I. In the introduction to a recent collection of essays entitled *New Pragmatists*, Cheryl Misak draws a distinction between Richard Rorty’s ‘neo-pragmatism’ and a revisionist brand of pragmatism she calls ‘new pragmatism’. This moniker is ironic insofar as the new pragmatists argue against Rorty by rehabilitating some of the insights of the classical pragmatic tradition, most especially those concerning the admissibility of concepts like truth and objectivity. While the new pragmatists agree with Rorty’s ‘humanist’ and ‘antiauthoritarian’ notion that the norms that inform inquiry are our norms rather than the world’s, they demur from his suggestion that this requires us to give up the notions of truth and objectivity. Implicit in human practices of dialogue and inquiry are norms of correctness, of getting things right, that go beyond what a community takes to be justified in the here and now. In being guided by such norms, we are not simply trying to convince a dialogical partner that our view of something is justified, as Rorty thinks, we are also trying to get our mutual beliefs of that something right.

For many of the new pragmatists, the problem with Rorty is that he does not, as Habermas puts it, perform the “pragmatic radicalization of the linguistic turn in the right way” (Habermas 2000: 35). While Rorty is right to replace the ‘philosophical of consciousness’ and it concomitant notions of representation and correspondence with a view in which reference and truth are internal to a linguistic community and its justificatory practices, he does not countenance, as he should, that these practices of giving and asking for reasons are governed internally by norms whose force transcends the justifying practices at hand. In essence, their criticism of Rorty is that he is too Humean and not sufficiently Kantian: while he claims to recognize that the space of reason’s is governed by norms of
correctness his practically motivated anti-authoritarianism, his wish to see humans as not answerable to anything outside of themselves, leads him to leave the norms of truth and objectivity behind. If Rorty just examined his Sellarsian commitments, the argument goes, he would come around to the new pragmatic way of seeing things—i.e., would see that accepting the norms of truth and objectivity does not in fact endanger his anti-authoritarianism.

In his article “On our Interest in Getting Things Right: Pragmatism without Narcissism” Jeffry Stout argues that this is precisely what Rorty realizes late in his career. As evidence, Stout points to an exchange that Rorty has with Bjorn Ramberg in the volume *Rorty and his Critics*. There, Rorty is persuaded to jettison two theses that he had preached for years, namely that the notion of ‘getting things right’ must be abandoned, and that there are only causal and not semantic relations to the world. Ramberg pulls off the difficult task of changing Rorty’s mind on these central issues by convincing him that his reading of Davidson is off base on two important issues. First, he shows Rorty that Davidson’s use of the indeterminacy of interpretation thesis does not serve the function of drawing an ontological distinction between psychological and physical predicates, as he thought, but is rather meant to help establish a thesis concerning the *indispensability* of the normatively governed vocabulary of agency-description. Second, Ramberg demonstrates that Davidson’s theory of interpretation is best characterized as a theory of truth rather than a ‘theory of complex behavior’, as Rorty thought, because the indispensable norm of truth is essential for the possibility of communication and object-directed thought itself. While we will briefly canvas the indeterminacy issue, this paper is mostly focused on the significance and importance of truth. This is because it is Rorty’s concession on this issue that prompts Stout to bring Rorty into the new pragmatic orbit.
Stout’s thought is this: if, as Rorty comes to admit, the process of distinguishing truth from error is essential for interpretation, communication, and thought generally, it follows that inquirers have an interest in getting things right, an interest that is distinguishable from coming to an agreement, even a reasoned agreement, with others. Prior to his engagement with Ramberg Rorty minimized the distinction between these two interests on the grounds that there is no practical difference between the practices leading to truth and those leading to justification. Since for the pragmatist what does not make a difference to practice should not make a difference to philosophy, philosophers should as far as possible jettison the concept of truth as a distinguishable goal of inquiry and be satisfied with the concept of justificatory solidarity. Stout’s claim is that in accepting the notion that inquirers have an interest in getting things right, Rorty, whether he knows it or not, also commits himself to overturning this previously held thesis. In doing so, Rorty moves from a neo-pragmatism, whose goal is to eliminate truth as an important topic for philosophers to consider, to a new pragmatism that admits truth to be an essential goal of inquiry.

My argument in this paper is simple: Rorty’s amended view, while accepting the propriety of the notion of getting things right, does not rehabilitate truth and objectivity in such a way as to evince a commitment to the new pragmatism. Even after his concession on the admissibility of the notion of getting things right, Rorty does not take truth to be a distinguishable goal of inquiry. My first reason for making this argument is narrow and exegetical, it is a matter of getting Rorty right. But hopefully the paper will serve the larger philosophical purpose of suggesting that the new pragmatic strategy for overcoming Rorty’s neo-pragmatism is flawed.
2. Rorty long portrayed Donald Davidson as the philosopher who best helps us escape the grip of modern representationalism, the view that knowledge is achieved through accuracy of representation and truth through correspondence with the way things ‘really are’. However, Rorty also thought that Davidson did not go far enough along the anti-representationalist road. Rorty criticized Davidson on two important points: First, he resisted the notion, based upon the indeterminacy of translation thesis, that there is a philosophically significant difference between the mental and the physical, and second, he contested the notion that a theory of truth needs to be anything more than a theory of ‘complex behavior’. Before examining the second issue, we need to briefly take up the indeterminacy thesis, for it is Ramberg’s response to Rorty on this issue that sets the stage for seeing truth as an indispensable norm for communication and object-directed thought.

In Quine’s hands the indeterminacy of translation thesis is meant to show that when we try to understand the meaning of the speech and action of a foreign person (by matching up our sentences with their sentences and actions) the settling of all the physical facts (sounds, physical movements, and their relations to the environment) does not uniquely determine the meaning of their speech and action. Alternative descriptions of their sayings and doings always remain a possibility. For Quine, indeterminacy is the mark of the mental (beliefs, intentions, and other propositional attitudes) insofar as it only pertains to the application of these predicates. Physical concepts and vocabularies, in contrast, are not indeterminate but underdetermined by the facts. Indeterminacy of meaning occurs after all of the physical facts are settled, while underdetermination concerns these very physical facts. From this, Quine concludes that the distinction between indeterminacy and underdetermination marks the same divide as Brentano’s distinction between the intentional and the non-intentional. However, unlike Brentano and philosophers like Chisholm who think
that this distinction marks a philosophically significant ‘crack’ in the ontological structure of the world, Quine, as a physicalist, thinks that there is no real distinction here in the first place. Mental predicates, in being indeterminate, are descriptively second rate and refer to phenomena that are not part of the fundamental furniture of physical reality. When attempting to ‘limn the true nature of physical reality’ we can drop any discussion of these folk idioms and take exclusive recourse to the predicates of the respectable physical sciences.

Although he was an eliminative materialist early in his career, Rorty’s move to pragmatism made him suspicious of any attempt to privilege one vocabulary over another. Quine’s view of the mental does this insofar as it is predicated upon the

invidious distinction between the ‘baselessness of intentional idioms’ and the better ‘based’ idiom of physical science. . . . [This] strikes pragmatists like me as a residue of the unfortunate positivist idea that we can divide culture into the part in which there is an attempt to correspond to reality and the part in which there is not. If you drop the idea that some of our sentences are distinguished by such correspondence, as Davidson has, it seems natural to say, as Dewey did, that all our idioms are tools for coping with the world. This means that there can be no philosophical interest in reducing one idiom to another. (Rorty 1999: 576)

In moving from a representationalist construal of our descriptive practices to a pragmatic one where vocabularies are tools for coping with various facets of the world, one also moves from a view where vocabularies are ranked in order of ontological precedence to one where they are ranked in terms of their significance for helping us achieve the variety of human ends. For Rorty, this means that we are “equally in touch with reality when we describe a hunk of space-time in atomic, molecular, cellular, physiological, behavioral, intentional, political, or religious terms” (Rorty 1999: 579).

