Chapter II

The question of self-creation

I would like to take into consideration in this chapter the possibility of Richard Rorty's evolution of views in terms of – suggested by him – distinction between the private and the public as well as in terms of his dichotomous pair of "solidarity" and "self-creation". My efforts would aim at showing that Rorty as a commentator on other philosophers is more and more inclined to value the significance of a self-creational, developing one's "final vocabulary" way of philosophizing, while on the other hand – as a philosopher himself he has remained as far as the private sphere goes – in his own philosophizing – rather moderate and full of reserve. Thus I would like to trace two roles possible in a philosophical language game – to have a look at Rorty's account of particular philosophers as heroes of the philosophical tradition and to have a look at Rorty himself in the role of a philosopher in a traditional sense of the term, that is to say, interested in the so-called "philosophical problems, "eternal, perennial problems of philosophy", generally – a language game of Philosophy with a capital "p" (to use the opposition between "post-Philosophical philosophy" and "Philosophy" from *Consequences of Pragmatism*).

First, we would have to outline briefly the Rortyan sense of particular elements of the aforementioned dichotomies, explain a little the concepts from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that interest us in this chapter. Let us begin by saying that Rorty – distinguishing between writers of self-creation (such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger or Nabokov) on the one hand and writers of solidarity (such as Marx, Mill, Habermas or Rawls) on the other – advises us not to attempt to make choices between the two kinds, not to oppose the two camps and rather, as he puts it, to "give them equal weigh and then use them for different purposes".[1] For there is no way to bring together self-creation and

[1] Richard Rorty, C, p. xiv.

solidarity on the level of theory, there is no such a philosophical perspective which would allow to have private perfection and solidarity or justice in one single comprehensive view (a private vocabulary of self-creation and a public vocabulary of solidarity are two incommensurable universes, devoid of common reference and shared language). Besides, there is no common purpose: for self-creation it is perfecting one's self so as to avoid giving the possibility of being described in someone else's – rather than one's own – "final vocabulary", for solidarity it is the end of humiliation, minimization of cruelty, lessening of pain. Rorty's assumption is that human solidarity increases when it refers not to an abstract account of the "humanity" in general but to "one of us", where "us" means "something smaller and more local than the human race".[2] Moral progress is the progress to greater solidarity seen as an ability to view traditional differences (of race, religion, customs) as insignificant when compared with similarities as to pain and humiliation. The Rortyan solidarity (different from identification with "the humanity as such") appears as a characteristic trait of the first epoch in human history in which, as he puts it

> large numbers of people have become able to separate the question "Do you believe and desire what we believe and desire?" from the question "Are you suffering?". In my jargon, this is the ability to distinguish the question whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question whether you are in pain. Distinguishing these questions makes it possible to distinguish public from private questions, questions about pain from questions about the point of human life, the domain of the liberal from the domain of the ironist. It thus makes it possible for a single person to be both.[3]

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[2] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 191.

[3] Ibidem, p. 198. Zygmunt Bauman asks in this context about the amount of this "large numbers of people" stressing at the same time the significance of the above distinction for the fate of the so understood (postmodern) solidarity. See my "philosophical excursus" on Rorty and Bauman for more details. See also Z. Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity,* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. XXI.

Let us take as a point of our departure here the fact that in his text entitled "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" (1984) Rorty unmistakably criticizes Foucault for his writing, as he puts it, "from a point of view light-years away from the problems of contemporary society", for his being "a dispassionate observer" of the present social order and finally for the lack of "the rhetoric of emancipation" in his work.[4] Besides, his work shows "extraordinary dryness", "remoteness", or to put it in a nutshell: the communal "we" is absent from his work. He adopts a similar tone in a criticism of Jean-François Lyotard when he discusses a controversy (from the beginning of the so-called "postmodern debate") between Habermas and his French antagonist. Rorty says the following:

