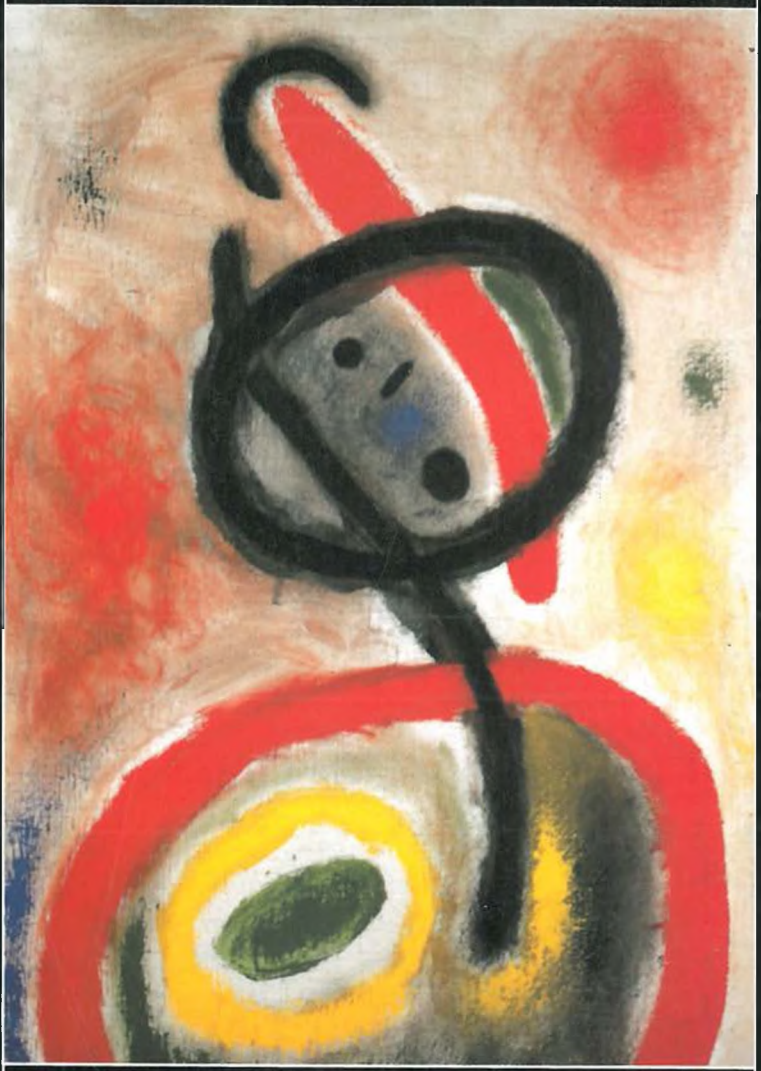
Marek Kwiek



RORTY'S ELECTIVE AFFINITIES

The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought

UNIWERSYTET IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU
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Marek Kwiek

Rorty's Elective Affinities. The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought

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Introduction

1.

The present book is devoted to "European connections of Richard Rorty's neopragmatism". The theme, chosen carefully and intentionally, is supposed to show the motivation behind the writing of the present work, as well as to show its intended extent. Let us consider briefly the first three parts of the theme, to enlighten a little our intentions. "European" is perhaps the most important description for it was precisely this thread that was most important to me, being the only context seriously taken into account, as I assumed right from the start that I would not be writing about rather more widely unknown to me – and much less fascinating (even to Rorty, the hero of the story) from my own, traditional, Continental philosophical perspective – American analytic philosophy. So accordingly I have almost totally skipped "American" connections (to use the distinction I need here) of Rorty's philosophy, that is to say, firstly, a years-long work within analytic philosophy, secondly struggles with it on its own grounds, and finally attempts to use classical American, mainly Deweyan, pragmatism for his own needs and numerous polemics associated with it – the questions that are far away from my interests and that arise limited interest among reading and writing philosophical audience in Poland, and perhaps also among Continental philosophers. It did not seem possible to me to write a book on Rorty in his American connections for they are insufficiently known to me, demanding knowledge of both post-war American analytic philosophy as well as pragmatism of its father-founders. I could see, setting to work on Richard Rorty, that a book on his American connections (leaving aside the issue that it would not be a philosophical problem but rather, let us say, the one of writing a monograph) written by a Polish philosopher in Poland and then in the USA was not a stimulating intellectual challenge but rather a thankless working task. Besides, having spent much time on Rorty's philosophy, writing extensively about him and translating his works, I already knew that the "Continental" context was extremely

important to his neopragmatism, and that thinking about it could be relatively prolific (as opposed to the context potentially given by American philosophy).

The next term from the guiding theme that would require some explanation is "connections". It is rather a non-philosophical term but it seems to be suitable considering a specific character of Rorty's work. For the fact is that Rorty can be connected to numerous controversies, polemics and discussions with European philosophy and within its framework, from Plato to Kant to Hegel to Habermas to Derrida. Rorty gets into European discussions with American freshness and intellectual breadth and therefore he is listened to carefully and read with great interest. His connections with European philosophical tradition are manifold, complicated and diversified; with a part of it he remains in a serious, deep controversy (Plato, Kant), with another part of it he remains in a cheerful agreement (young Hegel from *Phenomenology*, Nietzsche, the early Heidegger, the late Wittgenstein). It is also the case with his connections with contemporary European philosophy – apart from favorites (Derrida, Habermas) there are those he dislikes (the late Heidegger, Foucault). Rorty as a philosopher of the unprecedented erudition – surely, as many commentators admit, the greatest in the USA as far as the two traditions, American and European together, are concerned - in his philosophizing takes a stance towards the whole philosophy which, from our perspective of more than twenty five hundred years and Greek origins of philosophical conceptuality is European first and foremost. Therefore writing about Rorty, in my view, seems to require to take him in the broadest philosophical context he deserves – rather than a narrow, though institutionally perfectly well developed, context of analytic philosophy (or of no longer exciting classical pragmatism). "Connections", finally, refer to a polemical context of Rorty's writing, its context of discussion; they give the possibility of showing him from the perspective of others and in comparison with others, of whom he writes in his texts. Let us put it at the beginning, before we will discuss the issue in more detail: the present book never had monographic intentions, it does not want to tell a complete story of its philosophical protagonist in the manner of a German

Bildungsroman that presents its hero from the perspective of passing time, nor does it want to present the whole of Rorty's work from a unifying viewpoint or to present particular stages of Rorty's development (particular books), starting with the "early" Rorty, with the "medium" one to the "late" Rorty, if the first would be supposed to be Rorty until *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the second – Rorty from this book, and the latest – Rorty from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* onwards.[1] The book presented here intentionally is not a monograph, hence its poetics and architecture are different. We do not believe in the possibility (not to mention – desirability) of a reading and showing of the whole work in an innocent and objective way, so we are merely showing the part that also interests us, in an entanglement with other parts of today's philosophy that interest us. There is also a practical reason: Rorty is a philosopher who is still writing, providing his past writings with a new dimension, presenting recontextualizations and redescriptions of them in the light of what he is thinking at the moment (which is testified most strongly in his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids"). The monograph of what is – not only does not say what is going to be but also, furthermore, does not say anything about what was but is still evolving together with Rorty's self-description, with his changing self-image.

And finally the third term from the theme mentioned in the opening sentence of the book: "neopragmatism". It is a useful but not too revealing a term; it is a label useful on a big scale, useless if one takes a look at it in detail. The most important for me is the prefix "neo-" which suggests difference from and contrast to what the American philosophy has been proud until today. I get the impression that there are many other terms that would be equally telling, for Rorty's work is very broad and would require many

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[1] I will be referring to Richard Rorty's books in the following way: PMN – *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, London: Blackwell, 1980, CP – *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1982, CIS – *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, PP 1 – *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Papers*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, PP 2 – *Essays on Heidegger and Others. Philosophical Papers*, vol. II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

descriptions at the same time; Rorty is to some extent a pragmatist, perspectivist, contextualist, postmodernist, antifoundationalist, conversationist, ironist, historicist, nominalist (similarly, as he says in various places, he is a "Wittgensteinian therapist", "postmodern bourgeois liberal" or a "Deweyan"). It is hard to tell which of these descriptions suit best to the whole of his work (each of them is good to some extent, in the case of one theme, one book, one side of a polemic with one group of his opponents etc.). Let us say that "neopragmatism" in our description results first of all from the frequency of usage on Rorty's part of his favorite "we pragmatists" and from the frequency of usage of this already well established term in publications devoted to his thought. Surely, the terms "pragmatist" and "neopragmatist" do not say a lot about the philosopher, they say a little without mentioning the rest but it seems to me that it is also the case with all the other aforementioned terms.

The book, to sum up, approaches Rorty's work in a specifically chosen way and does not intend to go beyond what was sketched in the title and in the guiding theme (and whoever looked in it for something else, or more, be it a monographic guide to the whole of his work or to his discussions with American analytic philosophy would be disappointed, of which I am loyally warning). The task has been outlined – what we meant was exposing and problematizing, putting in context and enlightening the European side of philosophy of one of the greatest living American philosophers.

To the original intention of the work, the architecture of it is strictly linked. We have assumed here the following principle: the work consists of chapters followed by "philosophical excursuses". The former are focused on Rorty's philosophy, the latter show his philosophy in struggles with other contemporary and past philosophers, providing a more general philosophical background. Philosophers from "excursuses" as well as Rorty's polemics with them throw as much light to his philosophy as chapters themselves. But they show it in a slightly different, wider perspective, necessary in my view for a more general and culturally significant understanding of importance of his philosophy (let us also add that there is no rigid distinction, some excursuses

might become chapters and at least one chapter – might become an excursus, it merely allows generally and in rough terms to make the reader's expectations more concrete). Thus, heroes of the excursuses presented here will be Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, as well as such great past figures as G.W.F. Hegel and Plato, if we were to treat one chapter as lying "in between" the two conventions. Why not Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dewey – those three "most important philosophers of our century", as Rorty calls them in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – and Nietzsche? Dewey is for me a part of "American context" in which I am not going to be engaged. Heidegger and Wittgenstein are key figures for understanding Rorty (who, when asked by Giovanna Borradori who influenced his philosophy most, answers: "I would say, Martin Heidegger[2]). But contemporary contexts of which I am writing here are contexts of living, changing (except Foucault) philosophies, therefore polemical contexts. Although Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein are present in the whole book, they are not as serious heroes of it as heroes of separate philosophical excursuses. The choice was mine and within "European connections" I chose most recent connections, within which the omitted figures often appear. Why these philosophers rather than others? First of all, due to their importance to the development of Rorty's philosophy – by means of defining its position with reference to their philosophical settlements or by means of philosophical tensions born between them. Two factors were decisive: the role played in Rorty's philosophy as he can see it and the role played in it as I can see it. That is as far as contemporaries are concerned, and as far as Plato and Hegel (opposed to Kant) go, the choice was so obvious, considering the fact against whom Rorty's antiessentialism and historicism are directed and the definition of philosophy he refers to most often, that I do not feel obliged to justify it here. Let us mention the relations between Rorty's philosophizing and philosophizing of heroes of my excursuses: Derrida wrote next to nothing about Rorty, Rorty

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[2] Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 110.

merely mentions Bauman, the Rorty-Lyotard exchange is scarce, Foucault never managed to write a single line about him and, finally, the Habermas-Rorty exchange has not been developed more fully yet. But the other side of these relations were so interesting to me that I decided to deal with them in this book. It is rather excursuses that provide most contextual material to Rorty's work, it is them that trace in detail his European connections. The picture that emerges from them is fascinating due to Rorty's versatility because it is something totally different that is at stake in Rorty's struggles for fame and immortality with Derrida (as I am trying to outline the debate here), something else it at stake in his political discussions with Lyotard, and something still else in "merely philosophical", as he calls them, debates with Habermas – which one has to bear in mind. Without these contextual pieces I might be afraid that the book would be dry and devoid of the cultural surrounding of postmodernity in which Rorty's work has been written. Let me put it in the following way: if Rorty's philosophy takes its life juice from controversies with European philosophy, it is hard to imagine for me to cut them off in the present work; and they are essential in my view to show the significance of Rorty's neopragmatism, they are in tune, I hope, with Rortyan way of practising philosophy.

2.

Let us pass on to an attempt of sketching a general background for reflection on Rorty, of some natural environment in which his philosophizing – and my discussion of it – are coined. That will help the reader in reception of his philosophy in general as well as in reading more detailed parts of the work, especially parts of "philosophical excursuses". One can come reflexively to postmodernity – the culture of our times, of the world that surrounds us – from many different perspectives, asking a multitude of philosophical questions. But some of these questions are more common, they appear in the thought of more than just a few philosophers becoming questions that are overtly associated with the spirit of the times, with *Zeitgeist*. One of them is the question of the status, role and place in culture of an intellectual –

a writer, artist, philosopher, at least in a traditional, modern sense of the term. That is a metaphilosophical question, the question not only about topicality of one's own though (which gave rise to modernity in Kant, in the text "What is Enlightenment?", at least in Michel Foucault's view), but precisely the question of topicality of oneself as a philosopher, a writer... According to an until recently firm ideal – and project – of the Enlightenment, the place of an intellectual in culture was somehow superior in advance, being given the credit of trust *ex officio* that was being legitimized by a direct touch with the universal. An intellectual spoke in the name of universality as opposed to all that was merely contingent, historical, particular and individual. He spoke with a loud voice – and was heard with humility and attention – as he was supported by an Enlightenment project with its main part: great "metanarrative of Emancipation" (as Lyotard says). The authority of a modern intellectual was founded upon the idea of history that is developing toward its "natural" end – toward emancipation of humanity from "poverty, ignorance, superstition and lack of entertainment", Lyotard will say. He was listened to as a "spokesman of universality", "conscience of us all", Foucault will say. Or, as Rorty will put it in a different way, philosophy since the times of the Enlightenment became for an intellectual a substitute for religion, became that part of culture in which he "would find the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity as an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance of one's life".[3]

An intellectual *par excellence* until recently was a writer speaking from the position of man, humanity, nation, proletariat etc.; describing and analyzing the current situation from the point of view of the above mentioned entities, identifying himself with a subject endowed with a universal value and telling in the name of it what people should do for the progress to last. "Responsibility of an intellectual is inseparable from a (shared) idea of a universal

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[3] Jean-François Lyotard, "An Interview" (with Reijen), *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 5 (1988), p. 302; Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 126; Richard Rorty, PMN, p.4.

subject".[4] But this *idée d'un sujet universel*, just like the idea of the unquestionable universality, belongs to the times from Zola to Sartre (at least in France). These are the times of modern commitment legitimated by the metanarrative of emancipation, that seem to be already over. What is perhaps the case is that a cultural fertility of a certain historical proposal has been exhausted, and thus the role of an intellectual legitimated within that project and by that proposal collapsed. And it is precisely due to that fact that what Max Gallo from the French government was looking for (during a famous debate of 1983 on the "silence of intellectuals") – calling them to open a discussion on the transformation of France and asking for "concrete implications of their reflections" – comes not from our epoch in a shared opinion of French postmodernists. *Ce qu'il cherche est d'un autre âge*, Lyotard will comment the case brutally.[5] The questions for today are questions arising in the face of the end of something that was supposed to be firm and permanent, but turned out to be just contingent and historical. These are the questions that are worth being answered together with fundamental questions, if not before them. I would be inclined to think that passions associated with deconstruction and Jacques Derrida personally, or with the "affairs" of Heidegger and de Man, come from the urgency of thinking through the questions of the place of a philosopher in culture (and that they are not just substitute discussions of some philosophers who are bored with "real" problems of the end of the century).

It is rather not an accident that probably most energy of philosophers in Europe (and a lot of it in the United States) is spent on debates on other philosophers of the last fifty years or so, on debates – through an image of them – on their own image, a self-image of the philosophical profession (just to give an example, it is enough to mention a few philosophers who felt that they "must" express their views on the subject of Heidegger's Nazi involvments: Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard, Gadamer, Habermas, Steiner, Rorty, Ferry, Baudrillard, Finkielkraut and

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[4] Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris: Editions Galilée), 1984, p. 12.

[5] Ibidem, p. 21.

many others.[6] And these are discussions not only about the body of Heidegger's works (with a famous and widely commented on statement from "Introduction to Metaphysics" about *inner Wahrheit und Grösse dieser Bewegung*, internal truth and greatness of the Nazi movement), but about Heidegger himself, as a philosopher, as an intellectual, and it is perhaps only Richard Rorty who resists that dominating tendency by separating Heidegger's "life" from his "work", which has to be understood in a broader context of what he calls "the private/public split".[7]

3.

The common thread of all chapters and philosophical excursuses presented here can also be shown in the form of the opposition between the private and the public that plays a significant role in all of them. The following question can be read – as well as the temporary answer to that question can be found: what an intellectual (a philosopher) is supposed to do today, who is he supposed to be? It is a metacritical question about his own writings, his own work, a question of pursuits where to inscribe this work to, how to put it in a context of culture. For apart from the fact that one can be read or not as a writer, one can also be useful or not (useful today – or in the future), create one's self or unite a community, create one's life through one's work or one can give an example to others through one's work – as a model of self-creation or as an algorithm of changes in the external world.

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[6] See e.g. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Lyotard's Vienna conference *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1990); George Steiner, "Introduction – Heidegger in 1992" in *Heidegger* (London: Fontana, 1992); Jean Baudrillard, "Necrospective" in *The Transparency of Evil. Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (London: Verso, 1993); Rorty's Heideggerian PP 2 as well as a chapter on Proust, Nietzsche and Heidegger in CIS; the text of Christopher Norris about Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in *What's Wrong with Postmodernism?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990); Jürgen Habermas' interventions in *Historikerstreit - Historikerstreit – the Controversy about the Place of the Third Reich in German History* (London: Aneks, 1990), as well as in Poland some texts from the volume *Heidegger Today* (Warsaw: Aletheia, 1992).

[7] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 111, n. 11.

It may be the case that a simple and radical private/public dichotomy does not exist. That a longer perspective of time or the power of a public influence of a self-creating individual on the one hand, and an individual aspect of public engagement on the other hand, have to be taken into account. Both roads may lead to self-fulfilment and – at the same time – to changes in the surrounding reality. But regardless of the acuteness of the opposition of both spheres and purity of their separation, the question about the place and role of a philosopher is stubbornly present there, which makes one think that perhaps culture is worth being looked at from the perspective of this dichotomy. One can also wonder whether this does not happen to be some postmodern account of the traditional moral/aesthetic distinction, that is to say, of a radical division between the publicly moral (as the privately moral had not existed basically until the times of the late Foucault's projects of "ethics" and – recently – Bauman's "morality without ethics") on the one hand, and the privately aesthetic on the other. What might be heard in these questions are e.g. distant echoes of Kierkegaardian "ethical" and "aesthetical" mode of living, echoes of the twentieth century controversies about "moral message" of literature, "utility" of the avant-garde" etc. etc.[8] If one were to ask how far the origins of the split in question go, one would have to point to ancient Greece – at least in Hegel's readings from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right* – where for the first time appeared the division between man and citizen, a private person, owner of slaves etc. and a public person who performs his civic duties (before Stoicism came, there had only been a citizen, the equation was simple: man = citizen, and it had been almost totality of his identity). The private/public dichotomy sends us also back to a number of classical dichotomies e.g. *bios teoretikos/bios*

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[8] One has to bear in mind, though, that the moralist/aesthete opposition with reference to an intellectual was coined in the context of French debates, in which either a French intellectual was "committed", or he justified himself for not being "committed". It is a narrow and specific perspective, determined by the French culture more significantly from the times of the "Dreyfus Affair", but it nevertheless deserves great attention today. The oppositions presented here shed light merely on a section of the whole, allowing intellectuals (mainly from the left) to produce narratives about meanders of their own biography.

praktikos, thinking/acting, theory/practice, "interpreting the world"/"changing the world", "engagement"/"the ivory tower" etc. All of the above oppositions are equally ambiguous, refer to different spaces of meaning connected with the origin of terms being opposed.

Before we pass to detailed analyses and settlements in particular sections of the book, we would like to make a number of introductory remarks concerning Rorty's view of the role of the philosopher in postmodern world. That will not be the picture as it emerges from his books, as it is well known and widely discussed (also in further parts of our book). We will be dealing in this introduction for a moment, for a change, with tiny texts, uncollected interviews, occasional statements and even (published) philosophical correspondence. Thus, from a more traditional perspective, we will be dealing with the margin of his work. But the margin in question, owing to its clarity and openness, is extremely interesting, showing things that the so-called work sometimes only hints at. In most general terms, Rorty from among all philosophers referred to in this introduction is most concrete – he writes about the American intellectual of the end of our century who is well known, rich and works at the university, saying, for instance the following: "I think the solution in the rich North Atlantic democracies is that the intellectuals have their natural home in the University".[9] Bauman, Lyotard or Foucault write or wrote about the intellectual "in general", basically by abstracting from a local situation in England or in France (whether they would be "legislators" and "interpreters" of the first, the "intellectuals" for whom there remains only a "tomb" of the second, or "specific" and "universal" intellectuals of the third); although Rorty on numerous occasions reminds of a different situation of the intellectual in America, Poland or in the Third World countries, he restricts his reflections to the American intellectual. We will be writing here about his attitude towards "humanistic intellectuals" and to "philosophers" who may, but do not have to, be included among the former. Who are intellectuals in question according to Rorty? – these are people

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[9] "Interview with Richard Rorty" (Jorge Secada), unpublished typescript, p. 15.

who read a lot of books in order to "enlarge their sense of what is possible and important – either for themselves as individuals or for their society".[10] What matters most to them is – the theme that reappears in almost all Rorty's statements on the subject – reading lots and lots of books, obviously, as *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* explains, to become a different person, not to get stuck in the vocabulary one has been socialized in, not to view this vocabulary as the only possible. Tasks that "philosophers" face in Rorty's account depend on an account of "philosophy" itself. If it is seen as one of peripheral humanistic disciplines, a discipline that used to play an important role in culture and whose role is getting smaller and smaller (although there is a lot of rhetorics on his part, let us add), then also the role of the philosopher is small and insignificant precisely as a philosopher, a representative of his discipline (which, incidentally, does not mean his small role as an educated and enlightened, cultural humanist). The curse of philosophy, bringing about an undeserved amount of criticism from outside the academy is that it happens to have this "big, important name attached to it"[11], with which traditional obligations and duties, questions and "philosophical" problems are inextricably linked.

What specific should be today about one of many humanistic disciplines as he views philosophy to be, and what would be social utility of it, Rorty asks. He discusses and rejects two answers given by some philosophers in self-defence acts: first, philosophy teaches the ability of clear thinking (what does not? he adds), second, it provides us with professional expertise necessary in social politics (which can be done by any educated humanist because philosophers do not have any special knowledge on the subject at their disposal, he answers). The fault of philosophers is responding to the society's challenge when it asks, for instance, through financing federal agencies, "what for" philosophers are. "The general reply to the question, what are philosophers for? is,

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[10] Richard Rorty, "The Humanistic Intellectual: Eleven Theses", *ACLS Occasional Paper No 10*, American Council of Learned Societies, 1989, p. 9.

[11] Richard Rorty, "What Are Philosophers For?", *The Center Magazine*, Sept./Oct. 1983, p. 42.

don't raise questions like that".[12] Generally speaking, answers to such questions provided by philosophers today are harmful because philosophers say strange things and they should rather give a short reply – leave us alone, give us academic freedom (a very important subject for Rorty[13]) that guarantees high standard of education. If philosophers claim that they have access to special knowledge of a special status, then they raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled which, in turn, causes various reactions of unsatisfied society of tax-payers. Rorty defends the humanities against their "politicization" and "radicalization" (which is common mainly in the English and Comparative Literature Departments), he is against attacks on liberal country and liberal universities both from a right side of Straussists (e.g. by Allan Bloom with his vision of "Nietzscheanized America" by its "Nietzscheanized left") as well as from the left side of literary theorists – which sees in everything bourgeois degeneration and phallogocentric domination.

The issue of social utility of philosophy today is one of the fundamental, if not the most fundamental, point of disagreement with the majority of his most serious American critics (such as Richard Bernstein, Thomas McCarthy or Nancy Fraser). Rorty says: "Do not look to philosophy departments for heroic virtues".[14] In recent years the influence of other disciplines has increased, that of philosophy has decreased, and these are facts, he adds. In a fascinating debate between The Third World (Anindita Niyogi Balslev from India) and America (Rorty), whose traces we can find in a recently published book *Cultural Otherness. Correspondence with Richard Rorty*, Rorty responds to accusations of uselessness of his neopragmatism to feminism in the following way:

> From the fact that all knowledge is an instrument of power it does not follow that, as you claim, "philosophers matter; their ideas are of consequence". Nor does this follow from the fact that Mussolini used Nietzsche,

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[12] Ibidem, p. 42.

[13] See Richard Rorty, "Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?", *Academe* vol. 80, No. 6, Nov./Dec. 1994, pp. 52-63.

[14] Richard Rorty, "What Are Philosophers For?", p. 43.

> Jefferson used Locke, Stalin used Marx, or Roosevelt used Dewey. Sure, philosophers have often mattered, but then so have astrologers and shamans. The question is how much they matter – of what consequence their ideas are – for the issue at hand: how to establish a global community.[15]

Thus, to accusations directed to Rorty of maintaining the *status quo*, of its apology (Bernstein), Rorty could answer in a pragmatic spirit that they would be pertinent if the *status quo* got transformed only with the help of philosophers who came forward with ideas that change the world. But this is not the case. Rorty asks in this context what is so special in philosophy that while an engineer or a mathematician is entitled to say that he does not have anything useful for social purposes at the moment, a philosopher is not. There is, of course, a broad, etymological sense of "philosophy" as "the love, or pursuit, of wisdom" but – Rorty adds – "who uses 'philosophy' in this sense these days?", adding dramatically:

> Philosophy is not a magic wand which can make dreams come true, and a set of philosophical doctrines (such as pragmatism) is not to be judged on the basis of efficacy in doing so.[16]

Thus philosophy should not be expected to be something that is beyond human power, something that goes beyond the very discipline although it was supposed to become for many people a secular religion, just like philosophers were supposed to become secular priests endowed with a privileged access to truth which is denied to regular mortals, to regular scientific and humanistic disciplines. Why philosophy professors should be better in thinking about problems of contemporary world than all other intellectuals, all other educated people of all trades and specializations? Philosophy is, let us remind one of Rorty's memorable

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[15] Richard Rorty in A. N. Balslev, *Cultural Otherness. Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1991), p. 81.

[16] Ibidem, p. 84.

expressions, "a matter of telling stories: stories about why we talk as we do and how we might avoid continuing to talk that way".[17] We will return to the idea of philosophy as telling stories on many occasions in this book as this is one of the most widely spread themes in postmodern thinking in general. Rorty answers to a penetrating McCarthy's criticism that one cannot assume that, as philosophers, we can be useful in a specific way – within our professional abilities – for struggles with racism or imperialism. We develop this theme in a chapter on "philosophy and politics", but let us merely evoke in the introduction Rorty's fundamental statement from a text pronounced on a conference in Mexico in 1985: "we should not assume that it is our task, as professors of philosophy, to be the avant-garde of political movements".[18] Instead of developing particular themes in Rorty's thought, as I am doing in further parts of the book, I just intended to outline the contours of his position in most general terms as it reveals itself from the margins of his work. They are interesting (and necessary) and I evoke them here to show Rorty's view of "intellectuals" and "philosophers" from the most general and philosophically non-developed perspective.

Thus the thought of Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault – if looked upon from a certain perspective – puts somehow the same questions, the questions of the spirit of the times. And no matter whether we take the Lyotardian poles of art and politics or art and a critical theory, or Foucault's "ethics" in the sense of *rapport à soi*, attitude toward oneself on the one, and genealogical struggles with power on the other hand, or, finally, Rorty's reading of Derrida and Foucault within the framework of the solidarity/self-creation opposition, the questions I am dealing with here somewhere on the far-away horizon refer to their authors as well. The questions ask about the status of the one who is asking in the question he asks. Those who put questions ask about themselves, about choices they make in their philosophy. The reason for putting such

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[17] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy without Principles" in *Against Theory. Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism,* (ed.) W.J.T Mitchell (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 135.

[18] Richard Rorty, "From Logic to Language to Play", *APA Proceedings, Special Reports*, Eleventh Inter-American Congress of Philosophy, p. 752.

question is a collapse of a distinct and permanent place in culture accorded so far to an intellectual. The monument of unquestionable authority is a little useless and a little impossible: on the one hand, too powerless to change much, on the other not as important as he used to be when immature society was to be kept in order with the help of his intellectual capacities. Perhaps the place of an intellectual in Enlightenment culture (that has lasted in its manifestations until the present) may be derived from the Kantian interpretation of *Aufklärung* as a "passage of man from immaturity in which he has fallen through his own fault" – with the help of reason. Mature leaders (Bauman's "legislators") and immature, yet-to-be-formed "sheep"? The passage to that maturity (*Mündigkeit*) as an act of courage that requires support, offered by those who are already mature owing to their own work? For what Kant had it mind was that everyone, if he is only willing to, can be mature, but not all people want maturity... "Frenchmen, Germans, yet another effort..." – one could say. Also Marx's project required carriers of ideas that would be more clever than the proletariat (and let us remember, Marx never crossed the factory gates, as Paul Johnson says in *The History of the Jews*, studying the scandalous prostitution of the capital in cosiness of the British Museum...)

To hold these preliminary considerations in strict frames of traditional descriptions, we can ask whether "postmodernists" are not trapped within still another opposition, namely the opposition between the moral and the aesthetic, or more generally, between moralism and aestheticism, that is, between being a moralist and being an aesthete. I am gradually coming to the conclusion that it may be the case that they want to be both the former and the latter, which considering a certain redefinition of both notions and fitting them to our postmodern world might be possible (a classical example is the late Foucault's "ethics" as an "aesthetics of existence"). If ethics becomes that Foucauldian "attitude toward oneself", then – just like in Bauman's idea of "morality without ethics" (without legislative ethics, to be exact!) – the Socratic "care of the self" becomes fully ethical rather than "merely aesthetic". Life and philosophy understood as a "work of art" (from Nietzsche to Foucault) is another idea breaking the traditional distinction.

Foucault's "philosophical ethos, philosophical life"[19] cuts across the distinction in question. It is a way of life that is both moral and aesthetic: "from the idea that the self is not given to us there comes, I suppose, just one practical consequence: we have to make a work of art of ourselves".[20] What may become an ethical task of a thinker is an aesthetical attitude toward oneself – the "stylization of existence" that Nietzsche wrote about in *The Gay Science*.[21]

4.

Let us pass on now to more detailed considerations focusing on the questions (accusations?) whether postmodernists taken care of here are "aesthetes" and what might be possible consequences if they were. We would mean here, obviously, "aesthetes" in the traditional sense of the term, although without traditional, pejorative surplus senses (thus "dandies", Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and many more). "Aesthetes" compared with "writers", opposed to those who are "committed", compared with philosophers, poets... Further: aesthetes radically opposed to politics and politicians (as they have no longer dealt with science, at least since the times when they – as Rorty – came to the conclusion that it is not "the most interesting, promising or exciting field of culture", as he puts it in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*[22]). Aesthetes, finally, opposed to traditional

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[19] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que les Lumières?" (published as an *inedit* in France as late as in 1993), *Magazine littéraire*, No. 309, 1993, p. 73.

[20] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress" in *The Foucault Reader,* (ed.) Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 340.

[21] Foucault said: "... the most important work of art that has to be taken care of, the main field to which we have to apply aesthetic values, are ourselves, our lives, our existence" (*The Foucault Reader*, p. 234). "We need one thing – Nietzsche says. To provide our character with a "style" - it is a great and rare art" (*The Gay Science*, 290). Recently written, often monumental Foucault's biographies usually end with chapters about "life as a work of art" – cf. e.g. Didier Eribon's *Michel Foucault*, trans. B. Wings (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) or the English book by David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon, 1994).

[22] Rorty nevertheless deals with science in his philosophy, I skip over these questions altogether in the present book, referring those interested to the article

"intellectuals", figures of the kind of Emile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre, especially, almost paradigmatically, opposed to the latter. Thus, instead of explaining who was that nineteenth-century aesthete and what was his attitude to culture, we shall deal here with his today's potential oppositions, imposing to an extent the term that has no longer been used, that has lost clear reference – on figures analyzed here and attitudes represented by them. And I am going to do this in order to consider whether – appearing from time to time – descriptions of postmodernists as "aesthetes", as well as (helplessly often) attempts of the latter to show that they and their works are not "merely aesthetic", may mean anything and whether they should be treated as an insult and attempts to be safe from it, respectively. For one could also say the following: yes, precisely, as a philosopher I am also an aesthete in the situation when I do not like (for it is no longer possible?) the engagement of an intellectual in a traditional, Enlightenment-based sense of both terms. But would being an aesthete in such a redefined sense of the term exclude me from the circle of moralists? Does such an opposition still make sense?

So who will we be dealing here with? Richard Rorty's figure of a "liberal ironist" (or rather – an "ironist" only), a "marginalized" intellectual, Bauman's account of an intellectual (philosopher, sociologist of postmodernity and postmodern one, at the same time) who suffers from "political irrelevance": who can – as Derrida says[23] – *tout dire*, say everything, endowed with unprecedented freedom, but only within a closed, magical circle of the Academy, without an exit to the so-called "world". We shall also deal with Foucault's account of the role and tasks of an intellectual within his "aesthetics of existence", and, finally, with the Lyotardian figure

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of Anna Palubicka and Jerzy Kmita "The Question of Utility of the Concept of Experience" in *The Search for Certitude and Its Postmodern Denigration*, Jan Such (ed.), as well as to a text by Anna Palubicka, "Richard Rorty's Conception of Science" in *Postmodern Inspirations in the Humanities*, Anna Jamroziakowa (ed.), Poznan, 1993.

[23] See the discussion preceding the volume of Derrida's texts on literature, entitled *Acts of Literature*, (ed.) Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), e.g. p. 36, or the conversation with Derrida and Francois Ewald "Une 'folie' doit veiller sur la pensée" (*Magazine littéraire*, Mars 1991), p. 23.

of a "libidinal aesthetician" and "aesthetician of the sublime" in his later texts, the one who seeks "resistance through writing" (painting etc.).

All the above philosophers were "growing" to "aestheticism" in the sense being vaguely outlined here, just as the evolving world was growing to it starting from, say, May '68. Both Rorty and Lyotard used to think in the past, at the beginning of their philosophical careers, that the "mission" or "vocation" of a philosopher is to change the world, to be radically opposed to the status quo (distant echoes of Conrad's "dispensing justice to the visible world"). Rorty was charmed with Platonism (that could link "reality" and "justice", as well as "virtue" and "wisdom"[24]), Lyotard was charmed with radical Marxism, then Marxism and Freudianism, grand philosophical visions in which philosophers were ascribed particular roles and where they were judged on the basis of their utility: a philosopher was supposed to become a king, or a king – a philosopher, and a "committed" individual was supposed to "change the world", rather than to "interpret it", according to a well known thesis of a Marx. This is testified by their philosophical texts, as well as autobiographical fragments, redescribing the past in the name, and from the point of view, of the present. Lyotard: "Socialism ou barbarie", Algerian texts, polemics with Souyri, Castoriadis, "Pouvoir ouvrier", until *Economy libidinale* where, finally, within the framework of the Marxian opposition in question it is clearly said: "to interpret the world, damn!", as well as where the first realization of the danger of aestheticism and elitism is formulated. Rorty: how to reconcile "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids", how not to be ashamed of being interested in "socially useless flowers"[25] – the questions that did not fit into the philosophical vocabulary of analytical philosophers and which could be explicitly articulated after final settling accounts with analytical philosophy and – broader – with the whole "foundational" kind of philosophy (in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) in a new constellation of philosophical questions of

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[24] Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids", *Common Knowledge*, vol. 1, no. 3.

[25] Ibidem, p. 141.

Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. The questions found their answer embodied in "privatized philosophy" of Jacques Derrida, in "idiosyncratic visions"[26] of a philosopher-writer who - as Proust in literature – "have extended the bounds of possibility" and who relegated philosophy – together with poetry – to the private sphere and radically separated it from the political, social or ideological (in the manner of Jürgen Habermas). In a word: let politics be made by "social engineers" on an experimental rather than theoretical basis and let philosophy be made by philosophers in a full separation from public matters (thus "de-theoreticized politics" on the one hand, and "de-politicized philosophy" on the other hand, as Thomas McCarthy puts it[27]). This is the sense of radical incommensurability of "self-creation" and "solidarity", the private and the public, the sense of "the private/public split", as Rorty calls it. And it is close from here, let us add, to the Foucauldian account of philosophy as a "work of art" (it was already in Lyotard's *Economy libidinale*, in the most provocative and attacked chapter at that time, "Desire Named Marx", that Marx was treated as a "work of art" rather than as a "theoretician") – it is close also to the account of philosophy as "transforming one's self", that is to say: "self-creation". (It is also worth adding at that point that the whole conception of philosophy of Ancient Greece of Pierre Hadot in *La Philosophie comme l'exercice spirituel* goes precisely in that direction – a philosopher "takes care of a soul", as Socrates puts it, of his own soul, by means of spiritual exercises, just like he takes care of his body by means of physical exercises).

And finally Zygmunt Bauman from his recent texts, for instance from *Intimations of Postmodernity*, in which he recognizes a fundamental powerlessness of philosophers and sociologists – to whom their own "canons of works", "texts from the history of philosophy" are left, of which they are supposed to take care, in

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[26] Also Rorty himself being "homo idiosincraticus", as Lech Witkowski is writing of him in the text "Homo Idiosincraticus. Richard Rorty or the Debate over Significance of Irony" in *Postmodern Inspirations in the Humanities*, Warsaw, PWN, 1993.

[27] Thomas McCarthy, "Ironie privée et décence publique" in a splendid collective volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences*, (ed. par) Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris: l'éclat, 1992).

the manner of Jacques Derrida's metaphilosophical analyses of classics of philosophy[28] Bauman who is clearly against "legislative reason", represented as a standard by Kant and who supports "interpretive reason" devoid of socio-transformative aspirations. This is as far as the evolution of today's postmodern (the term that no longer means much) thinkers is concerned in the most general terms. Lyotard will protest against the word "postmodernist" – saying that there are two senses of "postmodernism", that something else is an artistic and commonly accepted in the culture of today sense of the term, and something else is his own philosophical, normative project etc.; Rorty will protest – saying that he is merely a "neopragmatist", a "pupil of Dewey" and that he does not wish to be associated with Frenchmen too much, and finally Bauman will express his opposition against the term – saying that what he does is just "sociological hermeneutics" and if at all, he could only be associated with Foucault's account of modernity as a "march towards prison" or with Baudrillard's accounts of *la societé de consommation*... And they will all be right, obviously. Let us then put it in another way: we are writing here about aesthetes (in different, studied here sense and degree), and if "postmodern" at all, then "postmodern" in the sense of belonging to "postmodern epoch", "postmodern times", that is to say – "times of today". And the only question is whether an "aesthete" as a name will not be in their eyes a greater insult – and might not raise more vivid protests – than a "postmodernist"... Another choice might be that of a "moralist" but, as we shall be trying to show, the difference aesthete/moralist is becoming more and more blurred nowadays.

5.

Let us remind – by way of a contrast – a couple of thoughts that only recently revived fervor for changes made by philosophy and owing to it – of perhaps the last – great philosophical optimist of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl. Who would be able to give expression – as Husserl did in Vienna and Prague in 1935 – to

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[28] See e.g. Bauman's interview closing *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992).

such convictions, who would share them today... Let us listen to Husserl: "In that ideally directed all-community [Europe], philosophy preserves a guiding function and its particular infinite task: the function of a free and universal theoretical thought that includes also all ideals and an all-ideal, that is, a universe of all norms. In the humanity of Europe, philosophy ought to perform its function as an archontic function of the whole humanity". Further on Husserl writes of "philosophy as an idea, an idea of an infinite task" and, finally – what sounds so horrifying in that place and at that time – of "rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy through the heroism of reason". How quickly "Europe" – that "unity of spiritual life, action, creation" – has lost faith in its *entelechia*, and philosophers – in its spiritual mission... Husserl would be furious seeing the "irresponsibility" of contemporary philosophy (not only "postmodern" one – with exception of post-Marxist and feminist - but also analytical one, isolated from the world and culture in an absolute way, the ivory tower of the end of the twentieth century). Philosophy in its postmodern version (just like "postmodernists-aesthetes" considered here) has renounced its "guiding", "archontic" function in the world, considering as "metanarrative" the past belief that philosophy is a "universe of all norms". It no longer believes in its "infinite task". And "rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy" (through "heroism of spirit") sounds so fantastic to philosophers responsible for their words that their hands begin to tremble... Husserl's belief in philosophy can be envied today, in the situation in which no longer being a substitute for religion, it stops or has already stopped being a substitute for science (cf. Charles Taylor's articles about "post-epistemological age"[29]). Philosophy used to turn to politics in the fervent sixties, for some people it is still a "weapon" for their fight (as Rorty puts it in his response to Christopher Norris) with capitalism, exploitation, alienation of work and disciplinary society. (It is precisely such "postmodernists" – mainly American and

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[29] Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, (eds.) K. Baynes, J. Bohman, T. McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 464-488; "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition" in *Reading Rorty*, (ed.) A. Malachowski (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 257-277.

Marxist disciples of Derrida – that Rorty has to repudiate, it is perhaps mainly due to them that he does not want to be called a "postmodernist", he, a professor of philosophy devoted to liberal democracy and proclaiming the United States of today "the best of possible worlds"). But the awareness of being cut from the possibility of changing the world is becoming more and more common (in a most explicit way its is presented, apart from Rorty, by Zygmunt Bauman who provides the picture with a sociological support: the "need" for intellectuals is over, rulers no longer need legitimacy as rulers, no longer need narratives legitimating power, Leviathan does perfectly well without intellectuals' background. The background thus returns to – subsidized and independent because no longer significant and influential – Academies).[30] A philosopher no longer feels he is a "functionary of humanity", as Husserl said in *Crisis* in 1937, he often may feel to be a "private philosopher", as Rorty writes of Derrida in and after his *The Post Card*. Perhaps that is the role – outsiders of a system, although taken care of and bred by it – to be played by aesthetes (or moralists). One would like to speak of "the power of taste", in

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[30] Writing about the figure of an intellectual, one cannot omit several crucial Zygmunt Bauman's considerations, that is to be more exact, his redefinition of the intellectual's role and place shown in the form of the passage from the metaphor of "legislators" to the one of "interpreters" – as one of the ways of looking at postmodernity, interpreters, today's intellectuals, being granted "autonomy devoid of practical significance out of a closed world of intellectual discourses" (*Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 16). Then one has to mention a highly idiosyncratic account, specific perspective and a significant choice of figures of intellectuals in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, where a modern intellectual – Shestov, Mannheim, Kafka, Simmel – is "outrooted", is an "eternal wanderer and universal stranger" for whom exile is a "blessing" (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991, p. 83). It is similar in an essay on Benjamin where the author says that a common fate of an intellectual is "exile". It is obviously a motive of a famous saying of George Steiner: My homeland is my typewriter, just like in Hannah Arendt when she says – in *Thinking* – that "thinking ego ... is nowhere. It is homeless in the full sense of the term"... But it seems to me that the author reads in his works one of ways the twentieth century intellectuals have chosen, but there was also another, excessively public, too much committed – the whole "French" road, so to speak, which forms a margin of the present book... It seems to me that none of them is universal and both Zygmunt Bauman for his narratives about modernity and postmodernity, as well as me for my story about postmodernity, need proper heroes: "outrooted" – and "committed", respectively... See my "philosophical excursus" on Rorty and Bauman for details.

favorite expression of Zbigniew Herbert, a great Polish poet, but that is as worn out a bit of words as the figure of a committed intellectual is worn out: the power of aesthetic taste, the power of aesthetic judgement devoid of rules, the power of singularity of an event, the role of *phronesis*, hidden potencies of the "wisdom of the novel", the return to the Aristotelian judge from *Nicomachean Ethics* who judges without rules, as well as producing works and rules for an evaluation of it at the same time. And also a philosophical ethos – the criticism of, as Foucault puts it, "what we are saying, thinking and doing on the basis of a historical ontology of ourselves".[31] These are just several catchwords - answers provided by Lyotard, Rorty and Foucault to the end of traditional attitudes in philosophy.

6.

Thus, returning to fundamental questions here: as an intellectual is no longer *engagé*, is it possible that he is gradually becoming an aesthete (for, as we noted, the very term "intellectual" ceases – in such a post-Enlightenment account – to mean much)? Is such an opposition meaningful, is committment an opposite pole to aestheticism (and it was committment that perfectly well defined French post-war intellectuals)? Does the turn from the public to the private, to use Rorty's distinctions from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, from the public today, that is to say, from current political questions – not egoistic but rather associated with an *exhaustion of a certain cultural project* (the one of *Aufklärung*), at least in that part of it – mean, among other things, the turn to aestheticism? And perhaps the turn to moralism? These are very important questions that will appear in the book many times, finally reaching an (uncertain and ambiguous) answer.

An aesthete loves art and literature. He is not satisfied with the so-called struggles for a better tomorrow (and that is not accidental that Habermas – one of those "philosophers with a public mission", as Rorty might call him – does not take interest in art). He is many-sided, while a committed philosopher is selective and

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[31] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que le Lumières?", p. 70.

flattening, reducing the multitude and complicacy of questions to a simple and single formula: what interests does it serve? French philosophers prefer painting to music, the domain of Germans – is not it therefore that Mann's *cold* Adrian Leverkühn is a composer, although he ought to have been rather a philosopher... – Lyotard in his texts constantly refers to the avant-garde painting (e.g. Barnett Newman, Valerio Adami, Jackson Pollock), while Derrida and Foucault write more about literature. And finally Rorty who writes about literature (Nabokov, Orwell, Kundera, Dickens), avoiding visual arts. A work and a commentary become closer to each other, as do a critic and an artist. Critics of aesthetes will say – how "playful", "useless", "elitist" and "care-free". An entertainment of aesthetes while what is at stake (in philosophy, literature, theory...) is preservation of the *status quo*/ overcoming of the *status quo*. While "Titanic" is sinking... There appears the motive of "irresponsibility", the most favorite motive of critics of postmodernism... What comes to mind are Richard Rorty's words about his own philosophical youth: "I was uneasily aware, however, that there was something a bit dubious about this esotericism – this interest in socially useless flowers ... I was afraid that Trotsky would not have approved of my interests in orchids".[32] And one knows that "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids" cannot be reconciled, they one can either be an intellectual snob or a friend of humanity and fighter for justice... Much more was done for the sake of better living of people by novels than by philosophical theories, Rorty says (which I examine carefully in a chapter on Rorty and literature).[33] And in the view of critics, it is only an aesthete (irresponsible jester, *homme des lettres*, paraphilosopher) that can say things like these, that can choose literature before philosophy, narrative before theory, detail before the universal, irrationality before reason (unity of reason, be it even in "diversity of its voices"). Literature, art – these are domains unworthy of being explored by philosophers. For there are those

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[32] Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids", p. 143.

[33] This is one of constant motives of Rorty's thought of recent years. See the text "Brigands et intellectuels" from *Critique*, p. 468 or "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" from PP 2.

"perennial problems of philosophy"... Philosophy still would like to be a foundational "queen of sciences", the first lady on the postmodern scene... There are things, though, that probably – today – cannot be done. And this results from a purely contingent set of circumstances rather than from a progress of human spirit in the course of human history, as Hegel or Husserl dreamed, or from teleological deepening of consciousness, coming of Spirit on a higher level etc. It so happened, Rorty would say (following Kundera both from *The Art of the Novel* and from his recent *Les Testaments trahis*), that "the wisdom of the novel" gives culture more today than hypostasied "wisdom of philosophy". And this is not any revenge of Plato after the ages.

An aesthete. He does not want to influence directly – does not imagine he might have such authority and such right – the shape of the surrounding world. He provides the shape to himself instead and provides himself as a model for others rather than shapes the historical-political matter of the present. He acts slowly and deliberately. He does not engage in current socio-political debates and does not solve the so-called "pressing problems of contemporaneity". If he speaks of the present, he does it indirectly, in a vague and ambiguous manner. He may wait for his readers, for his time, like Nietzsche. He does not participate in struggles for the shape of the state, although it often happens that he engages himself in fights for the shape of education, especially of universities. He interprets the world, perhaps with the intention that other people, later on, might change it to a little bit better. He reinterprets the philosophical tradition, writes the history of philosophy in his own idiom, coins his own vocabulary, according himself – following Nietzsche – a "lordly right of giving names", practicing like the latter "active philology" (Deleuze): "active philosophy". An aesthete. Today's hero of Richard Rorty and Jean-François Lyotard in his multiple embodiments?

How far it is from here to the old Lyotardian desire to be – to recall that painful metaphor indeed – "salt of truth in the wound of alienation", to the desire of "real criticism of the system that may take place ... through interventions of the here and now types", to the task in the form of "questioning and overthrowing the reality

that is evidently unbearable". How far it is, finally, to the Algerian texts![34] The breakthrough for Lyotard appears to have come with *Economie libidinale* in which he finally admitted that his words were not going to change the world, but, as we have already mentioned, to interpret it.

A couple of words about Michel Foucault now that we are coming to an end of this introduction. In one of his last texts he is writing about three poles of analysis in his reflection: knowledge, power and ethics; let us mention the specifically seen "ethics", these *rélations à soi*, referred to here several times, the title "care of the self". What is most important in the context that interests us here is the following: the author tries to derive his thinking from Kant's text on Enlightenment (also from it, let us say), inscribing his reflection into the current running up from Nietzsche, Weber to the Frankfurt school. But this is a peculiar reading, as the author seems to put an emphasis on an individual – rather than only collective – side of the Kantian reaching "maturity". At the same time, "ethics" in his account is one of four parts of morality, consisting e.g. of self-forming practices.[35] It is me who becomes the object of ethics. In his conversation with Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault says the following:

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society art has become something associated with objects only, and not with individuals or life. The fact that art is something specialized or something to be dealt with by experts who are artists. *But cannot life of each man become a work of art*? Why a lamp or a house might be objects of art, and our lives might not?[36]

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[34] Jean-François Lyotard, *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 45, 57, as well as the citation from the introduction to *Libidinal Economy* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. xxvi.

[35] See the diagram summarizing Foucault's story from his conversation with Dreyfus and Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader* from Arnold I. Davidson's text in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, p. 229, as well as "Introduction" to II vol. of *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), especially the fragment about "Morale et pratique de soi", pp. 32-39.

[36] *The Foucault Reader*, p. 350 – emphasis mine.

Precisely, these are questions directly from Baudelaire. They are returning today, but in a different context.

Foucault, the *philosophe masqué*,[37] coins his way to affinity with Enlightenment and Kant in a specific reading of the latter. He tries to show that Kant's lecture also opened another way of practicing philosophy. As, he will say, in Enlightenment there is rooted such a philosophical investigation that problematizes at the same time the relation of man to the present, his historical way of life and "constitution of oneself as an autonomous subject".[38] The important question thus might be the following: is the Foucauldian "philosophical way of life" – his last project of philosophizing – really to be derived from Kant? The French philosopher puts an emphasis to the last of the mentioned philosophical triad, to "constitution of a self", so far rather neglected in philosophical reflection. Let us recall Kant's key sentences (not recalled by Foucault, though): "So it is difficult for each single man to get out of immaturity that has almost become his second nature. He has even started to like it, that immaturity of his ... – and Kant's conclusion – So only few people managed to get out of immaturity owing to the work of their own spirit, and to stand on their own feet".[39] To conclude once again, it is possible to enlighten "the public", but individual enlightening pertains to "few only", to those who owe it to "the work of their own spirit". Foucault's last questions, paradoxically enough, appear as "Enlightenment" questions, taken directly from Kant, although in a version forgotten

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[37] As he says about himself, for anonymity was one of his numerous obsessions of a writer, starting with a famous text "Who is an Author?" (1969) in which there is a vision of literature disseminated anonymously (with the closing question of "what is the difference who speaks?"), through a well-known interview - programmatically anonymous - for *Le Monde*, to numerous interviews from the volume *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990). Foucault says: *Why anonymity? Pourquoi l'anonymat? Par nostalgie du temps ou, etant tout à fait inconnu, que je disais avait quelques chances d'être entendu.* But, on the other hand – how to be an anonymous "founder of discoursivity", like Marx and Freud? See Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader,* (ed.) D. Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) pp. 196-210 and "Le philosphe masqué" in *Entretiens avec 'Le Monde'* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984), pp. 21-30.

[38] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que les Lumičres?", p. 69.

[39] Immanuel Kant, "What is the Enlightenment?", p. 160.

and rather absent from our modern culture. If the Enlightenment is to be read also from an individual's point of view, then Foucault would be just exemplarily Enlightenment-like with that respect, and he would realize ethical tasks drawn also in Kant's text by way of an aesthetic constitution of himself... This is just a suggestion that I am not going to develop here, wishing just to mention such a possibility when one considers the moral/aesthetic distinction.

It is perhaps also worth while saying a few words about Foucault's "ethics" in connection with "morality without ethics" recently sketched by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman, suggesting that an ethical crisis does not have to mean a crisis of morality, expresses his distrust in ethically decreed morality (in a traditional sense of the term). He says that "Legislators are incapable of thinking of the world without legislating; ethical legislators are capable of thinking of the world without ethical legislating".[40] What results from this situation – perhaps analogously to Foucault's conclusions – is the "ethical paradox of postmodernity", as he describes it in his *Intimations of Postmodernity*: "moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice".[41] Man, freed from an ethical smoke-screen, from a metanarrative haze that covers ethical choices, receives the burden of his own moral dilemmas. Although he is morally independent (from ethical codes) and morally responsible (before himself and others), it is his burden – and chance? – to "face a 'bare truth' of moral dilemmas".[42] Paradoxically, both project, Bauman's and Foucault's, making use of different vocabularies, say almost the same, namely – choosing *via negativa* in a description – they say what ethics or moral philosophy still keeps silence about[43] But about reasons of absence of traditional ethics

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[40] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality* (Warsaw: The Institute of Culture, 1994), p. 74.

[41] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xxii.

[42] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, p. 84

[43] Arnold I. Davidson says that after Foucault's "ethics" there is no longer an excuse for the poverty of contemporary moral treatises that omit "proper ethics, the relation of self to itself, accounted for independently from a moral code", "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics" in (ed.) David C. Hoy, *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 232.

in culture and its present possibilities, I am writing in more detail in the chapter on Rorty's anti-Platonism, and about Bauman and realtions between Rorty and Bauman, I am writing in a separate chapter.

Chapter I

Philosophy of recontextualization, recontextualization of philosophy. General remarks

1.

Let us begin our more detailed discussions with a rather general chapter that is an attempt to get close to Richard Rorty's philosophical discourse on as broad a plane as possible and with a brief and introductory analysis of certain themes, questions and issues present in his recent books. Thus this will be a chapter not so much introducing to a wider context but rather introducing to Rorty's thought itself. In the next chapters there will appear in the form of more detailed analyses, reconstructions, redescriptions and readings some questions incidentally and generally put here in this chapter. This pertains mainly, but not exclusively, to "philosophical excursuses" presented here. Let us give several examples to link the architecture of the book as a whole to the present chapter. The merely indicated, brief discussions of Jacques Derrida are developed in an enlarged and detailed textual analysis from the "excursus" on "seriousness, play, and fame"; remarks about self-creation and solidarity are developed in a separate chapter; reflections of Rorty's use of literature and his pragmatic attitude towards it are developed in a chapter about the "priority of the wisdom of the novel to the wisdom of philosophy"; remarks about Rorty's attitude towards the history of philosophy in general and to philosophy of Habermas, Foucault, Hegel, and Plato in particular are developed in separate passages. So, the chapter serves in the book the function of an implicit link between most of them, presenting not a general context of Rorty's philosophy (its intellectual surrounding, its opponents and competitors) but rather its internal tensions and connections separated from other philosophers and from a broader plane of discussion presented in further parts of it.

