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What is eliminative materialism?

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WILLIAM G. LYCAN AND GEORGE S. PAPPAS

WHAT IS ELIMINATIVE MATERIALISM?

In 1965¹ Richard Rorty defended a theory of mind which has since come to be called 'eliminative materialism'. The theory has attained some status as a distinct, autonomous brand of materialism; and it has been criticized at length in the literature, principally by James Cornman² who argues on various grounds that the theory is false.

What we find startling is that it is more or less assumed on all sides that Rorty's theory is self-consistent. We shall argue in Section II of this paper that there are at least three good and relatively obvious reasons for doubting the consistency and/or the autonomy of the theory, and then, for emphasis, we shall go on in Section III to look at one of these three objections in a little more detail.

I. TAXONOMY

It will help at the outset to state a few different materialistic views and trace some preanalytical relations between them. Let us first set out what we take to be the materialistic view, *simpliciter*:

(M) If there are sensations, then they are identical with certain physical items (or with physical states of physical items, etc.; let us call all such things 'brain-processes', for short).

This view entails that there are no non-physical sensations (i.e., that there is no sensation that is not identical with some brain-process). Now we may distinguish the three principal materialist theories of mind that we shall be discussing, which share the feature of entailing the fundamental thesis *M*.

Reductive Materialism, as we shall use the term, is the view that

(RM) There are sensations, but they are not distinct from brain-processes.

¹ Rorty, 'Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories', *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XIX (1965-1966); we shall abbreviate the title as 'MPC'. Other articles by Rorty to which we shall refer are: 'Incorrigibility as the Mark of the Mental' ('IMM'), *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. LXVII (1970); 'In Defense of Eliminative Materialism' ('DEM'), *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XXIV (1970-1971); 'Wittgenstein, Privileged Access, and Incommunicability' ('WPI'), *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 7 (1970). All page references will be to 'MPC' unless otherwise specified.

² The term, 'eliminative materialism', was coined by Cornman. See 'On the Elimination of "Sensations" and Sensations' ('ESS'), *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XXII (1968-1969); 'Mental Terms, Theoretical Terms and Materialism' ('MTM'), *Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 35 (1968).

Most standard forms of the Identity Theory are subsumed by this rubric; let us always construe *RM* as involving a strict identity claim.

Strong Eliminative Materialism can be put fairly simply:

(*SEM*) It is just (non-trivially) false that there are any sensations. The term 'sensation', for all its apparent referring function, fails to denote anything, just as 'unicorn' does.

One particular refinement on *SEM* may be specified here. It is claimed by some materialists that

(*P*) Sensations are entities unnecessarily *postulated* by an explanatory theory.

Some *SEM*ists invoke *P* as the main reason for accepting *SEM*; others, however, do not take this line, since they deny that sensations need be postulated in order to be eliminable.

SEM is incompatible with *RM*. The *RM*ist is committed to the existence of sensations, since he holds that they are identical with brain-processes and that brain-processes exist; but the *SEM*ist, though he does countenance brain-processes, denies the existence of sensations and hence the identity claim.³

Rorty's theory is intended to be more radical than *RM* but not so much so as *SEM*. His view, *Weak Eliminative Materialism*, is this (we shall use quoted slogans here, to avoid committing ourselves as yet to the self-consistency of the position expressed):

(*WEM*) 'What we called "sensations" turn out to be nothing but brain-processes' (Rorty, 'MPC', p. 28).

'... a mental term such as "sensation" denotes, but ... what it denotes are brain-processes rather than sensations ...' (Cornman, 'MTM', p. 48; this formulation is seemingly accepted by Rorty in 'DEM'). Thus, 'sensation' does denote, *pace* the *SEM*ist, but it does not denote sensations, *pace* the *RM*ist.

(*WEM*, like *SEM*, is incompatible with *RM*, since it (officially) denies the existence of sensations; it is also incompatible with *SEM*, as we shall see.)

