

## ***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, redescrptions 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".<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 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".<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> As Rorty puts it: "Neither, in short, gets us into the particular binds into which the Cartesian-Kantian, subject-object, representationalist tradition got us".<sup>5</sup> 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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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> See Rorty's chapter on "The Contingency of Language" in CIS, pp. 4-22.

<sup>5</sup> 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".<sup>6</sup> 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*"<sup>7</sup> 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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<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> 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",<sup>8</sup> 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;<sup>9</sup> 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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<sup>8</sup> Rorty clarifies who the ironist is in a chapter on "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" from CIS, pp. 73-95.

<sup>9</sup> 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", *écrivain*), 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.<sup>10</sup> 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

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<sup>10</sup> 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*.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> – 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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<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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".<sup>13</sup> 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

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<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

Thus – both for Kundera and for Rorty as well (not to mention Jacques Derrida from *Acts of Literature*<sup>15</sup>) – 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, ethnographer'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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<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> 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".<sup>16</sup> 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".<sup>17</sup>

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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<sup>16</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> 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 metaphors – 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.<sup>18</sup>

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

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<sup>18</sup> 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".<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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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<sup>19</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons in Paganism* in: *The Lyotard Reader*, op.cit., p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

etc.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> 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...".

<sup>22</sup> 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".<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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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<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, p. 76.

traditions "will persist side-by-side indefinitely. I cannot see any possibility of compromise".<sup>25</sup>

### 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".<sup>26</sup> That is why, in his view, philosophers are both "argumentative problem solvers" like Aristotle and Russell and oracular "world-disclosers" like Plato and Hegel<sup>27</sup>, including Heidegger as well as Derrida among the latter. 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 a private writer – 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 a writer with a public mission. someone who gives us weapons with which to subvert "institutional knowledge" and thus social institutions.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 23.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 123; the distinction comes from Jürgen Habermas' *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

<sup>28</sup> 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").<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> Let us present here shortly only two, exemplary, Rorty's attempts to dismiss the charge; the former comes from 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".<sup>31</sup> 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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<sup>29</sup> See PP 2, pp. 193-198.

<sup>30</sup> 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 Neostucturalism?*), 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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".<sup>32</sup> 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".<sup>33</sup>

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".<sup>34</sup> But already in the "Introduction" to the second volume of *Philosophical Papers*, he admits an

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 198.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> See Richard Rorty e.g. in PP 1, p. 198, PP 2, p. 1.

unnecessary use of this fatal word (as Wolfgang Iser 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".<sup>35</sup> 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"<sup>36</sup> – 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.<sup>37</sup> 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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<sup>35</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> 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 Iser's anthology (*Wege aus der Moderne*, Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1988), p. 213.

him, as the very idea of "method" is alien to him<sup>38</sup>. 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"<sup>39</sup>. 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 writer, and finally, there is the third one (from which Rorty excludes

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<sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 125.

himself) which consists of people engaged in "deconstructionist literary criticism", assimilating early Derrida to Paul de Man's thought.<sup>40</sup> 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".<sup>41</sup>

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 scientific 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".<sup>42</sup> 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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<sup>40</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 2, p. 113.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Rorty, PP 1, p. 78 – emphasis mine.

<sup>42</sup> 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".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. xvi.

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**Marek Kwiek**

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and Postmodern  
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 **Wydawnictwo  
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Wydawnictwo Naukowe Instytutu Filozofii  
Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu  
60-569 Poznań, ul. Szamarzewskiego 89c, fax 471-555

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