy. In each of those areas he made stimulating yet controversial claims. Notwithstanding the latter, I think that the main and deepest concern that permeates all his works is the nature of philosophy.¹ Rorty's point of view about what philosophy is originated mostly in his discussion of the status of epistemology. His still impressive book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, constitutes his first step towards a systematic criticism of traditional epistemology. In that book, Rorty tries to convince us that epistemology – which he identifies with Cartesian epistemology – is an exhausted project.² Once we recognize this point, he believes, we should abandon the idea of philosophy as a special field of inquiry that is distinctive for a particular method.

In subsequent books and papers, Rorty examines some classical epistemology topics critically: the very concept of truth and the idea according to which truth is the goal of inquiry, the contrast between objectivism and relativism, the debate between realism and anti-realism, the normative character of epistemic justification, the opposition between solidarity and objectivity, etc. Moreover, since the publication of *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty offers an alternative, “non epistemological” vocabulary to oppose to traditional

epistemology: his own version of pragmatism. As Rorty himself realizes, there are two noticeable differences between classical pragmatism and his neo-pragmatism: the first one is the difference between talking about “experience,” as James and Dewey did, and talking about “language,” as he does. The second one is the difference between assuming that there is something such as “the scientific method,” as Peirce and Dewey did, and abandoning this assumption (Rorty 1999, 35).³

Even though there are many important and useful insights in Rorty’s works, I think that his thesis, according to which epistemology as such should be abandoned, is too drastic. There is no need to equate epistemology to the Cartesian tradition in epistemology.⁴ One topic that epistemology can ponder today, in a non-Cartesian fashion, is perceptual experience. Nowadays, philosophy of perception is a sub-area in philosophy of mind; and most philosophers of mind and epistemologists think – contrary to what Rorty thought – that experience has representational content.⁵ Nevertheless, in this paper I shall not use those views to challenge Rorty’s stance about experience; rather, I want to make clear how Rorty’s rejection of *any* cognitive notion of perceptual experience (a consequence of his resistance to attributing any kind of representational content to perceptual experience) conspires against his attempt to avoid some typical problems of Cartesian epistemology, in particular, that of explaining how we can know anything about the external world.

2.

Rorty describes traditional epistemology as an authoritarian perspective on knowledge. For him, the idea according to which we, as knowers, must be subjected to a non-human reality is a substitute of the old theological idea according to which we are subjected to God’s will. In contrast, a mature and anti-authoritarian view on knowledge should not acknowledge any other authority but that of a human community. In other words, we are not responsible to the world, but only to other human beings. Conversation with others, and not confrontation with the world, is the only means to justify our claims about reality. The idea of a confrontation between beliefs and the world is, Rorty thinks, absurd because there is “no way of formulating an *independent* test of accuracy of representation – of reference or correspondence to an ‘antecedently determinate’ reality” (Rorty 1991, 6), no way of thinking about reality independently of a judgment or belief.⁶ Thus, there are no representational relations between our beliefs and the world.⁷ As Rorty says:

The pragmatist recognizes relations of *justification* holding between beliefs and desires, and relations of *causation* holding between these beliefs and desires and other items in the universe, but no relations of *representation*. (Rorty 1991, 97)

Beliefs are not representations (or quasi-images) of reality, but habits of action for coping with it. It is the idea that beliefs are representations that engenders skepticism about the external world. To give that idea up is a way of avoiding – as something different than responding to – the main problem of Cartesian epistemology.

As a result of his rejection of representationalism, Rorty draws two drastic consequences. The first one is a radically conversational notion of epistemic justification according to which “we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation” (Rorty 1979, 170). Social justification contrasts here with the idea of representational accuracy and with the idea of a confrontation between beliefs and the world – the “method” of determining that accuracy. Thus, “there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones,” that is, “constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers” (Rorty 1982, 165).⁸ On this view, “nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept,” because, as Rorty claims, “there is no way to get outside beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence” (Rorty 1979, 178). Thus, a coherentist conception of epistemic justification is involved in Rorty’s conversationalism.

