RICHARD RORTY

ESSAYS ON HEIDEGGER AND OTHERS

PHILOSOPHICAL PAPERS

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VOLUME 2

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Acknowledgments

"Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics" was a-contribution to a symposium held at the University of Vienna in celebration of the Both anniversary of Husserl's *Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften.* A German translation was published in *Die Krise der Phänomenologie and die Pragmatik des Wissenschaftsfortschritts,* Michael Benedikt and Rudolf Burger, eds. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei, 1986), pp. 138-149. A revised and enlarged version of the English original (the version reprinted here) appeared in *The Institution of Philosophy,* Avner Cohen and Marcello Dascal, eds. (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), pp. 13-33.

"Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism" is published here for the first time. It will also appear *in Reading Heidegger,* Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming). It includes passages from "Heidegger wider den Pragmatisten," *Neue Hefte für Philosophie* 23 (1984), pp. 1-22. The latter was a version of a lecture given at Haverford College, and has appeared only in German translation.

"Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language" was a contribution to a symposium celebrating the tooth birthdays of Heidegger and Wittgenstein held at the J. W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, in April 1989. It has not previously been published in English, but will appear also in *The Cam-bridge Companion to Heidegger,* Charles Guignon, ed. (forthcoming).

"Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" was given as a lecture at the Sixth East-West Philosophers' Conference, held at the University of Hawaii in August 1989. It will appear in the proceedings of that conference.

"Deconstruction and Circumvention" began as a lecture called "Now that we have deconstructed metaphysics, do we have to deconstruct literature too?" given at the Summer School of Criticism and Theory held at Northwestern University in 1983. A revised version was published in *Critical Inquiry* 11 (September 1984), pp. 1-23. It is reprinted by permission of The University of Chicago Press.

"Two Meanings of 'Logocentrism' " was written in reply to Christopher Norris's "Philosophy as *Not* Just a `Kind of Writing': Derrida and the Claim of Reason," which was partly in response to "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" (included in my *Consequences of Pragmatism).* Norris's essay and my reply were published in *Redrawing the Lines: Analytic Philosophy, Deconstruction and Literary Theory,* Reed Way Dasenbrock, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 204-216.

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"Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?" appeared in *Yale Journal of Criticism,* April 1989. It is reprinted here by permission.

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Introduction: Pragmatism and post-Nietzschean philosophy

This is the second volume of a collection of papers written during the 198os. Volume 1 is made up of papers that discuss themes and figures within analytic philosophy. In contrast, most of this volume is about Heidegger and Derrida. Part I is made up of four papers on Heidegger — the fruits of an abortive, abandoned attempt to write a book about him. Part Il

contains three papers on Derrida, together with a pendant piece that discusses the uses to which Paul de Man and his followers have put certain Derridean ideas.

Part III is more miscellaneous. Of the four papers in this part, the first and most ambitious is called "Freud and Moral Reflection." It picks out and plays up certain aspects of Freud's work which fit in with Quine's and Davidson's picture of the self as a centerless web of beliefs and desires — a picture I employed in chapter 2 of my *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.* The remaining three papers are discussions of the social theories and political attitudes of various contemporary figures (Habermas, Lyotard, Unger, Castoriadis, Foucault); these papers amplify the sociopolitical views presented in Part III of Volume 1.

In the remainder of this introduction, I shall offer some general remarks about the relation between the post-Nietzschean tradition of Franco-German thought which these essays discuss and the antirepresentationalist, pragmatist tradition within analytic philosophy discussed in Volume 1.

Heidegger and Derrida are often referred to as "postmodern" philosophers. I have sometimes used "postmodern" myself, in the rather narrow sense defined by Lyotard as "distrust of metanarratives." But I now wish that I had not. The term has been so over-used that it is causing more trouble than it is worth. I have given up on the attempt to find something common to Michael Graves's buildings, Pynchon's and Rushdie's novels, Ashberry's poems, various sorts of popular mu-sic, and the writings of Heidegger and Derrida. I have become more hesitant about attempts to periodize culture — to describe every part of a culture as suddenly swerving off in the same new direction at approximately the same time. Dramatic narratives may well be, as MacIntyre has suggested, essential to the writing of intellectual history. But it seems safer and more useful to periodize and dramatize each discipline or genre separately, rather than trying to think of them all as swept up together in massive sea changes.

In particular, it seems best to think of Heidegger and Derrida simply as post-

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Nietzschean philosophers — to assign them places in a conversational sequence which runs from Descartes through Kant and Hegel to Nietzsche *and* beyond, rather than to view them as initiating or manifesting a radical rupture. Though I unreservedly admire the originality and power of both men, neither can hope to avoid being fitted into contexts by his readers. The most that an original figure can hope to do is to recontextualize his or her predecessors. He or she cannot aspire to produce works that are themselves uncontextualizable, any more than a commentator like myself can aspire to find the one "right" context into which to fit those works.

