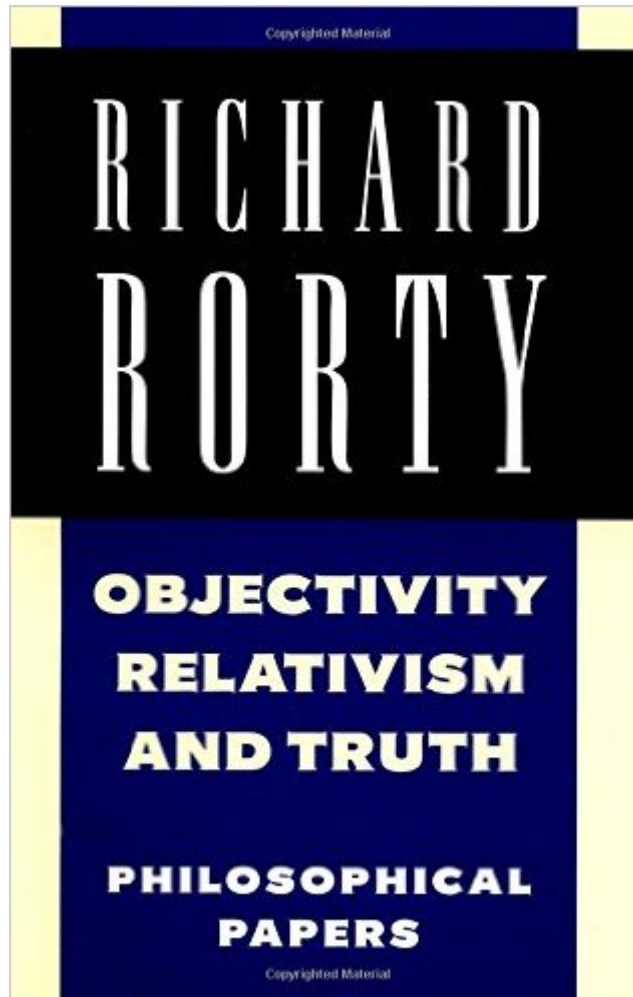


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# Objectivity, Relativism, And Truth: Philosophical Papers (Philosophical Papers (Cambridge)) (Volume 1)



## Synopsis

In this volume Rorty offers a Deweyan account of objectivity as intersubjectivity, one that drops claims about universal validity and instead focuses on utility for the purposes of a community. The sense in which the natural sciences are exemplary for inquiry is explicated in terms of the moral virtues of scientific communities rather than in terms of a special scientific method. The volume concludes with reflections on the relation of social democratic politics to philosophy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Published in 1990, 'Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth' (ORT) is the first installment in the 4-volume Richard Rorty: Philosophical Papers collection published by Cambridge University Press. ORT contains approximately a dozen essays originally published by Rorty in the 1980s. His pragmatic view of philosophy posits that knowledge results from conversation and convention, rather than from the uncovering of ahistoric truth, in other words, knowledge is created not than discovered. For those unfamiliar with Rorty, he is one of the best known and most controversial American thinkers of the late twentieth century; an accomplished philosopher, essayist and cultural critic. I offer a few comments for potential readers. While sharing a common pragmatic theme the essays are roughly divided between those that deal with questions of language and epistemology and those that are concerned with socio-political issues. While the essays are non-technical in nature they presuppose (especially the non-political ones) a familiarity with the Western intellectual tradition, its key thinkers and ideas. Indeed, much of the fun or frustration depending on your perspective, in reading Rorty is

interacting with his highly creative and oft criticized interpretations of other thinkers. In regard to this latter point the consistent casting of Dewey throughout ORT as a proto-Rortian has motivated me to re-read Dewey, while his engagement with Davidson has rekindled my interest in a philosopher that I have tended to overlook. Often characterized as a post-modern relativist Rorty is careful to distance himself from highly individualistic versions of relativism, preferring to define himself as a pragmatist, a pragmatist who sees knowledge creation as a group rather than an individual undertaking.

Richard McKay Rorty (1931-2007) was an American philosopher, who taught at Princeton, the University of Virginia, Stanford University, etc. He wrote many other books such as *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, *Consequences Of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980*, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2*, etc. He wrote in the Introduction to this 1991 collection, "This is the first volume of a collection of papers written between 1980 and 1989. The papers in this volume take up, for the most part, issues and figures within analytic philosophy" | The six papers that make up Part I of this volume offer an antirepresentationalist account of the relation between natural science and the rest of culture | I mean [an account] which does not view knowledge as a matter of getting reality right, but rather as a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality. He states, "it is not clear why 'relativist'™ should be thought an appropriate term for the ethnocentric third view, the one which the pragmatist DOES hold.

A sincere seeker of truth must deliberately seek opponents who challenge her cherished ideals and beliefs. Having thought and written a great deal recently about why the arguments of ancient philosophy must be considered as serious contenders in the contemporary quest for truth, I decided to seek out some opposing viewpoints as a counterbalance. My efforts in this direction led me to study a essay by pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty entitled "The priority of democracy to philosophy." Rorty is well known for his praise of irony, so we must be very cautious in assuming that his text is a straightforward presentation of the sincere views of its author. In my analysis of the essay, I will begin by assuming the views expressed are Rorty's sincerely held views. I will then consider other possible authorial intentions. 1. Interpretation under the assumption of authorial earnestness Rorty begins by considering Thomas Jefferson's contention that political discourse can be carried out without demanding agreement on matters of the most fundamental importance. As Rorty characterizes it, Jefferson's view is that even if a citizen sets her religious beliefs aside, a kind of secular conscience remains that will allow her to discover her civic duties. Rorty claims

Jefferson's view is no longer tenable in light of contemporary thought. In particular, contemporary psychology calls into question the idea that there is a core conscience that can be separated from a peripheral, contingent, historically conditioned exterior (p. 175). Rorty seeks to discard the metaphysical account that finds in the psyche an essential core surrounded by an inessential periphery, and to articulate instead a pragmatist position independent of such assumptions.

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