The second radical consequence that Rorty draws from his anti-representationalism is this: “We understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world,” he holds, “when we understand their causal relations with the world” (Rorty 1991, 128).⁹ This consequence is radical because, at least at first sight, is not obvious that semantic and epistemic relations with the world are merely causal. These two consequences are related to each other. Since the relations between beliefs and the world are merely causal, justificatory relations – on Rorty’s view, these are reason-giving relations¹⁰ – they are restricted to *beliefs* that others or oneself can give.

Accordingly, Rorty sees “nothing worth saving in empiricism” (Rorty 1998, 150). He thinks that “the notion of ‘perceptual experience’ can simply be discarded” (Rorty, 1998, 150). Of course, Rorty thinks that there is an innocent sense of “perceptual experience” that is innocuous, philosophically speaking. Thus, he distinguishes between “experience as the cause of the occurrence of a justification, and the empiricist notion of experience as itself justificatory” (Rorty 1998, 141). Abandoning the latter sense of “experience” means “reinterpreting ‘experience’ as the ability to acquire beliefs noninferentially as a result of neurologically describable causal transactions with the world” (Rorty 1998, 141). Like Davidson, Rorty claims that “only a belief can justify a belief” (Rorty 1998, 141). Experience cannot be “itself justificatory” because, according to Rorty, it does not have propositional content. As he says:

There is no such thing as a justified belief which is non-propositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions. So to speak of our acquaintance with redness or with an instantiation of

redness as ‘grounding’ (as opposed to being a causal condition of) our knowledge that ‘this is a red object’ or that ‘redness is a color’ is always a mistake. (Rorty 1979, 183)¹¹

Thus, to see a red object cannot be a reason for holding the proposition “This is a red object”; rather, it can only be a cause for that belief.

3.

However, a serious difficulty arises here. If one grants, as Rorty does, that “only a belief can justify a belief”; if one also holds that only perceptual experiences cause beliefs, yet do not justify them; and, finally, if one claims that “we understand all there is to know about the relation of beliefs to the world when we understand their causal relations with the world,” then how are we supposed to be able to know what the causes of our beliefs are? What capacity other than perceptual experience allows human beings to know the empirical world? Let’s suppose that, given certain circumstances, I have acquired the belief that this is a red object. If a confrontation between that belief and the world is impossible, if my experience of the putatively red object is only a cause of my holding the belief that this is a red object, how could I know that there is a red object causing my belief? Furthermore, supposing that there are some red objects nearby, how could I know that it is *this* object, and not any other, that causes my belief?

The coherentist’s answer to this problem could be the following: “I know what the causes of my beliefs are because they cohere. Since coherence is a test of truth, the fact that a belief satisfies that test is a reason for thinking that it is true. Thus, if I have a reason for thinking that a belief is true, then I have a reason for thinking that the object or event to which it refers is its cause.” However, this answer faces some well-known difficulties. Why should we assume that the fact that a belief satisfies the test of coherence is any reason for thinking that it is true?¹² Why should we accept that the fact that a belief satisfies the test of coherence is any reason for thinking that it effectively refers to such and such object? For all we know, our beliefs could refer to nothing, or to objects other than their causes. The mere fact that a belief, which has a putative connection with reality, coheres with other beliefs, which also have a putative connection with reality, does not allow us to make any progress.¹³ Of course, we have many beliefs which refer to unobservable things (for example, other people’s mental states and scientific theoretical entities). In such cases, we know the referents of those beliefs because we are able to directly perceive other things connected with them (for instance, we see others’ facial expressions and empirical effects which are caused by the corresponding theoretical entities which are posited). Nevertheless, the idea that in no case can we directly perceive the causes of our beliefs does not provide us with any cognitive grip on the world for thinking that our beliefs refer to their causes.¹⁴

