Irony and Solidarity: Two Key Concepts of Richard Rorty

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Abstract: Irony and solidarity are two key concepts characteristic of the vocabulary of Richard Rorty. Their thematization can be done on a narrower or wider basis of texts. In the present paper I attempt to contextualize and reconstruct them against the background of other important concepts of Rorty's vocabulary, such as, first of all, the concept of contingency. The concept of irony is shown to derive, for Rorty, from Sartre' conception of the humans who are claimed to be what they are not, and not to be what they are. The non coincidence of humans with themselves, or, with their „essence," is argued to lead the way to the basic attitude of irony. The concept of contingency may be shown to lead up to the concept of solidarity as well, in that the realization that what we are we are in a contingent way implies the possibility of being radically other than what we happen to be. (I.) In a second step, the basic concepts of Rorty, thus far reconstructed, are shown to be dependent on Rorty's basic philosophical stance of anti-foundationalism; the latter is claimed to have a hermeneutical background. (II.) In a final part the outlines of a tradition are sketched from Kant to the present, characterized by an anti-metapyhsical flow, whereby the importance of solidarity and morality is stressed without the attempt to anchor it in a metaphysical theory of humans or any kind of epistemology destined to provide knowledge rather than hope. Indeed, Rorty shows that hope stands over and above knowledge, and it contributes to making us humans more than a project to attain any kind of (secure) knowledge is ever capable of.

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When trying to gain access to the thoughts of important philosophers one of the most customary modes is to scrutinize or closely inspect some of their central concepts, or ---with Richard Rorty's expression--some of the entries of their vocabulary. Looking into the vocabulary of Rorty himself in search for his key concepts – in addition to finding that one of the prominent entries of this vocabulary is precisely the concept of "vocabulary"[1] – the two concepts signalled in the title are

[1] Besides the fact that one of the basic concepts of Rorty's "vocabulary" is "vocabulary" itself, it is also not unessential, and sheds light on Rorty's ideas on the finiteness and contingency of ethno-centrism, language and community, that while in English the terms "dictionary" and "vocabulary" are overlapping and synonymous, "dictionary" is only used to

very likely to be listed as two of Rorty's key concepts. Irony and solidarity: these are two central subjects in Rorty's thinking, which seem adequate, along with other topics, to be used as guidelines for a cross-section of Rorty's thinking. The basic concepts are however not isolated or independent from each other. They are linked directly to other specific concepts, their meaning is embedded into groups of other concepts, while they are also interconnected in various ways. (This insight is also an important part of Rorty's *vocabulary* as the expression of a basic meaning-theoretical *contextualism*). Irony for Rorty is, for instance, connected to liberal hope and thus liberalism itself, while solidarity is embedded into some of the particular problems of the contemporary world, among others the phenomenon of globalization. These key concepts can be reconstructed on various textual bases, and to various depths – in the present paper I will confine discussion to delineating and highlighting some of the aspects of "irony" and "solidarity" in Rorty's work (I., II.). Lastly, based on the reconstruction, I will attempt to present Rorty as the – so far – last significant representative of a tradition which may be called anti-metaphysical in relating knowledge and action to one another—a tradition, to which he can be unproblematically assigned, and to whose thinkers Rorty himself often refers. (III.)

I.

It is of importance for our theme to note that the development of the concept of irony is embedded by Rorty into the exposition of the concept of vocabulary as a sort of meta-concept. This is hardly accidental, since irony itself (like anything else) can only be characterized with the help of some sort of a discourse or description – that is, a sort of "vocabulary." Human beings, claims Rorty as his starting point, carry with themselves a set of words with which they tend to justify their actions, beliefs, lives. Rorty calls this a "final vocabulary", where the adjective "final" is not

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the forms published as books (language, professional, etc.), while "vocabulary" has an extra dimension of meaning which is beneficial to Rorty's use. Various dictionaries offer various descriptions for this dimension of meaning of "vocabulary"; as the *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* puts it: "all the words used by a particular person", *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*: "(range of) words known to, or used by, a person, in a trade, profession, etc.", *Webster's*: "all the words used by a particular person, class, profession, etc., sometimes all the words recognized and understood by a particular person, although not necessarily used by him (in full, *passive vocabulary*)"; for the term "dictionary" in the same dictionaries, in the same order, the following descriptions are given: "a book that lists words alphabetically with their meanings given in the same or in another language, and often includes other information"; "book, dealing with the words of a language, or with words or topics of a special subject (e.g. the Bible, architecture), and arranged in ABC order", or: "a book of alphabetically listed words in a language, with definitions [...] [or] with their equivalents in another language [...] [or] related to a special subject: as a medical dictionary" (see *Cambridge Dictionary of American English* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], 973, 236; *The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, 2nd ed. [London: Oxford University Press, 1969], 1120, 272; *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* [Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966], 1633, 407).

to imply that this vocabulary is beyond history or unsurpassable. It only means: unreferential and ungrounded: in case of doubts, there is no way to argue for them in a non-circular way.[1]

Rorty uses the adjective "ironic" to describe the attitude of a person able to confront the contingency of her basic views and desires, who is nominalist and historicist enough to give up the idea that these views and desires refer back to something beyond time and incidence.[2] According to the more detailed definition the persons characterized as ironic have to meet three conditions: 1. they should radically and persistently doubt about their own final vocabulary, because of the influence of other vocabularies (considered final by people they know); 2. they should admit that these doubts cannot be either confirmed or eliminated by any kind of arguments formulated in the current vocabulary; 3. if they formulate philosophical ideas about their current situation, they should not think that their own vocabulary lies any closer to something such as "reality" than any of the other vocabularies; whereby their choice of vocabulary does not take into account any kind of meta-vocabularies or it is not motivated by the intent to go forth to reality, but much rather by the ambition to replace the old with the new.[3]

The three conditions are obviously interconnected, and they are joined together by a kind of concealed and here unuttered premise (which appears nevertheless in the paper discussed, but only incidentally): the notion of contingency (the concept which appears emphatically, at the first position in the title of Rorty's book). Ironists can never take themselves fully seriously, Rorty mentions in passing, for they are aware that the concepts they use to describe themselves are always subject to changes – in other words, they are "always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves."[4]

I would like to comment on Rorty's remarks in two directions. First, this observation is a good starting point for clarifying the relationship of the two

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[1] CIS 73. Bibliographical note: I refer to Rorty's works with the following abbreviations: PMN = *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); CP = *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); CIS = *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); PP 1 = *Philosophical Papers, Volume 1. Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); PP 2 = *Philosophical Papers, Volume 2. Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); PP 3 = *Philosophical Papers, Volume 3. Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); AOC = *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); PSH = *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 2000). Other abbreviations: : EN = Jean-Paul Sartre: *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, édition corrigée avec index par Arlette Elkaďm-Sartre (Paris: Gallimard (collection Tel), 1998); GW = Hans-Georg Gadamer: *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1–10, (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985–1995), [vol. no., page no.]; SZ = M. Heidegger: *Sein und Zeit*, 15th ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979).

[2] CIS xv. Rorty confirmed this summarizing definition almost word by word in a later retrospection, see PP 3, 307. fn. 2.

[3] CIS 73.

[4] CIS 74.

concepts (irony and solidarity) appearing in the title of my paper and the three concepts in the title of Rorty's book (contingency, irony, solidarity). Second, I wish to dedicate some attention to the fact that Rorty draws on Sartre at this point, introducing as he does the concept of irony in relation to Sartre's ideas, thereby offering an opportunity for an interesting parallel.

I propose to discuss the first problem partly detached from Rorty's text. The concept of contingency is adequate to function as a mediating concept between irony and solidarity – connecting and bridging between them. Let us start from the relationship of contingency and irony. At a closer look the former leads up to the latter. This is so because the realization that we and our vocabulary are originally contingent, that is, not a necessity, suggests a distanced attitude which may rightly be called ironic insofar as irony means detachment from the thing, the cessation of identification with it, or a kind of hovering above it.[1] Relating with a kind of distance, doubt or modesty to our contingently being who we are – looking at ourselves this way: contingent and modest – is perhaps not completely inconsistent; and this, coupled with the view that the language and vocabulary we use to describe our world and ourselves is just as contingent, means relating to ourselves with (self-) irony, that is, a sort of distance.

However, in addition to irony, from contingency there is a way leading up to solidarity as well. If I am not necessarily what (and who) I am, then I could just as well be someone else; and this consideration *may* lead to solidarity with that someone or those others.[2] It may entail solidarity with those others of whom I could happen to be one, although I happen – although not necessarily – not to be one of them. I could be one of those others, insofar as it is in a contingent way that I am who I am. To distance from myself is to approach to, to make a step towards, the others. I might just as well be him (in exactly the way he could be me) – on my view this is one of the fundamental (perhaps even hermeneutical[3]) theses of solidarity,

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[1] If someone says something ironically, it means that she/he does not identify with it, does not mean it literally, and relates to her/his own discourse or chosen vocabulary in a specific – precisely ironical – way.

[2] This formulation is not suggested by some kind of compulsory stylistic modesty, but just as much by the choice to be consistent: a philosophy which starts from and centres around contingency cannot speak about *necessary* connections or relations without risking to be self-contradictory.