Hand in hand with the foregoing set of ontological theses goes a pair of claims about language use:

³ Very few philosophers actually present *SEM* as being an established fact; most materialists of an eliminative bent merely suggest, in a predictive way, that *SEM* is likely or probable. Feyerabend and Quine are the main exceptions. See Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge: The M. I. T. Press, 1960), pp. 264-266, and 'On Mental Entities', in *The Ways of Paradox* (New York: Random House, 1966); Feyerabend, 'Materialism and the Mind-Body Problem', *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol XVII (1963-1964), and 'Problems of Empiricism', in Colodny (d.), *Beyond the Edge of Certainty* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

Besides holding *WEM*, Rorty may believe that *SEM* is possible given what we know at present. Cornman disagrees with our interpretation of Quine as holding *SEM* and *P* ('MTM', p. 48), since he attributes *WEM* to him. For a discussion of this disagreement, see our 'Quine's Materialism', forthcoming.

(CR) '... at no greater cost than an inconvenient linguistic reform we *could* drop [mentalist] terms' from our vocabulary (Rorty, 'MPC', p. 37). We could do so without losing explanatory power (and perhaps without losing 'descriptive power', depending on what that means); neurological talk would take over at least the explanatory and reporting roles of mentalistic talk.

(OR) We *ought* (for reasons of elegance or whatever) to drop mentalistic talk in the way just suggested, replacing it by neurological talk. (See Rorty, 'DEM', p. 121, and Feyerabend, *op. cit.*)

OR entails CR. Some philosophers have seemed to argue, on grounds of parsimony, from CR to OR as well. And both claims have been used as reasons (in some cases the only reasons) for accepting SEM, WEM, or RM. Presumably CR, on a suitable reading of 'descriptive power', is entailed by M and hence by each of the three materialist theories we have listed. OR is entailed, we believe, by SEM but not by RM; whether or not it is entailed by WEM is an open question for now, though Rorty evidently thinks that the entailment fails ('DEM', p. 121).

A tentative box score helps to summarize what we may say at present. (Entries in the boxes represent agreement or disagreement of the proponent of the position in question with the claim in question.)

	'Sensations are brain-processes'	'“Sensation” denotes'	'There are sensations'	'We have certain false beliefs' ⁴	CR	OR
RM	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
WEM	no	yes	no	no	yes	no
SEM	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes

Each of the three positions except RM may be conjoined with P, yielding a more specific variant.

II. THREE DIFFICULTIES FOR RORTY

We shall now try to determine exactly what Rorty's view amounts to. This will not be easy, since some of his claims, taken together, are not obviously compatible. He seems to want a hybrid position, one which avoids the traditional objections to RM (Leibniz'-Law criticisms, and the usual difficulties attending attempts at 'topic-neutral translation'), as well as the bitterly counterintuitive consequences of SEM (that we now have a staggering number of empirically false beliefs, that the term 'sensation' denotes nothing at all). The most formidable task which faces the exegete is that of showing

⁴ See Section II. The beliefs in question are of the form, 'I am in pain', 'He is seeing green now', etc.

exactly how the brace of slogans that we have called '*WEM*' can differ both from *SEM* and from *RM*. (Rorty, in claiming that he is defending the 'Disappearance Form' of materialism and that he denies the existence of sensations, seems to be saying that his view may be regarded as a version of *SEM*; and yet, as we shall see, it can easily be construed as being quite close to *RM* instead.)

One difference between Rorty's theory and *RM* is quite plain: When he says, 'What people now call "sensations" are identical with certain brain-processes', the identity he is talking about is not the strict identity of *RM*—thus he avoids the Leibniz'-Law objections—but the 'identity of theory-replacement' (e.g., 'What people used to call "demoniacal possession" is a form of hallucinatory psychosis,' 'What people used to call "caloric fluid" is nothing but the motion of molecules,' etc.), the suggestion being that *there really are no such things as demoniacal possession, caloric fluid, or sensations*. The intuitive implausibility of this 'replacement' theory of the mind, he says, 'rests *solely* upon the fact that elimination of the referring use of "sensation" from our language would be in the highest degree *impractical*' (p. 32; italics Rorty's).