The first volume of Rorty's *Philosophical Papers* (1991) is devoted, for the most part, to the philosophers from the analytic circle, whereas the second to the figures and questions at the heart of which lie the works of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida and Foucault. It causes some noticeable tension between the two volumes but the links between them are created by "pragmatism" (and "liberalism"), strongly stressed and still clarified by Rorty. The first volume is shadowed mainly by one philosopher - Donald Davidson. Whereas when Rorty was writing his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the first and extremely influential book, he was strongly influenced, as he admits himself, by Wilfrid Sellars and W.v. O. Quine, during the next decade (in the eighties) it was Donald Davidson that impressed him most and affected his philosophizing to the greatest extent. "I have been writing – explains Rorty – more and more about Davidson – trying to clarify his views to myself, to defend them against actual and possible objections, and to extend them into areas which Davidson himself has not yet explored".[1] Also in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – the book which seems to use the knowledge and experience of a multitude of texts from the collection of *Philosophical Papers* (and to which Rorty refers the reader as to its exemplification and a more detailed description), and perhaps a crystallization of these articles – he sees Davidson as an absolutely crucial figure for his own considerations, especially those devoted to language, relations between language and reality, created truth rather than discovered one and so on. As is commonly known, Davidson is an antirepresentationalist and antiessentialist, he rejects the notion of language as some medium, as the third thing, intruding between the self and the reality. Knowledge, both to Rorty and to Davidson as well, is not a matter of getting reality right but rather a matter of "acquiring habits of action for copying with reality", as the former puts it.[2] Rorty hopes that the realism-antirealism problem will become as obsolete as now is the realism-idealism problem, that the Anglo-Saxon philosophy will follow the lead of the most Germans

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

[2] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 1.

and Frenchmen currently engaged in philosophy and subsequently put the issue of representation aside, accepting the definition of truth favored by Rorty – truth as "a mobile army of metaphors".[3]

It is just out of the above intuitions, hopes and expectations that to some degree the content of the second volume of Rorty's articles arises. The author examines there those "Continental" thinkers who have broken with the problems of representation and started to search new areas in philosophy. Consequently, as can be seen from these brief remarks, he considers two traditions – the one running up to Davidson and the other running up to Derrida and marked by such figures as (the young) Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Both these traditions, let us note, do not mention some quasi-thing called language which functions as intermediary between the subject and the object, the self and the reality: neither of them mentions the nature of representation, neither tries to reduce anything to anything else.[4] As Rorty puts it: "Neither, in short, gets us into the particular binds into which the Cartesian-Kantian, subject-object, representationalist tradition got us".[5] And that is exactly why they have been objects of Rorty's unflagging interest.

The important point about Rorty, however, is that he warns us – like all "ironists" do – that we should not think of his writings as getting to the Truth, as trying to reach the nature of reality, the

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[3] The definition, let us add, coming from Nietzsche in "On Truth and Lies in Their Ultramoral Sense" which assumes there the following form: "What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymics, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions; worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses, coins which have their obverse *effaced* and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal". See commentaries in Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1982) p. 217; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Preface" to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (p. xxii), Rorty in CIS, p. 27 or Christopher Norris in *Deconstruction: Theory & Practice* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 85.

[4] See Rorty's chapter on "The Contingency of Language" in CIS, pp. 4-22.

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

"reality beyond appearances". That is, that they present one, finite and absolute argumentation and the only possible point of view - which would be in discordance with an ever-increasing and changeable "final vocabulary" of a self-creating individual and first of all inconsistent with the fundamental belief that nothing, as he says in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, mind, matter, our self or our world, possesses an inherent nature, some essence which could be represented or expressed. He makes it clear when he says that "my essays should be read as examples of what a group of contemporary Italian philosophers have called 'weak thought' – philosophical reflection which does not attempt a radical criticism of contemporary culture, does not attempt to rebound it or reactivate it, but simply assembles reminders and suggests some interesting possibilities".[6] Rorty does not search for the nature of reality, for the truth about it (since there is no such truth in his view) – he is involved instead in recontextualization and redescription; one, short statement, to which we shall return more than once in this book, saying that "the most that an original figure can hope to do is to *recontextualize his or her predecessors*"[7] could be thought of as the epigraph to his recent philosophical activities. And that is exactly what he is successfully doing in his texts.

It would be extremely interesting to ask several questions right here, but the answer to all of them will not be provided in this chapter, some of them will be given in further parts of the book. So, first of all, it would be exciting to ask the question about the comparison of the evolution seen in the texts from the eighties with their – in a way – substratum contained in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* which seems to gather a vast majority of themes from the articles from both volumes of *Philosophical Papers*. Second, it seems worthwhile to consider the problem to which extent the texts collected there form a development of a certain fixed ideas (like that of a "scapegoat" in the case of René Girard, for instance) in different places and at various occasions. Third, what is intriguing is Rorty's way of philosophizing: curving his own philosophical views in a fight with other views rather than their

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[6] Ibidem, p. 6.

[7] Ibidem, p. 2 – emphasis mine.

production in isolation, that is, a polemical rather than presentational character of his works. It would also be interesting to trace his attitude towards "postmodernism" as a more and more worn-out concept, to ask about his capability of moving across various spheres of culture, about his style, cultural competence, his very philosophical manners; besides, it is interesting to know to which extent Rorty from both volumes of *Philosophical Papers* follows the recommendations directed later on to the figure of the "ironist",[8] what is his account of liberalism today – is it so strongly stressed here as it is in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* where the liberal utopia is the aim and the point of arrival? We would also like to ask to which extent Rorty is serious – and to which he is "merely ironic" (in the way others are "merely aesthetic" or "merely literary", to use old distinctions), that is to say, what the "language game" he is involved in is, what sort of narrative he produces? It would be no less essential to try to solve the issue of Rorty's identity – whom would he like to be? a writer only, or still a philosopher? what sort of philosopher? Let us remember that Rorty is aiming at blurring differences between and rejecting pigeonholing of various realms of intellectual constructions;[9] the issue concerning the genre that his books belong to would be an issue of the "metaphysician", as opposed to the "ironist", Rortyan cultural hero of the times to come. Finally, without any intention to exhaust a long list of ensuing questions, problems, and doubts, we would also like to put forward a question about the specifically Rortyan "pragmatism without method" which is sometimes referred to violently (especially among historians of American philosophy) as having little in common with pragmatism of its founding fathers. We shall try to touch here on some of the above

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[8] Rorty clarifies who the ironist is in a chapter on "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" from CIS, pp. 73-95.

[9] He does this in the way the French "thought of the difference" and American deconstructionism try to blur the differences between the philosopher and the writer (though only in Barthes' sense of the "author", *écrivain*, rather than the "writer", *écrivant*), philosophy and literature, science and art, a work and a commentary to it. See e.g. Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 80-81 or his "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation" and "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde" (in: *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin, Basil Blackwell, 1989, pp. 181-195 i 196-212).

questions, dealing with others in subsequent chapters of the book and leaving intentionally the multitude of them to careful readers of Rorty's texts.

2.

It seems that the traditional distinctions between philosophy and literature, criticism and art, and a commentary and a work is becoming more and more blurred in contemporary philosophy and literary theory.[10] And what is at stake here is not a form of expression, but rather certain *expectations and obligations* traditionally ascribed to particular genres. Thus it has always been so that a novelist and literature in general "was allowed to do more" or "dared more", so to speak, than a philosopher and philosophy, an artist more than a critic, a work – than a commentary to it. But what may be happening now is that philosophy and literature are steadily seized by some – programmatic – irresponsibility towards social matters, indifference towards their own community (to which Rorty refers as "marginalization"). His work read within such a context perhaps requires slightly different terms to be read. These could be, for example, terms like "books" or "writers", certain key word allowing to get closer to his philosophizing. While the opposition between a writer and a theoretician has found its full expression in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, where Rorty contrasts Proust with Heidegger, as well as philosophy in the traditional sense of the term with the work of such writers as Nabokov and Orwell, it had already been signalled in many texts from *Philosophical Papers*, announcing the future course his thought would take. So such figures as Baudelaire, Swift, Orwell and – above all – Rabelais, Dickens and Kundera appear here in numerous contexts. Especially Kundera, Rorty's favorite, mainly as the author of *Art of the Novel*, the passage from which about thoughtless and dangerous, Rabelaisian agelasts – those who

[10] As Lyotard, to whom owing to our predilections we shall be often referring, says: "Aesthetics becomes a paraesthetics, and commentary a paralogy, just as the work is a parapoetics", "Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation" in: *The Lyotard Reader*, op. cit., p. 191.

never laugh – is, incidentally, the epigraph to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.*[11]

Both in the book about "contingency" as well as in the collected essays from the eighties there appear the (Platonic, by all means) theme of putting the philosopher and the poet in front of each other, in two hostile camps. As we all remember, poets in Plato have been banned from *polis* and philosophers-kings have won their struggle for spiritual power. In the whole intellectual history of Europe since the times of Ancient Greece, it has been precisely philosophers and philosophy who have created these metanarratives viewed as so dangerous by postmodernists – and not poets and poetry. Together with the "incredulity towards metanarratives" shared by Rorty and lying at the heart of the postmodern way of thinking – for it is the way Rorty, following Lyotard, understands postmodernism, with all reservations to the term itself, its uses and abuses, as well as remembering about an additional distinction between narratives and edifying narratives from which only the former are shared by postmodernists, the latter being shared only by always hopeful Rorty[12] – poetry and literature in general is specifically elevated. It was already the work of late Heidegger which seemed to defend poets against philosophers and to re-discover – against the mainstream tradition – the meaning and value of particular *words* and expressions or, as Rorty puts it in his book on "contingency", "the sense of phonemes and graphemes". In the text entitled "Heidegger, Contingency, and

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[11] It is interesting to pay attention to such penetrating Milan Kundera's words, replacing on one's own the "novelist" with the "philosopher" and the "novel" – with "philosophy"... Kundera: "The novel does not state anything – it searches and asks questions... I invent stories, juxtapose them and thereby ask questions. Human stupidity derives from the fact that people have answers to all questions... The novelist teaches the reader to understand the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude. In the world built of the most sacred certainties, the novel is dead. The totalitarian world – no matter whether based on Marx, Islam or anything else, is the world of questions rather than answers. There is no place for the novel there. Or at least it seems to me that today in the whole world people prefer to pronounce judgements rather than to understand, to answer rather than to ask questions – so the voice of the novel is hardly audible among the noisy stupidity of human certainties". *Kundera. The Seminar*, London: Polonia Book Fund, 1988, p. 149.

[12] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation" in PP 1, p. 212.

Pragmatism", Rorty remarks that ever since philosophy won its quarrel with poetry, "it has been the thought that counts – the proposition, something which many sentences in many languages express equally well".[13] According to the traditional account of philosophy, it did not really matter whether a given sentence has been spoken or written, whether it contained Greek, German or English words. Since these words were only vehicles of something less fragile and transitory than "marks and noises". Philosophers thought that what mattered was only the literal truth, and not the choice of phonemes, and certainly not the choice of metaphors. For the literal lasts, the metaphorical – passes without leaving a single trace, it is just "impotent", as Rorty says. It is only Heidegger who discovers that the intellectual development of Europe can be summarized in certain words that we, people of the West, have used over the centuries, and among them there have been such as, for instance: *aletheia, apeiron, logos, arche, idea, telos,* or, closer to us – *res cogitans,* the practical reason, the absolute knowledge, will etc. Heidegger in Rorty's account provides them with too great power and is too much convinced that their use – like the use of a given metaphor by a poet – must have doomed the course of the thought of the West.

Rorty thus contrasts and develops the opposition between a theoretician (called "an ascetic priest", following Nietzsche), who loves simplicity, structure, abstraction and, first and foremost – essence, and a novelist, who deals with a narrative, detail, diversity, multiplicity or accident. He quotes a crucial passage from the aforementioned Kundera's book, the passage which also to us seems worth to be noted as a point of departure and inspiration of many of Rorty's ideas. Kundera says the following:

> The novel's wisdom is different from that of philosophy. The novel is born not of the theoretical spirit but of the spirit of humor. One of Europe's major failures is that it never understood the most European of the arts – the novel: neither its spirit, nor its great knowledge and discoveries, nor the autonomy of its history. ... Like

[13] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 34.

> Penelope, it undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers and learned men have woven the day before. ... I do not feel qualified to debate those who blame Voltaire for the gulag. But I do feel qualified to say: The Eighteenth century is not only the century of Rousseau, of Voltaire, of Holbach; it is also (perhaps above all!) the age of Fielding, Sterne, Goethe, Laclos.[14]

Thus – both for Kundera and for Rorty as well (not to mention Jacques Derrida from *Acts of Literature*[15]) – it is just the novel that is a genre characteristic of democracy, the genre most closely associated with the struggle for freedom and equality (we are developing that idea in far more detail in a separate chapter). In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Rorty adds that also journalists' reports, comic books, etnographer's accounts, documentaries may serve a similar purpose – they may, to be more exact, make us sensitive to the suffering of others, make us see something that otherwise might escape our attention, see still another "source of cruelty", often present within ourselves.

The traditional philosophy is largely criticized in Rorty's account for its essentialism, for the continuing search for (non existing, anyway) essence, nature, be it the "essence of human self", for the desire to reach the "human nature" or the "nature of

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[14] Milan Kundera quoted in Rorty, PP 2, p. 73. Let us note that the metaphorical picture of Penelope undoing her tapestry every night coincides with Rorty's conception of the "contingency of selfhood" from CIS or with J. Hillis Miller's account of the relation between the critic and the text. The differences in critical doing and undoing the tapestry are clear – how different is Derrida from CIS, Derrida from Rorty's "Derrida on Language, Being and Abnormal Philosophy" (*The Journal of Phil.*, Nov.1977, pp. 673-681), not to mention e.g. Derrida of Christopher Norris (from his *Derrida*) or of Paul de Man (from *The Rhetoric of Blindness*, pp. 102-141).

[15] See Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, New York: Routledge, 1992, especially "This Strange Institution Called Literature. An Interview with Jacques Derrida", where he says the following: "The institution of literature in the West, in its relatively modern form, is linked to an authorization to say everything, and doubtless too to the coming about of the modern idea of democracy. Not that it depends on a democracy in place, but it seems inseparable from what calls forth a democracy, in the most open (and doubtless itself to come) sense of democracy" (p. 37).

democracy" or the "essence of justice". Or – as it was the case with Heidegger - for the search of the "essence of the West", of what is "paradigmatically" Western, which he found in *Seinsvergessenheit*, forgetfulness of Being. Heidegger, as well as Plato, are described by Rorty with the Nietzschean term of "ascetic priests": he says that "the Heideggerian counterpart of Plato's world of appearances seen from above is the West seen from beyond metaphysics".[16] Plato looks down, Heidegger looks back, but they both are hoping to distance themselves from what they are looking at.

According to Rorty, the essentialistic approach to human affairs, the philosopher's attempt to replace adventure, narrative and chance with contemplation, dialectic and destiny, is a hypocritical way of saying: what matters to me is more important, I am allowed not to take care of what is important to you because it is me and not you who are in touch with something (reality) that is beyond your reach. The answer of the novelist to the above would be the following:

> [I]t is comical to believe that one human being is more in touch with something nonhuman than another human being. ... It is comical to think that *anyone* could transcend the quest for happiness, to think that any theory could be more than a means to happiness, that there is something called Truth which transcends pleasure and pain. ... What is comic about us is that we are making ourselves unable to see things which everybody else can see – things like increased or decreased suffering – by convicting ourselves that these things are "mere appearances".[17]

What we seem to need in the postmodern world of the end of the twentieth century instead of the appearance/reality distinction (but also instead of those of essence/existence, rational/irrational, objective/subjective, let us add here) is a multitude of points of

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[16] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 70.

[17] Ibidem, p. 74.

view, a diversity of descriptions of the same events. And this is what the novelist does, not the theoretician. The world of one Truth and the relative ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances, Kundera says. Theorizing based on the ideas of One Single Truth and One Proper Description of things omits – due to its essentialization – the "details of pain" and "sources of cruelty" so important and so stressed in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, which in turn are essential links within the domain of literature (as can be seen, for instance, from Orwell).

The opposition of philosophy in the traditional view and of literature, as well as the assimilation of literature by French "new philosophizing", blurring of borders existing so far between art and philosophy – these are perhaps the fundamental features of postmodernity, although the point is not to melt these spheres but to deconstruct them from the inside. The philosopher becomes the "cultural critic", as does the former "literary critic" who criticizes still wider areas of culture. The opposition of theory and narrative, or of metanarrative, metadescription and micronarrative, micrology ("in solidarity with metaphysics at the moment of its collapse", as Adorno says in his *Negative Dialectic*), are the "foundations", to use the fatal word – connected with the traditional philosophical metaphorics – in this context, of postmodernity. Rorty, among other things, says the following about tasks of the philosopher (and once again, we shall return to that crucial quotation more than once throughout the course of our study):

> 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 to tell about other sequences of texts, other genres – stories which fit together with his.[18]

Such a call – even within the sphere of its rhetoric – reminds the proposals an suggestions put forward by Lyotard to "essay", to "create micronarratives", to "tell stories". Lyotard, for instance,

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[18] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 82 – emphasis mine.

in his *Lessons in Paganism*, says that what he is doing is "merely telling a story, developing my own little narrative". He suggests that we should not ask whether a given story is more or less true than any other, but should rather notice that "it exists", that it is "a product of an almost invincible power to tell stories that we all share to a greater or lesser extent".[19] Like Kundera elevates the diversity of descriptions of the same events (and we can consider e.g. *A Farewell Waltz* in this light, not to be restricted to theory only) and Rorty praises the multitude of different descriptions, Lyotard would like to tell "different stories about the same historical and political points" whenever he wishes to.[20] To sum up this passage: let us say the same things in some other way and we shall learn something new, extend the range of our possibilities and the scope of our world, we shall face the unknown (and is not it one of the aims of the aesthetics of the sublime?). Let us not believe in single descriptions bearing in mind that facts or events come to us only through other narratives, remembering that they have already been fixed in some context – and that our narratives use them only as their reference.

We could ask here the following question: does the figure of the "ironist" – a well-shaped result of Rorty's considerations from the book on "contingency" – follow the above advice? He seems so, for, as we remember, the ironist's moral adviser is no one else but just the literary critic, with such a justification that he is the sort of person who "has been here and there", who has visited the country of literary descriptions of the world and thus he will not easily get trapped in a single, unified and common description of it made in a single vocabulary. So this is what is at stake here – he is a person who has read a lot, met many real and fictitious people and who is aware of various possible viewpoints. The ironist loves books because they help him in his self-creation, enlarge his own description of the world, thus he takes care of them, "locates them as friends", "places new ones within the context of old ones" etc.

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[19] Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons in Paganism* in: *The Lyotard Reader*, op.cit., p. 125.

[20] Ibidem, p. 125.

etc.[21] He obviously does not appreciate the philosophy of theoreticians, preferring probably philosophizing in the manner of Lyotardian "essaying" or "saying the unspeakable", philosophizing in the manner of Derridean writing about *philosophers*, about prominent figures taken from the history of philosophy...

We could also ask what is Rortyan "pragmatism without method". American pragmatism in recent hundred years or so, "has swung back and forth between an attempt to raise the rest of culture to the epistemological level of the natural sciences and an attempt to level down the natural sciences to an epistemological par with art, religion, and politics". Thus pragmatism in Rorty's view was a very muddled movement – "neither hard enough for the positivists nor soft enough for the aesthetes, ... a philosophy for trimmers". As far as the title lack of method goes, Rorty makes the following point:

> But this accusation [of intellectual schizophrenia – MK] presupposes that one ought to formulate general methodological principles, that one has a duty to have a general view about the nature of rational enquiry and a universal method for fixing belief. It is not clear that we have any such duty. We do have a duty to talk to each other, to converse about our views of the world, to use persuasion rather than force, to be tolerant of diversity, to be contritely fallibilist. But this is not the same as a duty to have methodological principles. It may be helpful - it sometimes has been helpful – to formulate such principles. It is often, however – as in the cases of Descartes's *Discourse* and Mill's "inductive methods" – a waste of time.[22]

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[21] Let us say that it brings to mind Kundera's belief put in Theresa's mouth in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* that the book "is a recognition signal of a secret brotherhood", for "against the world of brutality, she had just one sort of defence: books...".

[22] Richard Rorty, PP 1, pp. 63, 63, 67.

Thus, as far as a "scientific method" is concerned, Rorty sees just one figure of which it can surely be said that it had never used it – it is Martin Heidegger, who merely "points and hints". That means, however, that "we cannot criticize him for employing another method than the method of science. Heidegger does not employ *any* method. He is not, in *any* sense, competing with science".[23] Rorty does not want to see the philosopher as the intellectual with special rights, with a free access to always hidden Truth. While in European philosophy of the first half of the twentieth century there dominated the belief that what counted was being "scientific" in the sense of applying a certain (dialectical, inductive, analytic or any other) procedure, currently, towards the end of this century, intellectual life

> would not make much of the line between "philosophy" and something else, not try to allot distinctive cultural roles to art, religion, science, and philosophy. It would get rid of the idea that there was a special sort of expert – the philosopher – who dealt with a certain range of topics (e.g. Being, reasoning, language, knowledge, mind). It would no longer think that "philosophy" was the name of a sacred precinct that must be kept out of the hands of the enemy.[24]

The response to a liberal challenge would in Rorty's view be the approaching of pragmatism (without "method") and European philosophy (without the Heideggerian "depth"). Let us note that the architecture of *Philosophical Papers* suits that purpose fine, and it is not accidentally that Rorty speaks of locating post-Nietzschean European philosophy in the context of pragmatism as his own role. He does not see his task, however, in marrying the two traditions which are strange to each other: Continental and analytic philosophy, he just says that the philosophical profession is divided into two institutionalized traditions and that his hunch is that these

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[23] Ibidem, p. 73.

[24] Ibidem, p. 76.

traditions "will persist side-by-side indefinitely. I cannot see any possibility of compromise".[25]

3.

There are several points of departure to try to approach Richard Rorty's philosophy because various traditional distinctions and differences, traditional philosophical commandments, are intentionally becoming blurred there. For he sees culture as a whole, not believing in the existence of some special "scientific" way of dealing with the so-called "philosophical" ideas and treating culture, from physics to poetry, as a "continuous, seamless activity in which the divisions are merely institutional and pedagogical".[26] That is why, in his view, philosophers are both "argumentative problem solvers" like Aristotle and Russell and oracular "world-disclosers" like Plato and Hegel[27], including Heidegger as well as Derrida among the latters. Derrida, this "merely oracular" (Habermas) philosopher, has been an object of unfading fascination – and examination – of Rorty's discourse, especially if we take into account that fact that for Rorty Derrida's philosophy until *Of Grammatology* had been a "false start" and *The Postcard* is in his view the ultimate fulfillment of Derrida's philosophical desires.

Let us start our discussion with the quotation which is of fundamental importance. Rorty says the following:

> The quarrel whether Derrida has arguments thus gets linked to a quarrel about whether he is <u>a private writer</u> – writing for the delight of us insiders who share his background, who find the same rather esoteric things as funny or beautiful or moving as he does – or rather <u>a writer with a public mission</u>. someone who gives us <u>weapons</u> with which to subvert "institutional knowledge" and thus social institutions.[28]

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

[26] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 76.

[27] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 123; the distinction comes from Jürgen Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.*

[28] Ibidem, p. 120 – emphasis mine.

A slightly veiled question about the status and the role of the contemporary philosopher in today's world where no longer any important role is played by narratives of emancipation (which were essential part of the project of modernity) is put forward here; narratives whose author was – let us add for the clarity of our presentation – just the philosopher, the "producer of metanarratives" as Lyotard called them. With the beginning of the period of the "incredulity towards metanarratives", the intellectual's role as the one whose vocation, moral duty and ethical obligation was to "save the world", to create broad, emancipatory social visions, seems to be decreasing considerably. The figure of the "committed" intellectual who finds his moral identity in preparing or promoting a "total revolution", is falling into pieces at the moment (let us add that a typical figure of such "activism" was Sartre and his intellectual itinerary is very characteristic of a large proportion of the twentieth century philosophers and intellectuals).

If Richard Rorty considers today the issue to which extent Derrida is a "private writer", and to which a "writer with a public mission", he does so not without a good reason. For around the problematic of deconstruction and around Derrida himself – as it seems – there is a clash between two distinct models of philosophizing and two models of philosopher; what is at stake here is the problem of the private/public distinction, so stressed by Rorty (at stake is also the fame in manuals of post-Philosophy, of which we writing separately as a Rorty-Derrida struggle going on for a couple of years). The above distinction, already mentioned in many texts from the second volume of *Philosophical Papers*, finds its full expression, development and application in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* where Rorty – devoting one of the most exciting chapters to Derrida in general, and to his *Postcard* in particular – sees him as a fully private philosopher, as opposed to such public ones as Dewey, Rawls or Habermas. Drawing the distinction within the domain of human behavior between actions of self-creation and solidarity, and thus between private and public actions (with respect to their purpose), Rorty can see the incommensurability of both types of behavior, the incommensurability of discourses arising around them and, finally – the impossibility of agreeing them into a single discourse on the

level of theory. Some solution to this issue is provided by the article devoted to Foucault's moral identity and private autonomy ("Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: the Case of Foucault").[29]

The point of the text is that the only charge that could be put forward in his case would concern not his relativism but rather the lack of separation of the two roles played by him (thus, perhaps, the lack of a clear mark in which game one is taking part at a given moment: a private or a public "language game"): for on the one hand, Foucault is a citizen of a democratic country, with a definite moral identity, while on the other, he is still searching for an autonomy being, as Rorty describes him, a "knight" of it. And these two roles – the one strictly private and the other absolutely public, cannot be agreed with each other at a single moment.

The charge of purported "relativism" is very often made with reference to postmodern thinkers.[30] Let us present here shortly only two, exemplary, Rorty's attempts to dismiss the charge; the former comes form the aforementioned text devoted to Foucault, the latter is taken from the article about "postmodern bourgeois liberalism". Contrary to Habermas from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Rorty does not think that Foucault needs to answer the charge of "relativism" because, as he says, "if one is willing, as Dewey and Foucault were, to give up the hope of universalism, then one can give up the fear of relativism as well".[31] If we returned once again to the already mentioned classical Greek opposition between philosophers and poets, it could be said that philosophers, generally, should be "rational" and their "rationality"

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[29] See PP 2, pp. 193-198.

[30] Let us note that instead of harsh attacks on the ethics of postmodern thinkers (in the manner of Jacques Bouveresse from *Rationalité et cynisme* or Manfred Frank from *What Is Neostructuralism?*), one can also speak of a certain – as Zygmunt Bauman says – "ethical paradox of postmodernity". The paradox in question, in rough terms, is that postmodernity gives man once again the full possibility of making moral choice as well as full responsibility for his choice, taking away from him, at the same time, previously guaranteed self-confidence. "Moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice". Morality has been privatized – ethics has become "a matter of individual discretion, risk-taking, chronic uncertainty and never-placated qualms". See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Routledge, 1992; Introduction pp. XXII-XXIII.

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

would consist in their ability to show the "universal validity" of their standpoint. Poets are not expected to do the same. "Foucault, like Nietzsche, 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 that philosophers are as entitled to this privilege as poets, so I think this rejoinder sufficient".[32] In a short, and perhaps once even programmatic to an extent, text entitled "Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism", Rorty accepts another way of relieving postmodernism from a morally hard to bear burden of "relativism"; the view that each tradition is equally rational or equally moral to any other could be held, he remarks, "only by a god" who would only mention the terms "rational" and "moral" (and not use them). Man, however, cannot play the role of a god and escape from history and conversation to contemplation and metanarratives. Rorty – referring to Lyotardian intuitions – thinks that to accuse postmodern thought of relativism is to put a metanarrative in its mouth. "One will do this – he explains – if one identifies 'holding a philosophical position' with having a metanarrative available. If we insist on such a definition of 'philosophy', then postmodernism is postphilosophical. But it would be better to change the definition".[33]

There appears here in this context another interesting issue which we would not like to omit, namely Rorty's ambivalent attitude towards the very terms "postmodernism" and "postmodern". While in *Philosophical Papers* the two terms do occur – mainly as objects of attacks due to their vagueness, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* these words do not appear any more. It turns out that the terms of "liberalism" and "pragmatism" properly semantically modified allow Rorty to locate himself on the intellectual map of the present. Generally speaking, Rorty sees "postmodernism" as "distrust of metanarratives".[34] But already in the "Introduction" to the second volume of *Philosophical Papers*, he admits an

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[32] Ibidem, p. 198.

[33] Richard Rorty, pp 1, p. 202. About postmodernism or, to be more precise, about his own neopragmatism as a "post-Philosophical philosophy" in a "post-Philosophical culture" Rorty wrote already in CP, Introduction, p. xxxvii ff. or p. 143. Apart from post-Philosophical nature of postmodern thought, one could also speak of its metaphilosophical nature.

[34] See Richard Rorty e.g. in PP 1, p. 198, PP 2, p. 1.

unnecessary use of this fatal word (as Wolfgang Welsch says, *ein Reizwort*) in his text. As he puts it: "I have sometimes used 'postmodern' myself, in the rather narrow sense defined by Lyotard as 'distrust of metanarratives'. But I wish that I had not. The term has been so over-used that it is causing more trouble than it is worth".[35] Rorty goes on to explain that he has given up the attempt to find something common to Graves' buildings, Pynchon's and Rushdie's novels, Ashberry's poems or writings of Derrida. He shows his (justifiable, after all) hesitation about issues of periodizing of culture – about "describing every part of culture as suddenly swerving off in the same direction at approximately the same time"[36] – and comes to the conclusion that it would be safer and more useful (how pragmatic!) to periodize and dramatize each discipline or genre separately, rather than see them holistically. It seems worth to be noted that Lyotard clearly distinguished between two senses of "postmodernism" in his writings – the first included his normative, strictly described and philosophical project, and the second was to be used outside of any directly philosophical inspiration and was to refer to architecture (as by Charles Jencks, for example), painting (as by Oliva in his famous discussions of the "transavant-garde") or to literature.[37] Rorty, abandoning the use of the term "postmodernism", seems to resign himself to some semantic inflation, aware of which are other postmodern thinkers, in this particular case, Lyotard.

There is quite a similar confusion surrounding the meaning of "deconstruction" which Rorty considers in his text devoted to an apparently transcendental character of the Derridean project (as such his admirers as Rodolphe Gasché, Christopher Norris or Jonathan Culler would like to read it). Thus, in Rorty's opinion, the distinction between two meanings of "deconstruction" could and should be drawn: one is Jacques Derrida's philosophical project, and the other is the method of reading texts, absolutely alien to

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[35] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 1.

[36] Ibidem, p. 1.

[37] See Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" (in: *The Postmodern Condition,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 71-72, or his "Die Moderne redigieren" in Wolfgang Welsch's anthology (*Wege aus der Moderne*, Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1988), p. 213.

him, as the very idea of "method" is alien to him[38]. If the above distinction is beginning to blur, it really might appear that Derrida did present "strict" "arguments" in favor of some surprising philosophical conclusions, that he has "discovered" some new "method" of practising philosophy and of reading literary and philosophical texts; that seeking "conditions of possibility" (of a use of language), he becomes a transcendental philosopher... Thus, it seems, Derrida's admirers are at loggerheads, Geoffrey Hartman and Richard Rorty love him for inventing a new, ironic way of writing about philosophical tradition rather than for discovering foundations of the so-called "deconstructive literary criticism", which they do not particularly appreciate. Derrida as presented in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – as the author of *The Postcard*, that is, idiosyncratic, private fantasies and philosophical obsessions put down on paper – "privatizes his philosophical thinking ... drops theory ... in favor of fantasizing about predecessors, playing with them, giving free rein to the trains of associations they produce"[39]. According to Rorty, the whole of Derrida's significance lies in his courage to give up the attempt to unite the private and the public, to unite the search for private autonomy and the search for public utility. No sooner does the full evaluation of Derrida's nonpublic philosophizing find its expression than in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, although intuitions developed later on, as well as Rorty's very belief in the need to defend Derrida's position, date from the beginning of the eighties, as can be testified by texts written then.

In the text entitled "Two Meanings of Logocentrism: A Reply to Norris" (published for the first time in 1989), Rorty distinguishes three separate audiences to which Derrida speaks. By the first sort of audience, he is admired as a philosopher, for he is seen as an original follower of the tradition running up from Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. By the second sort of audience, he is seen a a writer, and finally, there is the third one (from which Rorty excludes

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[38] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 85. To see such intentions in Derrida's readers, it is sufficient to read any of the two books by Christopher Norris (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* or *Derrida*) or *The Tain of the Mirror* by Rodolphe Gasché.

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

himself) which consists of people engaged in "deconstructionist literary criticism", assimilating early Derrida to Paul de Man's thought.[40] About peculiar relations between literary criticism and philosophy, as well as about dangers of such a marriage, Rorty writes in "Texts and Lumps". Literary criticism, as he sees it, moves back and forth between a desire of tiny, specific tasks and that of painting broad visions. Currently it is in the stage of "painting big pictures" and hence its great interest taken in philosophy. But

> there is a danger that literary critics seeking help from philosophy *may take philosophy a bit too seriously.* They will do this if they think of philosophers as supplying "theories of meaning" or "theories of the nature of interpretation", as if "philosophical research" into such topics had recently yielded interesting new "results".[41]

Similarly, philosophy oscillates between its self-image modelled on the Kuhnian "normal science", in which small problems are definitely solved one after another and its self-image modelled on his "revolutionary science", within which all old philosophical problems are rejected as pseudo-problems and philosophers begin to redescribe phenomena in a new light. Theory of literature used mainly philosophy of the second sort, unfortunately, as Rorty says, its attempts to make its descriptions are as if it made use of its first sort. So it uses a scientistic rhetoric, characteristic of an analytic style of philosophizing. And it is better to realize that "philosophy is no more likely to produce 'definitive results' ... than is literary criticism itself".[42] As we have already mentioned, the pragmatist has a story to tell about his books... So it seems to us that it is only "late" (although not today's, I suppose) Derrida that is for Rorty an ideal example necessary to discuss the private/public distinction; Michel Foucault was not such a good example yet.

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[40] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 113.

[41] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 78 – emphasis mine.

[42] Ibidem, p. 78.

Closing this chapter, let us say the following: Rorty suggests a coherent and optimistic vision (as opposed to pessimistic view of "melancholic" Frenchmen) of postmodern reality for which the central point of reference is a – liberal – elimination of "cruelty" and "humiliation"; he wants to be a charitable adviser, without producing always dangerous metanarratives. He is aware of the collapse of the modern "era of gardeners" (Bauman), with its visions of the "perfect society", "new man", or "new society". He is aware of the disappearance of the epoch of the Single True Description and accepts existential uncertainty, the contingency of being, the lack of not only *arche*, but of *telos* as well. For he is afraid of creating a "paradise on the earth" in the way prophetically presented by e.g. Dostoyevsky in *The Devils*. From his political and philosophical beliefs there comes the picture of historicist and nominalist culture where the realization of utopias is an endless process, "an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth".[43]

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[43] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. xvi.

Philosophical Excursus I

Seriousness, play, and fame (on Rorty's Derrida)

1.

Reading numerous readings of Jacques Derrida made by Richard Rorty during the period of the last twenty years or so, one can get the impression that Rorty admires French deconstructionist without reservations, presenting him as an example of a new way of practising philosophy – a way which is private, idiosyncratic and publicly uncommitted, which is original, but publicly useless, which, finally, leads to individual autonomy. A way leading to self-creation, getting out of the influence and power of one's precursors by way of a para-Oedipal struggle of a son with a father (which is the motive of "strong poets" from Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*). Derrida in Rorty would be supposed to break with Heidegger in the way Heidegger tried to overcome Nietzsche, and Nietzsche struggled with Plato. And just like Nietzsche wished to be a new figure of a philosopher who "philosophizes with a hammer", but in Heidegger's reading turned out to be merely "the last metaphysician" and "inverted Platonic", similarly Heidegger in the eyes of Derrida is not – despite the former's assurance and unshakeable self-confidence – the first post-metaphysical thinker, but precisely the "last metaphysician", the last figure from the "ontotheological tradition" being destroyed or from the tradition of the "metaphysics of presence" (to use descriptions by both of them). Derrida overcomes Heidegger, Rorty reminds us, when he is trying to be the first post-metaphysical philosopher e.g. when he says that "there will be no unique name, even if it were the name of Being" ("Differance"), about which, incidentally, he already spoke as a broader project in a volume of interviews entitled *Positions*, telling his interviewer that he is attempting to locate in Heidegger's texts "the signs of belonging to metaphysics".[1]

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[1] Jacques Derrida, "Differance" in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago:

But philosophical search for fame – and hence immortality –leads to an infinite number of recontextualizations and redescriptions, to new readings fighting with old ones, and the characters of philosophical stories being told are philosophers who are closer and closer to us. And just like Jacques Derrida was not willing to leave Heidegger in peace until he overcame him (although he is still struggling with him), putting himself in a new light[2], similarly Richard Rorty relentlessly bites in his own way Derrida's philosophizing (let us remind here: "pragmatism bites other philosophies but not social problems as such"[3]). Let us look at relations between Rorty and Derrida in the following way: what repeats itself here might be the motive revealing itself in an already referred to sequence Plato-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida, the motive that consists in linking a given (precursor) philosopher to earlier figures from a given sequence, like Derrida attempted to link Heidegger to a closing chapter of Western metaphysics. So, according to my (rather strong, I would say) reading of Rorty presented in this chapter, Derrida would be useful for Rorty's purposes if he could be linked to his predecessors, leaving room for a "strong misreader", Rorty himself, to stay out of the sequence.

Thus I would like to have a look at Rorty in the present text (designed to be a strong reading) as a philosophically self-creating individual, a philosopher who is looking for his own philosophical autonomy by means of new, strong misreadings of texts of other philosophers, in that particular case, suggested and discussed here – texts of Jacques Derrida. Let us say it at the very beginning, to avoid any misunderstandings: it is not Derrida that is at stake in Rorty's writings, nor is it exclusively his philosophy, deconstruction is just a medium for a self-creating thought of Rorty, its reader (one could also say – what is important to me is what I will do with deconstruction for my own purposes). Perhaps I am turning that Derridean-Rortyan, one-sided so far and marginal for some,

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University of Chicago Press, 1982), trans. by Alan Bass, p. 27; *Positions* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), trans. by Alan Bass, p. 9-10.

[2] Recently in *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), trans. by G. Bennington and R. Bowlby.

[3] Richard Rorty, "Feminism and Pragmatism" (Tanner Lecture, 1990, typescript), p. 13.

controversy, into some additional key to make Rorty's work still more accessible to readers who admire him and his readings of philosophy designed to help to coin his own neopragmatism as much as I do. But let us note that the fundamental accusation that appears in polemics with and criticisms of Rorty is that of misinterpretation, an intentionally "wrong" (to use that favorite word) reading of philosophers of the present and the past: it is a common thread among the whole host of critics, no matter whether the accusation is supposed to pertain to Rorty's readings of Derrida and Davidson, or Kant, Hegel and the whole German idealism, Plato, the whole American analytic philosophy, or Dewey.[4] One could say that it is the fundamental principle of criticizing Rorty, the main thread in polemics launched against him – perhaps quite a natural reaction of contemporary philosophers to putting into practice by Rorty of the (horrifying to them, God knows why, and admirable to me) idea that "the most that an original figure can hope to do is to recontextualize his or her predecessors", as he says in "Introduction" to the second volume of his *Philosophical Papers.*[5] It is a Bloomian motive from his conception of Romantic poetry; it is not accidentally that Rorty is equally fascinated with a "liberal ironist", an "ironist" par

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[4] See e.g. Frank Farrell from *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism – the Recovery of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) who already in opening sentences of his book says that Rorty "gets Davidson wrong"; see also J.F. Rosenberg who says that the picture of edifying philosophy from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is "irresponsible and grounded in misreadings both of the epistemology of science and of episodes in the history of philosophy, especially the contribution of Kant" ("Philosophy's Self-Image", *Analyse & Kritik* 1/88, p. 114), Alisdair MacIntyre who negates the reading of analytic philosophy from the same book in "Philosophy and Its History" (ibidem, p. 102), Richard Bernstein who writes about a "caricature of the history of philosophy" in which readings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Freud are not so much "strong", but rather "ruthlessly violent", as they remove from their work the public side (in both his texts about Rorty from *The New Constellation*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), Alexander Nehamas from the fascinating collective volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: éclat, 1992) etc., etc. Rorty's "misreadings", his intentionally "wrong" readings (an object of my admiration in this text) are of primary importance as points to be attacked by his critics.

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

excellence, and a "strong poet" in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity.*

Let us repeat once again: Derrida in our reading of Rorty is used for Rorty's philosophical self-creation. Let us remind two remarks which show Rorty's attitude to philosophy in general and to Derrida in particular:

> Derrida did not say what he thinks of my attempt to read him as Proust is read. It is quite possible, even probable, that he detests me ... . But just like in the case of Freud, I am using Derrida's writings as grain for my own mill [*comme du blé pour mon propre moulin*] – I am taking from them what interests me, and leaving aside what seems to me to be uninteresting

in his reply to Jacques Bouveresse[6], or in his polemics with Umberto Eco when he says:

> Having read Eco, or having read Derrida, will often give you something interesting to say about a text which you could not otherwise have said ... A reading may be *so* exciting and convincing that one has the illusion that one now sees what a certain text is *really* about. But what excites and convinces is a function of the needs and purposes of those who are being excited and convinced[7].

For the purposes of our reading of Rorty's relations to Derrida here there is one question that comes to mind immediately: what may be a common denominator for Heidegger and Derrida, so that they could be *both* distinguished from – and surpassed by – Rorty himself? Obviously, "metaphysical aura" of Derrida – his "light, constructive, bad" side (as opposed to "dark, destructive, good"),

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[6] Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Jacques Bouveresse" in *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: éclat, 1992), pp. 155-56.

[7] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatist's Progress" in U. Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 105-6.

as Rorty speaks of it – shown exemplarily on Derrida's clinging to "differance" which is "older than Being" etc. – is one way, a way which is not so effective in the analysis of his later writings and not so spectacular, though. The choice on Rorty's part must be radical – and what comes in handy here is one of the most important ideas (at least as we can see it) that has been taking shape from the time of the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, namely the idea that philosophy should not be "taken (too much) seriously".[8]

The dichotomy in question is simple in its application – metaphysicians believe in transformative power of philosophy, in transformations made with the help of philosophy and owing to its power, while ironists lose faith in seriousness of their discipline (just like they lose faith in stability and uncheangeability of their final vocabularies). In political and social matters they do not take philosophy seriously. It is a very *serious* conviction which, nevertheless, harmonizes with a general character of postmodern culture associated strictly with the exhaustion of attractiveness of a cultural project of Enlightenment in which, and only in which, it seems, let us add, philosophy really mattered; it had to be taken seriously (in different metaphors that passage from modernity to postmodernity is described by Zygmunt Bauman: "legislators" must give way to "interpreters"[9]).

So Rorty divides the work of Derrida (his hero? his textual victim?) into two periods, as he puts it, "into an earlier, more professorial period and a later period in which his writing becomes more eccentric, personal and original"[10] (which, incidentally, seems to be one of his constant "methods", or at least, considering

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[8] The beginning of the idea can be seen already in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – where Rorty says that "redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do" (PMN, p. 359) and in the essay on Derrida from *Consequences of Pragmatism* entitled "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing", then in some reviews, e.g. of Victor Farias's book on Heidegger ("Taking Philosophy Seriously", *New Republic*, April 11, 1988) or of Christopher Norris's book on Derrida ("Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", *The New Leader*, 71, October 1988), and finally in CIS.

[9] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), especially chapters "The fall of the legislator" and "The rise of the interpreter" (pp. 110-148)

[10] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 123.

his explicit "methodophobia", one of his procedures). Dividing Derrida's writings into two periods, Rorty gains what otherwise is difficult to be gained: *early Derrida* is "too serious" (as he *takes philosophy seriously*, to use the title of Rorty's review of V. Farias's infamous book on Heidegger), because he treats philosophy and the tradition of "metaphysics of presence" as something that requires the most serious and the most pressing hierarchical, binary oppositions, the curse of Western metaphysics since Plato – permeating the whole culture, determining its future fate, determining the "destiny of the West". Early Derrida shares in Rorty's view Heidegger's faith that the fate of the West depends on the fate of philosophy – thus "metaphysics of presence" must be overcome, binary oppositions must be deconstructed, our culture must be freed from metaphysical burden that Heidegger was still supposed to carry. So the cultural role of deconstruction would be extremely important, as metaphysics "permeates everything" (as Christopher Norris wants to believe), is present everywhere (just like Foucauldian Power which "penetrates everything", being capillary by its very nature). Early Derrida allies with Heidegger owing to their belief in *seriousness of the task in hand* (i.e. of philosophy), the conviction of its cultural significance, its mission, be it even (anti)-philosophical and (post)-metaphysical one. Obviously, that belief on the part of Derrida was not constant and never took as strong a shape as in the sixties.

Later Derrida – following Rorty's "periodization" – becomes a "private writer", a philosopher who "privatizes his philosophical thinking", who produces "private fantasies" which have neither a "moral", nor any "public (pedagogic or political) use".[11] To put it in a nutshell: "*All* that connects him with the philosophical tradition is that past philosophers are the topics of his most vivid fantasies".[12] Derrida in such an account is a master of self-creation – more and more resembling Proust and less and less Nietzsche (among self-creators themselves), creating idiosyncratic texts that evade any discipline-fixed studies, extending the bounds of possibilities of philosophy with his "Envois" from *La carte postale* (1980) in the

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[11] Ibidem, p. 125, 125, 125.

[12] Ibidem, p. 126.

same way in which Proust extended the possibility of the novel in his *Remembrance of Things Past*. While reading Derrida - the later Derrida, let us remember, but not recent one, that is to say, Derrida since Paul de Man's "affair", when he has become more and more a "moralist"[13] – we should not expect any results of reflection, any concrete conclusions, as Derrida in Rorty's view is not willing to play any already known linguistic game, and especially not such in which one distinguishes between fantasy and argumentation, philosophy and literature or serious writing and playful writing.[14] So we read him, Rorty tells us – but actually we have no idea whatsoever what to do with the text we read, which criteria apply to it. As Derrida wrote on one of his Oxford postcards: "no public generalities, merely private idiosyncrasies". The later Derrida, let us bear in mind all the time: necessary for Rorty "his" Derrida, is a fantastic writer with unprecedented acquaintance with philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis, who aims at turning systematic projects of overcoming one's philosophical predecessors in an argumentative way into a "private joke" (for,

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[13] Let us listen to Derrida about deconstruction in connection with "Paul de Man's Affair": "Why do people overlook the fact that the exercise of (theoretical and ethico-political) responsibility prescribes that nothing be a priori exempted from the deconstructive questions? Because, in my view, deconstruction consists in nothing less than putting this responsibility to work, especially when it analyzes traditional or dogmatic axioms concerning the concept of responsibility. Why do people pretend not to see that deconstruction is anything but a nihilism or a skepticism?" ("Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" in *Responses. On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher et al., Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1989, p. 162). Such Derrida is also the author of "The Principle of Reason" (*Diacritics*, Fall 1983), "The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela, in Admiration" (in *For Nelson Mandela*, eds. J. Derrida, M. Tlili, New York: Seaver Books, 1987), or of an important part of *Du Droit à la philosophie*, especially the first section, "Who Is Afraid of Philosophy?" (Paris: Galilée, 1990, pp. 111-278), but, also, or perhaps first of all, of a recent book on Heidegger, *Of Spirit*, already referred to, somehow a response to – though published earlier than – V. Farias's book. It is in *Of Spirit* that Derrida indirectly responds to widespread (especially in the press) accusations of being apolitical and fascist – in accordance with Habermas' view expressed in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* that he is a "genuine disciple who critically took his master's teachings", which, in the context of a later "de Man question" and "Heidegger affair", sounded really ominously.

[14] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 133.

as Rorty says elsewhere, "philosophers as original and important as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida are forging new ways of speaking, not making surprising philosophical discoveries about old ones. As a result, they are not likely to be good at argumentation"[15]). Finally, Derrida is a "comic writer" who produces texts full of puns, word plays and multilinguistic, multicultural allusions.

2.

Rorty performs his recontextualization of Derrida *in both directions at the same time* (one goes toward too "serious" Derrida, the other toward too "playful", and hence insignificant, one). "Deconstruction and Circumvention" from the book *Essays of Heidegger and Others* is a text which unambiguously attempts to reduce Derrida to Heidegger, which takes away from the former the right to claim to manage to have "overcome" Heidegger, which analyzes a "serious" side of Derrida. The chapter from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "From Ironist Theory to Private Allusions: Derrida", on the other hand, discusses the opposite side of the later Derrida, his "playful" side; both texts has their satellite, accompanying texts and reviews, supporting the argumentation/the rhetoric in one or in the other direction of reading him. Anyway, the aim of both strategies might be the following: no matter what Derrida writes and wrote, *either* his philosophizing is "metaphysically" serious (and hence indistinguishable from Heideggerian one, which Rorty tries to show in "Deconstruction and Circumvention"), *or* it is "playful" to a previously unheard of extreme, devoid of any public or cultural significance except for allusions recognized by a small group of philosophers. So Rorty in the reading presented by us here *strikes Derrida in all his embodiments* (embodiments, let us hasten to add, chosen for him by Rorty himself) – both when he treats metaphysics with seriousness of Heidegger, as well as when he is mocking philosophy and its totalizing intentions, approaching Proust (which Rorty admires in his *Contingency, Irony, and*

[15] Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention" in PP 2, p. 93.

Solidarity, but revealing, at the same time, no significance of it except private one). There is no way out for Derrida in our reading of Rorty, let us conclude – Rortyan dichotomies of metaphysicians/ironists, private/public, self-creation/solidarity hold him tight in their traps and make him useful for Rorty's neopragmatism, and still more, for Rorty himself, as we are going to present it here. Hence comes the title of the chapter: "Seriousness, play, and fame".

To sum up, Rorty locates Derrida in his criticisms and in his apologies in such a way that whatever Derrida wrote will either be regarded as reiterated, derivative and bringing nothing new in philosophy with the exception of what has already been said (and additionally too "serious" for our postmodern times), or as fantastic and private, so totally insignificant in culture, at least in the short run.[16]

Dividing Derrida into the early and the later one, Rorty can apply both strategies of reading him at the same time. The result of these endeavors may be only one, at least from our perspective presented here: no matter which period of Derrida's philosophizing he discusses, Rorty always wins the game, he always turns out to be better in the eyes of his readers (not necessarily in the eyes of Derrida's readers), each time he shows himself in more favorable light. As irony allows him to face problems from two opposite sides at the same time, and from both of them Rorty can withdraw[17], Derrida chosen as an aim and object of all these descriptive and

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[16] The distinction in the short run/in the long run seems to me to be one of the most important distinctions in Rorty's neopragmatism, although not too theoretical and rarely applied by him. Let us listen to Rorty from the text on "academic freedom": "We pragmatists say that every difference must make a difference to practice. Yet we think it important to argue that the Western Rationalistic Tradition, as Searle defines it, is *wrong*. We insist on trying to develop another, better tradition. So how can we, without dishonesty, say that philosophical controversies do not matter that much? We pragmatists can make our position consistent, I think, by saying that *although they do not matter in the short run, they may well matter in the long run*" (Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?", *Academe*, vol. 80. no 6, 1994, p.58). That is a very pragmatic distinction indeed, and it is worth being reminded in all discussions of "profits from philosophy".

[17] See David Hall's excellent book (the most brilliant about Rorty ever written) *Richard Rorty. Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), especially the chapter "Irony's Master, Irony's Slave".

recontextualizing procedures is practically unable to defend himself (on the terrain chosen by Rorty and within dichotomies suggested by him).[18] Furthermore, Rorty does not disclose his position, which is to say, he reveals his two different faces in different texts, without claiming that it is just that, currently revealed, that is his own face, his own position. Let us think about it for a moment: if Rorty says that Derrida shares with Heidegger the "seriousness" of a metaphysician and "serious" treatment of philosophy, then one might expect him (Rorty) to be a supporter of Nietzschean lightness of an equilibrist, frivolity of a philosophical jester and mocker of the metaphysical tradition. But it is not so that is the case; while Rorty shows Derrida from *La carte postale* as an example and model of self-creation, he does not favor himself in his own writings a carefree, allusive, and private kind of philosophizing. While Derrida is an "ironist", the hero of Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is a "liberal ironist" (that is to say, "someone devoted to social justice who nevertheless takes her own devotion to this cause as merely contingent"[19]), and he takes away from Derrida a liberal component – just like from Michel Foucault, incidentally – immediately, turning him into a paradigm of a private writer. How is it possible that Rorty chooses such an attitude which allows him to distance himself from Derrida, as, considering two choices shown here, in one case he obviously is not as "serious" as the pair "Derrida/Heidegger", and in the other case he is not as private and as socially irresponsible as self-creating Derrida from *La carte postale*? There must be some mystery here. Rorty owing to his rhetoric is very strong, but that is just persuasive strength rather than argumentative one (which he is not looking for). A possible solution to the apparent mystery – as for many other Rortyan ambiguities – seems to lie in a still

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[18] Obviously, Derrida defends himself perfectly against Rorty "on his own grounds" and in different texts, especially recent ones, ethical and political, about Apartheid, university, authority or in his book about "specters of Marx" which appeared after so many years since first introductory remarks about Marx in *Positions* (see Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, London: Routledge, 1994).

[19] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", the text to appear in *Revue internationale de philosophie*, typescript, p. 1.

dubious private/public split, the split for self-creation on the one hand and solidarity on the other.

Rorty locates other philosophers on a private/public chessboard suggested by him, ascribing to them strictly determined roles: Proust, Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida are private, whereas Mill, Marx, Dewey or Habermas are public. The question is the following: *where in these dichotomies – and in these choices – is Rorty himself?*[20] *Rorty's answer is as simple as that – nobody has to choose* what kind of writer or philosopher he or she wants to be, nobody has to favor the private or the public option in philosophy or in writing. Let us remind his strong conviction:

> *There is no reason to think we have to choose between Dewey and Derrida*, between public problem-solving and private struggles for autonomy. The two activities can co-exist peacefully. There is no reason why philosophy should have to choose between them, nor any need to assign one some sort of epistemic priority over the other.[21]

So: both styles of practising philosophy may "peacefully co-exist" and do not require any choice on our part. There is only a question whether Rorty himself, an unshaken supporter of such a lack of decision and suspension of choice, does not make such a choice for himself without ever admitting it for rhetorical reasons? He seems to me to be making such a choice all the time: he seems to be interested in the public side of philosophy in *his own* philosophizing, whereas all praises, analyses, theoretizations etc. of private philosophy pertain to *other philosophers*. I do not know any text by Rorty that would be merely private, idiosyncratic and fantastic, that would be connected only with his obsessions individually associated with philosophical obsessions in the way he praises in Derrida. Rorty does not engage in such kind of

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[20] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", the text to appear in *Revue internationale de philosophie*, typescript, p. 1.

[21] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 13 – emphasis mine.

philosophical self-creation himself[22], for some reasons it seems to him, a "disciple of Dewey", as he likes to say, impossible.[23] Thus he is writing about philosophical self-creation – of *others*: of Derrida (this "comic writer", this "private writer") or of Foucault (this "knight of autonomy"). He admires others, being himself unable or unwilling to indulge in such philosophical practices. There appears a question about the aim of such practices, a delicate question, in order not to get into forbidden terrain of sociology of knowledge or just psychology of a writer.

3.

For a long time I had thought that Rortyan readings of Derrida and Foucault are extremely important also due to their impartiality and disinterestedness. Today I suppose both thinkers seem to be very close to Rorty in certain fundamental presuppositions. *They seem to be so close to Rorty that he has to distinguish himself from them in a radical manner*, in order not to become one of already numerous Continental "postmodernists". Therefore a (pragmatic) caricature (not to use it as disapprovingly as Richard Bernstein in *The New Constellations* does it), at least to a certain extent, becomes necessary for Rorty's own identity. What is needed is a distance from which to see a picture of a larger whole: the private/public dichotomy provides Rorty with such a possibility. It takes place at the cost of serious inconsistency that results from rhetorical and persuasive character of the whole (real or imaginary, intentional or accidental, conscious or not fully realized) undertaking: Rorty requires that others should not make a choice between the private and the public in their philosophizing, while making himself such a choice and confirming it in his texts all the

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[22] And that is the conclusion I came to in a text read during the "Rorty conference" held in Torun, Poland, in 1992. See my text "On Some Rorty's Evolution" and Rorty's "Response to Marek Kwiek" in proceedings of the conference published in English in *Ruch filozoficzny*, vol. L, no 2, 1993.

[23] Let me add that David Hall in the book referred above is of the same view, expressed almost in the same way I expressed it in Torun: "I assume that Rorty's advice to Derrida, that he continuous his pursuit of private perfection by following the path of creative idiosyncrasy, to be advice that Rorty, with some inner qualms perhaps, would himself like to follow" (Hall, op. cit, p. 234).

time, standing firmly on the *public* side of his own philosophizing and praising merely private philosophizing of others (but denouncing it elsewhere simultaneously, although theoretically giving an equal status to it). Such an appraisal may be a widely used (public) accusation. For although Rorty writes that there is no need to choose between two possibilities, both discourses are equally legitimate in today's "ironic" culture, nevertheless from behind those texts someone seems to be hinting to us, giving us a wink, someone standing above philosophical "fantasies" and "dreams" of the French on a firm ground of a self-assured pragmatic choice...

Let us pay attention to one of the consequences of it: if the reading of French philosophical postmodernists as private writers ("knights of autonomy", "masters of self-creation" etc.) becomes widespread, Rorty with his anti-foundationalism and anti-Philosophical attitude will be almost alone on the battleground with Philosophy with a capital "P" – to use the opposition from his *Consequences of Pragmatism* – as the rest of claimants to distinctions, after the won battle, which will surely take place, we hope, will be fooled, "circumvented". The title of the essay: "Deconstruction and Circumvention" would show such a state of affairs – deconstruction becomes circumvented, Rortyan circumvention replaces, leaves behind, Derridean deconstruction, Deconstructor becomes circumvented, reduced either to one of many thinkers (our "serious" version), or to frivolous and insignificant one (our "playful" version). Let us remind the second version from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity:*

> He [Derrida] simply drops theory ... in favor of fantasizing about those predecessors, playing with them, giving free rein to the trains of associations they produce. *There is no moral to these fantasies, nor any public* (pedagogic or political) use to be made of them.[24]

We have already said briefly how the picture of Derrida in such a "private" version looks like, let us show now in contrast his too

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[24] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 125 – emphasis mine.