Consequently, I think that if perceptual experience does not allow us to be in cognitive contact with the world, then, neither mere causal relations with it nor justificatory relations among beliefs can provide any sort of knowledge about the world. Ironically, in spite of arguing against what he calls “the world well lost,” Rorty makes the world similar to the Kantian *Ding an sich*: the incognizable source of our sensory affections. This reinstates the skeptical problem – the main and irresolvable difficulty that, in Rorty’s opinion, must face traditional epistemology – because the simple question “what are the causes of our beliefs?” arises inevitably from the inside of Rorty’s coherentism without any possibility of answering it suitably.

Perhaps by taking into account Davidson’s theory of radical interpretation, Rorty could reply that the problem that I am pointing out does not arise from the point of view of “the field linguist,” as he calls it, because the linguist does not have another way of interpreting natives’ utterances but by attributing to them her own beliefs and by observing “the way in which linguistic is aligned with non-linguistic behavior in the course of the native’s interaction with his environment” (Rorty 1991a, 133). Thus, Rorty could insist on the claim that “knowledge *both* of causation *and* reference is (equally) a matter of coherence with the field linguist’s own beliefs” (Rorty 1991a, 134). Supposedly, “this guarantees that the intentional objects of lots of beliefs ... will be their causes” (Rorty 1991a, 134). But there is no such warranty because, if the field linguist “must be purely coherentist in his approach” (Rorty 1991a, 133), she cannot make any confrontation between her beliefs about what the native does and what the native indeed does; therefore, she cannot know what the causes of her beliefs about the native are.¹⁵ The Davidsonian principle, endorsed by Rorty, which recommends us to maximize coherence and truth first, “and then let reference fall out as it may” (Rorty 1991a, 134), clearly does not solve the problem. What is needed is an approach according to which reference is not merely what falls out as it may, but something of which we can have direct perceptual knowledge. Only in that way could one know what the reference of a perceptual belief is, that a certain belief is about *this*, and not any other, object.

It is worth noting that there is a striking and unexpected similarity between representationalism and Rortyan coherentism. While representationalism posits epistemic intermediaries between us and the world, Rorty tries to eliminate those intermediaries by claiming that there is only a causal link with reality; but in both cases a dichotomy is assumed between what is inside and outside the network of beliefs. That dichotomy is what makes the problem of cognoscibility of the world arise: if our contact with the world is only causal; if justification cannot take place but *within* a body of beliefs, knowledge of the world becomes an irresolvable problem because reality is placed outside the space of reasons. This explains why Rorty, instead of claiming that we can know objects or states of affairs, holds that “There is nothing to be known about an object except what sentences are true of it” (Rorty 1999, 55). However, it is one

thing to say – correctly – that sometimes, in order to know an object, we have to *use* a sentence that is true of it; and another thing is to say – incorrectly, in my view – what Rorty claims. Rorty’s claim is incorrect, not only because there are objects that we can know by perception, but also because, by using a sentence that is true of an object, in a normal comprehension of the sentence, we understand that the *object* referred to by the sentence is such as the sentence describes it. In this understanding of a used sentence, it is the object referred to by it that we know, not merely the sentence itself. We know something of the object by using a sentence. I think that this point of view is expressed by a remark of Wittgenstein’s: “When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this-is-so*” (Wittgenstein 2009, §95). As McDowell says in reference to Wittgenstein’s quotation, “When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case” (McDowell 1994, 27). So I would say that when one uses a sentence that is true of an object in order to think about the world, one knows what is the case, and not merely that the sentence is true.