[3] As long as Gadamer's hermeneutics considers the other (whether text or fellow human) as formulating statements with truth and knowledge claims no less than I do, and who may in principle always be right against me. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised edition, revisions by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York: Crossroad, 1989, reprinted London/New York: Continuum, 1999, 355: „In human relations the important thing is [...] to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us" (= Gadamer, GW 1, 367: „Im mitmenschlichen Verhalten kommt es darauf an [...], das Du als Du wirklich zu erfahren, d. h. seinen Anspruch nicht zu überhören und sich etwas von ihm sagen zu lassen"). See also J. Grondin, "Die Weisheit des rechten Wortes. Ein Porträt Hans Georg Gadamers", in *Information Philosophie* 5 (1994): 28; Idem, *Einführung in die philosophische Hermeneutik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991), 160. Cf. Gadamer, GW 2, 116, 505; GW 10, 274; Gadamer: *Die Vielfalt Europas. Erbe und Zukunft* (Stuttgart: Robert Bosch Stiftung, 1985), 29.

which is however hardly possible without first acknowledging contingency as its presupposition. (If I necessarily am who I am, then I cannot not be who I am, so it is impossible for me to be one of the others.) Admitting my contingency – not only the *quod*, but also the *quid*, not only that I *am* contingently, but also that I contingently am *who/what* I am, and thereby the fact that the vocabulary which I use to describe myself and the world is just as contingent – might beneficially increase my ability to identify with other people and their vocabularies (for I could be any one of them, and I could use any one of their vocabularies). It is also worth adding: to be someone (i.e., a determinate person) and to use a certain vocabulary (in order to describe ourselves among other things) cannot really be separated, or what is more, they are almost identical. The way we describe ourselves and the way we relate to ourselves cannot really be separated. If the self-description (the vocabulary) changes, our relation to ourselves also changes, and therefore we change as well. For the way we relate to ourselves is mostly decisive also about who and what we are. I am who I am because I use a certain vocabulary – and not another one – although this vocabulary – let us emphasize again – is itself contingent. Our "redescription" and our transformation greatly overlaps; if I describe myself differently, I have become a different person.[1] Irony in this sense is the recognition of the power of redescription and the faith in it.[2]

Although important enough, it seems less discussed or acknowledged in the literature that Rorty expands on the concept of irony starting from and drawing upon Sartre. As Sartre constructed his independent and original worldview drawing on, but differing in several aspects from, Heidegger, Rorty takes up some of the basic thoughts of Sartre and develops them in a direction which primarily highlight his own, rather than Sartre's, views.

The fact that the choice between final vocabularies is incommensurable, that it is not taken on the basis of certain criteria, creates a situation of instability – claims Rorty – that Sartre called *meta-stable*.[3] Rorty gives no further commentary to this term, nor any bibliographical clarification, but after some investigation we find indeed this term in Sartre,[4] namely, in his characterization of the concept of bad faith. Bad faith is for Sartre very much a kind of faith; a faith, however, the first act of which is none other than a decision (obscured even from oneself) on the nature of faith itself, a decision which is itself conceived in bad faith, by which this faith makes a non-evident, non-persuasive evidence to be the criterion of evidence. This structure is originally and hopelessly unstable. Indeed, in contrast to the being-in-itself characterized by coincidence with itself, by being "what it is", human reality, consciousness, the structure of the being-for-itself is, according to Sartre, characterized by non-coincidence with itself: it is not what is it, and it is what it is not. Considering this, bad faith tries to escape from this ontological nature of human

[1] This relation is best described by Rorty's interpretation of the Gadamerian term of *Bildung*. Through *Bildung*, which has no other purpose than itself, we become different people, and an essential moment of this process is that we admit the historical contingency and relativity of descriptive vocabularies. See PMN 359, 362.
[2] See CIS 89.
[3] CIS 73.
[4] EN 104.

existence precisely towards the stability, permanebce, and coincidence with itself characteristic of the being-in-itself. *Meta-stability* in the wide sense is not only valid for bad faith. Human reality – inasmuch as it is not what it is, and it is what it is not, it exists at a certain distance from itself (and this is the starting point of irony for Rorty) – is itself unstable, it does not coincide with itself, and therefore there is no statement about it (in Rorty's later perspective: "vocabulary") which could adequately "grasp" it one way or another, (linguistically) "identify" it, "put it in words", and thus record it. "I cannot make any statement about myself," Sartre writes in a characteristic passage, "that would not become false the moment I make it" ("je ne puis rien énoncer sur moi qui ne soit devenu faux quand je l'énonce"); elsewhere he writes: the being-for-itself "is always different from what may be *said* about it" ("il est toujours autre chose que ce qu'on peut *dire* de lui").[1] The idea of the contingency and plurality of the final vocabulary may be seen from this perspective as a consistent continuation of this idea.

If we look at Rorty's concept of irony in his considerations on Sartre, then in addition to a general reference to meta-stability,[2] the second part of the same sentence offers a more specific – and in a certain sense more substantial – clue, although Sartre's name is no longer mentioned there. The ironists who find themselves in the position that Sartre calls meta-stable, in Rorty's further exposition "are never quite able to take themselves seriously because [they are] always aware that terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change", they are "always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies and thus of their selves". "[...] never quite able to take themselves seriously": this formulation recalls Sartre's critical remarks towards the end of *Being and Nothingness* on what he called the "spirit of seriousness", and which takes up and elaborates on what has been said in the first part of his work about "bad faith". For the "spirit of seriousness" [esprit de sérieux] the values constituting in human projects appear "transcendent givenness independently of human subjectivity" ("données transcendantes indépendantes de la subjectivité humaine"), and the "desirable" ("désirable") nature of things is also part of the material constitution of things.[3] The "spirit of seriousness" is characterized by the fact that it escapes the basically volatile, contingent, free nature of human reality, unjustifiable and unfounded for itself, towards the stability of the being-in-itself. Man tries to freeze himself into a rock – as seen about Flerieur, the protagonist of Sartre's short story, "The Childhood of a Leader" – and strives to acquire some kind of personality and, through this, stability, justification of his existence, or self-identification by a thoughtless connection to commonplaces, mass ideologies or meaningless views.[4] The "spirit of

[1] EN 151, 483. (Emphasis in the original)

[2] See the expression also in CIS 113. Rorty also uses the term meta-stability, for the mentioned reasons, for Heidegger's *Dasein*; the basic Heideggerian terms describing the *Dasein* are inherently ironic, he claims; it could even be said that the *Dasein* is Heidegger's term for the ironist. (ibid.)

[3] EN 674.

[4] The representation of various forms of bad faith and the spirit of seriousness frequently appears in Sartre's literary works and essays; see my somewhat more detailed references in

seriousness", in other words, takes itself very seriously, it tries to be *this and this* (and anchor itself *in this and this*), identify with itself one way or another with the greatest seriousness (thereby concealing that any such endeavour is the result of free choice), it flees from freedom and the anxiety that accompanies it, which would result in the consideration that to choose something rather than something else in a *necessary* way– as Kierkegaard was already very much aware of it[1] – is an impossible task. This kind of "seriousness" is not a serious confrontation with life and things, but intellectual and moral arrogance and rigidity, conceived in bad-faith; it is a flight from freedom and the responsibility that goes with it, from choosing, from plurality.

What he experienced that day
changed the way he looked at things

Patricia Todoran, *Feel*
40 cm x 50 cm, lambda print, 2015

Actually, Rorty's way of taking up Sartre's theme on this point is simple and disarming. He takes *seriously* Sartre's critique of the "spirit of seriousness" inasmuch as from there he deduces irony as a *correct* (authentic) attitude in contrast to the "spirit of seriousness". Sartre's critique of the spirit of seriousness could

István Fehér M., *Jean-Paul Sartre* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1980), 33. Elsewhere Sartre describes this ambition as an attraction to "the permanence of rock" or the "impenetrability of stone" (Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, translated by George J. Becker, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, 19, 38).

[1] See S. Kierkegaard: *Entweder – Oder. Teil I und II,* Unter Mitwirkung von Niels Thulstrup und der Kopenhager Kierkegaard-Gesellschaft hrsg. von Hermann Diem und Walter Rest, München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005, 725: „[...] eigentlich fordert sie [sc. philosophy], daß man notwendig handle, was ein Widerspruch ist".

indeed very much suggest this interpretation, but Sartre does not proceed to embrace this possibility lying in his own ideas. Irony in Sartre – if at all –appears at most as an occasionally sarcastic and defiant unveiling of various forms of bad faith,[1] manifest more in our attitude towards the criticized opponent, rather than in the (right) relation to ourselves. As regards the latter, the lack of the coincidence of human reality with itself appears in Sartre mainly accompanied by pathetic-tragic accents; Rorty however simply puts these aside, considers them to be a metaphysical sediment. In fact, Rorty still considers Sartre as being "metaphysical" when, for example, Sartre calls man "a useless passion".[2] And indeed: Sartre's oeuvre (in both its phases) is penetrated by a kind of pathetic-tragic tone and attitude, which is difficult to harmonize with the criticism of the spirit of seriousness, or is itself prone to overlap with the spirit of seriousness. The relevant passage at the end of the existentialist work is worth quoting: "Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui*, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion."[3]

Rorty (and his modest irony) is quite far from this dramatic tone: for him, it bears the traces of the sort of metaphysics that he gave up and systematically distanced himself from it, influenced by the critique of metaphysics taken over from the second period of Heidegger's work (and just as much from the tradition of American pragmatism). If man's ambition to become God as part of traditional metaphysics becomes meaningless in the light of a radical critique of metaphysics, then it also becomes meaningless to characterize man in terms of a "useless passion," following from the failure of this ambition (and Sartre leaves little place for doubting the failure of this ambition). "The topic of futility", says Rorty, "would arise only if one were trying to surmount time, chance, and self-redescription by discovering something more powerful than any of these. For Proust and Nietzsche, however, there is nothing more powerful or important than self-redescription."[4] Dependence on time and incidence as relativity – provided we think with radical

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[1] See, e.g., Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, translated by Carol Macomber, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, 39: „Essentially, that is what people would like to think. If you are born a coward, you need not let it concern you, for you will be a coward your whole life, regardless of what you do, through no fault of your own. If you are born a hero, you need not let it concern you either, for you will be a hero your whole life, and eat and drink like one."

[2] CIS 99; cf. also PP 2, 131; PSH 61.

[3] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, English translation by Hazel E. Barnes, London: Methuen & Co, 1958, 615. See EN 662: "Toute réalité-humaine est une passion, en ce qu'elle projette de se perdre pour fonder l'être et pour constituer du même coup l'en-soi qui échappe à la contingence en étant son propre fondement, *l'Ens causa* sui que les religions nomment Dieu. Ainsi la passion de l'homme est-elle inverse de celle du Christ, car l'homme se perd en tant qu'homme pour que Dieu naisse. Mais l'idée de Dieu est contradictoire et nous nous perdons en vain ; l'homme est une passion inutile."