The context in which my essays put post-Nietzschean philosophy is, predict-ably enough, pragmatism. I see Nietzsche as the figure who did most to convince European intellectuals of the doctrines which were purveyed to Americans by James and Dewey. A lot of what Nietzsche had to say can be viewed as following from his claim that " `knowledge in itself' is as impermissible a concept as 'thing-in-itself' " 1 and his suggestion that "[the categories of reason] represent nothing more than the expediency of a certain race and species — their utility alone is their 'truth'." 2 His famous description of "How the `True World' Became a Fable" in *Twilight of the Idols is,* except for the sneers at Christianity, pretty close to Dewey's vision of Europe's intellectual progress.

Nietzsche's version of pragmatism had, to be sure, little to do with the social hopes characteristic of James and Dewey. His perspectivalism, his refusal to admit the notion of a truth disconnected from interests and needs, was part of a striving for private perfection, for what he thought of as spiritual cleanliness. Nietzsche disliked both his country and his century, so the Emersonian combination of self-reliance and patriotism found in James and Dewey is alien to him. 3 All he took from Emerson, so to speak, was the self-reliance; there is no analogue in his writings to Emerson's American sense of a new kind of social freedom. When Nietzsche read Emerson's abolitionist polemics, he presumably regarded them as merely the unfortunate residue of Christian weakness in an otherwise strong man.

Despite this difference, Nietzsche was as good an anti-Cartesian, antirepresentationalist, and antiessentialist as Dewey. He was as devoted to the question "what difference will this belief make to our conduct?" as Peirce or James. If all you are interested in is epistemology and philosophy of language, as opposed to moral and

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1 The Will to Power, trans. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), sec. 6o8.

2 Ibid., sec. 515. There are "pragmatist" passages spotted throughout Nietzsche's works, but the best source is secs. 480—544 *of The Will to Power.* In a forthcoming book on Nietzsche's theory of truth, Maudmarie Clark gives a very convincing and lucid account of his gradual turn to a purer and more consistent version of pragmatism.

3 Comel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) is very useful for an understanding of Emerson's relation to Dewey. What West calls "the Deweyan project of an Emersonian culture of radical democracy" (p. 128) would have been unintelligible to Nietzsche, who thought that if you were going to be democratic, to go with the herd, you could not be radical.

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social philosophy, it will not make much difference to your subsequent conduct whether you read Nietzsche or the classical pragmatists. Further, it is as easy to graft the later, linguistified pragmatists — Quine, Putnam, Davidson — onto Nietzsche as it is to graft them onto Dewey. Indeed, when you switch over from Deweyan talk of experience to Quinean-Davidsonian talk of sentences, it becomes easier to get the point of Nietzsche's famous remark, in "Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," that truth is "a mobile army of metaphors."

I interpret this remark along the lines of my discussion of Davidson's treatment of metaphor in Part II of Volume i. I take its point to be that sentences are the only things that can be true or false, that our repertoire of sentences grows as history goes along, and that this growth is largely a matter of the literalization of novel metaphors. Thinking of truth in this way helps us switch over from a Cartesian-Kantian picture of intellectual progress (as a better and better fit between mind and world) to a Darwinian picture (as an increasing ability to shape the tools needed to help the species survive, multiply, and transform itself).

To see Darwin lying behind both Nietzsche and Dewey (and thus, at one remove, behind what, in Volume i, I describe as Davidson's nonreductive physicalism) helps one see post-Nietzschean European philosophy and postpositivistic analytic philosophy converging to a single, pragmatist account of inquiry — roughly the account offered in "Inquiry as Recontextualization" in Volume I. On this account, language is a set of tools rather than a set of representations — tools which, because of what Dewey called "the means—ends continuum", change their users and the products of their use. Abandoning the notion of representation means getting rid of the cluster of problems about realism and antirealism which I discuss in the Introduction to Volume i .

Sentences as tools, however, is a notion one associates with Wittgenstein rather than with Heidegger and Derrida. Despite the pragmatism of *Being and Time* (brought out by Mark Okrent and discussed in Part I below), and despite the Derrida—Wittgenstein parallels brought out by Henry Staten and the Davidson—Derrida parallels brought out by Samuel Wheeler (discussed in Part II below), Heidegger and Derrida share a tendency to think of language as something *more* than just a set of tools. The later Heidegger persistently, and Derrida occasionally, treat Language as if it were a quasi-agent, a brooding presence, something that stands over and against human beings.