Perhaps Rorty could ask here: what is the difference between saying that there is nothing to know about an object except the sentences that are true of it and saying, by using some sentences, that we know an object? One difference is that one could know that some sentences are true of an object without understanding them. In such a case, though one would know what sentences are true of an object, one would have no knowledge, however, about the object. But let’s suppose that Rorty’s idea actually *is* that there is nothing to know about an object except the true sentences that we meaningfully *use* in order to describe it. Then a very important theoretical difference could be pointed out. Compare Rorty’s last quotation, in the previous paragraph, with what a modern philosopher, in a similar fashion, would say: “There is nothing to be known about an object except what *ideas* are true of it.” This form of understanding our cognitive relation with the world immediately suggests the notorious image of a veil of ideas between the mind and the world. Remarkably, Rorty has criticized this image; however, his own way of understanding our cognitive relation with the world is very similar. In his case, there seems to be a veil of sentences between us and the world. Thus, in both cases – modern philosophy and Rorty’s view – some epistemic intermediaries between mind and world are posited, and as a result, the same sort of problems arises.

Related problems to the ones already sketched appear in Rorty’s idea of how the world influences the space of reasons. According to Rorty, the world does not exert a rational control on our inquiries, but a merely causal one (cf. Rorty 1998, 140). The world “shapes the space of reasons not by ‘vouchsafing facts’ to us but by exercising brute causal pressure on us” (Rorty 1998, 148). Thus, Rorty excludes the world from the space of reasons, because what the world is like cannot be a reason for believing that the world is thus and so. But this immediately makes the following question arise: how are we supposed to rationally adjust our thought to the way the world is?¹⁶ How can the “brute

causal pressure on us” guide us toward what we should believe in? Rorty claims that:

Even if there is no Way the World Is, even if there is no such a thing as ‘the intrinsic nature of reality’, there are still causal pressures. These pressures will be described in different ways at different times and for different purposes, but they are pressures nonetheless. (Rorty 1999, 33)

Thus, we cannot be arbitrary about what to believe because causal pressures restrict our thought. This issue notwithstanding, it is not that facts, manifested in perception, that constitute reasons to believe that the world is thus and so; rather, the causal pressures that the world exerts on us guide us blindly by causing certain beliefs and not others. In the end, we believe many things just because the world causes those beliefs. There is no further reason. In particular, we do not hold our beliefs because we know – independently of the beliefs in question – that the world is as our beliefs describe it. The problem with this conception of the space of reasons is that, if the way the world is cannot be a reason for believing that the world is thus and so, we cannot adjust, in a rational way, our beliefs to it. Even though our beliefs could be rationally related to each other, the whole web of beliefs would lack justification. In such situations, we would not have any reason for considering that our web of beliefs refers to the empirical world. In order to solve this problem, the causal pressures that the world exercises on us must be integrated into the space of reasons, that is, they must be able to be reasons for holding empirical beliefs about the world.¹⁷ That task could be performed by an appropriate notion of perceptual experience.

By way of example, let’s consider McDowell’s conception of perceptual experience.¹⁸ According to it, when we have a perceptual experience in which we are not misled, the world is directly presented to us. Experience, so conceived, puts us in cognitive contact with the world. By adopting this conception of experience, one could explain how experience can justify beliefs. What Rorty sees as impossible becomes possible: to make a confrontation between beliefs and reality. We can do so because we have cognitive and direct access, by means of perception, to how the world is. That conception of perceptual experience makes it possible to hold a different notion of justification as well: since experiences have a conceptual content, not only are beliefs able to enter into logical relations with other beliefs, but perceptual experiences also can do that.

Moreover, McDowell’s conception of perceptual experience has certain features in virtue of which it should be attractive for Rorty. For example, according to McDowell, perceptual content is conceptual in character, so there is no risk of falling into the Myth of the Given.¹⁹ In fact, according to the version of perceptual content presented in *Mind and World*, perceptual experiences have propositional content.²⁰ This certainly satisfies Rorty’s requirement quoted above, according to which there is “no such a thing as justification which is not

a relation between propositions” (Rorty 1979, 183). Furthermore, perceptual experience, thus understood, opens the world to us in the sense that those facts that are perceived constitute, in an intelligible way, part of perceptual content.²¹ Thus, there are no epistemic intermediaries between mind and world, no veil of ideas, because the world is directly presented to our senses. When we actually perceive that the world is thus and so, perception does not fall short of the world.

