

## **ELIMINATIVE MATERIALISM ELIMINATED:**

### **RORTY AND DAVIDSON ON THE MIND-WORLD RELATION<sup>1</sup>**

**Istvan Danka**

*(University of Leeds, danka.istvan@gmail.com)*

#### **Abstract**

In this paper I shall deal with some impact of Donald Davidson's work on Rorty's philosophy. I shall take a rejection of the distinction between natural sciences and humanities to be one of Rorty's central theses – a view for which he paid as high price as abandoning the investigations of central philosophical notions like truth or representation. This movement made him possible to exceed the analytic-Continental divide and hence opening up the possibilities of his analytic-originated philosophy to topics uncovered in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. If my arguments are correct, Davidson did not only serve him as an example of philosophers who can be taken "as grist to be put through the same dialectical mill" (Rorty 1989, p. 74) but Davidson's philosophy – especially what Rorty calls "non-reductive physicalism" – is the millstone of Rorty's dialectics.

After a short introduction, I shall characterise a difference between "the" truth and "truths" or facts. Rorty rejects not only truth but facts as well, on the ground that they depend on language and hence cannot fulfil the role attributed to them. From this it seems to follow that he holds a sort of linguistic idealism which directly contradicts his materialist, physicalist and naturalist commitments. I shall argue therefore that his reason for rejecting the notion of fact is not idealism but on the contrary: a sort of physicalism compatible with Davidson's account. After introducing some slight but important distinctions between materialism, physicalism, and naturalism, I shall demonstrate a

turning point in Rorty's philosophy when he gave up his eliminative materialism in favour of a still naturalistic pragmatism. I shall argue that at least one of the reasons for doing so was his recognition that Davidson's transformation of the mind-world dualism into a 'mental description'-'physical description' dualism is a suitable tool for his purpose of blurring the division between the arts/humanities and hard sciences, while holding naturalist principles at the same time.

#### **Introduction**

In the 1980s, Rorty celebrated Davidson's work as the culmination of "holist and pragmatist strains in contemporary analytic philosophy (Rorty 1987, p. 116) and that of "a line of thought in American philosophy which aims at being naturalistic without being reductionist" (Rorty 1987, p. 113). In the long run, Davidson's importance goes even beyond philosophy departments insofar as his "non-reductive physicalism gives us [...] all the respect for science we need, combined with more respect for poetry than the Western philosophical tradition has usually allowed itself" (Rorty 1987, p. 125). Rorty reminds us that since Plato, poetry and art have been managed as opposites to philosophical and scientific research; more recently this opposition has been transformed to the clash between natural sciences and humanities departments. Rorty extensively argues in several of his works that if we abandoned central notions of Modernity like truth and representation, the distinction between the two sorts of intellectual activities would disappear. Sciences (and scientific philosophy) are traditionally thought to be aiming at the true representation of reality; from this, it may follow that non-scientific enterprise of the arts, literary criticism, or so-called Continental philosophy either would be unable to present similarly true representations or, even worse, they do not even have such aims. Rorty fights against this unjust treatment – not independently of his recognition that non-analytic pragmatists and certain Continental philosophers

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1 I am grateful to György Pápay for our many conversations on these topics over years which essentially formed the present line of thoughts.

provide us more useful tools for developing a better future of humankind than scientific philosophy.

Rorty's relation to Davidson is most often discussed (both by themselves and their interpreters) via a presentation of their debate on the nature of truth (Rorty 1986, Davidson 1986, Bilgrami 2000, Davidson 2000, Rorty 2000a, Rorty 2000c, Sandbothe 2003 – just to mention a few of the more interesting references). In the 1980s, Rorty thought Davidson's views about truth to be pragmatist. This interpretation was not fully accepted by Davidson. Though the latter gradually gave up the idea that his coherence theory of truth could finally result in correspondence, he urged to keep a primitive notion of truth because it is one of those notions which "are essential to thought, and cannot be reduced to anything simpler or more fundamental" (Davidson 2000, p. 73). As opposed to that, Rorty thought truth is an abused philosophical concept better to forget in order to open up new possibilities for philosophical enterprise. If Davidson's impact is significant regarding Rorty's views about truth, it is significant only in the sense how Rorty gradually turns from a Davidsonian understanding of truth and knowledge to non-Davidsonian perspectives.

However, there are some clearly Davidsonian sources of these "non-Davidsonian" perspectives. Except truth, Rorty and Davidson agree in several philosophical questions about language, mind, and reality. The main reason can be that for a Davidsonian, it is not truth but causality that warrants a connection between our beliefs and worldly facts. I shall argue below that this difference between Davidsonians and non-Davidsonians is central to Rorty's view about Davidson as well as his own relation to naturalism. Presumably, even his views about vocabularies at least partially depend on Davidson's theory of descriptions.