Now there are two distinguishable kinds of cases of 'theoretical reductions of X's to Y's': those in which we continue to admit that X's (tables, clouds, temperature) exist, and those in which we are moved to claim that there never really have been any X's (demons, unicorn horns, caloric fluid). The Identity Theories of Feigl, Armstrong and Smart until 1967 are of the former sort, but Rorty (at first) seems to be concerned to assimilate the case of sensations to that of demons. He gives a thumbnail historical account of the reasons why we keep tables and temperature, but throw out demons and caloric fluid; what it comes to is that

although we could *in principle* drop 'table', it would be monstrously inconvenient to do so, whereas it is both possible in principle and convenient in practice to drop 'demon'. The reason 'But there are still tables' sounds so plausible is that nobody would dream of suggesting that we stop reporting our experiences in table-talk and start reporting them in molecule-talk. The reason 'There are no demons' sound so plausible is that we are quite willing to suggest that the witch-doctors stop reporting their experiences in demon-talk and start reporting them in hallucination-talk. (p. 34).

So far this might be preparation for a defense of *SEM* via *OR*. But now a difficulty emerges: what is the difference between tables and sensations? Rorty has already admitted that the elimination of sensation-talk 'would be in the highest degree impractical'. And on p. 37 he calls it 'obvious' that sensations fail to fulfill a condition ('A') which he has said 'must be satisfied if we are to move from "X's are nothing but Y's" . . . to "There are no X's" . . .' (p. 36). How, then, can Rorty have billed himself as a defender of the 'Disappearance' theory? Further down p. 37 he seems to retreat:

If the Identity Theorist [= *WEM*ist, here] is taken to be predicting that someday 'sensation', 'pain', 'mental image', and the like will drop

out of our vocabulary, he is almost certainly wrong.⁵ But if he is saying simply that, at no greater cost than an inconvenient linguistic reform, we *could* drop such terms, he is entirely justified. And I take this latter claim to be all that traditional materialism has ever desired.

This is just *CR*, and it seems to be a conclusion.⁶ But we could (and Rorty does) say just the same sort of thing about tables and temperature.

It appears that Rorty wants ultimately to say that sensations are neither strictly like tables nor strictly like demons and unicorn horns, so far as eliminability is concerned. The difference between sensations and demons, he has implied, is purely one of practical convenience. The difference between sensations and tables is, according to him, that

... the existence of tables is not (it would seem) impugned by their identification with clouds of electrons But a defender of the Disappearance Form of the Identity Theory⁷ *does* want to impugn the existence of sensations. (p. 33)

But unfortunately, Rorty has given only one explanation of the difference between the staying-power of tables and that of demons: viz., the 'monstrous inconvenience' of dropping 'table' as opposed to the congeniality of dropping 'demon'. Since he has admitted that dropping 'sensation' is inconvenient 'in the highest degree', he has still failed, so far as we can see, to show why sensations are any more readily eliminable from our ontology than are tables.⁸

⁵ Notice that the question of whether future generations *will* drop talk of sensations is irrelevant to the main issues here. If *CR* and/or *OR* are true, the sociological prediction ceases to be interesting—and ditto if *CR* or *OR* is false.

⁶ Elsewhere Rorty seems to equate *WEM* with *CR*: "There are no demons" and "What people call 'sensations' are nothing but brain-processes" can both equally well be paraphrased as "Elimination of the referring use of the expression in question . . . from our language would leave our ability to describe and predict undiminished" ('MPC', pp. 31-32).

This is puzzling. Since *RM* entails *CR*, this last remark of Rorty's would seem to authorize a direct inference from *RM* to *WEM*; and yet Rorty wants *WEM* to be logically distinct from *RM*. Indeed, if *WEM* encapsulates the claim that there are no sensations, and if we may infer *WEM* from *RM* in the way outlined just now, then *RM* is incoherent, entailing both that there are sensations and that there are no sensations.