"serious" picture that emerges from Rorty's writings, a picture of a Heideggerian who is too much concerned with the role of philosophy and the "metaphysics of presence" in our culture. That is extremely important as an example of the two strategies in his almost twenty-years-long struggles with Derrida – the strategies in struggles for fame, for immortality, as we want to read them here.[25] About how important immortality for a "strong poet" (Bloom) and a "strong philosopher" (Rorty) is, none of their readers has to be convinced – obviously immortality not only in being preserved in works (that *non omnis moriar*). Let us remind here the fear that nobody in the future "will find anything distinctive in them", the horror that the author, the philosopher, "has spent [his] life shoving about already coined pieces", that he will be merely a "copy or a replica" of his predecessors.[26] The fear of death in Rortyan-Bloomian account is the fear of failed self-creation, and "poets" (in a wide sense of "those who make things new") rebel against death stronger than others. Thus the way to immortality is supposed to lead through fight with one's predecessors for freeing oneself from under their influence, for describing them in one's own vocabulary, for using them for one's own purposes (*comme du blé pour mon propre moulin*..., let us remind) - with the help of redescription of the canon of books that held a reader-philosopher spellbound, and that still hold him in their power. "Each new theorist accuses his predecessors of having been metaphysicians in disguise", Rorty will say. Immortality may be reached by means of a redescription of philosophers of the past and of the present – overcoming them in order to be "equal" to them rather than to become their "epigone".[27] And although Rorty is writing the following about Heidegger, nevertheless let us risk in the context of present considerations to apply the thought to him: Heidegger was bothered by "his own, particular, private indebtedness to particular past philosophers, his own fear that their vocabularies might have enslaved him, his terror that he would never succeed

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[25] The theme of immortality (as one of "life strategies") was reminded to me by Zygmunt Bauman's discussions from his beautiful *Mortality, Immortality, and Other Life Strategies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992).

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

[27] Ibidem, p. 101, p. 103.

in creating himself".[28] I am inclined to suppose that this bother, this fear and this terror, if they were actually experienced by Heidegger, may have been to an equal degree experienced by Rorty himself whose conception of philosophy is strongly shadowed by Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, in which the struggle of a son with his father(s) assumes para-Oedipal dimensions. In Bloom, the only feeling of guilt that really matters comes from the feeling of indebtedness to one's intellectual predecessors, therefore one creates his predecessors himself so that the mighty dead could return only "in our colours, and speaking in our voices". Otherwise, "if they return wholly in their strength, then the triumph is theirs" – what belongs to us, let us add, is only failure.[29]

Let us remind at the moment one sentence from Rorty's text on Habermas and Derrida which did not find its way to, although at first was supposed to be there, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*:

> I see Jacques Derrida as *the most intriguing and ingenious* of contemporary philosophers, and Jürgen Habermas as *the most socially useful* – the one who does the most for social democratic politics.[30]

Thus we get here ingenious Derrida and useful Habermas. Let us ask where Rorty himself would like to stand, which side to favor in the – created and applied by himself – private/public opposition? Perhaps it is so, let us speculate a bit, that Rorty would like to be both ingenious and useful, useful in his ingenuity and ingenious in

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[28] Ibidem, p. 110.

[29] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973), p. 114. Let us content ourselves here with just one Rorty-Bloom analogy: in Bloom's view, "strong poets make poetic history by misreading one another" (p. 5), perhaps it might be possible to say by paraphrazing that "strong philosophers make history of philosophy by misreading one another". The example of Rorty and Derrida is quite telling and convincing, but similarly would be the case with Rorty's Davidson, Dewey or Foucault. For a strong philosopher ("strong textualist" once, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*) just misreads everyone that matters to him...

[30] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 1 – emphasis mine.

his usefulness? Once again, let us stress, other philosophers are either such or such, either only useful (and then dull), or only ingenious (and then useless). The distinction must be clearly maintained, so that philosophers of self-creation and philosophers of solidarity could be distinguished from Rorty himself and so that he could – formally – be out of the choice and out of the distinction: over and above Derrida and Habermas. Furthermore, Rorty says that Derrida's and Habermas' philosophizing "complement" rather than "oppose" each other.[31] The obstacle in treating philosophies of Derrida and Habermas as complementary rather than opposed may be in Rorty's view the fact that

> *they appear to disagree over the nature and function of philosophy.* Such a disagreement, *it is easy to think*, must be profound. On my view, however, "the nature and function of philosophy" is a pseudo-topic, as much so as "the nature and task of the novel".[32]

Let us comment briefly on the above quotation: it is not important that both protagonists think they are on the opposite extremes of philosophical choices (it is worthwhile to see Habermas' criticism from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, especially from the chapter on genre distinctions between philosophy and literature[33] – as well as Derrida's criticism from "Like the Sound of the Sea Deep Within a Shell: Paul de Man's War" of such kind of practising polemical philosophy[34], it is

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[31] Ibidem, p. 1.

[32] Ibidem, p. 11 – emphasis mine.

[33] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), "Excursus on Levelling the Genre Distinction Between Philosophy and Literature", pp. 185-209.

[34] Derrida answers to Habermas' "argumentation" from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (based primarily on Jonathan Culler's reconstruction) e.g. in the above text on "Paul de Man's War" from *Responses: On Paul de Man's Wartime Journalism*. The main accusation is a brutal lack of respect for elementary rules of discussion, such as, for instance, lack of any references to Derrida texts whatsoever ("non-reading" and "non-argumentation"). Derrida, clearly upset, answers to the accusation of performative contradiction: "Is there a more serious, flagrant, significant 'performative contradiction' than the one that

unimportant that they see in different ways the function of philosophy. What they have different views about does not actually exist – so the very point of disagreement disappears – so they are complementary, as they are not opposed to each other, *quod erat demonstratum*. "It is easy to think" that the difference between them is profound, that the disagreement between them must be serious, maybe even irreparable – but that is not the case, Rorty tells us in the above quoted passage. Let us note another point: the "function" of philosophy is quite different from the "nature" of philosophy, which Rorty knows perfectly well, tracing and denouncing himself essentialism in all its forms (struggling with the Platonic paradigm of philosophizing in which the fundamental distinction is between appearance and reality, the duality of the "real world" and "fable", to use Nietzsche's words), whether that would be "humanity" or "human nature" with a common core[35], or "reason" as the "essence" of humanity, or "method" and "rational argumentation" as the "essence of philosophy". Rorty would not be able to link Habermas and Derrida if he were writing about the "function" of philosophy which, at least for the latter, is individual and contingent rather than e.g. determined by culture. Writing about the "nature and function" of philosophy, however, gives birth to a new quality – Habermas and Derrida see different "natures" of philosophy and think that they differ from each other, but they are wrong, Rorty will tell us rhetorically, because, as is known, philosophy does not possess its "nature"... Philosophy is a contingent and undetermined being, is a pigeonhole for the needs of librarians and their databases, as well as rigid university divisions, nobody can claim to know what philosophy will be like in hundred years' time, when we will be no longer interested in

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consists in claiming to refute in the name of reason but without citing the least proof and first of all *without even reading or quoting the other*?" (ibidem, p. 163). While that text locates Habermas in a wider "moralistic" movement that wants to use "Heidegger's affair" and "de Man's affair" to show that "deconstruction is Fascist", the Foreword to Derrida's *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988, pp. 156-58) focuses mainly on breaking the requirements of discussion on the part of Habermas. In both cases there appear the following question: who is afraid of deconstruction and why?

[35] See e.g. Richard Rorty's "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality".

those "perennial, eternal problems of philosophy" from the opening sentence from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

Let us note the result of such a shift – Derrida becomes similar to Habermas, they seem to complement each other; they only appear to differ as they – unreasonably – believe in some "nature" of philosophy in which Rorty as a mature pragmatist no longer does and can believe. And once again, he stands as their critic *above* them, the criticized, distancing himself from them by means of – existing in Derrida's case, I suppose – conviction of non-essential character of philosophy on his part. Rorty thus "overcomes" both of them, showing delicately their philosophical naiveté which in the case of Derrida is rather not legitimate. But that is precisely the strategy to Derrida on the part of Rorty that I am discussing here in this text: Derrida is not different from Habermas, just like he is not different from Heidegger, or he is so playful that one hardly knows what one should read him for... Habermas and Derrida in such an account – in one of numerous Rortyan approximations – are philosophers who unnecessarily choose the side of philosophy, thinking that it possesses some "nature". Thus on the one hand we get "Habermas' public sort of philosophy", on the other "Derrida's privatized sort of philosophy", as Rorty says, and if we consider Rorty's and Habermas' respective views of Derrida, that would be, respectively, "opening new, private possibilities" and "extending the bounds of possibility"[36] on the part of the former, and "public danger" and "threat to democracy" in the view of the latter.[37] What is Rorty's

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[36] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 5; CIS, p. 137.

[37] Even if it were indirectly, then it is surely by way of analogy with "Young Conservatives" already spoken of in this context in "The Incomplete Project of Modernity" – with Carl Schmitt or Gotfried Benn. In *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* Derrida turns out to be e.g. an "anarchist" (p. 182). The most serious accusation against postmodernists is connected with an ambivalent attitude to the distinction between philosophy and literature – they in Habermas' view place literary criticism higher than science – without applying standards of the latter - on the level of creative activity (p. 192). At the same time they abandon the potential contained in negation – Derrida "allows the capacity of problem-solving to disappear behind world-disclosing capacity of language" (p. 205), and therefore he is not able to provide a meaningful analysis of society. Postmodernists are stuck in "philosophy of subjectivity", without seeing the need

position in that controversy, if it is indeed a controversy? Is he above – behind – the choice, formally he does not have to choose any of the sides, considering the very opposition as artificially imposed on those who practice philosophy. That is the only kind of rhetoric that gives him the chance to distance himself from – once again, only formally, not in a real, tacit choice that he actually seems to make – an important discussion about the place of philosophy in postmodern culture and about the role played by a philosopher in it.

Rorty seems to dislike such questions. In an extremely interesting conversation with Giovanna Borradori (from a telling volume of interviews *The American Philosopher*), to the last question: "Then, what is philosophy. A testimony to the survival of a community of readers of philosophical texts?" (we must admit, sounding due to its formulation "what is...?" terribly metaphysical), Rorty gives a simple answer: *I don't think one should ask that question.*[38] If one does not put that question, then one can say that there is no need to choose between Mill and Marx – and Derrida and Kierkegaard, that such a need derives from a metaphysical need of the "purity of heart", willing one thing with the exclusion of all the others. And that is the question that could satisfy the *reader of philosophy* (analogously to the reader of the novel), who could read today the formers, tomorrow the latters, and the day after tomorrow return once again to self-creators, just like in that old Marxian utopia of, roughly, fishing and making shoes in the morning and reading philosophical treatises in the evening. However, there is a question whether such an answer can satisfy a *philosopher*, the one who writes philosophy (to use for a moment that slippery distinction)? As we wrote above, it does not satisfy in practice even Rorty himself, although in theory he supports it strongly. Is it possible to practice philosophy without asking oneself the question who one wants to be, even if it were the question with answers restricted to two extremes of the whole spectrum of

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of "philosophy of intersubjectivity" (to which Habermas' book is just a destructive appendix) – they choose the road of "total criticism of reason" that does not allow to distinguish them from Nietzsche, Heidegger and Adorno. So they are "dead end" of the contemporary philosophy..

[38] Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 117.

possibilities: a private and a public philosopher. How to be both of them at the same time and, on the other hand, evade such a choice? Rorty does not provide an answer to such doubts - we are inclined to see that point as a blind spot in his thinking. How to treat self-creation and solidarity as complementary rather than opposed to each other? How to treat them not as opposed but – as just different? The questions appearing here are the same: each of them, Habermas, and Derrida (and Foucault, let us add), at some point of their development, had to choose (and two of them are still choosing) from a two-poled either-or. Each of them had to choose while philosophizing rather than before it, as such a choice does not exist before one starts to practice philosophy. How is it possible that there is no reason to choose between "Dewey [that is, also, Habermas] and Derrida", how one is supposed to know the meaning of one's work, the meaning of one's (philosophical) existence? According to Rorty - in theory only, let us bear it in mind all the time – one would have to be once a private philosopher, once a public one, some Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, a philosopher of two – "peacefully co-existing" – faces. How is one to confront such double-facedness if even Rorty – in the practice of his philosophizing – chooses for himself just one, traditional face of a "public" philosopher who merely writes about *other* private philosophers? I think that is one of Rorty's rhetorical traps that serves him quite pragmatic purposes – to distance himself from and "overcome" his biggest co-claimants to fame in future books of history of philosophy (or – postphilosophy)... I am not presenting here a logical sequence of arguments from which the above temporary conclusion would spring because in the case of a philosopher-ironist it is impossible, I am merely giving some suggestion that might throw additional light to complicated relations between Rorty's neopragmatism and Continental philosophy.

4.

Let us turn now to Derrida in his other account that can be found in Rorty's writings. Derrida in Rorty's "playful" and "literary" account, running from the text from 1977 entitled "Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy" (in which Rorty locates him on the side of "abnormal philosophy" – referring to

Kuhn's intuitions – that "requires only genius"[39]), through "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" (1978), to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, to show just a few milestones on that road, turns out to be a writer who has "a sense of humor". Rorty says: "Indeed, his essays sometimes appear to be complicated jokes".[40] Christopher Norris, a famous and radical English exponent of Derrida's philosophy, and Richard Rorty, are two opposite poles of possible readings of him (the pole of Norris is, at the same time, interestingly enough, on the side opposite to *both* Habermas' and Rorty's), for Norris Derrida is a radical, transcendental, rigorous philosopher who provides philosophy with the possibility of active participation in politics (who may "give us weapons", as Rorty says about him in one of polemics[41]), while for Rorty Derrida is "a writer of genius who has taken philosophy for his theme".[42] Norris fights with Rortyan annexation of Derrida to neopragmatism and with taking away from Derrida political significance by Rorty in almost all his recent numerous books. Rorty is the number one enemy of deconstruction according to him, perhaps more serious than enemies from the analytic movement (such as John Searle in the USA or Jacques Bouveresse in France) or the hermeneutic one (such as Manfred Frank in Germany), because he admires his hero, although for reasons unacceptable to Norris. Remembering about ambivalence of such praises and about the context of "circumvention" of the "master" of deconstruction analyzed in that essay, let us listen to still another Rorty's remark on Derrida:

> I cannot draw out any philosophical doctrines or morals from Derrida's work. *I simply admire his skill at writing and at reading, as I do that in a great literary critic.*[43]

Instead of "rigor" that Norris sees in Derrida[44], Rorty sees in him a "writer about philosophy", a kind of "postphilosophical

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[39] Richard Rorty, "Derrida on Language, Being and Abnormal Philosophy", *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77 (1977), p. 679.

[40] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20, p. 20.

[41] Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?" in PP 2, p. 120.

[42] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20.

[43] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20 – emphasis mine.

[44] See e.g. Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (London: Fontana) 1987.

commentator" rather than a contributor to it.[45] Although he feels that he has learned a lot about writers that matter to him, it is difficult to know what truths has he been taught, Rorty adds. And although the whole essay is entitled "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition" and is a review of Norris' *Derrida*, and although Rorty states in it clearly that he sees philosophy as "one more literary tradition", nevertheless in a wider context, that of coining his attitude to Derrida and that of the picture of Derrida presented to the American public, his words of admiration have somehow to be seen in the light of their pragmatic profits. Rortyan remark on a "sense of humor" may lead us still further towards the novel and away from philosophy if we recall the role played by those thoughtless, never laughing, Rabelaisian "agelasts" in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* whom Kundera revived in his *Art of the Novel*. (Incidentally, to lead that thread a little further, and to open long parentheses, the whole conception of the novel from Kundera's latest book, *Les Testaments trahis*, is contained in "humor" that belongs to the novel. Humor is an invention linked to the birth of the novel in Cervantes; the novel cannot be taken seriously and, at the same time, *rien n'est plus difficile que de faire comprendre l'humour*[46], it is precisely humor rather than e.g. moral or aesthetic beauty that can testify to belonging of a given novel to the history of the novel, that is to its lasting value. Those who do not laugh – they pass judgements, pass judgements in advance and without comprehension, they pass moral judgements in a sphere in which moral judgement should be suspended. The fundamental thought of Kundera in this respect is the following: the novel is – let us recall *The Art of the Novel* – "an imaginary paradise of individuals", here, in *Les Testaments trahis*, Kundera adds that it is *le territoire où le jugement morale est suspendu*. And those who want blood of Salman Rushdie who did not attack Islam – who just *wrote a novel*, do not understand that suspension of moral judgement). The Derridean humor helps Rorty perfectly to link Derrida to literature.

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[45] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Literary Tradition", p. 20.

[46] Milan Kundera, *Les Testaments trahis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 17.

Rorty hints about his strategies towards Derrida when he says that the latter "is torn between the *negative theologian's* urge to find a new pantheon ... and the *comic writer's* urge to make something once held sacred look funny. In his later work, it seems to me, he is less torn. He is content simply to have fun rather than to feel haunted".[47] Derrida thus has at his disposal the role of a negative theologian who is stuck in Heideggerian problematics of looking for "elementary words", or that of a comic. Obviously, these possibilities does not necessarily have to be highest compliments paid to his originality. They nevertheless do answer pragmatic need of their author.

Thus Derrida would have two faces imposed by Rorty in his highly convincing redescriptions: the dark, nostalgic, serious, "German", Heideggerian, when he says that one cannot escape the "metaphysics of presence", that the task to deconstruct binary oppositions in our culture is helplessly difficult, and the other face, light, Dionysian, funny, playful, "French", when Derrida reminds himself of his calling for a comic, a genius of writing. Rorty has a strong opinion when Derrida *is at his best*: he is at his best not when he offers us a kind of reading (against deconstructionists and generally against seeing deconstruction as a "method"!), but when he offers us a kind of writing – comic writing that does not assume that the "discourse of philosophy" would be something more than a "joke".[48] Derrida "at his best" realizes that a good way of making philosophical discourse enigmatic (of which he wrote in *Of Grammatology* as a task) – is to treat is as a joke. That is Derrida's answer as Rorty sees it.

In the most serious so far, as it seems, vivisection of philosophical views of Derrida made in "Deconstruction and Circumvention", Rorty distinguishes two senses of "deconstruction": a philosophical project of the French philosopher and the method of reading texts. He is obviously interested in the former as he is struggling with Derrida himself rather than with users of his philosophy in theories from deconstructive schools of

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[47] Richard Rorty, "Two Meanings of Logocentrism: A Reply to Norris", PP 2, p. 117 – emphasis mine.

[48] Ibidem, p. 117.

reading. Let us remind first several points that Rorty deals in that text with. These points – in our reading of Rorty-Derrida relations presented here – are intended to link Derrida closely to Heidegger and to separate them both from Rorty himself, to his advantage. Here is thus a "serious" picture of Derrida, his other criticized side. First, Heidegger's "magic words" do not differ in their role from those of *différance* or *trace* in Derrida's philosophy:

> The fact that language is a play of differences ... gives us no reason to think that words like *différance* and *trace* can do to, or for, philosophy what Heidegger failed to accomplish with his own magic words – *Sein, Ereignis,* and so forth.[49]

Second – and perhaps most important in the light of ideas of "not taking philosophy seriously" – the claim that "ontotheological" tradition has permeated science, literature and politics, common according to Rorty to both Heidegger and Derrida, is a "self-deceptive attempt to magnify the importance of an academic specialty", that is to say, of philosophy. Third, Derrida importance lies in "pursuing a certain academic specialty ... the re-reading of the texts of Western philosophy which was begun by Nietzsche and continued by Heidegger". Finally, fourth, the problem of Heidegger and Derrida how to "overcome" or flee from the ontotheological tradition is "esoteric" and "artificial" – "it has to be replaced with a lot of little pragmatic questions about which bits of that tradition might be used for some current purpose".[50] Let us sum up these several sentences of key importance for the understanding of Rorty's strategies towards Derrida: Derrida is linked to Heidegger by "word magic" (which Rorty also mentions in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*[51]), excessive attachment to philosophy as some super-discipline (and thus – knowing *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – perhaps even some foundationalism that runs from Kantian elevation of epistemology),

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[49] Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

[50] All citations from "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

[51] All citations from "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 87.

re-reading of philosophical texts, and "esoteric" and "artificial" problem of escaping from metaphysics. Needles to say, all the above *distinguishes Rorty from both Derrida and Heidegger.*

The picture of Derrida is thus in that ("serious") version quite gloomy, and it becomes more comprehensible only in the context of Derrida's struggles with Heidegger: who will be the first "post-metaphysical" thinker, and who will be just the "last metaphysician". It might turn out that in fact the first post-metaphysician is Rorty the ironist who suggests that we should get rid of metaphysics as we are treating binary oppositions: "by pointing out that the oppositions are there, and then *not taking them very seriously*".[52] It is only such an attitude to the metaphysical tradition and to its articulation in the form of the "discourse of Western philosophy" that may entitle one to hold the title of the first post-metaphysician. So the first thinker fully freed from Platonism, from the destiny of the West, from the distinction between appearance and reality, to express the thought in different vocabularies – from such a perspective – is Rorty, at least such a view would be the most advatageous to him. Both Heidegger's "ontological difference" and his very concept of "Being" are metaphysical, the early Derrida's belief in word magic, in new elementary words, is also metaphysical. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida are trying to overthrow Platonism, the most important duality between the real world and the world of appearances, as, in Heidegger's words from "The End of Philosophy", "all metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato".[53] But that is achieved only by Rorty himself who his antiessentialism and antiplatonism expresses strongly both in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, as well as in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Rorty's antiplatonic and antiessentialistic disbelief that one could ever get to know "how things *really* are", what a given philosophical or literary text *really* says, the resistance to "objectivity" and preference for "solidarity" etc., etc. – that is the fullest breaking with metaphysics that

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[52] Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention", p. 103 – emphasis mine.

[53] Martin Heidegger quoted in R. Rorty, "Deconstruction" (typescript), p. 4.

philosophers from a sequence of predecessors and ancestors strengthened by Rorty have always dreamed of. An antiplatonic and a post-metaphysician cannot speak of the "destiny of the West" or of the "historical and spiritual mission of the German *Volk*" (as Heidegger did in his *Rektoratsrede*), nor can he say that *différance* is "older than Being", and the most urgent task in culture is to "deconstruct metaphysics" (Derrida) – he can only say that neither "philosophy" nor "metaphysics" are central to our ironic culture. It is not from them that evil comes in our world, nor is it from them, perhaps, that the good will come. Rorty's answer is simple: Derrida considers metaphysics to be very important (just like Heidegger), whereas it is just "a genre which had a distinguished career and an important historical function but which now survives largely in the form of self-parody".[54]

But that is not yet the end of the story of two Derridas that appear in Rorty's writings. Finally, we would like to note how strongly Rorty's thinking in that concrete, Derridean game, seems to be inspired by Bloomian thinking of surpassing one's predecessors, struggling with them, in order to reach fame. In his reply to remarks of Henry Staten[55], Rorty, defending his picture of Derrida, says the following:

> People who invent brilliant new metaphors may sincerely deny that this is what they are doing ... Your own theory about your own activity may not cohere very well with *your successors' description of what you accomplished*.[56]

The answer pertains to Derrida, and Rorty (let us speculate once again) already unambiguously seems to locate himself as his successor, at least in questions discussed here. Derrida does not discover a new genre of philosophizing – "he just uses some words

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[54] Ibidem, p. 105.

[55] Henry Staten, "Rorty's Circumvention of Derrida", *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1986.

[56] Richard Rorty, "Nominalism in a Nutshell", *Critical Inquiry*, Winter 1986, p. 464 – emphasis mine.

in new ways".[57] And then saying that Staten bashes him for being more cunning, ungenerous and harsher toward Derrida than he had imagined himself to be, Rorty remarks disarmingly: "He may have a point, but it is hard for me to tell". That is – he prefers not to talk about it, fully relying on the redescriptions (be they even strong ones) of others. I would like my reading based on some textual analysis and some speculation presented in this essay on the subject of "seriousness, play, and fame" to be seen as a gloss to that magic answer. In the course of human history, all great men, and philosophers have not been an exception here, have struggled for immortality. One of best ways of achieving it is to be a strong reader of other strong readers, a strong poet for strong poets or a strong philosopher for strong philosophers. Richard Rorty in his philosophy is one of the greatest of them, and undoubtedly the most conscious of that strategy today. No wonder he is admired all over the world – his strategies produce a new, modest and singular "history of philosophy" that is fascinating, living, controversial and peculiarly personal...

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[57] Ibidem p. 465.

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

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[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 *Contingency, 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

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[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.

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

Philosophical Excursus II

Rorty and Lyotard, or about conversation and tragedy

1.

There are many more and less important points of discord between Rorty and Lyotard, there are many differences of fundamental importance for the two philosophers.[1] (Lyotard speaks precisely of a "radical divergence" between them[2]). One could write a lot about their different attitude towards utopia, liberal democracy, shape, place and role of philosophy in future culture, towards painting and literature, history of philosophy, the man/his work distinction[3], different account of the role of particular great philosophers in recent history of philosophy (of Kant in particular) etc. etc. What we are interested here in, though, is mainly one problem and one difference revealing itself through Rortyan disagreement with the Lyotardian idea of "differends". In the statement that the task of philosophy is to "bear witness to differends" (to maintain them and to search for new idioms coined especially for the purpose of expressing them rather than turning them into mere litigations) on Lyotard's part – and, on the other hand, in questioning of any positive role of differends in culture on

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[1] I wrote about them in more detail in my Polish book already referred to, *Rorty and Lyotard. In the Labyrinths of Postmodernity*, e.g. in the chapter "The Sign of History (Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault)".

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, "An Interview" (with Reijen and Veerman), *Theory, Culture and Society,* vol. 5 (1988), p. 304.

[3] For instance, on the occasion of the so-called "Heidegger affair". See Lyotard's *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* from the Vienna conference (Wien: Pasagen Verlag, 1990) as well as his book *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1991), and, on the other hand, Rorty's dismissive remarks from a review of Farias' book on Heidegger ("Taking Philosophy Seriously") as well as from notes to CIS and PP 2 such as the following: "On the general question of the relation between Heidegger's thought and Nazism, I am not persuaded that is much to be said except that *one of the century's most original thinkers happened to be a pretty nasty character*" (CIS, p. 11, n. 11) – emphasis mine.

Rorty's part, there is probably the crucial difference between them. Let us say by virtue of an introduction the following: if Lyotard says in a discussion with Rorty that "il y a entre Richard Rorty et moi un différend"[4], then the point is undoubtedly worth being discussed.

Within the "differend" between Lyotard and Rorty (which within detailed discussions in *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute* of the former seems to be too strong a word, the one characterized by emotions of the ongoing controversy between them), I will confine myself to tracing why Rorty does not recognize differends as such, that is to say, to just a part of a larger "differend" between them, but potentially a very important part. For it seems to me that in his inacceptance of differends there is also the pragmatic inacceptance of tragedy (and let us remind here a brief, never-developed remark made by Richard Bernstein: "Rorty's liberal culture seems to be a world in which there is no place for tragedy"[5]). In a pragmaticized world of liberal democracy with a constant, unchangeable, radical and ahistorical separation between the private and the public, there is no place for the tragedy of obligations and duties, the drama of radically different obligations, the tragic choice between one good and another good, each of which is precisely a good rather than a good and an evil. I am discussing the point in more detail in chapters devoted to Rorty's Derrida and about philosophy and politics, let me just try to show here what might possibly mean Lyotard's memorable words that his own "genre de discourse" is tragic, while that of Rorty – is conversational.[6] The "differend" between tragedy and conversation is unavoidable (and therefore Lyotard rhetorically asks about the tribunal which would be able to say which of the two "genres de discours est le plus juste"[7]). Let us turn it in this

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[4] Jean-François Lyotard in: "Discussion entre Jean-François Lyotard et Richard Rorty", *Critique* 456, mai 1985 (Ed. Vincent Descombes, "La Traversée de l'Atlantique"), p. 581.

[5] Richard Bernstein, "Rorty's Liberal Utopia" in *New Constellations* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1989), p. 287.

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, "Discussion entre Jean-François Lyotard et Richard Rorty", p. 581.

[7] Ibidem, p. 581.

book into one of many perspectives serving to show "European connections" of neopragmatism.

Let us first listen to Rorty from an answer given to Lyotard's text (both texts were pronounced in 1984 at Johns Hopkins University and then published):

> In a very interesting and enlightening synthesis of philosophical and political problems, Lyotard suggests that we can see *everything* from the semantic paradoxes of self-reference to anticolonialist struggles in terms of these contrasts [i.e. between "differend" and "litigation" as well as between "damage" and "wrong" – MK]. Using this vocabulary, Lyotard's doubts about universal history can be put by saying that the liberal-pragmatist attempt to see history as the triumph of persuasion over force tries to treat history as a long process of litigation, rather than a sequence of *différends.* My general reply to these doubts is to say that political liberalism amounts to the suggestion that we try to *substitute litigation for différends as far as we can*, and that there is no *a priori* philosophical reason why this attempt must fail, just as (*pace* Christianity, Kant, and Marx) there is no *a priori* reason why it must succeed.[8]

Let us comment briefly on this passage which contains perhaps the very essence of the discord between Rorty and Lyotard discussed here. Rorty tries to turn Lyotard into a kind of old structuralist who imposes on the complicated reality his own grid of two oppositional concepts ("differend"/"litigation") and thinks that he knows answers to all questions ("from the semantic paradoxes of self-reference to anticolonialist struggles"). He associates Lyotard's philosophical project with politics (by clear biographical reference to Algeria) and writes about the "synthesis of philosophical and political problems" to show that Lyotard is a kind of totalist who, which Rorty mentions a bit later in the text –

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[8] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Reply to Lyotard" in PP 1, p. 217 – emphasis mine.

horrible dictu! – makes use of forbidden, "suspiciously Kantian" terminology, who thinks about philosophical investigations in bad, Kantian, juridical metaphors... Thus Lyotard in Rorty's reading – does not separate philosophy from politics, the first fault; he still thinks in the Kantian way, the second fault, especially considering notoriously negative role played by Kant in all his books, from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to *Consequences of Pragmatism* to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Kant as a founder of the idea of philosophy as a super-science – epistemology; Kant opposed to Hegel; Kant opposed to Freud). And finally, Lyotard in Rorty's view separates himself from reformist, pragmatist liberals – allying with revolutionary philosophers interested only in "radical criticism".[9] The point is to transform differends into litigations and solve them rather than merely show existing differends. The replacement of force with persuasion and differends with litigations is, according to Rorty, a key to a future free from cruelty. As he says:

> The history of humanity will be a universal history just in proportion to the amount of free consensus among human beings which is attained – that is, in proportion to the replacement of force by persuasion, of *différends* by litigations.[10]

Lyotard has to oppose this, for he cannot accept the equation between persuasion and convincing (one thing is *persuader*, another thing is *convaincre*). Persuasion is a rhetorical procedure, making use of strategies of rhetoric and dialectic. It is a mental violence. And thus how can one achieve, starting from *la violence mentale* (of which Lyotard says in his discussion with Rorty), the consensus sought by Rorty? How is one to unite achieving a free, unrestricted consensus – with the use of persuasion and rhetorical tricks? How is one to unite a free choice with an imposed redescription? What comes to mind here is Rorty's remark from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that redescription often

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[9] Ibidem, p. 221.

[10] Ibidem, p. 218.

humiliates... Persuasion in Lyotard's view is force and cannot lead to a free consensus. Lyotard asks Rorty the following:

> How a consensus can be free if it was achieved with the help of persuasion? I think that the whole question of imperialism, including mild one – the question of what I would label *Rorty's conversational imperialism* – is right here.[11]

One could add – mild, conversational imperialism can easily lead to a monologue, especially when the only remarkable voice in a conversation is the voice of a liberal democrat... And it is very wise of Rorty to lead a discussion in his answer to Lyotard's text towards, finally, as he puts it in the last sentence, "our different notions of how politically conscious intellectuals should spend their time".[12] For the question whether one should be a witness, whether one should "bear witness" (to differends, truth, the past) – a *topos* common to moralists, novelists, poets, to refer to Orwell, Miłosz or Zbigniew Herbert – is a question about the intellectuals' self-image. Edward Said, undoubtedly a "committed intellectual", in his 1993 Reith Lectures asks *"the* basic question for the intellectual: how does one speak the truth? What truth? For whom and where?"[13], and answers somehow with the title of one of his lectures – "Speaking the Truth to Power". That "speaking the truth to power" in a country with strong reformist traditions is doomed to marginalization (hence unheard-of aversion of high-circulation papers like "New York Times" or "Newsweek" to radical theories put forward by Derrida, Foucault, Baudrillard or their followers, manifested strongly, for instance, during the so-called "de Man affair" in the end of the eighties). The situation in France is different, this can become there almost an institution in the way it was in the times of Zola, Sartre and even – functionally at least –

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[11] Jean-François Lyotard, "Discussion entre Jean-Francois Lyotard et Richard Rorty", p. 582.

[12] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Reply to Lyotard" in PP 1, p. 222.

[13] Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (London: Vintage), 1994, p. 65.

Foucault. As Bernard-Henri Lévy wrote about the (French) intellectual: "He has and must have betrayal in his blood". Reformism or revolution, lifting spirits through utopian fantasies, as Rorty wants – for "We Deweyans have a story to tell about the progress of our species, a story whose later episodes emphasize how things have been getting better in the West during the last few centuries, and which concludes with some suggestions about how they might become better still in the next few"[14] – or , on the other hand, bearing witness to "the unbearable", or "resistance through writing", as Lyotard wants. The difference between them is the difference in seeing their own tasks, different traditions, different obligations. Perhaps in broader terms – looking towards the future on the part of neopragmatism (and "hopes" put in a liberal "utopia" associated with it) and Lyotard's inclination against the past, against (any, even liberal) utopia and utopianism, fearing violence and totalitarianism which in America may sound strange and incomprehensible (for it is a "future-oriented country", as Rorty says). French philosophers are haunted by specters of the bloody past, more and less distant, *mémoire du crime*, which Lyotard merely mentions in his discussion with Rorty. Philosophy, literature, politics in France still remember the regicide of 1792, "we cannot fail to remember that this crime was horrible".[15] American philosophers are rather not haunted by anything with a similar degree of intensity. To close that theme with one sentence - the French look with fear to the past and think what to do so that the past never returned; the American look forward and are bold in inventing social utopias. The difference in attitude between them is clearly shown in Rorty's remark made on the margin of Lyotardian considerations of "signs of history" and *defaillance* of modernity:

> From our standpoint, nothing could refute that doctrine [the doctrine of parliamentary liberalism – MK] except some better idea about how to organize society. *No*

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[14] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", in PP 1, p. 212.

[15] Jean-François Lyotard, "Discussion entre Jean-Francois Lyotard et Richard Rorty", p. 583.

> *event – not even Auschwitz – can show that we should cease to work for a given utopia.* Only another, more persuasive, utopia, can do that.[16]

It is a philosophical creed rather impossible to be maintained from the perspective of European experiences, and this is testified by philosophical and intellectual controversies accompanying the *Historikerstreit* in Germany, *l'affaire Heidegger* in France or violent polemics surrounding the revisions of history suggested by Robert Faurisson (in which Lyotard, Lacoue-Labarthe, Vidal-Naquet and others were engaged). In Europe, since 1789, there were so many tragic events that it is becoming more and more difficult to look with hope to the future in the form of a utopia.[17] It is not to say that America has been just a land of happiness at that time, there is much to be said about that as well.

Rorty explains his differences with French philosophers in a still different way: "Like Lyotard, we want to drop *meta*narratives. Unlike him, we keep on spinning edifying first-order narratives".[18] And what is important in this sentence is not only – visible at first sight – opposition between narratives and metanarratives but also that of mere narratives and edifying narratives. Lyotard – and other postmodern French philosophers – do not construct *edifying* narratives for they do not believe as strongly as Rorty in liberal democracy.[19] What worries Rorty? "Their [French – MK]

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[16] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation" in PP 1, p. 220 - emphasis mine.

[17] Zygmunt Bauman asks in the context of the collapse of communism - how "to live without an alternative?". See *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[18] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", PP 1, p. 212.

[19] Lyotard advises Rorty to "revise his too great trust put in democracy, even liberal democracy" ("Discussion", p. 583). Perhaps it might be interesting to show a more, so to speak, philological theme, although the one full of philosophical consequences. In the original version of Rorty's text "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", the opening sentence is the following: "In the form John Dewey gave it, pragmatism is designed to be a *philosophical apology for political liberalism* – a way of making social democratic politics *look good*". The French translator from *Critique* (where the text was first published) performed some revisions in the first part of the sentence emphasized by me, and he did not understand the second part of it, perhaps being unaware that for Rorty the most

antiutopianism, their apparent loss of faith in liberal democracy".[20] Edifying narratives cannot be built by someone who is antiutopian, but nor can they be built by someone who would see the history of recent centuries as a sequence of (unsolvable) differends rather than a sequence of (always solvable) litigations. Rorty cannot accept Lyotard's account of history – his "signs" in the form of "Auschwitz" or "May '68" – as long as he wants to present it as a permanent, pragmatist progress in the history of humankind; although chance and contingent, nevertheless the one leading in a good direction (and therefore, as Rorty explains in his response to Thomas McCarthy, "we do not need more theory" for the most important conceptual theory has already taken place – and has given us the vocabulary of liberal democracy). Philosophy has to give way here to (liberal) democracy. If Rorty accepted the differend-related account of history, he would lack a moral belief necessary, as it seems, for building edifying stories about the present and constructing utopian visions of the future. Rorty's pragmatism cannot accept the differend, it has to maintain the private/public split, has to "drop the revolutionary rhetoric of emancipation and unmasking in favor of a reformist rhetoric about increased tolerance and decreased suffering".[21] For Lyotard this is just rhetoric, precisely the rhetoric that gives us *pistis* rather than logic that gives us *episteme*.

Referring to the Rortyan metaphor of language islands on which Frenchmen should invite other philosophers rather than build connections between them and the mainland, Lyotard responds

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important strategy is redescription: thus what was left was "le pragmatisme est *une sorte de défense philosophique du liberalisme politique* – une manière de *rendre acceptable* la politique social démocrate". And, finally, here is the final English version of the passage from *Philosophical Papers*: "... pragmatism is *a philosophy tailored to the needs of political liberalism*, a way of making political liberalism look good to persons with philosophical tastes". The metamorphoses of a single sentence show the whole range of standpoints in the debate on relations between philosophy and (liberal) politics. See "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", p. 1 (a manuscript), "Le Cosmopolitisme sans Emancipation", *Critique,* op. cit., p. 569, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation" in PP 1, p. 211 (emphasis mine)

[20] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", in PP 1, p. 220.

[21] Ibidem, p. 213.

in his recent *Moralités postmodernes* that "guarding our [= French – MK] archipelagos seems to be a wiser attitude". The mainland is not desirable because it is occupied by *l'Empire de la méta-conversation* (which unmistakably directs our attention towards Lyotard's discussions from *Le Mur du Pacifique* devoted to American Empire and its European provinces), the empire – among other things – of Rortyan metaconversation[22] – which does not notice heterogeneity and incommensurability of various genres of discourse – e.g. ethics, aesthetics, politics, knowing. "Conversational" Rorty and "tragic" Lyotard speak radically different languages, there is no tribunal to judge which way of thinking is more *just* (and that is Lyotard's perspective in his discussion with Rorty). According to Lyotard, there is a differend between them. Rorty cannot accept differends as the very idea of a differend cannot find its place in pragmatic account of practising philosophy in which the most important features are persuasion and rhetoric. It is important to bear this in mind reading another "context" of Rorty's philosophy in its European entanglements. Reading Lyotard and his thinking about the differend (which is *tragique* in his own words), it is worth while thinking about Rorty and his permanent doubts. As in any differend (if it really were to be one), the choice is only in an idiom of one of the two sides. It is worth while tracing – in the manner of thinking through the relations between the aforementioned mainland and surrounding islands – what remains out of the constellation of possible questions asked in neopragmatism. So let us listen to Lyotard for a moment, remembering about Rorty's connections. Let us start in a very general way.

2.

One can get the impression that the postmodern thought – together with the whole world of postmodernity that surrounds us – has been stripped of the tragic, being "flattened" or

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[22] Jean-François Lyotard, *Moralités postmodernes,* "Un partenaire bizarre" (Paris: Galilée, 1993), pp. 130, 130.

"de-dramatized"[23]. Postmodernists are often reproached for depriving their world of insoluble conflicts, of contradictions, for making it simple and comprehensible. (Richard Rorty may serve as a paradigmatic object of criticism that goes along these lines, perhaps not without some reason). The tragic is supposed to have disappeared from philosophy together with the arrival of the existentialist absurd and to have never come back, the world is supposed to have lost for ever its apocalyptic dimension... And yet, despite diagnoses and enunciations critical to postmodernism, one can show such points in postmodern reflection in which there may be the (irreducible) tragic, whose dramatics strikes as if the world had not been totally disenchanted of *katharsis* yet... Let us consider in virtue of an example the philosophical thought of Jean-François Lyotard.

In order to be able to discuss the possibility of "the tragic" in today's world, let me do two things at the same time in the present part of the excursus: first, I would like to present briefly the Lyotardian project of the differend (*le différend*) presented in his most significant – as he admits himself – philosophical work, entitled precisely *Le Différend* and, second, I would like to present a particular application of the project to a more than literary conflict of two reasons from *Antigone* (that of Antigone and of Creon, obviously). The task seems not to be easy and requires division of one's attention between two parallel planes of argumentation as well as some prudence because Lyotard does not provide any typical tools for analysis, not to mention a ready-to-use "method".

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[23] The impression of "de-dramatization" of the world is especially evident while reading the texts of Baudrillard and Bauman. In Budrillardian *la societé de consommation* the citizen – i.e. primarily the consumer – is subjected to "constraint" of happiness and pleasure. He simply, as Baudrillard says, "has no right not to be happy", otherwise he becomes "asocial" (Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. M. Poster, Oxford: Polity Press, 1988, p.48). In Bauman's postmodern world there is no determination – nor chance or contingency, the world of games "offers neither certainty nor despair; only the joy of a right move and the grief of a failed one" (Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1992, p.187). The world of games and moves, without contingency – thus without responsibility and ethical choices – is the world that we cannot see around us and, besides, it is in our view the world of deadly boredom...

The present piece has been born out of the search of a non-philosophical exemplification of a philosophical proposal in question that I strongly lacked in Lyotard's writings. I have the impression that mutual – and simultaneous – illumination and interpenetration of both – literary and philosophical – threads might lead to better elucidation of philosophical content of the Lyotardian *oeuvre*. That will be, let us admit contritely at the very beginning, a work of the Lévi-Straussian *bricoleur*, a philosophical tinker who unites discourses of (Greek) literature and (postmodern, as well as Hegelian) philosophy, mixes together different epochs, crosses borders of cultures and genres. One could question the legitimacy of such collage-like procedures but we think them to be justified by the conviction that what is at stake is not *one* truth about Sophocles or about Hegel (nor that of Antigone or Socrates) as – within today's horizon- there are no such truths. What is at stake is rather recontextualization, as Richard Rorty might like to say, locating an old, almost mythical question of judging Antigone's reasons and Creon's reasons within a new context imposed by the postmodern aura.

Let us begin with *Le Différend,* though. The book consists of 264 philosophical fragments grouped in seven parts which cover the problematic of the differend, the referent and the Name, presentation, result (*Resultat* of thinking), obligation, genres and norms as well as the signs of history, interspersed with "dense" and extremely erudite commentaries (*notices*) which refer to Protagoras, Gorgias, Plato, Antistenes, Aristotle, together with Kant, Hegel and Lévinas. Besides, a commentary is devoted to Gertrude Stein's writings, another one to Declaration of 1789 and, finally, still another one to a tribe of Cashinahua Indians that appears in many Lyotard's writings. The proper text is preceded by a text entitled *Fiche de lecture* – a partially ironic, partially parodic "summary", so to speak, of the whole work which will allow the reader, "if the fancy grabs him or her, to 'talk about the book' without having read it" [24] within an epoch one of chief features of

[24] Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend*, Minuit 1983 (English translation by Georges Van Den Abbeele as *The Differend. Phrases in Dispute*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 1988, hereafter references will be included in the text as LD, followed either by a page number or a paragraph number; LD, p.13.

which is "gaining time". That *dossier* which precedes the proper philosophical notebook of sketches (which *Le Différend* undoubtedly is) in itself deserves a moment of our attention. It describes or explains e.g. the title of the book, its object, thesis, philosophical context, as well as its reader, presenting a parody of a certain style of reading (not only philosophy). The situation a reader faces is seemingly strange – an author *himself* presents a (conceptual) summary of his book, so that a reader will know – with paralyzing certainty – "what is at stake" in it. He will master the book intellectually even before he has actually approached it. So it may turn out that the very act of reading will become just a "waste of time" (Lyotard remarks sadly that "reflection is not thrust aside today because it is dangerous or upsetting, but simply because it is a waste of time. It is 'good for nothing', it is not good for gaining time. For success is gaining time", LD, p. xv). Reading takes too much time if one can get the "contents" or the "message" of a book in the form of a ready extract.[25] And yet – as a reader should be "a philosophical one, that is, anybody" (LD, p. xiv) – Lyotard parodies such reading that performs merely a conceptual reduction, which reduces comprehension of a work to "possessing" its meaning. For reading (like judging) should be directed towards *singularity* of a text (of an event). Thus just as judging in Lyotard's account assumes the anti-universalistic shape of judging a particular event on the basis of – individual – criteria forged for it, it may also be the case that reading is a process of listening to a text in search of its peculiarities, its uniqueness (precisely therefore this *sensibilité à la singularité du cas*,[26] sensibility to singularity of a case, is necessary) rather than a process of reducing a text to its "meaning" in familiar concepts.[27] And perhaps the Preface to The Differend is supposed to serve just this function of expressing Lyotard's disgust with such reading

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[25] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. xix.

[26] Jean-François Lyotard, *Pérérgrinations. Loi, forme, événement* (Editions Galilée, 1990), p. 26.

[27] Bill Readings, *Introducing Lyotard*, p. xix. As it is worth while noting that it was already in *La condition postmoderne* that Lyotard wrote that "work and text have the characters of an *event*". *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984), p.81.

of philosophical texts and to make us sensitive to *quid* (that something is happening) rather than to *quod* (what is happening). The introduction in inverted commas says that "the time has come to philosophize" – to philosophize, let us add, without dreams of *telos*, without designing vast, utopian social "emancipatory" visions and, finally, to philosophize in narratives rather than in intellectual and abstract theories, to be "pagan", to "bear witness to differends" and to "save the honour of thinking" which, as he writes in his autobiographical *Pérégrinations*, requires "much subtlety (*finesse*) in the perception of small differences".[28]

Let us begin to approach the Lyotardian conception of a differend, partially quoting and partially paraphrazing some of the most important passages. Lyotard says at the very beginning that "as distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgement to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them (and both of them if neither side admits this rule)" (LD, p. xi). A wrong that results in such a case comes from the fact that rules of the genre of discourse on the basis of which judging takes place are not rules of a genre or genres of discourse being judged. Thus a wrong – to use Lyotard's words – is a "damage accompanied by the loss of means to prove the damage" (LD, 7). This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, of his or her liberties, of freedom to express public opinions or – to put it in the simplest way – when a sentence which bears witness to a wrong is (structurally) devoid of any meaning. In a word, a victim is deprived of the possibility to disclose his or her knowledge about a wrong to anyone else, including the tribunal before which it might be judged. The difference between a plaintiff and a victim is the following: a plaintiff is someone who has suffered damage and possesses means to prove it; he becomes a victim when *presenting a wrong* – expressing suffering – is *impossible*. The pair of plaintiff/litigation is symmetrical with the pair of victim/differend: a litigation becomes a differend when a

[28] Jean-François Lyotard, *Pérégrinations*, p. 41.

plaintiff is divested of the means to argue – when he or she is forced to remain silent – and becomes for that reason a victim (let us mention e.g. the case in which an author of damages is then a judge of them). "A case of a differend between parties takes place when the 'regulation' of the conflict that opposes them is done *in the idiom of one of the parties* while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom", says Lyotard (LD, 12). To bear witness to a differend – as this is as much as the philosopher can dare according to Lyotard – is to create the possibility of expressing a wrong. What is needed is a new idiom, new "prudence" (*phronesis*). Philosophers, seeing that not everything can be held in sentences – that certain sentences exceed the existing discourse, should "institute idioms which do not yet exist" (LD, 23). If a victim could phrase the wrong it suffers – could present it to a tribunal to be judged – he or she would merely be a plaintiff as there would be no structure within which he or she could be forced to keep silence. A paradigm of a victim is – for obvious reasons – an animal.[29]

3.

The event (*occurence*, *événement*) is a radically singular occurrence which for this reason cannot be *presented* within a framework of some general narrative without the loss of its singularity.[30] Writing after an event – that is to say, linking phrases (*phrases*) to it, should express its singularity: Lyotard's question

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[29] Richard Rorty wrote about the impossibility of existence of the "language of victims" – of the idiom that Lyotard searches – while analysing Orwell's work in CIS. Rorty is obviously right if we take into consideration the time which accompanies victims' wrong but he is wrong if we realize that a "victim himself" is not capable of phrasing his wrong. What is needed is an idiom to be forged later, a new representational framework in which (as in a new horizon of sense) a wrong will appear precisely as a wrong rather than as a damage. The Foucault – Derrida conflict about the *Madness and Civilisation* was just about that: can one "give voice back to those deprived of it", without reinforcing the power of voice over silence, the power of rationality over madness. To give voice to madness itself makes the book "impossible", as Derrida states in "Cogito and the History of Madness" (in *Writing and Difference*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), as madness is *l'absence de l'oeuvre*.

[30] As Bill Readings says about Auschwitz: "the event is the occurrence after which nothing will ever be the same again", op. cit., p. 57.

appearing throughout the book about the differend is that of Theodor W. Adorno: "how to philosophize 'after Auschwitz'?" and he gives it a new meaning – namely, how to responsibly (ethically?) link phrases about unpresentable horror of the death camp without presenting this horror at the same time? Other events which are often "signs of history" are, for instance, the French Revolution (whose significance as *Begebenheit* Kant immediately perceived in his *The Conflict of the Faculties*) or May '68, and looking back towards more distant past – let us add from ourselves as that will be necessary for a further analysis – gradual separation of ethics and politics in the times of, as Hegel puts it summarily in *Phenomenology*, "stoicism, scepticism and the unhappy consciousness".

Antigone and Creon were literary witnesses of this Lyotardian in spirit (although, as a matter of fact, imposed upon him by the author of the present essay, which is worth being kept in mind) *événement.* On the one side in this conflict there is the "law of shadows"- relentless necessity to bury brother's body, on the other side there is the law of a "bright day" (as Hegel calls them) [31] which does not allow to entomb a traitor. In *Antigone* there is a clash of two orders -that of a family, of blood ties and obligations of kinship, and that of a citizen. Divine law is not commensurable with human law. Hegel says that an "acting consciousness can negate neither that it has committed a crime, nor can it negate its fault". The situation of Antigone is "a tragic collision between a duty and lawless reality".

There is no possibility of finding a common language, Antigone and Creon seem not so much to be in an opposition as rather to be incommensurably, radically different because they express two different worlds: a primitive world of ethical unity and a new world of separated ethics and politics.[32] Their linguistic games remain

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[31] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, vol. II, the analysis from the chapter "True Mind. Objective Ethics (*Sittlichkeit*)" (in the Polish translation pp. 5-52).

[32] It is one of many possible interpretations of *Antigone*, worth mentioning at least due to its persistent presence in the culture of modern Europe. Antigone – like sophists and Socrates – witnesses the destruction of the ancient *polis*, the disintegration of the Aristotelian household (*oikos)* into morality on the one hand and the Roman law on the other. The two aspects of the disintegration in question

mutually untranslatable, there is no possibility of finding *common* criteria of judgement which could be accepted by both sides of that differend. The acceptance of a perspective (language – criteria – laws) of one of the sides irresistibly gives birth to a wrong on the other side, as we know from Lyotard's analyses. It is a differend of opposite reasons every one of which – within a framework of *its own* linguistic game – would be an acceptable reason. But united together in the figures of *Antigone,* they begin a deadly differend.[33]

The tragic which appears – excellently perceived and exposed by Hegel – consists in both Creon's and Antigone's being right. There is no *good way out* of thereby created differend: Antigone's wrong is accompanied by the said lack of means to prove it (in Creon's world of separated ethical and political orders, of a private sphere separated from public space), whereas in an opposite case a violation of public sphere (unavenged treason, a posthumous fate of a traitor of homeland being the same as that of its defender) would require to be phrased and actually could not be presented in an incommensurable world of blood ties in which – still – Antigone lives.

It seems to be a classical case of a differend (rather than a litigation) in Lyotard's sense of the term. Why would not it be a litigation? Because there is no common discourse, even common "we" shared by both sides. There is no instance judging "reasons"

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are dealt with in two Hegelian masterpieces: *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right.* When the split of ethics and politics was started in stoicism, at the same time man ceased to be *only a citizen*, he started to belong to two orders, a moral and a political one. It was for the first time in human history that "private man opposes particularities of his own needs to common life, society and the state" (p. 63). The Roman citizen no longer fights – he has to work for himself as a private owner, for money and property. Instead of "constantly waging prestigious wars" (i.e. wars for respect), as Alexandre Kojève says, he for the first time becomes an individual, accepting simultaneously ideologies of his slaves – stoicism, scepticism and Christianity. On the radical split between ethics and politics in stoicism see J.-M. Palmier, *Hegel* (Editions Universitaire, Paris 1968), pp. 59-63; Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), pp. 157-161 and A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1968).

[33] For us today it is a "conflict of values", while Antigone at her time was certain of being "totally right", says Charles Taylor, p. 175.

of both sides acceptable by them. The conflict cannot be resolved without making use of the language (the whole world) of one of the two sides, and it is for this reason that it is not a case of a litigation. What is needed for a litigation is just a code, laws, judges – and an accepted (be it even after making an appeal) sentence. In the case of a differend there is no such a possibility. Choosing the universe of one of the sides, we are "doing wrong" to the other one, we deprive it of the right of defence in a neutral vocabulary of an uncommitted judge.

Antigone and Creon speak *radically different languages* and their conflict of reasons cannot be expressed in any of them without doing "injustice", without prejudging, by means of the idiom used, which of the two sides is "right". (Either we speak the language of a premodern unsocialized world – and then Creon turns out to be a tyrant who illogically insists on an incomprehensible law, or we speak the language of a modern, i.e. socialized world in which Antigone, let us beg the reader's pardon in advance, turns out to be a hysterical neurotic, additionally driven by the will to death).

Let us stop for a while by certain classical accounts of the tragic. Max Scheler, for instance, as his commentators stress, assumed as the first after Aristotle that the tragic is a category of life rather than of art - that is to say, that it is aesthetic rather than ethical (He said: "the tragic is rather an element of life itself"[34]). So in order to be able to talk about the possibility of a "tragic differend" in Lyotard, we have to first follow Scheler's paths of understanding the tragic - as the Aristotelian definition saying that the tragic is what "bears compassion and fear" will not be of any use for us here. In the most general terms, a tragic world, according to Scheler, requires values because: "In the world deprived of values ... there is no tragedy".[35] Only such a conflict can be tragic which arises between subjects possessing some high positive value – for instance between highly ethical individuals. Not only both sides of the conflict "are right", but also each of the individuals taking part in it "represents equally sublime law – as he says – or seems to have and to fulfil equally sublime duty". In everything that is tragic there

[34] Max Scheler, "On the Phenomenon of the Tragic", Lwów, 1938, p. 51.

[35] Ibidem, p. 58.

is necessity and *unavoidability* of the destruction of values. (It is therefore, let us add, that the "differend" between Antigone and Creon is tragic in the sense suggested here, but a classical example of *différend* shown by Lyotard, Auschwitz, is not tragic unless in the abandoned by us sense of the Aristotelian *katharsis*, compassion and fear). There is also no tragedy in the case when one is capable of answering clearly the question: "who is to be blamed?". What belongs both to the essence of the Lyotardian differend, as well as to the essence of tragic conflict in Max Scheler's account is that "even an ideal, the wisest and the most just judge is not able to soften or heal it". Since what the Lyotardian judge lacks are universal criteria, he still has to forge them for a particular case. Just as in Scheler's view a conflict which can still be ethically or legally solved is not tragic, in Lyotard's view the conflict at stake would not be a differend, but merely a litigation. Let us also add here that Scheler to a large extent bases his analysis of the phenomenon of the tragic on the classical Hegel's intuitions. Although the name of the latter, just as these of Antigone and Socrates, does not occur in his study, nevertheless one can feel all the time while reading it a subterraneous, unrevealing course of the Hegelian reflection.

We can say that our world – postmodern world – still looks at Antigone with the eyes (and analyzes with the language) of Creon. Thus to apply our criteria – just like to apply his criteria – would make Antigone a Lyotardian "victim" (as she would not have any possibility of demonstrating her wrong which is incomprehensible and reasonably inexpressible out of the context of the idiom of ancient myths about Hades and obligations of blood). To apply them would bear injustice.