### Truth and Truths

Rorty is often labelled as a linguistic idealist (for counter-arguments see Brandom 2000b and Williams 2009). Some distinctions are in order, however, regarding what linguistic idealism is *about*. Idealism is mostly understood as a dominant form of antirealism. Insofar as realism can be held about several things (e.g. realism about truth, realism about facts, realism about meaning, realism about mathematical objects, etc.), idealism, and its linguistic form, can also be about different fields. Rorty's alleged idealism can be understood in at least two important senses. On the one hand, he is certainly an antirealist regarding truth as he directly denies its existence. On the other hand, in some sense he is also an antirealist regarding facts or truths.

Rorty uses terms of truths and facts interchangeably, supposedly in an opposition with the general notion of "the" truth. He thinks that "'truths' and 'facts' are pretty nearly equivalent notions" (Rorty 2000b, p. 184). Just as he claims that truth is a property of *sentences* (Rorty 1989, p. 21), he also thinks that truths/facts are to be understood as descriptions belonging to certain vocabularies. As Brandom read him,

"to talk of facts is to talk of something that is conceptually structured, propositionally contentful, something, that is, with the right shape to stand in inferential and hence justificatory relations. [...] Rorty can explain our talk of facts: to treat a sentence as expressing a fact is just to treat it as true, and to treat a sentence as true is just to endorse it, to make the claim one would make by asserting the sentence. But he rejects the idea of facts as a kind of thing that *makes* claims true" (Brandom 2000b, p. 161).

This notion of "fact" clearly differs from how philosophers use the word. Facts are precisely claimed to be *non-linguistic*. But for Rorty, a non-linguistic entity cannot stand in a truth-making, normative relation with a linguistic entity. If a fact makes a statement to be true, that can only be a linguistic fact, transmitting the validity of a statement to another statement. Statements can only be justified by other statements insofar as a

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correspondence theory of truth is rejected in favour of a coherence theory. The reason why the notion of truth is philosophically useless is precisely that there is nothing behind justifications. Hence, the reason why we call something as "true" is simply that we hold it to be true. The expression "It is true" only gives a stronger emphasis to expressions like "I guess so" or "I believe it".

After rejecting correspondence between facts and statements – i.e., accepting antirealism regarding truth –, there are two traditional ways how our relation to facts can be understood. First is the view of direct realists who claim that we humans are directly aware of facts. This is a combination of antirealism regarding a metaphysical notion of truth and realism toward facts and hence particular truths. According to direct realism, facts are "real" in the same sense as correspondentists think but in order to warrant our access to them, no robust theories of truth, reference, or justification are required. If there is no mind-body dualism, one can claim appearances to be real sensory inputs represented in a wrong way. Hence, representations and misrepresentations can be explained in the same theoretical framework (e.g. via causal explanations).

The alternative solution is idealism, the view according to which facts depend on us. In this view, facts are mind-dependent, or, in its linguistic form, language-dependent. Truths are invented rather than discovered. Facts are true because we made them to be true. Hence, facts are conceptually/linguistically structured entities, and there is no well-distinguished part of them to be called "the given" which could be isolated from the rest of them in order to warrant the objective validity of our claims about them. Objective validity is therefore not derived from their being real but their being constructed: could anything be "more real" than something that has been *made to be real* by ourselves? According to idealism, we have an access to facts precisely insofar as facts are our constructions, and they are still real because they have been constructed.

None of these views are accepted by Rorty though. He rejects that we have any (whether direct or indirect) awareness-relation with language-independent facts. Nor does he think that truths were made by us. As Williams (2009) put, Rorty is sometimes "accused of linguistic idealism – the view that facts are 'made' rather than 'found'. This charge [...] is unfounded. [...] Rorty is not arguing that everything is *nomos* and nothing *physis* but rather questioning the made/found distinction itself" (Williams 2009, p. xviii). Rorty's solution differs from idealism precisely in the claim that "facts are made" would only be meaningful if facts could be compared to any sort of *xs* of which it were meaningful to claim that "*xs* are, as opposed to facts, found". Since it is precisely facts about which philosophers used to think that they are subject to be found, and no novel opposition has been introduced between entities that are found and those that are made, the claim "facts are made" can be meaningful only if it is read somehow like "the explanatory framework which identifies facts (being subject to be found) as opposed to e.g. poems (being subject to be made) is a misleading one because it supposes a false dichotomy between what is made and what is found". Not reading it that way is a misunderstanding of Rorty. Anyway, this confusion is not unique, due to Rorty's well-known temptation to abbreviate his critical remarks into ostentatious phrases.