While this vocabulary pluralism rules out eliminativism or reductionism, it also rules out any position that elevates the vocabulary of the mental above others. Rorty’s specific criticism of Davidson consists in the charge that his utilization of the indeterminacy of translation thesis evinces a commitment to this over elevation of the mental. Ironically,
Davidson’s view of the mental is also based upon Quine’s ‘puritanical ontology’, an ontology that in leading to the split between indeterminacy and underdetermination forces the philosopher to either eliminate the vocabulary of the mental or declare it to be outside the nomological net of the natural sciences altogether. Unlike Quine, Davidson takes the second path, arguing that mental predicates cannot be integrated into physical theories that are based upon exceptionless physical laws. The problem with this for Rorty is that it makes “the intentional-non-intentional distinction” seem “interestingly different from the cell-molecule or organ-cell distinction” (Rorty 1999: 578). But once one accepts a general anti-representationalism, as Davidson does, one cannot make out the claim that the distinction between the predicates of psychology and those of the physical sciences (physics plus the special sciences) is more ontologically important than the distinction between the predicates of chemistry and those of biology. For how, without the resources of representationalism, is one to establish a hierarchy of vocabularies such that one vocabulary, the psychological in this case, is seen as interestingly different than the others? Rorty’s claim is therefore that Davidson has incompatible commitments, to the puritanical ontology that underlies the indeterminacy thesis and to an anti-representationalism that undermines the ability to avow this ontology.

Ramberg argues that this diagnosis of Davidson is incorrect because it misinterprets the ramifications of accepting a pragmatic vocabulary pluralism. For Rorty, the irreducibility of the vocabulary of the mental, it’s being one vocabulary amongst others, undermines its pretensions to being ontologically special. The ascription of psychological predicates is not fundamentally different than the ascription of biological predicates or other physical predicates. So while Rorty argues against the reduction of the mental he is for its deflation. Ramberg’s point is that a pragmatic vocabulary pluralism allows one to be against both
reductionism and deflationism without accepting a picture in which the mental is ontologically special. For one can establish the distinctiveness of a vocabulary not only upon ontological grounds but also upon the Deweyian or Jamesian grounds of a vocabulary’s indispensability for fulfilling specific purposes. On this view “the irreducibility of the vocabulary of agency” will not primarily be accounted for by the fact that mental predicates cannot be made part of a vocabulary that articulates strict physical laws, but by “features of that vocabulary which are unique to it” and which “serve the purposes that make it the vocabulary that it is” (Ramberg 2000: 359). In other words, based upon their different ends and features, the vocabulary of psychology might be distinct from the vocabulary of the physical sciences (physics plus the special sciences) in a different way than the vocabulary of biology is distinct from the vocabulary of chemistry without this signaling that the psychological is ontologically special.

3. By Ramberg’s lights, Davidson was working towards such a view in his later work. Rorty’s focus on and misreading of the indeterminacy issue prevented him from appreciating this change in Davidson’s view, one that in its pluralism is congenial to Rortyian pragmatism.

First, Rorty does not see that Quine’s puritanical ontological view needs more than the contrast between the indeterminate and merely underdetermined, the intentional and the non-intentional. It also needs “the idea that the latter mode of description is the fact expressing one. However, when Davidson affirms the Quinean distinction, he does so in a way which commits him only to the former claim” (Ramberg 2000: 355). In other words, Davidson, in espousing the indeterminacy thesis is not trying to establish a hierarchy of vocabularies based upon their correspondence with the facts—a picture where reducing one idiom to another seems philosophically interesting—but is simply trying to point out “that making a physical theory choice will not settle agency-description” (Ramberg 2000: 356). While this fact
suggests to Quine that agency description is second-rate, for Davidson it suggests a point that should be dear to Rorty’s heart, i.e., that the vocabulary of agency-description is not reducible to other vocabularies.

Second, already in his paper “Belief and the Basis of Meaning” Davidson provides a different ground for the distinctiveness of the mental than that of indeterminacy, i.e., the normativity of the mental. As he put it:

Theories of belief and meaning . . . use concepts which set such theories apart from the physical and other non-psychological sciences: concepts like those of meaning and belief are, in a fundamental way, not reducible to physical, neurological, or even behavioristic concepts. This irreducibility is not due, however, to the indeterminacy of meaning or translation . . . It is rather the methods we invoke in constructing theories of belief and meaning that ensures the irreducibility of the concepts essential to those theories. Each interpretation and attribution of attitude is a move within a holistic theory, a theory necessarily governed by concerns for consistency and general coherence with the truth, and it is this that sets these theories apart forever from those that describe mindless objects. (Davidson 1984: 154)

Our ascriptions of belief are moves in a holistic theory because they are made and revised in light of the assumption that the beliefs of our interlocutor, like our own beliefs, are nested within a thick background of other beliefs and propositional attitudes. This, along with the assumption that this background of belief coheres together in a way similar to ours, governs our ascriptions and interpretations by giving us a pre-understanding of the inferential transitions that it is rational for our interlocutor to make from their doxastic position. This holistic theory of ascription and interpretation is normative because it is constrained by the so-called principle of charity. This principle states that we should interpret the verbal behavior of our interlocutor in such a way as to maximize agreement between our beliefs. One way to do this we just stated; assume that our interlocutor’s beliefs cohere in a way similar to ours. Another way is to assume that our interlocutor’s beliefs correspond to the worlds in a way similar to ours. This assumption is forced on us by the nature of interpretation: If we assume that the meanings of our interlocutors sentences are given by their truth-conditions, and that these conditions are causally determined by the objective states of affairs which prompts their
assert, then we can ascribe beliefs to our interlocutor by assuming that what our interlocutor holds to be true is what we would hold to be true in the same circumstances. In making both of these assumptions—in ascribing a concern for the coherence and truth of their beliefs—we assume that our interlocutor is responding to the same standards of rationality that govern our verbal behavior. In doing so we give ourselves a baseline of similarity to judge the extent to which it is plausible that they deviate from our interpretive expectations. The fact that our holistic theories of meaning and belief are based on judgments of plausibility and reasonableness determined by ascribed norms of rationality is what makes the interpretation of verbal behavior normative and distinctly different than our interpretations of physical phenomena.

