

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

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 other⁶), 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

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 latter, 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,

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

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 best¹⁵), exhausted "philosophy of

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

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 Sklar 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 Damians 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.

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.*

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 the 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

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,

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

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

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 work³⁷:

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

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.

³⁹ Richard Rorty, "Beyond Nietzsche and Marx", *London Review of Books*, 19 Feb. 1981, p. 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

The Sartrean 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 disappeared⁴¹.

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 than everything else".⁴³ Foucault's response to Sartre and Barthes, to

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 pardefinition 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.

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

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 an 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 reproblematication (in which

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

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 say⁵⁷, 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

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 them⁶³ has shown difficulties in going

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

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

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:

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.

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.

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UNIwersytet IM. ADAMA MICKIEWICZA W POZNANIU
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TOM XXXV

Marek Kwiek

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The New Pragmatism
and Postmodern
Thought**

 **Wydawnictwo
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Cover illustration: Joan Miró, "Woman III", 1965

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ISBN 83-7092-026-8

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Poznań, ul. 28 Czerwca 1956 r. 223/229, tel. (061) 31-11-86, 31-11-90