> Anything that Habermas will count as retaining a "theoretical approach" will be counted by incredulous Lyotard as a "metanarrative". Anything that abandons such an approach will be counted by Habermas as more or less irrational because it drops the notions which have been used to justify the various reforms which have marked the history of the Western democracies since the Enlightenment and which are still being used to criticize the socio-economic institutions of both Free and the Communist worlds. Abandoning a standpoint which is, if not transcendental, at least "universalistic", seems to Habermas to betray the social hopes which have been central to liberal politics.[5]

Thus what is at stake here is differences of utmost importance to both philosophers – it is "private irony and liberal hope" (to use the title of one of chapters of Rorty's book on contingency). Habermas in this controversy represents an option oriented to a "social hope", requiring from the philosopher efforts in favor of the progress of the "human spirit in history". Lyotard, incredulous to global projects, social-oriented "great narratives", favors

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[4] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 173.

[5] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 165.

micronarratives, micrologies, whose aim is to show tiny "injustices" (or "wrongs") within existing social patterns and to advise, to coin a new idiom to try to express them. Habermas' project appears today as perhaps more radical but less effective, while Lyotard's proposals – although in the sphere of declarations obviously less "committed" – in the long run may open possibilities of greater transformations in the symbolic world than could be expected.

Rorty in his text does not seem to see in Lyotard one particular trait and this is the aspect of his criticism we want to draw attention to in his evolution we are interested – namely, that seeking the sublime in Lyotard's conception of the aesthetic of the sublime is, despite appearances, not free from social or ethical references, it is not separated from a "solidarity"-related side of human behavior. Rorty thinks that the need of the ineffable, the need of the sublime, the desire to transgress the restrictions imposed, never coincide with social needs: "[O]ne should not see the intellectual as serving a *social* purpose when she fulfils this need".[6] In Lyotard, as is well known, it is not accidental that the aesthetics of the "sublime" is synonymous with the aesthetics of "resistance" – and although at stake is not a social resistance, some common movement of social disobedience, the essential trait of his aesthetics is *cultural resistance*, a protest against the power of the capital and omnipotence of the (Horkheimer-Adorno's) instrumental reason, a degenerated form of the Kantian theoretical reason.[7] The aesthetical and the social (or specifically "political" in the Lyotardian sense of the term) themes form a mixture from which one cannot separate merely "eastheticizing" thought and the "political", ideological one, oriented to current needs of politics. Lyotard's answer to Habermas' objection lies in "little narratives", in (potentially) critically powerful counter-narratives which apart from politics and aesthetics, manifest themselves in cognitive and practical spheres.

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[6] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 176.

[7] See e.g. Lyotard's "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" or "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity", in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell), 1989, pp. 181-212

Rorty clearly separates both motivations of human activities (the one of self-creation, the other of solidarity) and locates Lyotard unhesitatingly among philosophers of self-creation, at least as far as the issue of the sublime is concerned: Habermas is the philosopher of solidarity, Lyotard who looks for "sublime ways of disengaging from the interests of others", is a philosopher of solidarity. Such a radical dichotomization of attitudes works perfectly well in the case of Jacques Derrida from *The Postcard*, but it does not seem to be accurate and applicable in the case of Lyotard. His aesthetics of the sublime is not a "privatized" version of current philosophy, nor is it away from problems of contemporary society – for in the very idea of "incredulity towards (all) metanarratives" as well as in the opposition between metanarratives and narratives, there is a peculiarly subversive point, unnoticed or omitted as insignificant by Rorty.

This is what Rorty says in the times when his figure of an "ironist" has not been crystallized yet. It can be easily seen how far in the author's philosophical thinking the public sphere, the domain of solidarity dominated then and it was just this domain that determined the estimation of the contemporary French philosophy which Rorty did not want to have much in common with (it can also be seen not less clearly from his polemics with Lyotard in "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation" where he accuses French philosophers of and worries about their "antiutopianism, their apparent loss of faith in liberal democracy"[8]). The private, self-creation and self-invention, seems unable to find its way to Rorty's philosophical constellation of the middle of the eighties, though, let us add, formally both spheres were not isolated and opposed to each other in his discourse yet.