So we might be allowed to look at this classical conflict with different eyes (which, obviously, do not exist, and which is precisely why differends remain for ever unsolvable) – not in order to resolve them but to add our thoughts about these times – to link our sentences (*phrases*) to the existing ones, to think *after* Sophocles and *after* Lyotard – forming and idiom which would "save the honour of thinking", as the latter puts it. As what is at stake is to phrase or express a differend rather than to resolve it because a differend – contrary to a litigation – must remain open.

Its solution transforms a differend into a mere litigation, depriving it of its specific character. When a differend becomes a litigation, one of the sides (and sometimes two of them, or all of them) becomes a victim. Its wrong cannot be expressed, put in phrases, it subsides into silence. Lyotard does not identify himself with an (ideological, theoretical and always conceptualizing) "intellectual", perhaps best descried in his *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers*: he is a "philosopher" whose "responsibility before thought – as he says – consists ... in detecting differends and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them" (LD, p.142). The intellectual smoothes a violent surface of social life, helps to forget about the existence of differends, first transforming them into litigations and then resolving.

4.

A differend always occurs between two (incommensurable) language games, two little narratives – as what results from incommensurability, a radical difference, is the impossibility to find and to apply common criteria to pass a judgement. The existing criteria, well settled, fixed and obligatory representational frameworks do not suffice to judge a difference unless one wants to reduce or repress it, annihilate it, make it keep silent. The difference at stake – a differend – cannot be phrased at a given moment. It is only later, within a framework of new representational rules, that one can try to show it in a new idiom formed particularly for that case (just as the singularity of Auschwitz disappears the moment it is not regarded – following Adorno – as a breach in a speculative discourse of reality and rationality: it is then merely one among many atrocities).

In Lyotard's view the task of art, philosophy or aesthetics in our (post-metaphysical and post-metanarrative) postmodern epoch is, as a matter of fact, detecting, bringing to light and bearing witness to all differends with one aim: to resist injustice which "deprives of voice those who cannot speak the language of the master".[36]

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[36] As Readings puts it in op.cit, p. xxx.

Antigone is bound to lose (although it is worth bearing in mind that the chorus takes her side in the play). Her world no longer exists. A homogeneous unity of the private and the public, of the man and the citizen, is already a thing of a past. The "differend" finds here no other solution than a tragic one. Oedipus' daughter is not able to prove that her conduct is right; in a new world of split obligations it is Creon who has a reason, evidence before a possible tribunal and, finally, power at his disposal. It is Creon who – let us add – neither is a tyrant nor destroys a weak individual in the name of utopian reasons or pathological ambitions, but who is just a legalist in the world of politics. Although in the end he gives up and changes his mind (not without the influence of Teiresias' prophecies), it is too late anyway. The last act of the tragedy is completed. As the mechanism of "wrong" has been set in motion. The tragic event, death, happens. We feel compassion for Antigone but also Creon is not a less tragic, not a less split hero.

It is another time that the two orders (Lyotard would say: genres of a discourse) that have just been separated from each other: ethics and politics, turn out to be incommensurable, take opposite sides after the destruction of *oikos*; one has to bear in mind, at the same time, that every attempt to unite them once again – when "power" belongs to "virtue", as Hegel says in *Phenomenology*, as Jacobeans and Bolsheviks had wanted – gives birth to terror (and then heads go down like "cabbage-heads"). It looked some time ago as if philosophy might be an adjucating tribunal in controversial cases. Today it is a more and more common view that also philosophy is just one of genres of a discourse, a philosopher being merely "a kind of writer" (and philosophy being "a kind of writing", as Rorty once provocatively wrote).

The conflict of Antigone's and Creon's opposite reasons becomes in our account a "differend" of incommensurable orders. Could one say – non-historically, so to speak – who "was right" in the differend? One could not do that, I suppose, without privileging one of the sides, that is to say, without doing wrong to the other. The classical opposition: *either* Antigone, *or* Creon, either obligations of blood, or public obligations, cannot be maintained (as we leave aside here the interpretation starting from the choice made by Antigone herself, at stake being placing of two worlds

side by side rather than dealing with the psychology of the heroine). Is there a good "resolution" from such a perspective?

Perhaps one could "write narratives", "build micrologies" after what had happened in *Antigone*. Lyotard says: "let us wage a war on totality", "let us activate differends" – not so that we could confront an old totality with a new one or so that we could "resolve" differends (unsolvable without a "wrong"), but so that we could know something new, say something which cannot be phrased in the case of a homogeneous paradigm of the human nature. Perhaps the following could be stated: it is impossible to adjudicate Creon's "reasons" and Antigone's "reasons" within a classical account of the humanistic whole which bears the collective name of "man". Creon and Antigone – pushing the differences between them to perhaps grotesque extremities – come from different cultures, different worlds which remain "impenetrable" to each other (i.e. they do not share much in common as "people"). There is not any *God's eye view* which would allow a super-cultural analysis and super-cultural adjudication of both "reasons". There is no cultural translation.[37] Cultural differences cannot be abandoned in some "objective" gaze of the uncommitted researcher or judge. The world of Antigone, her culture (like pre-Socratic world and culture) do not exist, just as they did not exist in the literary space governed by Creon. Although they did share a common (Greek) language, the universes built upon it were incommensurable and untranslatable, mutually incommunicable. Antigone *was right* in her own world, Creon *was*

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[37] A similar argumentative course is taken by Bill Readings somewhere else – in his analysis of Werner Herzog's film "Where Green Ants Dream": for Aborigines from whom the Whites want to buy land the place at stake is a wholly one. The formers' language in untranslatable in the language of the court, heterogeneous with respect to the language of law. Their identity as "men" would be imposed on them (See "Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire of Capital" in: *Judging Lyotard*, ed. A. Benjamin, London: Routledge, 1992). There is no common, shared "human nature" – says Rorty in CIS, personality being a "web of contingent beliefs and desires". There is no common "we" for Antigone and for Creon, just as there is no common "we" for Aborigines and Westerners (Readings), Cashinahua Indians and Europeans (Lyotard) or Serbs and Americans (Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality and Sentimentality", typescript).

right in his own. But none of them could rely upon a just judgement of a super-cultural judge. Their "differend" could be resolved by Gods only, man entangled in his culture – in *Antigone* paradoxically still coexisting in the same time and in the same place – could not do that. The world of the "divine law" and that of the "human law" according to Hegel's *Phenomenology* are the two worlds of two different (contradictory) forms of objective ethics (*Sittlichkeit*): a family and the state. To follow the duties of one law results in the revenge of the other law. The other, opposite ethical power brings about destruction. In *le différend* from Sophocle's *Antigone* a pre-modern or ancient world and a modern world face each other, two different ethical orders confront each other, one of them basing itself on irrational power of kinship, the other on newly opened political space. Neither Creon nor Antigone could surrender – they acted within frameworks of rationalities of their own worlds.

5.

It is also the death of Socrates that Hegel describes in a similar tone. Death in the sense that someone is dying is not tragic in his view, it can be merely sad. Real tragedy occurs only – he explains - where there are ethical forces on both sides and they collide with each other. In Socrates' fate the tragedy of Athens, the tragedy of Greece were exposed. We have here two forces which confront each other. One of them is the divine law, a naive, traditional custom. The other principle is an equally divine law of consciousness, the right of knowledge (of subjective freedom); it is the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, i.e. reason. These two principles clashed in Socrates' life and philosophy. Let us add to that the Hegelian saying from his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that "tragedies in which tyrants and innocent men play are flat, they are empty and irrational to a highest degree. The great man wants to be guilty, he takes up a great conflict". Antigone frightens us with her drive to death much more than rational Socrates does. It seems to me that while Socrates had to die because the world of Ancient Greece could not tolerate a subjective will to knowledge *yet*, Antigone meets her failure

because modern world of split ethics and politics could *no longer* tolerate a subjective will to live in that old world which Hegel used to call a "political world of art" and which had just collapsed. And just as it was Athenians' *duty* to condemn Socrates, it was also Creon's *duty* to condemn Antigone. They both resist the existing order; Socrates in the name of (still unrecognized by Athenian prosecutors) future, Antigone – in the name of (scarcely buried) past. Socrates wished individual freedom, freedom of an individual who would not be saturated with the state – he put morality before objective ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) and he was bound to lose. Antigone wished the right to close a human being in (no longer available) totality of man-citizen. They are both innocent, but nevertheless so guilty in their innocence. Innocent expressing a yet undiscovered (Socrates) or an already rejected (Antigone) principle, guilty – destroying the only principles existing. The conflict of misunderstood by their own time figures of Antigone and Socrates has much in common with *le différend.*

Max Scheler discussing the "tragedy of a noble man" once again reaches for a figure of Socrates, or rather to such an image of him that had been formed by Hegelian analyses. And although neither of the names is mentioned there, it seems that behind the generalization in question is precisely that Hegel's example. Thus "'a noble man' – Scheler says – has to break 'moral law' or whatever can be a 'commandment' in the domain of morality. *Actually without guilt, he necessarily has to appear to be 'guilty'*". At the same time a crowd of prosecutors "with clear conscience" fulfils their "bounden duty". The tragic is born from the fact that prosecutors cannot be condemned on "ethical" grounds. A tragic hero does not have to differ from a criminal in the eyes of his epoch. Moreover, he may even die as a criminal... Let us quote here *in extenso* that moving passage: "A tragic man steps his way among his 'contemporaries' calmly and without renown. He walks around unrecognized by the crowd; if he is not seen by people as a criminal. *Lack of an instance* which would draw a distinction between the former and the latter is not here *casual, but necessary*".[38] We can do justice to a tragic, lonely hero only in a

[38] Max Scheler, p. 90, 91 – emphasis mine.

different epoch – just like in the case of idioms coined by Lyotard which "save (often after a long time) the honour of thinking". At present that "lack of an instance" is exactly "necessary" – a judgement devoid of a "wrong" will be passed only by the future. A tragic hero is not to be blamed for his "guilt", he is caught in it, says Scheler. It is guilt that comes to him, not the reverse. Antigone and Socrates are tragic with a different kind of the tragic...

Both Antigone and Socrates suffer wrong in the Lyotardian sense of the term. But in the existing (and obligatory) language their wrong *cannot be phrased.* The Athenian prosecutors, similarly to Creon, act in a just manner in every respect. Socrates' too early language game as well as Antigone's too late language game are reduced to silence, remain unrealized, incomprehensible. The two heroes do not appear in the times proper to them. Socrates and Athenians, Antigone and Creon - these are differends between one law and another law, each of them being precisely a law rather than lawlessness (and therefore their individual fate is a tragic one). Hegel says about Socrates that he is a "hero who consciously recognized and expressed a higher principle of spirit", that yet unaccented individuality. Antigone, on the other hand, was late with her law, she expressed the principle which had just been overcome by the constantly changing world. While Socrates was a "historical hero" who was defeated as an individual but the principle discovered by whom succeeded – because it was used by the "cunning of reason", Antigone was merely "manure" of history... She was not given a posthumous satisfaction that Socrates was given, her death was a death in vain, a death that could not change the course of history (although it still was an example of *Belle mort*, beautiful death, which was later refused to prisoners in Auschwitz dying – as Adorno wrote – "as specimens".[39]

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[39] Theodor W. Adorno said in *Negative Dialectics*: "The fact that in death camps died the specimen rather than the individual cannot not pertain to dying of those who have avoided these administrative means" (Polish translation, p. 508). It is from here that the Adornian "drastic guilt of the saved" comes...

6.

The Lyotardian conception of the differend allows one to take into consideration the question of an entanglement of two orders: private and public, in all its dramaticality and irresolvability. The solution put forward by Richard Rorty – strangeness of "solidarity" and "self-creation", their "incommensurability" – makes disappear the aura of tragedy which accompanies human choices from the highest existential registers (one could simply ask whether it is not the case that he "flattens" in his conception what cannot be "de-dramatized" if only tragedy should be inscribed in human fate). What Rorty would suggest? How would he solve our conflict of tragic reasons – perhaps he might take the course of avoiding it as one of those age-old and never-solvable *perennial problems of philosophy?* In other words, *can* a self-creating, Rortyan "liberal ironist" be a tragic figure in the sense given to the term here or perhaps the tragedy has been taken away from him with a radical pragmatic gesture? Can fantasies, idiosyncrasies, singular and unique – Lyotard's *singulier* – philosophical idioms (as Rorty would like to see Derrida from *La carte postale*, *Limited Inc.* and *Glas*[40]) ever lead to a situation of the tragic, existential choice? It seems to us that the answer has to be in the negative as dramatic Pascal's struggles from *Thoughts*, Kierkegaard's from *Fear and Trembling*, not to mention Nietzsche, Shestov or Camus, cannot be heard in Rorty. Tragedy – inscribed in the human condition by "existentialist", to use the broadest term, thinking – seems to be

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[40] The most fervent defender of Derrida against his "pramaticization" by Rorty is probably Christopher Norris: starting with arguments of the kind of – "Rorty has no time for Derrida's more detailed or complex passages of textual argumentation" (in *Derrida*, Harvard UP, 1989, p.150), through a sophisticated argumentation that it is precisely Rorty who is responsible for and lies at the basis of Habermas' misunderstanding of Derrida in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* ("Deconstruction, Postmodernism and Philosophy" in: *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell 1992, pp. 171-3) to his continuous philippics in almost every essay from *What's Wrong with Postmodernism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990). A question appears whether Norris is not such a "authorized depository of truth" about Derrida as Searle is of Austin – which Derrida so masterfully deconstructs in *Limited Inc. a b c...* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988, pp. 29-110).

absent there.[41] While Lyotard had in mind detecting differends, Rorty in a polemics with him in *Philosophical Papers* would like to repress them, to replace differends with litigations, according to a more general idea of replacing force with persuasion. But that seems to be an option of political liberalism rather than a philosophical choice – an example of this title "priority of democracy to philosophy" in another essay.[42]

Thus the question asked at the beginning whether postmodernism in philosophy really deprives human fate, culture, world - of the tragic, the dramatic, apocalypticism, ability to choose or just, as Zygmunt Bauman wants somewhere else, bears "existential insecurity – ontological contingency of being"[43] – divides in a multitude of questions, as many of them, to be exact, as many there are these "postmodernisms". It seems to be problematic whether in Rorty's world of "contingency" there is some room left for the drama of human fate. It seems possible to solve (overcome, avoid, repress) most contradictions according to him, to flatten the tragic of existential conflicts of reasons, take away from drama its horror, in a word – to "de-dramatize the world". But in Lyotard that is not the case, at least in Lyotard of his conception of *le différend*.[44]

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[41] The significance of the private-public distinction in Rorty's philosophy is testified e.g. by his (as autobiographical as *Pérégrinations...* for Lyotard) text "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids". It was only after forty years of struggles – in *Contingency...* – that he realized that the two perspectives: that of solidarity and that of self-creation, cannot be united: it is impossible to unite "Trotsky" ("fight with social injustice") with "wild orchids" ("socially useless flowers"). Rorty says that it was only when he was writing *Contingency...* that he solved the problem: "[T]here is no need to weave one's personal equivalent of Trotsky and one's personal equivalent of my wild orchids together. Rather, one should try to abjure the temptation to tie one's moral responsibilities to other people with one's relations to whatever idiosyncratic things or persons one is obsessed with" (p.147).

[42] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism Without Emancipation" in PP 1, pp. 217, 218.

[43] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, Introduction.

[44] It is worth adding that also Michel Foucault "de-dramatizes" the modern world when in *Surveiller et punir* he shows the point of transition from the theatre of pain (how difficult it is to forget the opening scenes from the book!) to the theatre of surveillance, punishment, in a word - to *Panopticon*. Neither power nor

One could also ask the question whether the effect of a differend – a wrong – is always tragic? Not necessarily, it seems. If we assumed that a tragic conflict of reasons is such one in which both reasons are morally right and one of them has to give up, it would turn out that if a victim could simply become a plaintiff before some tribunal, the element of tragedy would disappear immediately. And a tribunal to judge a wrong in Lyotard's sense of the word does not exist – in a paradigmatically binding picture of the world a wrong can be neither phrased, nor represented. A wrong is only looking for new forms of expression. Lyotard says that in order for the wrong to find an expression and for the plaintiff to cease being a victim philosophizing (always in experimental, judging *coup par coup*, case by case, respecting singularity of an event way) has to search for "new rules for the formation and linking of phrases ... a new competence (or 'prudence')" (LD, p.13). The differend is such a situation in language when something that ought to be phrased in it – that begs for being phrased – cannot be phrased. At least – cannot be phrased immediately, within existing representational frameworks and according to binding criteria. It is therefore, let us add, that Lyotardian justice is neither a discovered norm or an invented one, but always a horizon out of our reach. Each judgement passed without a criterion – which has been known at least since Aristotle and his judge guided by his *phronesis* – must assume that it will be judged itself. And then next judgement, and then next once again, and so *ad infinitum*.[45] The Lyotardian account of justice does not tell us *how* to judge, it merely makes us sensitive to unavoidable *necessity* of judging itself (ethical necessity, let us make it clear). Judging in the form of linking (adding) phrases to existing ones is necessary though

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resistance to it are dramatic – power penetrates everything as it is "capillary", while resistance to it is hopeless, for which Foucault is even today often reproached (see e.g. quite a representative criticism by Edward Said in "Criticism and the Imagination of Power" dealing with the paradox that is born when one realizes that Foucault's *analyses* of power detect its injustice and cruelty, while his *theoretizations* demonstrate unavoidability of presence of such power, in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Hoy, Oxford: Blackwell 1986).

[45] See Jean-Francois Lyotard (with J.L. Thebaud), *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), pp. 25-29.

contingent – Lyotard says the following: "It is necessary to link, but the mode of linkage is never necessary" (LD, 41). If there occurs an event, a previously existing representational framework is destroyed, so for this event to be judged one has to find a peculiar, singular idiom precisely for this case. In the case of language games "justice" would equal resistance to the situation in which a certain game becomes a meta-game, a meta-language, providing rules and criteria to other games. The meta-game most attacked by Lyotard is that of cognitive rules to which other, heterogeneous and irreducible games of ethics, politics or aesthetics are reduced (which always gives birth to the differend). It is also sometimes the case that politics becomes an existing meta-game – especially with respect to ethics or aesthetics. Perhaps it might be said that the only acceptable case in which heteronomity of language games could be broken is the case of the "wrong" – and simply transcendental hegemony of duties, obligations, in a word – of ethics. But that is a story to be told in another micrology...

There may arise here the following question: why in this philosophical excursus did I decide to give voice to Lyotard for such a long time? I did it in order to present briefly another, incommensurable vision of philosophy and philosopher, of their past, present and future. Rorty is a strongly "reactive" philosopher – in the sense of reacting to others' philosophy. He possesses an exceptional and unique talent of coining his own philosophy mainly in confrontation with other philosophers – with Habermas, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard (apart from Dewey, Heidegger, Wittgenstein or Nietzsche from among more distant figures). Who, as a matter of fact, said the following, asked about what philosophy was, if not Rorty:

> The reason I write philosophical books is all the other books I have read, and my reaction to those books. I react to some books and not to others.[46]

Lyotard's book about the differend gave rise to many serious generalizations about recent French philosophy; it gave rise to

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[46] Richard Rorty in a conversation with Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 117.

comparisons, to another *traversée de l'Atlantique*, as we can say following Vincent Descombes, this time looking for one's identity in confrontation with Lyotard's thought. Each Rorty's confrontation with European philosophy is extremely stimulating to him. While in philosophical reports from his confrontations with Derrida, Habermas or Foucault we gave incomparably more possibility of expressing his voice to Rorty, here we decided to allow Lyotard to present his case (although in our own redescription) more fully. It seems to us that such a European context will turn out to be useful for the book.[47]

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[47] I want to express my deep gratitude for Professor Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska for a number of inspiring suggestions made after reading the draft version of the present chapter. The chapter would have never been written without the stimulation of Professor Marek J. Siemek's years-long lectures and seminars. I owe my fascination with Hegel and Plato to him.

Chapter III

Anti-Platonism of Rorty's thought

One can consider right at the beginning whether the so-called postmodern thought is anti-Platonic, or maybe it is just non-Platonic, that is to say, whether the thought in question is created in opposition to Plato, against him, or maybe it just omits certain questions that are viewed as foundational for philosophical thinking in general and that determine the course taken by reflection in the whole, as Rorty calls it, "Plato-Kant sequence". It might appear, and many commentators of recent cultural transformations do get such an impression, that philosophical postmodernism merely abandons traditional issues, abandons attempts at answering traditional questions as useless, fruitless, sterile or uninteresting. That is, in fact, the case with many questions and that is also what one can clearly see in postmodernists' general declarations. But it is also the case that part of those problems ("perennial, eternal problems of philosophy", as Rorty calls them in the opening section of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) haunt postmodernists and even if they do not attack classical answers to certain questions, they nevertheless question the meaningfulness or usefulness of questions themselves.

Is thus postmodern philosophy (and let me hasten to explain that I am using here the term for the sake of convenience, in an ambiguous, very broad sense, being aware that the word itself gradually ceases to mean much) "footnotes to Plato"?[1] Sure it is,

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[1] Rorty tries not to use the word "postmodern" because it has been annexed (in the USA, not in Europe) by radical, ultraleftist – and socially ineffective – literary theorists. The European meaning of the term is much broader, while in the USA it may be the case that its connotations are narrow and unambiguous: postmodern are "red-hot centers of political radicalism", as Rorty says, and "postmodernists" are "cynical outsiders" who not so much have abandoned rationality in favor of irrationality, not so much even politicize the universities within "political correctness" attitude, but rather have abandoned a certain idea dear to liberal intellectuals. The idea in question is "mobilizing moral outrage in

I will attempt to show below specifically postmodern anti-Platonic themes in Rorty; I will try to show that some Platonic ideas are an extremely topical, *negative* point of reference, bringing about both epistemological, as well as ethical and cultural consequences.

1.

From the perspective of subsequent books and texts by Richard Rorty it can be clearly seen that to have a look at his anti-Platonism and anti-essentialism, it is not enough to read either only *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, or only *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, Consequences of Pragmatism* and both volumes of *Philosophical Papers.* I see as more and more illusory statements about some "Rorty to *Philosophy...*" and his "post-PMN-writings" (as some his Anglo-Saxon commentators call them). For me it turns out that the impression given by various readings of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in *Reading Rorty* – the first serious collected volume devoted to the American pragmatist – is totally misleading, or at least extremely one-sided. The book, it is claimed there, is merely criticism of traditional epistemology carried out on the grounds of American analytic philosophy not too interesting to a wider public (and, possibly, a loose project of philosophy as "conversation", some of them add). And yet it can only be seen retrospectively that the book provides most interesting philosophical "foundations" to later, often more metaphilosophical, literary and cultural ideas. To put it in a nutshell: one can find there the idea of solidarity and self-creation, there is the fundamental question about the place of philosophy in culture rather than merely that about the place of epistemology in philosophy; as well as there is a question about the future of the philosopher in culture, about mechanisms of production and collapse of his self-image, there is also the germ of the project of

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defense of the weak, of drawing upon a moral vocabulary common to the well-educated and the badly educated, to those who get paid for analyzing symbols and those who get paid for pouring concrete or dishing up cheesburgers". Therefore Rorty on numerous occasions regretted having happened to use the term – although he used it in a European, especially Lyotardian sense. See Richard Rorty, "Intellectuals in Politics: Too Far In? Too Far Out?", *Dissent*, Fall 1991 (a typescript, pp. 14, 20).

the "post-Kantian culture", "philosophy without mirrors" and criticism of merely cognitive – and derived from Plato – paradigm of human activity (and from there there is only a step towards discussions of suffering, pain, novels, redescriptions, recontextualization, private/public etc. – as a matter of fact, the whole "turn" seems to me to be a change of rhetoric to the one culturally better understood).

For our purposes here it will be necessary to present briefly the dichotomy between edifying (borrowed from Gadamer's *Bildung*) and systematic philosophers, preceded by some general remarks on *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Let us say at the very beginning that the book is "therapeutic" (in the sense of the late Wittgenstein) rather than "constructive", thus it is unavoidably "parasitic", for it uses means worked out by e.g. Quine, Davidson, Kuhn and Putnam to ends deriving from Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey.[2] The reason for which the book was written in the vocabulary of analytic philosophy is banal, contingent and – as Rorty himself says – "autobiographical". Owing to familiarity with this rather than that philosophy, the author can be parasitic on "constructive efforts of analytic philosophers". The purpose of the book is

> To undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations", and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant.[3]

Thus the reader looking in that book for a new *theory* about any of the aforementioned issues would be disappointed. Rorty presents in it a traditional, Kantian view of philosophy (as the so-called "epistemologically-centered philosophy") according to which it would be supposed to be "foundational" with respect to all other domains of culture, to "ground" claims to knowledge of other

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[2] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 7.

[3] Ibidem, p. 7.

disciplines of culture, in a word – it would be suposed to be such a domain in which the central place is occupied by a general theory of representation, dividing up culture into the areas which "represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so)".[4] The Kantian ideal of philosophy as a "tribunal of pure reason" was still strengthened by Russell and Husserl with their ideals of "scientific" and "exact" philosophy. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* - treating Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy as "one more variant of Kantian philosophy", still constructing a "permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture" – engages in a daring deconstruction of hegemony of analytic philosophers (and let us bear in mind that the book was published in 1979 and it was a long road to a wider acceptance of Continental theories of e.g. Derrida, Lyotard or even Foucault). Rorty puts forward the most serious reproach, uncontested as it cannot be contested – namely the *escape* of all these philosophies, from Plato to Kant to analytic philosophers, *from history*... Positive protagonists of the book are Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger (in their second, later incarnations) – the philosophers who contributed to gradual setting free our philosophical beliefs from the picture of the mind as a great mirror that contains various, more or less adequate, representations. The ocular metaphorics was criticized by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*, Heidegger was supposed to provide us with historical awareness of its origins and Dewey was supposed to add a "social" perspective. It was them in Rorty's view who made it possible to think of the "post-Kantian" culture in which there is no all-encompassing discipline providing legitimation or grounding all other disciplines; they rejected epistemology and metaphysics, ignored them instead of – in a traditional manner – arguing against them... The se are the most general remarks to outline a background without which anti-Platonism in Rorty's thought might remain incomprehensible.

Let us pass on now to the opposition of systematic and edifying philosophers that cuts across the whole history of philosophy and

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[4] Ibidem, p. 3.

that is needed by Rorty, so at least it seems to me, for narrative reasons. The oppositions can be derived from a more original contrast between "edification" on the one hand and "truth" on the other; searching for truth is supposed by Rorty to be *one of many* ways of edifying, being on a par with various descriptions suggested by poets, novelists, anthropologists etc.[5] "Discovering facts" – "knowing" – "search for truth" – is just one from among many projects of possible edification. But how it would be in Western tradition, everyone knows: Greek thought determined for over two thousands years that knowing (with all visual metaphors accompanying it[6]) became privileged. Rorty says that

> In every sufficiently reflective culture, there are those who single out some area, one set of practices, and see it as the *paradigm human activity.* ... In the mainstream

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[5] See Richard Rorty, PMN, pp. 359-362

[6] It is worth while reminding here of the criticism of "ocularcentrism" in French thought, of philosophically grounded disinclination to visual metaphors, of violent and broad criticism since Bataille (from *The Story of the Eye*) to Lyotard to Derrida to Baudrillard to Foucault. As "ocularcentrism" of the whole philosophical tradition is one of those "footnotes to Plato", all attempts at questioning it must be seen as anti-Platonic. Let us remind here briefly of that theme in Michel Foucault: it is present from scattered remarks in *Madness in Civilization* to e.g. "A Foreword to Transgression" to a culminating point in his analysis of visual techniques of power in Benthamian Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish.* Madness – is a thing to "look at", an object of medical and political "observation" which under disciplining eye of power hid itself in an asylum opened in Classicism. *Discipline and Punish* shows the passage from "spectacles of power" – from "the spectacle of the scaffold" to theatricality of the guillotine to the silence of death places, it also reveals an overwhelming power of *le regard*, the look, in Bentham's project. To expose an individual to power, one no longer needs sophisticated methods, the look (or just the awareness of it) will suffice. If one adds to that desires for "anonymity" of that *philosophe masqué*, then it will become clear that what was paralyzing to Foucault was an objectifying, alienating look of the Other. Under his look it is indeed impossible to "transform oneself" – as he writes in *Archeology of Knowledge* – and "escape from questions somewhere else", "not to be someone they think you are", and that is all important to the philosopher who writes in order "to have no face". See especially Martin Jay's superb study *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Chapter "From the Empire of the Gaze to the Society of the Spectacle: Foucault and Debord" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), previously published in a shorter version in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, ed. D. C. Hoy.

> of the Western philosophical tradition, this paradigm has been *knowing* – possessing justified true beliefs, or, better yet, beliefs so intrinsically persuasive as to make justification unnecessary.[7]

Thus, in the mainstream – rather than on the periphery – of the Western philosophy the essence of being human is knowing: "Man's essence is to be a knower of essences".[8] You shall not know, i.e. you are not allowed to take fruit from the tree of knowledge, the Hebraic tradition says, "you shall know" Greeks told us in their legacy. "The rest results from this", Nietzsche, perhaps the most violent anti-Platonist says in the *Anti-Christ* (and it is perhaps that "rest" that Richard Rorty investigated in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and in his subsequent writings). The reduction, or equation, of "humanity" and "knowing" gave birth to the priority of epistemological thinking in philosophy, for that knowing in question had to be more and more strict, methodical, indubitable etc. Two decades ago it was difficult to imagine (outside of France, that is) "philosophy" that would not be dealing with "knowledge", to imagine philosophy deprived of its epistemological hard-core. Platonists, Kantians and positivists share a belief that "man has an essence – namely, to discover essence", as Rorty puts it. So, what is at stake in anti-Platonism of the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in a narrow sense discussed here is not only the rejection of epistemologically-oriented philosophy – and of a superior place of the philosopher in culture associated with it for the good and for the bad – it is also, perhaps first of all, the rejection of a classical, Platonic picture of man. Not so much the Platonic picture of human nature – but rather the very conception that there is something that might constitute that nature. In the problematic that interests us here[9], Rorty follows two roads and faces two tasks: the conception

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[7] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 366 – emphasis mine.

[8] Ibidem, p. 367.

[9] For the context of Rorty's discussions in PMN is much wider: generally speaking, he blows a strike at the philosophical tradition of Plato, Descartes and Kant, that is, at the same time, at Plato's conception of truth, knowledge and rationality, Descartes' account of mind as an internal "mirror" and, finally, Kant's

of *human nature* and the *epistemologically-centered philosophy.* Both tasks are interrelated, both conceptions can fall down owing to the same blows...

One of them is to distinguish systematic and edifying philosophers in the history of philosophy. The former are "constructive", engaged in epistemological issues, the latter are "reactive", taking as their point of departure "suspicion about the pretensions of epistemology". The former present arguments. The latter – satires, parodies and aphorisms, producing transitory works (merely reacting...), they are peripheral in their intentions, often abandoning their earlier foundational and systemic ambitions – like Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey, they are skeptical, working out their writings for their own generations rather than for eternity.[10] They want to get rid of ocular, especially "mirror", metaphors from their philosophizing. They are not willing to accept speech as merely representation, sentences are supposed to be linked to other sentences rather than (exclusively) to the world (by the relation of correspondence). Additionally, they do not want to express their views with respect to some questions – so far obligatory and necessary for every professional philosopher – as they seem insignificant to them.

How come they avoid the paradox of self-reference, it could be asked? For instance, when they say "man has no essence, no nature" or when they say "truth is ..." or "the essence of philosophy is..."? They avoid it for they do not put forward the "theory of truth", nor do they discover some objective being of "philosophy", nor do they present a belief about non-existence of human nature as a recently discovered and the only adequate representation of reality. The traditional game of discovering how it is *really*, what is objective and what is more and more accurately presented in the "mirror of nature" i.e. in the mind, is of no interest to them! (obviously, I am summarizing in my own words complexities of many pages of detailed Rortyan considerations). Rorty opposes

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account of the role of philosophy as investigation and grounding of "foundations" of science, morality, knowledge and art. For the needs of the present chapter, we just take a tiny fragment of the context in which the book is immersed.

[10] See Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 366, pp. 365-372.

the Platonic view of philosophy, the equation of humanity, rationality, knowing, *inquiry* – to *conversation* (and several years later – *recontextualization*), when he writes of edifying philosophers that they

> do not think that when we say something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be *saying something* – participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are.[11]

Edifying philosophers are thus such "conversational partners" who, to use Rorty's memorable phrase, "prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into an exchange of views".[12] Edifying philosophers do not seek for objective truth but protest against attempts to finish conversation that might lead to – and here is an ethical motivation – "freezing-over of culture" and the "dehumanization of human beings".[13] They protest against claims that man is able to know himself in an atemporal and ahistorical manner, that he can get to know his nature rather than get to know himself by means of certain vocabularies and descriptions. Edifying philosophers are the later Wittgenstein and the later Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche; systematic philosophers are Husserl, Russell, Descartes, Kant and Plato.[14]

That is an introductory outline of an anti-Platonic theme in Rorty's (anti)-epistemological discussions. It is not accidentally and comes as no surprise that the result of a detailed construction (destruction) from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* with respect to epistemology found its continuation – after developing the metaphysical tradition in "the Plato-Kant canon" from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – after a dozen or so years in

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[11] Ibidem, p. 371 – emphasis mine.

[12] Ibidem, p. 372.

[13] Ibidem, p. 377.

[14] Although in PMN Rorty still hesitates as to the place of Plato in that dichotomy, then later he has no doubts about it. See "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in: *Human Rights*, ed. S. Hurley & S. Shote, New York: Basic Books, 1993.

ethical deliberations. Here the perspective is different: it is not only so that epistemology as a core of philosophy is "uninteresting", culturally "insignificant" or merely "useless" for social issues and we can therefore abandon its questions – following the lead of those greatest edifying philosophers of the twentieth century, abandoning the chance of getting answers to classical questions; the point is, rather, that now Rorty shows us how the conception of rational man derived from Plato leads directly to the most serious *ethical* problems. It is from there that comes Rorty's – still playful, still within rhetorics, still with the cover of two sides of irony – opposition of *reason* and *sentimentality.* To be sure, the ideas presented in "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" do not form any clear-cut theory, nor a conception. These are, I suppose, first attempts at showing ways of thinking that remain opposite to Plato and (almost) whole philosophical tradition, clearly appearing also in discussions about the role of the novel in sensitizing us to pain and humiliation (that is, to everything that matters to the liberal in Rorty's account). But that is the issue deserving a separate section.

2.

Let us note first that the possibility of ethical consequences of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was not exposed by Anglo-Saxon commentators (unless in the direction of nihilism, skepticism or relativism) from *Reading Rorty*, the most important collective critical reader devoted to that book. Perhaps it was only Charles Taylor who saw such a possibility but not in the text from that volume[15] but in a later contribution to *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?* He says there that the *epistemological* tradition is strictly linked to the *moral and spiritual* one, and at stake in struggles "over the corpse of epistemology are some of the most important spiritual issues of our time".[16] That it is the case one can

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[15] Charles Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition" in: *Reading Rorty. Critical Responses to 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' (and Beyond),* A. Malachowski (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 257-278.

[16] Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology" in: *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?*, K. Baynes et al (eds.), Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991, pp. 464-488; p.485.

see from consequences drawn by Rorty after some time. Here the judgement of Plato appears in its full light.

The text "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", as the majority of Rorty's essays, is occasional and born out of contingent circumstances, but, as usual, serves the purpose of presenting the most important questions of Rorty's post-Philosophical discourse[17]. At stake is Bosnia at war; at stake are Plato, Aquinas and Kant. And finally reason and feelings or sentiments. But we in the present chapter will only be dealing with a gloomy picture of Plato.

While in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* there appeared Rorty's serious doubts concerning the human nature – the protest against thinking that we possess "a deep, hidden, metaphysically significant nature which makes us 'irreducibly' different from inkwells or atoms"[18] – the ethical significance of that question was to be more fully thought over later on. Rorty developed his conception of "contingency of selfhood" – apart from contingency of language and contingency of community – e.g. in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. What would be human self? – according to Rorty's well-known phrase, it is a "centerless web of beliefs and desires" or a "coherent and plausible set of beliefs and desires".[19] In Rorty's view such an account of the self was enabled only with Freud – it was only him who rejected the idea of a paradigmatic human being, and thereby the very need of a theory of human nature.[20] The Nietzschean superman is not more "human", nor is so the Kantian dutiful fulfiller of common moral obligations, nor is so Harold Bloom's self-creating "strong poet". Freud was to discredit the idea of true human self, and thereby the idea of the search for a permanent and unchangeable self behind ever changing accidents. As Rorty puts it: Freud helped us "to see ourselves as centerless, as random assemblages of contingent and idiosyncratic needs rather than as more or less adequate exemplifications of a common human essence".[21] Rorty saw today a growing willingness to disregard the question of our nature

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[17] For the philosophy/Philosophy distinction, see "Introduction" to CP.

[18] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 373.

[19] Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in PP 2, p. 147.

[20] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 35.

[21] Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection", p.155.

and replace it with the following one: "What can we make of ourselves?"[22] With Darwin and Freud, the sense of our *malleability* was closer and closer to us. Rorty says: "We are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping, animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal".[23] That is to say, we are not content either with Plato's answer, or with Nietzsche's, the very controversy between them becomes insignificant. What was supposed to be specifically human and to "ground" morality was (traditionally, since Plato) "rationality". To be human was to be rational, and to be rational, at the same time, was to be moral.

Rorty (as a pragmatist) asks about effectiveness of such thinking in the context of attempts of bringing about utopias sketched by European Enlightenment. According to him in the last two hundred years most of the work of changing our moral intuitions, vast part of transformations of our "vocabulary of moral deliberation"[24] was done not by increasing our moral *knowledge* but by – as he calls it – "manipulating our *feelings*".[25] From a pragmatic point of view, there appears here a fundamental opposition between rationality and sentimentality, reason and feelings. Plato, Aquinas, and Kant, claiming their rights to knowledge of human nature, had failed; hence the following Rorty's conclusion: "since no useful work seems to be done by insisting on a purportedly ahistorical human nature, there probably is no such nature, or at least nothing in that nature that is relevant to our moral choices".[26] His doubts, as can be seen, are about the efficacy rather than epistemic status of moral considerations.

Rorty contrasts rationality and moral knowledge with "sentimental education" (which, incidentally, refers us back via Flaubert to novelists contrasted with philosophers). The education in question takes its power from a well-documented belief that today's Western culture has been shaped by "hearing sad and sentimental stories"[27] rather than by moral knowledge. What

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[22] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 115.

[23] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 115.

[24] See "Freud and Moral Reflection" in PP 2.

[25] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 118 – emphasis mine.

[26] Ibidem, p. 119.

[27] Ibidem, p. 118. That is to say, for instance, reading novels. See "Brigands et Intellectuels", *Critique* 493-494, Juin-Juillet 1988.

would be that Plato's fault, repeated later on by generations of moral philosophers, I have been looking for here? Plato according to Rorty was to turn the interest of philosophy to extreme cases (like Thrasymachus and Callicles), seeing his task in answering such questions as, for instance, "Why should I be moral?", "Why is it rational to be moral?", why being moral is in the interest of human beings? He tried to convince egoists, neglecting in Rorty's liberal (referring to "pain" and "humiliation") view a much more common case: that of a person *indifferent to the suffering of others*, and, whose relation to others is, at the same time, *morally impeccable*. So Plato was supposed to make a turn towards rationality to fight with extreme, rare cases instead of trying to sensitize us to common suffering of others, often pseudo-humans to us (unfaithful dogs during the Crusades, slaves, Blacks etc.). The main point of accusation of Plato is exactly the following:

> By insisting that he could reeducate people who had matured without acquiring appropriate moral sentiments by *invoking a higher power than sentiment, the power of reason*, Plato got moral philosophy off on the wrong foot.[28]

Obviously, let us say it right now, we are dealing here with a narrative strategy – Plato, to be sure, could not behave in a different manner in the situation of the common birth of *logos* and *polis,* rationality and socialization, reason, to be sure, *was* the greatest achievement of Ancient Greece, and it is only from current perspective that we are able to look at Plato considering possible priority of sentiments to reason in shaping liberal consciousness in recent two centuries. Within that strategy, one can find the source of that denigration of sentimentality, locate in the history of philosophy and at the beginning of the narrative about sentiments and reason. One also has to bear in mind that it is one of many narratives about Plato, the aim of which is making us sensitive to dangers deriving from reason itself. And it was to that particular

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[28] Ibidem, p. 123 – emphasis mine.

persuasive story that the very founder of the philosophical discourse was useful.

For discussions of Plato are to lead us directly to discussions of the present. Rorty binds the two with a violent summing-up when he says that our problem is not the (Platonic) rational egoist: "The problem is the gallant and honorable Serb who sees Muslims as circumcised dogs".[29] And today, after the experiences of the Holocaust and other nightmares of the twentieth century coming to an end, to be effective, it is not enough to refer to what is common to people – to rationality. And neither Jefferson writing about inalienable human rights ever thought about his own slaves (a classical example of Rorty's from his numerous texts), nor the Nazis thought of the Jews they murdered as fully human[30], nor the sides of the Balkan war saw one another as human beings. For what really matters, as Rorty says, is who we think of as fellow-human. The history teaches us that Platonic-Kantian dreams of common, rational human nature are not efficient enough to stop a conviction common out of our (subtle, civilized, and post-Enlightenment) cultural sphere that to belong to common biological species *does not suffice* to belong to a common moral community.[31]

It is just that aforementioned sentimental education, development of sentiments rather than merely reason, that is to bring closer and familiarize people with others so that they were not treated as non-human. "The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms 'our kind of people' and 'people like us'".[32] So there is no point in writing of

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[29] Ibidem, p. 124.

[30] See Zygmunt Bauman's remarks on "racial hygiene" in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1989 and *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1992.

[31] Let us note that Rorty's thinking breaks with "humanism" in Heidegger's sense of the term: each humanism (metaphysically) assumed the "essence" of man – man was precisely *animal rationale* (see the "Letter on 'Humanism'") . Rorty is antimetaphysical, anti-Platonic, antihumanistic. He also breaks with an "antropologistic" (as Derrida calls it in "The Ends of Man") reading of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, popularized in France owing to Kojève and Sartre. It comes perhaps as no surprise that the Derridean tradition of the "Western metaphysics" is parallel to Rorty's "Plato-Kant canon".

some Rorty's "irrationalism" (and in criticizing him on principle), for that is merely intraphilosophical label that allows to keep in order the ranks of philosophers, the label coming directly from Plato. To be just in the evaluation of the idea of contrasting reason and sentiments, one has to look at efficacy of such tactic. And let us state that this is the tactic successfully used in a different domain of culture since last century – in literature. It is there that instead of formulating general schemes of human duties, developing abstract theories of morality etc. etc., the writer appeals to the very same people by metaphors, pictures, smuggles humanitarianism by means of tears and laughter. What is worth considering here is the whole pleiade of great writers of recent one hundred and fifty years... And one can get the impression that Rorty the pragmatist had been moved by the awareness of real successes of the novel and novelists on the one hand, and sterility of cultural efforts of traditional, "Kantian" philosophers on the other. Therefore he is no longer willing to ask following Plato, Kant and others the question "Who is man?" and "What is his nature?" – but, for instance, "What sort of world can we prepare for our great-grandchildren?".[33]

If we can create ourselves and shape the surrounding – after Darwin and Freud – we are no longer obliged to play the game of *theories* of what we *really* are. Instead of looking for answers to the standard question of the (Platonic) rational egoist – why he should be moral – perhaps one could think of a more important question – "Why should I care about a stranger, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting?".[34] Coming to an end of that section, one could say the following: if we want to realize our dreams and prophecies (e.g. the Enlightenment utopia), we will not be helped by classical discussions of human nature, the essence of justice (the famous theme of opposing Aristotle to Plato in Lyotard's discussion of justice[35]) or moral obligations of man as man. What is Rorty's advice? He sees a hope in educating generations of tolerant, rich, safe and respectful

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[32] Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 123.

[33] Ibidem, p. 122.

[34] Ibidem, p. 133.

[35] Jean-François Lyotard, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

students in all corners of the world. Perhaps one more point is important here: Rorty's questions presented above may be a beginning of a "new reading" of Plato, but they cannot be a new "discovery" of Plato or a new "truth" about him (as that of Karl R. Popper - Plato is totalitarian!). It is rather, as I can see it, the method of engaging the present in philosophy, looking contemporariness or outmodedness of old thoughts, it is a "recontextualization" that needs for a given problem a dark and a fair side, positive and negative protagonists, heroes and villains. Also – not to be a boring, dull, empty story... For the point is not being fundamental, but being effective... Even if these discussions are not accepted in their entirety in a common philosophical discourse, they are nevertheless extremely fertile and stimulating for culture, even if one will have to wait until culture redefines in common consciousness what philosophy, at our moment and in our culture, is.

3.

Who could have helped Rorty in realization of the significance of anti-Platonism? It is often repeated that the constitutive element of American thought is its *pluralism.* But pluralism, the multitude of perspectives and points of view ("perspectivism") is at the same time one of the fundamental descriptions of Nietzsche's philosophy, especially in the way it was read by the French humanities since the sixties, mainly owing to Gilles Deleuze. His book *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) shows that Nietzsche is simply incomprehensible if "fundamental pluralism of his philosophy" is not taken into account".[36] Pluralism is for both of them a guarantee of a concrete mind – as Deleuze puts it: "Gods died but they died of laughter hearing that some God said there was just one God". If each thing has *many meanings* – then Nietzsche questions in Deleuze's reading the distinction between a model and its copy, the reality and its appearances, that has been born with Greek rationality and permeated the culture for over twenty centuries. His deep anti-Platonism, an attempt to

[36] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy,* a Polish translation by B. Banasiak as *Nietzsche i filozofia*, Warsaw: Spacja 1992, p. 8.

question the whole building of Western metaphysics, by means of its "untimely" influences on (mainly French) postmodern thought, shows how to break with writing footnotes to Plato: that method may be, for instance, the multitude of perspectives that manifests itself in the multitude of stories told (with the famous one about the "true world" and the "fable" from *The Twilight of Idols*) and the aim may be that hidden pluralism. (At the same time, one has to bear in mind that Nietzsche's work in that reading is equally anti-Hegelian and anti-dialectical).

The *anti-essentialism* of Rorty's thought – an objection to all, especially contemporary attempts to look for the hidden "reality" under a layer of "appearances", to look for anything deeper and more important than the contingent reality of here and now – may also take its roots from e.g. Nietzsche's philosophy. For essentialism in his account is just asking metaphysical questions and looking for metaphysical answers about: the essence of truth, beauty, justice etc., that is to say, questions beginning with "what is...?" And like Deleuze remarks how "Nietzsche seems to be close to Callicles and Callicles supplemented by Nietzsche"[37], we would like to note how Nietzsche in the narrow sense of objecting to Platonic foundations of our philosophical thinking is close to Rorty. (On the other hand, one has to admit, Nietzsche is never a fully positive protagonist for he lacks that liberal component of sensitivity, the question about pain of others closely looked with the *hope* that the pain in question can be avoided. His relation with Michel Foucault is similar, to some extent – although he wrote thick volumes about suffering and humiliation, he lacked hope for the better future which today, incidentally, is one of the main aims of attacks directed to his philosophy).

"What is truth? – Nietzsche asks in "On Truth and Lies in an Ultramoral Sense" – a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, antropomorphisms..." And that description suits Rorty's anti-essentialistic convictions, one often finds that definition of truth in Rorty's writings. Just like the Deleuzian belief that what is at stake in criticism is not justification but feeling otherwise – "other sensitivity"[38] goes hand in hand with Rorty's conception of

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[37] Gilles Deleuze, ibidem, p. 64.

rhetorical and persuasive philosophy which role is to make us sensitive to others' pain rather than produce sophisticated and abstract, and insignificant for culture, speculative systems. To summarize that theme, let us say that anti-Platonism in neopragmatic thought can be derived directly from, for instance, peculiarly reinterpreted Nietzsche's thought.

4.

We shall be dealing now with the possibility and meaningfulness of polemic with such a reading of Plato, passing then on to a picture of Greece sketched by Pierre Hadot and Giorgio Colli which is more appealing to us. Then we shall pass on to more general remarks about readings in philosophy. Their Plato will appear here as an alternative vision, an equally justified account. Instead of engaging in polemic with details of Rorty's reading, we shall try to show very briefly two other readings, for various reasons still more in tune with postmodern thinking in order to, as a matter of fact, show the variety of perspectives and multitude of attitudes and viewpoints. That will be an implicit way of saying: if one can write like Hadot and Colli, eminent French and Italian historians of philosophy, respectively, why postmodernists should not be allowed to use the Ancient Greece for relatively less controversial readings, which is the case with Richard Rorty?

The question I am putting here is thus whether one should engage in defence of *particular*, individual readings of Plato's work – or perhaps in defence of the *right* granted by postmodern culture (but not only of that one – as we shall see in a moment) to produce radically new readings of past philosophy. The first task is hopeless, for how is one to compare with philosophical authorities who spent years and years in reading Plato and his subsequent interpretations. The other task is somehow metaphilosophical. That is an open question that is faced not only by readers of Plato, but by readers of any other philosophers as well. That is a universal question about the right to particularity within the philosophical discourse, and let us remember that perhaps – to make a

[38] Ibidem, p. 100.

metaphoric use of Hegel's ideas – his "cunning of reason" will make the general shine through the particular, that is to say, an obsessively new reading in a longer perspective will contribute to a new widely-shared view of Plato, and any other philosopher, writer or artist. (Let us remind here of Rorty's original Nabokov, Derrida's protagonists, the Hegel as is read by Taylor and Pelczynski, let us look at the Lyotardian Diderot, "Western" Bachtin, the renaissance of the Kantian – almost forgotten – aesthetic of the sublime redescribed by Lyotard in recent years. Let us also compare, by way of an example, the Kafka of Bataille's *Literature and Evil*, of Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Derrida's "Devant la loi/Before the Law", Bauman's book on modernity and ambivalence, to stick just to several readings by philosophers. And what about psychoanalytic, feminist, structuralist or reader-response criticism? And so on and so forth. The possibilities are practically almost inexhaustible. One can ask whether the same "methods" cannot be applied to Plato the philosopher? And then Rorty's reading of him will turn out as a relatively most philosophical in a traditional manner...)

Let us pass on to details, though. From the point of view of the *rhetorical* strategy used by Rorty, from that of the persuasive rather than argumentative nature of his philosophizing, everything is all right as long as he is pragmatically effective. His rhetoric needs narrativity, telling stories set in philosophy and narratives, as is well known, require good and bad characters.[39] Rorty, especially in the period following *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, changed his style of philosophizing the moment he turned to a wider public. He became less dialectical and analytical and more narrative; as he put it once: "We cannot get along without heroes. ... We need to tell ourselves detailed stories of the mighty dead in order to make our hopes of surpassing them concrete".[40] As David Hall says in his excellent book, Rorty engages in

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[39] Perhaps the first to write about it was Charles Taylor in the aforementioned text from the *Reading Rorty* reader; it is also the idea of David L. Hall from the book entitled *Richard Rorty. Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994).

[40] Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres", in *Philosophy and History*, ed. Richard Rorty et al. (Cambridge, MA: CUP, 1984), p. 73.

"allegorization of history" – heroes become names of certain virtues and vices – and he makes metaphysical "lists" of his heroes and villains, prior to narratives themselves.[41] And it is on such a list that Plato appears and such a role as described in the preceding sections is ascribed to him.

Let us return for a moment to Ancient historians. According to Giorgio Colli for Plato as we know him (and hence for the Plato that has influenced Western thought) everything he wrote "*was not something serious*".[42] That conviction fundamental for us here comes from an analysis of a myth about invention of letters by an Egyptian god Teut from *Faidros* and from the passage of The Seventh Letter devoted to writing. According to Colli, Plato's view of his own works may be ironic and distancing. And in such a case all "footnotes to Plato", taken so seriously, may turn out to be footnotes to just one, serious pole of Plato, omitting his non-serious pole. And irony derives from the tension between two poles taken into account at the same time. Obviously, such a Plato could never be presented as a "foundational" and "systemic" philosopher in Rorty's sense of the terms. Plato could be defended against such criticism in the same way Rorty defends himself – responding to criticism with the other side of irony (the serious one when attacked on non-serious grounds, or the non-serious one when attacked on serious grounds).

Such a picture of Plato is still more difficult to be acceptable if we view ancient Greece following Pierre Hadot (whose influence on the late Michel Foucault was very strong), the French historian of philosophy who accounts for ancient philosophy as the "spiritual exercise". Key words dominating his analysis are, for instance, "self-improvement", "self-realization", "self-modification", "therapy", "healing one's soul", "transformation of one's personality", and "conversion". Ancient philosophy viewed from the perspective of the spiritual exercises in question appears not as a theoretical construction but as a method of shaping one's own life and one's own vision of the world, as an attempt to transform

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[41] David Hall, pp. 59, 60.

[42] Giorgio Colli, *The Birth of Philosophy*, a Polish translation by S. Kasprzysiak (Warsaw: Res Publica, 1991), pp. 98-99.

one's personality.[43] That is, in a word, ancient philosophy is conversion, that changes whole life of the one who undergoes it. Philosophy became abstract, theoretical procedure no sooner than in the Middle Ages when spiritual exercises became part of mysticism and philosophy became a conceptual maid of theology. And although in modern times it regained its autonomy, it took place together with the whole theoretical luggage and it was only Nietzsche, Bergson, existentialists who made it once again a way of life.[44] Then – to finish that narrative – after structuralist attempts that trend, let us add, gained some response in postmodern thought. And although Rorty never says that, in his discussions of self-creation he could find significant and powerful allies among Ancient Greeks (of which Foucault with his "aesthetics of existence" and "life as a work of art" was fully aware[45]). Reading Plato in such an unambiguous way – the way presented in this chapter – Rorty deprives himself of the possibility of allying with Greeks. But let us stress that his texts are smaller or greater pragmatic narratives in which parts do not function in the same way as they do out of the whole, which have local aims and local priorities.

One could ask about the purpose of my writing these brief remarks on Hadot and Colli. The answer is simple – I am opposing Rorty's American story with different (Italian, French) stories on the basis of the assumption that it is no use to criticize its explicit details or implicit assumptions. It may be the case that one story

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[43] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Spiritual Exercise*, a Polish translation by P. Domański (Warsaw: IFIS PAN, 1992). Hadot remarks that "the aim of all philosophical schools [of Ancient Greece] is self-improvement, self-realization. ... The parallel between physical and spiritual exercises can be guessed here: just like repeating physical exercises the athlete provides his body with a new shape and power, by the same spiritual exercises the philosopher develops powers of his soul, changes internal climate, transforms his vision of the world and, finally, his being", p. 45.

[44] Pierre Hadot, p. 54.

[45] See e.g. "An Aesthetics of Existence" in: *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1990; "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?", *Magazine littéraire*, No 309, Avril 1993, pp. 63-73 (in a series of *inédits*) or "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in: *The Foucault Reader* (ed. P. Rabinow), New York: Pantheon, pp. 340-372.

can only be opposed with another story, one philosophical narrative with another philosophical narrative, the one more useful, persuasive, different. More useful on an individual or social grounds (perhaps it was the reason for inability to counter-balance so convincing, so persuasive Popper's story of Plato?). With ironist methodology, criticism in a traditional sense of the term does not exist for one has to accept tentatively rules of the criticized. And it was Rorty who favoured "changing the subject rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on".[46] A direct struggle with the ironist is not possible. Two sides of his irony will always allow him to save his face: so perhaps it is better to "change the terrain" right at the beginning and show a glimpse of extremely useful account of ancient thought. It is neither the time nor the place to provide broader remarks, for these are not what is essential here, we just intend to show the possibility of a potential method of criticism of Rorty's account of Plato.

What appears here is a question about differences, if any, between "twisting philosophy"[47] and what Harold Bloom labelled "strong misreading". How far are we entitled to both in writing philosophy and where, possibly, is the boundary, if there is one? It is, for sure, a metaphilosophical question; the answer probably depends on what we are looking for in philosophy: if we are seeking (absolute, non-historical, atemporal and even philological) truth, then both attitudes to philosophical texts are out of the question. If we are looking for "self-creation" – to use a key word from Rorty's opposition between solidarity and self-creation – then we merely privatize the philosophical discourse, loyally warning the reader about it (stating e.g. that it is "my Plato", "the Plato as I can imagine him" in the manner Maurice Blanchot wrote "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him"[48]). But what if we want "solidarity", the other part of the pair? It may turn out that also new strong misreadings, contributing to topicality of Plato, may be more

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[46] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 44.

[47] My reflections about "twisting (Plato's) philosophy" were born not without stimulating conversations with Piotr Juchacz, and for that impulse I am grateful.

[48] See *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987).

revealing for the contemporaries than (seeming) faithfulness to his "spirit and letter". How is one to pass a judgement? Perhaps on the basis of effects, proposals, interest born or revived, response of philosophers from the professional gild (but there are also various "untimely" meditations). The questions have been put, we are leaving the answers open.