[4] CIS 99. Rorty repeatedly returned to Sartre's *topos* of man as a "useless passion". See note 19

consistency about relativity – is not identical with, and does not account for, futility (this could be the reconstruction of Rorty's possible answer to Sartre at this point). Futility presupposes absolute standards. The ironist might find it meaningful to apply the concept of "better description", but has no criterion for this term, therefore the concept of "*the* right description" is useless for him. So he finds no futility in man's not being able to become a being-in-itself, *être-en-soi*. The ironist is distinguished from the metaphysician precisely in that he never wanted to become one (or he wanted never to want to become one).[1]

The human project as an ambition to become God (just as Heidegger's view in his letter on humanism about man as the "pastor of being"[2]) is hardly compatible with Rorty's pragmatist attitude, his pragmatic view on man as a cooperative social being. In this respect, Sartre was not radical enough for him, or, so to say, not existentialist (anti-metaphysical) enough. By contrast, Sartre's dissolution of the strong relationship of metaphysics and politics is very consonant with Rorty's views on Dewey, emblematically expressed also in the title of his influential study: "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy".[3] In his study entitled *Materialism and Revolution*, Sartre criticizes the view that the materialistic metaphysics and the revolutionary attitude are strongly interrelated, and the philosophy of revolution or the liberation of man could only be brought by dialectical materialism (that is, one could only be a *true* revolutionary if one were to accept the materialistic metaphysics that Sartre considers absurd).[4] There is no necessary connection between metaphysics and political position, and the political position or the commitment to democracy needs no kind of philosophical (metaphysical) foundation. It is hardly the case that one cannot be a good democrat or liberal unless one embraces some theory on some atemporal, unchanged human essence. "A liberal society" – goes the rightfully ironic note – "is badly served by an attempt to supply it with 'philosophical foundations'."[5] Its necessity is a concept which goes

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[1] CIS 99; cf. also PP 2, 131.

[2] Heidegger, "Brief über den 'Humanismus'", in Idem, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann, 1967), 175–196, 145–194, here: 162, 172.

[3] See J.-P. Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," in Sartre, *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, translated by Annette Michelson, New York: Collier Books, 1962, 198--256, here in particular 200 (it is to be asked "whether materialism and the myth of objectivity are really required by the cause of the Revolution and if there is not a discrepancy between the revolutionary's action and his ideology"), 215f, 221, 234 ("But, once again, is the materialistic myth, which may have been useful and encouraging, really necessary?"), 241, 243f .

[4] PP 1, 175–196. Here mainly 180.

[5] CIS 52. At the end of his classic study entitled *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), Isaiah Berlin approvingly cites the words of Joseph A. Schumpeter: "To realise the relative validity of one's convictions, and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguishes a civilised man from a barbarian" (Joseph A. Schumpeter: *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* [London, 1943], 243.). Rorty quotes both Schumpeter, and Berlin's commentary on it approvingly: "To demand more than this is perhaps a deep and incurable metaphysical need; but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity"; CIS 46.). Berlin also writes: "It may be that the ideal of freedom to choose ends without claiming eternal validity

back to the scientism of the Enlightenment. The liberal society is a historical formation; however, acknowledging its contingency does not have to shatter one's committment to it, nor does one have to turn away from it; it can still be loved, supported and perfected. And which is not better enforced or confirmed by wanting to make it seem necessary by metaphysical or pseudo-philosophical arguments.

I have tried to find a connection with irony from the direction of the concept of contingency, and highlight this connection in certain respects. And while irony is explicitly derived from Sartre, it must be mentioned that the concept of contingeny may also derive from Sartre, for it does not appear at all at Heidegger, while for Sartre it is one of his central philosophical concepts.[1] Before proceeding, one might also refer to the fact that this connection appears literally in the expression "the ironists' sense of contingency",[2] as something that, according to the refutations and reproaches of some liberals, as an unserious attitude undermines the moral operation of democratic societies. But freedom is the recognition (not of necessity, but) of contingency[3] – says Rorty through his original and characteristic thesis created as the reverse of the well-known philosophical thesis. We excessively and unnecessarily overrate philosophy if we want to use it to metaphysically support or justify political systems (any such attempt is circular anyway). Liberal democracy is much rather in need of concrete social measures to relieve the starvation, pain and humiliations of the many (a liberal is a person who thinks that cruelty is the worst

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for them [...] is only the late fruit of our declining capitalist civilisation: an ideal which remote ages and primitive societies have not recognised, and one which posterity will regard with curiosity, even sympathy, but little comprehension. This may be so; but no skeptical conclusions seem to me to follow. Principles are not less sacred because their duration cannot be guaranteed. Indeed, the very desire for guarantees that our values are eternal and secure in some objective heaven is perhaps only a craving for the certainties of childhood or the absolute values of our primitive past." Rorty says largely the same when claiming: "The fundamental premise of [my] book is that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (CIS 189.)

[1] It is one of the most characteristic concepts of *Being and Nothingness*, see e.g. EN 118. „ L'événement absolu ou pour-soi est contingent en son être même."; Ibid. 119.: „le pour-soi est soutenu par une perpétuelle contingence, qu'il reprend à son compte et s'assimile sans jamais pouvoir la supprimer". Contingency means for Sartre the lack of foundations – just as later for Rorty it implies the rejection of foundationalism. The Sartrean concept of „injustifiable" is also characteristic in this respect. (EN 73f, 118f.) Sartre's protagonist, Roquentin, says in *Nausea*: „one cannot define existence as necessity"; „those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them [...] contingency is [...] the absolute," (Sartre: *Nausea*, New Directions Publishing 2007, 107.). Sartre uses the concept of facticity as a synonym for contingency (EN 119.), while in Heidegger only facticity appears, albeit very emphatically (see, e.g., SZ 12. §, 56.: Die Tatsächlichkeit des Faktums Dasein, als welches jeweilig jedes Dasein ist, nennen wir seine *Faktizität*"), contingency does not (probably because Heidegger considers inappropriate the very pair of contingency-necessity; if *Dasein* cannot be necessary, then it cannot be its opposite, contingent, either.)

[2] PP 3, 325.

[3] PP 3, 326.

thing we can do – claims Rorty's definition taken over from Judith Shklar).[1] Novels, reports and newspaper articles are much more capable of reporting on such things. Expressions like "late capitalism", "modern industrial society", "conditions of the production of knowledge" must be replaced by "workers' representatives", "association of journalists", "laws against financial manipulation".

II.

Before we proceed, we should mention a thesis of Rorty's "vocabulary", strongly interrelated with the tenet of contingency, as it has already been implicitly assumed in the above considerations as a silent premise. For, as quoted above, not only do we "badly serve" a liberal society by supplying it with 'philosophical foundations', but thereby we also attempt to make something that – in addition to being a "bad service" – is also an impossible task: one more reason to give up this endeavour. Rorty's rejection of any idea of foundations (*anti-foundationalism*)[2] is very closely connected to the tenet of contingency – actually, the former is a premise for the latter. Views of Heidegger, the late works of Wittgenstein, Sartre, Gadamer and the American pragmatists inform Rorty that it is just as hopeless as it is unnecessary to find foundations for man, the (democratic) community, for "values" or anything else. There is no super-historical human essence just as there is no neutral matrix or an "objective," super-historical viewpoint and language which would not be the very own of contingent communities and language games.[3] The first three studies in his contingency book argue precisely for the contingency of the three central concepts of Western philosophy: language, the self, and liberal community. By these considerations Rorty drew upon himself, of course, the accusation of relativism, irrationalism and anti-democraticism, and he took great pains to prove: one could be a good liberal without running after metaphysical guarantees in the (false) conviction that one cannot believe – legitimately, "coherently" – in Western values, liberal democracy, etc., unless one finds appropriate philosophical (metaphysical)

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[1] CIS, xv.

[2] See e.g. PSH xvi, xxxii, 36, 151. (The latter place is a summary of the rejected idea of foundationalism: "Foundationalism is an epistemological view which can be adopted by those who suspend judgement on the realist's claim that reality has an intrinsic nature. A foundationalist need only claim that every belief occupies a place in a natural, transcultural, transhistorical order of reasons – an order which eventually leads the inquirer back to one or another 'ultimate source of evidence'. Different foundationalists offer different candidates for such sources: for example, Scripture, tradition, clear and distinct ideas, sense-experience, common sense. Pragmatists object to foundationalism for the same reasons as they object to realism."). Cf. also Ibid. 155. – The rejection of foundationalism is not only based on relating to the views of philosophers influencing Rorty; it also has a kind of independent "theoretical" background, summarized in his biographic writing as follows: "There seemed to be nothing like a neutral standpoint from which these alternative first principles could be evaluated. But if there were no such standpoint, then the whole idea of 'rational certainty', and the whole Socratic-Platonic idea of replacing passion by reason, seemed not to make much sense" (PSH 10.)

[3] See PMN 348f; CP 161, 226; CIS 44, 50, 52; PSH 116.

foundations for them. (Just as it was thought once that one can only believe – legitimately, "coherently" – in the social objectives of Marxism if one accepted materialism, or dialectical materialism as a theory.)

In the light of the fact that Rorty shows not much understanding for phenomenology, as he considers it a late descendent of Platonic-Kantian Western metaphysics[1] – the idea of philosophy as science, the view that man is a cognitive being, whose essence is to know or discover essences[2] –, it is especially important that, seen from the perspective of a hermeneutically transformed (let's say, Heideggerian) phenomenology, for which things should be taken as they appear (not in consciousness, but) in life, Rorty proves, in fact, to be a good phenomenologist. Most of his arguments are *descriptions*, uninfected with inherited theories, metaphysics and epistemology, of how things *are* in real life, for an unbiased regard. For instance, to show solidarity to my fellow human beings, I do not need any theory on the I or on the human essence; a much more restricted, concrete, contingent – or with Rorty's word, parochial[3] – consideration, or rather emotion, would also do it. I help because "She is, like me, a mother of small children"[4] (and not because she is also part of, or embodies, the same unchanged human essence). Nor should we be much worried if someone objects saying: our practical activity is only "consistent", "coherent", if it is based upon an appropriate theory. As things are in *real* life, practice precedes theory – this is what pragmatism, Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer and the late work of Wittgenstein teach for Rorty.