The author's change in attitude towards self-creational philosophizing and generally towards the private sphere in philosophy is brought about, just to give one example, with the text "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault". It is here that Foucault becomes a sole object of interest but it happens this time that his philosophizing did have its value and significance, it would be great if it were not for one detail, extremely important:

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[8] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 220.

separation of the two spheres (called there the sphere of moral identity and of private autonomy) on which Foucault's stubborn thought swept, separation – distinct, performed by the author himself – of his two roles, indication of dissimilarity and separateness of the two language games. Thus Foucault would be entitled to self-create his personality, to develop his "final vocabulary" – and no longer would it be an accusation – if he were more willing to separate his moral identity (as a citizen) from his (private) search for autonomy. Rorty says there the following:

> I think Foucault should have answered the questions "Where do you stand?, What are your values?" in this way: "I stand with you as a fellow-citizen, but as a philosopher, I stand off by myself, pursuing projects of self-invention which are none of your concern. I am not about to offer philosophical grounds for being on your side in public affairs, for my philosophical project is a private one which provides neither motive nor justification for my political actions.[9]

Thus, in this text two equally justified spheres appeared, two potential references of the philosophical discourse, two - incompatible with each other – parts of the human self: the private and the public. Let us add here that Foucault was for Rorty of that time a convenient example, since his work unmistakably touched upon public matters, although put them in unknown previously light. So some equilibrium between (already separated) public and privatized philosophy, between its self-creational and solidarity motifs, is maintained. Let us notice that the most fascinating texts devoted to Derrida – with the exception of one of the most interesting essays he ever devoted to him, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" (1979) – were written towards the end of the eighties, just then (1989) there appeared also his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. It seems that Derrida must have waited – to become Rorty's leading example of ironist philosophizing, the one devoid of "liberal hope" and focused upon self-creation – until Rorty

[9] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 198.

himself exposes one element out of the two remaining in balance. This element became the private, as it is easy to predict.

Analyzing late Derrida's writings, especially *The Postcard,* in C*ontingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty unambiguously accepts the non-public kind of philosophy. He compares the role Derrida plays in philosophy with the one Proust did in the domain of literature – they both mark the new horizon, require new criteria to evaluate their work and to categorize them in a given genre (philosophy and literature, respectively). They extend the bounds of possibility. Rorty says, for example:

> I take Derrida's importance to lie in his having had the courage to give up the attempt to unite the private and the public, to stop trying to bring together a quest for private autonomy and an attempt at public resonance and utility.[10]

Derrida in Rorty's account does not want to participate in such language game which does not draw a distinction between "phantasy and argument, philosophy and literature, serious writing and playful writing" – but first and foremost Derrida is not willing to write according to the rules of someone else's "final vocabulary". Let us pay some attention to the degree of overt admiration contained in Rorty's (summing-up, anyway) sentence about Derrida in which he says that Derrida "has written a kind of book which *nobody had ever thought of before*".[11] Finally, it is not accidentally that Derrida's work in philosophy is compared with Marcel Proust's work that puts an end to the great tradition of the French prose from Montaigne on the one hand, and opens new horizons for the novels of the twentieth century on the other.

Rorty's figure of the "ironist" helps him to counter-balance first and then to overbalance one of the elements of the distinction. The "ironist" as a cultural hero meets three conditions: first, he must have constant doubts as to his (current) final vocabulary because he is influenced by people he meets and books he reads. Second,

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[10] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 125.

[11] Ibidem, p. 137 - emphasis mine.

he must be aware that the above doubts cannot be got rid off, and third, he cannot think that his final vocabulary is somehow "closer" to the reality than all other vocabularies. If his self is contingent, so also his final vocabulary is changeable and unstable[12].

