

Response to Adam in 15 Pieces

TJ Crow 2014

Response to Adam's response to my paper called **Not Reading Rorty** which in turn was a response to Haack's paper called *Vulgar Rortyisms*.

1

"...just as rejecting God doesn't leave you morally unhinged, rejecting the idea of the World As It Is In Itself leaves your beliefs just as connected to reality as they ever were."

What makes you think our beliefs are ever connected to reality?

"...our beliefs never stray too far from it."

How do you know?

Because we're not mostly doing stupid things like walking off cliffs and such.

2

"Beliefs don't work because they closely correspond to the World As It Is In Itself. Beliefs work because they're constantly tested against the reality of trying to get something done."

And what if I have no interest in getting anything done?

Then you don't need any beliefs.

3

"It's fishy because you can't let go of the idea of World As It Is In Itself."

I'm not sure Peircian pragmatism subscribes to the correspondence theory of truth.

I think you're right about this. Isn't the non correspondence theory of truth attributed to the classical pragmatists? My take is that Rorty sharpened up this line of thinking by picking up important threads of classical pragmatism, like the non correspondence theory of truth, and paying them out to their logical conclusions, like there being no World As It Is In Itself.

4

"Rortyism induces the hope of the possibility of real inquiry of the kind that actually helps people."

I'll admit I've just started reading Rorty, but I'm not sure in what ways his philosophy is meant to "help" people.

The "real inquiry" that I refer to is inquiry unburdened by attempting to match our beliefs to the World As It Is In Itself. We are thrust into helping each other because we realize we only have each other. Only consensus and the occasional genius help us figure out what's true. We no longer have the assurance that somewhere out there is the truth if only someone could tell us what it is.

5

"I don't want to live a world where the search for truth and the search for happiness are different."

Is truth meant to be consolable?

No, but we search for truth in order to find happiness. In this way they are intertwined. By the way, I'm using the word "happiness" to mean "a good satisfying life", more than just consolation, as in "the pursuit of happiness".

6

// "When that happens, you get a bunch of prideful positivist types saying stuff like Haack quoting Peirce about the '... genuine desire to discover the truth- which "is SO ... whether you or I or anybody thinks it is so or not."//

I am not a positivist, but I do agree with Peirce that truth is discovered.

I believe that truth is discovered by people deciding what beliefs are best. For example, over the past few centuries most societies have discovered that owning slaves is bad. It's always been true that slavery is wrong. That's the way truth is: eternal. You know what's true. All I'm saying is that you can't justify your true beliefs by appealing to the World As It Is In Itself (because it's not there, remember :)). Things would be easier if we could. As history suggests, it's not for want of trying.

7

". .look the truth in the face, whether doing so be conducive to the interests of society or not."

Who gets to arbitrate what is or isn't conducive to the interests of society?

I don't know. This is Haack quoting Pierce. Presumably Pierce is saying even if he or his fellow arbiters think it's bad for society, he'd still rather look truth in the face. I hope the You/Me conversation in my paper convinced you that such a position is deeply illogical.

8

"They are proud they have the guts to put knowledge above other human concerns. To my ears it sounds just like, "We have to follow God's commandments whether we like them or not"

No, I think you are jumping to the conclusion that if truth can be discovered that it can necessarily be transferred to others. Borrowed knowledge is not truth, IMO. I am skeptical of those who have such high regard for intersubjective agreement/peer review. That is, why depend on others to spoon feed you truth when you can discover truth for yourself?

Why reinvent the wheel? Why not build on the truths discovered by your ancestors? Borrowed knowledge is knowledge none the less. Like Ohm's Law. Perhaps you're saying that knowledge is borrowed until you've had a chance to work with it to "make it your own". Like doing electrical experiments to learn Ohm's Law.

I believe that truth is transferrable from human to human. That's the purpose of all the marks and noises we make.

9

"It's an authoritarian and anti-intellectual attitude that encourages people to stand up for the truth whether others like it or not, thereby discouraging inquiry and inviting dogmatism."

lol?

What's so funny? I thought I nailed it, IMHO. :)

10

"The truth must be faced not so much because it's a matter of honor, but instead because knowing the truth is conducive to the interests of society and yourself."

Because it's a matter of honor?

That's just me giving some rhetorical thrust to expressing the way I see those "prideful positivists" that I'm describing. In other words, it seems to me, the honor talk is coming from them.

11

"Beliefs are true because they are successful. Try to think of a true belief you have that doesn't work for you in this pragmatic way."

Is there not more to life than utility?

Sure, lots of stuff, like honor and trust and love to name a few. All I'm saying is that if a belief isn't working for you, you won't think it's true.

12

". .all the cooperative inquiry that may have gone into finding this true belief of yours was conducted by humans none of whom can see the World As It Is In Itself any better than you can."

Agreed.

"Because it's not there. There never has never been a World As It Is In Itself to compare beliefs with in order to find out if they are true."

It's not there?

Sure. Sounds unhinged, doesn't it? Of course there's a real world we're part of it. But there's no such thing as the World As It Is In Itself. That's the paradigm shift that I'm describing.

13

"We're coping beings and the more a belief helps us cope, the more we say that belief is true. That's it. There ain't no more."

Which begs the question, why do we, as beings, have a need to cope with life 'as it is' ??? Why not just renounce this life and put a bullet in your brain? Why go on living?

Yikes. Life itself begs these questions of us all. We cope because that's what organisms do. "We Cope Cause There's Hope". Each person must answer for them self why they choose to continue.

Perhaps I wasn't clear. What I meant was "there ain't no more" to say about truth.

14

"No more metaphysical Freudianesque phantasies connecting us with a huge powerful body of knowledge called The Truth. We don't owe allegiance to The Truth but only to Each Other."

That is assuming that we, the society, are somehow separate from the 'huge powerful body of knowledge called The Truth'.

Yes, true enough -- if you insist on thinking in terms of huge powerful bodies. :) We both agree that the assumption of separation from truth is wrong-headed. What I'm saying is that this very assumption gets built into everything you say and think if you don't let go of the World As It Is In Itself. "There's Us and then there's the World That Contains All the Truths and we're separate. The best we can do is get a fuzzy picture of what's Really Out There." Balderdash! There's no such thing as that World and there never has been.

15

"Rorty argues that we can give no useful content to the notion that the world, by its very nature, rationally constrains choices of vocabulary with which to cope with it." (Adam - where does this quote come from? -- it's not from my paper.)

Here I think Rorty is referring to how we might cope with the burden of discourse rather than how any of us might cope with the phenomenon of the world.

In this case, it's easy to be Not Reading Rorty. Rorty would have no problem with the non controversial assertion that a culture's physical environment can influence their choice of words. If he was speaking, he might mumble, "If you live near a volcano, you'd have a couple dozen words for lava." But it's easy to read him as saying the opposite. Here's why.

Rorty's using certain words and phrases in a technical sense that's missing out of context. Replace the phrase "the world, by its very nature" with my phrase World As It Is In Itself (WAI4). Realize too that the word "vocabularies" is meant in the broad sociological sense which he gives it in his 1989 book Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. Then you'll read him as saying that the attempt to rationally trace the causes of how people talk from "the world, by its very nature" is meaningless and fruitless since to talk about the "very nature [essence] of the world", you'd have to, as Rorty says, "talk about how things are apart from being talked about."

Postscript

Okay friends. How's this to sum up what I've been saying. Poetic and maybe even metaphysical (?)

Remember (grasshoppah)
The World Is Not Out There
The World Runs Right Through Us