The Heideggerian as well as Sartrean thesis that there is no human essence, and that human existence precedes its essence is shared by Rorty, too – with the single difference that for him this is less dramatic than for the other two philosophers, and even entails some ironic consequences. This ironic attitude would stand in opposition with the thought of solidarity only if the latter were in need of a metaphysical foundation, perhaps connected to the super-historical essence of human nature, or the permanent, inalienable human rights. But since this is not the

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[1] See "Philosophy in America Today," In CP 211–230: here 213, 226. On page 226 one can read: "Husserl's quest for a phenomenological method was, like Reichenbach's logical positivism, an expression of the urge for »the secure path of science.« But Husserl was a brief and futile interruption of the Hegel-Marx-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Foucault sequence which I am taking as paradigmatically »Continental« [...]. What distinguishes Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault from Hegel and Marx is precisely the increasing wholeheartedness with which they give up the notions of »system,« »method,« »science« [...]". Rorty's lack of understanding for phenomenology is related to the fact that Rorty only wants to hear Husserl's urge for "strict knowledge" and "apodictic truths" – not unjustly, considering Husserl's verbal manifestations, but still onesidedly, considering the general practice of phenomenology established by Husserl, see PMN 8.); therefore Husserl often appears for him next to Russell's similar endeavours (especially those that wish to clean logic of psychologism, resulting in a complementarity of Husserl's term "essence" and Russell's "logical form") [see on this PMN 166f.]); see PMN 4, 8, 166ff, 269, 369, 390; CP xvi, 37f, 160, 165, 169; PP 2, 10, 12, 19, 21, 23, 32, 109ff; PSH 176.

[2] PMN 367.

[3] See e.g. CIS 73; PP 1, 21.

[4] CIS 191.

case, the lack of such a foundation is not a barrier to solidarity. If we look at things as they are, we see: helpfulness is not a matter of adequate theories.

The dilemma lies in the fact that, while solidarity seems to be a serious thing, it raises the question: could anyone feel solidarity for others while being ironic at the same time? In other words: can anyone show *solidarity ironically*? Is it not a contradiction? Rorty senses this possible reproach himself. As he writes in the introduction to his book on contingency: "ironism has often seemed intrinsically hostile not only to democracy but to human solidarity."[1] However, this presupposition, as he convincingly argues, is basically false. "[...] But it is not. Hostility to a particular historically conditioned and possibly transient form of solidarity is not hostility to solidarity as such.",[2] he writes. What he calls here "Hostility to a particular historically conditioned and possibly transient form of solidarity", refers in fact to the concepts of solidarity with metaphysical foundation. Solidarity however, and this is Rorty's main thesis, is not a matter of philosophical investigation and theoretical foundation. Nor is it the result of research or reflection: it is simply a product of imagination or "imaginative ability," it simply rests on our ability "to see strange people as fellow sufferers."[3] To see the other, the strange people (not necessarily as a fellow human being in the first place, but) as fellow sufferers: this summarizes the concept of solidarity. One may speak about "imagination" because pain, as Rorty convincingly explains, is not a linguistic phenomenon. People who are the victims of cruelty, who suffer hardly have words or a message to express in language. What could they possibly "say"? Some kind of objective "accounts" or "reports" on their suffering? Therefore there is hardly anything like the "voice of the oppressed" or the "language of the victims". The language once used by victims no longer functions, or the victims have suffered too much to be able to coin new words. Therefore the linguistic expression of their situation is a work that someone else must do for them. The liberal novelist, poet or journalist know how to do that – the liberal theoretician does not.[4]

Rorty later describes the concept of "imaginative ability" as "imaginative acquaintance", "skill at imaginative identification".[5] Solidarity is much more about this, rather than an agreement upon common metaphysical truths. Meditations on "human nature" or "human dignity" presuppose a great deal of reflection, while the sufferers hardly have access to such reflections or the "vocabulary" created in result. "Such reflection will not produce anything except a heightened awareness of the possibility of suffering," but it "will not produce a *reason to care about* suffering."[6] We may of course ease our (theoretical) consciousness by creating a new theory on

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[1] CIS xv; cf. Ibid. 87.
[2] CIS xv.
[3] CIS xvi.
[4] CIS 94.: "Pain is nonlinguistic [...] So victims of cruelty, people who are suffering, do not have much in the way of a language. That is why there is no such things as the 'voice of the oppressed' or the 'language of the victims'. The language the victims once used is not working anymore, and they are suffering too much to put new words together. So the job of putting their situation into language is going to have to be done for them by somebody else. The liberal novelist, poet, or journalist is good at that. The liberal theorist is not."
[5] CIS 92f, 190f.
[6] CIS 93.

human nature or the inalienable human rights, but have we thereby helped those who suffer? Is it this – a new theory – that they need? Is it not bad faith to ease the consciousness this way? Rorty's fundamental reproach that he addressed to the American left – primarily the university left, that Allan Bloom called "Nietzscheized" – was that, besides the sweeping criticism and over-sophisticated, or, better said, "over-philosophized" theoretical commentaries of Western civilization, "rotten to the core", it has lost all receptivity or susceptibility to the suffering and dispossessed; apart from the global criticism of the "system," it has nothing to say, it has no recommendations about practical actions, or the political reforms to reduce inequality – it looks into the distant future, and disregards the present.[1]

The connection of solidarity as a matter of imagination to irony, as mentioned before, can be presented with the mediation of the concept of contingency. Taking up my previous formulation: the insight that I am who (and what) I am not by necessity, but by contingency, is equal to the insight that I could be someone else as well; and this may lead to the solidarity and empathy with other(s). What can be added to all these, is the role of imagination and imaginative identification in this process. Irony, or the lack of stable self-identification, the abandonment of one's identification once and for all makes one receptive to the understanding and experience of life situations which could be one's own, and it ultimately points in the direction of community existence. "Solidarity – the recognition of the other as your equal and as entitled to your sympathy – is the natural companion of irony, and becomes, for Rorty, the true basis of political life" – writes Roger Scruton.[2]

Rorty takes up and develops several themes of Gadamer's hermeneutics, and the idea of solidarity appears at Gadamer as well. Not unimportantly, the concept appears in Gadamer's major work as one of the leading humanist concepts. This means that – as I shall soon dwell on it a little – there is a connection between humanism and solidarity: humanism is related to solidarity, and solidarity refers to humanism. The concept of solidarity appears in Gadamer amongst the leading humanist concepts, in the analyses of *sensus communis*, but since the leading humanist concepts ("formation", "sensus communis", "power of judgment", "taste") are interconnected on several levels – their common characteristic is that they do not give some general knowledge that still needs to be applied, but a knowledge which is just as much existence, and having-become existence, which carries the application within itself, and thus in each case it is a knowledge for life which has its place in the life of people, or rather the community life, for which reason it is connected to all of them, especially the most important leading concept of the leading concepts themselves, *Bildung*.

"The sensus communis is an element of social and moral being", writes Gadamer, and this concept, in the course of its long history expressed, from time to

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[1] See PSH 129; AOC 78ff, 98. Only the rightists speak about the consequences of globalization. (AOC 91.). Cf. also PP 2, 133.

[2] Roger Scruton, "Richard Rorty's legacy", 12 June 2007 – emphasis by I. F. M.; see: http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy_power/people/richard_rorty_legacy).

time, "a polemical attack on metaphysics,"[1] or in other words, a criticism "against the theoretical speculations of the philosophers."[2] From this perspective, there appears here the motif of the humanist opposition to scholastics, in addition to the community creating aspect (*sensus communis* is the sense that makes a community[3]). The fact that Gadamer opposes the leading humanist concepts and humanism in general to the "school",[4] that is, to scholasticism and the scholastic ideal of learning corresponds to the way Rorty opposes the "mainstream" epistemology- or metaphysics-based European philosophy, and the self-serving (and not less conceited) theory and knowledge creation of its newest form, "analytical philosophy"; or – in this particular case – the metaphysical foundation of the idea of solidarity, or any kind of philosophical approach to "human nature" for that matter. *Sensus communis* is a "social virtue" for Shaftesbury, stresses Gadamer, and he mentions with consent that "ancient Roman concepts [...] include in *humanitas* a refined *savoir vivre*, the attitude of the man who understands a joke and tells one because he is aware of a deeper union with his interlocutor."[5] The idea of solidarity also appears later in connection with community feeling, insofar as this is precisely a "genuine moral and civic solidarity".[6] It is not without significance that in one of his later works, Gadamer also developed the central concept of hermeneutics, understanding, in the direction of solidarity: understanding the other is to make an effort to think with and show solidarity with him; solidarity is the basic premise to form common convictions, albeit slowly, and in this sense understanding has a "significance for world politics"("weltpolitische Bedeutung des Verstehens").[7]

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[1] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 29 (= GW 1, 38: "Der *sensus communis* ist ein Moment des bürgerlich-sittlichen Seins. Auch wo dieser Begriff, wie im Pietismus oder in der Philosophie der Schotten, eine polemische Wendung gegen die Metaphysik bedeutet, bleibt er damit noch in der Linie seiner ursprünglichen kritischen Funktion.")

[2] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 20 (= GW 1, 28: „ein gegen die theoretische Spekulation der Philosophen gerichteter Ton").

[3] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 19: „here sensus communis obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community." (= GW 1, 26: „Sensus communis meint hier offenkundig nicht nur jene allgemeine Fähigkeit, die in allen Menschen ist, sondern er ist zugleich der Sinn, der Gemeinsamkeit stiftet.")