The identification of *WEM* with *CR* makes Rorty's thesis relatively weak and unexciting, unless 'describe' means 'say everything there is true to say about the universe', in which case his view would entail that there are *as a matter of fact* no sensations (= *SEM*).

⁷ This title is a misnomer, since the 'Disappearance' view is not a form of the Identity Theory at all, but rather is incompatible with it (presuming that the Identity Theory is a form of *RM*, as its name indicates).

⁸ Rorty hints (p. 32) at an extremely strong connection between false beliefs and inconvenience: He seems to be saying that the difference between *WEM* and *SEM* apropos false beliefs explains ('backs up') the difference between sensations and demons; but he has already maintained that the difference in *inconvenience* is the 'sole' explanation of this latter difference. These two claims seem to have the joint consequence that the false-beliefs difference must in some way be the very same difference as that based on inconvenience, or is pretty trivially explained by it. This points toward a very ambitious view about epistemology and truth, the view that the falsity of a belief is either strictly a matter of the 'convenience' of holding the contrary of that belief, or trivially explained by this convenience.

Let us now turn to a second paradoxical aspect of what Rorty says.⁹

Although Rorty claims that 'future science may want to deny that there are sensations' (p. 30), he also '[does] not wish to say that people who have reported sensations in the past have (necessarily) any empirically disconfirmed beliefs' (p. 33).¹⁰ Now if in 3000 A.D. 'future science' denies that there are sensations, and if this denial is *true*, then we are now (in the 1970's) holding a false belief or two which will ultimately be disconfirmed. Evidently this disconfirmation cannot, according to what Rorty has just said, be empirical. It must be a revision of our conceptual scheme (or some such) that is involved. But this seems further to break down the analogy between sensations and caloric fluid etc.—for is it not just an empirical fact that there is no caloric fluid? And were not believers in caloric fluid just wrong?

On p. 29 Rorty says that we would be right to deny the existence of demons, but he asks, '... would we be right on *empirical* grounds?' This seems to be a rhetorical question, answered 'no'. Why? Because, he admits to the 'sophisticated witch-doctor', no 'empirical criteria ... go unsatisfied' by the tribesmen's theory; no 'predictions which the tribesmen make fail to come true.' He is apparently conceding that no 'observational consequences' (to use a somewhat archaic term) are at stake. The reasons that we ought to side with modern psychologists rather than with the witch-doctors are more subtle: '... the simplicity of the accounts which can be offered if we forget about demons is an excellent reason for saying that there are no demons' (p. 29). Thus our falling out with demons is motivated by Occam's Razor and other considerations of theoretical elegance. The demonless theory (a) effects a gain in simplicity, as well as one (we suppose) in theoretical power, and (b) eliminates the need to ask certain very difficult questions ('Why are demons visible only to witch-doctors?' etc.). We have no quarrel with the substance of this support for doing away with demons; but are the considerations cited (simplicity and so forth) not 'empirical criteria', i.e., tests that we use for choosing between empirical theories? Surely the natives are not just non-empirically wrong. In spots Rorty seems to think that the modern psychologists have merely changed *language*, albeit for a good reason. E.g., on p. 30 he talks of 'replacing sensation-discourse with brain-discourse'.

It is just barely possible that his point is as simple as this: 'Not all verbal recommendations are otiose and arbitrary; we sometimes have good reasons,

⁹ Actually, the three difficulties that we discuss here are all very closely intertwined. To show exactly how they are connected is beyond the scope of this paper; but it is clear that the *WEM/SEM* issue rests on several more primitive issues which are recondite to date: those of what it is to denote, what it is to have a false belief, what is required for the preservation of 'descriptive power', and how change of theory may or may not affect the meanings of theoretical terms, among others.