Although *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* for the most part is devoted to a "liberal" ironist and to liberal utopia, it is pervaded with worship and admiration of a "non-liberal" ironist – of Derrida. (It might be worth-while to notice that Rorty's attitude towards Habermas – who being a "liberal", is not an "ironist" – is quite different; at least this asymmetry indicates how important irony is: you can forgive the lack of liberalism (with irony present), but it is more difficult to be the case with the lack of irony (with liberalism present).

It seems to me – though I must admit that this feeling may be not satisfactorily grounded – that what pervades *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is a sort of tension, perhaps connected in Rorty's case with his still traditional – at least with reference to himself – account of the role of the philosopher and of philosophy, as well as with the acceptance of the still classical model of the intellectual. This tension is born between an enthusiastic acceptance of a non-public (and obviously non-liberal), just privatized form of a philosophical discourse, exemplified by Derrida's writing – and still very concrete projects of "liberal utopia", a constant care of those "details of pain", of "humiliation", "cruelty", present almost everywhere in this book. In this tension (present also in texts from *Philosophical Papers*) there is – in a more or less explicit version – the question of a fundamental importance to every thinker: Who am I? what am I doing in culture

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[12] Let us add that Rorty, according to his conception of the contingent nature of human self and human personality, decidedly rejects the idea that – for instance – concentration camp guards from Auschwitz lacked some essentially human component, which may have caused their precisely non-human behavior, agreeing thereby with e.g. Zygmunt Bauman who (like Lyotard) traces the relations between modernity – and the Holocaust rather than modernity – and the "authoritarian personality", for instance. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989) and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) pp. 86-127.

today?, that is to say, the question about the philosopher's identity. The tension is expressed in many parallel conceptual pairs and in various accounts: for instance, Rorty asks – referring to Derrida – whether the latter is a "private writer" or "a writer with a public mission", whether he is a "writer" or a "philosopher", and with reference to Foucault he asks whether he is a "poet" (or a "knight of autonomy") or a "philosopher", engaging thereby in a controversy about the primacy of poetry or philosophy started already by Plato[13]. Finally, Rorty opposes the philosopher-"social engineer" and the philosopher-"poet" and seems to be equally attentive to both of them. It is possible to show in detail in which texts Rorty is closer to a (pragmatic) elevation of philosophy as a "prolongation of politics", and, on the other hand, in which he decidedly favors self-creational "recontextualizing one's predecessors".[14] At the same time one could show how far away Rorty was from French postmodern thought in the times when he criticized the Lyotardian conception of "the signs of history" (inspired by Kant) or his idea of "*defaillance* of modernity"[15], when French postmodernism was "irresponsible" and "revolutionary" – rather than reformist in the spirit of American pragmatism – for him, and then when he gradually got closer to it until he accepted

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[13] See Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?", "Texts and Lumps", in PP 2, or the text on Foucault from the same volume already referred to.

[14] See, by way of example, "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, as Politics" and "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" on the one hand and the chapter on Derrida from CIS or "Texts and Lumps" from PP 1 on the other, where he says that "the pragmatist philosopher has a story to tell about his favorite, and least favored, books – the texts of, for example, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Russell. He would like other people to have stories about other sequences of texts, other genres – stories which will fit together with his" (p. 82) which, incidentally, immediately reminds of Lyotardian calls for us from *Instructions paiennes* to "make micronarratives" and "tell stories"; See "Lessons in Paganism" in *The Lyotard Reader*.