Finally, McDowell’s conception of perceptual experience is in harmony, in my view, with our common-sense understanding of the ways of our ordinary epistemic practices. This point has some importance because philosophers usually try to explain or clarify, among other things, our own epistemic practices. Now, I think that Rorty’s way of understanding the space of reasons distorts our intuitive notion of how thought is related to the world. In effect, our common-sense comprehension of what a belief is is not that of a mental state whose content we hold because we have been caused by the world to hold it. When someone says “This is a red object,” it is natural to think that she has a reason for holding that belief. An acceptable answer to the question why she believes so could be: “Because I *see* that this is a red object.” By responding in this way, the person is giving a genuine reason (she is not repeating what she originally said to believe).²² This answer seems to imply that there is an attitude – namely, perceiving – towards certain content that is different from believing. By maintaining the epistemological dimension of a certain notion of perceptual experience (a dimension that is present in our ordinary practices of justifying what one claims and believes), one could explain both how the world can be accessible (cognitively speaking) to us and how the “brute causal pressure” that the world exerts on us can be rationally integrated into the space of reasons.

So why does Rorty reject this notion of perceptual experience? The main reason seems to be the following: the very idea that beliefs are postures that are adopted according to how the world is constitutes “a relic of the need for authoritative guidance” (Rorty 1998, 143).²³ Since, according to McDowell, perceptual experience is a tribunal by means of which the world rationally controls our beliefs, McDowell’s conception of experience, Rorty seems to argue, must be discarded. It is worth noting here, however, that Rorty has no problem with the idea according to which the world blindly directs our cognitive efforts by exercising a brute *causal* pressure on us. What is rejected by Rorty is the idea according to which the world exercises a *rational* control on our cognitive lives. But McDowell’s idea is harmless, because the world is not our partner, literally speaking, in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Rather, it exercises a rational pressure on us only to the extent that we have perceptual experiences of it. It is perceptual experiences that give us reasons for holding empirical beliefs, McDowell holds, not the world in itself, independently of whether we perceive it or not. And, as McDowell claims:

The obligation to think for oneself cannot require one to emancipate one's thinking from being controlled by good reasons. And when one's experience reveals to one how things are, one is in possession of an excellent reason to think things are that way. (McDowell 2009, n. 15, 140)

So, Rorty's fear of "authoritarian guidance" is misplaced here, and, as a consequence, it is not a good reason for rejecting McDowell's conception of perceptual experience.

In contrast to McDowell, Rorty not only dismisses the notion of experience as "a mediating tribunal" (Rorty 1998, 140), a notion that could explain how the world exerts a rational control on our inquiries, but also the idea, closely related to that, of human answerability to the world. As he says:

I think that saving the notion of answerability to the world saves an intuition that clashes with the romanticism which animated both Dewey and Nietzsche. For this notion retains the figure of 'the world' as a nonhuman authority to whom we owe some sort of respect (Rorty 1998, 150).

For McDowell, the practice of justifying assertions is governed by two norms at least: one recommends asserting everything that passes muster in the current practice with our partners; the other one recommends asserting only what is the case. The first norm invites the question "justified (warranted, rationally acceptable) to whom?" The second one favors the question "justified (warranted, rationally acceptable), in the light of what?" Rorty accepts the first norm of inquiry only. He acknowledges that the two questions are different, but denies that they involve two norms of assertibility for, from his pragmatist point of view, "the difference is not one that makes a difference" (Rorty 2000, 125). Anything that helps us decide to answer one question will let us answer the other question in the same way. So where McDowell sees a distinction between two questions – "to whom?" and "in the light of what?" – Rorty sees "a distinction between two answers to the question "to whom?" The answer may be 'current practitioner' or 'some other, better informed or more enlightened practitioners'" (Rorty 2000, 125).