Admittedly, Rorty follows the idealist tradition in several aspects – most notably he follows recent offsprings of idealism called textualism (Rorty 1980) and historicism (e.g. Rorty 1995). However, he is clearly an anti-idealist in the most important sense of idealism regarding facts. Namely, he denies that the world around us would be purely an effect of some sort of epistemic activity of the mind and also denies that appearances would purely be products of the mind. The best way to explain this is introducing a distinction between Kantian and Hegelian idealism. Rorty's philosophy shows several Kantian inspirations (see Danka 2010) but he still thinks Kant to be the last great dead philosopher to be rejected and Hegel the first to be followed. His reason for this is

probably that Kant still took seriously that the mind is primarily an observer; that the *prima philosophia* is epistemology. Hegel can be understood as the first philosopher who gave up this concept of philosophy. Rorty agrees with the idealist that things are to be explained in terms of construction rather than in terms of acquiring them. However, the construction is not epistemic but action theoretical. We do not construct *fictions* called "Vorstellungen" once we did not find anything out there. We take mundane objects *themselves* (in a sense in which no Kantians but only Heideggerians suppose an access to them) and make them to be tools supporting our purposes. Rorty agrees with the idealist that what is yet unknown has to be created rather than acquired. However, the reason why it has to be created is that it *has not been created yet*. This seemingly pointless remark is central because in pre-Hegelian, atemporal models of knowledge acquisition, this distinction could not be made. Temporality (or, more precisely, history) is a key aspect of Rorty's relation to idealism and constructivism.

Idealists claim that facts are made epistemically; linguistic idealists claim that facts are made linguistically. As opposed to them, Rorty claims that neither our epistemic nor our linguistic capacities are suitable for making facts. For (epistemic or linguistic) idealists, facts are made *ex nihilo*. For historicists, facts are altered by time but not in the sense that a fact that was true can be made false (as some sort of relativism might involve) but in the sense that with the flow of time, things happen to change by their own and also by our coping with them. However, for Rorty, coping with reality is definitely not an epistemic activity.

All the same, this is no answer to the question how Rorty *does* relate mind- and language-independent facts to humans. It would be a *too easy* answer to simply claim that for him, there are no language-independent facts. Namely, it would be the same as following the superficial reading that "everything is language-dependent", from which the above-refuted "nothing is found because

everything is made" shortly follows. This line would therefore contradict the above-mentioned interpretation of Michael Williams (which I am tempted to follow, except that the distinction between *nomos* and *physis* would be Kantian in any sense – see Danka 2010). This would still be not a knock-out argument against this reading though. The main problem with it is that Rorty often describes himself as a materialist, naturalist or physicalist. These positions are in such an evident contradiction with any form of epistemic/linguistic idealism that no one can seriously think this contradiction to be unapparent for Rorty himself.

### Materialism, Physicalism, Naturalism

First, some conceptual clarification is in order. Rorty calls himself a materialist as well as a physicalist or naturalist, and even though the three are very close positions, a difference in emphasis has to be made. Materialism is the view according to which everything consists of matter. What matter is claimed to be is of course different from author to author but materialists definitely hold a monist ontology according to which everything consists of material components. As opposed to that, physicalism is the view according to which everything consists of physical properties. (Or, in a weak version that will be proved to be highly important below, everything can be *described* in terms of physical properties.) Materialism is a doctrine about *substances*, whereas physicalism is a doctrine about *properties*. Ontologically speaking, materialism, as opposed to traditional mind-matter dualism, is a sort of monism about substances. Contemporary materialists do not necessarily speak in terms of substances. They keep holding the view, however, that there are only material objects "out there".

In contrast, physicalism is better characterised as a sort of antiessentialism. For a physicalist, in order to explain physical events, no substances or objects "out there" have to be supposed but only properties. Materialism

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agrees with physicalism that properties are physical because this claim well fits to the materialist world view. Physicalists, on the other hand, do not necessarily hold any ontological commitments regarding substances or objects. They only need to be committed to the existence of (physical) properties.

A third closely related position is also worth to mention. Naturalism is the view which denies any supernatural being or, expressing the same positively, naturalism claims that all beings are in accordance with the laws of natural sciences. Naturalism is compatible both with materialism (in denying mental substance) and physicalism (in denying non-physical properties). Though naturalism also has versions with ontological commitments, in this comparison, I shall use the term in its so-called methodological version which, for purely methodological reasons, supports weak physicalism but does not hurt or support strong physicalism or materialism either.<sup>2</sup>

Idealism clearly stands in an opposition to all these views. Idealism is a sort of monism just as materialism, but it claims that the only substance that exists is mental. In this sense, idealists are comrades of materialists, physicalists and naturalists in their campaign against substance dualists. But their ways how dualism should be dissolved clearly differ. Materialists, physicalists and naturalists think the cement of reality to be (or to be explained in terms of) causal relations. Idealists, on the other hand, explain reality in terms of reasons instead (except a few *physicalist* idealists like

Berkeley who claimed mental substance to be a *causal* power. This is compatible with slight physicalism but certainly not with materialism and naturalism).

