

THROUGH THE RORTYIAN TURN

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ABSTRACT

This study is an overview and analysis of Richard Rorty's recent philosophical writings. I compare Rorty's neo-pragmatist vocabulary in regards to models of argumentation, accounts of knowledge and conceptions of ethics. Following the work of Hans Blumenberg, I focus on the practical advantages of the modern vocabulary, Rorty's arguments against those advantages, and the advantages of Rorty's neo-pragmatist vocabulary. My central concern is answering the question: is Rorty's vocabulary persuasive to participants in the modern vocabulary? Can we reasonably give up on metaphysics? Does the Rortyan post-metaphysical vocabulary respond to the functional needs of adherents of the modern vocabulary? Does Rorty provide good reasons for giving up those needs that are tainted by metaphysics?

My conclusion is that Rorty's vocabulary is largely persuasive, but that his rejection of metaphysics, especially in his account of argumentation, suggests a relativism that leans towards irrationalism. I suggest that Rorty's vocabulary, while retaining its post-metaphysical tone, could be strengthened by adopting a notion of "practical rationality." This notion of rationality would help us see that advocates of different vocabularies can engage in a fruitful dialogue over whether a certain vocabulary is useful, and what "useful" should mean, although this

dialogue defies easy resolution. My conviction is that this model of “practical rationality” is central to a post-metaphysical (and dare we say “postmodern”) vocabulary.

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