¹⁰ Rorty also says, on the same page, that "What people call 'tables' are nothing but clouds of molecules" does not suggest or require as a ground that people who say "This is a table" hold false beliefs.' Of course, the parallel sentence, 'What people call "sensations" are nothing but brain-processes', neither suggests nor requires as a ground the falsity of our present beliefs either; but the question is rather whether it, conjoined with our holding the beliefs we do (that people are sometimes in pain, and so on) does not *entail* that the beliefs we hold are false.

based on considerations of elegance, for changing our language when new facts are brought to light.' But if this is all Rorty means, his thesis is much less exciting and controversial than we would have thought, and he could have established it much more briefly and simply. And further, his point would then be only trivially different from *RM*. We shall therefore assume that *WEM* encapsulates more than just a terminological shift, no matter how (notationally) handy that shift might have been. So we are still left with the main difficulty: why, if *WEM* is right, are our present mentalistic beliefs not empirically false? (This amounts to asking, 'How is *WEM* finally different from *SEM*?')

There is yet a third threat to the autonomy (if not the coherence) of *WEM*, though (again) this may amount to another way of expressing the same misgivings.

Perhaps Rorty understands 'sensation' (as it is now used) to mean something that precludes sensations' being identified with physical items. E.g., he might say that sensations have some logically essential or characteristic feature which physical things necessarily cannot share. This is why sensations cannot be identified with brain-processes. But if we follow this up, a problem is created: The claim that sensations cannot be identified with brain-processes, and thesis *M*, jointly entail that there are no sensations¹¹; and this conclusion seems to be empirical in character, unless the essential feature in question is an incoherent one, such as that of being an even prime greater than two. This would mean that our beliefs in sensations are empirically false—which claim is the earmark of *SEM*.

A dilemma arises here. Either 'x is a sensation' entails 'x is not a brain-process' or it does not. If it does, and if *M* is true, we are forced (by the foregoing argument) to accept *SEM*. But if it does not, then (so far) our concept of a 'sensation' is not laden with any uncongenial anti-materialist theory, and the following argument (the second horn of the dilemma) may be brought to bear:

- (1) We are speaking English throughout this paper.
- (2) The inscription-type 'sensation' is an English noun which purports to denote-in-English, and 'sensations' is its plural.
- (3) In English, when 'There are' is concatenated with a plural substantive expression that purports to denote-in-English, the result is a sentence which is true-in-English just in case the putative denotata exist.
- (4) If (2) and if (3) and if 'sensation' denotes-in-English some extant things, then 'There are sensations' is true-in-English.¹²
- (5) If *WEM*, then 'sensation' denotes-in-English brain-processes.
- (6) There are brain-processes.
- (7) *WEM*. (Assumption for later conditionalization.)
- (8) 'Sensation' denotes-in-English some extant things. (5, 6, 7)
- (9) 'There are sensations' is true-in-English. (2, 3, 4, 8)

¹¹ Rorty is quite aware of this. He argues in similar fashion on pp. 421-422 of 'IMM', on the grounds that sensations do have such a characteristic feature (incorrigibility of a weak kind).

¹² Notice that this conditional does not depend on our taking 'denote' to be a success-verb.

- (10) There are sensations. (1, 9)¹³
- (11) If *WEM*, then there are sensations. (Conditionalization from 7.)
- (12) If *WEM*, then *M*.
- (13) If there are sensations, and if *M*, then *RM*.
- (14) If *WEM*, then *RM*. (11, 12, 13)

Of course, if we conjoin (14) with the trivial premise that *WEM* entails not-*RM*, we can derive not-*WEM* straightforwardly.

The argument has just four contingent premises: (1), (2), (3) and (6). Since (if our trivial premises (4), (5), (12) and (13) are right) the four contingent premises plus *WEM* jointly entail the contradiction *RM* & not-*RM*, a *WEM*ist must give up at least one of the contingent premises; and they seem indisputable.