It is here that the irreducible difference between mental concepts and physical concepts begins to emerge: the former, at least insofar as they are intentional in nature, require the interpreter to consider how best to render the creature being interpreted intelligible, that is a creature endowed with reason. As a consequence an interpreter must separate meanings from opinions partly on normative grounds by deciding what, from his point of view, maximizes intelligibility. In this endeavor to interpreter has, of course, no other standards of rationality to fall back on than his own. When we try to understand the world as physicists, we necessarily employ or own norms, but we do not aim to discover rationality in the phenomena. (Davidson 2001f: 215)

4. In his paper “Davidson’s Mental-Physical Distinction” Rorty counters this argument for the distinctiveness of the mental. The main problem with it is that—in Wittgenstein’s terms—it ‘sublimes’ normativity. As Rorty puts it:

[T]here is nothing especially normative about my effort to translate, since all I am doing is trying to find a pattern of resemblances between my linguistic behavior and the native’s. I am trying to mesh her behavior with mine by finding descriptions of what she is doing that also describe what I sometimes do. I cannot see that this attempt differs in kind from my attempt to find, for example, resemblances between the structure and behavior of an unfamiliar insect and those of familiar insects—resemblances which will permit me to assign the newcomer its proper place in the entomological scheme of things. Attributing species-membership to a new, strange, and ambiguous object is a matter of playing off a lot of other considerations, and so is figuring out how to translate a string of native noises. (Rorty 1999: 585-4)

The question of whether we find patterns of resemblance between our linguistic behavior and that of another speaker through ascribing norms of rationality or simply by finding common descriptive patterns is, in Carnap’s terms, an external question settled by pragmatic
considerations of usefulness and salience. One “can speak normatively—talk about conforming to rules and standards instead of talking about exhibiting regularities and similarities—whenever one want to. But I do not see anything which distinguishes psychological from biological descriptions that makes it more important to do so” (Rorty 1999: 584). The challenge for Davidson is to explain how the application conditions of psychological predicates is specifically different than those of biology or the other special sciences; how translation or interpretation is not merely a descriptive game of fitting a speaker’s utterance into a definitional schema provided by an idiolect but rather something that inescapably requires the utilization of norms and standards of rationality.

Ramberg put his finger on the essence of Davidson’s answer when he says “The distinctiveness of agency lies not in the holism that characterizes the vocabulary [of agency], but in the fact that the predicates thus applied take their point from a normativity we invoke when we try to explain to ourselves what it is that makes communication possible” (Ramberg 2000: 360). What does this mean? Ramberg argues that in his later work Davidson unfolds an argument that tries to show that any vocabulary, even one that simply describes its phenomena, is inextricably governed by normative principles of rationality, coherence and most especially truth. This is so because the condition of possibility of being intentionally directed to and knowing the shared objective world—a condition necessary for finding common descriptive patterns in either nature or in the behavior of another speaker—is that we can communicate with other minds, an accomplishment where the norms of coherence and truth plays an indispensable role. Davidson has a two-step argument for why being directed to and knowing the objective world presupposes norm-governed communication between at least two agents. The first step, the argument from object-directedness, has to do with how intersubjectivity is a condition for ascribing object-directed contents to a creature’s beliefs,
thoughts, or speech acts. The second step, the argument from error, concerns the relationship between intersubjectivity, the possession of objective contents, and truth.  

5. The argument from content is concerned with the features that are necessary to credit a creature with having object-directed beliefs and thoughts. The ability that creatures have by themselves to discriminate reliably between stimuli is not enough to credit them with such thoughts. To have a thought of an object a creature must instead participate in what Davidson calls ‘triangulation’, i.e., participate in a nexus that involves two creatures reacting not only to an aspect of the world but to each other reacting to that aspect of the world. Davidson describes this nexus at two levels, the causal level of innate discriminations and reactions, and the conceptual level of communication and language use. His strong thesis is this: for a state—a belief, thought, or speech-act—to be about an object it is necessary that that state not only enter the causal triangular nexus but also the nexus of communication.

   Davidson’s argument begins in cryptic fashion:

   The criterion on the basis of which a creature can be said to be treating stimuli as similar, as belonging to a class, is the similarity of the creature’s responses to those stimuli; but what is the criterion of similarity of response? This criterion cannot be derived from the creature’s responses; it can only come from the responses of an observer to the responses of the creature. And it is only when an observer consciously correlates the responses of another creature with objects and events of the observer’s world that there is any basis for saying the creature is responding to those objects or events rather than other objects or events. (Davidson 2001f: 212)

   In other words, if there were no criterion of similarity of response over and above actual responses, there would be no way of telling what a response is a response to. What is the frog responding to when it catches the fly: the fly as a dot in space-time, the fly as a pattern of sensory information, or the fly as protein? “If we consider a single creature by itself, its responses, no matter how complex, cannot show that it is reacting to, or thinking about, events a certain distance away rather than, say, on its skin” (Davidson 2001b: 119). Davidson
stresses that the issue here is not epistemic, one of knowing what the creature is reacting to. Rather, “the point is that without a second creature responding to the first, there can be no answer to the question” (Davidson 2001b: 119). To give an answer to this question there must be a causal triangle ‘connecting two creatures, and each creature with a common feature of the world’.

It takes two points of view to give a location to the cause of thought, and this to define its content. We may think of it as a form of triangulation; each of two people is reacting differently to sensory stimuli streaming in from a certain direction. Projecting the incoming lines outward, the common cause is at their intersection. If the two people now note each other’s reactions (in the case of language, verbal reactions) each can correlate these observed reactions with his or her stimuli from the world. A common cause has been determined. The triangle which gives content to thought and speech is complete. (Davidson 2001f: 212)

While this location of a common cause through correlating reactions is a necessary to give content to thought and speech, it is not sufficient. The difficulty is that the sharing of reactions to common stimuli is cashed out causally in terms of innate similarity of responses. For Davidson, the fact that creatures have similar causal responses is vitally important, if this were not so there could be no answer to the question of what they are responding to. But something else is needed for these responses to be genuinely object-directed. Creatures must not only take part in triangulation, but this “interaction must be available to the interacting creatures” (Davidson 2001b: 120). In other words, creatures must not only share reactions to stimuli with other creatures, they must know that they are doing so. Here we have a self-consciousness constraint on content, if a creature cannot avow a content to itself as one that could be shared, it does not genuinely possess the content. For this constraint to be met a creature must not only respond to stimuli, they must “knowingly and intentionally [respond] to specific stimuli. The speaker must have the concept of the stimuli” (Davidson 2001b: 120, my emphasis). This conceptualist thesis is of course very controversial. For the purposes of this
paper, we shall grant it to Davidson. But what does it have to do with triangulation or communication?

Davidson’s thesis is this: “[T]o have the concept of a table or a bell is to recognize the existence of a triangle, one apex of which is oneself, the second apex another creature similar to oneself, and the third an object (table or ball) located in a space thus made common” (Davidson 2001b: 121, emphasis mine). This leads to the conclusion for which Davidson has been searching, namely, that communication is essential for possessing object-directed content.

The only way of knowing that the second apex of the triangle—the second creature or person—is reacting to the same object as oneself is to know that the other person has to same object in mind. But then the second person must also know that the first person constitutes an apex of the same triangle another apex of which the second person occupies. For two people to know of each other that they are so related, that their thoughts are so related, requires that they be in communication. (Davidson 2001b: 121)

The obvious question is why must a creature be able to recognize the existence of the triangle to have a particular concept of an object? Why couldn’t it acquire a concept of an object simply through repeated exposure to the object (plus memory)? Davidson’s argument is this: To have a concept of a particular object is not simply the ability to recall representations of that object, rather it is an ability to cognize that object within ‘a space made common’, i.e., to be able to locate it within an intersubjectively shared objective world. The concept of an empirical object, one that is in a common world, is the concept of something that is there for others as it is for me and vice versa. So to have the notion of an object requires knowing that the object is accessible not only from my particular spatio-temporal perspective, but from other spatio-temporal perspectives. We can of course know that there are other perspectives on an object by moving to those perspectives consecutively. But this is not enough: what is needed is the knowledge that these perspectives on the object exist concurrently to our experience. To cognize an object as objective requires that we experience concurrently to our present experience that there are other experiences of that object from
other perspectives. But to know this requires that we can communicate with those others. In this way the concept of objectivity makes essential reference to intersubjective communication.