So, thinking of "postmodern" readings of Plato, or of that by Rorty in particular, one has to remember about their *current* nature. Also about the fact that they are written by philosophers rather than traditional historians of philosophy (to stick to that distinction for a moment). The historian of philosophy, let us say, stepping now on a very slippery ground, may be looking for unambiguous senses of a work (i.e. senses involved with *current* culture only); the philosopher, on the other hand may – sketching his new culture (like Rorty his "liberal ironist", postmetaphysical, post-Philosophical etc. etc. one) – use another (usually past, but not only) philosopher for his project, his vision of the future. He needs specially prepared past for his projected future, he goes back and makes recontextualizations, transforms the surrounding of chosen figures from the history of philosophy. He takes a look at a closed, written work from a totally different level than the historian of literature, to use acute Foucault and Deleuze's metaphor, he takes it as a "toolbox". And that is not a manifestation of relativism for certain things cannot be done by a hammer from that toolbox. It is similar to the *possibility* of choice of various views given by postmodernism which is not equivalent to relativism by any means – from a pragmatic point of view – for not every view turns out to be an effective tool, not every view can be made use of (which, obviously, is determined e.g. by culture).

It is also worth remembering that constructing the history of philosophy in a narrative form, as Rorty does it for his own purposes, paradoxically enough, requires temporary *suspension* of the irony of the one who is writing it – for one cannot say that a Kant or a Plato is, and at the same from the other side, non-serious side of irony, is not, a foundational philosopher.[49] And that unavoidable *suspension of irony* (depriving of the possibility of

[49] On the two sides of irony, see David Hall, pp 129-168.

defence by saying: I said this seriously and that non-seriously, here I was a serious philosopher and there a non-serious philosophical jester; here – a philosopher, there – a poet, etc. etc.) potentially forms a crack, opening Rorty's reading to polemic and criticism.

But one has to remind here of one more thing: Rorty has already produced several parallel stories (narratives) of modernity – in *Consequences of Pragmatism* there are narratives about growing "professionalization" of philosophy, about struggles between "Kantians" and "Hegelians" and, finally, about a philosophical sequence of Kant-Hegel-Nietzsche/pragmatism in a text about "nineteenth-century idealism and twentieth-century textualism".[50] So it is hard to assume that what we are writing about here will be *the only* Rorty's story about Plato. Three parallel narratives about modernity from *Consequences of Pragmatism* are a strong example of Rorty's narrative way of thinking about history – therefore one has to avoid being trapped and thinking that this is the only, unchangeable and well-founded picture of Plato in Rorty's thinking. Perhaps there will be more pictures of him, as necessary links in another, parallel narrative from the history of philosophy. For the very evolution of modern thinking itself has so far found three accounts in his writings.

Let us ask whether Rorty's discussions of Plato and on the margins of him are non-objective, twisted, essentially insignificant (as some historian of ancient philosophy might put it)? I seriously doubt it; they come to the problem from various sides, looking at it from various angles, each time making use of a different perspective – they somehow approach their object, forming and shaping it. That is the method called "perspectivism" in Nietzsche and "recontextualization" in Rorty. Let us put forward a question: what does it mean that discussions are "false" if there is no truth of the text, or that they are "essentially insignificant" if their significance can reveal itself after many years? (Quite useful here can be Derrida's considerations of "responsibility" for every reading expressed, for instance, in "Toward an Ethic of Discussion" from *Limited Inc.* or in a collection of essays in

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[50] R. Rorty, in "Professsionalized Philosophy and Transcendentalist Culture", "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida" and "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism", respectively, from CP.

literature entitled *Acts of Literature*[51] – so there is no "freeplay" as Alan Bass mistakenly translated French *le jeu* in the title of the first Derrida's American essay, which for many years influenced a hostile attitude towards him). It is not "free play of intertextuality", irresponsible fantasies, that are at stake here – for an end is put by *ethics*, or rather morality, to refer to Zygmunt Bauman's "morality without ethics" from his superb *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality.*[52] The choice is individual – as is responsibility.

Discussions about Rorty's neopragmatic (or, more generally, postmodern) reading of Plato opens way to a more serious discussion of readings in general, and strong (mis)readings in particular. There would appear here (Derridean) questions about parasites and hosts, Hillis Miller's questions from his "Critic as a Host", some Paul de Man's texts as well as a famous book by Geoffrey H. Hartman – *Literature/Derrida/Philosophy.*[53] Finally, there would be some place for two conceptions of practising philosophy – a "scientific" and a "poetic" or "literary" one; two different readings of Heidegger that gave rise to Derridean and Gadamerian branches[54], at least two extreme readings of Derrida: a radical one *à la manière* Christopher Norris et al. and a more private and idiosyncratic reading by Rorty based on Derrida's *The Post Card* etc. etc., without developing that theme here. That is the case today, how about yesterday? Let us think of a brutal reading by Popper from *The Open Society and Its Enemies* of Plato, Hegel and Marx – a criticism almost "paranoid" (as Charles Taylor, perhaps the greatest authority in Hegelian studies in the last two decades, says). And it was – as Popper put it – "my

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[51] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), pp. 111-154, Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. D. Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992).

[52] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 10-43.

[53] See Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Saving the Text. Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981).

[54] The degree of misunderstanding between the two can be testified by a failed book *Dialogue & Deconstruction. The Gadamer – Derrida Encounter* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), a report of and commentary to the meeting of Gadamer and Derrida in Paris in which almost all contributors speak of a complete impossibility of a dialogue.

contribution to the war". There is a question whether it is worth while reading such complete misinterpretations, a book written with a negative thesis right from the start (although sincere and written out of depths of Popper's heart, late at night, as he reminds in his *Unended Quest*). Let us add that still more than Plato deformed – crushed – with a New Zealand pen was Hegel, the great Hegel of *Philosophy of Right* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, today's hero of civil society, especially in England. It is a book which is published and read, it can be viewed as an extremely personal, born out of hard war years, reading of history of philosophy. We can say – incorrect, subjective etc. But let us have a look at Russell's *The History of Western Civilization* – it just a monster of subjectivity: I like this, I do no like that, is perhaps the leading principle of the book...

But these are books read rather than rejected as "false", for they provide the reader with an insight to some (exaggerated) sides of their protagonists, reveal their unknown (be they only potential) faces. They provide us with *perspectives* born out of the time in which they are written, i.e. by culture. Perhaps it is only in this context that it is worth while thinking about criticism of, for instance, Rorty's account of Plato. Popper, Russell and many others just needed for their own purposes past philosophical figures. And that is still the case. There is no moon-like history of philosophy, written out of time and out of place, out of culture, *sub specie aeternitatis*; it is possible to defend philosophers against twistings and misreadings remembering that it is also defence itself that is supported by one perspective, currently chosen – more or less consciously – by the defender. Readings rejected today can be canonical for the next generation. Like the revolution devours its own children, philosophical readings devour their predecessors. That is a theme of a violent, (para)Oedipal fight of Sons with their Father, of construing one's place in history by means of a radical gesture with respect to others... And like Nietzsche struggled with Socrates, that "theoretical man", Heidegger with Nietzsche, that "last metaphysician", and Derrida with Heidegger, Rorty struggles with Derrida. And that is probably the only secure road to immortality... when Jean Baudrillard reduces (in the time "after the orgy"– for, as he says in *Amérique*,

aujourd'hui, l'orgie est finie) "the future" to "now" and Zygmunt Bauman reads the deconstruction of "immortality" as a postmodern "life strategy".[55]

All these lead us, to be sure, to an ever-present, although sometimes in a implicit form, question of the roads of the humanities, and of philosophy particularly, today, when old roads do not seem fertile at worst and interesting at best... Obviously, on can imagine a response that philosophy *does not necessarily have to* be interesting, or read, or culturally stimulating for it has superior tasks, from which laymen or all non-philosophers should stay clear. Maybe that is the case; but perhaps the case is something else. There is no ready answer for which one could reach because there is no – as one is inclined to think in the world of free thought – "truth" of philosophy, no independent being of philosophy, pre-existing like Platonic ideas. Philosophy is made by *philosophers* with the help of surrounding culture. And nostalgic beliefs in lost unity and unambiguity of it are futile. Maybe it is a little bit like in Proust – it is only in the last volume, *Time Recovered,* that the significance and meaningfulness of seemingly hopeless life of Marcel the bon-vivant is revealed, for it is only there that it turns out that all the time he was sketching his great work. I hope that with a passage of time that will happen to (anti-Platonic) postmodernism; the question is, which volume we are stuck in at the moment...

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[55] See Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 1988), p.105 and his "After the Orgy" in *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993), Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); also Albrecht Wellmer, "The Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism" in *The Persistence of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

Philosophical Excursus III

Hegel's presence in Rorty

1.

Hegel is a philosophical giant that appears in all Rorty's books, his specter hovers over the Rortyan conception of philosophy and his attitude towards the history of philosophy. But Rorty is interested only in one side of Hegel's philosophy, namely the Hegel from *Phenomenology of Spirit* rather than the older Hegel – the creator of the system. The "young Hegel" is one of the greatest Rorty's heroes (if we think of his philosophical figures in term of good and bad guys, heroes and villains). Rorty never devoted an article to him, nor did he write about him more than a page or two in one place. He never wrote about him in the way a historian of philosophy writes about his "subject" – in a detailed, strict, severe and dull manner (to make perhaps too far a generalization). In a great narrative about the history of philosophy written over the years by Rorty, Hegel appears as a turning point in European philosophical tradition: it is he who breaks the "Plato-Kant canon", who begins the "tradition of ironist philosophy", as Rorty labels it, continued by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. He is the founder of such kind of philosophy – called also by Rorty a "literary genre" or (cultural) "criticism" – in which philosophers define their achievements through the relation with their predecessors rather than with truth.[1] He is for Rorty a paradigm of the ironist's abilities to use the possibilities offered by redescriptions of the past. And finally it is he who in Rorty's stories is opposed to Kant (and Plato) – in the history of philosophy Rorty always favors "Hegelians" as opposed to "Kantians" in his specific sense of both terms.[2] He is for Rorty a paradigm of historicism, a model way in which one can

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[1] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 79.

[2] See Richard Rorty, "Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism", PP 1, pp. 197-198.

abandon the ideal of philosophy as a search for ahistorical, atemporal and transcendental truths.

Historicization of reason, "temporalization of rationality" – was "the single most important step in arriving at the pragmatist's distrust of Philosophy", Rorty says about Hegel in his "Introduction" to *Consequences of Pragmatism*.[3] Hegel gave philosophy the sense of finitude, temporality, historicity of its problems, helped it to realize that vocabularies change in history, that they are temporal and transient. Rorty's Hegel is a romantic conducting congenial reinterpretations of earlier interpretations, presenting redescriptions of redescriptions, telling stories about old stories in a new terminology; Hegel is a "poet" in Rorty's wide sense of the term (that is, "one who makes things new"[4]), a "strong philosopher" who is interested in dissolving old, inherited problems rather than in solving them.[5]

In one of philosophical narratives about recent two centuries of philosophy sketched by Rorty in *Consequences of Pragmatism* Hegel plays a crucial role in philosophy's achieving pragmatic consciousness:

> Under cover of Kant's invention, a new super-science called "philosophy", Hegel invented a literary genre which lacked any trace of argumentation, but which obsessively captioned itself *System der Wissenschaft* or *Wissenschaft der Logik, or Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*.[6]

The main Hegelian legacy in the nineteenth century was the sense of the possibility of "forgetting about science", the ability of the literary culture to stand apart from science, to assert its spiritual superiority to it.[7] The way from Kant to pragmatism is presented to have taken the following form: Kant and Idealism (philosophy

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[3] Richard Rorty, CP. xli.

[4] Richard Rorty, CIS, pp. 12-13.

[5] Ibidem, p. 40.

[6] Richard Rorty, CP, s. 147

[7] Ibidem, p. 149.

as the "third road", transcending both religion and science, allowing to see "the ultimate nature of the reality"), then Hegel and romanticism (philosophy as "science" only by name and as a matter of fact as a new literary genre) and finally Nietzsche and James who – at the same time and independently from each other - replace romanticism with pragmatism, that is, with the belief that new ways of speaking, new vocabularies, can help us to get what we want rather than to discover hitherto hidden secrets. The significance of vocabularies is thus not in their ability of decoding reality, reading essences, but rather in their utility – that is the message of pragmatism which used German romanticism, notably Hegel, for its own purposes.[8]

Rorty often refers to the Hegelian definition of philosophy as "holding your time in thought". He says in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* that he understands this Hegel's famous phrase as follows: it means "finding a description of all the things characteristic of your time of which you most approve, with which you unflinchingly identify, a description which will serve as a description of the end toward which the historical developments which led up to your time were means".[9] Holding in thought what is most precious from one's own epoch: Rorty reaches for Hegel in his narratives making him a key figure for the development of modern philosophical consciousness. He thereby differs in his reading of Hegel from Jürgen Habermas who sees in Hegel the beginning of a dead-end, the beginning of the "philosophy of subjectivity" which has already exhausted its possibilities.[10] In Rorty's reading, the wrong step was made by Kant rather than Hegel, the Kant who separated science, morality and art[11] and

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[8] And therefore Dewey is "between Darwin and Hegel", see Rorty's text "Dewey between Darwin and Hegel" in *Rorty and Pragmatism. The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*, ed. Herman J. Saatkamp (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1995), pp. 1-15.

[9] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 55.

[10] From commentaries, see especially David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas*, chapter "Reading Habermas: Modernity vs. Postmodernity" (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 94-113 and R. C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas. Critic in the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991), chapter "Modernity and Postmodernity: the Debate with J.-F. Lyotard" , pp. 133-161.

[11] Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", PP 2, p. 170.

turned philosophy into a foundational and epistemologically-oriented discipline[12] rather than the Hegel who has shown for the first time fully consciously the possibilities of historicity for philosophy.[13]

2.

I shall be trying to show in the present excursus that the Hegelian Odyssey of Spirit from his *Phenomenology* is one of great models of the Rortyan narrativism and that Hegelian procedures of generating his own vision of philosophies of the past described by Rorty – correspond perfectly well to his own conduct and his recommendation how to proceed in philosophy. As is often the case with Rorty – his reading of Derrida's methods and his own methods, his readings of the so-called "textualists" and his own procedures, and also his reading of Hegel's strategies in philosophy and his own are very similar. One could perhaps dare to make the following generalization: Rorty writes about other philosophers, about the ways they practise philosophy, about their invention, originality and innovations – imposing on them (or – reading in them) his own experiences and conclusions drawn from them (which corresponds to the "pragmatist's grid" he imposes on fiction he reads and of which he says in the text devoted to Umberto

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[12] As Rorty puts it in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: "Kant ... managed to transform the old notion of philosophy – metaphysics as 'queen of the sciences' because of its concern with what was most universal and least material – into the notion of a 'most basic' discipline – a *foundational* discipline". PMN, p. 132.

[13] Which was revolutionary, to be sure. Although earlier Montesquie in his *On the Spirit of Rights* said that the constitution of a given nation is a product of its history, it was only with Hegel that historicism became self-conscious and directed against pretenses and illusions of philosophy itself. The turn away from ahistoricity of history of philosophy in Hegel was a turn against the Platonic tradition of practising philosophy. Philosophy in Hegel's hands is no longer an atemporal, apriori reflection of permanent forms and ideas, it becomes self-consciousness of some culture, an expression, defence and criticism of its fundamental beliefs. What comes to mind here is Rorty from the first version of his response to Lyotard when he says that Dewey's pragmatism was a "philosophical apologia of political liberalism" ("Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation", typescript, p. 1). See also Frederick Beiser's article on "Hegel's Historicism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp. 270-300.

Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*[14]). His "grid" is so strong – and his rhetoric so persuasive and convincing - that he manages to read in philosophers he reads his own philosophical beliefs. And there is nothing surprising in the fact if we realize how "strong" a textualist and how "strong" a philosopher – a "poet" in his wide sense – Rorty in his readings of philosophy is. I take it as one of the most vivid marks of his philosophical genius, and the trait responsible to a considerable degree for his international intellectual success. So, as in the case of readings of Plato presented above: we should not look for Hegel himself in Rorty, for we can only find individual and almost private "Rorty's Hegel" there: the Hegel of his needs and of his imaginations, the hero of his narrative with a pre-established role, located well in advance in a fixed place, next to others – also set well in advance – opponents and followers (let us bear in mind that it was Rorty who mentioned the possibility that in his conversation of humankind "creatures of our own fantasy" would participate[15]). Between those heroes – like Plato, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger or Dewey – there emerge individual and unique links of philosophical sympathies and antipathies, links imposed once by the producer of the narrative, Richard Rorty. That is the reason why Hegel does not close German idealism and in Rorty's descriptions is first of all the greatest romantic, Nietzsche is so pragmaticized with his definition of truth as a "mobile army of metaphors" that he says "the same" as James as long as the latter abandons the theory of truth as correspondence to reality etc. etc. All the aforementioned figures are not heroes of some history of philosophy in general – they are specific and individual heroes and villains of the Rortyan history of philosophy which does not even attempt to be the proper, or only, or exhaustive one but rather is an *auxiliary* narrative constructed by Rorty over the years, needed by him for the description and definition of his own pragmatism and of himself as a philosopher. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why there was

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[14] See Richard Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress" in Umberto Eco et al., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 89-108.

[15] Richard Rorty, "Historiography: Four Genres", *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), p. 71.

never published any Rorty's article on Plato, Kant or Hegel, for they themselves may turn out to be not too interesting for Rorty. They can only exist fuller when put in a greater whole, given voice within a greater, ongoing philosophical conversation. What is needed is what Rorty calls a "big sweeping story" – a story told with courage and a vision in mind.[16] Perhaps all Rorty's philosophy can be read as such a story. And perhaps it will turn out some day that – using his own distinctions – he will not be the author of *geistesgeschichten* but will be read as an "intellectual historian" who gives a wide, synoptic vision: he will be read not as the one who merely presents stories from the history of philosophy using others' big visions but as the one who produces these visions himself.

As an example of inscribing in past philosophers (or, more generally – in other philosophers) his own beliefs, let us try to discuss briefly Rorty's account of philosophy suggested in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and compare it to his description of Hegel's achievements. From the convergence between the two there can emerge a provisional conclusion (made for the purposes of that particular little "philosophical excursus") that Hegel is for Rorty a model, that – inscribing in Hegel his own principles and then realizing them in practice – he would like himself to be a figure as great as Hegel, with one reservation though: without looking for a "larger-than-self hero", like the Spirit for Hegel, Europe for Nietzsche or Being for Heidegger. (The aforementioned figures are ironist *theoreticians* who are not satisfied with small pictures in philosophy, who want instead to describe "a big thing": history, Western man, metaphysics - claiming most often that it has just been completed, or exhausted its possibilities for only then could they count as exceptional figures, as events in its history. Rorty says that ironist theoreticians "are not interested only in making themselves new. They also want to make this big thing new; their own autonomy will be a spin-off from this larger newness".[17] It is precisely this big hero – Europe,

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[16] Richard Rorty, "The state of philosophy in the United States", a typescript, p. 5.

[17] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 101.

Spirit, Being – that separates them from mere ironists, paradigmatically in Rorty from Proust in *The Remembrance of Things Past*. While the above philosophers want to be "first postmetaphysicians" or "philosophers of the future", Proust merely describes what he had encountered in his life; producing his great work – he produces himself, and has no public ambitions: "Proust succeeded [where Heidegger failed – MK] because he had no public ambitions – no reason to believe that the sound of the name 'Guermantes' would mean anything to anybody but his narrator".[18] Heidegger, on the other hand, in such an opposition between ironists and ironist theoreticians constructed by Rorty, believed that he knew certain words which had, or should have had, resonance for everybody in modern Europe: "words which were relevant not just to the fate of people who happen to have read a lot of philosophy books but to *the public fate of the West*".[19] This is perhaps the most important reservation to be made – Rorty does not accept such a hero of his narrative, at least officially, so to speak, for one could remark that a similar, to an extent, "big hero" of his philosophy might be "liberal democracy", although he would obviously, and rightly, respond that it is a political rather than philosophical choice and that philosophy in his account is strictly separated from politics).

Returning to the theme we abandoned for a while, let us remind what Rorty says:

> *Interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis*. Usually it is, implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises great things.[20]

Surely, we are inclined to suggest that the vocabulary which "vaguely promises great things" is Rorty's vocabulary. Such a "method" of philosophy brings it close to "utopian politics" and

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[18] Ibidem, p. 118.

[19] Ibidem, p. 118 – emphasis mine.

[20] Ibidem, p. 9 – emphasis mine.

"revolutionary science" – and it is "to redescribe lots and lots of things in new ways" until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt this rather than that vocabulary. Thus this sort of philosophy works "holistically" and "pragmatically"[21] rather than piece by piece, in small steps, analyzing concepts by concepts or verifying a thesis by thesis. It directs the following recommendation to the reader: "try thinking of it in this way", "try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions", "stop doing those things and do something else". Let us quote one more sentence, referring to the whole project of a liberal utopia presented in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*:

> I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favor look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics.[22]

3.

This is what Rorty says in his metaphilosophical generalizations and concrete recommendations. Now the time has come to present the picture of Hegel in Rorty (and the point is to bear in mind both Hegel and Rorty at the same time): Hegel "created new problems in place of the old", as he says in *Consequences of Pragmatism*[23], the vision of truth from *Phenomenology of Spirit* is that it is "what you get by reinterpreting all the previous reinterpretations of reinterpretations"[24], the Hegelian dialectical method is not an argumentative procedure but merely a literary skill at "producing surprising gestalt switches by making smooth, rapid transitions from one terminology to another".[25] Rorty's Hegel

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[21] Ibidem, p. 9.

[22] Ibidem, p. 9.

[23] Richard Rorty, "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey", CP, p. 40.

[24] Richard Rorty, "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing", CP. p. 95.

[25] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 78.

from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* avoids argumentation – constantly changing vocabularies; in practice, he drops the idea of reaching truth in favor of the idea of "making things new" (and interesting). It is not the case that their predecessors' claims are false, the case is that their language is obsolete.[26] He invents new tools to replace old ones, creates the third vocabulary rather than discovers how the two old ones can be combined[27], to use Habermas' terminology: he is an oracular "world-discloser" rather than argumentative "problem-solver".[28] He is a paradigm of an ironist who uses "massive redescriptions".[29] The similarities are striking. Thus, Rorty may appear from the above brief presentation as today's Hegel – a producer of a convincing narrative from the history of philosophy – wiser owing to philosophical experience of Nietzsche, Heidegger, pragmatists and even Derrida and the French, as we are trying to show elsewhere in the book. I think it is important to look at his neopragmatist narratives – in which Hegel may be a model for Rorty – also from this sort of perspective.

If we are now dealing with such issues as Rorty's attitude towards great constructions of the history of philosophy, let us remind his conception of narratives (*Geistesgeschichten*).[30] Rorty distinguishes between four kinds of philosophy: reconstructions (rational and historical ones), narratives, doxography and intellectual history. Historical reconstructions speak of past philosophers in the context of their present, in the context of their discussions with philosophers contemporary to them. Rational reconstructions, on the other hand, turn old philosophers into conversational partners for today's philosophers and their problems. Doxography, in turn, is a kind of philosophy in the form of books about history of philosophy, let us say, "from Tales to Derrida", which, as a genre, "inspires boredom and despair"[31], for it assumes that there is a finite list of great philosophers and a finite

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[26] Ibidem, p. 79.

[27] Ibidem, p. 12.

[28] Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?", PP 2, p. 123.

[29] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 79.

[30] Richard Rorty, "Four Genres", op. cit.

[31] Ibidem, p. 62.

list of philosophical problems. Finally, the fourth genre, intellectual history, constructs the picture of the past in terms of the present, referring to as wide a context as possible, to figures from out of the canon of recognized philosophers, to "limit cases"; its role is to inspire reformulations of the canon of great, past philosophers. Historical reconstructions and rational reconstructions are so dependent on each other as intellectual histories are dependent on narratives.[32]

Rorty's favorite is "*geistesgeschichte* as canon-formation". This kind of philosophy takes responsibility for identifying which past philosophers are "great" (as opposed to both types of reconstructions, which brings them closer to the history of science), answers the question as to who counts as a philosopher and who does not. For *Geisteshistoriker*'s job is

> assembling a cast of historical characters, and a dramatic narrative, which shows how we have come to ask the questions we now think inescapable and profound. Where these characters left writings behind, those writings then form a canon, a reading-list which one must have gone through in order to justify what one is.[33]

Geistesgeschichte wants to keep in us the awareness that we are still en route – that the dramatic narrative it offers to us is to be continued by our descendants. At the same time, it attempts to justify philosophical beliefs of its producer, attempts to maintain a certain chosen and favored image of philosophy. It works on the level of problematics rather than on that of solutions to problems. Rorty in his philosophy clearly favors narratives as opposed to universal and totalizing theories, he is for reformulations of the past in the form of dramatic narratives performed on an individual basis and against reproduction of the "history of philosophy" as the one which is non-contingent and based on a purported consensus, against an unchangeable and established once and for all march

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[32] Ibidem, p. 71.

[33] Ibidem, p. 61.

through the same problems – towards solutions of them and towards the truth. Rorty is supported in this belief by irony and rhetoric, by a persuasive nature of his undertaking: the canon is being formulated all the time, it is being formulated by those who are the most convincing in their philosophical narratives. Let us read books and let us put them in the context of other books, as Rorty says in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Let us make new lists of positive and negative heroes, new goodies and new baddies, new taxonomies, new lists of interesting philosophers, new alliances in the history of philosophy, let us impose our vocabulary to others' vocabularies, using them for our current purposes. Hegel comes in handy to Rorty all the time. He allows him to construe a counterbalance for the Kantian sort of philosophy which, in turn, is a dark spot in numerous narratives about modernity, starting with *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* where Kant is presented as the one who transformed philosophy into a "foundational" discipline, to Rorty's discussions from "Freud and Moral Reflection" from *Philosophical Papers* where he is charged with having left the possibility of enriching the vocabulary of moral deliberation only to "novelists, poets, dramatists"[34], to discussions from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* where Kant is opposed once again to Freud who managed to replace the picture of man as the Kantian "dutiful fulfiller of universal obligations" – with that in which "each human life is a poem", for a democratized genius has been given to each individual in the form of creative unconsciousness.[35] Human self in Rorty's description as a "web

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[34] Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection", PP 2, p. 156.

[35] Konstantin Kolenda who wrote the first in the Anglo-Saxon world book about Rorty, *Rorty's Humanistic Pragmatism* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1990), provided it with the following subtitle: *Philosophy Democratized*. He says that "We are reminded by Rorty that thought originating in any branch of intellectual activity *may* have practical consequences in the general climate of opinion, but it is no less valuable when it produces no more than *a constructive change in the thinker's or reader's self-image*. This is the sense in which philosophy becomes democratized..." (p. xv – emphasis mine). Let us add here that "democracy" obviously does not come from the individual Greek "daimonion" (false etymologies!) but from "demos", "people". Thus Kolenda's picture would be of an individualized, privatized - egotistic etc. philosophy. This can throw some additional light to the American view of democracy as "live and let others live". Hence perhaps there may appear the difference: (Rortyan) "democratized"

of beliefs and desires" is as far as possible from the Kantian well-formed system of the faculties of reason. The Hegelian question about progress in history is still open to Rorty, the owl of Minerva spreads its wings (no sooner than) at dusk, it is still a challenge because, as he puts it

> we latecomers can tell the kind of story of progress which those who are actually making progress cannot. ... Those who made us possible could not have envisaged what they were making possible, and so could not have described the ends to which their work was a means. But *we* can.[36]

And it is precisely the Hegelian historicism, manifesting itself in his definition from *The Philosophy of Right*, that is so important for Rorty's self-identity that it is worth being remembered. Apart from Blumenberg, Bloom, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Freud – Hegel is one of the most important Rorty's heroes. For, let us return to that memorable phrase, "we cannot do without heroes". Both in life and in our narratives. We need conversations with mighty dead philosophers, we want to see the history of our race as a "long conversational exchange"[37] – for, as Rorty said already in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, philosophers' only moral concern should be "continuing the conversation of the West".[38] And this is the breaking of the said conversation that separates the world of the Anglo-Saxon philosophy from that of the Continental one: in the former, generally, speaking and with few exceptions, to be sure, the conversational partners in departments of philosophy are neither Plato, nor Hegel, nor Nietzsche, nor Derrida, and thereby none of those who deals with them today. One point is essential – the significance of the history

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philosophy in Kolenda's sense – and philosophy ("in favor of", "supporting") democracy. Two different philosophies, clearly so, and hence a tension – and aversion! – to calling this "democratized" bit of it "pragmatism" on the part of so many critics and commentators....

[36] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 56.

[37] Richard Rorty, "Four Genres", p. 51.

[38] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 394.

of philosophy. In the USA, since the arrival of positivists as refugees during the second world war, neither a new canon has been formed, nor an old one has been more strongly established – for philosophical books from the past are of little interest to professional philosophers. Rorty wrote once in *Consequence of Pragmatism* about a practical problem: who is going to "teach Hegel"? And perhaps it was not accidentally, we can speculate, that he used Hegel, the hero of the present "philosophical excursus" in this phrase?

4.

I think that it might be very interesting to supplement this excursus with a quick glance at Hegel's presence in French philosophy (as part of our "European" contexts). What I would like to draw the attention to would be the status of Hegel as a "master thinker" right after the war, and then a passage from Hegel to Nietzsche in the sixties, and, finally, a gradual retreat from Nietzsche (and "Nietzscheans") at the end of the eighties and in the nineties. My story begins with "Hegel's tyranny" in France. What requires an explanation is at least the phrase "Hegel's tyranny". Precisely what period are we talking about, what sort of tyranny do we have in mind – and finally, what Hegel do we mean? What we are interested in here – within questions pertaining to the topicality of Hegel – is a powerful and permanent influence he would exert on a pre-war and post-war French thought (the years of 1930-1960, roughly speaking) but as long as it became an object of sharp discordance and wide criticism of the next generation of thinkers and philosophers, the postmodern generation. Thus we will be dealing here with the generation of Alexandre Kojève, Jean Hyppolite, Georges Bataille, reading and commenting on Hegel – mainly from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – against which there stood up the generation of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. While for the former generation Hegel was the master of thinking, *matre à penser*, for the other generation he was only (and yet still as much as) the figure to necessarily get free from. The paradigmatic shift of focus from Hegel to Nietzsche in France was revealed in the most powerful way in two books: Gilles

Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962) and Pierre Klossowski's *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (1969). Since then, it has been Nietzsche rather than Hegel who seemed to provide French philosophical thought with a tone.[39]

The question to ask in this place would be, for instance, the following: what was so peculiar about the Hegel that the whole generations of Hyppolite's pupils (furthermore, the most brilliant participants in his seminars – such as Derrida and Foucault) turned against him with such solidarity? Who was the Hegel that would dominate French intellectual life for over thirty years, from Kojève's initially small, irregular and elitist lectures in Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes from 1933-1939, to Hegelian seminars in Collège de France in the turning of the sixties and the seventies? The question about that Hegel – read mainly from the famous Chapter Four of the *Phenomenology* devoted to "dialectic of mastery and slavery" – will help us in dealing with the issue of complicated relations between Hegel and postmodern thinkers of today's France. We get the impression that one cannot understand current (or perhaps - recent, to which we shall return further in the text) French anti-Hegelian scenery without asking the questions what this Hegel was, where he came from and what the circumstances of his appearance were.[40]

The point here is not analyzing French Hegelian studies from pre-war and post-war period, for it was not they that exerted powerful influence on today's and yesterday's cultural face of France, and especially its philosophical face. Hegel dominated

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[39] Incidentally, some explicit enemies of postmodern thought – like Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut – in their (once) famous pamphlet *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, trans. by M.H.S. Cattani (Amherst: The Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1990) – present the whole French "thought of difference" as only a radicalization of themes deriving from German philosophy. Hence also comes the very structure of their book – it is devoted to French Nietzscheanism (Foucault), Heideggerianism (Derrida), Marxism (Bourdieu) and Freudianism (Lacan). From such a perspective, we all are merely repeating – Plato...

[40] The present piece asks a question about the passage from Hegel to Nietzsche as well as about Hegel himself in French account. An unavoidable in that context question about Nietzsche – "the new Nietzsche", as says the title of the collection of texts edited by David Allison, famous in the Anglo-Saxon world – I am asking elsewhere.

France after the war - he just tyrannized and paralyzed it with his presence, his discourse and conceptuality, like all later "masters of thinking".[41] After the war, Hegel imposed the horizon of questions and answers, he was the single most serious philosophical authority. As Michel Foucault expressed the thought in the name of his generation in *The Discourse on Language*, i.e. in his opening lecture at Collège de France in 1970 – when the battle with Hegel carried out with Nietzschean weapons was already definitely won: "... our age, whether through logic or epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel".[42]

But why should one "flee from Hegel" at all – and is it possible to flee from him? How is one to break with Hegel if one lives and breathes in philosophy his dialectic, one thinks his language, argues with his arguments? That peculiar inability, that stiffening of tongue that attempts to oppose Hegel perhaps has been expressed in the best way by Emmanuel Lévinas (in the text "Hegel and the Jews" from the collection of essays *Dificile liberté*); he said the following: "It is surely not easy to oppose Hegel's speech. It is so not only because thought lacks audacity but because language as if becomes disobedient. There is hardly anything more deplorable than to 'express one's view on Hegel', to classify him...".[43] Language as if becomes disobedient, says Lévinas, language becomes "completely mute", says Foucault, thinking somehow stops, not wanting, not being able to find familiar points of departure... How to avoid the situation which also Foucault mentions that when we set up on an anti-Hegelian journey – at the end of it there will be Hegel who within his system, and especially within dialectic, forecast every opposition against himself. How to be "other than Hegel" rather than anti-Hegelian, how to avoid battles on a ground chosen by him, how to take a

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[41] For "masters of thinking" as *spécialité de la maison* of French philosophy, see Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1995), the chapter "The Master Thinker in French Philosophy", pp. 18-39.

[42] Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Language", appendix to *Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 235.

[43] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Dificile liberté,* Albin Michel, 1963 (in Polish as *Trudna wolność*, trans. A. Kuryś, Gdynia: Atext, 1991, p. 252).

non-Hegelian strategy? It is precisely the Nietzsche as presented by Derrida, Klossowski and Deleuze that came as the greatest help for the whole generation of French philosophers. He became, as the latter puts it, "the absolute opponent of dialectic", as Nietzsche's philosophy is the "absolute anti-dialectic", and between the two, Hegel and Nietzsche, "there will be no compromise".[44]

Alexandre Kojève is of interest to us here as the one who shaped – together with Jean Hyppolite – the picture of Hegel in post-war France, influencing through his lectures e.g. Bataille, Lacan or Merleau-Ponty (*in Specters of Marx* Derrida says that nobody can deny the fact that the reading of Hegel by Kojève "played a formative and not negligible role, from many standpoints, for a certain generation of French intellectuals"[45], to which in turn Richard Rorty replies mercilessly – "so what?", it is no reason for him to be of any interest today – and this is a really meaningful and interesting difference[46]). Georges Bataille is of interest to us here as long as in our account he is a figure at the philosophical cross-roads, the philosopher who suits neither the former nor the latter French generation described here, a philosopher who is both Hegelian and Nietzschean, reading at the same time Hegel and Nietzsche and approaching the reading of one of them with conceptual tools taken from the other. And finally, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida are two postmodern figures in whom a retreat from Hegel (for in Jean-François Lyotard it was a retreat from Marx[47]) – with the help of Nietzsche read in a new way – took the most clear forms.

The manifesto of the generation of Hyppolite's students was Gilles Deleuze's book, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, published in

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[44] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (Paris: PUF, 1962), in Polish as *Nietzsche i filozofia*, trans. B. Banasiak, Warsaw: Spacja/Pavo, 1993, p. 205.

[45] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. by P. Kamuf (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 72.

[46] Richard Rorty, "A Spectre is Haunting the Intellectuals", *European Journal of Philosophy,* vol. 3, number 3, December 1995, p. 295.

[47] As I am trying to show in more detail in my Polish book *Rorty and Lyotard. In the Labyrinths of Postmodernity.*

1962. It was there that Nietzsche was for the first time presented as an anti-Hegel and his anti-Hegelianism was recognized as his philosophical mark (such a reading was then widely accepted by two big Nietzschean conferences in Royaumont in 1964 and then in Cerisy-la Salle in 1972, the papers of which were published in two thick volumes, not accidentally entitled *Nietzsche aujourd'hui*). The Hegel/Nietzsche opposition needed by the whole generation is clear and simple: "... dialectic is work and empiricism is pleasure. And who said that there is more thoughts in work than in pleasure?", or, in Deleuze's words – "Nietzschean 'yes' opposes Hegelian 'no', affirmation opposes – dialectical negation, difference – dialectical contradiction, joy, pleasure – dialectical work, lightness, dance – dialectical heaviness, beautiful irresponsibility – dialectical duties".[48] Let us remind: "Il n'y a pas de compromis possible entre Hegel et Nietzsche" is Deleuze's fundamental conviction. It is impossible in his view to understand the whole Nietzsche's work if one does not note "against whom" its main concepts are directed. And the enemy is Hegel. "Hegelian themes – says Deleuze – are present in his work like an enemy whom he fights".[49] Nietzsche intended to reveal all "mystifications" which were to find their last refuge in dialectic, he intended to free Hegel's thought from the burden of its dialectic. Nietzsche's philosophy is just incomprehensible in Deleuze's account if one does not take into consideration its "fundamental pluralism": "pluralism is a purely philosophical way of thinking invented by philosophy: it is the only guarantee of freedom of a particular mind, the only principle of violent atheism. Gods died, but they died of laughter hearing that some God said that he was the only one".[50] Nietzsche seen through Deleuze's eyes – as well as through those of Pierre Klossowski from his book *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* and of Jacques Derrida from *Eperons. Nietzsche's Styles*, and recently in America of Alexander Nehamas from *Nietzsche. Life as Literature* – suggests a new way of thinking – an affirmative

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[48] Gilles Deleuze, pp. 13, 13-14.

[49] Ibidem, p. 171.

[50] Ibidem, p. 8.

thought which, finally, "excludes each negativity".[51] Instead of a speculative element of negation, opposition, contradiction – Nietzsche is to offer the element of difference, affirmation and pleasure. Nietzsche's superman in Deleuze is to be directed against a dialectical conception of man, transvaluation – against a dialectical elimination of alienation. Nietzsche's work, to sum up, is according to Deleuze "saturated with anti-Hegelianism".[52]

5.

Alexandre Kojève conducted his seminars in the mood of a reneissance of Hegelian interests inspired by himself that began to spread towards the end of the twenties under the influence of e.g. Marxism and the Russian revolution. When Alexandre Koyré reported in 1930 during an international Hegelian congress "the state of Hegelian studies in France", he was forced to remark at the very beginning that his paper would be brief and poor in comparison with other ones for neither at that time nor earlier there was any Hegelian school, nor even an eminent student of Hegel.[53] Reasons enumerated by Koyré are manifold: first of all, difficulties in comprehending Hegel, the total oblivion into which he had fallen in the sixties of the nineteenth century when translations of his writings into French had been made, then – a "return to Kant", and, finally, Hegel's Protestantism. They had led to a dominating "attitude of hostility", as Koyré remarks; Hegelianism was degraded also due to highly infavorable opinions expressed by the

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[51] Ibidem p. 14. Alexander Nehamas treats Nietzsche as a philosopher who creates an artwork – we would say, in the manner of the late Foucault from his "aesthetics of existence" – out of himself. "Nietzsche exemplifies through his own writings one way in which one individual may have succeeded in fashioning itself - an individual, moreover, who, though beyond morality, is not morally objectionable. The individual is none other than Nietzsche himself, who is a creature of his own texts. This character does not provide a model for imitation, since he consists essentially of the specific actions - that is, of the specific writings - that make him up, and which only he could write". *Nietzsche. Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985), p. 8.

[52] Gilles Deleuze, p. 13.

[53] Alexandre Koyré, "Rapport sur l'état des études hégéliennes en France" in: *Études d'Histoire de la pensée philosophique* (Paris: Libraire Armand Colin, 1961), p. 205.

greatest philosophical authority of France after the first world war, Leon Brunschicg.[54] The turning point in the reception of Hegel was the book by Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (1929) of which Jean Hyppolite was to write later that it had been a shock for all – *une sorte de révélation*. Thus Hegel appeared in France of the thirties – as if from nowhere (incidentally, out of the three Hegelian pioneers – Wahl, Kojève, Koyré – the latter two were Russian emigrés whose interests and personal fates had thrown them before their arrival to France to Husserlian-Heideggerian Germany of the twenties). And right after the second world war everything avant-garde, modern and progressive referred to Hegel and his dialectic of "mastery and slavery" from *Phenomenology*.[55] Finally, in the sixties, to paint this picture to the end that interests us here, the Hegelian page was turned once again - the point was, as Foucault put it in a passage quoted above, to "flee" from Hegel. As Vincent Descombes comments on this situation in a very good (especially in more historical passages) book *Modern French Philosophy*:

> The difference separating the two generations [that of three 'H's – Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger – and that which loved three "masters of suspicion" – MK] lies in the inversion of the sign that marked the relationship to Hegel: everywhere a *minus* was substituted by a *plus*. The reference point remained the same.[56]

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[54] Ibidem, pp. 207, 208.

[55] German *Herrschaft* and *Knechtschaft* is English *mastery* and *slavery* and French – from Hyppolite and Kojève – *maître* and *esclave*. A new French translator of *Phenomenology*, Jean-Pierre Levebvre (1991), referring to a biblical dimension of the pair *Herr und Knecht*, suggests still another possibility: *maître* and *Valet*, rendering *Knechtschaft* as *servitude*. In Poland, new proposals by Marek J. Siemek (from *Philosophy of Completed Modernity – Hegel*, Torun: UMK, 1995) go in the same direction as these of Levebvre, presented in "L'oeuvre en mouvement" in a Hegelian issue of *Magazine littéraire* (Nov. 1991, No 293), p. 24 – starting from different positions, they arrive at similar linguistic conclusions.

[56] Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.K. Harding (Cambridge: CUP, 1980), p. 12.

Without getting too much into details of the evolution of Kojève's views (as we are doing it elsewhere) and starting from his Hegelian lectures edited and published by Raymond Queneau as well as from some of his post-war texts (and especially a correspondence with his most serious philosophical adversary, Leo Strauss, published four years ago, which provides their polemics about the figure of the "tyrant" and a" philosopher" with an additional dimension), I would be inclined to say, agreeing with his numerous French and American commentators, that his work is a splendid example of a genius of propaganda. A genius which promotes Hegel, Marx, Heidegger – as well as Kojève – at the same time and which is a "very talented story-teller" (Descombes), provides his revelational – and revolutionary – interpretations as Hegel's message to France on the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution.[57] Historical circumstances favored indeed such a prophetic reading and commenting: the period of Hegelian seminars reminded in its intensity that of writing the Phenomenology itself – cannon sounds during the battle of Iena, Hegel completing his work, Napoleon, that *l'âme du monde à cheval*, parading in front of Hegel's windows on his horse. The war, violence, interventions in Spain, generally, a culmination of pre-war tensions in the form of the outbreak of the world war. Precisely – the "world" one, on a "world" dimension, like Napoleonic wars were "world" ones for the first time in history. Once again the clue to thinking about the world was History with the capital 'h' (Czesław Miłosz in a short text about Albert Camus, "Fraternal Interlocutor", wrote that in the forties and fifties French intellectuals were fascinated by History – "we [here in Central

[57] It is sometimes said that Kojève gave France "interpretations" of Hegel while Hyppolite gave it "commentaries", the former being subjective, often unfaithful and foreign to Hegel, the latter being an example of an objective, cold and modest philosophical work. Not accidentally in numerous contemporary works devoted to Hegel and written by French historians of philosophy – Kojève's book is not even mentioned... It is simply unbelievable considering the influence of one and the other on post-war French thought. Jacques d'Hondt, an established French Hegelian authority, says that Hyppolite presented a deep commentary, while Kojève merely interpreted some aspects and some chapters of the *Phenomenology* – that he had specifically chosen. See *Magazine littéraire* No 293, p. 32.

Europe – MK] were also fascinated by it, but in a different way. They longed for personal saturation with historicity. We were saturated with it in abundance...").

One of the participants in Kojève's Hegelian seminars was Georges Bataille who simultaneously attempted to write about Nietzsche, protesting as the first in France against appropriation of him by the Nazi ideology[58]. Sometimes it is said that Bataille's intention was anti-Hegelian right from the start and the tool for his struggles with Hegel was to be Nietzsche read extremely intensely and personally[59]. (As Bataille put it in *On Nietzsche*: "Except for a few exceptions, my company on earth is mostly Nietzsche" or "My life with Nietzsche as a companion is a community. My book is this community"[60]). But personally I share the view – and I am not isolated in this respect for the same goes for e.g. Denis Hollier[61] – that Bataille as the only French philosopher of the period that interests us here is neither Nietzschean nor Hegelian (staying close to both). It is perhaps so that as the only one he needed in his thinking both a transgressive as well as a dialectical element – in his *Summa atheologica* (*Inner Experience, Guilty, On Nietzsche*) he revealed a Nietzschean part of his work and in *The Accursed Share* its Marxian-Hegelian side. Divided into two, Bataille wrote under the sign of both philosophers, rejecting at the same time an unambiguous and permanent subordination either to Nietzschean textuality (the "irresponsibility" of which Pierre Klossowski writes so much) or to everything that is brought about

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[58] For instance in such texts as "Nietzsche and the Fascists" or "Nietzschean Chronicle" translated in English by A. Stoekl in *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP), 1985.

[59] See Bruno Karsenti, "Bataille anti-hégélien?", *Magazine littéraire*, Nov. 91, No 293, pp. 54-57. To how deplorable results can lead reading Bataille as a mere sociologist, see a very poor book by Michael Richardson, *Georges Bataille* (London: Routledge, 1994). From among a couple of books I know, the most philosophically interesting to me was Jean-Michel Besnier's *La politique de l'impossible* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988).

[60] Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. by B. Boone (New York: Paragon House, 1992), pp. 3, 9.

[61] See Denis Hollier, "Le Dispositif Hegel/Nietzsche dans la bibliothèque de Bataille", *L'Arc*, 38, pp. 35-47.

by social-oriented thinking.[62] One the one hand, he was looking in a Nietzschean manner for Hegel's non-knowledge, what remains un-thought in his system and what he found in "poetry, laughter, ecstasy" as blind spots of the system[63], being distant from the community and political and social mission of the philosopher and close to a transgression restricted to the text[64]; on the other hand, he was writing his counter-history of civilization in which work was a mark of slavery rather than a road to emancipation and where social power was associated only with destruction, and not production.

6.

"Dialectic of mastery and slavery" from Kojève, Bataille with his idea of general rather than restricted economy, to Foucault and Derrida, was a *constant* in French thought, Descombes says. Chapter Four of the *Phenomenology* became the most frequently discussed – and appropriated and then digested – passage from Hegel's writings. Not surprisingly enough, the opposition against Hegel's domination in the years of 1930-60 appeared both in Foucault and Derrida e.g. in considerations on dialectical conception of history, on the place reason occupies in history as well as on dialectic itself. Let us take into account several texts representative for that period, leaving aside others, sometimes devoted to Hegel to a large extent (such as Derrida's *Glas*): Foucault's "Preface to Transgression" and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" and Derrida's *Positions* and "Hegelianism Without Reserve". For what we mean is not so much, and not only, to show the relation of the two thinkers to Hegel's philosophy but rather to indicate opposing Hegel – precisely with Nietzsche, and

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[62] I present in more detail the opposition between textualists and communitarians in post-war French culture in a text "'They should only follow the one who leads...' or on philosophy and politics (Sartre-Barthes-Foucault)" in A. Jamroziakowa (ed.), *Revisions – Continuations*, Poznan: Humaniora, 1996.

[63] Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. by L.A. Boldt (New York: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 111.

[64] See Allan Stoekl, *Agonies of the Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

it is there that this can be seen most clearly. The atmosphere of the "new Nietzsche" in question can be seen from the opening sentence from Klossowski's book on Nietzsche: "how is one to speak of 'Nietzsche's though' without ever referring to what has been said about him"; besides, Nietzsche there is supposed to reject the attitude of a "teaching philosopher", to give up writing "in care of the human condition".[65] And it was not accidentally that Michel Foucault asked about his philosophical identity said in "Le retour de la morale", his last interview – given while he was correcting two last volumes of his *History of Sexuality* – that two fundamental experiences which had shaped his philosophical development were Heidegger and Nietzsche. Mentioning his "fundamental Nietzscheanism", he says exactly the following: "Je suis simplement nietzschéen" – I am just a Nietzschean.[66]

Foucault's homage paid to Bataille, the founder of *Critique* – in "A Preface to Transgression" – powerfully shows "the Nietzschean turn" in France[67]: the author writes there about our falling "asleep in dialectic and anthropology" (which, I suppose, refers us back directly to Hegel and Kojčve) from which only Nietzsche can wake us up. Discursive language, however, like in the passage from Lévinas cited above, becomes "ineffectual" and "nearly silent".[68] There remain non-Hegelian, non-philosophical writers such as Klossowski or Blanchot (or also, in Foucault's view, Bataille) who as the only thinkers can find proper words to express the experience of transgression. Foucault says, presenting a peculiar proportion, that "perhaps one day it [the experience of

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[65] Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux* (Mercure de France, 1969), in Polish as *Nietzsche i błędne koło,* trans. B. Banasiak and K. Matuszewski, Warsaw: Wyd. KR, 1996, p. 62.

[66] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits 1954-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. IV, p. 704.

[67] One also speaks of the "aesthetic turn" – see James J. Winchester, *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn. Reading Nietzsche After Heidegger, Deleuze, Derrida* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994). Especially important, in my view, are moral implications of this turn in French philosophy, discussed recently by Richard Rorty in CIS in an opposition between moralists and aesthetes.

[68] Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977), p. 38.

transgression – MK] will seem as decisive for our culture, as much a part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought".[69] If the experience of contradiction corresponds to the Hegelian dialectical thinking, that of transgression must correspond to some totally new thinking - maybe the thinking of Foucault himself? Philosophical language is to be characterized by "profound silence" and in a language stripped of dialectics, the philosopher is aware that "we are not everything". A new search for limits is to replace an old search for the whole, and transgression is to replace the Hegelian movement of contradictions. The language of philosophy remains "bound" as long as it does not think over the experience of the limit.[70] The genealogist, as opposed to the historian, learns that "behind things" there is no timeless and essential secret but rather the secret that they have no essence.[71] The Foucauldian genealogist is as anti-Platonic as Nietzsche and as anti-Hegelian as Deleuze.

And finally Jacques Derrida who always struggles with Hegel in different forms, stating explicitly about his relation to Hegel that "we will never be finished with the reading or rereading of Hegel, and, in a certain way, I do nothing other than attempt to explain myself on this point".[72] Hegelianism for him is "the ultimate reassembling of metaphysics"[73], the culmination of the logocentric tradition running from Plato. Derrida does not create, however, being aware of difficulties of philosophical thinking against Hegel, a totally anti-Hegelian stance.[74] Referring to Lévinas, he says, disclosing his own strategy towards Hegel: "as soon as he *speaks* against Hegel, Lévinas can only confirm Hegel, has confirmed him

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[69] Ibidem, p. 33.

[70] Ibidem, p. 41.

[71] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, p. 142.

[72] Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Athlone Press, 1987), p. 77.

[73] Jacques Derrida, "The Pit and the Pyramid: Introduction to Hegel's Semiology" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 80.

[74] See Włodzimierz Lorenc, *Hegel i Derrida. Filozofia w wersji radykalnej* (Warsaw: IF UW, 1994, in Polish), p. 254.

already".[75] The game with Hegel is going on the margins of Bataille's reading of him as presented in Derrida's *Writing and Difference*. Bataille was to have taken Hegel too seriously, he was to have taken the absolute knowledge too seriously.[76] Comparing Hegel's "mastery" and Bataille's "sovereignty", Derrida comes to the conclusion that Hegel did not see the possibility of existence of anything outside his system – for instance, poetry, laughter, ecstasy, which neither are knowledge nor provide it. Excess, *dépense* – are beyond reason. And it is not accidentally that a considerable part of post-war French thought mentions the theme of Hegel's "madness" from the period before he had not completed his system: namely, how is one to accept the fact of being the incarnation of the Absolute Spirit, of announcing the end of history, without being at the same time – God? Although there is no definition of the Derridean *différance*, if it were one, there might perhaps be that of suppressing the Hegelian *Aufhebung* wherever it operates, as he says in *Positions*. Hence the affinity of the *différance* with all operations against Hegel's dialectical speculation. Both in Derrida, as well as in Foucault, the opposition to Hegel gives birth to the escape towards Nietzsche (and, incidentally, Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, next generation of French philosophers and today's opponents of both Nietzschean postmodernists and of their Nietzsche, publish collective volumes entitled provocatively *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzschéens* (1991) – why are we not Nietzscheans... So, who are we?)

To sum up this little walk taken to the French postmodern thought, let us say that we did not mean to deal in detail with any of the postmodern figures described here, or with any commentators of Hegel first and then of Nietzsche. What we meant here was the topicality of Hegel today; we merely attempted to outline his constant and permanent presence in subsequent generations of French philosophers. The explicit presence in the

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[75] Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Lévinas" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 120.

[76] Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy. Hegelianism Without Reserve" in *Writing and Difference*, p. 253.

first generation and the presence-as-negation, presence in fight led from new, Nietzschean positions. And whenever we open Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* in its Hegelian passages, we have to bear in mind the fact that he wrote his book in a totally different culture, although at the same time as Kojève, Hyppolite or Bataille – nowhere in the world was Hegel so alive, and so topical, so close and then so controversial, as in the post-war France.

Chapter IV

Rorty and literature, or about the priority of the "wisdom of the novel" to the "wisdom of philosophy"

1.

Let us start our peregrinations to various aspects of Rorty's considerations devoted to literature with the most important and at the same time most general statement: it seems that Richard Rorty's approach to fiction results from its consistently – to use here his own opposition – "solidarity-related" account; the "other side", literary self-creation, remains programmatically and intentionally undiscussed with much seriousness. One can just get the impression that literature, and the novel in particular, has been burdened with an ("unbearable") heaviness of *responsibility...* Does in Rorty's reflections the novel appear as a source of multifarious metaphors, of the whole worlds born out of the writer's imagination? Is there in it another dimension of the reality in which mundane obligations no longer bind the human being and where one can give rein to usually hidden desires and passions? The answer is in the negative.

The world of fiction of which Richard Rorty writes is a *pragmaticized* one – and fiction itself is supposed first to build, and then to defend a democratic, liberal order as one of utopias feeding that order. On the other extreme, let us hasten to add, there is philosophy with its right to choose self-creation (the right given so willingly to these fragments of Derrida of which the most famous are perhaps the telecommunicational phantasies from *The Post Card* or quasi-polemics from *Limited Inc.*). The situation as outlined by Rorty might be described in the following manner: the writer has to be responsible (similar – although with a different ideal to – Sartre's conception of *littérature engagée*), the philosopher may indulge in certain irresponsibility – or rather certain irrelevance with respect to social problems. It is as if "poets" are returned back to *polis* after more than twenty five centuries

and made to think about the state and laws, relieving at the same time at least some philosophers from the respectful Platonic duty of "enlightening the darkness" of the world. In today's intellectual climate it is probably easier to accept a new role for philosophers than to accept putting part of the burden of responsibility for the success of a contingent, like it or not, experiment of liberal democracies on the writer's shoulders. Rorty thus seems to me to be making both one step forward and two steps backwards, as his pragmatism does not allow for leaving society at the mercy of spiritless technocrats, social engineers of the future, when poets and philosophers no longer have much to say. (The opposite direction is taken by Jacques Derrida, to insert here a short note in parentheses. He accords this "strange institution called literature", as he writes, the right of *tout dire*, of saying everything, the power of breaking away from existing rules and conventions, of questioning and dislocating them.

The writer can say whatever he wants to, or whatever he is able to, remaining in an institutional zone protected against any censorship; the institution of literature is according to him strictly linked to "the coming about of the modern idea of democracy".[1] So while in Rorty literature "fights" for democracy, in Derrida literature can already "make use" of its charms). Philosophy and poetry, to a large extent, are on the "private side", while on the "public" one there is the novel together with politics. That is the picture one can get from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and related essays from *Philosophical Papers*, especially the second volume of them. Conceptual difficulties of philosophy and individual idioms of poetry do not seem to change the world – the key to social reality is held by liberal politics and the novel that shapes human sensitivity. This is a very pragmatic solution which rejects traditional roles and obligations ascribed in culture to literature and philosophy. What I intend to discuss in this chapter is what may have pushed Rorty to such conclusions (as I want to read them) and where he finds justification or support for them.

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[1] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. by D. Attridge (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 37.