Despite all their common purposes regarding dualism, idealist principles become the main target of the other three views. The reason is that all the three traditionally argue against dualism via attacking the mental part – i.e., the one which serves as the ground for idealism. How stressfully they attack the mental is different from case to case, however, and understanding the whole picture requires some further classification.

The most offensive weapon against idealists in the hands of materialists is eliminativism. Eliminative materialism claims that there are no mental/psychological states or properties but they are (falsely) supposed to be just in order to make folk psychological explanations consistent. Hence, the mental could be eliminated if folk psychology were replaced with a physiological description of neural states. A similar but less radical methodology is reductionism, often mentioned simultaneously with some sort of physicalism. Reductionism claims that anything can be adequately explained by explaining its components; wholes can be reduced to their parts. Reductive physicalism is therefore the view that complex mental phenomena, though exist, can be reduced to purely physical components. Via this reduction, anything seemingly non-physical disappears in the explanation. A third alternative seems to be a sort of "golden mean" between the acceptance and the rejection of the mental. Namely, a *purely* methodological or instrumental naturalism – or, as also labelled sometimes, naturalistic pragmatism – does not deny the existence of mental states like eliminative materialism, nor does it say with reductive physicalism that mental states can be reduced to physical properties. Naturalistic pragmatism is namely naturalist only at the level of methodology: it interprets Quine (1953)'s claim that our only reason for preferring a physical explanation of reality e.g. to a mythological world view is (roughly) that it explains phenomena more

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<sup>2</sup> An Aristotelian or Lockean concept of matter is no less supernatural than God or the soul. However, as physical phenomena can be described in terms of interactions of material objects, a materialist vocabulary is more suitable for naturalist purposes than a mental one. Strictly speaking, I would take naturalism to be opposite of both idealism and materialism, assuming that the connection between materialism and naturalism is only a contingent historical fact. However, admittedly, the borders between these positions had never been clarified as sharply as my approach would require. Hence, I shall follow the mainstream view that naturalism and materialism are compatible with each other, regarding their *target* (which is the mental part of substance dualism) though not their purposes.

comprehensively, more economically and in a more aesthetical manner for our naturalist taste.

Naturalistic pragmatism tends to hold that everything can be described causally but they see causal explanations as a purely methodological device that should be applied with care. Though it assumes that e.g. interpersonal relations can be explained in causal terms to a certain degree, it also assumes that we have no need of such an explanation for the reason that interpersonal relations can be much more plausibly explained in sociological and/or psychological terms. Non-reductionist physicalism is in this sense closer to naturalistic pragmatism than to reductionist physicalism: a non-reductionist physicalist like Davidson does not claim that everything is physical; rather she claims that everything *depends on* the physical. She allows that there are mental properties at a higher level of complexity but mental properties supervene on physical properties at a micro-structural level. Hence, any alterations at the level of mental can be physically explained by some alterations at the level of micro-structures. The difference between a Davidsonian non-reductive physicalist and a Rortyan naturalistic pragmatist is that the former *does not deny* that there really are physical properties at the micro-structural level, because the efficiency of a physical vocabulary is a sufficient reason to extend its claims to ontology. In contrast, the latter thinks that Davidsonian "physical properties" and "the micro-structural level" are just theoretical suppositions that are meaningful only within a description or vocabulary. They think that it is sufficient for a *denial* of the existence of physical properties at the level of ontology, precisely because they are still description-dependent.

Insofar as a plurality of explanations is not applied to a "plurality" of reality (resulting in two distinct spheres of beings like in substance dualism), there is no conflict between the point that everything is explicable by a causal vocabulary of natural sciences on the one hand, and the point that something is better explained by

other vocabularies for certain purposes. For a naturalistic pragmatist, ontologies can be seen as tools or models just as scientific theories. They are not to be managed as some fundamentals of all that can be said about reality. The only ontologically relevant claim of a naturalistic pragmatist is that we should prefer any ontology that excludes such features of mental phenomena that can hurt the causal closure of reality. Mental phenomena should be explained as physical/natural insofar as they can be identified as parts of a causal chain on the grounds that they have physical causes and effects. Brandom interprets Rorty's naturalism in an opposition to his linguistic idealist readings as follows:

"[Rorty's] critique of representationalism is founded not on denying or ignoring the causal context [...] but precisely on a hard-headed insistence and focus upon the significance of that context. What distinguishes his view is rather his claim that the sense in which the talk answers to its environment must be understood *solely* in causal terms" (Brandom 2000b, pp. 160-161).