The identification of the objects of thought rests, then, on a social basis. . . . Only communication can provide the concept [of objectivity], for to have the concept of objectivity, the concepts of objects and events that occupy a shared world, of objects and events whose properties and existence is independent of our thought, requires that we are aware of the fact that we share thoughts and a world with others. (Davidson 2001e: 202).

6. Davidson’s second argument, the argument from error, is concerned with another condition for possessing states that have object-directed content: “having a belief demands . . . appreciating the contest between true belief and false, between appearance and reality, mere seeming and being” (2001f: 209). To have a thought or belief which is objective not only requires knowing that the object of thought is accessible ‘horizontally’ from different points of view simultaneously, but also that there is a ‘vertical’ difference between our take on the world and the world itself. Communicative interrelations that trade upon the norm of truth are, as we shall see, essential for understanding these distinctions and so essential for possessing object-directed content.

The argument from error starts in the same place as the argument from content, namely, by noting the inability of reliable response dispositions to generate beliefs with object-directed content. “[T]o have a belief it is not enough to discriminate among aspects of the world, to behave in different ways in different circumstances” (2001f: 209). The reason why this is not enough is that even though dispositions to respond and discriminate can (at least in higher-order animals) be flexible in the face of changing environmental circumstances “there is no sense in saying a disposition is in error” (Davidson 2005: 14). Error is essential for an awareness of the distinction between appearance and reality, seeming and being, because in being different from what we take it to be, we experience the world as resistant to our powers...
of thought and action. In resisting our powers of thought and action, the world holds itself out to us as independent, objective, and separate from our perspective on it.\textsuperscript{11}

To possess the notion of error requires the ability to apply concepts. It is in classifying things as one way or another, and in being aware that we are doing so (by using a concept), that the awareness of misclassification, and so error, comes into play.\textsuperscript{12}

What is clear is we can say that the child \textit{thinks} something is red, or a ball, only if it appreciates the distinction between the judgment and the truth for itself; the child thinks something is red or a ball only if it is in some sense aware that a mistake is possible. The child is classifying things, and it knows it may have put something in the wrong slot. (Davidson 2005: 14)

Because the knowledge that we can misclassify something in a judgment presumes that we can classify it correctly, the awareness of error is accompanied by an awareness of truth and objectivity. “To apply a concept is to make a judgment, to classify or characterize an object or event or situation in a certain way, and this requires application of the concept of \textit{truth}, since it is possible to classify or characterize something wrongly” (Davidson 2004: 9). Using a concept correctly in a judgment requires knowing under what conditions the judgment is true, and to know this requires having the concept of truth. But once one has this concept, one also has the concept that the truth or falsity of one’s judgment is not up to them, i.e., is objective and independent of the judger’s beliefs and interests. As Davidson puts it, “someone who has a belief, who holds some proposition to be true or false, knows that that belief may be true or false. In order to be right or wrong, one must know that it is possible to be right or wrong” (Davidson 2004: 10).

As we know from section five above, the ability to possess concepts requires taking part in the communicative triangle. But then this means that the notions of error, truth, and objectivity also depend on communication.

The source of the concept of objective truth is interpersonal communication. Thought depends on communication. This follows at once if we suppose that language is essential to thought and we agree with Wittgenstein that there cannot be a private language. The central argument
against private languages is that, unless a language is shared, there is no way to distinguish between using the language correctly and using it incorrectly, only communication with another can supply an objective check. If only communication can provide a check on the correct use of words, only communication can supply a standard of objectivity in other domains. . . We have no grounds for crediting a creature with the distinction between what is thought to be the case and what is the case unless the creature has the standard provided by a shared language; and without this distinction there is nothing that can clearly be called thought. (Davidson 2001f: 209-10)

Why can’t a creature come to the distinction between what it thinks to be the case and what is the case on its own? Why can’t the world hold out its recalcitrance and objectivity to a creature without that creature entering into communication? The problem is that for us to be surprised by a recalcitrant reality requires that we can already recognize the distinction between what we think and what is the case (see Davidson 2004: 7). This means that we already are in touch with a standard to differentiate between appearance and reality, which in the case of surprise, have come apart unexpectedly. And if this standard can’t come from the world, nor from the subject,¹³ the knowledge of this standard can only come from our taking part in rule-governed communication.

After a long detour we are now in a position to come back to the question of what distinguishes mental vocabularies from physical ones. Davidson puts it this way: “The fundamental difference between my knowledge of another mind and my knowledge of the shared physical world” is that “[c]ommunication, and the knowledge of other minds that it presupposes, is the basis of our concept of objectivity, our recognition of the distinction between true and false beliefs” (Davidson 2001f: 217). In this precise way, communication is the indispensable condition of possibility for thought and knowledge of the objective world. Here we find the reason why Rorty’s Carnapian conventionalism—his view that vocabulary choice is merely a question of pragmatic salience—is incorrect. We cannot step out of the norm-laden vocabulary that we use to communicate with others because any attempt to go outside the standard of the real provided by a shared language to check whether we have
things right assumes that we are already using this standard in our assessment. “We can, of course, turn to a third party and a fourth to broaden and secure the interpersonal standard of the real, but this leads not to something intrinsically different, just to more of the same” (Davidson 2001f: 218). We also can, of course, use other types of vocabularies to register causal patterns of regularity, for example a biological vocabulary, but we can only do so because we can already use a normatively structured vocabulary that includes truth as our ‘interpersonal standard of the real’.

7. In attempting to specify what is distinctive about the vocabulary of agency we have found ourselves discussing truth. But it is not immediately clear what theory of truth is implied by the fact that possession of the concept of truth is essential for object-directed thought. On the face of it, it seems to lead to an ‘epistemic theory of truth’ in which truth is tied to the beliefs and practices of an epistemic community. For if the origin of the concept of objective truth is interpersonal communication it seems that the standard for what is true or false is indexed to a community’s communicative practices and the beliefs embedded within them. However, Davidson emphatically rejects epistemic or ‘subjectivist’ theories of truth, whether pragmatic, coherentist, anti-realist, or internally realist. We have to separate, Davidson thinks, the role the concept of truth plays in the communicative economy of belief and meaning, and truth itself. While the former is in the hands of society, the latter is not. He gets at the complex interrelation of these two registers in this passage:

Sentences are understood on condition that one has the concept of objective truth. This goes also for the various propositional attitudes sentences are used to express. It is possible to have a belief only if one knows that beliefs may be true or false. I can believe it is now raining, but this is because I know that whether or not it is raining does not depend on whether I believe it, or everyone believes it, or it is useful to believe it; it is up to nature not me or my society or the entire history of the human race. What is up to us is what we mean by our words, but that is a different matter. (TR: 16).
While the knowledge of the truth/false distinction is essential to communication and object-directed thought—and so is a subjective capacity—what is true (or false) is an objective matter. Truth itself is not relative to a time or place and is a property that cannot be lost.