A pragmatic line of reasoning is seemingly simple, and is certainly convincing: liberal society does not need "philosophical foundations" any more – liberal culture will be much better served with still more refined self-descriptions. The natural sciences are no longer, as he puts he, "the most interesting or promising or exciting area of culture"[2] and the imagination of the youth is moved by the arts and politics. A cultural hero of postmodernity is a "strong poet" – rather than a warrior, priest, sage or natural scientist who is searching for objective truth. Ironists do not take philosophers as their moral advisors any more, as the whole French and German Enlightenment tradition would wish, turning instead to literary critics, as they fear getting stuck in one single vocabulary – the one in which they have been educated. Therefore they change perspectives and compare redescriptions by various figures with one another rather than redescriptions with their "originals". Finally – they read a lot of books (which is a guiding trait of the intellectual), "spend[ing] more of their time placing books than placing real live people".[3] (And it was already Marx who said in one of his letters: "I am a machine doomed to devour books", as Paul Johnson reminds in his *History of the Jews*). Literature has more to say and more to do – together with literary criticism; traditional philosophy is less interesting to culture and in this account gives less to it. Thus, describing various possibilities, either we will deal only with literature, or we will try to think of another possibility of the other, of philosophy, taken off the Kantian pedestal, or we will think philosophy through with the help of a specific kind of literature (as Frenchmen do, starting with Bataille and Klossowski to Foucault and Derrida), or – finally – we will keep silence in the manner of the young Wittgenstein, pretending that nothing has changed in philosophy in the times of postmodernity. And that latter possibility will probably be the cultural end of philosophy.

Culture and society need many "vocabularies of moral deliberation" (as Rorty calls them in his text on Freud, "Freud and Moral Reflection") which constantly have to be coined, developed,

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[2] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 52.

[3] Ibidem, p. 80.

transformed and made up-to-date as the world changes. The Kantian idealistic morality of duty, one side of moral philosophy falling to pieces (the other side being politics, as in Marx or Bentham) caused the essential pauperization of the possibilities of moral deliberation. The result of closing of the possibilities of moral philosophy (of ethics) was in Rorty's view the opening of possibilities of enriching moral reflection by "novelists, poets and dramatists".[4] Culture cannot stand void – so it was filled with the nineteenth-century novel. And it has been since then that "literature" cares more than "philosophy" for the said vocabularies of moral deliberation, the central role in culture of which can only be doubted if a "human nature" common to all is believed. The "human nature", the essence, from which philosophers as the only entitled to, deduce how is one to behave, and then pass that knowledge to people (like those Platonic heroes who were able to make a "journey upward", "look at the Good", and then to go back down here to "those people in chains", being their guides in the unreal world of shadows[5]).

So far I have been using the "self-creation"/ "solidarity" and the "private"/"public" distinctions, but one can easily add to them other pairs, more or less metaphoric, coming from various Rorty's texts, such as, for instance, "sublimity" and "decency", "private narcissism" and "public pragmatism", "private irony" and "liberal hope" or "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids".[6] These seem to be various approaches to and different accounts of the fundamental opposition of the two themes (still present over the years in Rorty): the romantic and the pragmatic ("romantic" in the sense of the text on "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism" and "pragmatic" – in the sense found in "Pragmatism and Philosophy"[7]). Pragmatic and romantic conceptions of philosophy are the two reactions to "Plato-Kant canon", two different and opposite responses to metaphysics (as well as to

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[4] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 156.

[5] Plato, *The Republic,* 519D.

[6] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 210; CIS, pp. 73-96; "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids".

[7] Richard Rorty, CP, pp. 139-159; "Pragmatism and Philosophy" in *After Philosophy. End or Transformation*, K. Baynes et al (eds.), pp. 26-66.

Husserl with his vision of philosophy *als strenge Wissenschaft*). As philosophy can no longer be science in an unquestionable way, let it be politics – that is Dewey's answer – or metaphor – that is the answer of Heidegger after his "turn" (to follow the title of Rorty's essay: "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor, and as Politics"). These are answers going in opposite directions for it is not easy to make politics metaphorical or make metaphor political (suffice it to say how Walter Benjamin was afraid of aestheticization of politics; and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Heidegger, Art, and Politics* called National Socialism – "national aestheticism"); these are two incommensurable, metaphilosophical conceptions of the role of philosophy in culture. But Rorty would be willing to be at the same time – and this is one of key points of the reading outlined here – that pragmatist and that "strong poet", be a utopian social engineer and a visionary, both to serve his community and to make use of intellectual pleasures derived from self-creation. For he bears in mind that in the future we will not be turning to the philosophers for rescue and advise as our ancestors turned to the priests – "we shall turn instead to *the poets and the engineers*, the people who produce startling new projects for achieving the greatest happiness of the greatest number".[8]

Rorty consistently *avoids choosing* between the romanticism of the poet and the pragmatism of the politician and social engineer; we have to agree here with Nancy Fraser who says that according to Rorty "it is the desire to overcome the implacable split between public and private life that is at the root of many theoretical and political difficulties".[9] It may be perhaps so that while the Romantic need turns Rorty to philosophy, the pragmatic one directs his attention to literature, and to the novel in particular. Philosophy, inessential, insignificant in today's culture and devoid of transformative powers as it seems to be, is located by him in the same camp as poetry, while the novel which transforms vocabularies of moral deliberation and shapes liberal sensitivity

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[8] Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 26 – emphasis mine.

[9] Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty between Romanticism and Technocracy" in *Reading Rorty*, ed. A. Malachowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 311.

gets closer to politics and liberal social engineering. Theory is "de-politicized", politics – "de-theorized", as Thomas McCarthy puts it in his reaction to Rorty.[10] Philosophy – as in Zygmunt Bauman's *Intimations of Postmodernity*[11] – either hides behind silent walls of the Academy, or takes alliance with literary criticism and poetry. The direct link between (philosophical) theory and (political) practice is broken. As Rorty puts it, "we philosophy professors are people who have a certain familiarity with a certain intellectual tradition", and nothing more, let us add, "as chemists have a certain familiarity with what happens when you mix various substances together".[12]

To sum up briefly these notes outlining the background for a more detailed reflection: the pragmatic impulse, ideals of liberal democracy, the priority of democracy to philosophy etc. push Rorty's thinking towards literature as a certain democratic utopia (the novel as Milan Kundera's "paradise of individuals"), the Romantic impulse, on the other hand – from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* to Derrida, pushes his thinking towards self-creational kind of philosophy. There is no third way. Both ethoses constitute at the same time his liberal sensitivity – what is important is other people's suffering, their pain and humiliation *as well as* what he has named over the years in various texts with different words: "self-enlargement", "self-invention", or already in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – "edification" (derived from Gadamer's *Bildung* from his *Truth and Method*). Both ethoses are constantly present, both give birth to confessions like, on the one hand, "what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark"[13] and on the other hand: "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"[14], or, to put it still stronger:

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[10] Thomas McCarthy, "Ironie privée et décence publique" in *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: Editions de l'éclat, 1992), p. 94.

[11] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 16.

[12] Richard Rorty, "Trotsky...", p. 152.

[13] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 166.

[14] Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 82.

"nothing is more important than saving our liberal institutions"[15] from the pragmatic side and "redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do"[16] from the Romantic side. It is difficult to abandon any of the two sides, nor can they be agreed with each other: the only solution seems to be the public-private split, the split of both orders. Hence maybe Rorty's specific attitude towards literature (the novel) that satisfies the need of communal thinking as opposed to a post-Philosophical attitude to philosophy, satisfying the need of "privatized thinking" (as Rorty writes of Derrida in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*). Let us add that is just a general tendency in his considerations rather than some rigid distinction. We will attempt in the present chapter to place his philosophical reflections on literature in a wider context of his views about the role and place of philosophy in contemporary culture.

2.

Richard Rorty in his philosophizing asks, among other things, about – in a quite pragmatic manner – what literature and philosophy can give us, elevating the former on numerous occasions by means of juxtaposing its usefulness with the apparent uselessness of traditional philosophy. He brings them close to each other – treating them as two "kinds of writing". He does not make use of criticism already traditional today: that is, e.g. of showing the philosophical background of literary works (themes, questions, oppositions, conceptuality – as if the second "bottom" of literature) – nor does he seek the "literariness" of philosophical works. As a matter of fact, he does not change the status of literature; instead, together with the whole conception of philosophy being developed since *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), he takes off from philosophy the place accorded to it so far (at least since the Kantian times).

For in the *cultural conversation* going on (the word "conversation", incidentally, being the key-word to a vast part of attacks on that book), the philosopher has so far had a privileged

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[15] Richard Rorty, "Brigands et intellectuels", *Critique* 493-494, Juin-Juillet 1988, p. 485.

[16] Richard Rorty, PMN, pp. 358-359.

position, the first and the last word belonged to him, it was he who knew better as he knew the widest – philosophical – context of questions and answers. For it was he who used to decide, in the last instance, about the claims to knowledge of all the other domains of culture. Rorty says that the central concern of the whole hitherto existing philosophy was

> a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so.[17]

Thus, on the one side of that landscape there was philosophy as a Kantian "tribunal of pure reason", on the other side of it there were claims made by all other areas of culture which philosophy either rejected or accepted. Philosophy would "ground" knowledge claims, it was a "foundational" discipline, overwhelming and legitimating other domains. The abandonment of the Kantian perspective (reinforced still in the twentieth century by Russell's and Husserl's ideal of "scientific" and "exact" philosophy) would be an attack on the philosopher's self-image – would be an abandonment of the idea that his voice "always has an overriding claim on the attention of the other participants in the conversation".[18] This would be – to be more precise – a collapse of the idea that there is some "philosophical method" or some "philosophical point of view" which enables the philosopher, by reason of his profession to express interesting opinions, *ex officio*, on the subject of e.g. psychoanalysis, moral dilemmas of humanity or values of literary works. Philosophy in Rorty's account becomes less important and thereby the philosopher himself becomes less important, the philosopher whose opinions have so far been important owing to the importance of the philosophical discipline itself... Philosophy cannot escape from history, therefore Rorty asks why it became an autonomous discipline, foundational for the

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[17] Ibidem, p. 3.

[18] Ibidem, p. 392.

whole of culture? It was because German idealists of the nineteenth century, he goes on explaining, told us that such a discipline was the "hope of mankind"[19] and we have kept on believing them (just as we kept believing in what Lyotard calls the Enlightenment "metanarrative of Emancipation" as long as dark clouds of the "signs of history" did not cover the horizon – which, incidentally, separates Rorty and Derrida from e.g. Lyotard and Baudrillard). To sum up, Rorty elevates literature, locating at the same time philosophy on an equal footing with other disciplines, devoid of any old privileges. Old philosophy, or philosophy with a capital "P", as Rorty sometimes claims, is a dubious domain, considering, pragmatically, its twentieth-century failings on the one hand, and its cultural deadness on the other.

So Rorty does not apply philosophical conceptuality to literature, does not seek its "philosophical core" by removing surface layers of vocabulary, style or getting at its "blind spots" or unsaid "margins". He does not ask a question about the *essence* of literature, asking instead about what it is doing, how it is working: for example, in Rorty's response, the novel enlarges human sensitivity to suffering and cruelty (which is, incidentally, a peculiar, liberal-pragmatic reduction of the multiple richness of literary qualities and benefits, including e.g. a lack of any benefit at all). Here a question arises of whether Rorty is interested in literature as literature or perhaps as a better, more effective tool than – for instance – philosophy? So, is not Rorty's writing about literature *instrumental* with respect to it in that what is perhaps at stake is merely juxtaposing it to philosophy? That is, showing what post-Philosophical philosophy ought to be, or might be, by means of idealizing, drawing artificial contours, and even caricaturing literature and, in broader terms, the so-called highbrow literary culture. Today's "supremacy of literary culture"[20], placing literature in the center of culture and treating both science and philosophy as literary genres (as did the philosophers he described as "textualists") may result from Rorty's new ideal, new pattern to be followed (once the sciences – in philosophy and in

[19] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 148.

[20] Ibidem, p. 150.

culture – are not that ideal any more). That can be testified by the way in which he accounts for the work of the literary critic – as *strong misreading*. What is the way of reading texts in literary criticism and in literature according to him? Rorty sees here so accepted lack of a method, of general, ahistorical and permanent criteria of evaluation, he admires the self-creational possibilities of literary criticism (imposing one's own vocabulary on someone else's text, redescription carried out in one's own terms rather than in terms of a given text or inherited ones). Another question[21] – is not Rorty producing for his own pragmatic needs such a picture of literary criticism that suits him, on the basis of e.g. philosophical conceptions or their application (Derrida and Harold Bloom). Literary criticism would be an outlet for self-creational desires of the critic or the philosopher. The text would serve only the critic's own aims – Rorty's "method" shown following Harold Bloom might be as follows: the critic shapes the text for his own needs imposing to it a vocabulary which "may have nothing to do with any vocabulary used in the text or by its author, and seeing what happens".[22] Rorty applies that "method" – and admits it explicitly - in his discussions of Derrida. When Jacques Bouveresse (in a congenial volume of texts on Rorty and his responses: *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences*) reproaches him that he makes the Derrida he needs, Rorty answers that he takes from him whatever he wants, rejecting what is left. He uses him as a grain to be ground in his own mill (*comme le blé pour mon propre moulin*).[23] And he gets the right for it from the fact of being a "strong misreader" endowed with the right of his own redescriptions. He is rightfully proud that he can, as he puts it, "get more out of the text than its author or its intended audience could possibly find there".[24] Literature replaces philosophy as a "presiding cultural discipline", as science in the nineteenth century was replaced with philosophy as a secular substitute of religion.

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[21] See Michael Fischer, "Redefining Philosophy as Literature: Richard Rorty's 'Defence' of Literary Culture" in *Reading Rorty*, pp. 233-243.

[22] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 151.

[23] Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Jacques Bouveresse" in *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences*, p. 156.

[24] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 152.

In the nineteenth century, the secular intellectual began losing faith in science in the same fundamental way as the Enlightenment lost its faith in God.[25] Philosophy would give the secular intellectual his conception of himself. Rorty says that in the nineteenth century "'philosophy' became, for the intellectuals, a substitute for religion", namely

> [i]t was the area of culture where one touched bottom, where one found the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity *as* an intellectual, and thus to *discover the significance of one's life*.[26]

In other words, as we have noted right at the beginning – I am important as a philosopher, because philosophy itself is that important... But in the nineteenth century, with the beginning of what Rorty calls the culture of the man of letters, that is the culture of the "intellectual who wrote poems and novels and political treatises, and criticisms of other people's poems and novels and treatises"[27], the importance of philosophy began to be doubted. Consequently, scientists became isolated at the beginning of the twentieth century from the majority of intellectuals, just like theologians had been isolated before. Moral teachers of the youth, to use favorite Rorty's formulation, became poets and novelists, and the more philosophy wanted to be "scientific" or "exact", the more it drifted away from the rest of culture and thereby the more absurd in Rorty's view its traditional claims to being a foundational discipline for the whole of culture were. To show the next part of philosophical history in one sentence, one can add that it was Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey ("the three most important philosophers of our century", as Rorty says) who first wanted to make philosophy a grounding or foundational discipline according to the Kantian ideal, and then broke with that ideal and did everything they could to warn philosophers and philosophy against

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[25] See ibidem, p. 228.

[26] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 4 – emphasis mine.

[27] Ibidem, p. 4.

succumbing to such temptations; they gave birth to the possibility of such a culture in which there is no room left for one, single, all-encompassing discipline that legitimates all other disciplines.

Rorty, within a framework of C.P Snow's dichotomy of the "scientific culture" and the "literary culture", seems to place philosophizing, together with, for instance, literary criticism, as well as poetry, within the latter culture, with all the consequences of that.[28] Who is that "literary intellectual" or – in broadest Rortyan terms – "cultural critic" and what is his role in culture? He feels he may comment on everything in culture that is going on around him. He is a prefiguration of a philosopher of the "post-Philosophical" era, he is the one who has abandoned traditional pretensions to Philosophy (with the capital "p"). This is his congenial description: "He passes rapidly from Hemingway to Proust to Hitler to Marx to Foucault to Mary Douglas to the present situation in Southeast Asia to Ghandi to Sophocles".[29] He is a "name dropper", a master in using proper names as sets of descriptions, ways of seeing the world. His specializes in searching for similarities and differences between big visions, pictures of the world painted in the most general lines. Deprived of historical constants, doomed to redescriptions of redescriptions ("like Nietzsche, to interpret interpretations" – Derrida), he is doomed to be quickly forgotten. Not finding immortal sentences, true statements – he leaves behind merely mortal, ever-changing vocabularies. According to Rorty, the "temporalization of rationality" discovered by Hegel in his *Phenomenology* was one of the most significant steps on the road to pragmatic incredulity towards – atemporal and ahistorical – Philosophy.[30]

Rorty's answer to the question about philosophy and literature, while convincing, is perhaps too simple, similarl to the one given by Zygmunt Bauman in *Intimations of Postmodernity*[31]: namely, philosophy and literature in the past (when the former was still

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[28] See Thomas McCarthy, "Ironie privée et décence publique", in *Lire Rorty*, p. 91.

[29] Richard Rorty, CP, p. xl.

[30] Ibidem, p. xli.

[31] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 215.

Philosophy) would stand on the *opposite sides of the dichotomy*, they were paradigmatic cases of the oppositions: subjective/objective, rational/irrational, scientific/non-scientific, *doxa/episteme* i.e. opinion and knowledge, contingent/universal, historical/ahistorical etc. (and still earlier the opposition of *logos* and *mythos*, that is to say, philosophers and poets). Nowadays - if one were to abandon the traditional account of truth, objectivity, rationality – philosophy would not stand on the side of the objective, the rational, the atemporal etc. One part of the dichotomy would have to disappear, and together with the dichotomy itself would share its fate. So what would separate philosophy and literature today? The common answer of the two thinkers would be: different books, different traditions, finally, different history, for philosophy, like literature, cannot escape from its history and historicity, although it is sometimes difficult to remember that also e.g. the philosophy of Rorty himself is just a contingent product of liberal American culture of the end of the twentieth century. It so happened, but it *could have happened* in a quite different way. In a word, philosophy today can dare only what Hegel so beautifully called "grasping one's time in thought".

And then both philosophy and literature see the present (and the past) in their contingent vocabularies, endowed with different degree of sensitivity, embedded in different conceptuality shaped by their respective histories. In a different *style*, one could say (referring to Nietzsche, Deleuze, Derrida). But claims of both disciplines to be coining a neutral vocabulary (as discovering one is totally out of the question) are equally unjustified. What is significant is Rorty's attitude to the practical achievements of both spheres of culture. Whose sensitivity to pain was changed by traditional philosophy, did it manage to change the world to the better? Literature has its successes – Rorty advises us to compare the role played by novelists and literary critics in creating liberal democracies in the Western world with the rather insignificant one played by philosophers.[32]

If one assumes all Rorty's points of departure, it may turn out that philosophy is merely "a kind of writing" (as he wrote of

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[32] See e.g. Richard Rorty, "Brigands et intellectuels", p. 486.

Derrida's writings in *Consequences of Pragmatism*). It is most difficult to agree with such a seemingly reductionist point to all those who see some specific, universal and emancipatory tasks for philosophy; to those who seek one, final and unchanging over the centuries "philosophical context"– in which one can put, and then judge, in front of a philosophical tribunal of reason, all other disciplines and all other participants in a cultural conversation precisely from a "philosophical point of view". To the question whether philosophy may be outdated as a discipline, Rorty will answer that "disciplines outlive paradigms that give birth to them". For the philosopher who is able to answer the question of an inquisitive student "what did Hegel mean", will always be needed. The practical problem – "who will be teaching Hegel" – guarantees the survival of philosophy today, like questions of e.g. Heidegger tomorrow, or of a Rorty the day after tomorrow... For who else if not the philosopher is able to provide us with that "commentary on the details of the tradition" the depth and extent of which distinguishes the philosopher from "the amateur, the philistine, he mystic, or the belletrist".[33]

3.

What is needed now in our discussion is a brief excursus into Rorty's attitude towards the history of philosophy – for the choice of one's own history of philosophy determines the self-image of the philosopher. "The self-image of a philosopher", Rorty says – "his identification of himself as such (rather than as, perhaps, an historian or a mathematician or a poet) – depends almost entirely upon how he sees the history of philosophy". The adoption of a new vocabulary – an independent gesture of each philosopher - "is motivated almost entirely by a perception of one's relation to the history of philosophy".[34] The choice: Hegel or Plato, and further pragmatism or some fundamentalism – that is, on the one hand, philosophy seen as "one's time grasped in thought", and on the other, "an escape from conversation to something atemporal which lies in the background of all possible conversations" – is

[33] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 41.

[34] Ibidem, pp. 41, 41.

made simply by reading the history of philosophy and drawing a moral.[35] A similar attitude to the history of the novel is taken by Milan Kundera, one of Rorty's recent favorites. Perhaps it would be easier to understand Rorty's attitude towards philosophy – as well as his account of the history of philosophy – by means of comparing it with Kundera's account of the novel and its history from *The Art of the Novel*. Let us add first, though, what binds so closely Rorty, Lyotard or Foucault with Kundera: *histories*, stories, micrologies, written narratives. Without developing that theme, for there is not enough space for it here, let us use a couple of well chosen citations. Kundera says the following: "I am making stories, juxtaposing them and that is why and how I ask questions"[36] which is echoed by Lyotard when he says that he is merely "telling you a story, unfolding a little story of my own"[37] and advising to "set to work forging fictions rather than hypotheses and theories"[38]; Rorty's response might be the aforementioned sentence about telling stories about most and least favored books, and Michel Foucault's agreement might be expressed in the following statement: "I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fictions". In other words, as Maurice Blanchot explains it, "I am a fabulist composing fables whose morals one would be unwise to wait for".[39] (Setting oneself free of various narratives may, in the most general terms, be associated with May '68, that Lyotardian "narrative explosion"... and so on, but we cannot diverge from the main course taken in this chapter so let us cross out, not without regret, the very possibility of Sternian digressions).

Philosophy is a thing devoid of its nature – its essence, endowed only with its history ("Personne ne sait qu'est la philosophie, pas plus que l'on ne sait qu'est la poesie ou la science", as Rorty will put it in his response to Bouveresse[40]).

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[35] Ibidem, p. 174.

[36] Milan Kundera in *Kundera. Materiały z sympozjum* (London: Polonia Book, 1988), p. 149 (in Polish).

[37] Jean-François Lyotard, "Lessons in Paganism" in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. A. Benjamin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 125.

[38] Ibidem, p. 118.

[39] *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 94.

[40] Richard Rorty in *Lire Rorty*, p. 151.

Kundera writes about the novel as a "sequence of discoveries" – and about the "need to answer to no one but Cervantes"[41] and Rorty writes about commenting on "the Plato-Kant sequence". What does the ironist philosopher do? He is a parasite on metaphysics as "the topic of ironist theory is metaphysical theory"[42] – he wants to understand a "metaphysical desire to theorize" in order to be able, finally, to get free from it. Ironist philosophy remains without a task, an aim, devoid of its *telos*. It does not head towards a settled point (e.g. towards truth) nor does it look for roads leading to it. According to Husserl's *Crisis of European Sciences and Phenomenology*, philosophy was born out of the "passion of knowing". The birthplace of spiritual Europe (to which, let us add, belongs according to Husserl also North America – but not "Eskimoes, Indians, travelling zoos or gypsies permanently wandering all over Europe", of which Derrida reminds us in his *Of Spirit*[43]) was ancient Greece of the seventh and sixth centuries BC, and it was there that a theoretical attitude appeared for the first time: "man becomes there a non-engaged observer, he looks at the world, becoming a philosopher".[44] The "passion of knowing" in question, located by Husserl in Greece, lies at the origins of philosophy, it also gave rise to the novel, although after many centuries, in Cervantes, Fielding or Richardson. With Cervantes, the new European art began to indulge in deliberations on human existence about which, since Descartes and Galileo, modern philosophy began to "forget" under the influence of "stray rationalism" (Husserl). A novel which does not discover an unknown bit of existence is *immoral*, Kundera will say following Hermann Broch. Novels have to "set out on a further conquest of being". When they do not discover anything, they do not participate in that sequence of discoveries – in the history of the novel, and

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[41] Milan Kundera, *Art of the Novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), p. 144.

[42] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 96.

[43] Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: *Chicago UP, 1989), p. 120.*

[44] Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Phenomenology*, a Polish translation by J. Sidorek, *Kryzys europejskiego człowieczeństwa a filozofia* (Warsaw: Aletheia, 1993), p. 31.

when they stand next to it, they fall out of it. They either refer to their history – or are dead.

Rorty seems to want philosophy – together with the novel and similarly to it – to recognize that the world is ambiguous; that there is no single, absolute truth but a multitude of relative and contradictory truths. He would like to accept Kundera's "wisdom of the novel" (*la sagesse du roman*) which is the "wisdom of uncertainty". He is seduced, paradoxically enough, by the truthfulness of an ambiguous and relative world that philosophy does not want to accept. "The world of a single Truth" is not only a totalitarian world, as Kundera presents it. It is also, let us add, the world of the traditional philosophy made of a different material than the "relative world of the novel". "Totalitarian truth excludes relativity, doubts, questions and can never accept what I would call the spirit of the novel".[45] The method of truth of epistemologically-oriented, traditional philosophy deriving from Kant, of the truth of philosophy as a foundational discipline for the rest of culture, is similar. The "wisdom of the novel" seems closer to Rorty than the "wisdom of philosophy", if I can put it that way, as the former took better care of freedom of the individual – for it is the novel that is a "fascinating imaginary space where no one is the owner of truth and where everyone has the right to be understood".[46] In the face of dangers to (fragile and unstable) culture it comes in handy that the "precious essence of the European spirit is, like in a silver jewellery box, in the history of the novel, in the wisdom of the novel".[47] And Rorty, the philosopher, the pragmatist, believes in it for he is convinced by his liberal opinions and his philosophical views. The wisdom that allowed to shape the West in the way it is shaped today (and let us remind here of Rorty's attitude to the USA – that "best of all possible worlds"– and American culture, so different from that of catastrophists of Marxist postmodernism or of a Baudrillard from *Amérique* who says with a scorn: *Les Etats-Unis, c'est l'utopie*

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[45] Milan Kundera, *Art of the Novel,* a Polish translation by M. Bieńczyk (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1991), p. 19.

[46] Ibidem, p. 130.

[47] Ibidem, p. 130.

réalisée, but so full of concern for the future) did not come from philosophers, nor was it defended by philosophers. It was mainly done according to Rorty by literary imagination, the writers' sensitivity and their loud voice, given to them temporarily only[48], incidentally, by the project of modernity that may be coming to its completion.

4.

It is not the point that the philosopher has to write about literature, the point may be that he re-thinks the very knot of relations between philosophy and literature. It is sometimes not in investigating how philosophy approaches its "object" and "sharpens" its philosophical "tools" (Hegel) that lies at the heart of the question; it may also lie in relations the two retain with each other. In Jacques Derrida deconstruction is an intended re-thinking of the two domains at the same time. Is Rorty's project similar to Derrida's? Or perhaps it is manifestly philosophical, instrumentally making use of literature for Rorty's pragmatic needs (e.g. for the devalorization and denigration of Philosophy with the capital "p")? It may be worth noting that the attitude of Zygmunt Bauman to literature is similar – he does not investigate today's blurring of boundaries, the merging of the two genres, but uses the literary genre as an example, as a case from history described by the pen of a man of letters, as an object of a sociological deliberations (se e.g. Kafka and his *Diaries* as described in *Modernity and Ambivalence*). Derrida is different – his aim – as *Positions* explain – is to "deconstruct practically the *philosophical* opposition between philosophy and myth, between *logos* and *mythos*" which can be done only textually, with the help of an *"other* writing", neither "philosophical", nor "literary".[49] Deconstruction of the opposition between philosophy and literature gives birth to a

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[48] See Marek Kwiek, *Rorty and Lyotard. In the Labyrinths of Postmodernity* (in Polish), especially "Introduction". See also Jean-François Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), pp. 9-23.

[49] Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 53, 53, 71.

metaphilosophical (for the very opposition is philosophical) or a no-longer-philosophical undertaking.

Rorty does not hide his intentions towards literature. He exposes its past, present and future to a simple test – to the question of its *utility,* benefits that can be derived for developing liberal democracies. (He admits it explicitly in his polemic with Umberto Eco when he says that he imposes on each book his own "grid" which is the narrative of "the pragmatist's progress"[50]). So he opposes, for instance, the public uselessness of Heidegger's philosophy – and the public benefits deriving from reading Dickens' novels, confronting a philosophical theory with a literary narrative. The novel turned out in his view to have been more fruitful than philosophy in the history of social transformations of modern West, which is to say that "when you weigh the good and the bad the social novelists have done against the good and the bad the social theorists have done, you find yourself wishing that there had been more novels and fewer theories".[51] It is thanks to novels that the West has worked out an "increased ability to tolerate diversity" – by means of realization of and sensitivity to intolerance, which the West owes more to "our novelists than to our philosophers or to our poets".[52] As within the Heidegger – Dickens opposition (that is, a taste for "theory, simplicity, structure, abstraction, and essence" on the one hand, and a taste for "narrative, detail, diversity, and accident" on the other[53]) Rorty sides with Dickens, similarly in the Heidegger – Proust opposition outlined in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, that is in an already smaller group of "ironist" writers and theoreticians, Rorty decidedly sides with Proust. The choice in the latter case is between "self-creation" and "affiliation" (to greater powers than that of the one who writes). Let us try to outline briefly the opposition between ironist theoreticians (such as Heidegger, but also Hegel and Nietzsche) and ironist writers.

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[50] Richard Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress" in Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 91.

[51] Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" in PP 2, p. 80.

[52] Ibidem, p. 81.

[53] Ibidem, p. 73.

Perhaps the single most important approximation will be seen in Rorty's introductory statement that for ironists theory has become "a means to private perfection" – rather than a tool for social communication.[54] Thus we are on the one side of the opposition between the private and the public, fundamental to Rorty, within which there appears still another opposition: ironist writers who are fully private and ironist theorists who do not totally abandon their public mission (despite socially being totally "useless"). The former writers – like Proust – remain in their writings in relation to their own, private, idiosyncratic past; they reconfigure objects, people and events once again (using, for instance, that *memoire involontaire*), making redescriptions of their surrounding in their own vocabulary, in their own terms. They aim at autonomy (precisely, *auto* and *nomos*, as opposed in a Kantian manner to heteronomy, foreign laws, "foreign governance") redescribing in their works those who once described themselves. They break free from external authorities, showing their relativity, finiteness, transitoriness.

Ironist theorists, on the other hand, still keep vestiges of public ambitions. They write about Europe, the march of the Spirit or Being, they invent – as Rorty puts it – "a larger-than-self hero".[55] They want to remain in relation to the past which is broader than their own – preferably to the past of a species, race or class. They are not content with merely ordering small things in their own way (details, accidents, narratives etc.) – they want to describe also a big and important thing, drawing their power from it. They prefer, to sum up, affiliation to self-creation. What is disharmonious in their works is their (immodest) feeling of their superiority as philosophers coming from the belief that it cannot be by any means the case that certain beloved, philosophical words – words like "Aristotle", "physis" or "Parmenides", to Heidegger – are nothing more but their private counterparts of other words beloved by others (far more numerous, incidentally), such as "Combray" or "Gilbert" from *Remembrance of the Things Past*. "Proust succeeded because he had no public ambitions – no reason to

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[54] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 96.

[55] Ibidem, p. 100.

believe that the sound of the name 'Guermantes' would mean anything to anybody but his narrator". And he adds that "Heidegger thought he knew some words which had, or should have had, resonance for *everybody* in modern Europe, words which were relevant not just to the fate of people who happen to have read a lot of philosophy books but to *the public fate of the West*".[56] But as a matter of fact these are merely – not endowed with different significance from other words – private sets of (favorite) words. Europe and its fate do not depend more on a list of books read by Heidegger or on any other list of any other books, Rorty comments. When one contrasts Nietzsche's or Heidegger's ironist theorizing with the modern novel, it turns out that the former is just "one of great literary traditions" – possibly comparable to the novel if we take into consideration its achievements, but much less significant if we take into account its influence on politics, social hopes and solidarity.[57]

As Kundera tries to show, the novel has invented its own – imaginary – democratic utopia. It is as if a future society in which nobody dreams of thinking that God, Truth or the Nature of Things is on his side. In such a utopia nobody would dream of thinking that there is something more real than pleasure or pain. Democratic utopia would be a community in which the most important virtues of mind would be tolerance and curiosity – rather than seeking truth.[58] In such a Utopia people would suffer from and cause much less pain than they do today, it would be a utopia of brotherhood realized in many currently unimaginable ways. "The unifying social ideal of this utopia would be a balance between the minimizing of suffering and the maximizing of rationality[3] [= tolerance] – a balance between pressure not to hurt others and tolerance of different ways of living, between vigilance against cruelty and reluctance to set up a panoptic state".[59]

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[56] Ibidem, p. 118 – emphasis mine.

[57] Ibidem, p. 120.

[58] Richard Rorty, "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens", p. 75.

[59] Richard Rorty, "A Pragmatist View of Rationality and Cultural Difference", *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 42, no. 4, October 1992, p. 587.

5.

Thus, as a matter of fact, Rorty writes of such writers and such literature which is (or in his reading can be) socially – not even only individually, self-creationally – useful. For even when he writes of Nabokov – and he does that in an absolutely superb manner – he does it in order to show that although Nabokov was a writer aiming at autonomy (self-creation), nevertheless he studied cruelty inherently included in search for that autonomy. So, paradoxically as it seems, Orwell and Nabokov get closer and closer to each other in Rorty's reading – for, as he puts it, "both of them warn the liberal ironist intellectual against temptations to be cruel".[60] And the fear of causing pain, of being cruel, constitutes in his view the liberal sensitivity.

Let us say, somehow on the margin of the text, a couple of words about French postmodern thought: their engaging in discussions of (non-representational) literature was a wholly critical undertaking. French culture resisted the representational paradigm – so philosophers started to deal with "literature of illegibility" (Sollers) or "opaque speech" (Foucault). Since Mallarmé, literature has no longer wanted to reflect the world, to be "a copy of a copy", to stand on the other end than the world itself. It wants instead to become a full part of that world and not merely a mirror of nature. The language of literature does not want to represent the reality – there appears the awareness of a "fundamental inadequacy" (as Barthes says in his inaugural *Leçon*) between the linguistic order and that of the world; the category of representation becomes a banner-like object of a critical investigation – and rejection – in the French humanities of recent decades. The myth of *mimesis* that has constituted art (together with literature) since ancient Greece, is violently questioned in works of Bataille or Artaud – and of their post-war commentators. Rorty's thinking of literature is of a completely different nature – and pertains to a completely different sort of literature. It is Dickens and Proust, Nabokov and Orwell, and finally Kundera – but Kundera the literary theorist and essayist, the

[60] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 144.

author of *Art of the Novel* rather than as the author of his novels. That is, to be sure, a philosophical (to be more precise: pragmatic) choice on Rorty's part – i.e. "details" and "cruelty", the concern for pain hidden under the mask of aestheticism, as well as moral protest – and the "depreciated legacy of Cervantes" as an instance in the face of which one accounts for one's writing. Obviously, both philosophy and literature may be just literary genres, two kinds of writing; Rorty never said that philosophy *is* literature – they are separated by an abyss of, first of all, *tradition* and *history*, that is, on the one hand one has Father Parmenides, on the other Father Cervantes, on the one Kant and on the other Flaubert etc. etc. Philosophy can be seen as a "family romance"[61], philosophers – as commentators on certain past writers (usually).

In Rorty's account of literature, one can focus on the importance of attempts to blur the traditional opposition: the moral and the aesthetic (that is, by way of an example, literature with a "moral message" and literature that is "merely aesthetic"). Rorty in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* draws a distinction between books that help readers to become autonomous subjects and books that help them to become less cruel. Among the latters – those referring to cruelty rather than to autonomy – there are books treating of the influence of practices and social institutions on other people and those pertaining to the influence of our personal idiosyncrasies on others. Instead of the traditional distinction between "moralists" and "aesthetes", Rorty suggests the basic question to determine a genre of a given work: "*what purposes does this book serve*?".[62] The purposes taken into consideration are not the good and the beautiful, but either maintaining an old, existing final vocabulary or working out of a new final vocabulary (there seem to be here remote analogies to Kuhnian "normal science" and "revolutionary science"). Books that transform a final vocabulary form a tiny but perhaps the most important part of all - they can transform more. It is to them that Rorty applies his private-public distinction. He says namely that there belong books which

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[61] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 92.

[62] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 142.

> aimed at working out a new *private* final vocabulary and those aimed at working out a new *public* final vocabulary. The former is a vocabulary deployed to answer questions like "What shall I be?" "What can I become?" "What have I been?" The latter is a vocabulary deployed to answer the question "What sorts of things about what sorts of people do I need to notice?"[63]

Let us remind ourselves here: there is no "nature of literature", Rorty stresses. The aim of some writers (Plato, Heidegger, Proust, Nabokov) is search for "private perfection", the aim of other writers (Dickens, Mill, Dewey, Orwell, Habermas, Rawls) is serving "human freedom". They cannot be evaluated on a common scale, by making some inferior, or superior, to others. Just like there is no "aim of writing", there is also no "aim of theorizing".[64] It does not lead anywhere to contrast both kinds of "writers" (rather than philosophers and writers, let us add) with each other – as, for instance, writers of "self-creation" and those of "solidarity", as there is no higher, synthesizing account that could grasp self-creation and justice, private perfection and solidarity, in a single view. It was precisely looking for such a "synoptic vision" – such a single account – that first brought about and then directed Rorty's interest in philosophy. How is one to make one's "Trotsky" and one's "wild orchids" agree, he would ask in a autobiographical text, how is one to be at the same time a "friend of humanity" and an "intellectual and spiritual snob".[65]The answer to that pervading question is brought no sooner than in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, for it was still in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that this question fundamental to Rorty's thought was untouched (although there are already in it many themes forecasting such a solution to the problem[66]). The answer Rorty gives at the same time denies philosophy the hope of reaching such an account, such a vision (being impossible on the level of theory) stating that

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[63] Ibidem, p. 143.

[64] Ibidem, p. 141.

[65] Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids", p. 143.

[66] See prefiguartions of "self-creational" themes in PMN, e.g. pp. 359-360.

the vocabulary of self-creation is private, non-shared and incompatible with argumentation, whereas the vocabulary of justice is public and common, is a means serving precisely to argumentation. These two vocabularies, like aims that the aforementioned two kinds of writers have in common, as well as requirements of self-creation and solidarity, are "equally valid, yet forever incommensurable", in his memorable expression.[67] Between the private and the public there seems to be no opposition, there is a tension instead – and incommensurability.

Coming to an end of this little story, let us say that literature (and the novel in particular) has a settled position in Rorty's philosophical conceptions: in the face of the powerlessness of Continental philosophy on the one hand and a cultural demise of analytic philosophy on the other; in the face of a restricted influence of philosophy as such on the delicate issues of social life in the times of collapse of a traditional Enlightenment figure of the intellectual – the chance, perhaps the last one, of shaping liberal sensitivity is provided by the novel (and let us bear in mind that we belong to culture that was not only nourished by the "Bible, Socrates, Plato, and the Enlightenment" but also, as Rorty says, by "Rabelais, Montaigne, Sterne, Hogarth and Mark Twain").[68] That may be the reason for which Rorty invests all his "pragmatic" hopes in literature, leaving philosophy with a role of advising or of "Romantic" (in the opposition suggested here) individual self-creation. Thereby he replaces a critical and yet softened tooth of philosophical thinking (partially saved in Lyotard – e.g. in his idea of the "resistance through writing"[69] or "bearing witness to differends" from *The Differend*, or in the late Foucault – e.g. in his texts on Kant and the Enlightenment[70], or in Derrida – in the form of transcending both philosophy and literature in order to deconstruct their philosophical opposition by means of particular

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[67] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. xv.

[68] Richard Rorty in *Lire Rorty*, p. 184.

[69] Jean-François Lyotard, "An Interview", *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 5 (1988), p. 302.

[70] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?", *Magazine littéraire*, No 309, Avril 1993, pp. 63-73; Michel Foucault, "The Art of Telling the Truth" in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, L.D. Kritzman (ed.), pp. 86-95.

"acts of reading") – with the sharpened and newly valued tooth of the novelist. Nevertheless, his general perspective is rather pessimistic: intellectuals cannot do much today – from among them perhaps writers are most needed by liberal society. And the philosopher, well, let he just advise others at the moment that it is important to read novels...

Philosophical Excursus IV

The picture of an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal and a liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist (Foucault and Habermas)

1.

Constructing the figure of the "liberal ironist" – the inhabitant of a liberal utopia sketched in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – Rorty notes his differences with "an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal" and with "a liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist", that is with Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas in his account.[1] Both of them do not fit into his utopia, although for different reasons. Let us remind Rorty who says that

> the citizens of my liberal utopia would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community. They would be liberal ironists – ... people who *combined commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment.*[2]

Under such conditions, Michel Foucault is not allowed to Rorty's utopia because he lacks commitment in a specific, Rortyan sense of the "lack of hope", while Jürgen Habermas is committed and full of the social hope in question but he does not have a sense of contingency of his own vocabulary of moral reflection. Rorty's hero of the future must be the bearer of both traits at the same time, it does not suffice to be merely an ironist or merely a liberal. (Incidentally, if one took a look at the philosophy of recent decades, it would turn out, with a high degree of probability, that both aforementioned criteria could be met only by Rorty himself, for it

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[1] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 61.

[2] Ibidem, p. 61 – emphasis mine.

is only he who claims that he can combine being an ironist and being a liberal).

Rorty, having at his disposal two opposite sides of irony (serious/non-serious), for Habermas and Foucault uses its serious side (as opposed to Heidegger and Derrida, especially as far as the so-called "Heidegger affair" is concerned, to whom he applies its non-serious side). The relations with Habermas and Foucault are such that Rorty seems to radically distinguish himself both from Habermas (with a philosophical rather than political gesture) and from Foucault (with a political rather than philosophical gesture). Habermas turns out for him to be an admirer of liberal democracy devoted to attempts of its universal grounding, providing it with "philosophical foundations", while Foucault turns out for him to be an anarchist who is unwilling to accept the value of "we" of which he would be a representative – as a philosopher who writes "to have no face", as he puts it in *Archeology of Knowledge* – for he does not see what is perhaps most important for Rorty in his philosophizing: the hope to diminish suffering and humiliation. (Foucault in Rorty's redescription masterfully describes cruelty, notices it and exposes to the readers but he does not see any hope to get rid of it – he seems to hint, together with Nietzsche, that "you and I together, as *we*, aren't much – that human solidarity goes when God and his doubles go", as Rorty comments on him in a text from *Consequences of Pragmatism.*[3]) While Rorty is satisfied with using the category "we liberals" – with the whole range of additional adjectival descriptions – Foucault questions in his reading all existing "we's", all existing social contexts. As he says in one of his last interviews (with Paul Rabinow, from May, 1984):

> Richard Rorty points out that in these analyses I do not appeal to any "we" – to any of these "we's" whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide *if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a "we"* in order to assert the principles one recognizes

[3] Richard Rorty, CP, "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope", p. 207.

> and the values one accepts; *or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a "we" possible*, by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the "we" must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result ... of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it.[4]

Rorty had no doubts, as was the case with Habermas: according to the view of the "priority of democracy to philosophy", the "we" of liberals is quite satisfactory and there is no need of looking for another "we" than that one in the manner of Foucault. Therefore Rorty's differences with the latter are according to him "political" ones, as opposed to "merely philosophical" differences with Habermas, as Rorty calls them in inverted commas.[5]

Rorty's controversy with Habermas focuses on several main points, let us mention three of them: the evaluation of Kant's philosophy, the evaluation of the post-Nietzschean stream of philosophy (of Bataille, Lacan, Foucault on the one hand and Heidegger and Derrida on the other[6]), the belief in significance of the Enlightenment reason in philosophy and culture. Kant for Rorty is a founder and main exponent of the "foundational philosophy", "epistemologically-oriented philosophy", deprived of a positive influence on today's culture (the classical division throughout the history of philosophy, used by Rorty on numerous occasions, is that of good "Hegelians" and bad "Kantians", similarly, Freud - who "de-divinizes the self" – is opposed to Kant – who "divinizes" it – in the domain of moral deliberation etc. etc.). Habermas, on the other hand, believes in the power of universal, ahistorical, Kantian norms, believes in "reason" which has to be strongly defended against its "irrational" critics, for these norms are the foundation of a democratic, liberal order. Rorty sees the relation between Habermas and Kant in the following way – Habermas thinks that Kant was right as far as purposes were concerned, but his strategy

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[4] Michel Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations" in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 385 - emphasis mine.

[5] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 67.

[6] See especially Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1987).

was wrong; we can still achieve grounding of which Kant had dreamt if we abandon the "philosophy of subjectivity" and begin to develop the "philosophy of intersubjectivity". Thus the fault does not lie in Kantian Enlightenment rationalism – it lies in the "subject", "just German philosophy's special, funny little God-surrogate, 'The Subject'".[7] "The philosophical discourse of modernity" – the philosophy from Hegel on – has exhausted its possibilities in Habermas' view. Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault – are subsequent stages of the European, philosophical "journey to nowhere" and therefore *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* according to Rorty is a destructive appendix to Habermas' philosophy which tries to show mistaken roads of today's, especially French, philosophy.

Second, Habermas and Rorty differ in the evaluation of post-Nietzschean philosophy; for the former it is the "dead-end" of European philosophy (which nevertheless does not undermine philosophy as an undertaking that started with Plato and merely undermines the bit of it that started with Hegel), for the latter it is the "other side" of it, no less justified in being. Rorty says that

> people like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Foucault are *relevant to the private spiritual life of a certain kind of intellectual* (an intellectual who has been turned on by a particular kind of book), *but not to politics* – or, at least, not to democratic politics.[8]

Rorty, as is known, wants to separate radically philosophy from politics – be it even by means and at the price of "privatization of philosophy". Opposing "deep thinkers" and "superficial dreamers" (philosophers from the "Plato-Kant canon" and H.G. Wells or M.L. King), he says that the latters, like the novelists, have done more for the democratic society. For these superficial dreamers suggest concrete solutions to concrete problems – "ways in which things might get better – become more democratic, fairer, more open,

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[7] Richard Rorty, "Posties" (a review of *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*), *London Review of Books* (3-05-87), p. 11.

[8] Ibidem, p. 12 – emphasis mine.

more egalitarian, more decent".[9] Habermas in Rorty's redescription wants to be "deep" and universal – and for such people there is no place in the Rortyan liberal utopia. The evaluation of Kant's significance is crucial here.

And finally, third, they differ in their belief in the significance of philosophy in culture. Let us put it briefly, as the theme is present throughout the book, that Rorty does not accept "*radical* social *theory*" – choosing instead (at best) "continual social *criticism*".[10] That is to say, he prefers criticism as provided by journalists, anthropologists, sociologists, novelists, movie-makers because they are able to show pain and humiliation in their tiniest details. What thus would guard Rorty's utopia against the said pain and humiliation? "Only particular descriptions" that would on the one hand incite revolution, on the other force reforms. "Only particular descriptions of injury and concrete suggestions about ways of avoiding injury"[11] (which, incidentally, is part of a much broader turn in culture, the turn "against theory" and towards "narratives", about which Rorty mentions in an introduction to his book on contingency). Theory conducting radical criticism of society has been exciting to philosophers since the French revolution, it promises them the possibility of getting behind the stage of events, behind the mere appearances, reaching the reality in which everything, finally, will appear simple (and obviously everything will turn out to be the simplest if one manages to find out a single evil, just one source of injustice). Rorty says about himself that he is more dubious than Habermas about the social utility of philosophy. Instead, he advises to put most of one's liberal hopes for the relief of unnecessary, socially-countenanced, pain and humiliation in novels, articles and reports that make specific kinds of them visible and – on the other hand – in proposals for changes in social arrangements such as laws, company regulations, administrative procedures or educational practices.[12]

Thus Rorty in his social thinking is in favor of concreteness rather than universality which is motivated by him by political

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[9] Ibidem, p. 12.

[10] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Functions of Philosophy", a typescript, p. 17.

[11] Ibidem, p. 17.

[12] Ibidem, p. 21.

judgement of rich North Atlantic constitutional democracies – which do not need "unmasking" any more, in which "communication" is already "undistorted" (objections are often made to Rorty for such a radical political choice – stating e.g. that his philosophy is "little more than an ideological *apologia* for an old-fashioned version of cold war liberalism dressed up in fashionable 'postmodern' discourse"[13]). Although such a political choice may be risky, and perhaps mistaken, but it would be shown only by "continued trial and error" rather than by (Habermas') "universalist problematics and strong theoretical strategies".[14] To return for a moment to themes from other chapters, more for human solidarity and for human freedom was done and will possibly be done by literature than by philosophy. One does not have to say much about Habermas' attachment to the significance of social theory and philosophy due to its obvious nature – suffice it to note that the fundamental criterion in the evaluation of Heidegger's and Derrida's philosophy is its practical utility: both did not provide public legitimation for their philosophizing producing socially useless (at best[15]), exhausted "philosophy of

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[13] Richard Bernstein, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward" in *The New Constellation*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 249.

[14] Richard Rorty, "Habermas, Derrida and the Functions of Philosophy", p. 21.

[15] See Habermas' introduction to a German edition of Victor Farias' book, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, translated as "Work and *Weltanschauung*: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective" in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed. H. Dreyfus and H. Hall (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 186-208, where we says that "under the levelling gaze of the philosopher of Being even the extermination of the Jews seems merely an event equivalent to many others. Annihilation of Jews, expulsion of Germans – they amount to the same" (p. 201). It is important to add here that the young Habermas' review of *The Introduction to Metaphysics* shows some thirty years earlier what will be the attitude of Habermas to Heidegger's Nazi involvement when he mentions there explaining the latter's fault "in terms of the history of Being" (J. Habermas, "Martin Heidegger: On the Publication of the Lectures of 1935" in *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Wolin, New York: Columbia UP, p. 186). This theme can also be heard in his interview with Peter Dews when Habermas says that Heidegger's turn was connected only with external events – with his disappointment with National Socialism: "one solution was to interpret what had happened as an objective, fatal mistake, one for which he was no longer responsible as a person – an error which revealed itself like fate in a Sophoclean tragedy", *Autonomy and Solidarity* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 195.

subjectivity" rather than socially relevant "philosophy of intersubjectivity". Let us note a significant parallel: Habermas' "philosophers of subjectivity" since German idealism – are as a rule Rorty's "private" philosophers (ironists), while Habermas' "philosophers of intersubjectivity" – are Rorty's "public" philosophers (liberals). The opposition is analogous in both thinkers, what is different is the evaluation made by both of them: only Rorty sees non-public philosophy, the one useful only for a small circle of philosophers (whose future in the public domain is unpredictable), as meaningful. Habermas does not give it such a right. Let us say with caution and in general terms that Habermas is perhaps one of the last, and surely the greatest of "universal intellectuals" – as Michel Foucault described Jean-Paul Sartre – a great heir to a completing Enlightenment tradition, which apart from his philosophizing can also be testified by volumes of interviews as well as a passionate participation in all recent serious social and political debates in Germany.[16] As can be seen from the chapter from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* about levelling of genre differences between philosophy and literature or from a text from *Postmetaphysical Thinking* about philosophy and literature, Habermas differs from Rorty in maintaining a traditional division between philosophy and literature as separate genres endowed with different tasks in culture.[17] Rorty inverts traditionally ascribed obligations (as we discuss it in a chapter about the "wisdom of the novel" and the "wisdom of philosophy"), the philosopher is no longer the guardian of rationality of the society. As David Hall rightly puts it: "The aestheticization of culture goes along with, indeed has as one of its implications, the privatization

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[16] As can be testified by the interviews from the aforementioned collection, as well as a participation in *Historikerstreit*, polemics following Farias' book about Heidegger's philosophy etc. etc.

[17] See Jürgen Habermas, "Philosophy and Science as Literature?" in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 1992), pp. 205-227. He says e.g. that: "The levelling of the distinction between the genres of philosophy and science on the one hand and that of literature on the other hand is the expression of an understanding of literature that is derived from philosophical discussions. The context of these discussions is the turn from philosophy of consciousness to the philosophy of language, specifically that variation of the linguistic turn that does away with the legacy of the philosophy of consciousness in a particularly relentless way" (p. 207).

of the intellect".[18] That privatization of the intellect – as well as more and more "privatized philosophy" resulting from this – is the price to be paid by Rorty for abandoning traditional universalism.

Yet Rorty remembers about the distinction between intersubjectivity and universalism. For instance, he remarks that

> Abandoning universalism is my way of doing justice to the claims of ironists whom Habermas distrusts: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida. Habermas looks at these men from the point of view of public needs. I agree with Habermas that as *public* philosophers they are at best useless and at worst dangerous, but I want to insist on the role they and others like them can play in accommodating the ironist's *private* sense of identity to her liberal hopes. All that is in question, however, is accommodation – not synthesis. My "poeticized" culture is one which has given up the attempt to unite one's private ways of dealing with one's finitude and one's sense of obligation to other human beings.[19]

Let us pass on to the other of the two rejected, Michel Foucault.

2.

Foucault in Rorty's view, as we said, is an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal. One could see some incoherence here, for the liberal is someone for whom, according to the definition of Judith Skhlar often referred to in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, "cruelty is the worst thing we do" – and Foucault's philosophizing is filled with images, descriptions and analyses of cruelty over the period of several recent centuries (from the "ship of the fools" to execution of Damiens the regicide to visible and invisible cruelty of prisons, asylums and hospitals). And yet for pragmatism – and for Rorty's neopragmatism as well – the crucial belief is in the "hope" mentioned in the beginning of this excursus.

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[18] David Hall, *Richard Rorty. Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 153.

[19] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 68.

Let us remind the description of liberal ironists from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*: "liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own *hope* that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease".[20] The theme of "hope" appears in many Rorty's texts (even in some of his titles, for instance: "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope" from *Consequences of Pragmatism* or "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*). I take it to be one of the most important themes in Rorty's philosophy, mainly owing to "European connections" of it that are of interest to me here: to put it in broad terms, that part of French philosophy which followed Heidegger and Nietzsche (often having abandoned Marx and Hegel earlier) does not leave social hope for the future, being a disillusioned discourse about the reality rather than hopeful proposal for the future.[21] Two poles: hope/hopelessness and the present/future (obviously connected with a different attitude towards utopias in the two traditions) can be seen as determining significant differences between Rorty and French postmodern philosophers. Thus also the two poles include: optimism *contra* melancholy, belief in salutary power of democracy *contra* nostalgia, self-certainty as opposed to hesitations and permanent doubts. Philosophy as a product of two cultures, one of which was fed by the utopia of unlimited freedom and unlimited possibilities, the other was plagued by specters of nationalisms, totalitarianisms, and hence was seduced by the faith in the emancipation of (once and for all) the whole humanity. It is interesting to remind now what Rorty thinks of American culture (interviewed by Giovanna Borradori):

> American culture is essentially political. America was founded upon an ethical concept of freedom. It was founded as *the land of the freest society, the place where democracy is at its best, where the horizons are open.*

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[20] Ibidem, p. xv – emphasis mine.

[21] See a very interesting book by Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980). See also my "excursus" on Hegel.

> There is a kind of national romance about a country that says, "We are different from Europe because we made a fresh start. We do not have traditions, we can create human beings as they are supposed to be". I think that the romanticism about America runs through from Emerson to Dewey. Unfortunately, it has been lost. It's been lost quite recently, around the time of the Vietnam War.[22]

America had the feeling that it was "the country of the future", he says.[23] There was no such a feeling in Europe of the twentieth century – with the exception of new Italy, new Germany or new Russia, which, in the long run, was a very expensive lesson for the humankind. Therefore it is difficult to speak of "hope" in today's French postmodern philosophers of whom we are writing here. In Rorty the belief in the role of "hope" in philosophy increases, allowing him at he same time to distance himself from e.g. Foucault and Lyotard. In politics *hope* should replace *knowledge* (which philosophers tried to achieve), and the most important distinction for the pragmatist is the one between *the past* and *the future* - which "can substitute for all the old philosophical distinctions".[24]

Returning to Michel Foucault from whom we were led away due to generalizations about pragmatic "hope", Rorty claims that from the circle of liberal ironists he is excluded by virtue of the lack of hope for the change for the better in the present, lack of chances given to the future (which is a caricature, to an extent, especially considering the period following '68 to the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*[25]). The liberal ironist should combine two projects: his private project of self-creation and public

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[22] Richard Rorty in Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 109 – emphasis mine.

[23] Ibidem, p. 109.

[24] Richard Rorty, "Truth Without Correspondence to Reality", a typescript, p. 3.

[25] See philosophical biographies of Michel Foucault by David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault,* transl. B. Wing (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) or a more contextual book also by Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault et ses contemporains* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).

project of expanding the range of consciousness of common "we".[26] It does not suffice to recognize – and describe – evil in Rorty's view, one also has to participate in the development of moral consciousness that would allow to fight that evil in the future. Hope must be present – the hope that evil and cruelty can be overcome. Foucault, like Deleuze and Lyotard, do not provide us according to Rorty with reasons to choose this rather than that direction in a potential development of society. Foucault can be read as a stoic, "a dispassionate observer of the present social order, rather than its concerned critic".[27] He lacks the "rhetoric of emancipation", his work can be characterized with "extraordinary dryness" produced by the lack of identification with any social context on his part.[28] By saying that he would like to write so as "to have no face", as he says in the *Archeology of Knowledge*, he excludes himself from membership in Rorty's utopia. As Rorty writes in his text on Habermas and Lyotard: "He forbids himself the tone of the liberal sort of thinker who says to his fellow-citizens: '*We* know that there must be a better way to do things than this; let us look for it together'. There is no 'we' to be found in Foucault's writings, nor in those of many of his French contemporaries".[29] It is precisely here that there is a memorable phrase that Foucault writes from a point of view light-years away from the problems of contemporary society... (Habermas, on the contrary, was struck by "the political vitality of the vulnerable, subjectively excitable,

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[26] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 64, n. 24.