[4] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 18 (= GW 1, 26).

[5] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 22 (= GW 1, 30: Shaftesbury „folgt […] auch darin altrömischen Begriffen, die in der *humanitas* die feine Lebensart mit einschlossen, die Haltung des Mannes, der Spaß versteht und macht, weil er einer tieferen Solidarität mit seinem Gegenüber gewiß ist.")

[6] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 29 (= GW 1, 38: "echte sittlich-bürgerliche Solidarität").

[7] H.-G. Gadamer, "Vom Wort zum Begriff" (1995). In *Gadamer Lesebuch*. ed. J. Grondin (Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 100–110, here 109, 108. I think it is evident that understanding-agreement is inherently related to solidarity. These implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics, related to the philosophy of science, were expanded by Rorty. He formulated in his major work that the only usable meaning of the concept of "scientific objectivity" was "agreement" (PMN 33: "our only usable notion of 'objectivity' is 'agreement', rather than mirroring"); and that scientific praxis as such, with its need for objectivity and rationality, is rooted in a determined form of human cohabitation: solidarity. This idea was later expressed in several of his writings: „the only sense in which science is exemplary is that it is a model of human

The relation of understanding and solidarity is therefore fundamental for Gadamer: one could formulate the thesis "the more understanding, the more solidarity". Irony is the point where Rorty enriches the picture compared to Gadamer – and, as we have seen, also Sartre. Although the relation of irony and solidarity at Rorty is predicted by some background aspects in Gadamer; for instance, that Gadamer first mentions solidarity in connection to jesting as if taking one step towards Rorty's subsequent concept of irony.

Rorty hardly ever uses the concept of understanding. Therefore Gadamer's thesis "the more understanding, the more solidarity" can only be loosely connected to Rorty. Another thesis can be connected to this one however, which is more justified for Rorty as well: "the more *Bildung*, the more solidarity".

There are two considerations in connecting this thesis to Rorty's thinking: a general and a specific one. The first one: explaining the Gadamerian concept of *Bildung*, Rorty explains emphatically and legitimately that this concept is for Gadamer the alternative of "knowledge" ("as the purpose of thinking"). *Bildung* is not so much about gaining "knowledge" (as the faithful representation of reality), but about something radically different: to "become different persons", " 'recreate' ourselves".[1] The recreation of ourselves (with or without redescription) is one of Rorty's central issues,[2] and the premise of this is our own unfixed nature and the irony by which we admit it, which is connected to solidarity – thus Gadamer's concept of *Bildung* and Rorty's concepts of irony and solidarity are comprehensively interconnected.

The more specific connection can be elucidated starting from the concepts of "imaginative ability", "imaginative acquaintance", "skill at imaginative idenitification". Emphasizing the practical aspect of his concept of understanding, Gadamer referred to the fact that "understanding [...] is especially able to contribute to the *extension* of our human experiences, self-knowledge, and *horizon of world*."[3]

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solidarity."(PP 1, 39f.) Rorty then extended to notion of solidarity to other, wider fields of community existence. See e.g. "Solidarity", CIS 189–198.

[1] PMN 359. „Metaphysicians think"–writes Rorty elsewhere– „that human beings by nature desire to know" (CIS 75). They are opposed to the ironists, who think that the purpose of discursive thinking is not *knowledge* in the sense of "reality", "true essence", "objective viewpoint", "the correspondence of language of [*recte*: to] reality". Their purpose is not the representation of reality.

[2] See e.g. Rorty's requirements for the "humanist intellectual". "[The humanistic intellectuals'] idea of teaching–or at least of the sort of teaching they hope to do–is not exactly the communication of knowledge, but more like stirring the kids up. When they apply for a leave or a grant, they may have to fill out forms about the aims and methods of their so-called research projects, but all they really want to do is read a lot more books in the hope of becoming a different sort of person." (PSH 127). Elsewhere he writes: "Unmethodical criticism of the sort which one occasionally wants to call 'inspired' is the result of an encounter with an author, character, plot, stanza, line or archaic torso which has made a difference to the critic's conception of who she is, what she is good for, what she wants to do with herself: an encounter which has rearranged her priorities and purposes". (PSH 145).

[3] Gadamer, "Hermeneutik als praktische Philosophie". *Rehabilitierung der praktischen Philosophie,* ed. M. Riedel (Freiburg i.Br.: Rombach, 1972), vol. I, 342f. "Verstehen [...] vermag in besonderer Weise dazu beizutragen, unsere menschlichen Erfahrungen, unserer

Dilthey also wrote about the effect of the extension of the horizon on our being in the introduction of his classic study on hermeneutics: "Our action always presupposes the understanding of other persons; the major part of human happiness derives from the reminiscence of strange states of mind [...] The historical consciousness built on these makes it possible for the modern man to possess the entire past of the humanity as being there in itself: it gains insight into foreign cultures beyond all limits of his own age; it absorbs their power and enjoys their magic; and from this derives a major increase of happiness for himself."[1] Dilthey talked about the "never satisfied need" to "complete our individuality by contemplating the individuality of others", and that "understanding and interpretation [...] are always alive in life itself."[2]

The widening of horizon happening through *Bildung,* as long as it is able to shape one's personality, changes not only the knowledge, but also the existence of man, thus it has a community creating function and has an effect of increasing solidarity. *Bildung* can increase that which solidarity depends on in Rorty's view: the imaginative ability, the imaginative acquaintance, and the skill at imaginative identification. Education makes one able to imaginative identification. As a result of the extension of horizon caused by *Bildung* man learns to take into account the perspective of others, to see the world as they see it. The reverse side of it is that meanwhile he also learns: the way he sees the world is only one possible way to see it. And this, in Rorty's perspective, means irony (and not to the least the awareness of our contingency). Only the uneducated may think that things cannot be otherwise than the way they see them.

Selbsterkenntnis und unseren *Welthorizont auszuweiten*" (emphasis by I. F. M.). Eduard Spranger speaks about the "Ausweitung der Individualität über sich selbst hinaus" in reference to Humboldt (Spranger, *Wilhelm von Humboldts Humanitätsidee* [Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1909], 2nd ed. 1928, 12.). See also the similar ideas in Andrew Abbott's influential speech: "Education is a way of expanding experience. [...] education is good in itself because it expands the range of your experience, both temporally and spatially. [...] education is a habit that expands experience" (Andrew Abbott, "The Aims of Education Address", *The University Of Chicago Record* (21 November 2002): 4–8: here 7; see http://home.uchicago.edu/~aabbott/Papers/aims2.pdf>; reprint: "Welcome to the University of Chicago". *Forschung und Lehre*, 8 (2007, Supplement): 1–22: here 17f.

[1] W. Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik", *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, 317: „Unser Handeln setzt das Verstehen anderer Personen überall voraus; ein großer Teil menschlichen Glücks entspringt aus dem Nachfühlen fremder Seelenzustände; die ganze philologische und geschichtliche Wissenschaft ist auf die Voraussetzung gegründet, daß das Nachverständnis des Singulären zur Objektivität erhoben werden könne. Das hierauf gebaute historische Bewußtsein ermöglicht dem modernen Menschen, die ganze Vergangenheit der Menschheit in sich gegenwärtig zu haben: über alle Schranken der eigenen Zeit blickt er hinaus in die vergangenen Kulturen; deren Kraft nimmt er in sich auf und genießt ihren Zauber nach: ein großer Zuwachs von Glück enstpringt ihm hieraus" Dilthey's formulation contains nevertheless an "aestheticist" undertone (the attitude of the "lover of art"), which is later criticized by Heidegger and Gadamer.

[2] W. Dilthey, "Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik", 328: „Und nun kommt diesem Werk das unersättliche Bedürfnis entgegen, die eigne Individualität zu ergänzen durch die Anschauung anderer. Verstehen und Interpretation sind so im Leben selber immer regsam und tätig."

The educated man, writes Hegel, "also learns that there are other and better ways of behaviour and action, and that his is not the only possible way."[1] Interpreting the discussion of the concept of *Bildung* in Hegel's *Propedeutic*, Gadamer writes: "contemplating ourselves and our purposes with distance means to look at these in the way that others see them".[2] We should realize that, seen from Rorty's perspective, to "contemplate with distance" implies irony, for the latter means precisely giving up the naive identification with ourselves; it means distancing ourselves from ourselves. If one learns other ways to judge things, he remains less of a captive of the provincial narrow-mindedness[3] which closes him up in the world of his own restricted environment and experiences. One remains less of a captive of the naive belief that the world cannot be seen otherwise than one sees it.

Rorty is also familiar with this closing up within oneself, and makes a critical remark about it. Interestingly enough, and unusually for Anglo-Saxon philosophy, as well as for his own thinking, he identifies the criticized viewpoint, not unjustly, as a kind of *common sense* perspective. "The opposite of irony is *common sense*" – he writes. It is characteristic for those who describe everything with the help of the final vocabulary that they and their environment are used to. This kind of common sense takes it for granted that the statements formulated in its final vocabulary are also appropriate to describe the actions and life of those who use other final vocabularies.[4] It would be a kind of philosophical extension or levelling of the *common sense*, as urged by the "metaphysicians" to justify the standpoint of the *common sense*. The metaphysicians do not question the plain truths of *common sense* – they do not offer redescriptions – but they analyze old descriptions with the help of old descriptions, insisting on the principle of the one true reality and vocabulary.[5] The ironist opposes both of them – both the common sense and the metaphysics of the common sense. Rorty's opposition at this point can be seen as the opposition between narrow-mindedness and *Bildung*. The former, narrow-mindedness, is characteristic thus both for common sense *and* metaphysics. Open-mindedness, on the contrary, means irony and awareness of contingency; it sensitizes for solidarity and identification with other people. It makes me aware that I might just as well be the person who suffers. *Bildung* and the awareness of contingency opposes narrow-mindedness, the conceitedness of common sense, as well as the philosophy that justifies it, and last but least the self-satisfied, posing attitude of *self-righteousness.*[6]

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[1] Hegel, *Philosophische Propädeutik,* §. 42. *Theorie Werkausgabe*. vol. 4, 259. ("Indem der Mensch über das, was er unmittelbar weiß und erfährt, hinausgeht, so lernt er, daß es auch andere und bessere Weisen des Verhaltens und Tuns gibt und die seinige nicht die einzig notwendige ist. [...]").