The objectivity of truth leads Davidson to an important thesis, namely that truth is not a norm or goal to be pursued at all. To understand this thesis we need to make a distinction between two ways of understanding the notion that truth is a norm: 1) truth is a norm of belief in the sense that bringing to bear the concept of truth (and falsity) is constitutive for the very possibility of belief, and 2) truth is a norm for belief in the sense that it is a goal of inquiry, a conscious aim for believers, or something valuable for them to attain. Davidson’s argument is directed against the second understanding of truth as a norm, truth as an explicit goal of inquiry. His reason for rejecting this view is pragmatic: no matter how well justified a belief is it is always possible for it to be false. Here Davidson takes his cue from Rorty. In his paper “Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth” Rorty claims that the only use of the term ‘true’ that is not eliminatible from our linguistic practices is the so-called ‘cautionary use’. In saying something like ‘Your belief that S is perfectly justified, but perhaps not true’ we remind ourselves that truth cannot be equated with what is justified or rationally agreed upon as true by a community because even though S is justified it can always turn out to be wrong. What this signals to Rorty is that our epistemic goal is not the achievement of truth, a superfluous aim, but an enlargement of the circle of solidarity, i.e., an achievement of rationally motivated agreements in larger and epistemically more informed audiences. Davidson agrees. “The best we can do is test, experiment, compare, and keep an open mind. But no matter how long and well we and coming generations keep at it, we and they will be left with fallible beliefs. We know many things, and will learn more; what we will never know for certain is which of the things we believe are true. Since it is neither visible as a target, nor
recognizable when achieved, there is no point in calling truth a goal” (Davidson 2005: 6).

However, while Davidson agrees with Rorty that truth is not a goal, he does not think that this requires us to either equate what is true with what is justified or eliminate truth as an important concept altogether. We can give up on the notion that truth is a norm to be pursued, yet maintain its objective status.

From the fact that we will never be able to tell for certain which of our beliefs are true, pragmatists conclude that we may as well identify our best researched, most successful, beliefs with the true ones, and give up the idea of objectivity. (Truth is objective if the truth of a belief or sentence is independent of whether it is justified by all of our evidence, believed by our neighbors, or is good to steer by.) But here we have a choice. Instead of giving up the traditional view that truth is objective, we can give up the equally traditional view (to which the pragmatists adhere) that truth is a norm, something for which to strive. I agree with the pragmatists that we can’t consistently take truth to be both objective and something to be pursued. But I think they would have done better to cleave to a view that counts truth as objective but pointless as a goal. (Davidson 2005: 6-7)

Interestingly, Davidson also rejects ‘objectivist’ theories of truth, theories that detach truth from belief and inquiry altogether. Davidson has in mind metaphysical versions of the correspondence theory. While truth is objective it is not, Davidson thinks, correctly captured by objectivist theories of truth. While subjectivist theories of truth are merely wrong, objectivist theories are incoherent insofar as there “is nothing interesting or instructive to which true sentences might correspond” (Davidson 1990: 303). But how then does Davidson thread the needle between subjectivist or epistemic theories that connect truth to belief, evidence, and inquiry, and objectivist theories that separate truth from human beliefs and practices altogether? His claim is this: “What saves truth from being ‘radically non-epistemic’ (in Putnam’s words) is not that truth is epistemic but that belief, through its ties with meaning, is intrinsically veridical” (Davidson 2001c: 156). In other words, while truth cannot be equated with what is justified or what we rationally believe at any given point (even at the proverbial end of inquiry), it is related to belief because most of our beliefs must be true—although, of course, we can never know which ones with total certainty. While our
mutually believing something does not make it so (because truth is objective), belief creates a presumption that it is so. “Truth emerges not as wholly detached from belief (as the correspondence theory would make it) nor as dependent on human methods and powers of discovery (as epistemic theories of truth would make it)” (Davidson 2001c: 156).

The natural question to ask at this point is: Why must we presume that most of our beliefs are true? Why can’t there be too large a slack between our beliefs and truth? In response, Davidson famously provides a transcendental argument that claims that a condition for the interpretability of another’s speech, and so successful communication, is that most of our mutual beliefs must be true. In his words, belief is of its nature veridical. For the purposes of this paper, let us briefly restate the argument in the terms given to us by the ‘argument from content’ and the ‘argument from error’. According to the latter argument, for interpretation and communication to be possible it is necessary that interlocutors share an ‘interpersonal standard of the real’, i.e., shared patterns of truth and falsity that give them basic benchmarks of agreement. If speakers did not share these benchmarks, the conditions for there being even a disagreement between two speakers over what is true or false would not be in place. For disagreement to be possible two speakers must share enough beliefs so as to make disagreement meaningful. As Davidson puts it, “[w]e can make sense of differences . . . only against a background of shared belief. What is shared does not in general call for comment; it is too dull, trite, or familiar to stand notice. But without a vast common ground, there is no place for disputants to have their quarrel” (Davidson 1984a).

Of course, the fact that disagreement assumes massive agreement between two speakers says nothing about whether their agreed upon beliefs are true, for both speakers could have incorrect beliefs about the world. Their interpersonal standard of the real might not hook up with what is in fact real. The argument from content meets this problem by
showing that speakers, to have a concept of truth and hence to share content at all, not only must match their beliefs, mind to mind, they must also causally vector those matched beliefs with the world. This means that there is a two-way constitutive dependence between objectivity and inter-subjectivity: While our concept of what is objectively true or false is dependent upon intersubjective communication, intersubjective communication “requires and assumes knowledge of a shared world of objects in a common time and space” (Davidson 2004: 118). This two-way dependence expands the scope of the veridicality of belief thesis. Now to say that most of our beliefs are true not only includes our mutual beliefs about each other’s beliefs, but includes our mutual beliefs about the world.

8. At long last, we are now in a position to return to Rorty and his relationship to the new pragmatists. As we mentioned in the introduction, through confronting Ramberg’s arguments Rorty is persuaded to abandon two doctrines that he had been preaching for years: “that the notion of ‘getting things right’ must be abandoned, and that ‘true of’ and ‘refers to’ are not word-world relations” (RC: 375). How did Ramberg get Rorty to change his mind?

First, Ramberg persuades Rorty that—in Rorty’s words—his interpretive focus on “the famous Brentinian irreducibility of the intentional” distracted him from seeing that the upshot of Davidson’s work was “the inescapability of the normative” (Rorty 2000a: 370-1). In elaborating a post-ontological philosophy of mind where the question of normativity is detached from the ontological problematic of what minds are, Davidson is telling us something “Hegelian instead of Brentinian, something about Anerkennung” (Rorty 2000a: 373), i.e., something about our recognition of each other as members of a normatively-governed community. Because our membership in this community is the condition of possibility for object-directed thought, we “cannot stop prescribing, and just describe, because the describing
counts as describing only if rule governed, only if conducted by people who talk about [and to, SL] each other in the vocabulary of agency” (Rorty 2000a: 17).17

Second, Ramberg shows Rorty why truth must be central to Davidson’s enterprise. Before his encounter with Ramberg, Rorty was unsure why this was so, why Davidson thought that the “conceptual underpinnings of interpretation” must be “a theory of truth” (Davidson 1990: 326). While it is true that “without the idea of truth we wound not be thinking creatures, nor would understand what it is for someone else to be a thinking creature” (Davidson 2005: 16), the same could be said for other concepts that we use in describing and interpreting behavior. If tracing the pattern of truth in an interlocutor’s behavior is also to trace the pattern of belief, desire, meaning, and rationality, why should a theory of interpretation be called a theory of truth rather than a ‘theory of complex behavior’—one that includes truth as a basic concept amongst others? Rorty chalks up the privileging of truth to the fact that the theory of interpretation requires Davidson’s thesis concerning the veridicality of belief.18 But even this thesis, Rorty thinks, should not be seen as supporting the notion that truth should have a larger more prestigious role in Davidson’s theory than concepts like belief, desire, or rationality.