[27] Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", PP 2, p. 173. And it is interesting to note how he differs in that view from Jürgen Habermas from an (exceptional for him, one must admit) text about a Foucauldian reading of Kant's "What Is the Enlightenment?", where Habermas says: "And yet in him the stoic attitude of keeping an overly precise distance, the attitude of the observer obsessed with objectivity, was peculiarly entwined with the opposite element of passionate, self-consuming participation in the contemporary relevance of the historical moment". Rorty precisely – in the passages quoted above – opposed this particular reading of Foucault by Habermas. Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), "Taking Aim at Heart of the Present", p. 173.

[28] Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", PP 2, p. 174

[29] Ibidem, p. 174.

morally sensitive intellectual"[30]). Let us remember – pragmatism is the philosophy of solidarity rather than that of despair.[31]

When Michel Foucault takes hope away, he becomes dangerous; as Rorty puts it in an interview:

> He was a remarkable man; he had a great imagination, and he wrote memorable books. Foucault has been the most influential figure on the culture of the American left, but his influence has been dangerous. The result has been the "disengagement" of intellectuals.[32]

The difference between pragmatists and philosophers from the Nietzsche – Heidegger – Foucault line would consist also in that they did not share optimism as to the future of liberal, democratic societies.[33] Hope has the priority to wisdom, tomorrow – to yesterday, "democracy" to "philosophy"... And this determines the picture of Foucault in Rorty's writings.

We should remember, however, about the other side, less present and more fully exposed perhaps only in one text – the side as usual associated with the general opposition between the private and the public – about Foucault as a "knight of autonomy". I would like merely to draw attention to a similar Rorty's strategy to Foucault and to Derrida, although with a much smaller intensity. I get the impression from reading various texts and reviews that Foucault, like Derrida (which I am discussing separately), is used by Rorty as a point of reference in his attempts of searching for his own philosophical identity. Foucault is either criticized for the lack of "we" in his texts – or praised for "searching for autonomy" of which he is a "knight". Praises are mixed with criticisms, although fundamentally the reading of him does not get changed. What

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[30] Jürgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present", p. 174.

[31] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?", PP 1, p. 33.

[32] Richard Rorty in Giovanna Borradori, p. 111. Which does not quite amount to a serious statement made elsewhere that Foucault was one of the three founding fathers of "deconstruction" (apart from Derrida and de Man) – responsible for its "left slant". See Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction", a typescript, p. 3.

[33] See Richard Rorty, ibidem, p. 18.

changes is *Rorty's attitude* towards philosophy and philosophizing – or, to put it mildly, what gets changed is the favored side from the opposition between self-creation/solidarity. It is important to bear this in mind while reading all Rorty's texts about his French contemporaries.

Passing for a moment to a more general remark: Rorty's philosophizing can also be read as attempts of appropriation of European philosophical heritage by pragmatic tradition by means of showing that – as a matter of fact – all representatives of the former say the same as pragmatists do (but, in a worse manner due to various reasons). With such a general picture, Nietzsche says "the same" as James, Heidegger the same as Dewey, finally, Derrida and Foucault – the same as "updated Dewey" and, partially, Rorty himself. In the most explicit way this strategy is shown probably in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, especially in the text about "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism". Rorty's conclusion from this text is the following: "I conclude, therefore, that textualism [that is, let us hasten to add, Deconstructionists from Yale, Derrida or Foucault] *has nothing to add to romanticism and pragmatism*".[34] The case with Foucault is similar, in Rorty's reading he merely "updates Dewey"[35] but what separates him from Dewey is the lack of hope: "Although Foucault and Dewey are trying to do the same thing, Dewey seems to me to have done it better, simply because his vocabulary allows room for unjustifiable hope, and an ungroundable but vital sense of human solidarity".[36] Thus, let us make a very important point: Rorty characterizing textualists – "strong misreaders" in Harold Bloom's terms – is writing about himself, about his own use of them in producing his own narratives about the history of philosophy. In 1981, the year of the first publication of the essay, this was not fully clear, as this was not clear a year later when the essay was republished in *Consequences of Pragmatism*. With the passage of time, however, the passage quoted below began to fit to Rorty

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[34] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 154 – emphasis mine.

[35] Richard Rorty, "Method, Social Science, Social Hope", CP, p 207.

[36] Ibidem, p. 208.

himself – appearing later on in various places in different versions as a descriptions of his own work[37]:

> The critic asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions but simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose. He makes the text refer to whatever is relevant to that purpose. He does it by imposing a vocabulary – a "grid", in Foucault's terminology – on the text which may have nothing to do with any vocabulary used in the text or by its author, and seeing what happens. The model here is not the curious collector of clever gadgets taking them apart to see what makes them work and carefully ignoring any extrinsic end they may have, but the psychoanalyst blithely interpreting a dream or a joke as a symptom of homicidal mania.[38]

This is the way textualists should be, as opposed to Rorty. This is the way Rorty himself is – in his later self-descriptions! If we are unwilling to call this an "evolution", let us call this a "change" or "development". Rorty takes the method of textualists as he describes it, sticking until today to the pragmatic theme of "hope", absent in "twentieth-century textualists".

Rorty's criticism of Foucault for the latter's lack of a positive program for the future has been on the same level in a recent dozen or so years in his philosophy. Already in his review of the collection of interviews *Power/Knowledge* from 1981 he comes to the conclusion that Foucault had not achieved what only Dewey had managed to achieve: namely, a combination of Nietzschean skepticism to science and philosophy with Marxian social attitude. Although Foucault goes "beyond Nietzsche and Marx", as the title

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[37] See for instance Rorty's text about Umberto Eco from *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992) where he says about his "pragmatist grid" that he imposes on whatever he reads, or his response to Jacques Bouveresse from *Lire Rorty* (Paris: L'eclat, 1992) where he accounts for his readings of Derrida and Freud.

[38] Richard Rorty, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism", CP, p.151.

of the text says, nevertheless his attempt to find utility for philosophy fails because he does not speculate on the possible future utopias, and his suggestions on the subject of social reforms "remain allusions".[39] Foucault, who does not dream about the future in the way Rorty does – cuts himself off the possibility of participating in Rorty's utopia. He does not propose the vision of the future – but merely, let us remind, "writes the history of the present", as he says in *Discipline and Punish.* Destructive efforts, unmasking power in all its manifestations are not enough, one can almost hear Rorty, what is needed is a constructive part and the one who "seems to hate the bourgeoisie more than he loves anyone else"[40] lacks one.

Rorty applies to Habermas and Foucault, as we have seen, a serious side of irony, while for Heidegger and Derrida he uses a playful tone, the other side of irony, of which we are writing separately as one of strategies of achieving fame and immortality. Only the ironist who all the time has two opposite views at his disposal is able to do this (and perhaps the best example is the text about "moral identity" and "private autonomy" in Foucault who is allowed there not to take care of the social context of his philosophy as opposed to the picture in all other writings Rorty devoted to him...)

3.

I think it might be interesting to show Foucault's account of the role of the philosopher in culture as well as his account of the relations between philosophy and politics. For one thing is Foucault as read by Rorty, as needed by Rorty (for his own identification as a philosopher), still another is Foucault shown as a strictly French thinker, immersed in problems and questions put forward by e.g. Roland Barthes, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Blanchot or Georges Bataille. The contrast between the two pictures may, I hope, tell us more about Rorty's philosophy, being its additional context.

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[39] Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", *London Review of Books*, 19 Feb. 1981, p. 5.

[40] Ibidem, p. 6.

The Sartrian opposition between the aesthete and the committed writer from "What Is Literature?", as well as its Barthesian inversion in the form of authors/writers from "Authors and Writers", have not been seriously challenged until Michel Foucault – whose *intellectuel universel*, to be replaced by *intellectuel spécifique,* takes the meaning of *both* parts of the said dichotomy. The point is writing, writer and his place in French culture:

> the intellectual par excellence used to be a writer – as universal consciousness, free subject, he was opposed to those who were just competences in the service of the State or the Capital – as technicians, judges, teachers. Since then ... the threshold of *writing* (*écriture*) as a *sacralizing mark* (*marque sacralisante*) *of the intellectual* has disappeared[41].

The writer fighting for maintaining his political privileges has become in Foucault's view a figure of the past – all that "feverish theoretization of writing which we witnessed in the sixties was undoubtedly just a swansong"[42], and besides, it produced "so second-rate (*médiocres*) literary works". It was not accidentally that Foucault – as opposed to, for instance, Jacques Derrida – often stressed that he had never felt to have a vocation of a writer. "I don't consider that writing – he will say in 1978 – is my job and I don't think that holding a pen is – for me, I am speaking only of myself – a sort of absolute activity that is more important that everything else".[43] Foucault's response to Sartre and Barthes, to

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[41] Michel Foucault, "Entretien avec Michel Foucault" in a monumental volume of *Dits et écrits 1954-1988*, D. Defert et F. Ewald (eds.) (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), to which I will be referring here; vol. III (1976-1979), p. 155.

[42] Michel Foucault, ibidem, p. 155.

[43] Michel Foucault, "On Power" in the volume *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* edited by L.D. Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 96. Let us add here, by way of a contrast, that Derrida on numerous occasions wrote and said about his passion as a writer, see e.g. "Une 'folie' doit veiller sur la pensée" in *Points de suspension. Entretiens (*Paris: Galilée, 1992), pp. 349-376 or in "This Strange Institution Called Literature", *Acts of Literature*, ed. by D. Attridge (New York: Routledge), 1992, pp. 33-79.

the split present in French culture for over a hundred years – and especially to the particular place accorded to the writer – was to be the figure of the "specific intellectual" who no longer derives from the jurist and the writer but from the savant and the expert (like in Oppenheimer or earlier already in Darwin).

Thus Foucault in my reading rejects both traditional functions of writing (and writer): the avant-garde (textual) and the political (communal) one. So what is he left with? Not much, it seems, although at the same time there remains the unperformable: local struggles described above and – rather impossible, in the long run – struggles with one's own incarnation as the "universal intellectual". For how is one to make generalizations from local positions about precisely these positions, how is one to generalize without making reference to a recent role (whose clearly criticized representative is obviously Jean-Paul Sartre, the gourou of the post-war France), bashing it, showing its incoherence, invalidity, even harmfulness? How to be *both* a local specialist and a theoretician of that local, intellectual specialization? How to convince others to that role, being oneself – functionally – a man from the previous epoch? Michel Foucault had to fight such a fight with himself, he had to promote in the name of universal reasons and in its terms a new – "specific" – function of the intellectual. He was, to be sure, perfectly well aware of that contradiction and it is perhaps therefore that in his work – like perhaps in no other work of a living contemporary French philosopher – there are so many discussions about the place of the intellectual (or – the philosopher – depending of the period of his work) and his possible role in culture and society.

A careful tracing of Foucault's changing answers to that question would be a fascinating task that would throw additional light to intellectual ruptures, subsequent new beginnings of the one who always wrote in order "to have no face" (*Archeology of Knowledge*), to attempt to "think differently" (*The Use of Pleasure*) – starting with the early seventies, a famous conversation with Gilles Deleuze, genealogical struggles with Power, to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, its last two volumes as well as to dozens of texts and interviews from that feverish and extremely

prolific period of his life. It was already in *Archeology of Knowledge* that he said in an often referred to and commented on passage: "Do not ask me who I am, nor tell me to remain the same: that is the morality of a civil state; it rules our documents. Let it leave us in peace when we are to write".

Foucault often stated in his interviews that he had never been a Freudian, Marxist, structuralist: that he had been seen as an anarchist, leftist, disguised Marxist, nihilist, anti-Marxist, technocrat, new liberal, but "none of these descriptions is important in itself; on the other hand, taken together, they nevertheless mean something. And I must admit I rather like what they mean".[44] Precisely so, without consenting to any other's description of himself, he all the time kept looking for a paradefinition of what he was doing as a philosopher, sociologist, finally, as a man. As Maurice Blanchot puts it: "what seems to me to be difficult – and privileged – position of Foucault might be the following: do we know who he is, since he doesn't call himself (he is on a perpetual slalom course between traditional philosophy and the abandonment of any pretension to seriousness) either a sociologist or a historian or a structuralist or a thinker or a metaphysician?".[45] We still do not know "who he is", as he does not want to join known and respected traditional disciplines which he detests as long as he has not redefined them. Michel Foucault, looking for himself, for many years was asking, among other things, what the philosopher is doing when he is philosophizing. He kept asking about himself and others. He also kept asking about himself as opposed to others and in distinction to them, searching for some general meaning of his own work. Let us remind here at least several ideas that appear in his writings in that context.

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[44] Michel Foucault, "Polémique, politique et problématisations", *Dits et écrits*, vol. IV, 1980-1988, p. 598 (published for the first time in English in P. Rabinow's volume).

[45] Maurice Blanchot, "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him" in *Foucault/Blanchot*, trans. by J. Mehlman and B. Massumi (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 93.

4.

In 1972 in a conversation with Deleuze – later to be known as "Intellectuals and Power" – Foucault said that during May events in France

> the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they *know* perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves. But there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power – *the idea of their responsibility for 'consciousness' and discourse forms part of the system.* The intellectual's role is ... to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness', and 'discourse.[46]

So if the traditional intellectual is – as we already know – the writer, there is no possibility of resistance on the part of either *écrivants* or *écrivains*, either poetry or *littérature engagée,* against that "enigmatic", "at once visible and invisible, present and hidden, ubiquitous" Power. It can be said, *exit* the writer, but who enters the stage? Precisely who enters is someone about whom it is known from Foucault's descriptions what he is supposed not to do and whom he is supposed not to be. Although the opposition of the two types of intellectuals is merely a "hypothesis"[47], it is directed against the whole French intellectual tradition.[48]

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[46] Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, D.F. Bouchard (ed.), Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977, pp. 207-208.

[47] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 132.

[48] See in this context Krzysztof Pomian's book *The Past as a Subject of Knowledge*, especially the chapter on "République des lettres as an Ideal Community of Scholars", Warsaw: Aletheia, 1992 (in Polish).

Theory in Foucault's account is not supposed to be a support for practice which, in turn, would be its application; theory does not serve practical applications, being local, regional and non-totalizing. "This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious". The point, as Foucault explains to Deleuze, is "to sap power, to take power": "it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A 'theory' is the regional system of this struggle".[49] The writer's thinking of the world may have been universal, in Foucault's vision suggested here the specific intellectual is reduced to play the role of one of many links in an ongoing struggle - he is neither a spokesperson of the will of those who fight, nor is he their representative (which means drawing radical conclusions from questioning representation), nor is he even an interpreter of their struggles from a safe place behind his desk. Theory becomes practice. Those who until then had been accorded a specific place in culture of its "consciousness", "conscience" and "eloquence" – become potential providers of tools for analysis, of the famous "toolbox" with the help of which one can make a topographical description of a battlefield... For Foucault, his own philosophy was not the theory of his practice, his political practice not being a application of theories presented in philosophical books of which he was the author. As François Ewald, Arlette Farge, and Michelle Perrot say in a moving commemorative volume entitled *Michel Foucault. Une histoire de la vérité*: "there are only practices, theoretical practices or political practices, totally specific ones".[50]

The intellectual's work according to Foucault does not consist in shaping others' political will. It rather consists of conducting analyses on the grounds of disciplines familiar to him whose aim is, as he puts in a conversation with François Ewald, "to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this reproblematization (in which

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[49] Michel Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power", p. 208.

[50] *Michel Foucault. Une histoire de la vérité* (Paris: Syros, 1985), p. 54.

he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as a citizen to play)".[51] Michel Foucault is fully aware of the demise of an old, traditional, prophetic function of the intellectual. Those who speak and write today are still haunted by the model of a Greek wise man, Jewish prophet or a Roman legislator.[52] (And it is important to note that it was also Sartre who in the last years of his life considered breaking with the conception of the "committed writer". In 1974 in a discussion with Herbert Marcuse he said that workers "can better express what they feel, what they think ... For me, the classical intellectual is an intellectual who ought to disappear"[53]). Foucault himself wants to take care of the present, as the most important question - is the one about the present.[54] And that is what he was doing, discussing in his books over the years the relations between experience (madness, illness, transgression, sexuality), knowledge (psychiatry, medicine, criminology, sexology, psychology), and power (institutions connected with the control of the individual – psychiatric or penal ones). As he said in *Discipline and Punish*, what was at stake there – and surely not only there - was "writing the history of the present"[55] that would perhaps "make the present situation comprehensible and, possibly, lead to action".[56] That large theme of the "ontology of the present" guided Foucault's thinking in the last years of his life and he found the protoplast of this way of thinking about philosophy (as we have known at least since Borges that we produce our predecessors) in Kant from the text "What Is the Enlightenment?", about which he would write and lecture in Collège de France. The task of

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[51] Michel Foucault, "The Concern for Truth" in L.D. Kritzman (ed.), p. 265.

[52] See the interview with Foucault conducted by B.-H. Lévy, reminded recently in the latter's *Les Aventures de la liberté. Une histoire subjective des intellectuels* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1991), p. 382.

[53] Which is reminded by L.W. Kritzman in a "Foreword" to *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. xix. See also R. Goldhorpe, "Understanding the committed writer" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, Ch. Howells (ed.), Cambridge: CUP, 1992, pp. 140-177.

[54] As Foucault said: "Genealogy means that I begin my analysis from a question posed in the present", "The Concern for Truth", p. 262.

[55] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. by A. Sheridan (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 31.

[56] Michel Foucault, "On Power", p. 101.

philosophy is to describe the nature of the present and us in that present, he would say[57], inscribing his thought in the tradition running from Kant to Weber to the Frankfurt School. The late Foucault made every attempt to inscribe himself in the Kantian tradition of making mature use of reason, but he read Kant through the Baudelairean figure of the dandy. In ethics as aesthetics of existence in *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* he seems to break with an opposition difficult to maintain in practice that we are still thinking here of. He moves towards himself, towards building his own ethics of self-transformation.[58] Intellectual work seems not to go beyond oppositions drawn by Sartre and Barthes, beyond our textualism and communitarianism, or romanticism and pragmatism. Foucault becomes Rorty's "knight of autonomy"[59] when he notes (in 1983) that for him

> intellectual work is related to what you could call aestheticism, meaning transforming yourself. ... I know very well, and I think I knew it from the moment when I was a child, that knowledge can do nothing for transforming the world. Maybe I am wrong ... But if I refer to my own personal experience I have the feeling knowledge can't do anything for us and that political power can destroy us. All the knowledge in the world can't do anything against that.[60]

Thus it is not much that Foucault's *intellectuel spécifique*, a new figure suggested for our postmodern times, can do. Local and regional struggles with power die out, theory is no longer like a

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[57] Michel Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History" in L.D. Kritzman (ed.), p. 36.

[58] As Sartre said in his *Baudelaire*: "Baudelaire's single most favorite activity was changing: changing his own body, feelings, life – in search of an unattainable ideal of creating oneself. He works only not to owe anything to anyone, he wants to regenerate and correct himself, as one corrects a picture or a poem, he wants to correct his own poem for himself..." "Baudelaire in Face of Time and Being" in '*What is Literature?' and Other Essays,* a Polish translation (Warsaw: PIW, 1968), p. 299.

[59] See Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault" in PP 2, pp. 193-198.

[60] Michel Foucault, "The Minimalist Self" in L.D. Kritzman (ed.), p. 14.

fellow-traveller of the masses fighting to take power. Parasurrealistic – that is, modernistic! – transforming one's existence in a poetic manner has little to do with the Sartrian pole of "activism" and "commitment", with making laws, suggesting solutions valid always and everywhere, professing about the future on the part of (intellectual and philosophical) legislators from a universal place accorded by culture in the past. But, on the other hand, the aesthetic of existence does not seem to go beyond the other pole of Sartre's and Barthes' oppositions – aesthetic, narcissistic, dandish, textual. The attempt to go beyond a framework imposed on writing and philosophizing some hundred years ago, as we try to outline it here, seems to be misguided and unsuccessful. The final acceptance of the fact that "my problem is my own transformation" and that what is at stake is "transformation of one's self by one's own knowledge"[61], that, to refer to the well-known citation, "we have to create ourselves as a work of art" (for our self is not pre-given to us and we do not discover its truth)[62] – seems to lead back to modernistic oppositions. The point is not merely "a certain amount of knowledgeableness", it is also "the knower's straying afield of himself": "There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all", as he will say in the "Introduction" to the second volume of *The History of Sexuality.*

We would be willing to accept as one of such attempts of the said *penser autrement* the conception of the specific intellectual, never developed and made more precise, never put into practice i.e. experienced. The "aesthetic of existence" of the last two (published) volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and numerous interviews preceding them[63] has shown difficulties in going

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[61] Ibidem, pp. 14, 14.

[62] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress" in *The Foucault Reader*, P. Rabinow (ed.), New York: Pantheon, 1984 p. 351.

[63] Let us remind here the most important texts for the "aesthetics of existence": "Introduction" to *The Use of Pleasure* (which earlier functioned as a separate text), the "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" text (from P. Rabinow's collection, and then for the first time in French in the Kantian issue of *Magazine littéraire*, Avril 1993), "L'éthique du souci de soi comme pratique de la liberté" (*Dits et écrits*, IV, pp. 708-729), "Une esthétique de l'existence" (ibidem, pp.

beyond the pre-existing constant in French thinking. The intellectual in a classical sense, banned and criticized – returned, that is to say, who returned was Foucault *writing* rather than ("locally and regionally") *acting*. It turned out that even the idea of ethics as aesthetics of existence is an idea of a writer who obviously has a different place and different obligations in today's postmodern aura rather than an idea of the one who was born out of the "expert" and "savant", i.e. of the specific intellectual. When the turmoil of (post-May '68) struggles with power disappeared, when the consciousness of moderate possibilities of the philosopher as a philosopher came, what remained was seducing with one's pen and showing oneself as an example for others: a classical idea of providing *exemplum* for one's descendants.[64] Some parts of *The History of Sexuality* are disarming in their sincerity, in their tone of personal confessions, in their seriousness of histories put down by a feverish hand. Foucault – to return to Sartre – was engaged ("committed") in his writing: not in politics, ideology, but in a new, still thought-of morality and ethics. For the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules "is now disappearing, as he says, has already disappeared. *To this absence of a morality, one responds, one must respond, with a research which is that of an aesthetics of existence*".[65]

5.

Numerous critics see in Michel Foucault the passion of a moralist (e.g. Richard Bernstein), a reproach often directed to him being precisely his "cryptonormativism" (e.g. Jürgen Habermas, Nancy Fraser), his unwillingness to accept his indebtedness to the Enlightenment; for some commentators the philosophy of the late Foucault is the "philosophy of freedom" (John Rajchman).[66] Who

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730-35), as well an English interview given to Dreyfus and Rabinow and published as "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress" (in *The Foucault Reader*).

[64] As is reminded by Tadeusz Komendant, the author of the excellent and the only Polish book on Foucault, *Powers of Discourse. Michel Foucault in Search of Himself* (Warsaw: Spacja, 1994), e.g. p. 154.

[65] Michel Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence" in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*, trans. by J. Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 311.

[66] See Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT

is he? Although in his theory he probably did not manage to transcend Sartre's opposition (Sartre, that "man of the nineteenth century who wished to conceive of the twentieth century"), in practice, in his written work, one can look for new ways of answering the latter's questions. Hence radically different valuations and interpretations of Foucault as a philosopher, philosopher of politics or moral philosopher.[67] In his practice, the author of *The History of Sexuality* does not fit in the horizon of sense outlined in the opposition discussed here, for although for some he is a dispassionate "aesthete", for others he is a passionate "moralist", a par excellence political philosopher, a radical critic of the *status quo*, an originator of a new politics of resistance, a new liberal etc.; for some he is the follower of Kant and the light side of *sociologie de la modernité*, for others the follower of the dark, irrational side of modernity, that of Nietzsche *via* Bataille, like in Habermas' or Ferry/Renaut's criticism.[68] And the point is probably not that there are divergent interpretations, that is something we are quite used to – the point may be that we need new categories and new dichotomies to attempt to domesticate, to tame Foucault's thought.

A possibility was suggested by Foucault himself by way of digression in a long conversation with an Italian communist, Duccio Trombadori, in 1978, almost totally unnoticed in literature devoted to him.[69] He discusses there the question what kind of

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Press, 1992); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Nancy Fraser, "Michel Foucault: a 'Young Conservative'?" in *Critique and Power. Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*, M. Kelly (ed.), Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994; John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault. The Freedom of Philosophy* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985).

[67] Arnold I. Davidson makes it explicit in summarizing sentences of his text: "Unless moral philosophers supplement their discussions of moral codes with ethics *à la* Foucault , we will have no excuse against the charge that our treatises suffer from an unnecessary but debilitating poverty". That is perhaps the strongest opinion about Foucault's ethics I managed to encounter. See "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics" in *Foucault. A Critical Reader*, D.C. Hoy (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, p. 232.

[68] See a (once) influential pamphlet of Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties. An Essay on Antihumanism*, in which Foucault = Heidegger + Nietzsche (like Derrida = Heidegger + Derrida's style), Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990, a chapter on "French Nietzscheanism" or e.g. p. 123.

books he had been writing in his lifetime and draws a distinction between *livre d'exploration* and *livre de méthode*, or a still different one between *livre-expérience* and *livre-vérité*. Books-explorations and books on the method, books-experiences and books-truths, let us say. To be sure, in philosophy the downgraded ones have been and still are books-explorations and books-experiences – those most precious to Foucault. Books were as rich experiences as possible, so that the writer could get out of them as someone else, someone new and changed, precisely – *transformé*. The book transforms both him and what he thinks: *"Je suis un expérimentateur en ce sens que j'écris pour me changer moi-même"*.[70] The author is a writing experimenter who transforms himself rather than a theoretician. He does not know at the beginning of his road what he is going to think at the end of it. Thus, to the question about the sense of philosophical work, we get two possible answers – we either explore the unknown and transform ourselves (and somehow incidentally – we also change others, as a book is an invitation to a common participation), or we present truth and evidence for it to others.

Returning to alliances with power, returning to philosophy and politics, let us say that it is perhaps so that books-truths were – potentially could be – moving on the same tracts with power (with it or against it); communicating, proving, justifying, legitimating, validating (like in the case of Barthes' "writers"). The question is whether the same can be said of philosophical books-explorations? It seems to me that the answer is in the negative, for they seem to be on a *different plane*, the plane of transforming oneself rather than the world (the plane of changing the world only after a round way of changing oneself). I fully agree here with Richard Bernstein – evidently not an enthusiast of postmodern thinkers – who presented the following diagnosis of postmodern philosophy:

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[69] The exception to which I owe my awareness of this passage is Martin Jay in his splendid article "The Limits of Limit-Experience: Bataille and Foucault", *Constellations*, vol. 2, No 2, 1995.

[70] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, III, pp. 41-42.

> In the early writings of Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault and Rorty these questions [ethical-political – MK] do not even *seem* to be considered. Yet as we follow the pathways of their thinking and writings *something curious begins to happen* – for each of these thinkers begins to gravitate more and more to confronting the ethical-political consequences of their own thinking.[71]

I am personally convinced that it pertains to Derrida - recently just a moralist, and no less it does to Rorty and Foucault. "Something curious begins to happen" and that "something" in question may be associated with a decline of a super-project of modernity that makes some questions suddenly appear to be more significant to a growing number of people. It is quite revealing to compare Foucault, Rorty, and Rorty's Foucault to see what may be at stake in philosophy today.

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[71] Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, p. 11 (emphasis mine). And I absolutely cannot agree with George Steiner from *The Broken Contract* when he says of deconstruction in the closing sentence that "present masters of emptiness care only for fun". At least, if Derrida himself is at stake. (Warsaw: Wyd. Instytutu Kultury, 1995), p. 82.

Chapter V

Philosophy and politics, or about a romantic and a pragmatist

1.

We would like to go on to the terrain which is perhaps the most difficult to catch and describe, which may lie at the origin of the most serious criticism, which, finally, requires one's own choice – in a word (to paraphraze the young Habermas from a famous review of Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*), which requires thinking "with Rorty against Rorty". We will follow here the path of numerous texts, grouping and separating them depending on attempts of answers given over the years to some basic questions, and some basic tensions that are born. The question we want to discuss here pertains to the fundamental – both for Rorty and for his critics as well – issue of the relation between philosophy and politics which makes Rorty bashed from all sides, philosophical and political, radical, leftist, postmodern, feminist as well as neoconservative and rightist (whatever the above labels were to mean, what is significant is their opposition).

Let us say in the most general terms: Rorty in his philosophical and political choices is an exceptional figure (for his attitude to the philosophy/politics relation, to the theory/practice distinction etc. etc. is exceptional). *Philosophically*, he is in accordance with contemporary French postmodern philosophy, with Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard – despite numerous more or less specific differences revealing themselves over the years, as well as changing over the years – therefore he is often referred to as "postmodernist" (which, incidentally, does not mean much[1]) and

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[1] To see how misleading such classifications are, suffice it to have a look at the book by John McGowan, *Postmodernism and Its Critic* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), in which Rorty and Lyotard together form a category of "postmodern pragmatists" – a point hardly acceptable unless one knows and writes only of Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, as is the case with McGowan. I attempted to outlined differences between them in my Polish book, *Rorty and Lyotard. In the Labyrinths of Postmodernity.*

the greatest and most serious philosophical challenge to him is Jürgen Habermas. On the other hand, *politically*, he agrees with Habermas' social democratic choice and disagrees with radical (especially in the USA), basically leftist account of politics on the part of promoters and followers of French postmodernists. From the same philosophical – post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian – conclusions he draws different, further conclusions in social and political matters. So, he is different from Habermas and the Frenchmen at the same time, although they differ radically between themselves; asked which differences are more important to him, Rorty would presumably answer that political ones as philosophy in his view is the domain devoid (at least "in the short run") of practical meaning in social and political matters. There are at least three possibilities: either the Frenchmen (rather than Habermas) or Habermas (rather than the Frenchmen) or finally Rorty (and neither Habermas nor the Frenchmen) are right. If Rorty were right – even if it were to mean merely "if he were the most convincing of them" – then all the others on the philosophical scene would be wrong. The only question is whether Rorty's position is acceptable – philosophically, if not politically.

Rorty expresses his views on the subject (responding to Richard Bernstein's objections) when he says that he attempted to separate in his writings what is called "postmodernism" from political radicalism, to separate polemics with "metaphysics of presence" with polemics with "bourgeois ideology", as well as criticism of Enlightenment rationalism from criticism of liberal, reformist political thought.[2] Thus, in a word – he tried to separate philosophy from politics, as a result of which he finally got "de-politicized philosophy" and "de-theorized politics" (as Thomas McCarthy puts it). And it is precisely the radical Rortyan withdrawal of philosophy from social matters, from the public sphere and joining it – together with poetry – to the private sphere that raises in (surely, non-analytic) America the greatest controversies and that accounts for the fact that Rorty is not an American intellectual hero as admired as Dewey or, still earlier, James, despite having

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[2] See Richard Rorty, "Thugs and Theorists", *Political Theory*, Nov. 1987, p. 564.

unheard-of among philosophers literary talent combined with erudition in the two philosophical traditions at the same time: the analytic philosophy and European thought. Taking away from philosophy its public relevance – and perhaps still more taking public significance off from philosophers themselves – is fiercely opposed by deconstructionists, feminists, leftist postmodernists from "Gay and Lesbian Studies", "Comparative Literature" and all those who are not quite happy, to put it mildly, with the American social and political *status quo*. Rorty's stance is well know – "we already have as much theory as we need" (and we need, in turn, "concrete utopias and concrete proposals how to reach them from the point we are at currently"[3]). Contemporary liberal society has institutions that help it changing for the better, as he says in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Western social and political thought perhaps has already gone through the last conceptual revolution it needs, or as he put it in a similar manner in *Consequences of Pragmatism*:

> On my view, we should be more willing than we are to celebrate bourgeois capitalist society as the best polity actualized so far, while regretting that it is irrelevant to most of the problems of most of the population of the planet.[4]

It is from such and similar statements that arise accusations of "cynicism", "ideological *apologia* for an old-fashioned version of cold-war liberalism dressed up in fashionable 'postmodern' discourse" or "apology of the *status quo*" (as in Richard Bernstein[5]), making radical theory "aestheticized, narcissized and bourgeoisified" and thereby "sterile" (in Nancy Fraser words[6]), or finally, most recently, of "terror", "assuring the continuance of the

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[3] Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Thomas McCarthy" in *Lire Rorty*, op. cit., p. 191.

[4] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 210.

[5] Richard Bernstein, "Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy" in *New Constellations* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), e.g. p. 249.

[6] Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty Between Romanticism and Technology" in *Reading Rorty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), ed. A. Malachowski, p. 314.

status quo" and "cultural imperialism" for which he can be viewed as an "apologist".[7] The accusation of elitism is put forward by all the aforementioned critics – in the case of Haber it is even "cavalier elitism". It is often noted that attacking Rorty has become the whole intellectual industry, the so-called "Rorty industry"; some criticisms do not bring about anything new to ongoing discussions, some of them open eyes of Rorty's readers, and there is also some small part of it that opens the eyes of Rorty himself (and then he says, "Come on, there must be something to it: when they describe me like that I look really bad"[8]). Sometimes Rorty looks so bad in the eyes of his critics – and the redescription of him is performed so skilfully and so convincingly – that he has to answer serious and embarrassing questions such as the one asked by Bernstein about who precisely constitutes the "we" to which Rorty constantly refers in his writings, such as "we liberals", "we pragmatists", "we inheritors of European civilization" etc. (Bernstein: "Sometimes it seems as if what Rorty means by 'we' are 'all those who agree with me'"[9]). Then he presents his political creed describing himself as a social democrat, making his answer very specific in eight points.[10]

Philosophy according to Rorty should stay clear from politics (like religion), it should not provide politics with "philosophical arguments", nor be "ammunition" for its guns, a weapon in its hands. Politics should be experimental rather than theoretical. As Rorty said in a famous (owing to numerous polemics) text read during the Philosophical Congress in Mexico in 1985,

> We should not assume that it is our task, as professors of philosophy, to be *the avant-garde of political movements*. We should not ask, say, Davidson or Gadamer [or Rorty, for that matter? – MK] for "political implications" of their view of language, not spurn their

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[7] As Honi F. Haber says in *Beyond Postmodern Politics. Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 44, 55, 44.

[8] Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Thomas McCarthy", p. 180.

[9] Richard Bernstein, "Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy", p. 247.

[10] See Richard Rorty, "Thugs and Theorists", pp. 565-567

> work because of its lack of such implications. ... [P]hilosophy should try to *express our political hopes* rather than to *ground our political practices*. On the view I am suggesting, nothing grounds our practices, nothing legitmizes them, nothing shows them to be in touch with the way things really are.[11]

Such a solution to the relations between philosophy and politics requires a radical re-thinking of the public/private distinction in philosophy, requires considerations how to locate – "agree" – irony on the one hand and pragmatism on the other. This is the problem Rorty seems to be dealing with over many years and for which he seems to have found at least three solutions and which, so at least it seems to me, he tackles even today – because, from my perspective, all solutions suggested by him until now are insufficient. Let us put some Rorty's texts in three distinct groups, each of which provides a different answer to the question of philosophy and politics, that of elitism, aestheticism and solidarity; of the Bloomian, Romantic ("how to give birth to oneself" rather than to be a "footnote" to someone else, to use Whitehead's saying) theme opposed to the Deweyan, pragmatic one, of self-creation and constructing oneself on the one hand and providing "social glue" on the other, of being a "strong poet" and his social responsibilities etc. etc., for oppositions can be multiplied almost indefinitely, using a multitude of (not only Rorty's) vocabularies and metaphors.

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The first answer is given by, for instance, the following texts: "Solidarity or Objectivity", "From Logic to Language to Play", "The Contingency of Community", "The Contingency of Language" from *London Review of Books*, or "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* – self-creational, ironist philosophers appear there as figures useful for the society; between freedom of intellectuals and lessening of suffering and

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[11] Richard Rorty, "From Logic to Language to Play", *APA Proceedings*, Special Report, p. 753 – emphasis mine.

humiliation in the world of liberal democracy there is a visible link, in accordance with a more general belief that the transformation of the way we talk brings about the transformation of what we desire and what we think of ourselves and that a poet - in a general sense of the term – is a creator of new words, shaper of new languages, being "the avant-garde of the species".[12] What moral vocabulary one speaks, how one judges the reality, how one looks at the world – this is decided by the imagination of strong poets, basically inaccessible to other fellow-humans (for although Freud "democratized" genius in Rorty's view, and although everyone can be a self-creating individual, possess creative unconsciousness and shape himself – as there is no single "human nature", common to all people, nevertheless not everyone can become a strong poet who imposes his vocabulary on others rather than uses the vocabulary he inherited). Thus the first solution to the dilemma: private autonomy or pragmatic utility of the philosopher consists in showing public utility of the philosopher-intellectual-self-creator-ironist. If the world is safe for the poet, it is also safe for all others, one could say.

The second answer to the philosophy/politics relations is suggested, for instance, by the following Rorty's texts: "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism", "Method, Social Science, and Social Hope" (from *Consequences of Pragmatism*), "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault" (from *Philosophical Papers*), a chapter on "Self-creation and Affiliation" from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* or "Thugs and Theorists: A Reply to Bernstein". They show dangers inherent to intellectuals' irony – in their power of redescribing everything and everyone. And let us remind: "Ironism, as I have defined it, results from awareness of the power of redescription", and most people do not want to be redescribed because, as Rorty admits, "redescription often humiliates".[13] Two motives, a "Romantic" and a "pragmatic" one, as Nancy Fraser

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[12] Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of Language", *London Review of Books*, 17 April, 1986, p. 6.

[13] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 90.

calls them in her excellent text , already referred to here[14], in that second account are not to be mixed with each other; pragmatism is democratic and society-oriented, Romanticism is egotistic and potentially cruel, they are opposed to each other and require a choice: either "private irony" or "public decency" (to refer to the title of McCarthy's text).

Finally, the third answer comes from a chapter of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* about "self-creation and affiliation", and, more generally, from the whole book, in which a separation between the private and the public sphere, as well as viewing them as incommensurable, is suggested ("equally valid, yet forever incommensurable", as Rorty says). The separation goes along the whole culture – separating e.g. poetry and philosophy from the novel and politics – to one's final vocabulary in which there are two sectors. The domain of the ironist is the private, he is not entitled to enter politics (which was Heidegger's fault) because politics, together with social problems, instrumental reason etc. belong to the public sphere. Such a philosopher – whose philosophy is "publicly useless" – cannot be the aforementioned in the first answer "avant-garde of the species", becoming rather an "aesthete" (which from a different side I am trying to show in discussions from the introduction and from the chapter on "Rorty's self-creation").

All three answers appear more or less at the same time, they do not follow one another as subsequent solutions to a stubborn problem. With different intensity they are – all of them – in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. This gives birth to a noticeable tension between three chapters which in a slightly different versions appeared first in *London Review of Books* and chapters written later, also between chapters from the parts on "contingency" and on "irony" – and chapters of the third part of the book, devoted to Nabokov and Orwell. The tensions in question seem to result not so much from inconsistency of the author, from an intentional providing several possible perspectives, several mutually opposing answers, but perhaps from Rorty's inability, or still more his unwillingness, to give one convincing answer to some

[14] Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity?...", pp. 303, 304.

fundamental questions, including the one about philosophy and politics.

None of the three answers singled out here by us, none of solutions given (of which we will write in more detail in a moment), is convincing enough, either argumentatively, or rhetorically. The one that is most important of them and determines Rorty's specific position in today's metaphilosophical discussions – the solution in the form of "the private/public split" – rather cannot be maintained which I am suggesting throughout the book, especially while discussing Rorty's Derrida. I am still unable to imagine a "liberal ironist" who has separate domains of the liberal and of the ironist at his disposal which "makes it possible for a single person to be both", as the closing sentence of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* puts it. I also cannot see how Rorty himself might be the "liberal ironist" – if I were to describe him with these two terms, I would say that he is rather a liberal who due to his attachment to freedom sometimes takes the liberty to be an ironist, but who, first of all, praises irony in other philosophers (such as Nietzsche, Derrida, to a much smaller degree Foucault) which is often merely one side of them. The separation between the private and the public – this "fixed, rigid, ahistorical dichotomy", as Richard Bernstein writes of it[15] – cannot be maintained, for, it was itself born out of public and political views, beliefs of a liberal who is desperately seeking the possibility of building the world in which the point of reference would be freedom (rather than truth, but also rather than rationality or objectivity), the possibility of

> leaving people alone so that they could dream, think and live as they wish, as long as they do not make harm to others.[16]

We shall return to this point but let us say by way of introduction that Rorty's passion of a moralist makes the private/public split itself a public construction, resulting from deep political beliefs, that of the "priority of democracy to philosophy" in the foreground, that

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[15] Richard Bernstein, "Rorty's Liberal Utopia", p. 286.

[16] Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Thomas McCarthy", p. 181.

is the priority of a political choice over a "merely philosophical" one (as Rorty calls his differences with Habermas in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*[17]).

Let us sum up before passing on to details necessary in this context: in the first version, or first answer, irony and liberalism are equally essential for the society, irony *via* intellectuals just lends liberalism its support (thus philosophy – supports politics); in the second version, irony and liberalism are opposed, Rorty shows the "dark side" of irony; finally, in the third version, the two are neither essential for the society, nor opposed in their interests but rather kept far from each other owing to the private/public split suggested by Rorty. His difficulties in answering the question – or rather unwillingness to give a priority of one answer to any other - about relations between philosophy and politics may derive from the acceptance of the Romantic vision of the philosopher as a genius, self-creating, autonomous, idiosyncratic, unique artist as well as the view of the philosopher as a pragmatic visionary who thinks for the needs of the society, inventing new utopias and roads that lead to them from the current starting point. As Rorty does not seem to be willing to abandon any of the two – oppositional, as they seem – accounts of the philosopher, he is trying to "agree" them with each other, looking for possible solutions. The three answers result from the impossibility of convincing himself and others that it is possible. "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids" cannot be agreed (to use Rorty's title, autobiographical metaphors) but I am not sure whether the solution lies in a radical separation of the private from the public sphere, of philosophy from politics, whether the point is to reduce philosophy to the role of a useless commentary to texts from tradition and to cut philosophy – together with poetry – from the real world. I do not know whether this is desirable, I also do not know whether this is possible...[18]

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[17] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 67.

[18] Christopher Norris, Nancy Fraser, Richard Bernstein, Thomas McCarthy, Jürgen Habermas – *do know* that this is neither desirable nor possible. My answer is not so unambiguous, perhaps owing to the image of the philosopher and the intellectual changing right before my eyes. My short, so far, philosophical road is located only in a new atmosphere of postmodernity; so I am personally neither linked (or attached) to the modern place and modern role of the

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Let us pass to details of the three answers. The first one – ironists are publicly useful for only they produce new metaphors, new tools to cope with the reality, to change the existing world to be better and less cruel. Let us discuss a passage from the text "The Contingency of Community" (for in the chapter from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* it has been slightly modified). The ideal citizen of the ideal state would be someone who considers the strong poet to be the ideal human being. Such a citizen would think of strong poets as founders and defenders of his society. He himself can be a poet or not, can find his own metaphors for his own fantasies or not. But he would definitely be the one who thinks it obvious that it is the revolutionary artist and the revolutionary scientist – Rorty goes on to argue – rather than the academic artist and the normal scientist who embody virtues that are supposed to support his society.[19] Heroes of Rorty's liberal society, "the strong poet and the utopian revolutionary[20], do not have to be alienated from the society, for it is just them who are

> protesting in the name of society itself against those aspects of the society which are unfaithful to its own self-image.[21]

The aim of ironists is self-creation, private perfection, but the benefits of their struggles for their own redescriptions go for the

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philosopher (as seen most clearly in the French tradition until Sartre, or even Foucault). Therefore my final view belongs to the future, for I do not want my answer to derive from experiences of others rather than my own beliefs. But one thing for me is certain – the choice what philosophy is and who the philosopher is is an individual choice, it is a self-description to which the philosopher attempts to convince others. Some philosophers succeed in this, some do not. Some are lucky to be able to describe others, some are less lucky to be merely described by others. This is what I was taught by the heroic dimension of neopragmatism.

[19] Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of Community", *London Review of Books*, 24 July, 1986, p. 14.

[20] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 60.

[21] Ibidem, p. 60.

liberal society as a whole. Rorty says that there are "fairly tight connections between the freedom of the intellectuals on the one hand, and the diminuation of cruelty on the other".[22] Freedom of the intellectuals is negative freedom as seen by Isaiah Berlin.[23] If we "leave" ironist intellectuals "alone", then their imagination may become an important social tool, especially that bit of imagination that provides new descriptions. Let us remember about Rorty's (potentially) extremely dangerous belief that "anything can be made to look good or bad, interesting or boring, by being recontextualized, redescribed"[24] (which, incidentally, leads Bernstein to the conclusion that O'Brien from Orwell's *1984* is Rorty's true pupil who has diabolically mastered the lesson of contingency of all vocabularies; in both accounts, Rorty's from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and O'Brien's from an imagined *Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism*, man is an infinitely malleable being[25]). The producer of these recontextualizations and redescriptions is precisely the philosopher, intellectual, the one who is a "strong poet" from among them - changing the way we talk, he changes what we are and what we think, thereby becoming "the avant-garde of the species".[26] As Rorty says,

> There are many objections to what I have been saying, but the one which I find most disturbing says that *I am treating democratic societies as existing for the sake of the intellectuals*. I seem to be describing institutions which we constructed in order to prevent cruelty and obtain justice as if they had been constructed to safeguard the freedom of the leisured elite.[27]

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[22] Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of Community", p. 14.

[23] Rorty in his "Habermas, Derrida, and the Functions of Philosophy" says the following: "The ideal liberal community will be one in which respect for such particularity and idiosyncrasy is widespread, one in which the only sort of human liberty which is hoped for is Isaiah Berlin's 'negative liberty' being left alone", a typescript, pp. 16-17.

[24] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 113.

[25] See Richard Bernstein, "Rorty's Liberal Utopia", pp. 289-291.

[26] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 20.

[27] Richard Rorty, "The Contingency of the Community, p. 14 – emphasis mine.

But reading Rorty's formulations both from earlier versions of three chapters from *London Review of Books* and their final versions from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* as well, it is hard to resist getting the impression that Rorty is an elitist. Elitism hovers like a specter over the aforementioned bits of his work. Rorty says that he is perplexed between the statement that poets' well-being is in the interest of non-poets (that is non-intellectuals, the majority of the society) and the awareness that perhaps he thinks so because it is much easier for us to identify with "poets" than with "peasants".[28] Honi Fern Haber, already referred to (as well as used) here cannot stand such Rorty's light-minded statements and comments angrily on them:

> Is the poet really able to get outside of her own situation to understand that of another as she would have herself understood? We cannot be sanguine about the suggestion that there is no voice of the oppressed or about the consequence that the leisured elite will speak for them. ... *This is simply wishful speaking on the part of one who is already satisfied with his position as a beneficiary of rich North American democracies.* But what if one is not so satisfied?[29]

Thus Rorty, separating "intellectuals" from mere "human beings", promoting a Romantic vision of an artist, would be in Haber's view playing a political role: that of consolidating the *status quo*. This is quite a wide-spread view among Rorty's critics – an *apologia* for American, capitalist, liberal-democratic and male reality is perhaps the political objection most often made by leftist philosophers and social theorist (still more understandable owing to the fact that Rorty almost obsessively speaks about "us relatively leisured intellectuals, inhabiting a stable and prosperous part of the world"[30] or refers to himself as a "white male inhabitant

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[28] Ibidem, p. 14.

[29] Honi F. Haber, *Beyond Postmodern Politics. Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault*, p. 55 – emphasis mine.

[30] Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 359.

of the richest part of the globe"[31] in almost all of his books). The conclusion of the chapter on the "contingency of community" puts forward an alliance with Romantic poets and aestheticization of the society (keeping it safe for the poets in the hope that "the poets may eventually make it safe for everybody else"), according to Dewey's view that the main tool for action for the sake of the good – is imagination.

This is as far as Rorty's first answer is concerned. Let us pass on to the second within which he shows dangers inherent to the choice of ironists as cultural heroes of his utopia and as moral advisors of the society – by means of separating a Romantic and a pragmatic theme and abandoning the belief in (direct) utility of ironism and ironists. Pragmatism is democratic and public, Romanticism, as we already wrote, is egotistic and potentially cruel, ironism is antithetical to liberal politics and solidarity.

In the oldest text I managed to locate in this context ("Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism" from 1980), Rorty remembers moral objections made to textualism, that is, in his account of that time, to Foucault, Derrida, Bloom and the deconstructionist school from Yale. He notes that these are objections that pertain also, at the same time, to the pragmatic belief that there are only changing vocabularies (as "temporary historical resting places") – and thus that the very vocabulary of the liberal democracy cannot be grounded in anything non-historical and non-contingent.[32] Let us pay close attention to Rorty's sentences, taking his doubts from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* ten years backwards:

> the stimulus to the intellectual's private moral imagination provided by his strong misreadings, by his

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[31] Richard Rorty in A.N. Balslev, *Cultural Otherness. Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1991), p. 86.

[32] In another text from *Consequence of Pragmatism*, "Pragmatism, Relativism, and Irrationalism", Rorty says the following: "The pragmatists tell us that the conversation which it is our moral duty to continue is *merely* our project, the European intellectual's form of life. It has no metaphysical nor epistemological guarantee of success", p. 172.

> search for sacred wisdom, is *purchased at the price of his separation from his fellow-humans.*[33]

Rorty at that time did not have answers to such doubts. Pragmatism and textualism – in this account – were "morally dangerous"[34]. The eighties in Rorty's thought can also be viewed as repeated attempts to answer the question how to combine self-realization, private fulfilment – with public morality, a concern for justice, as the last sentence of the text referred to says. It seems to me that a gradual "privatization" of philosophy, relegation of it to the private sphere (and opposing it, for instance, to the novel as a vehicle of liberal progress) in the eighties, taking away its significance and aspirations – which I attempted to show in my "paraevolution" of Rorty's philosophy on a Rortyan conference in Torun[35] – is Rorty's escape from making a radical, and sometimes tragic, choice. "Separation from one's fellow-humans", "isolation from common, human concerns" is the "price" to be paid for the emergence of the ironist literary culture with which it is hard, if at all possible, for Rorty as a moralist to agree. How to unite "private fulfilment" and a "concern for justice" – the three answers to the question about relations between philosophy and politics outlined here are intended to account for the significance of the question and its stubborn recurrence in various forms over the years in Rorty's writing.

In another text that I associate with the second answer ("Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity"), Rorty gives a direct answer to the question about the intellectual's utility: he should not be seen as serving social needs when he fulfils his self-creational needs ("a need for the ineffable, the sublime, a need to go beyond the limits, a need to use words which are not part of anybody's language-game, any social institution"[36]). It is no use pretending that one is the avant-garde of the humankind and serves the

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[33] Richard Rorty, CP, p. 158 – emphasis mine.

[34] Ibidem, p. 159, n. 15.

[35] See Marek Kwiek, "On Some Rorty's Evolution", in English, with R. Rorty's "Response to Marek Kwiek", *Ruch filozoficzny* 50, no. 2/1993, pp. 195-200.

[36] Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity", PP 2, p. 176.

wretched of the earth, Rorty tells Lyotard and other French postmodern thinkers.

The ironist awareness of the "power of redescription" is a strong weapon which can humiliate, the intellectual can thus be cruel, cold (writing "from a point of view light-years away from the problems of contemporary society", in Rorty's memorable and unjust description of Michel Foucault), and harmful. Potentially the most dangerous can be an ironist theory – and ironist theorists, like Nietzsche and Heidegger who treat themselves as examples to be followed by other people (as well as transpose ironism to politics). The private self of a self-creating philosopher cannot serve as a model for others for it is contingent and restricted to just one person. When a Romantic intellectual begins to think that other people have a moral duty to achieve the same autonomy as he himself has achieved, then his politics tends to become antiliberal, 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*".[37] And then he may ally with the power that brings about desirable changes – be it with the Nazi movement (as Heidegger who kept believing that he can become *the* philosopher of new, National-Socialist Germany, the creator of a new, German university etc. etc.). Europe, Spirit, Being (history, Western man, metaphysics) – thinking in terms of "a larger-than-self hero"[38], a faith in a "big secret"[39], make them potentially dangerous theoreticians of ironism rather than mere ironists, like Marcel Proust. Rorty draws a penetrating picture of traps waiting for the intellectual on the dark side of irony.

So it would seem that there should be a choice between the society of eccentrics, ironists, aesthetes and elitists – and a liberal society. The either/or dichotomy seems to require a choice, it can be seen as unavoidable, were it not for the third and the last Rorty's answer to the question about the knot of philosophy and politics,

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[37] Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault", PP 2, p. 194 – emphasis mine.

[38] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 100.

[39] Ibidem, p. 99.

the answer sketched mainly in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*: the idea of the private/public split, getting rid of the opposition of the two spheres by relegating them to radically separate spheres, remaining according to Rorty with no relation to each other.

In the third account traced here, the private sphere becomes the domain of ironist philosophy, the public sphere – the domain of politics. Philosophy has become "more important for the pursuit of private perfection rather than for any social task".[40] The third answer does not require of Rorty a choice between "sublimity" and "decency", "private irony" and "liberal hope", "private autonomy" and "moral identity", to refer once again to several key oppositions from different texts. Philosophy gets devoid of any influence on social reality, ironist theory has only one use – to shape the (self)-image of men of letters, suggesting new descriptions which, nevertheless, stay clear of politics, left for social and political engineers. So the ironist philosopher does not change the reality in Rorty's view – he can only project visions of the future. As Rorty said in his reply to Richard Bernstein, the difference between them concerns the utility of theory, including philosophy as part of it, in thinking about today's political situation – as opposed to its usefulness in inventing liberal utopias. The main use of philosophy is "inventing our utopian visions".[41]

The French help us in deciding "what to do with our loneliness", they are useful only for private purposes, although obviously private (ironist) and public philosophers produce parallel philosophical discourses between which we do not have to choose; they have different conceptions of philosophy and philosopher which we do not have to juxtapose and favor (or reject – generally speaking, according to Rorty, we should give them equal weight and – in accordance with the view of philosophy as a tool – "use them for different purposes".[42]) This is as far as the past is concerned, that is, the history of philosophy in which there are Marx and Kierkegaard, or Dewey and Nietzsche; today, the

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[40] Ibidem, p. 94.

[41] Richard Rorty, "Thugs and Theorists", p. 369.

[42] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. xiv.

best, the least dangerous, idea is not to take philosophy too seriously, which I am discussing separately.

Nancy Fraser describes Rorty's position in one word – "aestheticism". The strong poet is no longer an (also social) revolutionary endowed with unbound imagination, no longer is he the "avant-garde of the species" mentioned in the "Contingency of Language" – in her words, "strictly speaking, indeed, the intellectual will have no social role or political function".[43] Nobody can expect much from him – nobody can judge him on the basis of the utility of his theories. The traditional connection between theory and practice is broken, the result of a radical split between the private and the public being no less radical separation between theory and practice, philosophy and politics. Theory gets devoid of its political implications, politics is no longer supported by or based on theory but rather on "experimenting" (to which Rorty allude in Mexico). Thomas McCarthy comments:

> Critical thought becomes aestheticized and privatized, deprived of any political or social implications. There can be no politically relevant critical theory and hence no theoretically-supported critical practice.[44]

And he is right with one significant reservation: he does not take into account the fact that Rorty's philosophy is *future-oriented* and not present-oriented, it focuses on the "hope" (one of key words in his writings) rather than on the change of current state of affairs (for, as Rorty often asks, "what can we do, we philosophy professors?"). According to him, there is not any end of philosophy, or end of theory; it is rather so that they gradually lose their attractive power, they become ineffective in comparison with journalistic reports, ethnography, films or – the novel (which is probably only Rorty's great, mythical dream). Rorty accepts that cultural transformation as one of the first thinkers in our philosophical culture, for others it is too hard to stand (and therefore he often stresses the "peripheral" character of

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[43] Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity?...", p. 312.