[15] See Jean-François Lyotard, "Universal History and Cultural Differences" and "The Sign of History" in *The Lyotard Reader* or *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute*. See also a chapter "The Sign of History" from my Polish book, *Rorty and Lyotard. In the Labyrinths of Postmodernity*

the role of new alternatives, new "vocabularies" in transformations of ways we think.[16]

It might be thought of from a distance in the following way, for example: me, Richard Rorty, a neopragmatist and a liberal (the question arises whether "postmodern" in Lyotard's sense of the word?), for some – personal? cultural? institutional? or other? – reasons cannot let myself create such kind of philosophy that Derrida does. Me, Richard Rorty, cannot be "merely ironical" (i.e. I cannot merely "deprive us of certainty, disclosing the ambivalence of the world", as in *Art of the Novel* Milan Kundera said about the "irritating irony"), I can only be a liberal ironist, while what bears more significance to me out of this pair of terms is "liberalism" (and "solidarity", a chapter about which not accidentally closes the book). I admire though – let us notice the power lying in the original title of the chapter, positive, as it is evident from its content: "From ironist theory to private jokes!" – Derrida's consistency and persistence, and under the influence of the charm of philosophy of such a kind – I acknowledge self-creational philosophizing to be absolutely equal, if not higher of the two, although to me, Richard Rorty, unfortunately inaccessible... Rorty seems to be fascinated with the poetical side of philosophy no less than with its conceptual, theoretical, argumentative one. In the already mentioned article about Foucault he says about him that he was a philosopher who claimed a poet's privileges. "One of these privileges is to rejoin 'What has universal validity to do with me?' I think – he concludes – that philosophers are as entitled to this privilege as poets, so I think this rejoinder sufficient".[17] Rorty might have not expected that, in

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[16] So, to juxtapose quotations from Rorty which express two different thoughts put in the same philosophical categories: "This difference between wanting *new vocabularies* [i.e. the French – MK] and wanting *new arguments* [i.e. the Anglo-Saxon – MK] is closely connected with the difference between revolutionary and reformist politics" ("Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", PP 1, p. 221, emphasis mine) *versus* – four years later, which is important for our purposes – "the only thing that can displace an intellectual world is another intellectual world – *a new alternative, rather than an argument against an old alternative*" ("Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?", PP 2, p.121, emphasis mine).

[17] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 198 – emphasis mine.

a couple of years, this unnoticed and underestimated Derrida would become his best example of a philosopher-poet. (Let us also remark how simple, assimilable, understandable Derrida is in Rorty's account, how good clues he provides to his riddles...) It is important to note here that irony not necessarily goes anti-liberal, it is rather so that ironist thinking – according to Rorty from Hegel to Nietzsche to Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida – is indifferent with respect to the public sphere, to the "public life and political questions".[18] Ironist philosophers are invaluable when at stake is our private self-image, our self-creation, autonomy of thinking and sensibility, and they are useless as far as political, or in more general terms, public purposes are concerned. Irony becomes dangerous (because anti-liberal) only when an intellectual desires his own, private, self-creating self to serve as a model for others. For, as Rorty says elsewhere,

> When he begins to think that other human beings have a *moral duty* to achieve the same inner autonomy as he himself has achieved, then he begins to think about political and social changes which will help them do so. Then he may begin to think that he has a moral duty to bring about these changes, *whether his fellow citizens want them or not*[19].

It should not be forgotten, though, that it was already in the second half of the seventies that Rorty touched upon the significance of Derrida's philosophizing, not using then, obviously, the distinctions drawn later on – the private/the public and self-creation/solidarity. He thought of Derrida then as "a writer who is helping to see philosophy as a kind of writing rather than a domain of quasi-scientific inquiry".[20] In this article there appeared rather the opposition of philosophy and literature, of a writer on the one, and a philosopher on the other hand, or – quite shyly still –

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[18] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 83.

[19] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 194 – emphasis mine.