My criticisms of Heidegger in Part I and of Derrida in Part II center around their failure to take a relaxed, naturalistic, Darwinian view of language. I see both men as still, to a certain

extent, under the influence of the Diltheyan distinction between *Geist* and *Natur* which I criticized in Part I of Volume i. So in "Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the Reification of Language" I criticize the later Heidegger for succumbing to the urge to make language a quasi-divinity. In "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?" I criticize Rodolphe Gasché's attempt to portray Derrida as offering "conditions of possibility" for the use of language. Both sets of

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criticisms are protests against letting "Language" become the latest substitute for "God" or "Mind" — something mysterious, incapable of being described in the same terms in which we describe tables, trees, and atoms.

The trouble with making a big deal out of language, meaning, intentionality, the play of signifiers, or *différance is* that one risks losing the advantages gained from appropriating Darwin, Nietzsche, and Dewey. Once one starts reifying language, one begins to see gaps opening between the sorts of things Newton and Darwin describe and the sorts Freud and Derrida describe, instead of seeing convenient divisions within a toolbox — divisions between batches of linguistic tools useful for various different tasks. One begins to be enthralled by phrases like "the unconscious is structured like a language," because one begins to think that languages must have *a distinctive* structure, utterly different from that of brains or computers or galaxies (instead of just agreeing that some of the terms we use to describe language might, indeed, usefully describe other things, such as the unconscious). One takes the irreducibility of the intentional — the irreducibility of descriptions of sentential attitudes such as beliefs and desires to descriptions of the motion of elementary particles — as somehow more philosophically significant than the irreducibility of house descriptions to timber descriptions, or of animal descriptions to cell descriptions.

As I argued in Volume i, a pragmatist must insist that both redescribability and irreducibility are cheap. It is never very hard to redescribe anything one likes in terms that are irreducible to, indefinable in the terms of, a previous description of that thing. A pragmatist must also insist (with Goodman, Nietzsche, Putnam, and Heidegger) that there is no such thing as the way the thing is in itself, under no description, apart from any use to which human beings might want to put it. The advantage of insisting on these points is that any dualism one comes across, any divide which one finds a philosopher trying to bridge or fill in, can be made to look like a mere difference between two sets of descriptions of the same batch of things.

"Can be made to look like," in this context, does not contrast with "really is." It is not as if there were a procedure for finding out whether one is really dealing with two batches of things or one batch. Thinghood, identity, is itself description-relative. Nor is it the case that language *really is just* strings of marks and noises which organisms use as tools for getting what they want. That Nietzschean-Deweyan description of language is no more the real truth

about language than Heidegger's description of it as "the house of Being" or Derrida's as "the play of signifying references." Each of these is only one more useful truth about language — one more of what Wittgenstein called "reminders for a particular purpose."

The particular purpose served by the reminder that language can be described in Darwinesque terms is to help us get away from what, in the Introduction to Volume I, I called "representationalism" and thus from the reality—appearance distinction. Unsurprisingly, I see the best parts of Heidegger and Derrida as the

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parts which help us to see how things look under nonrepresentationalist, nonlogocentrist descriptions — how they look when one begins to take the relativity of thinghood to choice of description for granted, and so starts asking how to be useful rather than how to be right. I see the worst parts of Heidegger and Derrida as the parts which suggest that they themselves have finally gotten language right, represented it accurately, as it really is. These are the parts that tempted Paul de Man to say things like "literature ... is the only form of language free from the fallacy of unmediated expression" 4 and Jonathan Culler to insist that a theory of language ought to answer questions about "the essential nature of language." 5 These are also the parts that prompt a whole generation of American literary theorists to talk about "the discovery of the nonreferential character of language," as if Saussure, or Wittgenstein, or Derrida, or somebody, had shown that reference and representation were *illusions (as* opposed to being notions which, in certain contexts, might usefully be dispensed with).

If one treats it simply as a reminder, rather than as a metaphysics, then I think the following is a good way of bringing together the upshot of both the Quine-Putnam-Davidson tradition in analytic philosophy of language and the Heidegger-Derrida tradition of post-Nietzschean thought. Consider sentences as strings of marks and noises emitted by organisms, strings capable of being paired off with the strings we ourselves utter (in the way we call "translating"). Consider beliefs, desires, and intentions — sentential attitudes generally — *as* entities posited to help predict the behavior of these organisms. Now think of those organisms as gradually evolving as a result of producing longer and more complicated strings, strings which enable them to do things they had been unable to do with the aid of shorter and simpler strings. Now think *of us* as examples of such highly evolved organisms, of our highest hopes and deepest fears as made possible by, among other things, our ability to produce the peculiar strings we do. Then think of the four sentences that precede this one as further examples of such strings. Penultimately, think of the five sentences that precede this one as a sketch for a redesigned house of Being, a new dwelling for us shepherds of Being. Finally, think of the last six sentences as yet another example of the play of signifiers, one more example of the way in which meaning is endlessly alterable through the recontextualization of signs.

