

## What Pepperian Response to Rorty is Possible?

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The following comment on Reck's paper praises his exposition of the metaphilosophical ideas of Pepper, Rorty and Nozick but asks how the Pepperian can respond to Rorty's critique of epistemology and systematic philosophy. It is asked whether Reck wishes in his response to follow the lead of Bernstein or that of Neville.

I am quite sure that no one has as thorough knowledge of the whole range of recent American philosophy as Andrew Reck. I do not exaggerate. For about thirty years Reck has been tirelessly and carefully reading the work of American philosophers of every type. In the tradition of Stephen Pepper he has been dedicated to the exploration of each and every manner of philosophizing that has been competently practiced.

It is not surprising that such an experienced expositor of philosophical ideas has given us a clear, concise and accurate account of the metaphilosophical ideas of Pepper, Rorty and Nozick. I can find no fault with his exposition. What disturbs me is that Reck does not attempt to give those influenced by Pepper what they most need—a reasoned rebuttal of Rorty's critique of epistemology and systematic philosophy. To be sure, Pepperians can welcome much that Rorty does: (1) his demolition of analytic philosophy; (2) his effective use of metaphor in explaining what philosophers are doing and how one type of philosophy is to be distinguished from another; and (3) his enthusiastic endorsement of pragmatic contextualism. But it is not enough to say, as Reck does, that Rorty's "attacks on epistemology and systematic philosophy would surely have earned Pepper's condemnation" (1982, p. 211). That doesn't tell us what *reasons* Pepperians can give for such condemnation. Having slain the dragon of logical positivism, Pepper was convinced that we can evaluate world hypotheses objectively, using the proper sort of epistemology. Rorty, however, argues that *all* epistemology is doomed to failure, at least epistemology that attempts to establish knowledge on a foundation independent of a particular culture. We must be satisfied, Rorty insists, with historicism and edifying "conversation" within the limited framework of a particular culture. Rorty knows full well that most philosophers think, as Reck does, that philosophy then "lacks adhesion to a logical system of categories and anchorage in a bed of empirical facts. It floats the way cocktail conversation does, fueled by alcohol, passing wit, and social amiability." But Rorty chal-

lenges us to show that a type of philosophy more to our liking can be rationally defended. Surely it is incumbent on Pepperians and other advocates of epistemology and systematic philosophy to show that such a defense can be given. It is not enough to appeal to the sort of defense of systematic philosophy presented by Reck in the useful book he published ten years ago (1972). The plight of systematic philosophy ("world hypotheses") has become much more desperate with the introduction of Rorty's famous metaphilosophy, perhaps most succinctly stated in his 1979 Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association (1980).

What can Reck suggest as a way for Pepperians to respond to Rorty's fundamental challenge? Does he, perhaps, favor Bernstein's counterchallenge? Bernstein appeals to Dewey, one of Rorty's heroes.

Dewey [Bernstein writes] would certainly agree with Rorty that all justification involves reference to existing social practices and that philosophy is not a discipline that has any special knowledge of knowing or access to more fundamental foundations. But for Dewey that is where the real problems begin. What are the social practices to which we should appeal? How do we discriminate the better from the worse . . . . According to Rorty's own analysis, these are genuine problems, but Rorty never quite gets around to asking these and related questions. He tells us, of course, that there is no special philosophical method for dealing with such issues and no ahistorical matrix to which we can appeal. But accepting this claim does not make these issues disappear. (1980, p. 768)

This is not a matter of arbitrarily endorsing one set of values over competing values, but rather trying to give the strongest "historical reasons" to support one side or the other. The issues *cannot* be resolved simply by appealing to existing social practices, for the heart of the controversy is the genuine and serious conflict of competing social practices. How are we to understand what are the relevant "historical reasons"—or even what we mean by "historical reasons"? (1980, p. 770-771)

[Rorty refers] to a consensus chosen by *rational discussants*. How are we to decide who are the rational discussants? . . . [E]verything he says and shows indicates that this is the sort of question which philosophers or, if one prefers, "reflective intellectuals" ought to be addressing. (1980, p. 771-772)

But if Reck opts for Bernstein's way of responding to Rorty, it seems that the Pepperians will have lost the element of ahistorical objectivity that Pepper claimed for his views, though they will have preserved the pragmatic justification of philosophy that Pepper also thought essential.

For Pepperians there is another equally serious problem with Bernstein's way of responding to Rorty. They must show, contrary to what Rorty claims, that "world hypotheses" or what Rorty calls ways of "making everything hang together," are helpful in an historicistic critique of social practices and the rationality of discussants. In his discussion of "Dewey's Metaphysics" (1977, p. 67) Rorty argues that Dewey's elaborate attempt to set out "the generic traits of existence" does not help one bit in his criticism of social practices. This is his way of saying that the use of "root metaphors" in "world hypotheses" is a waste of time in such pragmatic criticism. Indeed, he thinks such metaphysics is worse than useless—it misleads and confuses people into

believing that they are getting something foundational and ahistorical.

Alternatively, does Reck wish to reject Bernstein's approach as too un-supportive of world hypotheses and instead wish to suggest to Pepperians that they follow Neville's lead and attempt to develop a non-foundational world hypothesis. In his most recent book (1981) Neville presents the first part of what he calls an "axiological cosmology," in which he wishes to substitute a valuational foundation for what Rorty would consider an epistemological foundation. Though Neville never mentions Pepper even in a footnote, his neo-Deweyan and neo-Whiteheadian metaphysics seems to have many affinities with Pepper's. His emphasis on having an "image of the cosmos" seems close to Pepper's notion of a root metaphor, and his taking valuation as ontologically basic seems close to Pepper's use of "the purposive act" as the best root metaphor.

Though the still unpublished second volume of Neville's cosmology may provide the basis for criticism of specific social practices as his first volume does not, I suspect that Rorty will consider Neville's cosmology to be as idle as Dewey's account of "the generic traits of existence" and will also insist that Neville, despite his repeated disclaimers, sneaks into his systematic philosophy yet another ahistorical, epistemological foundation.

Arthur Efron has asked us to end our brief comments with some questions for discussion. But before I give you my questions let me explain why I have not commented on or raised questions about Nozick. I have not done so because I don't consider Nozick to have presented an interesting and serious challenge to Pepperians and other systematic metaphysicians. He is not, in my estimation, a worthy opponent or ally of Pepper.

Now, finally, here are my questions. They are big questions, but I trust that Reck can help us start to answer them.

1. How can Pepperians and other systematic metaphysicians respond to Rorty's challenge to provide a defense of world hypotheses as, at least in some important respects, ahistorical?
2. Should Pepperians and other systematic metaphysicians adopt Bernstein's suggestion that they concentrate their humble efforts on developing an historicistic critique of social practices on which world hypotheses are presumed to be based?
3. Should Pepperians and other systematic metaphysicians adopt Neville's ambitious strategy of developing a cosmology which takes valuation as ontologically basic and attempts to avoid what Rorty would consider an ahistorical epistemological foundation?

### References

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