[20] Richard Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy", *Journal of Philosophy,* vol. LXXIV, No. II, p. 673.

of "normal" and "abnormal" philosophy (the last qualification being devoid of any feeling of condemnation, disapproval or of only pejorative coloring). "Abnormal inquiry – called 'revolutionary' when it works and 'kooky' when it does not – requires only genius", the author says. The idea that the philosopher and philosophy as such are actually nothing unusual (what is the point of investigating what philosophy *really* is or who *really* deserves the name of philosopher), that philosophy may be merely (?) one of the possibilities given by writing, appeared for the first time in Rorty in a developed form in an essay "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" (1979), published subsequently in *Consequences of Pragmatism*. It is there that Rorty notes that philosophy is not constituted by its eternal questions but rather by its specific traditions – that of philosophers; that is, Father Parmenides, uncle Kant, little brother Derrida – that philosophy is a "family romance", at least in its dialectical, non-Kantian, "Hegelian" version. Does Derrida want to comprehend Hegel's books? No, he merely – Rorty says – "wants to play with Hegel. He doesn't want to write a book about the nature of language; he wants to play with the texts which other people have thought they were writing about language".[21] Is Derrida writing some philosophy? Does he put forward a coherent and comprehensible account of anything that was asked in the philosophical tradition? Does he protest against faults of some philosophical school? No, he merely shows that there is no last word, last commentary, the final reason – but only another redescription in a sequence of earlier redescriptions, another reinterpretation in a sequence of earlier reinterpretations made by predecessors. To sum up, Rorty's Derrida from this essay is a philosopher (or perhaps a metaphilosopher?) owing to the fact that he *writes* about philosophers; that he is engaged in a dialogue with Hegel, Husserl or Heidegger rather than, let us add, for instance, Cervantes, Rabelais, Sterne or Fielding. (The limit case of such view of philosophy is *The Postcard*, an almost "private" work which is undoubtedly philosophical, for is not the Socrates who *writes* a philosophical problem?[22]). It seems to have taken Rorty almost a

[21] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 96.

[22] Let us listen to Derrida: "Have you seen this card, the image on the back

decade to recontextualize the term "philosophy" in such a way that Derrida's work is entitled to be included there without further hesitation. It was already in this text written in 1977 that Rorty – although distancing himself from the "Continental" philosophy by locating himself within the "serious" tradition of the Anglo-American philosophical thinking – saw the meaning and purpose in dealing with philosophers and not only philosophical claims, the sense of overcoming and surpassing one's predecessors, and not only solving inherited problems. This philosophical split into two traditions took place in Rorty's view after Kant, together with Hegel's *Phenomenology* and it is present today, giving rise to two parallel "philosophies", linked only by the traditional, common name.[23]

To sum up: what reveals itself in Rorty is an interesting evolution in an approach to philosophy, its role and position in the world, as well as to a philosopher and his or her tasks. Apart from a publicly "committed" figure, a private philosopher (Rorty says: "I claim that ironist philosophers are private philosophers") whose work is "useless" to liberals "qua liberals", is born. Towards the end of the period of a metanarrative, also its "producer" (Lyotard) – philosopher in the traditional sense of the word – comes into oblivion, into inexistence. This evolution in case of Richard Rorty could be shown in the form of the following catchwords, although explicitly they appeared only in its last stage, requiring a radical, dichotomous split: *the public – the public and the private – the private*. Rorty's course seems today to start from quite typical gradual leaving the "public" discourse (within which his object of criticism was Foucault, although when Derrida already glimmered somewhere as an interesting theme from the border line of philosophy and literature), through the acceptance of both types of philosophizing and equal justification of both spheres: the

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of this card? ... I stopped dead, with a feeling of hallucination (is he crazy or what, he has the names mixed up!) and of revelation at the same time, an apocalyptic revelation: Socrates writing, writing in front of Plato, I always knew it, it had remained like the negative of a photograph to be developed for twenty-five centuries – in me of course". *The Post Card*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 9.

[23] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 23.

private and the public (just like in "The Case of Foucault"), to overtly expressed in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* fascination with "private" and "self-creational" philosophizing of the late Derrida.