[44] Thomas McCarthy, "Ironie privée et décence publique", p. 94.

philosophy as one of numerous humanistic disciplines). He also says that philosophy professors do not have any special access to weapons for fights with injustice or racism, the future of the world will not depend on them, like the dangers for future of "abnormal discourse" do not come from science or naturalistic philosophy but rather from "scarcity of food and from the secret police", as he says in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* .[45]

The third answer to the question about relations between philosophy and politics does not seem more satisfactory than the previous two – for Rorty does not seem to be able to maintain it from some neutral point; the reference always is liberal democracy and public beliefs about the need of separation between the private sphere from the public one in order to avoid the dangers of ironism. Rorty's vocabulary within it is a political, public one, the vocabulary of liberalism which requires that radical theory should be relegated to the private sphere, leaving one vocabulary as obligatory, the vocabulary of liberal democracy loved by Rorty. Irony gives up here in front of liberalism, but for Rorty there is no other alternative. It is difficult to keep politics far from privacy for, as Foucault and Barthes, for instance, has shown, "politics is everywhere", "everything is political" – our culture, our language, our prisons, fashions, everyday choices, accounts of sexuality, norms and pathologies... The Rortyan version of relations between philosophy and politics is strongly criticized for it goes against the mainstream thinking about traditional obligations ascribed to philosophy (and to intellectuals by e.g. Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*, Julien Benda in *The Betrayal of the Intellectuals,* Jean-Paul Sartre in *What is Literature?* or, recently, Edward Said in *Representations of the Intellectual*). On the other hand, though, even with a very charitable attitude towards the solution discussed here, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that Rorty's arguments are not fully convincing (that his redescription is not powerful enough). We fully agree with Rorty's conclusions about philosophy and politics, but we cannot accept his justification as strong enough. Although we look very sympathetically to Rorty's thinking about philosophy and

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[45] Richard Rorty, PMN, *p. 389.*

philosopher in relations with politics, we do not find the solution in the form of the split between the public and the private really good. The searches are going on, we do hope that there will appear a more convincing rhetoric that in accordance with the spirit of postmodernity will provide convincing justification of the fact that politics and philosophy cannot be mixed.

Philosophical Excursus V

Rorty, Bauman, contingency, and solidarity

1.

The philosophical excursus presented here differs from all the others. While in the majority of them we presented Rorty's polemics and discussions with other philosophers – according to the view that Rorty's philosophy is being coined to a large extent in confrontations with them rather than it is written in isolation, while in one of them we present in an expanded version the picture of what Rorty criticizes (namely we include the Lyotardian concept of the "differend" in the context of the Rortyan inacceptance of it), here we are trying once again to reverse perspectives. We want to show Zygmunt Bauman's account of the intellectual and the philosopher in the context of Rorty's account of the role and tasks of the philosopher today presented throughout the book. The point of connection between the two thinkers will be mild criticism of Rorty presented in numerous places by Bauman. Rorty, as far as I know, never responded to it therefore so far the exchange between them is one-sided. But the way of seeing culture, philosophy, modernity and postmodernity as well as intellectuals is so convergent in the two thinkers that I think it is useful to present Bauman's account of them. This, I hope, will throw additional, although not direct, light to European connections of neopragmatism, and although Rorty does not participate in discussions with Bauman, the closeness of their standpoints produces extremely interesting tensions between them.

The present philosophical excursus will thus assume the following shape: first we shall try to outline Bauman's attitude towards Rorty in questions that are of interest to us here, then we shall present a wider picture emerging from his works published in recent years, treating his vision as a competing, independent and parallel with respect to Rorty's. Both heroes grew out of different philosophical traditions, dealt with different questions and issues in their older works, and today they use different vocabularies and different philosophical traditions. But what links

them is more or less similar philosophical conclusions. While a lot is being written in the world about Rorty and Derrida, Habermas or Foucault, this additional Polish-English context of (not only) Rorty's works is still not as much commented on as it deserves. And although Rorty so far has not taken his position with respect to Bauman, I get the impression that Bauman may provide in the coming years one of the most interesting contexts in discussions of certain – European, post-Heideggerian and post-Nietzschean, let us say – themes of his philosophy. Not to mention the value of Bauman's sociological hermeneutics out of the Rortyan context, as one of the most stimulating and inspiring source of ideas in postmodernity (and it is important to bear in mind Anthony Giddens' words about him: *"the* theorist of postmodernity").

Let the two thinkers be linked at the beginning with a single Rorty's remark made recently in an article from *Dissent* in which he excludes from generally insignificant reflection on postmodernity only "Zygmunt Bauman and Gianni Vattimo".[1] Let us leave Vattimo alone in the present work, believing that the time will come to get closer to his "weak thought", his Nietzsche and his Heidegger. Let us rather deal with the picture of Rorty present in a merely outlined form in Zygmunt Bauman.

In most general terms: Bauman is critical of Rorty due to quite different reasons that the majority of his critics – namely due to the fact that in Bauman's view Rorty stopped in half-way, did not draw further conclusions, stopped in the place that vaguely promises further road. Rorty appears as an insufficiently radical philosopher as far as postmodern challenges are concerned. In two books, namely in *Legislators and Interpreters* (1987) and in a collection of earlier essays published as *Intimations of Postmodernity* (1992), Rorty is ascribed by Bauman to the tradition of "legislators" rather than "interpreters", that is to say, to traditional philosophers with traditional legitimizational ambitions who "demand the continuation of legislative function for the sake of the importance intrinsically carried by concern with reason, ethical norms, aesthetic standards".[2] In another, later, book – *Modernity and*

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Movements and Campaigns", *Dissent,* Winter 1995.

[2] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 19-20.

Ambivalence (1991) – there appears for the first time a more detailed analysis of Rorty's "solidarity" from his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* from which it turns out that it is supposed to lead to dangerous indifference. Bauman's response is unambiguously formulated in the passage entitled "From Tolerance to Solidarity" in which, obviously, a (mere) tolerance is represented by Rorty, a (new) solidarity – by Bauman himself.

Let us discuss the first, earlier in time, Bauman's criticism, to pass then on to the most important for our purposes passage devoted to Bauman's "surpassing" of Rorty. Generally speaking, in the first version of his criticism, Bauman characterizes Rorty (like Adorno who is on the other end of the range of criticized legislative positions assumed in contemporary philosophy) by the "refusal to abandon the legislative mode of intellectual discourse".[3] Adorno represents despair, a feeling of defeat, while Rorty is to react to the present situation in culture with a simple "so what?" The task of the philosopher is the preservation of unique values of Western civilization, the preservation of – so exposed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – "conversation of the West", keeping alive our local, Western, liberal tradition. Bauman sees this strategy as insufficient. He writes about the other, more radical strategy requiring a redefinition of the role and social status of the intellectual in the form of the passage from the metaphor of the "legislator" to that of the "interpreter.[4] In *Legislators and Interpreters* Bauman says that neither Gadamer's hermeneutics, nor Rorty's neopragmatism, forecast the rejection of the traditional, Western vocation of the intellectual. These are merely forms of defence of the way of life of the Western intellectual in the face of a gradual disappearance of certainty grounded once in evident "superiority" of Western societies.[5] He says, for instance, that

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[3] Ibidem, p. 21.

[4] Let us only mention here in passing that the attitude to Rorty as an already radical supporter of interpretive reason is also present in Bauman in the same collection of essays, though (I suppose) in the one written later. The author says the following: "The strategy of interpretive reason has been elaborated in various forms by Freud, Heidegger, late Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Ricoeur and Derrida; it finds today arguably its most radical, uncompromising expression in the work of Richard Rorty", ibidem, p. 126.

[5] See Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-modernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), pp. 144-145.

> Rorty is quite outspoken about the purpose of this willingness to talk, to listen to people, to weigh the consequences of our action upon other people, and suggests that it is the proper subject-matter for philosophy: its purpose is to continue the conversation which is unmistakably our project, European intellectual's way of life.[6]

Rorty's answer, "the most radical of all possible answers to the postmodern condition"[7], is a strategy that finds legitimacy of an intellectual activity in a moral value of one's own work as ascribed to intellectuals themselves. If others do not need legitimacy provided by philosophers any more, we are no longer providing them, no problem. With one restriction of which Bauman is always aware and of which Rorty rarely speaks and writes (and which, incidentally, shows at the same time the differences between hopes for the future of philosophy within the Academy in England and in the USA): the concern of academic philosophy for its self-reproduction – "until further cuts".

Let us pass on to the criticism of Rorty from the book on modernity and ambivalence. Let us note first, though, that the theme of links between contingency, tolerance, and solidarity appears also in the "Introduction" to *Intimations of Postmodenity*: Bauman says there that tolerance is possible in one form only – that of solidarity. Tolerance consists in the acceptance of significance of the difference of the Other, requires the acceptance of subjectivity of the "tolerated". But as such, it is not enough for the "tolerated" not to be humiliated. For, Bauman says, what if tolerance takes the following form: "you are wrong and I am right; I agree that not everybody can be like me, not for the time being at any rate, not at once; the fact that I bear with your otherness does not exonerate your error, it only proves my generosity".[8] Tolerance thus in Bauman's view has to offer more than the

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[6] Ibidem, p. 144.

[7] Ibidem, p. 197.

[8] Zygmunt Bauman, "Introduction" to *Intimations of Postmodernity,* p. xxi.

acceptance of diversity and coexistence: it must call for the admission of the equivalence of knowledge-producing discourses, it must call for a dialogue. I take this argumentation to refer directly to Rorty from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. The same link appears in Bauman's *Modernity and Ambivalence*. According to Bauman, Rortyan "kindness" comes from fear and is not "the last station on the road to emancipation".[9] The general Bauman's idea is that to discover fully the emancipatory potential present in contingency seen as destiny it is not enough to avoid humiliation. One has to respect others – respect them for their otherness. One has to respect in others their otherness and in strangers their strangeness. My bond appears as a "community of destiny rather than merely similarity of fate. The latter is satisfied with mutual tolerance; the community of destiny cries for solidarity".[10] It is a direct criticism of Rorty. Let us read it in more detail. Bauman shows two roads leading from tolerance: one leads towards solidarity (his own) and the other to "indifference and seclusion".[11] Bauman locates himself in opposition to Rorty which can be seen also on the level of vocabulary; let us listen how the words used are value-loaded. "To respect others" (for it does not suffice to "avoid humiliating others", Bauman on Rorty), "responsibility" (rather than "indifferent neutrality", "cold kindness", tolerance as a "possible manifestation of loftiness", "painful humiliation"), "the road from tolerance to solidarity" (rather than to "indifference and seclusion").[12] The road to be followed, being aware of the contingency of being, comes from fate to destiny, from tolerance to (new, non-Rortyan) solidarity – for "The *new* solidarity of the contingent is grounded in silence".[13] Rorty's solution is only half-way because he stays by dangerous and ambivalent tolerance and one must go further, towards (new) solidarity...

I fully agree with Zygmunt Bauman's arguments pertaining to dangers of tolerant attitude as he outlines it. But I do not think that

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[9] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), p. 235 (a splendid Polish translation was done by Janina Bauman).

[10] Ibidem, p 236.

[11] A Polish typescript translated by Janina Bauman, p. 220.

[12] Zygmunt Bauman, ibidem, pp. 219, 219, 303, 303, 303, 220.

[13] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 236.

there is so much that differs Rorty and Bauman, that Rorty leaves so much room for humiliation of others and, finally, that one cannot accept - which follows clearly from Bauman's line of reasoning - the whole Rorty's conception of solidarity based on the definition of the liberal as the one for whom "cruelty is the worst thing we do". It seems to me that intuitions expressed by both thinkers go in similar directions, with emphasis put somehow differently (e.g. Bauman stresses much stronger the "otherness of the other" and the "strangeness of the stranger"). Rorty's conception undoubtedly requires clarifications, of which Rorty takes care all the time in his writings, but I do not get the impression that the difference between them is as radical as Bauman outlines it. I would like to present here Bauman's dilemmas so as to throw some additional light on Rorty's work – after the above initial remarks, let us regard the passage on Bauman as another "European context", another possible though thus far absent (with the exception of a single reference cited at the beginning) connection of neopragmatism.

2.

Zygmunt Bauman is one of those few contemporary thinkers with whom it is worth while thinking together about our postmodern condition, and thinking together with him does not necessarily have to mean following his roads and accepting his conclusions, though – it may also mean thinking parallel to his own thinking, one that sometimes crosses with it in some points of convergence, sometimes departs from it for various, often idiosyncratic and individual reasons. Although reading Bauman requires close attention, as his particular works are interrelated, mutually complementary and supplementary, nevertheless the attention paid to them is amply rewarded.

For the perspective of his sociological hermeneutics (as he sometimes calls his thinking) is extremely productive for today's thinking of culture – both in itself, as well as confronted with proposals and suggestions of other postmodern critics and critics of postmodernity, especially (in a strong sense of the term) philosophical ones. A peculiar paradox becomes apparent, at least

as far as I can see it precisely as a philosopher, that Bauman's questions appeal stronger to a philosophical discourse of postmodernity rather than to a sociological one. There is a growing number of sociological volumes devoted to "intellectuals" of today, but none of them seems to compare in its intellectual horizons with diagnoses and suggestions of the author of *Legislators and Interpreters.*[14] The controversy that for a dozen or so years has been taking place in France and in the USA among philosophers, finds in Bauman its most interesting supplement. Therefore, crossing traditional disciplinary boundaries, it is worth while reading him in the context of *philosophical* discussions, as in these discussions Bauman's voice – although indirect and rather from behind of the main currents of a philosophical discourse of today – is a voice that deserves the highest attention. And let the author of *Intimations of Postmodernity* forgive me the fact that I am trying hard here to associate him with what perhaps is not dearest to him, not closest to his thinking from his own perspective (i.e. with postmodernism and neopragmatism, to use these two vague terms). The point is, though – and let us provide it as legitimacy of a sort – that *habent sua fata libelli.* Books have their own fate, their fate depends on the direction we push them in (i.e. we – readers), depends on what books we will put them next to in the great library of humanity. Their fate depends on what we will manage to do with them, for what purpose we will be able to use them, what interests we will have while reading them and writing about them. Nietzsche wrote about it, Walter Benjamin did, finally Richard Rorty used this saying when he was asked what provides legitimacy for his reading of Donald Davidson on the one hand and Jacques Derrida on the other.[15] Davidson does not seem too sympathetic to Rorty's

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[14] What fails in this respect are recently published sociological and philosophical works: *Intellectuals. Aesthetics, Politics, Academics*, ed. B. Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) or *Intellectuals in Liberal Democracies*, ed.A.G. Gagnon (Praeger Publishers, 1987). On the other hand, Michael Walzer's *The Company of Critics* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), a collection of essays, "case studies" of different thinkers with a common horizon, seems to be quite interesting; still more intriguing is Allan Stoekl's *Agonies of the Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992).

[15] See Richard Rorty, "Réponse à Jacques Bouveresse" in the congenial volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences* (Paris: L'eclat, 1992),

endeavours that reduce him to an intellectual shield in struggles of Rorty's neopragmatism with his opponents; Derrida, as far as I know, has so far kept silence on the subject. But, anyway, great polemics are taking place all the time, what is more, they are highly interesting, there emerge groups of "defenders" of both philosophers against their Rortyan "pragmaticization" which take care of purity and undisturbed transmission of their masters's views...[16] Given a certain (a)methodological charity, perhaps it not so interesting to get into details of the essence of "misunderstanding" in such readings of works of Davidson, Derrida (or Bauman, for that matter) that suggest (be they even non-existing) connections and parallels, as the fate of books is as contingent as our whole postmodern being. There are no non-contingent and universal foundations, thus there is also no author's foundation of a text that provides him *a priori* with greater rights and more important voice in the "cultural conversation" taking place. The voice of the author, traditionally important, has already become at the same time one of many equally valid voices of readers and commentators. On the one hand, one has to take into consideration the "modesty of the age" about which Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe writes almost in the form of the manifesto in his *La Fiction du politique*[17], on the other hand it is just with the help of the power of precisely this modesty that philosophy has a still greater possibility – chance? – to become a commentary to already written and currently being written philosophical works, a

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p. 156, or the answer Rorty gave to F. Farrell's complaints from *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism*: "... I do not think it matters whether Davidson would or would not be sympathetic to such an extrapolation. If you borrow somebody's idea for a different purpose, is it really necessary to clear this novel use with the originator of the idea?", a typescript, p. 1.

[16] Let me provide only two examples: Frank Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism – the Recovery of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994) the opening sentence: "... Richard Rorty, in his various writings, has given an unreliable account of recent philosophy. He gets certain figures wrong, Davidson in particular...", p. xi. On the other hand, obsessively anti-Rortyan Christopher Norris from his four recent books about Derrida, deconstruction or "truth" about postmodernism.

[17] "... Could it not be derisory to claim that one is engaged in philosophy, or - still worse – that one is a philosopher?", asks Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe in his *Heidegger, Art and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 1.

commentary to a still enlarging and changing canon of works, a commentary to commentaries. And a commentary always gives birth to a (Bloomian) temptation of a "strong misreading", a "poetic misprision", since, as he says in *The Anxiety of Influence*, *the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but another poem – a poem not itself.*[18]

Thus – Bauman's poem read in the mirror of other poems... What inclines one to make such a reading is also an extremely metaphorical and highly individual way of writing of the author. It happens in Bauman, let us bear it in mind, that the whole book is supported by several metaphors chosen with impressive erudition and ingenuity. It is difficult to imagine a "rational" discussion of a traditional philosopher with metaphors; a metaphor can be confronted with another metaphor, but it is not comfortable in the way arguments are. Just like in the case of Rorty, the construction of an "ironist" produces a distance and pushes the edge of irony in two opposite directions at the same time ("I am saying this, but maybe I am saying that? I am saying this, but only 'ironically', how could I take it 'seriously'" etc. etc.), depending on the actual direction of an attack and the sophistication of polemics, also in Bauman the support of his vision of modernity and postmodernity on several carefully chosen metaphors may bring about similar helplessness of a (traditional) critic. For, let us ask, what is supposed to mean the opposition of "legislators" and "interpreters", "pilgrims" and "wanderers", what are metaphors of "vagabonds", "nomads", "tourists" or "flaneurs", if we would like to look at them with cold eyes of a strange and insensitive to the poetry of words and magic of pictures analytician of the present and decoder of texts devoted to it? The method of decoding, deciphering – just like one deciphers the truth – must fail here

[18] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 70. "Strong poets" make the history of poetry by misreading one another - it might be asked whether "strong philosophers" could not be making the history of philosophy by misreading one another, by producing their own idiosyncratic sequences of philosophers (just like Rorty creates and uses the sequence "Plato-Kant" or "Nietzsche-Heidegger-Derrida")? The majority of "proper" interpretations of poetry is worse than mistakes, says Bloom. "Perhaps there are only more or less creative or interesting misreadings"..., p. 43. Rorty's redescriptions and recontextualizations versus Romantic "genius" in poetry?

totally, what a reader is left with is the (Nietzschean) awareness of perspectival character of interpretation and getting out of what the whole history of Western metaphysics has always required him to do, as Derrida noted for the first time in his discussion with Lévi-Strauss in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences".[19] One cannot get away with deciphering metaphors, as, struggling argumentatively with a metaphor, and consequently refuting it, one remains with a meaningless, devoid of significant senses, text.

Metaphors are fundamental in Bauman's thinking of the world – let us listen to a characteristic statement from *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*; as the metaphor of a nomad as an ideal type is "imperfect and misleading", the only unambiguous task left is:

> to look for other metaphors...[20]

Bauman confronts an old metaphor with a new one, rather than confronts it with argumentation against an old metaphor; a scrupulous investigator of postmodernity does not confuse levels in thinking of the world and in feeling it, neither in himself, nor in confrontations with others. Who fights with the help of metaphors, dies of metaphors, it could be said. What is important is whether a metaphor – another metaphor – can be killed, is it easy to literalize it? A dead metaphor is a literalized one, but what is needed for that is time and arduous work of culture, with which fame is usually associated... Metaphor as one of (postmodern) "life strategies"? Metaphor as a contribution to a picture of a status of the postmodern intellectual? For as it is difficult to argue with a metaphor, it is also difficult to argue with someone who "passes rapidly from Hemingway to Proust to Hitler to Marx to Foucault to Mary Douglas to the present situation in Southeast Asia to Ghandi to Sophocles", as Richard Rorty says in his *Consequences of*

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[19] See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.

[20] Zygmunt Bauman, *Dwa eseje o moralności ponowoczesnej* [*Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*] (in Polish, Warsaw: Instytut Kultury, 1994, p. 20

Pragmatism about a post-Philosophical intellectual.[21] It is difficult to argue with someone who is a "name dropper", an expert of proper names with which he plays being afraid of getting stuck in one vocabulary, one – be it even self-chosen – perspective, one and privileged view of the world. Bauman and his metaphors... Metaphors in Bauman's texts... An explicit – practical – end of a certain way of practising the humanities, philosophy, be it even sociology; an end of a certain figure of the humanist to which modernity managed to get us accustomed. Perhaps the beginning of a new way of thinking of culture in the post-legislative, post-metanarrative, post-Philosophical epoch (as this state is called by Bauman, Lyotard and Rorty, respectively)?

In Bauman, that way of thinking derives from a deep and irreducible suspicion of the project of Modernity which finally, through its "gardening" dreams, had led to the Holocaust, after which "nothing will be the way it was". Lyotard in *Le Différend* calls Auschwitz *le signe d'histoire* or *événement*, Lacoue-Labarthe names it his *La Fiction du politique* a *caesura* (*la césure*) of the speculative; apart from saying with the latter that in Auschwitz "God died", that a dark, so far unseen side of modernity manifested itself, one can also say that (German) speculative philosophy with its emancipatory wishes, supported by Reason and History, died there as well. That philosophical side is studied by Germans and Frenchmen, from Theodor W. Adorno from *Negative Dialectics*, Emmanuel Lévinas e.g. from his texts about Blanchot, the whole recent German *Historikerstreit* – the dispute of German historians with the participation of Habermas and Tugendhadt, to Lyotard from *Heidegger et 'les juifs'*, Lacoue-Labarthe from *La Fiction du politique*, and many others. How to "philosophize after Auschwitz" – that was the question put forward for the first time by Adorno, and in this form it has been present in culture ever since. By his own means, on his own and following his own paths, Zygmunt Bauman comes to similar, fundamental questions about modernity in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Let us listen to him:

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

> Modernity, as we remember, is an age of artificial order and of grand societal designs, the era of planners, visionaries, and – more generally – "gardeners" who treat society as a virgin plot of land to be expertly designed and then cultivated and doctored to keep the designed form.[22]

It seems to be one of the most beautiful (para)definitions of modernity, obviously, knowing Bauman's *façon de parle* – a metaphorical one. Let us think of it for a while and let us read it slightly differently, from a different side and in different vocabularies. "Planners" and "visionaries" may be – let us assume the following descriptions as a "possible world" – traditional intellectuals of the period of modernity, those of great ambitions and superior status in culture; more and less important, more and less philosophically-minded, those who planned the Jacobean Terror and those who planned the Bolshevik terror. (How different faces metaphors of planners can assume can be testified by "glass houses", in Poland, following Żeromski and German Glasarchitektur, the hope for "bright" future, while for George Orwell – the nightmare of an accomplished utopia, man subjected to the gaze of the Other, deprived of intimacy, as it is obsessively present in Sartre, Foucault or Barthes, which is beautifully shown – under a general label of "denigration of vision" – in Martin Jay's recent impressive study[23]). Bauman's gardener is not Kosinski's Gardener from *Being There* – he is rather a self-conceited erudite, aware of his exceptionality in culture, interpreter of the present and planner of the future. Gardeners taking care of a "virgin plot of land" - society, rather than society seen as e.g. "English garden" in which work consists in cultivation and maintenance of the status quo. Gardeners as executioners – those who pull weeds out of the social plot of land (supported by the great idea of "racial hygiene") or who kill (be it even with Zyklon B) bugs, fast disseminating and

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[22] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 113.

[23] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), preceded by chapters published previously e.g. on Lyotard and Foucault.

parasitic on assumption. Sanitary action, hygienic challenge, getting rid of filth and bugs... They were specific gardeners, indeed. So in modernity a virgin plot of land needed planning – and that was done by experts in ideas hired by Leviathan, and needed putting into practice, for which Leviathan had different personae (who saw a serious philosopher in a uniform of the SS or in a grey greatcoat of the NKWD?).

What the euphemism "to keep the designed form" used by Bauman in the above quotation might mean? It might mean, for instance, terror to which precise, disciplined and rational bureaucracy was employed; and the bureaucracy lacked just a grand vision of a perfect society, a vision of a better and more just world (which will be e.g. *Judenfrei*, or in which there will be no bourgeoisie or no other "weeds"). "Modern dreams are given absolute power" – says Bauman, and thereby modern genocide is born. And these grand visions are postmodern *métarécits*, Lyotardian great narratives from his *La Condition postmoderne* to which one can only feel distrust today; "gardener" vision of modernity is the vision in which *telos* is already known – the end of present sufferings (and crimes) is future happiness planned by smart minds here and now. Given a traditional role and modern status of intellectuals, these smart minds are never lacking, they are being created and they create themselves. Fortunately, there is fewer and fewer gardeners today. Fewer and fewer candidates for gardeners. For it is no longer that easy to cultivate the garden, and the Idea of future Emancipation no longer appeals to human hearts...

3.

Zygmunt Bauman's books are a perfect pretext to – as well as a perfect point of departure for – the discussion of postmodernity. Bauman's texts can be perfectly located in a certain wider manner of thinking about culture and society present today, and perhaps therefore we would like to assume here the following guiding principle (of a sort): we will be reading Bauman and commenting on his texts immediately, we will be undressing his metaphors and suggesting different ones, linking his thinking with that of those he

never refers to, or does it rarely and unwillingly. We will be presenting a more general commentary to a more detailed one, taking samples from his various books and looking at them through a magnifying glass of a philosophical investigation. We will place some fragments in "proper" contexts, listening carefully to the author's intentions, some others we will violently pull out of the context, without taking into account the possible damage and destruction of harmony of the author's well-groomed garden of thought. Bauman's text will be providing life-blood to our reflection, it will be giving it more power with power of its own.

Let us take into consideration the opening sentence from *Freedom*, Bauman's book on freedom published in 1988, which is the sentence quoted by him from common knowledge just in order to promptly repudiate it: "You can say what you wish. This is a free country".[24] The author dismantles it and listens to its possible senses when he says e.g. that

> We *can* do what we wish, without fear of being punished, thrown in jail, tortured, persecuted. Let us note, however, that the expression is silent about how effective our action will be. "Free country" does not guarantee that what we do will reach its purpose, or what we say will be accepted. ... And so the expression tells us also that being in a *free* country means doing things on one's own responsibility. One is free to pursue (and, with luck, to achieve) one's aims, but one is also free to err.[25]

And there is no way to disagree with the above. We can, however, look at the above sentence from a different perspective of the one who made a living of speaking and writing, whose task it was to speak and write, who was even listened to: from the perspective of the man of letters endowed with the Enlightenment authority, one of those *les philosophes*, an inhabitant of *la*

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[24] Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom* (London: Open University Press, 1988), p. 1.
[25] Ibidem, p. 1.

république des lettres and then – following the "Dreyfus affair" – just *l'intellectuel.*[26]

So: "You can say what you wish. This is a free country". Philosophy (and, more generally, the whole culture of today), despite misleading appearances of having found a solution to that problem by way of taste, decency, even the law, is still having trouble within itself with those who are taking the statement too seriously. Questions of an ethical nature are being born all the time. Nobody knows for sure which standards to appeal to, as together with the exhaustion of the Enlightenment project which has brought its own figure of an intellectual to highest peaks, what is also getting exhausted is the power that place was still recently giving and which those in question made use of. As long as it was clear what the role and place of an intellectual in culture was (an intellectual in a European, especially French sense of the term, rather unknown in the United States, which seems not to know or have known such a role as played by Habermas in Germany or Sartre and later – at least functionally – Foucault in France), it was easy to pass judgements on others as the canon of behavior was as known as the model of one meter from Sevres near Paris. Today, however, in a totally new and – still – unexpected situation, there appear questions for which there are no ready answers. Numerous philosophers participate in thinking about these questions – the question is a spark from which an interesting polemic takes its origin.

Let us take the following point into consideration, departing for a moment from Bauman's books to take a long detour to return to them after a while: what may underlie such a concentration of attention and energy on seemingly simple questions about life on the one hand, and work on the other hand, of several twentieth century philosophers and theorists, or on absurd and seemingly easy to refute theses of several inspired historians (revisionists) of the Holocaust. So, to put it clearly: for instance, Martin

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[26] See in this context about the "Dreyfus Affair" the chapter "Emil Zola: the Citizen Against the State" from *The Dreyfus Affair and the American Conscience* by Egal Feldman (Wayne State University Press, 1981) or Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair. The Case of Alfred Dreyfus* (New York: George Braziller, 1986), the third section entitled "Two Frances", pp. 245-358.

Heidegger, Paul de Man, Robert Faurisson (bearing in mind relative insignificance and caricatural nature of the latter figure). What Heidegger said – and about what he kept silence when others were speaking or leaving Germany which was full of hatred at the time, and when others were speaking having returned to post-war Germany. Why Heidegger kept silence right until his death, even in his Spiegel interview, his silence was indeed "unbearable" and "inexcusable".[27] Was Paul de Man a hidden anti-Semite when he was engaged in his Belgium wartime journalism, was he an anti-Semite later on, at Yale? What is common to Nietzsche, Heidegger, de Man – and Derrida in all these ethical contexts? What is going to happen to deconstruction (as an American school of literary criticism) in the light of all these "revelations", widely used e.g. by the press? And finally Robert Faurisson who explicitly negates the existence of gas chambers in Auschwitz: what did he betray and break away from that he was able to incite such an intellectual storm in France, as he must have betrayed something, for, just like in the case of previous questions, the wound was so painful that needed years-long polemics from various French thinkers at the same time. How to "live with Faurisson" (to treat that *casus* a little bit wider), how to "discuss" with him, without bringing him to the (undeserved) level of a partner in discussion who is endowed with equal rights? These are some ethical questions of France and the United States (although, it is important to bear in mind, that, in Lyotard's formulation, *L'affaire Heidegger est une affaire française*), these are some questions of philosophers who take their culture seriously and who has sensitive ears to what is going on in it. How frail the place in culture of an intellectual in France today must be if a Faurisson is able to bother so much so many eminent philosophers? Pierre Vidal-Naquet in all his essays from the volume *Les Assassins de la mémoire: 'Un Eichmann de papier' et autres essais sur le révisionisme* returns constantly to a question fundamental to him: is one to get into "polemics" with theses of revisionists, how not to

[27] As Jean-Francois Lyotard in *Heidegger and "the jews"* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) and Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe in already referred to *Heidegger, Art and Politics* put it.

ennoble them by means of locating them within a scientific debate, how to write knowing that the discussion with Faurisson is, as he puts it, "absolutely impossible"[28], how to fight with lies and bad faith – and fight or not fight? Truth has always been supposed to defend itself, but it seems to be too weak. What did Noam Chomsky say in his "preface" to Faurisson's book *Mémoire en défense* and is such a version of the right of free expression worth being defended? Such and similar questions are being currently asked all over the world, in books and articles, during seminars and conferences; what is the "freedom of an intellectual" – and what is his "ethics" today. When undisturbed being of leaders of human souls is being disturbed, these leaders go in for self-analysis, they deal with themselves or with their predecessors, they look for their own definitions of themselves (and therefore Zygmunt Bauman says in *Legislators and Interpreters* that all definitions of intellectuals are "self-definitions"[29]). When their self-image is shaking, then so is their place in culture, life-long vocation, the meaning of their work as well as the effort to question the reality. It is not accidentally that the questions about thinkers shown here as examples are important today – some twenty years ago nobody would care so much about them, nobody would pay so much attention (let us also remember that, generally, they are still not important in America except for some Continentally-minded thinkers).[30] A well-formed, modern ethos of an intellectual is commonly known, it seemed to

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[28] Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Assassins of Memory. Essays on the Denial of the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 2.

[29] Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters. On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), p. 8.

[30] Perhaps one should separate an intellectual's "speaking" from his "writing"? Perhaps an intellectual is only the one who is writing (starting with – written – Zola's "Manifesto of the Intellectuals"), although one can also look at the collection of famous pictures: Sartre and Foucault, two giants of post-war France, Foucault speaking with a megaphone, Sartre handing in leaflets to passers-by. Smiling, happy, *speaking* to the crowd gathered around. May '68 is in turn a (written) "narrative explosion" (Lyotard), but also a madness of loud speaking after years of silence, the beginning of struggle with the "confiscation of a discourse", as Foucault and Deleuze called it. So perhaps he should speak – but only if he had written before?

be present in culture for good. Now culture changes its mind and seems to take rights and privileges off from him.

Within the horizon that interests us here, let us take into consideration, by way of an example, a couple of great figures from philosophy of the recent two hundred years who determined the shape of today's Continental philosophy – (Kojève's) Hegel and (Derrida's and Deleuze's) Nietzsche. Alexandre Kojève said:"... the future of the world, and thereby the meaning of the present and the sense of the future, will depend, in the final analysis, on the contemporary interpretations of Hegelian works"[31], to shorten it and to disregard nuances – *the future of the world will depend on our reading of Hegel.* It is important today to remember the earnestness of the belief and the constant presence of it in the tradition of philosophy, common, incidentally, also to Husserl from his last lectures in Prague and Vienna and to Heidegger after *Kehre* to whom one can attribute a (paraphrazed) saying – the future of the (German) world – but also that of Europe – will depend on our reading of Hölderlin. Let us read Hegel and let us read Hölderlin, let us read the Thinker and let us read the Poet, and we shall influence the world directly and effectively...[32] The questions about Hegel, as is well known, dominated (almost) whole French post-war thought – as Michel Foucault said in *L'Ordre du discourse* in 1970: "our whole epoch is trying to disengage itself from Hegel", as Hegel from *Phenomenology of Spirit* in an anthropologized reading of Kojève used to dominate the great part of philosophical imagination of the French for over a quarter of a century.[33] A violent contrast to – and antidote against – Hegel became Nietzsche, but not the Nietzsche as seen over the period of thirty years by Walter Kaufman in the USA (in his influential *Nietzsche:*

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[31] Alexandre Kojève, cited in Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1980), p. 9.

[32] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe wrote about Hölderlin – whose "imagined Greece" influenced the German imagination starting with Hegel, then through Nietzsche and finally Heidegger – in the volume *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), in the text "Hölderlin and Greeks", pp. 236-247.

[33] About which reminds Vincent Descombes in his *Modern French Philosophy* in a chapter on "humanization of nothingness", pp. 9-54.

Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist) but rather Nietzsche as seen by the French of the sixties first (and then, in the eighties, in America by e.g. Alexander Nehamas and Richard Rorty[34]). Nietzsche who is light and "perspectival", the author of "Truth and Lies in the Extra-Moral Sense" rather than the author of *The Will to Power*, a self-creator who asks about "style" (Derrida) and who has a "sense of humor" (Rorty) rather than a philosopher full of seriousness and convinced of his "mission", "used" (or "abused") later on by still more serious philosophers like Heidegger.

The passage from Hegel to Nietzsche took place in French culture in the sixties and since then it is quite rare to hear someone saying that the (Kojèvian) "future of the world" may depend on the reading of Nietzsche, or of *any other* philosopher, to be exact. (And I have discussed it in more detail in the excursus on "Hegel and Rorty"). The most explicit about it is Richard Rorty, which brings violent storms to his philosophizing from both sides, both from the (philosophical and political) right and from the left, that is also what Zygmunt Bauman says, although not in a vocabulary of the history of philosophy and that of philosophy itself but in the vocabulary of sociological reflection or in fundamental metaphors built by him. Bauman's "powerlessness of an intellectual", his gradual "retreat to the Academy"[35], subsidized and devoid of any contact with resistant matter of reality, his *interpretive* rather than l*egislative* reason, his metaphors of a "vagabond" and a "tourist" – translated into philosophical language – may just mean the awareness of the end of traditional attitudes not of a philosopher, but of an intellectual in general. *Intimations of Postmodernity, Legislators and Interpreters*, and finally *Modernity and*

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[34] See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche. Life as Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) and R. Rorty, CIS.

[35] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992). Let us listen to these descriptions: "Having reached the nadir of their political relevance, modern intellectuals enjoy freedom of thought and expression they could not dream of at the time that *words mattered politically*. This is an autonomy of no practical consequence outside the self-enclosed world of intellectual discourse", p. 16). Paradoxically enough, at least apparently, the growth in the irrelevance of legitimation – traditionally provided to the state by intellectuals – brings about the growth in intellectual freedom that, at the same time, stops to mean anything in practice.

Ambivalence seem to testify in a totally different language to the same phenomenon of postmodern world: diagnozed by Lyotard *l'incredulité à l'egard des métarécits*, incredulity common and justified, brings about a crisis of the producer of those metanarratives (as Lyotard put it crudely in his *Tombeau de l'intellectuel*). Reading Bauman in such a context – among such thinkers as Foucault, Rorty, Lyotard or his favorite, Baudrillard - may turn out to be extremely instructive, accounting for the very same phenomena in a different vocabulary, in totally different metaphors and within a different tradition of thinking about culture in general.

One can think whether it might not be the case that the pair Hegel/Nietzsche is some parallel of modern and postmodern intellectuals, needless to say, such Hegel from behind of whom Kojève the Marxist and the Heideggerian is winking at us, and such Nietzsche who is opposed to Hegel in the strongest way perhaps by Deleuze in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Asking what Hegel was doing - and what was doing Nietzsche, and how French thought made a radical passage from the former to the latter, we are asking about a (new) figure of an intellectual today, as the change of his or her status may be also a consequence of that passage. Nietzsche may turn out to be a key turning point for today's discussions, from Derrida and Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari from *Anti-Oedipus*, Lyotard from *Economie libidinale*, or – in the USA where discussions of Nietzsche became fervent in the eighties – Allan Bloom on the one hand (with his "Nietzscheanized America") and Richard Rorty on the other (in whom Nietzsche is opposed to Heidegger – the one who "took philosophy (too) seriously", as he says in the title of one of his reviews[36]). "The New Nietzsche", to hint at David Allison's influential volume, becomes in this context an important question today, and the link between "intellectual", "freedom" and Nietzsche may be a link of a fundamental importance.

Thus one could think of two opposite poles in thinking about the role of philosophy: on the one pole there would be Hegel (and Kojève) who link the fate of the world to philosophy (as well as a

[36] Richard Rorty, "Taking Philosophy Seriously", *New Republic*, April 1988.

"serious" Heidegger – who tells us to read Hölderlin – and even the "last metaphysician" and the "inverted Platonic" Nietzsche in the reading of the latter), one the other one there would be the same Nietzsche but this time as a model of self-creation who is not bothered by the fate of the world because has different questions and different troubles (closer e.g. to Marcel Proust). The differences of positions taken appear still today e.g. when what Heidegger did (wrote, said) in the famous year of 1933 is being discussed. Lyotard and Lacoue-Labarthe write that Heidegger's silence about the Holocaust is *impardonnable*, while Rorty wants to separate Heidegger's "life" from his "work" saying that the latter as a person turned out to be "a nasty figure", which, nevertheless, does not affect much his philosophy (and it is easy according to him to conceive of "another possible world" in which he actually leaves Germany – and we are reading today the same philosophy of his[37]).

4.

Having finished this somehow long detour, let us have a quick look at a certain traditional and well-rooted model in sociological and philosophical thinking of culture; Zygmunt Bauman says about it the following:

> All wills are free, but some wills are freer than others; some people, who knowingly or unknowingly perform the function of educators, instil (or modify) the cognitive predispositions, moral values and aesthetic preferences of others and thus introduce certain shared elements into their intentions and ensuing actions.[38]

And here we are, with this one simple sentence, in the very heart of controversies that we are interested in – from the Platonic notion of *basileia* (leading to philosophers-kings), from the "Seventh Letter", via Kant's "Was ist Aufklärung?" and its

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[37] Richard Rorty, "Another Possible World", *Proceedings on Heidegger's Politics*, October 1988.

[38] Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, p. 6.

Foucauldian interpretations, via Hegel – for whom it was a period of "madness", as he puts it, when he though of himself as being an incarnation of the Absolute Spirit (as a mortal can only be God for Kiryllov from *The Possessed*), to Heidegger's *Führung* and his belief that a philosopher can be a part of something greater, e.g. of that "movement" glorified perhaps for purely philosophical reasons rather than personal and mean ones... The quotation from Bauman leads us also to the consideration of the belief from "Theses on Feuerbach" that *Die Philosophen haben die Welt nur verschieden interpretiert; es kommt aber draufen, sie zu veränder* that Derrida takes into account in his recent *Specters de Marx*.[39] As it is one of constant motifs of the tradition of philosophy – there is a group of people who know more than others due to having access to a (revealing and being revealed) truth, who disclose truth with the help of their intellects and – if need be – present it to the world in a softer, more common way. The religious metaphor of a shepherd and the herd fits here perfectly (and let us bear in mind that for Bauman, ethics is e.g. a common task for "philosophers, educators and preachers"[40]), a philosopher-prophet has always told people "what to do". He is an unquestionable authority as he knows the deepest (the metaphors of removing surface layers of appearances to get to a hidden essence!) context, the philosophical one. An authority that looks at things and judges them "from a philosophical point of view", that is, from the point of view of the world, humanity, the universal rather than the particular, the eternal rather than the contingent etc. etc. The conversation with him required one to raise (Platonic "cave" metaphors again!) to a philosophical level on the part of the interlocutor. As Rorty wrote in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* – a philosopher expressed his opinion about all questions, and his voice was the most important one in almost any discussion (as he was supported by the authority of philosophy itself).

Bauman says that "the free individual, far from being a universal condition of humankind, is a historical and social creation".[41]

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[39] See Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx. L'Etat de la dette, le travaille du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale* (Paris: Galilée, 1993).

[40] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Ethics*, p 41.

[41] Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, p.7.

Freedom of an individual cannot be taken for granted, it is a relative novelty in the history of mankind, "a novelty closely connected with the advent of modernity and capitalism".[42] Bauman's melancholic remark about the advent – and possible departure – of freedom has to be supplemented by an optimistic vision, also supported by an awareness of common contingency, the vision of freedom as a historical, social creation, but also one that human beings create themselves. The vision of freedom in self-creation and through self-creation in the situation in which there is no other "road to freedom". And when Bauman refers (allusively) to Orwell from *Animal Farm* – why there are supposed to be voices of equal and more equal, free and freer wills – then one could suggest an answer that such voices and such wills may be coined in arduous, individual effort, and that, surely, their freedom and significance of their voices do not come today from some legitimacy, from power of the discipline they represent, in the name of which they express their views. So in the situation in which the place traditionally (historically and socially) accorded to an intellectual in culture is getting more and more deserted, one perhaps might attempt to take it on a quite different basis, with one's own effort, with the help of power of one's own projects... Rorty's "freedom as recognition of contingency"[43] and Bauman's (quoted from Agnes Heller) motto about "transforming our contingency into our destiny" from *Modernity and Ambivalence* may have a lot in common although with one important exception – Rorty's account leads optimistically to the awareness of the possibility of surpassing oneself, Bauman's account may (though does not necessarily have to) lead to fatalism. The fatalism can be heard in Agnes Heller:

> An individual has transformed his or her contingency into his or her destiny if this person has arrived at the consciousness of having made the *best* out of his or her practically infinite possibilities. A society has transformed its contingency into a destiny if the members of this society arrive at the awareness that they would prefer to

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[42] Ibidem, p. 7.

[43] Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 47.

> live at no other place and at no other time than here and now.[44]

It seems better not to have the feeling of fulfilment, and to aim always at something which cannot be reached, rather than to live with the possibility that one is a citizen of the only accessible, and at the same time the "best" of possible worlds (as we remember Faust promising to give in to Mephistopheles in Goethe the moment he is satisfied with a "moment", saying "Let it last! It is beautiful!"). It may be better not to fix the level of possibilities on the one of reality... It may be better to trust (Romantic) imagination, with all postmodern reservations, than (totalitarian) self-complacency of inhabitants of Oceania or Eurasia... It is important to remember about threats of fatalism and of melancholy of that Bauman's vision.

Thus freedom in Bauman's account is a construct to which we are not allowed to get accustomed, as the world of which it is a product is contingent itself, and may disappear any time at all. That is a philosophically justified melancholy, but it may be also connected with melancholy or pessimism so evident in Michel Foucault - in his account of "power". Freedom, Bauman says, is not a a property, a quality which an individual can have or can not have, "freedom exists only as a social relation": "It makes sense only as an opposition to some other condition, past or present".[45] Just like there are no free and coerced, there are also no ruling and ruled, those who hold power and fight to maintain it and those who are deprived of it and dream of having it, as "power is everywhere", it is of a "capillary" nature, as it penetrates everything... It is a relation rather than a property whose some (chosen) possess, others (temporarily worse-off) do not possess, but might do if only they made another effort, another step on the road leading to emancipation, if they only wished to – preferably by means of the revolution which would "seize" power. Power in this account is not something that one seizes, then losses, power

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[44] Agnes Heller quoted in Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 234.

[45] Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, p. 7, p. 7.

works from a multitude of points, from below, in a word: "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere", as Michel Foucault says in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality*.[46] One does not "have" freedom (Bauman) just like one does not "have" power (Foucault). Freedom – like power in such an account – exists only between individuals. Both accounts are pessimistic, the first leaves little room for will to individual freedom, the other leaves little room for hope for resistance, for which Foucault was reproached many times during his life and afterwards.[47]

If we were to look for a moment to the most famous Odyssey of Spirit, the Hegelian *Phenomenology*, then it would turn out that freedom can organize thinking about history and history of philosophy perfectly well. From the freedom of an "oriental despot", and only his, via freedom of some, that is to say, freedom of that "top of an iceberg" in Ancient Greece in Hegel's memorable expression, to the culmination of freedom in the period of (post)revolutionary France – in a radical contrast to the "misery" of German life, on the one hand; on the other hand the dialectic of *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* and struggle for recognition, freedom only as freedom recognized by the Other, deprived of it (who promptly, however – owing to his work – turns out to be more free than his master as the latter appears from a distance to be just a dead end of history, *une impasse existentielle*, as Kojève says of him[48]). The Idea of Emancipation turns out today to be a more and more a modern illusion, perhaps the greatest and the most persistent metanarrative. Incredulity towards it, however, is something else than incredulity towards freedom. There is perhaps the possibility of freedom without the Idea of

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[46] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction*, vol. I (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 93.

[47] The role of "hope" with reference to Foucault is most important to Richard Rorty. The reproaches I have in mind come e.g. from Michael Walzer from the text on "lonely politics of Michel Foucault" in his *The Company of Critics* or from Edward Said from his "Foucault and the Imagination of Power" in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. D. Hoy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

[48] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 25.

Emancipation. How is one to reconcile the lack of *arche* and *telos* at the same time, the lack of simple history as an incarnation of the Idea of emancipation of the humanity (Napoleon on the outskirts of Iena would be such a simple history), preferably with the help of the power of Reason appreciated by Enlightenment - with dreams of "free man" from declarations and constitutions of the times of the Revolution? It seems, to push the differences to an extreme, that the answer today might be the (Nietzschean-Bloomian-Rortyan) self-creation, but it might also be the (Baumanian-Baudrillardian) fatalism and melancholy, to sketch here caricatures of two extreme possibilities of attitudes. Since how is one to describe such statements as Bauman's: "In our society, individual freedom is constituted as, first and foremost, freedom of the consumer"[49] from *Freedom* or

> No determination, no chance; just a soft, pliable game without set or predictable denouement, a game which exhausts itself fully in the aggregate of players and their moves. ... This world promises no security but no impotence either; it offers neither certainty nor despair; only the joy of a right move and the grief of a failed one

from a gloomy, para-Baudrillardian picture drawn in *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies.*[50]

Indeed, the first choice to be made would be to abandon "the vocabulary parasitic on the hope of (or determination for) universality, certainty and transparency", as we are fully aware of the omnipresence of contingency, the question appears, however, whether we can afford the luxury of "abandoning all hopes" (to refer to a classic formulation)? Instead of lost hopes there may be enough room for other hopes, smaller, more moderate, one of them might perhaps be (philosophical, literary, artistic, emotional etc.) self-creation. Then there might be a chance that one will be a consumer, which is probably inescapable today, but not a

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[49] Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom*, pp. 7-8.

[50] Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1992), p. 187.

consumer first and foremost. "Freedom of a consumer" and the very Baudrillardian *la societé de consommation* are strongly pessimistic motifs if one is to use them to study postmodern society. Sometimes Bauman, like Baudrillard, like Foucault, does not leave much hope for a reader, he may appear then as a grave-digger of modernity who enters postmodernity with a sense of depression, but sometimes he presents a bright and ravishing picture of today's culture, as in *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality* and in *Postmodern Ethics*, to which I devote the last section of this chapter.

5.

Bauman's books are to a large extent works of a moralist in the best sense of the term who is bothered by moral dilemmas of modernity and postmodernity. *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality* published in Polish and *Postmodern Ethics* published in English seem to be the culmination of these moral deliberations.[51] Let us confine ourselves here to the former book, though. Bauman says in it for instance the following:

> we know today ... that morality has neither its cause nor its reason – that the necessity of being moral as well as the sense of the moral cannot be logically deduced or demonstrated. Morality appears to us today as a phenomenon as contingent as the rest of being – as deprived of foundations as the rest of being, in its case ethical ones.[52]

It is so, however, that today's loss of belief in foundations as such is not by any means reducible to the past belief that ethical foundations have not been *discovered* yet, the author makes it precise. What results from it for us, those living in postmodernity? It means for us sharpening of our own moral responsibility, as we are "facing the chaos", which is to say at the same time that we are "facing the 'bare truth' of moral dilemmas as well as looking in

[51] Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
[52] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, p. 51.

the eyes of our own moral independence".[53] Postmodern world appears for Bauman as a *chance* for one's own responsibility and one's own choice rather than responsibility and choice grounded in metanarratives. Each moral step is difficult as it is one's own step as we are deprived of any big moral background and big moral advisors of modernity. So the consciousness of contingency is total. We ourselves are contingent as children of time and chance (as Rorty likes to put it), our personality is contingent, as well as society in which we are leading our (contingent) lives. Philosophy that we are dealing with assumes a contingent form, the form determined just by other contingencies (as a great skeptic Odo Marquard says in a subtitle of a fragment from his *Apologie des Zufälligen*: "We human beings are always more our contingencies than our choices"[54]). We are drowning in an ocean of contingencies having lost the grounds of a clearly fixed determination... Deprived of a supporting point, accustomed to it for such a long time, we are waving our hands crying for help which will never come as it cannot come... "Ethical paradox of postmodernity" - "moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice", as Bauman says in *Intimations of Postmodernity...*[55]

How is one to live in a moral world devoid of traditional foundations? How is one to live in a world "without an alternative" (i.e. without the other pole of a nourishing utopia)? How is one to live if philosophy is supposed to be just a (Rortyan) "conversation of mankind"? How, and for how long, can one – meaningfully, usefully and "interestingly" – converse about philosophy within the framework of a philosophical language game? What at the same time, however, is the alternative to the postmodern cultural conversation (of those "name-droppers" from *Consequences of Pragmatism*) – perhaps the *only* alternative is a much worse deep illusion of one's own philosophical necessity and, in broader terms, the necessity of philosophy itself... Bauman writes about "ethically non-grounded morality" – "uncontrolled and unpredictable". The

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[53] Ibidem, p. 50, p. 80, p. 84.

[54] Odo Marquard, *In Defence of the Accidental* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 118.

[55] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. xxii.

loneliness of moral choice is that of man devoid of higher than "here and now" senses, of plans further than the *hic et nunc* generation. But it is always to be born in mind that the greatest fear (at least in modernity) had always come from those in whom flame in eyes had been accompanied by the certainty of a rightly chosen Idea, rightly chosen *telos*, rather than from mere psychopaths. *Telos* used to sanctify crimes of today, sanctify present wrongs, being a bright point in the future which gives birth to darkness on the earth today (let us remind here of Bakunin and Nietshayev's "Catechism of a Revolutionary": "a revolutionary breaks any possible connection with a civilized world. If he is in touch with it, it is only in order to destroy it" or "What ought to be moral for a revolutionary is what co-operates with revolution, what ought to be immoral and criminal for him is what stands in its way"). "Legislative", modern thinking brings about "gardener" practice, weeds are being pulled out on the basis of hygienic procedures. A legislator-gardener as a modern incarnation of evil, evil that is born just because someone "knows better" what others want? How, in Max Horkheimer's words, to "be on the side of the temporal against merciless eternity"? How to live when no "horror!" (to use that unforgettable expression of Kurtz from the ending of *The Heart of Darkness*) can be explained by means of tension between (inexisting but promised) future and (all-too-known) present? When the present is no longer merely another point of a pilgrimage to a known goal, no longer another – still higher each time – stage in coming to the promised land, no longer another suffering here for the sake of future brightness there? Bauman says that "what was at stake was that the future should prove that the effort had not been fruitless; that the future ought to be forced in advance to provide legitimation for the effort *ex post facto*".[56]

Obviously, the "effort" here may be also a soft euphemism, one could perhaps just say: it was often hatred, a crime, a lie (not the Greek, "noble" one). Obviously, modern, rational – hatred, crime and lie – because, as Bauman says, "feelers of hesitations go deep: to the very heart of the 'project of Modernity'".[57] *Modernity and the Holocaust* is a moving testimony to Bauman's

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[56] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, p. 56.

[57] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 65.

disappointment first, then his disbelief and anger, then, finally, his accusation... Therefore the author does not spare philosophers of modernity when he says that "universality was the weapon and honor of philosophers" – but today little in the world seems to depend on what, and if anything at all, they are saying, as

> there are no bachelors willing to marry the truth of philosophers, and philosophy no longer sees any remedy against spinsterhood.[58]

There is no longer any history – there is just a chronology, there is no progress – just development, no great plans – just contingency, and in Bauman's view philosophers are not to blamed for it. As, in his vivid description summarizing in a way a hundred or so years of history of philosophy, "it all happened not because philosophers were not able to put a temporary and contingent being on a solid foundation. It is rather that tools and building materials were taken from them – and not in order to hand them to others, but to throw them away on the garbage heap of lost hopes and failed promises where dreams of common rules of Reason had already been put".[59] Thus today's culture – in a common view of Bauman on the one hand, and "postmodernists" (in its European rather than American sense of the vague term) on the other – seems not to be looking for successors of philosophers, nobody seems to compete with them today, as they used to compete with priests and scientists in the past. Great metanarratives – with the one of Emancipation in the forefront - have been severely dirtied and dreadfully abused. Hence incredulity, hyper-sensitivity and carefulness of the philosophical discourse of postmodernity. Especially considering the fact that while the role of normative, universal ethics seems to be commonly criticized, the sense of justice and injustice (Lyotard's "wrong" as opposed to a mere "damage", his *tort* and his *dommage*) or the sensitivity to pain and humiliation (e.g. in Rorty's utopian figure of a "liberal ironist") are still growing. Philosophers, to sum up, do not

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[58] Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, p. 58, p. 59.
[59] Ibidem, p. 59.

give their privileges to someone else as they received them once from priests, it is rather that the very privileges disappear, turning out to be a useful illusion produced for the needs of modernity...

It is not easy to reconcile with it for quite a few. To return to Bauman, "legislators cannot think of the world without legislation; ethical legislators cannot think of society without ethical legislation".[60] The decline of ethics does not necessarily have to mean the decline of morality, in a new vocabulary of moral deliberation of – post-ethical, post-legislative – postmodernity, one of the key words will surely be *responsibility*. For people at large with unprecedented freedom (Hegelian *entlassen* from *Phenomenology*) given to them may be building their moral identity just on responsibility. Moral autonomy may be constituted by responsibility itself. Is philosophy (together with ethics) in such a case a merely (intellectual) "vagabondage", just like a philosopher is a postmodern "vagabond" of the philosophical tradition? Is philosophical vagabondage to endure the test of time, will it reconcile with its relatively inferior status granted to it by postmodern culture? "The path of vagabondage is created during journey itself" and nobody knows where it will lead us to – "the point is not to lose the ability to move" (Bauman)...

Thinking of Zygmunt Bauman, but not only of him, let us listen to a quotation from Gombrowicz that gives *avant la lettre* the feeling of the postmodern mood:

> To be a concrete man. To be an individual. Not to attempt at the transformation of the world as a whole – to live in a world changing it as long as it is in accordance with my nature. To become realized according to my needs – individual needs. I am not saying that the other thought – mass, abstract thought, that Humanity as such, are not important. But the balance must be restored. The most modern direction of thinking is that which leads to a discovery of an individual man (*Diary*).

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[60] Ibidem, p. 74.

Finally, let us ask one more question: how close to each other Rorty and Bauman are in their philosophical choices? How close Bauman is to Lyotard, Derrida, and Foucault? To what extent the philosophical excursus presented here is an imposed "strong misreading" produced for the purposes of the present writer (and if it were the case "to a large extent", what would be its status – would it be about Rorty and others, about Bauman, about today's culture, or merely about the one who wrote it?) How far do all engaged in it agree with it – and what would be the status of their agreement or disagreement, what would be appropriate consequences of these acts, if any? These are questions that must appear on the margins of Rorty's writings. The answer to them is neither simple nor unambiguous in the face of the loss of modern innocence which until very recently would give support, certainty and legitimation of one's own place in culture as well as a full, tested and reliable set of instruments and tools to investigate others' thinking. Our journey to Rorty's work together with short trips ("excursuses" within it) taken to numerous European contexts of his philosophy comes to an end. To the question whether it was worth while devoting several years of one's intellectual life to just his philosophizing rather than to someone else's, the answer is simple – yes, it was, for it is always worth while thinking together with great thought, questioning together with it (perhaps it is also worth while erring together with it); the point is, it is worth while, for it helps in the emergence of the awareness of necessity and urgency of searching for one's *own* answer to some important questions only philosophers still dare to ask.

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