[2] See Gadamer, GW 1, 22f.: „Sich selbst und seine privaten Zwecke mit Abstand ansehen, heißt ja: sie ansehen, wie die anderen sie sehen".

[3] Cf. Andrew Abbott, "The Aims of Education Address": "[...] education is a habit that expands experience so as to overcome that provinciality by increasing ties between your locality and other human meanings." See note 54 above.

[4] CIS 74.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See my remarks on this attitude in István Fehér M., "Hermeneutika és humanizmus" (Hermeneutics and Humanism),in *Hans-Georg Gadamer - egy 20. századi humanista* (Hans-

III.

Insofar as a moral-political stance and action renounces any kind of philosophical (theoretical, metaphysical) foundation in addition to emphasizing the idea of solidarity and the importance (and absolute primacy for life) of such a stance and action,[1] Rorty is only the last link in the chain of a respectable tradition, which started with Kant in the modern age, and displayed names such as Kierkegaard, Rickert and neo-Kantianism, Weber, Heidegger and Sartre, Popper and Feyerabend. This tradition is characterized by the conviction that practical action, a right life lived with morality, based on freedom and responsibility is not dependent on knowledge, and especially not on *metaphysical* knowledge (on the world's "objective" essence and human essence) – to the extent that the latter is opposed to it, and makes it impossible, rather than possible. Taking it one step forward and formulating it sharply: aim and pursuit to metaphysically ground morality, in ultimate analysis, and not quite unjustly, can also be placed under *moral* suspicion. To present the main stations of this tradition as a last step is even more justified because Rorty refers to some of the authors as precedents of his own views.

The presented point of view appears in Kant's radical approach.[2] The *Critique of Pure Reason*, according to Kant's self-understanding, forces the speculative mind within barriers, and its role is negative in this sense, but its important positive effect is that "it eliminates an obstacle which threatens the [pure

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Georg Gadamer – a 20th century humanist), ed. Miklós Nyírő (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2009), 43–117: here 104ff. This attitude, rejected by Emilio Betti, then by Rorty and Gadamer, was not unknown to the classical liberal tradition. John Stuart Mill wrote about it as "moral police". Mill, *On Liberty* (London: Watts & Co., 1936), 105. Mill also adds: this is one of the most universal of human attitudes. The term "righteous indignation" also appears at Rorty, see PP 1, 37.

[1] This stance is best summarized in the fragment quoted in note 26: "The fundamental premise of [my] book is that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance" (CIS 189). The claim of contingency means here to renounce any kind of (ultimate philosophical) foundation, or any kind of (historical, philosophical, or other) necessity, or any ultimate certainty about life conduct or anything else. Briefly and sharply: life usually needs no kind of theory; but if it still does, definitely not the kind that makes a contingent practice seem necessary and leads to self-deception.

[2] The reconstruction below is the– partly shortened, partly extended – exposition of thought that I formulated in some of my earlier writings in different contexts: István Fehér M., *Az élet értelméről. Racionalizmus és irracionalizmus között* (On the meaning of life. Between rationalism and irrationalism) (Budapest: Kossuth, 1991), 35–43; "Sartre, hermeneutika, pragmatizmus" (Sartre, hermeneutics, pragmatism), *Holmi* VI/12 (1994), 1810–1831: here 1820f, 1828f; "Polgári kultúra, polgári műveltség, polgári filozófia: Kant és a neokantianizmus világszemlélete. I. rész" (Bourgeois culture, bourgeois culture, bourgeois philosophy: Kant and the worldview of neo-Kantianism), *Protestáns Szemle* 1 (2002): 29–55: here 33–36; "Hermeneutika, etika, nyelvfilozófia" (Hermeneutics, ethics, philosophy of langauge), *Világosság* 5-6 (2003): 73–81: here 75f.

practical] reason [...] with complete elimination."[1] That our knowledge is restricted to phenomena revealed by experience, and we cannot know the world-in-itself, is definitely a disadvantage from the point of view of *knowledge*. But this disadvantage is fully balanced by admitting: if the necessary order of the world revealed by knowledge gave us not only the world of phenomena, but the world-in-itself too, then the causal relation would become universal, and would extend to the being-in-itself. If we made no difference between phenomena and beings-in-themselves, that is, if we knew the being-in-itself through cognisance, this would mean that the more perfect our cognisance is – while cognisance is the more perfect the more necessity or causality is within it – the more human freedom turns to nothing. Simplifying a little, but probably not incorrectly, we may say: *the world of cognisance (knowledge) is a world of necessity, while the world of action is a world of freedom.* Let us assume, Kant argues, that morality presupposes freedom, but the difference between things as objects of experience and as beings-in-themselves had not been made; in this case the thesis of causality acquires a universal meaning. "I could not say about the same being, e.g. the human soul, [...] that its will is free, but it is still subject to natural necessity"; in this case "freedom and morality with it [...] must give way to the mechanisms of nature".[2] To put it briefly: "If phenomena are things-in-themselves, then freedom is beyond recovery."[3] There would only remain one world, the natural world guided by necessary laws (revealed by scientific knowledge, as a world-in-itself), and in its closed causality chain the human soul would itself be only one link, deterministically defined. The *Critique of Pure Reason* paves the way at this point for the *Critique of Practical Reason*, ethics. The deficiencies and the limited, imperfect nature of our human *cognisance* ground precisely the possibility of our *action* as free, moral beings.

This recognition is the key to understand Kant's thesis, not easily comprehensible, and often explained and misinterpreted, that "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith [Ich mußte das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen]".[4] Kant reduced knowledge in order to make place for freedom, morals and faith. The knowledge that he wanted to "remove" or "deny" in the first place, is expressed in the haughty statement of dogmatic metaphysics that it is able to *know* the "ultimate" things – God, freedom, immortality – with the help of theoretical reason; and in this regard Kant does not only claim that there is no such kind of *cognition*, and to state this is mere deception, but, beyond this, also that *precisely this dogmatism is the true source of faithlessness and immorality*.[5] Probably the easiest way to shed light on this state of facts is to

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[1] *See Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* BXXV: „Daher ist eine Kritik, welche die erstere [the theoretical reason] einschränkt, so fern zwar negativ, aber, indem sie dadurch zugleich ein Hinderniß, welches den letzteren [practical] Gebrauch einschränkt, oder gar zu vernichten droht, aufhebt, in der That von positivem und sehr wichtigem Nutzen, so bald man überzeugt wird, daß es einen schlechterdings nothwendigen praktischen Gebrauch der reinen Vernunft (den moralischen) gebe […]."

[2] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* B XXVIIff.

[3] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* A 537=B565;

[4] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* B XXX

[5] Cf. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft,* B XXX.

suppose for a moment that we possess immovably stable, indubitable knowledge about all this, then we ask: what happens then with human freedom and ethical actions? It is worth mentioning an example of Karl Popper, completely Kantian in this respect. He writes that, supposing one could precisely foresee what will happen in the future, the question of how one should act, for instance which side should one take or what kind of morality should one accept, still could not be clearly decided. The question whether one would accept the morality of the future – just for being the morality of the future – is a moral question in itself, and no kind of knowledge or anticipation of the future may help to answer it. "The fundamental decision cannot be derived from any knowledge of the future."[1] Rorty fully agrees with Popper at this point: Marx was wrong to think that starting from Hegel's dialectics one may make predictions for the future, and Popper rightfully criticized this kind of historicism.[2] Seen from here and coming back to Kant, one could say that the desire for an absolute metaphysical knowledge is connected to, or is a sign of, moral weakness. It is characterized by what Kant said about looking into the future in his fundamental work on the philosophy of religion: "In my opinion there can be no certainty in this respect, and it is not even beneficial from a moral point of view."[3] The weight, responsibility and dignity of action – action which is not a technical production – are given precisely by the risk that we cannot fully see its effects and consequences, and indeed, it is not even desirable that we do. If someone still thinks it is desirable, since – using Popper's above example – he wants to stand on the side of the winner order in the future – well, we could hardly be very happy about it, even if the *will of knowledge* is usually regarded as a praiseworthy thing.

This Kantian thought was preserved and applied in neo-Kantianism. The novelty and specific contribution of neo-Kantianism was the inclusion of history (quite neglected by Kant) into the Kantian worldview, the elaboration of the concepts of culture and cultural science, and its protection against natural sciences. The neo-Kantian addition to Kant, seen from our perspective, lies in the fact that it completes the field of ethical action with a domain of being yet unknown for the Enlightenment thinker, a domain called history and culture. It was primarily the Baden-based neo-Kantianism that undertook the defence of history and the compatibility of freedom and history, against the reduction of history to knowledge and cognition.

"If we could predict the future in its individuality", writes Rickert, "if we knew precisely about *everything* that *must* come, then will and action would immediately lose their sense." The "irrationality" of reality sets the limits of the natural scientific thinking as soon as individuality comes forth; but this irrationality, this impossibility to be known "is one of the major assets for him who always strives forward ambitiously. Merciful is the hand that wrapped the future for us [...] in an impenetrable veil. If future in its individuality and strangeness were also the object

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[1] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 2nd ed, vol. 2, 206.

[2] AOC 19.