According to Brandom, this Rortyan view echoes the Sellarsian idea that things cannot affect us normatively (normativity is one of the key notions of idealism), and hence the only connection between us and reality can be causal. Similarly to "the" pragmatist notion of truth, representation also has to be explained in, or perhaps explained away by, an account of human-world interaction in terms of causes and effects. No sort of idealism is compatible with a world view in *solely* causal terms. This is a conclusive argument against Rorty's idealist interpretations.

At this point we have arrived at a statement that now seems to be *too strongly* anti-idealist for Rortyan purposes. How could a primacy of causal explanations over all sorts of non-causal explanations be serving as a bridge between causal/scientific and non-causal/artistic vocabularies? How can this sort of naturalism be harmonised with the claim that natural sciences are not superior to humanities? The answer follows from a shift from the level of the explanations of reality to the meta-level of explanations of explanations. While ontological

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naturalists agree with eliminative materialists that physical explanations are about reality and hence what will ever remain unexplained by natural sciences cannot exist, naturalistic pragmatists agree with non-reductive physicalists that physical explanations are descriptions just as mental explanations, and from this they conclude that description-independent reality in itself is neither mental nor material.

**Descriptions and Events**

Davidson claims that his own position about the mind-matter dichotomy called anomalous monism

"resembles materialism [in my terminology, rather physicalism is appropriate here – I.D.] in its claim that all events are physical but rejects the thesis, usually considered essential to materialism, that mental phenomena can be given purely physical explanations" (Davidson 1970, p. 141).

This remark contains two statements. On the one hand, anomalous monism is physicalist in accepting that all events are physical. But on the other hand, it is non-physicalist in rejecting that mental phenomena can be explained purely physically. It seems that the apparent contradiction between the two statements could be dissolved if an appropriate distinction were made between events and phenomena. A possible way to do so is that non-reductive physicalism allows mental properties at a higher level but only claims they are explicable by physical properties at micro-structural level. I accept this as a valid pathway but relating the point appropriately to Rorty's interpretation of Davidson (and Davidson's action theory rather than his philosophy of mind), I would prefer to understand this remark within the framework of an ontology of events. According to an ontology of events, the only kind of entities is events in a causal chain, and phenomena other than causal can only occur at the level of descriptions (not a level of alleged high-order *ontological* beings). Hence, what I offer as an interpretation of this statement is a distinction between events and *explanations* instead of events and phenomena. At the

level of *ontology*, Davidson supposes that only physical events exist ("all *events* are physical"). At the level of *explanations*, there are, however, phenomena described in mental terms (which cannot be given "purely physical *explanations*").

An ontology of events supposes two sorts of relations between events: causality and identity (Davidson 1969). If the fundamental structure of reality is explained in terms of events (rather than in terms of objects), one can plausibly explain both static explanandum (an object's being there) and dynamic explanandum (e.g. moving) within the same framework. It means that an ontology of events is suitable for providing a temporal extension of ontology which is highly important for Rortyan historicists. All the same, if there is basically one type of ontological entities, namely, events, our metaphysics is monist regarding first-order ontological categories (since causality is a derivative, second-order category, serving as relations among events). It does not mean, however, that our *explanations* or *descriptions* of those events could only be causal. In order to rationalise events (i.e., to treat certain events as intentional actions), it is preferable to use a normative vocabulary of reasons, beliefs, and other pro-attitudes. Certain events are simply more elegantly explained (in accordance with instrumental naturalism) in a way like "Brutus killed Caesar because he *wanted* to keep Rome as a republic and he *believed* his killing of Caesar supports his desire".

The problem with such explanations is that they *seem* to commit us to a supposition of mental entities like reasons, beliefs, desires, etc. Davidson's landmark thesis was the assumption that pro-attitudes can be described as causes of an action (Davidson 1963). In the final analysis, propositional attitudes (serving as reasons for an act) *cause* the agent to do its act. Causal descriptions are superior to normative descriptions insofar as every event can be described in terms of causes and effects, but only certain events – and definitely not certain *types* of events – can be described in normative terms. The mental-physical distinction is a contrast at the level of

descriptions, whereas at the level of ontology, everything is supposed to be, in accordance with physicalism, explicable in causal terms. With Rorty's words,

"to say that Davidson is an *anti-reductionist* physicalist is to say that he combines [physicalism] with the doctrine that 'reduction' is a relation between linguistic items, not among ontological categories. To reduce the language of X's to the language of Y's one must show either (a) that if you can talk about Y's you do not need to talk about X's, or (b) that any given description in terms of X's applies to all and only the things to which a given description in terms of Y's applies. But neither sort of reduction would show that 'X's are *nothing but* Y's', any more than it shows the converse" (Rorty 1987, pp. 114-115).