For when we remember that Davidson will have no truck with the idea that truth consists in correspondence to, or accurate representation of, reality, we realize that he is not saying that our minds are, thanks to God’s or Evolution’s contrivance, well suited to the task of getting reality right . . . He is, rather, saying that most of anybody’s beliefs must coincide with most of our beliefs (because to ascribe beliefs in the first place one must invoke the Principle of Charity) and that to reject that mass of shared beliefs (as perhaps not corresponding to reality) is to bring back a tangle of uncashable and useless metaphors—those used to state the scheme-content distinction. To say, as Davidson does, that ‘belief is in its nature veridical’ is not to celebrate the happy congruence of subject and object but rather to say that the pattern truth makes is the pattern that justification to us makes. (Rorty 1998: 25)

Davidson’s argument from content is meant to undermine this anti-realist construal of the veridicality of belief thesis. In Rorty’s language, if the recognition of each other as members of a rule-governed community is inseparable from our mutual recognition of each
other as being directed to the same aspects of objective reality, then the pattern that truth makes is not just the ‘pattern that justification to us makes’. For the patterns that are traced now include the world and our mutual relation to it. Rorty recognizes this with these words:

“[W]hen Davidson argues that most of anybody’s beliefs must be true, he is not just saying (as I sometimes have been tempted to construe him) that most of the beliefs of anybody whom we can treat as a language-user must accord with most of our own beliefs. He is saying that most of what anybody says about whatever they are talking about gets that thing right” (Rorty 2000a: 374). Davidson’s theory is therefore a theory of truth because interpretation is predicated upon the fact that my interlocutor and I generally get things right not only with respect to each other’s beliefs but with respect to world itself.

To see how this admission ramifies for Rorty’s thinking overall, we must characterize the notion of getting things right carefully. It should not, for example, be given a representationalist construal. For both Davidson and Rorty true beliefs get things right not because they represent accurately but because most of our beliefs are true (although we don’t know which ones). What Rorty got wrong, before he amended his view, was to draw the inference that the denial of truth as accurate representation requires denying the thesis that true propositions get things right. As he puts it, it is a mistake “to go from criticism of attempts to define truth as accurate representation of the intrinsic nature of reality to a denial that true statements get things right” (RC: 374). For if most of our beliefs about each other’s beliefs, and our mutual beliefs about the world, are true, then most of those beliefs get things right.

This conclusion undermines Rorty’s long held doctrine that we only have causal relations to the world and not semantic ones. For if our mental states only have content by being communicable to other minds and by bearing on the world (i.e., entering the triangular relationship), then the semantic terms ‘true’ and ‘refers’ cannot just signify intra-linguistic
relations, as Rorty—following Sellars—thought. Instead, they must also signify word-world relations. Because his anti-representationalism is still in place these semantic relations are neither causal nor representational. Rather they signify relations between an expression and the object of that expression as that object is rendered within the communicative triangle. Because there is no other access to the object than this, his concession about our being semantically related to the world does not require the rehabilitation of the metaphysical notion of ‘reality as it is in itself’. But it does lead Rorty to recognize that there is a ‘truth in realism’. He says:

I can epitomize what I have been saying as follows: What is true in pragmatism is that what you talk about depends not on what is real but on what it pays you to talk about. What is true in realism is that most of what you talk about you get right. Would there be snow if nobody ever talked about it? Sure. Why? Because according to the norms we invoke when we use ‘snow’ we are supposed to answer this question affirmatively. (If you think that that glib and ethnocentric answer is not good enough, that is because you are still in the grip of the scheme-content distinction. You think you can escape the inescapable, cut off one corner of Davidson’s triangle, and just ask about a relation called ‘correspondence’ or ‘representation’ between your beliefs and the world.) (Rorty 2005: 374)

9. As Stout points out, this passage is one of the most surprising in Rorty’s corpus insofar as he spent the better part of his career arguing against various forms of realism. Stout interprets it to be an expression on Rorty’s part of a newfound commitment to the new pragmatism. As Stout puts it,

I am tempted to sum up what he is doing in this passage by saying that he is trying to formulate a non-narcissistic pragmatism, a pragmatism that can do justice to the objective dimension of inquiry. For he is describing inquiry as a human practice that answers to human interests, but also as portraying as an expression of human interests the distinction between getting one’s subject matter right and merely holding beliefs about that subject matter (or holding beliefs that one’s peers would let one get away with holding). The norms we are guided by in this practice, however fallibly, are norms of the people, by the people, and for the people, participating in the practice. But those norms have to do with getting things right in a sense of ‘right’ that cannot be reduced to communal agreement. (Stout 2007: 17-8)

Stout here provides a strong interpretation, for Rorty’s passage does not mention anything about our interests or about the distinction that Stout takes to be central to the new pragmatism, i.e., that between getting things right and achieving agreement with one’s fellows.
Setting aside the question of our interests for the moment, why does Stout credit Rorty with espousing this central distinction?

By Stout’s lights, Rorty must accept this distinction for three reasons: first and most obviously Rorty overturns his view about the admissibility of getting things right, second, Rorty, after reading Ramberg, accepts the fact that the vocabulary of agency is distinctively normative, and third, Rorty admits that even though most of our beliefs get things right, the cautionary use of the truth predicate shows that we could be wrong about anything in particular. With respect to the first reason, Stout thinks it is obvious that in accepting the notion of getting things right Rorty also accepts that there is something over and above achieving agreement with one’s fellows. This follows once it becomes clear that the normative vocabulary of agency does not just bear on our intersubjective justificatory relations to one another in the lifeworld, but is applicable “to any enterprise, including any form of scientific inquiry, that concerns itself with applying the norms of rationality and objectivity or with the difference between true and false beliefs” (NP: 16). While the norms of truth and objectivity that govern inquiry have their origin within our communicative practice, because they are inextricably involved in the triangular relationship with the world they inform our retail practices of trying to get things right, things that are outside the circle of justification and communication.

What about the second reason? This points to the distinction between getting things right and achieving intersubjective agreement because, as Stout puts it, “[a]ccepting the former idea involves adopting a normative stance, whereas the later idea does not” (Stout 2007: 18). In other words, getting things right, truth, is a normative idea generated by the normative stances taken within language and inquiry, whereas communal agreement is a sociological or descriptive fact. If one accepts that normativity is indispensable, as Rorty
claims to do, then the norm of truth as it circulates in the communicative triangulation cannot be accounted for in descriptive or sociological terms. When this is put together with the third reason—i.e., that we can always be wrong about any given matter—we see that truth is a normative idea that always transcends the factuality of our intersubjective agreements. While transcendence does not define truth, something Stout—following Davidson—does not think possible, it helps explain the role of truth within our inquiring practice, i.e., to guide inquiry by providing a goal for our beliefs beyond intersubjective agreement.

In the remainder of this paper I would like to contest this interpretation of Rorty. Rorty is not a new pragmatist, nor is he implicitly committed to the doctrines that would allow us—regardless of his self-understanding—to call him one. To see why, we must come back to the question of our interest in getting things right. Stout defines the core commitments of a revisionist or new pragmatist in this way: “(1) we inquirers have an interest in getting things right; (2) this interest needs to be understood in the context of the social practices in which it is expressed; and (3) it need not be seen as implicated in a pseudo-explanatory conception of correspondence to the real” (NP: 19). The important issue is Rorty’s attitude towards (1). Stout claims that Rorty, in accepting that propriety of the notion of getting things right, concedes (1) to Ramberg, and in so doing joins forces with the revisionist or new pragmatists (see Stout 2007: 19). But is this so? Is Rorty’s concession about the admissibility of the notion of getting things right equal to a concession that inquirers have an interest in getting things right? The answer to this depends upon whether truth is a norm in the sense of being a goal of inquiry, for to have an interest in getting things right is to want to achieve the goal of getting things right.