This argument does not show that *WEM* is incoherent, since it does not demonstrate the falsity of *WEM* without using any contingent premises. At best it shows that *WEM* is false, on the grounds that *WEM* is incompatible with the set of contingent premises, which are true. But when we plug this argument in as the second horn of our dilemma, the upshot is that, if *WEM* is true, *WEM* collapses into *SEM*. It is again hard to see how Rorty can manage to hold a view that entails *M* but that is distinct both from *RM* and from *SEM* in the intermediate way he wants.¹⁴

III. MORE ON FALSE BELIEFS

We have already seen the ways in which *WEM* is supposed to differ from the other materialist positions we have demarcated. But we found that *WEM* seemingly collapses either into *RM* or into *SEM*. Let us now conclude by trying harder to determine whether there is a difference between *WEM* and *SEM*, and whether the problem of false beliefs will ultimately make us give up *WEM* or regard it simply as a species of *SEM*. (We shall take Rorty's various remarks about false beliefs (in 'MPC') as indicating what the *WEM*ist will have to say on the subject in order to make his view coherent,

¹³ The inference from {1, 9} to (10) can be mediated by the following truism: If a sentence *s* is true-in-*L* and if someone who is speaking *L* tokens *s* assertively, then what that person asserts in *L* is true. To apply this to the argument: 'There are sensations' is true-in-English, and we, speaking English, token 'There are sensations assertively in (10). Therefore (by the foregoing truism) what we say in English in (10) is true. What we say is that there are sensations. So it is true that there are sensations. Therefore, there are sensations.

¹⁴ As we mentioned above, Cornman believes that Rorty's view is coherent and autonomous (his complaint is against *CR*). He appears not to notice the problem of false beliefs, but he does address himself briefly to versions of each of the other two difficulties we have raised.

He obviates the first (the table-demon problem) by attributing to Rorty the belief that 'linguistic convenience . . . [is] of no ontological relevance' ('ESS', pp. 24-25). But it would seem that Rorty holds just the opposite (that convenience and inconvenience have immense ontological relevance), if our interpretation above is correct. As regards the third difficulty, Cornman considers and rightly rejects an anti-Rorty argument similar to the second horn of our dilemma; but the argument he considers has as its conclusion that *WEM* entails *RM simpliciter* (a much stronger conclusion than ours), and none of our premises is apparently affected by what he says.

but we shall also speculate beyond them.) Let us suppose for the sake of argument that Rorty simply cannot solve the problem of tables and demons, and that he is struck with holding that 'the "sensation" case is relevantly like the "table" case which is relevantly like the hallucination case after all' (Cornman, 'ESS', p. 25). Given that there are no sensations because 'sensation' is eliminable (*CR*), what about false beliefs? How can the belief expressed by the statement 'I feel a pain', made by someone now, fail to be false?

A first possible explanation is this: We can believe (truly) that *S* is in pain without believing that there are sensations, because we can deny the 'act-object' account of sensation and instead accept an 'adverbial' analysis à la Chisholm, or some such. Eliminative Materialism amounts just to the denial of the act-object view.

But there are excellent reasons for thinking that this negative thesis is not all that *WEM* means. (i) It is extremely weak and, these days, truistic (and of course it has all been done at length before). If all we wanted were to deny that '*S* is in pain' means 'There is a certain object *x* which is a pain and to which *S* is related by the ineffable relation "being in" ' (if all we wanted were to avoid quantification over sensations generally), we could easily do so without accepting any brand of eliminative *materialism* or even being physicalists at all. (ii) The traditional arguments against act-object analyses are *a priori*, having largely to do with the lack of identifying and individuating conditions for the reified sensa. Yet *WEM* and *SEM* are put forward, as Quine says, 'in the spirit of natural science'.

Rorty might mean, secondly, that whether 'I feel a pain now' is false depends on what it is taken to report. If it is taken to report the presence of a sensation, then it is false; and, if one who utters it believes that he is correctly reporting the occurrence of a sensation, then he believes falsely. But, inasmuch as one who so reports need not believe that he is reporting a sensation (he might be 'speaking with the vulgar'?), he need not betray a false belief in making the statement.