If so, anti-reductionist physicalists ignore (either positive or negative) ontological commitments to the mental. From this angle, Davidson's physicalism seems to be rather irrelevant regarding his anti-reductionism. He could even assume that reality is neither mental nor physical but, let us say, "ontical" (where "ontical" could be explained only in a non-mentalist and non-physicalist vocabulary). Davidson carefully applies his physicalism to *descriptions* instead of properties as reductive physicalists do (Baker 2009). In fact, it is very hard to argue in what sense events themselves can be claimed to be physical in a Davidsonian framework, except the unprovable hypothesis that our causal descriptions are applicable to each and all events.

For Davidson, every event is claimed to be describable in physical vocabularies but there are at least some events that cannot be described in mental vocabularies (Davidson 1970, p. 141). Roughly, this is *all* his argumentation for the claim that reality itself is physical rather than mental. Events – the building blocks of spatio-temporal reality – can be described several ways, among which physical and mental descriptions have been central to the interests of philosophers. They do not cover, however, two different fields of investigation, and especially do not refer to two ontologically distinct sets of entities (even though the mental is irreducible). Rather the mental and the physical are ways of

descriptions: they consist in two different ways of explaining certain partially overlapping aspects of reality.<sup>3</sup>

### Davidson, Rorty, and Naturalistic Pragmatism

Nevertheless, it is more than a coincidence or an impact of the recent *Zeitgeist* that both Davidson and Rorty claim themselves to be physicalists. Davidson builds up all his philosophy to a causal account of an ontology of events and causal explanations are hardly compatible with idealist or dualist accounts. Davidson follows Quine in rejecting non-empiricist dogmas of empiricism, claiming that the scheme-content dualism is as worthless as the analytic-synthetic dualism (Davidson 1974). His attempts can be well put into a pragmatist trend of leading an all-out attack against any theoretical backgrounds of a Cartesian-inspired dualism between the external and the internal, between the physical and the mental, and, perhaps with less emphasis but no less importance, between the scientific and the artistic. This line has been developed further by Rorty who, in order to reject representationist vocabularies, also has to deny that the human-world relation could be normative. If the human-world relation is normative then normative categories like truth, reference, justification, and other stuff of the representationist vocabularies would apply

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3 Following Davidson, two different interpretations can be provided to this "overlap". The difference between the two is central to the way *how* to dissolve the mental-physical dualism at the level of ontology (though irrelevant for Rortyan purposes). First, one can assume that the physical *entails* the mental; events that have mental descriptions is a subset of events that have physical descriptions. Second, one can say that because of the structural differences in causal chains and normative chains like chains of reasoning, supervenience can only be applied holistically, and hence speaking in mental terms commits us to an entirely different ontology of particular events from the one supposed by speaking in physical terms. I assume the two ways can be held independently but can also be easily harmonised. Whichever route one chooses, however, the distinction has been transformed to the level of descriptions and even if one holds that there are ontological implications of our distinction in our descriptions, she has to admit that these are not *genuinely* ontological questions.

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to it. This would also count for the primacy of science over arts.

Clearly, the most appropriate candidate for the role of a non-normative description is a causal vocabulary supported by materialism, physicalism and/or naturalism. At first sight, this can be done only by a naturalisation of normativity *at the level of ontology* as well, since if one ignores ontological questions, one cannot say anything about the human-world relation *itself*. Actually, this was the way Rorty chose in the 1960s when he developed his own sort of eliminative materialism. According to Brandom, Rorty's views had contained several insights still at this point that became later central to him. Most notably, Rorty had held "pragmatism about epistemic norms", the view according to which "any normative matter of epistemic authority or privilege [...] is ultimately intelligible only in terms of social practices" (Brandom 2000b, p. 159). In his reply, Rorty says he did not realise this connection, and although he finds it illuminating, he also admits that "in the 1960s I was over-ontological, and too inclined to talk about what 'really' exists" (Rorty 2000b, p. 190. fn. 4).

Certainly, Rorty's eliminative materialism is about eliminating sensation-terms rather than directly sensations themselves or other mental phenomena (see esp. Rorty 1965, Rorty 1970) but via this by-pass, it intends to attack sensations themselves on the supposition that linguistic analysis results in ontological differences. Hence, whether it is deeply grounded in pragmatism (as Brandom thinks) is a doubtful point. Pragmatism, in Brandom's use of the term, is an often illuminating but by no means generally accepted characterisation of the method of tracing back ontological and epistemological questions to a vocabulary in terms of social practices. Brandom argues for his point as follows.