The problem is that Rorty, even after his ‘conversion’, remains resistant to the notion that having true beliefs about something is a goal of inquiry. Stout recognizes this and
consequently argues that Rorty, having gone part of the way with the new pragmatists by admitting that we have an interest in getting things right, should go all the way and admit truth to be a goal of inquiry. But I think this gets things hermeneutically backwards: Rorty’s continued dismissal of truth as a goal of inquiry should cast doubt on the notion that Rorty thinks that we have an interest in getting things right. Just because most of our beliefs in fact get things right (because belief is of its nature veridical) does not mean that truth is a goal of inquiry or that we have an interest in getting things right.

Rorty provides a pragmatic argument for the conclusion that truth is not a goal. As it was for Davidson, Rorty thinks that “you can only work for what you could recognize” (Rorty 2000: 4), and since true beliefs don’t come marked there is no sense in saying that inquirers could definitively recognize them. What we can recognize are the beliefs that live up to and are justified in accordance with our highest epistemic standards. So while discourse is subject to norms of justification or warrant, “there seems no occasion to look for obedience to an additional norm—the commandment to seek the truth. For . . . obedience to that commandment will produce no behavior not produced by the need to offer justification” (Rorty 1998: 26). And because for a pragmatist if a distinction makes no difference to practice it should make no difference to philosophy, if the norm of truth (understood as a goal) does not produce distinguishable behavior from the need to offer justifications then there is no important distinction here to mark in the first place.

How does Stout counter this argument? Stout admits that at any given time and for any given individual, what they hold to be true and what they hold to be justified are coextensive. In other words, from the point of view of an individual the most justified beliefs and the true beliefs are the same beliefs. But this perspective, he thinks, ignores the fact that
inquiry is a social practice, and it takes place in time. We need the distinction between truth and justification largely because we have an interest in assessing the success of our beliefs over time and because to have beliefs at all, we are necessarily caught up in communicative interactions with others, interactions that require us to assess, as well as interpret, what those others say and believe. Both of these forms of interpretive assessment involve departures from first-person, present tense uses of the relevant expressions. And they both involve a distinction between two sorts of cognitive propriety: the kind that a person exhibits by believing responsibly, given the epistemic circumstances, and the kind that a belief (or the corresponding assertion) exhibits by getting the subject matter right. (Stout 2007: 21)

The social and temporal dimensions of inquiry bring about an awareness in individual inquirers that certain beliefs they take to be well-justified can be wrong. In the social case this comes about when we recognize that another agent might be epistemically entitled to hold certain beliefs that we know to be in fact wrong. Of course, this circumstance is reciprocal, we might be epistemically entitled to hold certain beliefs that others know to be wrong. The temporal dimension of inquiry shows something similar: when we revise our beliefs in light of better knowledge we recognize that there is a disjunction between beliefs that were once held to be justified according to the best epistemic standards, and our evaluation of those beliefs as now incorrect. “Once I get this far, however, I can easily speculate about the possibility that what I now believe about something fails to get the subject matter right, even if I happen to be epistemically entitled to believe it, given our epistemic circumstances” (Stout 2007: 21). In both cases, inquirers come to recognize, within inquiry, that getting things right, i.e., truth, always transcends what is responsible for us to believe in the here and now. As Stout notes, with this the normative status of truth comes to the fore: a single individual might be right while a whole community might be wrong, and a whole community of inquirers, even one utilizing the best epistemic practices, could be wrong about any particular matter. The upshot of these arguments for Stout is that once the difference between these two properties, truth and intersubjective agreement, can be avowed within inquiry by inquirers then it makes sense to say that they hope or desire to get things right rather than just agreement. But if we hope or
desire to get things right, then it “makes sense to take an interest in getting something right, in a sense that involves treating truth as a distinguishable goal of inquiry” (Stout 2007: 22).

While Rorty claims that there is no practical difference between truth and justification, Stout here seems to identify a difference that makes a practical difference to inquiring agents. Since for the pragmatist the practical differences between concepts as they function for agents (from their point of view) is what is most philosophically important this seems to put Rorty into a bind. If inquiring agents think and act in such a way as to evince a commitment to there being a difference between truth and justification then for the pragmatist these concepts are legitimate and distinct. How might Rorty respond to this? Rorty gives an alternative interpretation of the practical difference that is germane here, and claim that it does not involve truth as a distinguishable goal of inquiry.

While as we saw above Rorty did sometimes take a deflationary attitude to the difference between truth and justified agreement, claiming that there is no difference, at other times he recognized that they cannot simply be equated because a well-justified belief can always turn out to be wrong. This is what the cautionary use of the truth predicate signals. In using this predicate we remind ourselves that no matter how well-justified a belief currently is that it can be overturned by new data, new explanatory hypotheses, or shifts in vocabulary. Here, Rorty takes on board the social and temporal dimensions of inquiry that Stout canvases. But recognition of these dimensions does not, Rorty thinks, require us to countenance truth as a distinguishable goal of inquiry. Why? Because the

only difference between truth and justification that makes . . . a difference is, as far as I can see, the difference between old audiences and new audiences . . . We pragmatists . . . see the cautionary use of the word ‘true’ as flagging a special sort of danger. We use it to remind ourselves that people in difference circumstances—people facing future audiences—might not be able to justify the beliefs which we have triumphantly justified to all audiences we have encountered. (Rorty 2000: 4)
Stout is right that there is a difference between ‘justification’ and ‘true’. But this difference is not between intersubjective agreement and the transcending normative ideal of truth. Rather it is between what a community takes to be justified now and their anticipatory knowledge, signaled by their cautionary use of the truth predicate, that it might not be justified in the future. While the concept of truth in its relation to belief and meaning is inextricably normative, truth in its cautionary mode is not. In this role, the one it plays in inquiry, truth is not a normative idea but simply an expectation that future audiences might not find justified what we find to be justified. The practical difference that this makes is to inculcate a sense of fallibilism, of the contingency and fragility of our beliefs. This is the essential aspect of liberal culture, one that takes open and continued dialogue to be its most important feature.\textsuperscript{21} So while Rorty back off the deflationary notion that there is no difference between truth and justification, his way of doing so does not give aid and comfort to those who want to reinstate truth as a goal of inquiry. Instead, he buttresses his humanist notion that freedom is more important than truth.

10. The upshot of Rorty’s view is that while truth in its cautionary mode makes a practical difference for citizens and inquirers insofar as it inculcates the habits necessary for a liberal culture, truth as an additional norm to get things right does not. We do get most things right, and for Rorty this concept is theoretically admissible, but only at the quasi-transcendental level of the veridiciality of belief. The concept cannot be transferred directly to the epistemic level and made a goal of inquiry. As he puts it, “the connections between the concept of truth and those of meaning and belief has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether, or how, we can tell when a belief is true” (Rorty 1998: 23). Although he posits this for different reasons, Rorty here is the faithful follower of Davidson. The problem with Stout’s
interpretation is that he does not take note of this conclusion, thinking instead that the norm of truth in communication and object-directed thought is directly applicable to how we go about telling whether a belief is true in inquiry. But this mixes up the two senses in which truth can be a norm: the sense constitutive for the very possibility of belief and the sense in which truth is a conscious aim or goal for inquirers. To say that truth is normative in the first sense, as Rorty does after reading Ramberg, is not to say that truth is normative in the second sense. Perhaps an argument can be found which shows that the first sense leads to the second, but one would have to provide an independent argument to this effect since it cannot be found in Rorty, even implicitly.