Those last seven sentences are an attempt to hold animals, Dasein, and *differance* in a single vision: to show how one can modulate from Darwinian through Heideggerian to Derridean without much strain. They are also an attempt to show that what is important about both traditions, the one that runs up to Davidson and the one that runs up to Derrida, is not what they say but what they do *not* say, what they avoid rather than what they propound. Notice that neither

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4 Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight,* end edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 17.

5 Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 118.

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tradition mentions the knowing subject nor the object of knowledge. Neither talks about a quasi-thing called language which functions as intermediary between subject and object. Neither allows for the formulation of problems about the nature or possibility of representation or intentionality. Neither tries to reduce anything to anything else. Neither, in short, gets us into the particular binds into which the Cartesian-Kantian, subject-object, representationalist tradition got us.

Is that *all* that both traditions are good for? Are all these eminent thinkers *simply* showing us the way out of a dusty fly-bottle, out of a dilapidated house of Being? I am strongly tempted to say, "Sure. What more did you *think* you were going to get out of contemporary philosophy?" But this may sound reductive. So it would be, if I were denying that the works of these people are indefinitely recontextualizable, and so may turn out to be useful in an endless variety of presently unforeseen contexts. But it is not reductive to say: do not underestimate the effects of batting around inside that particular fly-bottle. Do not underestimate what might happen to us, what we might become, as a result of getting out of it. Do not underestimate the utility of merely therapeutic, merely "deconstructive" writing.

Nobody can set any *a priori* limits to what change in philosophical opinion can do, any more than to what change in scientific or political opinion can do. To think that one can know such limits is just as bad as thinking that, now that we have learned that the ontotheological tradition has exhausted its possibilities, we must hasten to reshape everything, make all things new. Change in philosophical outlook is neither intrinsically central nor intrinsically marginal — its results are just as unpredictable as change in any other area of culture. The essays in this and the preceding volume do not try to predict what the effects of the adoption of the pragmatism common to these two traditions might be. My essays should be read as examples of what a group of contemporary Italian philosophers have called "weak thought" 6 — philosophical reflection which does not attempt a radical criticism of contemporary culture, does not attempt to refound or remotivate it, but simply assembles reminders and suggests some interesting possibilities.

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6 See Gianni Vattimo and Pier Aldo Rovatti, *eds., Il pensiro debole* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983).

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PART I

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Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics

Beyond scientific philosophy

Three answers have been given, in our century, to the question of how we should conceive of our relation to the Western philosophical tradition, answers which are paralleled by three conceptions of the aim of philosophizing. They are the Husserlian (or 'scientistic') answer, the Heideggerian (or 'poetic') answer and the pragmatist (or 'political') answer. The first answer is the most familiar, and was common to Husserl and his positivist opponents. On this view, philosophy is modeled on science, and is relatively remote from both art and politics.

The Heideggerian and pragmatist answers are reactions to this familiar 'scientistic' answer. Heidegger turns away from the scientist to the poet. The philosophical thinker is the only figure who is on the same level as the poet. The achievements of the great thinkers have as little to do with either mathematical physics or statecraft as do those of the great poets. By contrast, pragmatists such as Dewey turn away from the theoretical scientists to the engineers and the social workers — the people who are trying to make people more comfortable and secure, and to use science and philosophy as tools for that purpose. The Heideggerian thinks that the philosophical tradition needs to be reappropriated by being seen as a series of poetic achievements: the work of Thinkers, people who "have no choice but to find words for what a being is in the history of its Being." 1 The pragmatist thinks that the tradition needs to be utilized, as one utilizes a bag of tools. Some of these tools, these 'conceptual instruments' — including some which continue to have undeserved prestige — will turn out no longer to have a use, and can just be tossed out. Others can be refurbished. Sometimes new tools may have to be invented on the spot. Whereas the Heideggerian sees Husserl's "faith in the possibility of philosophy as a task, that is, in the possibility of universal knowledge" 2 as a scientistic, mathematizing misunderstanding of the greatness of the tradition, the pragmatist thinks of it as sentimental nostalgia, an

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1 Heidegger, *Nietzsche 1!* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1962), 37. Translated in Heidegger, *Nietzsche,* vol. IV, trans. F. A. Cappuzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 7.

