

get the position, endorsed by Donald Davidson, that follows quickly on the heels of the statement that caused all the vexation: “[T]o say that truth and knowledge can only be judged by the standards of the inquirers of our own day is not to say that human knowledge is less noble or important, or more ‘cut off from the world’, than we had thought. It is merely to say that nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and that there is no way to get

Truth is what our peers will let us get away with saying

outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence.”

True, Rorty did devote much of his work to arguing for the cultural desirability of replacing the philosophical concern for objectivity with an emphasis on solidarity or intersubjectivity. But even here, one must keep in mind that late in his career he made some rather startling admissions to the pragmatist philosopher Bjorn T Ramberg. In a critical essay in the volume *Rorty and His Critics*, Ramberg argues that Rorty’s desire to replace objectivity with intersubjectivity is problematically un-Davidsonian (see “Post-Ontological Philosophy of Mind: Rorty vs. Davidson” in that volume). Ramberg reminds Rorty that, when it comes to knowing, there are three points to Davidson’s triangle: the self (or subject), the other person, and the external world (or object). While Davidson agrees with Rorty that, outside of the normative triangulation we undertake with others through discourse and dialectic, we cannot establish

direct correspondence between our thoughts and the world, this by itself does not mean that the notion of objectivity goes by the board; for if it did, says Davidson, the other two points of the triangle would fall with it as well.

Accepting this criticism, Rorty responds: “It was a mistake to locate the norms [for justifying knowledge] at one corner of the triangle – where my peers are – rather than seeing them as, so to speak, hovering over the whole process of triangulation It is not that my peers have more to do with my obligation to say that snow is white than the snow does, or I do.”

I have spent this much space defending Rorty from standard criticisms of relativism, because I think that if one can move past this block (one that has tripped up many) one will meet a very intriguing philosopher who maintained a highly interesting and salutary conversation with his time in thought. Rorty’s corpus presents the patient reader with much more than Wittgenstienian therapy for our philosophical muddles. In addition to the persona of the philosophical therapist, he also presents us with the personae of the liberal ironist and the anticlerical prophet. The most exciting cultural conversations Rorty held involve these latter two personae, and through these guises he was able to make us think differently about what it means to be human, and to encourage us to take responsibility for the freedom that the human form of life affords.

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