So stated, this view is highly implausible; but it may be unpacked to advantage: We might say that what is believed is *underdetermined* in a certain way by the mere acceptance of a sensation-sentence. As an illustration or model for our approach, let us contrast two different views of physical objects: one, mentioned by Rorty, is that tables etc. are nothing but clouds of molecules; the other is Berkeley's view that tables are nothing but bundles of ideas. Now, if we believe that there are tables, are our beliefs false either if the molecule theory is correct or if the Berkeleian theory is correct? One might answer negatively in both cases, on the same grounds: To believe that there are tables is just to believe that there are things we use to write on and to place objects on, that we can buy those in stores, that some of them are made of wood, and so on. The 'and so on' does not contain, on the ordinary view of the matter, any further commitment to any ontological thesis about tables. Tables are, of course, publicly perceivable entities and things which persist independently of humans, but these facts conflict neither with the molecule theory nor with the Berkeleian theory. The point is that our

ordinary beliefs about tables, and about physical objects generally, are underdetermined in the sense that we are not committed, by holding them, to any special theory as to tables' ontological status. Our ordinary beliefs, we might say, are in this way topic-neutral.

Something like this view of the ordinary man's beliefs is probably held by the average chemist and by Berkeley respectively, and may be the key to understanding Berkeley's oft-repeated claim that his views were compatible with common sense (though there is surely much more to the latter issue than this). We need not investigate that here; instead let us see how we might try to use the foregoing point to help the *WEMist* solve the problem of false beliefs.

When a person says, 'I am in pain now', all that he typically believes in asserting this is that something hurts and perhaps that this is unpleasant. But he is not committed to any particular claim about the ontological status of what he feels. He would still believe correctly (*pace* the *SEMist*) that something or other hurts and that there is unpleasantness, regardless of whether what he actually feels is a brain-process, some other bodily process, a disordered state of his body, a state of a spiritual substance, or an irreducible mental object. As ordinarily used by most people, sentences like 'I am in pain now' are used to express claims which are neutral as between these distinct ontological positions; thus, the belief expressed by the statement may well be true, because one may believe it without believing anything at all about the philosophical character of what one feels.

So, although there are no sensations, people who believe that they are in pain are often correct, if all they believe is that they feel something or other. What people have called 'sensations' may not be sensations, in the full-blooded sense, at all.

Granted that this interpretation is somewhat appealing, there is still an important reason, in the form of a dilemma, why it will not suffice to get Rorty out of the false-beliefs difficulty:

On the one hand, Rorty may be claiming just that there are no irreducibly mental entities and events, i.e., entities that have no extension, that are not located in space, etc.; it would be compatible with this to say that people who report sensations do not believe falsely because their beliefs are suitably topic-neutral. Although this strategy has some plausibility, it is hard to see, once more, how Rorty could adopt it without having his theory collapse directly into *RM*. Indeed, as just stated, his position would come out to be almost exactly that of Smart in 'Sensations and Brain Processes'.¹⁵

On the other hand, if Rorty is not using 'sensation' in this dualistically charged way (if, when he says that there are no sensations, he means 'no sensations, *however conceived*'), then when the ordinary man who reports being in pain believes, in asserting his sentence, only that something hurts, he is believing falsely. This view is just *SEM*. So it would seem (this is the conclusion of the dilemma) that Rorty avoids the problem of false beliefs, on the present interpretation, only at the expense of collapsing his position

¹⁵ *Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXVIII (1959).

either into *RM* or into *SEM*; in either case his view would be incoherent, since it is supposed to be incompatible with both theories.¹⁶

We cannot think of any further ways in which Rorty might successfully address the false-beliefs problem.¹⁷ So we conclude that *WEM* is unsatisfactory, on the three grounds presented in Section II.

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¹⁶ Cornman raises the issue of topic-neutrality in a related manner. See 'ESS', p. 27.

¹⁷ There is one other possibility, not a very plausible one: Rorty might follow some 'Wittgensteinians' who hold that first-person sensation reports lack truth-values and hence cannot be false. But (i) Rorty does not in fact share this view (see 'WPI', p. 192); (ii) the view is not very appealing in the first place; and (iii) the view applies, in any event, only to first-person utterances.