[3] Kant: *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft,* Kant, *Werkausgabe, Werke in zwölf Bänden,* edited by Wilhelm Weischedel, vol. VIII, 724: „Gewißheit in Ansehung derselben ist dem Menschen weder möglich, noch, so viel wir einsehen, moralisch zuträglich."

of our *knowledge*, then it could never be the object of our *will*. In a world that became perfectly rational nobody would be able to act."[1] "A metaphysical idealism", he writes later, "which is supposed to know the general evolutionary law of the world, makes the one-time course of history just as meaningless and futile as metaphysical naturalism, which considers the absolute reality a permanent cycle. [...] History is only possible as long as we do not grasp the world metaphysically."[2]

History is unknowable *but* free: this is how one could summarize the message of Rickert and neo-Kantianism, but this thesis could also be put this way: history is unknowable *because* it is free – and the pledge of its freedom is its unpredictability and unknowability. *The world of knowledge is a world of necessity, while the world of action is a world of freedom*, I summarized Kant's tenets above, and now it could be added: if something like history must belong to the world of action, if actions take place in a domain called history, then they must also be unknowable.

The Kantian duality of metaphysics and ethics, knowledge and freedom (free action) can also be found in Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard criticized Hegelians for being able to fly in the cosmic heights of absolute knowledge, that is, "they can mediate Christianity and paganism, [...] they can play with the titanic forces of history," but they are unable to tell the simple man what to do with his life", for "they do not know what to do themselves."[3] Hegelian philosophy is only valid supposing that the present is an absolute age, that there is no future – a supposition which is very difficult to be embraced by the existing man, to build his life upon it. But if there is future, then the age in which the philosopher lives is not an absolute age, if the world history is not over, then "the system is in permanent becoming", that is, there is no system, which means here: *knowledge* has no system.[4] Hegelians, says Kierkegaard, interchange two spheres, the sphere of thinking and that of freedom; and in the sphere of thinking, where Hegel's philosophy dwells, "necessity

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[1] Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1913), 464: „Könnten wir die Zukunft wirklich in ihrer Individualität vorausberechnen, und wüssten wir also genau, was kommen *muss*, so verlöre sofort alles Wollen und Handeln seinen Sinn. Wir haben daher nur Grund, uns zu freuen, dass es keine historischen Gesetze giebt. Die Irrationalität der Wirklichkeit, die allem naturwissenschaftlichen Begreifen eine Grenze setzt, gehört zugleich zu den höchsten Gütern für den, der immer strebend sich bemüht. Es ist eine gnädige Hand, die für uns Menschen die Zukunft in einen undurchdringlichen Schleier gehüllt hat. Wäre auch das Künftige in seiner Individualität Objekt unseres Wissens, so würde es niemals Objekt unseres Wollens sein. In einer vollkommen rationalen Welt kann Niemand wirken". "To act" means of course here to act morally. „In einer rational gewordenen Welt", he writes towards the end of his book, „gäbe es nicht nur keine Geschichte und kein sittliches Wirken sondern auch keine Religion" (ibid., 641).

[2] Ibid., 578f.: "ein metaphysischer Idealismus, der das Entwicklungsgesetz der Welt zu kennen glaubt, macht den Verlauf der Geschichte genau ebenso sinnlos und überflüssig wie ein metaphysischer Naturalismus, der die absolute Wirklichkeit für einen ewigen Kreislauf hält. […] Nur so lange wir die Welt nicht metaphysisch begreifen können und die empirische Wirklichkeit in einem irrationalen Verhältniss zu Werthen steht, ist also Geschichte möglich."

[3] Kierkegaard: *Entweder – Oder*, 721.

[4] Ibid., 723, the following two quotations: ibid., 723, 724.

rules". Thereby we return back again to the Kantian difference between the world of knowlede and the world of freedom. In this respect Hegel's absolute philosophy is a philosophy of necessity – a critique that the old Schelling already formulated against Hegel.[1] And if Kierkegaard says that "philosophy is unable to send man to action", this evidently refers to Hegel's philosophy, which refuses to be aware of the other sphere, that of freedom, or is only aware of it in such a way that it has eliminated its freedom in the necessity of thinking.

The basic ambition of foundationalism, namely to acquire well-founded (metaphysical) knowledge and to ground practical actions on this knowledge, becomes thus fundamentally questionable: the very concept of *knowledge* becomes thus unstable. The result could be summed up approximately like this: human mind is unable to attain a coherent, "objective" knowledge of the world, but this may be not a great problem. We may not be able to reach our desired goal, but possibly it is not even desirable in all repects to reach this goal. The analysis can shed light on the unreflected, naive, even dogmatic desire for an absolute knowledge of the world. For if we ask why we need such an absolute knowledge, why we long for it, then the answer would be this: in oder that we may know our purpose in life, the way to act correctly, and get guidance for our actions. But if our reconstruction has been meaningful then we might realize: although we cannot reach our goal, it is not at all certain that attaining it would *fulfil* the hopes we connect to it. If we could somehow peep into the absolute order of the world, would it offer us any clear guidance as to what our purpose is? And if so, if we could so indecently look into the ways of destiny or providence, would we not become a little like a cheater, for whom the game is already over?[2]

The summary of the Kantian tradition is largely similar to how Rorty understands Kant's work. At an important section of the concluding part of his major work, there is a fundamental reference to Kant. Rorty places emphasis on Kant's dismissal of the traditional concept of mind in order to make place for moral faith, and considers this idea precisely as Kant's "greatness." What this is about – he sums up briefly and to the point – is "the philosopher's special form of bad faith – substituting pseudo-cognition for moral choice".[3] "Kant's greatness – he writes – was to have seen through the 'metaphysical' form of this attempt, and to have destroyed the traditional conception of reason to make room for moral faith. Kant gave us a way of seeing scientific truth as something that could never supply an

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[1] Cf. *Schellings sämmtliche Werke,* ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart und Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–61), vol. 10, 159.

[2] This is similar to how Wittgenstein questions the supposition of the immortality of the soul: „Not only is there no guarantee of the temporal immortality of the human soul, that is to say of its eternal survival after death; but, in any case, this assumption completely fails to accomplish the purpose for which it has always been intended. Or is some riddle solved by my surviving for ever? Is not this eternal life itself as much of a riddle as our present life?" (*Tractatus logico–philosophicus*, 6.4312). Wittgenstein's words can be understood as being meaningful for the immortality of the soul as long as it is expressed as a desire against the finiteness of human life. But if we wish to think it autonomously then it becomes just as mysterious as what it should have had to offer a result for as against a mystery.

[3] PMN 383.

answer to our demand for a point, a justification, a way of claiming that our moral decision about what to do is based on *knowledge* of the nature of the world."[1] Clearly, this is what Rorty considers to be Kant's basic idea. At the same time, he also criticizes Kant for not being able to keep up with this idea, and for having formulated his diagnosis on science – "unfortunately" – under the heading "inevitable subjective conditions", claiming that there was a procedure of decision for solving moral dilemmas.[2] Seen from here, Kant is part of the main trend of European philosophy starting with Plato, and criticized by Rorty, that is concerned first and foremost with putting philosophy on the stable path of science.[3]

Returning to the tradition starting from Kant, the thesis of the independence and unconnectedness of (scientific) knowledge and (practical) action (a moral and political decision and position) also plays an important role in the work of Max Weber, connected on several points to neo-Kantianism. As he exposed it probably most clearly in his influential lecture *Science as a Vocation*, scientific knowledge and practical decisions form two separate, unrelated realms. No science is capable to ground the individual's decisions (religious, political, or regarding one's worldview). Such things as "scientific worldview" or "scientific politics" are therefore impossible, they serve only to conceal decisions or shift the responsibility for autonomous action onto some kind of "knowledge".[4] The very question about the meaning of science is not a question to be answered with the means of science. The distinction of facts and values, science and politics/ethics, the recognition that practical positions cannot be scientifically grounded may give reason to a certain degree of disappointment or disillusionment (in virtue of questioning the omnipotence of science) against the background of the hope of some kind of ultimate metaphysical knowledge of the world. Its acceptance is therefore a matter of "intellectual rectitude",[5] which can hardly be proved at all with scientific means. The best way to characterize Weber's stance is by a thesis of Karl Popper. Although "ethics is not a science", Popper writes, and "there is no 'rational scientific basis' of ethics", "there is an ethical basis of science"[6] It is worth mentioning: this difference shows significant parallels with Gadamer's claim, in the preface of the second edition of his major work, that, although the "hermeneutics" he elaborated is not a science – not a "system of professional rules" or "methodology" – but it "invites to *'scientific' correctness*".[7]

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[1] Ibid., emphasis in the original. See also CIS 34.

[2] PMN 383.

[3] This is the interpretation of Kant that Rorty has in mind when he mentions Kant together with Plato, or talks about a "Plato-Kant canon". (See e.g. CIS 33, 45, 61, 76, 78f, 96f, 106, 118, 154; PP 2, 65, 157; PSH xvii, 34.) It is this Kant who seeks certainty, and not the Kant to demolishes knowledge for the sake of faith that he will oppose Sartre to (as we shall see later). See PSH 13: „Jean-Paul Sartre seemed to me right when he denounced Kant's self-deceptive quest for certainty".

[4] See Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, eds. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004, 17ff, 26ff.

[5] Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, 20 ("intellektuelle Rechtschaffenheit").

[6] Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol 2, 238.

[7] Gadamer, GW 2, 438: „'wissenschaftliche' Redlichkeit".

The thesis of the difference of scientific knowledge and moral responsibility also appears in Paul Feyerabend, radical representative of the philosophy of science, rethinking Karl Popper's position. Knowledge offers certainty and security, action offers uncertainty and risks. "Certainty – writes Feyerabend – if it were attainable, would mean the absence of responsibility. It is precisely the other way round: since certainty is unattainable, *therefore* we accept the responsibility and become adults. It is interesting to see that the researchers of epistemology and theory of science strive for relations in which we would be less mature than we would like."[1] The desire to escape responsibility in this context goes together with renouncing human maturity, with the childish desire to remain immature, to remain forever under age. The question of how we can act if there is no certainty, can be answered like this: the question is bad or of bad faith. We can act *only* if there is no certainty. This position parallels the above cited formulation of Rickert's: if "the future were the object of our *knowledge*, then it could never be the object of our *will*. In a world that became perfectly rational nobody would be able to act."