With one reservation though: Rorty himself seems not to follow an "ironist's" rules: it is not clear whether his sole aim is his own final vocabulary, his ideal is obviously not a "strong poet" (and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* is extremely important among sources of Rorty's discourse), he does not create his radically own, idiosyncratic language game, he moves within the domain of inherited questions and problems (though he writes about some of them that it might be better to "dissolve" them then "solve"); he argues with his opponents on the common ground instead of avoiding head-on fights and various tricks, and finally – there is much more of a "liberal" in him than of an "ironist", more of an advocate of solidarity than of self-creation... It seems an extremely interesting question what next Richard Rorty's step will be like: but not Rorty's as a person writing about philosophers (since this we know: long live Derrida!), but as a person who himself is a philosopher, who must himself struggle with incommensurability of private and public universes. Is it so that "philosophy has become more important for the pursuit of private perfection rather than for any social task"?[24] And if it actually is the case, to what degree this statement would apply to its author? Will he also step into, or is just stepping into – as it might be expected from the evolution shyly sketched here – the private world of philosophical imagination, the world of phantastic – since merely (?) self-creational – projects? That is the question.

Postscript:

It is hard for me to resist the temptation to express my view about Richard Rorty's response to an earlier version of that chapter presented during a conference in Toruń, Poland, devoted to his philosophy (1992).[25] I will try to give a brief "response to a

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[24] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 94.

[25] Richard Rorty, "Response to Marek Kwiek", *Ruch Filozoficzny*, vol. L, no 2/1993 (A response to a text "On Some Richard Rorty's Evolution", ibidem).

response", for Rorty's short remarks reveal still more, in my view, the significance of what I was writing about for the needs of the Rorty conference.

Let us begin in a textual (Rortyan?) manner. Rorty says the following right at the beginning: "there is one point at which he [Marek Kwiek] gets me wrong". What is it in Rorty's vocabulary to "get somebody wrong" if there are no unambiguous authorial intentions, there is no unambiguous foundation of a text in a form of an unchangeable reading of it etc. etc. (of which Rorty writes so often)? Is it possible to "get somebody wrong" on the basis of the Rortyan set of redescriptive strategies and their assumptions? Is not it so that – as Rorty himself wants, to stick to his works and his beliefs in readings of works in general – what is at stake is saying something new, interesting (the word *interesting*, crucial to Rorty's discourse, not accidentally is an object of criticism for contemporary American philosophers, like the word *conversation*)? Surely, we are within a vicious circle of two different poles of irony; seriously speaking, I "got Rorty wrong", which is undoubtedly his right to reproach me for. Non-seriously speaking, using the other pole of irony, one could say, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of the questioned passage of argumentation and interpretation – I made a "strong reading" of Rorty which he might have liked or not (for that is not a question of argumentation). If one wanted to stick to ironist Rortyan-Bloomian recommendations, one could write almost everything about almost everything (and such are Rorty's conclusions on numerous occasions). Therefore Rorty's philosophizing is a double-edged style – it allows to write about others but it somehow has to allow, on the very same basis, others' writing about itself. Each redescription, each perspective, each horizon that potentially seems to be – interesting, has to be allowed. And then, no matter what one writes, no matter how interesting or non-interesting it may sound, one cannot write, so it seems to me, that someone, like me in Rorty's case, "got someone else wrong"... One seems doomed to reading convincing visions, investigating their persuasive power, and either praise or deplore on the same basis. That is the remark on one sentence.

Let us listen to Rorty from Toruń, from his response to me:

> The issue Kwiek raises is whether I have to "struggle with the incommensurability of private and public universes". But incommensurability is not, in itself, an occasion for struggle. *My delight in listening to Mozart is, in the relevant sense, incommensurable with my delight in catching fish* - that is to say, there is no way to talk about both at once, to compare their respective advantages and disadvantages by reference to a single set of preferences or standards. But that does not mean there is a struggle between the two alternative occupations. There is only the same struggle as arises when there are conflicting dinner invitations – one cannot do both at the same time.