"Although Rorty did not put the point just this way, I take it that it is specifically pragmatism about epistemic norms that structures this diagnosis of the conceptual bankruptcy of

*epistemological foundationalism*" (Brandom 2000b, p. 159 – emphasis added).

With no doubt, the early Rorty's masterpiece by which he provided the most comprehensive "diagnosis of the conceptual bankruptcy of epistemological foundationalism" is his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Rorty's *therapy* to this diagnosis was a sort of therapism he attributed, somewhat surprisingly, to Carnap. In the *Preface* to the book, he identified his own inspirations as follows:

"Getting back to [the assumptions behind most of modern philosophy], and making clear that they are optional, I believed, would be 'therapeutic' in the way in which Carnap's original dissolution of standard textbook problems was 'therapeutic'. This book is the result of that attempt" (Rorty 1979, pp. xiii-xiv).

However the results of this attempt can be understood retrospectively in the light of his later pragmatism, Rorty's original purpose with the *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was a good old positivist elimination of metaphysical problems, and he thought that metaphysical problems could be explained away by clarifying linguistic misunderstandings. Much later on, he argues against therapism (particularly, in the case of Wittgenstein – see Rorty 2007, Danka 2011). But in the 1970s when he further developed his eliminative materialism introduced in the 1960s, he clearly agreed with the aims of that approach.

A de-ontologisation of Rorty's early arguments is central to my present purposes. Namely, he reformulated his views about the mind-body dualism in his 1987 paper *Non-reductive Physicalism* that he owes to Davidson. Why he prefers the term "non-reductive physicalism" to its original name anomalous monism is probably a matter of emphasis. While for Davidson, it was important to state that he is a monist *but* he does not accept psychological laws (reducible to neurological laws), for Rorty, it was important to state that he is a *non-reductivist*, as opposed to his early quasi-reductionism (but, anyway, he still prefers the physical

vocabulary). Rorty (1987) has good reasons why he does not need to eliminate ontological entities anymore (whether on linguistic grounds or not). Namely he claims that

"once we drop the notion of 'consciousness' there is no harm in continuing to speak of a distinct entity called 'the self' which consists of the mental states of the human being: her beliefs, desires, moods, etc. The important thing is to think of the collection of those things as *being* the self rather than as something which the self *has*" (Rorty 1987, p. 123).

If we say that there is no centre of consciousness but our pro-attitudes *constitute* what we call "the self", there is no reason to think that the self is something *behind* pro-attitudes which Davidson (1963) put into the causal chain. Hence, there is no reason to think that an acceptance of a mental vocabulary would commit us to any causally inexplicable entities. On the contrary, an acceptance of a mental *vocabulary* has nothing to do with ontological beings themselves.

Hence, one can keep speaking, contrary to Rorty's early eliminative materialism, about mental phenomena without actually committing us to the existence of them. If we are Davidsonians, without falling into reductionism, we can satisfy our physicalist needs. Instead of reality based on linguistic grounds, we can speak about pure descriptions like Continental philosophers do. Hence, on Davidsonian grounds, Rorty was able to eliminate his eliminative materialism, and also open the door to his late, open-minded approach to different philosophical traditions. He did not need much to do. He was instrumentalist enough to replace his less efficient theory with Davidson's one that fits better to Rorty's own purposes and differed from his views only in the ontological commitments which were otherwise unnecessary, if not straightforwardly awkward, consequences of eliminative materialism.<sup>4</sup>

If someone is a physicalist, she can avoid problems of linguistic idealism (most notably, the problem of how reality could be "made" linguistically but objectively). If she is a non-reductive physicalist, she can also avoid problems of reductionism (first of all, the problem how we explain away mental phenomena without throwing the baby out with the bath water). A non-reductive physicalist does not even have to claim physical explanations to be prioritised over other sorts of explanations. On the contrary, other explanations can be equally valid for her. She only claims that "an overall physical description of the world" is definitely one of the valid explanations (Nyírő 2010, p. 4).

All the same, if someone is a non-reductive physicalist, she can keep a minimalist realism about facts or truths, even if she gives up explaining them in a robust theory of truth. She can assume with Davidson that the world is physical, and when we speak about it, our statements can be true or false in a Tarskian way. She can assume all these even though she has only linguistic reasons to do so. She can hold that there is something language- and mind-independent "out there", even though she can say this only via language- and mind-dependent descriptions. These assumptions cannot be refuted precisely for the same reasons why they cannot be proved, since what we have as refutations and proofs are only descriptions. Why the Davidsonian still can hold that she is justified in her belief that there is something beyond descriptions is her notion of *cause*. She claims that, at the end of the day, reality can *really* reward or penalise us, because, as Rorty and Davidson hold, our relation to reality is causal rather than representational or, in other words, the human-world relation lies in coping with our environment rather than going to a Cartesian play.