My goal in writing this paper has not been to defend Rorty. In fact, I agree with Stout and the new pragmatists that a tenable pragmatic position must rehabilitate concepts like truth and objectivity, and must in addition elucidate the function and place of these concepts in our inquiring practices. My goal has rather been to point out that even after his change in view concerning the admissibility of getting things right Rorty still has resources to resist accepting the notion that truth is a goal of inquiry and therefore that we have an interest in achieving it. And this casts doubt, I think, on whether the new pragmatist’s strategy for overcoming the neo-pragmatic dismissal of truth and objectivity is sufficient.

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2 Misak 2007.

3 Some thinkers that fit the new pragmatist bill are Cheryl Misak, Robert Brandom, Hilary Putnam, Jeffry Stout, Jürgen Habermas, Huw Price, Bjorn Ramberg, and Richard J. Bernstein (amongst others).

4 For lucid presentations of Rorty’s anti-authoritarianism see McDowell 2000 and Stout 2007.

5 Davidson moved to this new way of accounting for the distinctness of the vocabulary of agency description because he realized that the nomological and definitional irreducibility of mental concepts to strictly physical
concepts (the concepts of physics) is not enough to establish its distinctiveness insofar as mental predicates share this feature of irreducibility with the physical concepts of the special sciences.

6 I prefaced this sentence with the phrase ‘Ramberg argues’ because it is questionable whether Davidson thinks that truth is a norm, even in the minimal sense that the possession of the concept of truth is constitutively for our communicative and intentional accomplishments. See notes 16 and 17 below.

7 This way of couching things, as we shall see later in the paper, is a bit misleading, not because of my heavy-handed use of transcendental vocabulary, but because Davidson thinks not only that objectivity presupposes intersubjective communication, but also that communication presupposes objectivity.

8 This two-step argument is very controversial. My interest here, however, in not in its validity but in getting enough of its structure on the table to understand how it affects Rorty’s amended reading of Davidson.

9 We adopt the names of these two steps from Bridges 2006.

10 Davidson notes this fact in the famous passage where he first mentions triangulation. He says: “If I were bolted to the earth, I would have no way of determining the distance from me of many objects. . . I might interact successfully with objects, but I could have no way of giving content to the question of where they were. Not being bolted down, I am free to triangulate. Our sense of objectivity is the consequence of another sort of triangulation, one that requires two creatures. Each interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the baseline formed between the creatures by language” (Davidson 2001a: 105). In other words, while our free movement (our not being bolted to the world) is necessary for taking part in causal triangulation, the concept of objectivity emerges from ‘another sort of triangulation’, i.e., communication.

11 In his paper ‘Rational Animals’, Davidson couches this thought about resistance in terms of the world ability to surprise us. See Davidson 2001a.

12 Davidson puts this point in Wittgensteinian terms when he say that the possibility of error comes about when a creature takes the step “from mere conditioned response to what Wittgenstein called ‘following a rule’,” for while one cannot fail to act in accord with a disposition, “one can fail to follow a rule” (Davidson 2005: 14). In other words, the awareness of error comes about when one learns a language. However, he also has a story about how the possibility of error emerges though our taking part in the causally discriminative triangle. When we correlate our reactions a norm or standard is set up which sets the bar for our future expectations concerning the behavior of the other creature vis-à-vis the world. Error is introduced when these expectations are not met. This, in turn provides for the possibility of full-scale communication and interpretation. So the question is: does an awareness of error need to be in place for the possibility of communication, or must rudimentary forms of communication and language use be in place for the awareness of error. For Davidson, this is a bad question; all of these abilities emerge together. In this paper, we are not interested in the genetic question but in the structural features of these capacities.

13 For arguments to this effect see the essays in the first part of Davidson 2001.

14 In making this distinction we partly follow Pascal Engle (see Engle 2001). It is instructive to see how we differ from him. The difference concerns the first sense in which truth is a norm. His conception is this: “truth is a norm of belief, in the sense that it is constitutive of belief and assertion that ‘belief aims a truth’ and that asserting something is asserting something that one takes to be true” (Engel 2001: 43). We have not followed Engel here because Davidson, in a response to Engel’s article, explicitly rejects it. While truth is a norm of assertoric practice insofar as "someone who make an assertion represents himself as believing what he say so gives other the right to believe he believes what he says" this "norm attaches to the representing not the belief” (Davidson 2001g: 296). In other words it attaches to the second order self-representation, which, in being a psychological state, can be normative. Truth is not a psychological concept and therefore cannot be normative like the propositional attitudes.
There is a question as to whether Davidson’s argument cuts against our first definition of truth as a norm of belief. His argument would be that just because truth is “a concept that we make essential use of in understanding the attitudes” (Davidson 2001g: 296) does not mean that it is psychological concept and so potentially normative. We would reply by repeating what we said above, namely, that there is a distinction between the role that the concept of truth plays in the communicative economy of belief and meaning, and truth itself. In its former role, the concept of truth is psychological and normative with respect to formation of judgments. But this does not mean that truth itself is a norm. Regardless of whether this picture stands up to Davidsonian scrutiny, we shall continue to work with it because it is clear that Ramberg, Stout, and Rorty after reading Ramberg, think that truth is norm in our first sense. The question that will become important for assessing the new pragmatists’ reading of Rorty is whether this first sense of truth as a norm implies the second.

This complaint follows from C. I. Lewis’ notion that one cannot locate the part of reality to which a sentence corresponds and Frege’s slingshot argument that all true sentences refer to the same thing. See Davidson 2001d: 183-4.

My insertion reflects the fact that, as Stout notes, Rorty’s point would be better put if he had said that this mutual describing was conducted by people who talk to one another, i.e., who communicate. At Rorty 2000a: 373 he acknowledges this point.

Another reason, one that Rorty sluffs off, is that the theory of another speaker’s linguistic behavior eventuates in a set of Tarskian T-sentences.

Stout only explicitly ascribes the first and second reason to Rorty. See Stout 2007: 18.

In addition to the argument we are about to give Stout also provides an argument by analogy involving archery. The attempt by archers to live up to the standards of athletic excellence as they are understood in archery and their aiming to hit the bull’s-eye lead to exactly the same behavior. Yet we would not hesitate to say that hitting the bull’s-eye is a distinguishable goal of archery. Similarly, even though the attempt to adhere to the best epistemic practices in inquiry and the attempt to reach the truth lead to the same behavior we can distinguish these aims and claim truth to be a separable goal of inquiry. This analogy misses the mark (pun intended) because Rorty’s argument for why truth is not a goal of inquiry does not just depend upon the fact that the norm of truth does not produce distinguishable behavior over and above justification, but also on providing a reason why this is so: we can’t have something as a goal and act to reach it if we can never know when that goal is achieved. In this regard, truth is obviously different from hitting a bull’s-eye. So while in the abstract Stout is right that we can sometimes distinguish between goals that entail the same behavior, this is not the case all of the time. To defeat Rorty (and Davidson) on this point one must provide an argument that truth can be recognized and so can be sought. See Bilgrami 2000 for an argument along these lines.

For more on this aspect of Rorty’s view see Wellmer 1998.

It should be pointed out that Stout’s mistake is very easy to make insofar as it is natural for a pragmatist to think that the capacities that make intentionality possible are also operative, in a higher-level form, in inquiry. Indeed, for the classical pragmatists this isomorphism is one of pragmatism’s most important insights. Rorty, by following Davidson so closely, abandons this insight and accepts Davidson’s quasi-Kantian (and hence non-pragmatic) thesis that there is a split between normative notions used in triangulation and those used in inquiry that is akin to the split between the transcendental and the empirical.
WORKS CITED