In my view, McDowell is on the right side of the debate with Rorty, even when I am not sure if my own reasons are the same as his. When someone asks "Is there any vaccine for cancer?" what she is asking is if a vaccine for cancer has been discovered, not if the assertion "There is a vaccine for cancer" is accepted in our current practice. Even if this assertion were accepted in our current practice, it could be the case that there is no vaccine for cancer. The difference between what our fellows take as justified and what is the case cannot be grasped by the distinction between what current practitioners accept as justified and what "some other, better informed or more enlightened practi-

tioners” will accept as justified because (apart from the possibility that it might be the case that there are no such more enlightened practitioners) it is by contrasting what current practitioners hold as true and what is in fact true that makes sense to talk about “better informed or more enlightened practitioners.” Better informed or more enlightened practitioners are those whose beliefs are more probably true (or, at least, they are those who have discarded the errors committed in the past).

The idea of beliefs being more probably true presupposes that there is a way in which the world is – a way that is indifferent to what current or future practitioners justifiably take as true. Thus, the norm of truth is the norm of the world, and this norm recommends adjusting our thought and actions, not only to what our fellow inquirers accept as justified, but also to how the world is. In the simplest and happiest cases, we can determine if a certain perceptual belief is true by perception. Of course, one can say that, in order to have an epistemic place within inquiry, perceptions must be accepted by our peers (for instance, the latter must believe the relevant perceptions are veridical). But the point is that the veridicality of perceptions does not depend on what our fellows think, but on whether they correctly present how the world is to us. When we accept a certain experience as veridical, and in fact it is so, we are satisfying the requirement of accepting only what is the case. Likewise, the truth of an assertion does not depend on what our fellow inquirers let us assert; rather, it depends on whether the assertion represents the world such as it actually is. So when our fellows let us make an assertion that is true, we are obeying the norm that commands us to assert only what is the case. It is difficult to see how, without this norm, we could understand our assertions as referring to the world. Thus, in a sense, it is misleading to devise a contrast between two requirements – what the world lets us claim, and what our fellows let us claim – because the former is implicit in the latter.²⁴

4.

I have argued that there is a blind spot in Rorty’s picture of empirical knowledge that consists in his not acknowledging a notion of perceptual experience according to which the world is cognitively directly presented to us. It is not the rejection of every notion of perceptual experience that allows us to escape from Cartesian epistemology, but the rejection (among other things) of a very particular notion of it: the idea, correctly criticized by Rorty, according to which experience is a set of mere sensations or ideas situated between the world and our mind.

However, this rejection must be complemented with a new and better notion of experience: one that can assure us that we can have a cognitive contact with reality. If one accepts McDowell’s minimal empiricism, as he calls it, one could agree with Rorty on his criticism of Cartesian representationalism, while acknowledging that there is some space notwithstanding, for a certain idea of a

confrontation between beliefs and world, and, consequently, for the idea according to which beliefs represent states of affairs. To abandon the very idea of a cognitive contact with the world raises the same sort of problems affecting traditional epistemology.

NOTES

1. From the “Introduction” of *The Linguistic Turn to Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Rorty did not stop reflecting about what philosophy is. See, for example, Rorty 1979, 1982, 1991a, 1991b, 1998.

2. For a discussion of the Rortyan thesis according to which modern epistemology is equivalent to epistemology as such, see Williams 2000.

3. In fact, there are important differences between Rorty’s pragmatism and other forms of neo-pragmatism, such as Putnam, Haack, and Brandom’s pragmatisms. See for instance Bernstein 1995, Haack 1995, Putnam 1995, and Brandom 2011.

4. See McDowell 2000.

5. See, for example, McDowell 1994, Searle 1983, Siegel 2010, Brewer 1999.

6. This argument also appears in Dewey 1991 and Davidson 2001.

7. This conclusion has been objected by Moretti. See Moretti 2008.

8. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Rorty writes: “The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that” (Rorty 1989, 6).