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4 Interestingly enough, Rorty was seemingly uninspired by Davidson in the 1970s, even though they were fellows at Princeton from 1967 to 1970. He started frequently referring to Davidson's work only in the 1980s. I hardly believe that Rorty had been unaware of Davidson's

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philosophy of action (developed in the 1960s-1970s) before his turn toward Continental philosophy. Presumably it was precisely his turn that made him realise how usefully Davidson's views can be applied for his purposes.

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Paradoxically enough, Rorty differs from Davidson precisely in that he exploited what is more Rortyan in Davidson's non-reductive physicalism than Rorty's own eliminative materialism could ever be. It is an advantage for Rortyans that Davidson never wanted to exploit fully. Namely, the possibility of speaking about descriptions without any ontological commitments. The reason why Rorty did not follow Davidson in committing himself to physicalism about events or facts is that he thought that the notion of facts and non-robust truths, in any minimalist sense, still contain normative elements (like individuating the event in question). Even some Rortyans like Brandom dangerously think facts to be reasons and hence norm-governed, instead of thinking the same with Davidson conversely, that reasons are factual (i.e., causal) and this is why they mostly work effectively in our coping with reality. Rorty protests against the view that causal connections, especially perceptual experience, could provide *reasons* to us. If he accepted this, he should accept the science-art opposition on the grounds that science does have such reasons but art does not. The alternative, Davidsonian way claims that whatever our reasons are (being even groundless perceptually), they *were* caused by reality and *do* have causal effects on it. Insofar as those effects are appropriate, it is indifferent if at the level of mental descriptions, our reasons counts as valid or not.

Nevertheless, denying that we can *identify* language-independent facts is not the same as denying language-independent facts *themselves*. Language-independent facts are not denied by Rorty either. His only claim is that without identification, it is senseless to *talk about* them but it is much better to *cope with* them. There is no need to talk about "how the world really is" because we can cope with our environment without such theories quite well. On purely instrumentalist grounds, it is reasonable to say with Davidson for a naturalistic pragmatist that she is a physicalist, because physicalist vocabularies work quite effectively, and that is all that pragmatists need to have in order to accept them. But Rorty is right that nothing forces naturalist pragmatists

to do so because descriptions as instruments work quite well without ontological commitments as well.

What distinguishes Davidsonian non-reductionist physicalists from Rortyan naturalistic pragmatists is that no naturalistic pragmatist can say that *the world itself* is physical. "Why cannot we get Reality (aka How the World Really Is In Itself) right?" - asks Rorty and then he replies: "Because there are no norms for talking about it" (Rorty 2000d, p. 375). Getting reality would mean grasping it linguistically. It would mean that reality should have to conform our norms and our vocabularies could force reality to do what we want. Thanks to Davidson, Rortyans think they occasionally could, though not by a proper description of, but causal effects on, it.

### **Conclusion**

I may predict (obviously with no decisive evidence supporting my claim) that from a historical perspective, Rorty's attempt to unify some of the most prominent analytic and Continental philosophers' views will be seen one of his most significant contributions to the history of philosophy. Regarding his professional impact strictly, his argumentation against representationist theories of knowledge, language and mind may be seen as most central. In the light of the final paragraphs of his *Non-reductive Physicalism*, it nonetheless seems that anti-representationism also supports his further purpose of unifying arts and sciences.

Rorty is able to ignore questions of a representation-like world-human relation only if he supposes that relation to be causal. He cannot simply say that there is no such relation at all, because it would involve one of the following three undesirable consequences: (1) scepticism, often attributed to him, which claims that there is no connection between us and reality; (2) linguistic idealism, which is another frequent accusation, claiming that the Cartesian gap can be bridged over only by an extension of the internal to the external; (3) reductive physicalism or eliminative materialism, his

early but over-ontological attempt, claiming that the Cartesian gap can be bridged over only by an extension of the external to the internal. None of them is acceptable if one's purpose is harmonising sciences and arts, i.e., the two most important forms of our relation to the external and the internal.

Rorty prefers rejecting the whole theoretical framework of fundamental philosophical questions instead of choosing one of the overworked alternatives. But he cannot ignore the problem that there *must* be

something to be said about our relation to the rest of the world. By his good fortune, he found a good comrade to his interests. Davidson's theory that our pro-attitudes, constituting the self, are under some descriptions in a causal relation with reality, is a plausible account of the mind-world relation in non-representational terms by which Davidsonians can avoid falling back into the representationist way of speaking, while developing a pragmatist view about how we humans relate to the rest of the world.

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