2 Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology,* trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 17.

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attempt to keep old slogans and strategies alive after they have outlived their practical utility. 3

Husserl thought the suggestion that we drop the ideal of universal, ahistorical, foundational philosophical knowledge, a suggestion common to pragmatism and to Nietzsche, was the final stage of a disastrous `change which set in at the turn of the past century in the general evaluation of the sciences. " 4 -On his view, "the total world-view of modern men, in the second half of the nineteenth century, let itself be determined by the positive sciences and be blinded by the 'prosperity' they produced" and this in turn produced "an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity." 5

Husserl thought of traditional rationalism and of empiricist skepticism as two sides of the same 'objectivist' coin. 6 He tried to place both within the framework of his own transcendental phenomenology. Heidegger agreed with Husserl about the relative unimportance of the empiricist-rationalist distinction, and also about the dangers of a technologized, pragmatic culture. But Heidegger thought of pragmatism and transcendental phenomenology as merely two further products of the 'objectivist' tradition. He tried to place both pragmatism's abjuration of 'spirit' and Husserl's attempt to reclaim it within his own account of 'Western metaphysics'. He agreed with Husserl that

an autonomous philosopher with the will to liberate himself from all prejudices ... must have the insight that all the things he takes for granted *are* prejudices, that all prejudices are obscurities arising out of a sedimentation of the tradition ... and that this is true even of the great task and idea which is called 'philosophy.' 7

But Heidegger thought that neither Husserl nor the pragmatists were radical enough in their criticism of their predecessor's self-understanding. He distrusted the pragmatist attempt to replace the Platonic-Cartesian idea of "universal knowledge" with the Baconian dream of maximal control over nature. But he also distrusted Husserl's attempt to see Galilean *techne* as 'founded' in something 'transcendental'. For Heidegger, projects of 'founding' culture — either upon concrete human needs or upon transcendental subjectivity — were simply further expressions of the 'prejudices' which needed to be overcome.

Although Heidegger's assessment of our century's dangers was closer to Husserl's, his actual philosophical doctrines were closer to Dewey's. Like Husserl,

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3 My failure to discuss Marxism in what follows, and to use it, rather than American pragmatism, to represent the "political" conception of the activity of philosophizing, is due to the conviction that Marxism is an inconsistent mixture of the pragmatism of the 'Theses on Feuerbach' with the scientism common to Marxism and positivism. Kolakowski's history of

Marxism shows how every attempt to make Marxism more pragmatic and less scientistic has been firmly suppressed by the institutions which Marxism has created.

4 Ibid., 5.

5 Ibid., 6.

6 See ibid., 83, on Descartes and Hobbes.

7 Ibid., 72.

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Heidegger thought that "the European crisis has its roots in a misguided rational-ism. " 8 But he thought that a demand for foundations was itself a symptom of this misguided rationalism. *Sein and Zeit is* filled with criticisms of the doctrines which Husserl shared with Descartes. The treatment in that book of 'objective scientific knowledge' as a secondary, derivative form of Being-in-the-World, derivative from the use of tools, is of a piece with Dewey's Baconianism. 9 Heidegger's dissolution of philosophical pseudo-problems through letting social practice be taken as a primary and unquestioned datum, rather than an explanandum, exemplifies what Robert Brandom has called "the ontological primacy of the social." 10

Another way in which Heidegger and pragmatism belong together is in their deep distrust of the visual metaphors which link Husserl to Plato and Descartes. Husserl and Carnap shared the traditional Platonic hope to ascend to a point of view from which the interconnections between everything could be seen. For both, the aim of philosophy is to develop a formal scheme within which every area of culture can be placed. Both are philosophers of what Hilary Putnam has called "the God's-eye view." Heidegger's term for such attempts at a God-like grasp of the realm of possibility, attempts to have a pigeonhole ready for every actual event which might occur, is 'the mathematical'. He defines *to mathémata* as "that 'about' things which we really already know." 11 The search for the mathematical, for a formal ahistorical scheme, was, in Heidegger's view, the hidden link between Husserlian phenomenology, Carnapian positivism, and the objectivist tradition.

Dewey's insistence on the subordination of theory to practice, and his claim that the task of philosophy is to break the crust of convention, expresses the same distrust of the contemplative ideal, and of attempts to have an a priori place prepared for everything that may happen. But Heidegger's and Dewey's conceptions of philosophy were nevertheless very different. Their common opposition to foundationalism and to visual metaphors took radically different forms. In what follows I want to discuss these differences under two headings: their