The answer is a playful one, to an extent, but it does not touch on what I attempted to write about, nor on what may turn out to be important and what Rorty cannot, and is not willing to, see from his perspective. Rorty says that he does not have to struggle with the private/public choice. The example he gives is defective, for both "listening to Mozart" and "catching fish" do not go beyond the private sphere. Rorty's example can be linked only to a choice made within the private sphere, as each choice is between different pastimes which always (at least in their socially accepted forms) remain in the private sphere. The choice I meant and the incommensurability I was writing about, cannot be reduced to banal examples from the life of the so-called everyman, for the everyman in question does not write and does not have any influence on the public sphere generally in all days except those of democratic elections. The philosopher, on the other hand, writes, and it is perhaps by the very act of writing (or rather publishing what he writes), that he enters the public sphere, whether he wishes this or not. The "public sphere" I meant, however, was still something else; I mean, obviously, the choice how, about what, what for and for whom one engages in philosophy. The issue is relatively simple in the case of poetry (except e.g. French surrealism in which Lenin and Rimbaud or Lautréamont formed two direct and simultaneous impulses) – one writes for oneself, it is less clear in the case of the novel, literary

criticism, essays, and totally unclear – today – in the case of philosophy. And I meant that ambiguity.

To be sure, I do not mean the choice (born out of incommensurability) between the private and the public based on nonhistorical and nonindividual criteria, on a noncontingent set of preferences. The choice is a totally individual one, and by any means as simple as the one between two conflicting dinner invitations. The choice requires determination – for the very person engaged in it – what is or might be philosophy and practising philosophy. One can choose between the pastimes aforementioned by Rorty, catch fish for three days and listen to Mozart for another four (and reverse the proportion the following week). It is difficult, however, and I would like to defend the view, not to choose between two kinds of philosophy one wants to engage in, be it only in the nearest period of time. Can one be a pragmatic social engineer on Mondays and an ironist/self-creator/poet on Fridays? Cannot one speak here of some struggles and some incommensurability? Is not there a place for a struggle – between committment (which we knew in abundance from history, especially of French intellectuals in the twentieth century) and social indifference (no less known there and elsewhere), not on the level of theory and with the help of existing models of conduct but on that of an individual choice which makes one thinker (at least for some time) a philosophical commissar and another a philosophical poet. The fact that Rorty does not accept the moment of the possibility of choice does not testify to the fact that there is no such choice. We are writing in the present book that philosophers of the past and of the present are located by Rorty on a private/public chessboard, that they are, generally, either private or public, either liberal or ironist. Perhaps the only *liberal ironist* one can think of at the moment is Rorty himself. Surprisingly enough, he seems unable or unwilling to show anyone else suitable for this mixed private and public place he occupies. All others can be characterized with the Kierkegaardian "purity of heart" – willing one thing – which requires to desire one thing with the exception of all other; all dead and living philosophers are immersed in this "religious desire for single-mindedness" from the response given to me. Perhaps the situation of a philosopher who

does not have to choose – at some point in his life – from among Rorty's dichotomies is a utopian one (and therefore the only exemplification of it is Rorty as he sees himself)?

Rorty simplifies and makes a caricature of the problem when he writes that the choice separated by me is the following: "at every moment of one's life, there is one and only one right thing to be doing". Rather, at most moments of our lives there are such things to do that are connected with our earlier choices. "If one is a philosopher – the author goes on ironically – there is one and only one sort of thing that one ought to be doing with one's time".[26] There are many things one can be doing with one's philosophical time, but I do not think that no choice is necessary; the choice was also made by Rorty himself when he gave priority to democracy rather than to philosophy, to liberalism rather than to totalitarianism, to public philosophy (in his own case) rather than private philosophy (praised in the case of others). Let me ask once again whether he is stepping in the private world of philosophical imagination, the world of phantastic – since merely (?) self-creational – projects? I do not think so, at least this cannot be found in his works – more public, to use his distinction to himself.

[26] Richard Rorty, "Response to Marek Kwiek", p. 199.

UNIWERSYTET IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU
WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE INSTYTUTU FILOZOFII
TOM XXXV

Marek Kwiek

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