9. See also Rorty 1999, 33.

10. Rorty thinks that we should not confuse a causal explanation of belief with its justification (see Rorty 1979, chap. 3). Accordingly, even when he does not directly discuss externalist conceptions of epistemic justification, he does not take them into account as plausible explanations of what justification of beliefs consists in.

11. A similar thesis is defended by Davidson. See Davidson 2001.

12. See Bonjour 2002, 207.

13. Notice that this would be the case even if our beliefs were actually true. In such a situation, it would be hard to claim that a person has knowledge about the world because, if my objection is correct, she would neither have any good reason for thinking that her beliefs are true, nor for thinking that they refer to such and such thing.

14. Note that beliefs about theoretical entities cause beliefs about them only to the extent that we can perceive their effects.

15. For a parallel criticism to Davidson, see my Kalpokas 2012. This difficulty is especially urgent in the case of understanding demonstrative expressions. According to an intuitive and familiar explication, when somebody says “This is white” in front of something that is white, one can understand that sentence if one is able to directly perceive the object that is pointed out. How could we understand demonstrative expressions if perceptual experience did not directly present the object referred by them?

16. The expression “the way the world is,” with small letters, does not refer to the world that, according to Rorty, is well lost; rather, the expression refers to states of affairs such as that the tomato is red, that there is a beer in the fridge, that John is at home, etc.

17. Notice that the required reasons need not be “ultimate” in the foundationalist sense; revisable reasons are good enough.

18. I use McDowell's conception of perceptual experience as an example due to both the following reasons: Rorty's explicit discussion with him about it and McDowell's conception as being particularly suited for the point I am trying to make here.

19. See McDowell 1994, Lecture I.

20. McDowell changed his mind in McDowell 2009.

21. As McDowell says: "In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment." (McDowell 1994, 26).

22. Perhaps, Rorty could say that the adduced reason "Because I see that this is a red object" reports no more than that something that I see – this red object – caused me to believe that this is a red object (for a similar strategy, see Davidson 2005, 135). However, how could that answer, so interpreted, be a reason for the relevant belief? If it only reports how I have acquired the relevant belief, then, according to Rorty himself, it cannot be a reason at all (remember that, for Rorty, a causal explanation of how a certain belief has been acquired does not constitute any justification for it. See Rorty 1979, chap. 3). Anyway, my point is merely that, according to our common sense intuitions, perceptual experiences, by virtue of their contents, have an epistemological role in the justification of our empirical beliefs.

23. In Rorty 1998, 142–143, Rorty seems to suggest a further reason: the linguistic turn in philosophy was a turn away from the very idea of experience. Yet this reason is not strong enough to discard all epistemic notion of experience, nor to discard McDowell's conception of experience, not only because Rorty's comprehension of the linguistic turn could be disputed (many analytic philosophers have continued to talk about experience), but also because, if the linguist turn were what Rorty says it is, one could reply "So much the worse for the linguistic turn!"

24. At this point, Rorty could reply that the contrast between current and better informed or more enlightened practitioners presupposes neither the contrast between what current practitioners hold as true and what is in fact true, nor the idea that the beliefs which are better justified are those which are most likely true. Then he could try to explain the contrast between current and better informed practitioners in terms of current and better ways of coping with reality. However, what is the criterion for claiming that some ways of coping with reality are better than others? Given certain interests and the way the world is, it makes sense to claim that there are some beliefs which allow us to cope better with reality than others. This account, however, appeals to the notion "the way the world is." Thus, the norm that recommends adjusting our beliefs to the way the world is in order to acquire better ways of coping with reality is exactly the norm of the world that, in my view, is necessary for explaining the contrast between current and better informed practitioners. Better practitioners are the ones whose beliefs are better tools for coping with reality (given the way the world in fact is). On this view, to speak of practitioners whose beliefs are more probably true is to speak of practitioners who are able to avoid the errors committed by other practitioners in the past.

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