With respect to Heidegger, a short reference may suffice, which claims that for him science and the scientific attitude is just one of the modes of being of the human Dasein – not the single one, and not the most original one.[2] One of these modes of being is the authentic being – in which man appropriates himself and – relating to the Feyerabend-quotation – gains or rather wins his maturity for itself. In order to attain this, however, the derivative mode of being of the contemplative knowledge of the world offers no help. The assuming of one's thrownness, to own up to the being that relates to death, responsibility and conscience: these are the concepts that describe for Heidegger the transition to authentic existence – and this is a completely different level than the possibly "objective" definition of the merely existing things.

Rorty himself offers important additions to the interpretation of Sartre's ideas from our perspective. Commenting on Sartre, Rorty emphasizes: the attempt to acquire objective knowledge on the world and ourselves is for Sartre none other than an attempt to ward off the responsibility for choosing our own project.[3] Rorty's interpretation can also be justified by a fragment he did not analyze. If for Sartre man is a being that (in Sartre's peculiar formulation) is what it is not, then it means that – as he explicitly states – any statement I make about myself becomes false in the very

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[1] Paul Feyerabend, *Wieder den Methodenzwang. Skizzen einer anarchistischen Erkenntnistheorie*, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1976), 49. "Gewißheit – wenn sie erreichbar wäre – bedeutet Fehlen der Verantwortlichkeit. Vielmehr ist es so: da sich Gewißheit nicht erreichen läßt, nimmt man die Verantwortung auf sich und wird ein reifer Mensch. Es ist interessant zu sehen, daß Erkenntnistheoretiker und Wissenschaftstheoretiker Verhältnisse anstreben, in denen unsere Reife geringer ist als wir vielleicht wünschen."

[2] SZ, 4. §., 11.: "Wissenschaftliche Forschung ist nicht die einzige und nicht die nächste mögliche Seinsart dieses Seienden." In his pragmatist stance Rorty fully agrees with this approach; he emphatically and approvingly mentions that in *Being and Time* Heidegger considers "'objective scientific knowledge' as a secondary, derivative form of Being-in-the World" (PP 2, 11)

[3] PMN 361.: "[Sartre] sees the attempt to gain an objective knowledge of the world, and thus of oneself, as an attempt to avoid the responsibility for choosing one's project."

moment of utterance,[1] and this also confirms Rorty's interpretation. The need for "objective knowledge" is connected for Sartre to "bad faith" ("mauvaise fois"). The attempt to grasp ourselves in some kind of ultimage objective description (suggested by the "spirit of seriousness"[2]) is therefore not only futile and hopeless, but – even more importantly – the aspiration itself is conceived in bad faith. Lying behind it is the tacit intention to turn the being-for-itself into being-in-itself, into a thing.

"This attempt to slough off responsibility," writes Rorty, "is what Sartre describes as the attempt to turn oneself into a thing-into an *etre-en-soi*. In the visions of the epistemologist, this incoherent notion takes the form of seeing the attainment of truth as a matter of *necessity*, either the 'logical' necessity of the transcendentalist or the 'physical' necessity of the evolutionary 'naturalizing' epistemologist. From Sartre's point of view, the urge to find such necessities is the urge to be rid of one's freedom to erect yet another alternative theory or vocabulary. Thus the edifying philosopher [the sort whose primary concern is not knowledge of metaphysical truths, but the edification of humans – I.M.F.] who points out the incoherence of the urge is treated as a 'relativist,' one who lacks moral seriousness, because he does not join in the common human hope that the burden of choice will pass away."[3] Sartre was definitely lacking "moral seriousness" since he did not want at all to take off the "burden of choice" from people's shoulders, and in his major work he thoroughly criticized the spirit of seriousness ("esprit de sérieux"), and referred ironically to "serious people" even in his popular lecture.[4]

Rorty's remark that Sartre (and what Rorty calls edifying philosophy) "lacks moral seriousness" should evidently not be understood literally, containing as it does *irony*. Sartre (similarly to all representatives of the mentioned tradition, beginning with Kant) embodied and expressed a kind of (often rigorous) moral attitude and strictness – one that rejects any kind of self-deception and self-delusion, any kind of *wishful thinking*, one that is ready and able to ruthlessly confront the fallibility of the contingent man which urges him to "substitute pseudo-cognition for moral choice."[5] However,

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[1] EN 151; cf. also ibid, 483: the being-for-itself is always different from what may be *said* about it („toujours autre chose que ce qu'on peut *dire* de lui"; emphasis in the original).

[2] See Sartre: "Materialism and Revolution", Sartre, *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, 215, where Sartre writes about materialism that it is „one of the forms of the spirit of seriousness and of flight from one's own self" (translation modified; see Sartre, *Situtions*, vol. III, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, 162: „une des formes de l'esprit de sérieux et de la fuite devant soi-même").

[3] PMN 376. Rorty writes further on: "Sartre adds to our understanding of the visual imagery which has set the problems of Western philosophy" by showing the traditional image of the "unveiled mirror of Nature" as the image of God. From this point of view Rorty concludes: „to look for commensuration rather than simply continued conversation–to look for a way of making further redescription unnecessary by finding a way of reducing all *possible* descriptions to one–is to attempt escape from humanity" (PMN 376f.). In a later writing, explaining Sartre, Rorty writes: "We shall not need a picture of 'the human self' in order to have morality" (PP 2, 160), cf. also CIS 42, PP 2, 132.: "Sartre's point that we have a tendency to repudiate and evade this freedom of choice is perfectly just".

[4] See EN 674, also: Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Nagel, 1946), see: http://www.mediasetdemocratie.net/Textes/Existentialisme.htm>

[5] PMN 383.

the measures are reverse for the man who escapes responsibility and himself; for him, it is the rejection of the urgent desire for certainty-security-stability that counts as "lack of moral seriousness". Be it as it may: Rorty is receptive of Sartre's critique of the "spirit of seriousness"; his answer – as I have outlined earlier – is irony (and hope, as will be mentioned in the concluding part).

"Jean-Paul Sartre seemed to me right when he denounced Kant's self-deceptive quest for certainty" – says Rorty.[1] In his major work, in reference to Quine and Sellars, Rorty talked about a concept of philosophy, trying at the same time to raise sympathy for it: "holism produces, as Quine has argued in detail and Sellars has said in passing, a conception of philosophy which has nothing to do with the quest for certainty."[2] This certainty is illusory and unachievable: the quest for it is nothing else than self-deception, evasion of life, and all this in the best of the cases. For a false certainty and the illusion of certainty may stabilize and grow into an ideology, they may lead to self-justification, in the possession of which man may pose as morally superior. The moral suspicion might extend to other philosophical disciplines in addition to ethics, and ultimately also to philosophy as such.

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This paper could be concluded with the following remarks. One of the basic metaphysical questions of Kant – the third one – sounds like this: "Was darf ich hoffen?" (What may I hope for?)[3], and for Rorty also it is primarily about hope. From Rorty's perspective, hope plays a fundamental role both in the lives of people and in the philosopher's life. The expression itself appears often in his texts and in the title of one of his books as well: *Philosophy and Social Hope*. One chapter of this book indicates the narrow context of this phrase: *Hope in Place of Knowledge*. Hope stands, therefore, for Rorty – just like for Kant – in the place of knowledge. If Kant demolished knowledge to make place for faith (*Ich mußte also das Wissen aufheben, um zum Glauben Platz zu bekommen*),[4] than we could state by analogy: Rorty demolished knowledge to make room for hope. Solidarity for Rorty does not depend on the existence of common truths, common language, or some final

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[1] PSH 13. See also the the bibliographical indications in note 81.

[2] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 171. See also J. Grondin, "Die Hermeneutik als Konsequenz des kritischen Rationalismus", *Philosophia naturalis* 32 (1995), book 2, reprint: *Hermeneutik und Naturalismus*, ed. B. Kanitscheider, F. J. Wetz (Tübingen: Mohr, 1998), 42f. „[...] die kartesianische oder, im allgemeinen, die wissenschaftliche Sicherheitsobsession einer 'Flucht' des Daseins vor seiner eigenen Zeitlichkeit oder Geschichtlichkeit entstamme. Heidegger und die Hermeneutik sehen nun in dieser »Sorge um Gewißhet« eines der Grundmotive der abendländischen Philosophie und Wissenschaft, sofern sie nach »letzten Fundamenten« streben"

[3] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B833: "Alles Interesse meiner Vernunft (das spekulative sowohl, als das praktische) vereinigt sich in folgenden drei Fragen: 1. Was kann ich wissen? 2. Was soll ich tun? 3. Was darf ich hoffen?". See also: *Logik. Ein Handbuch zu Vorlesungen*. ed. G. B. Jäsche, in Kant: *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik*. 2, *Werkausgabe*. ed. W. Weischedel, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974, vol. 6. 448.

[4] *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, BXXXI

vocabulary, but on the receptivity for pain, suffering and humiliation, and the common *hope* that everybody's own world with the little childish things and individual vocabulary would not be destroyed.[1]

As Rorty exposed in his influential writing discussing the common features of the Bible and the Communist Manifesto, both teach the sensitivity to inequality, and feed the hope in the future. Both want to encourage, and not formulate knowledge claims (about the second coming of Christ, or about the realization of the communist society). Christianity and socialism – they both mean the same, so something like "Christian socialism" is almost a pleonasm: "nowadays you cannot hope for the fraternity which the Gospels preach without hoping that democratic governments will redistribute money and opportunity in a way that the market never will.".[2]

The question "Was darf ich hoffen?" is for Kant sharply separated from the question "Was kann ich wissen?". And not by chance. If I *knew* everything that was possible to know – everything I want to know – I would not have much to hope for. Hope is only possible where knowledge does not have access to. Hope is at home in the world of action – it motivates, urges and guides our actions. As such, it is connected to practical life, and not to knowledge. I do not – I cannot – have hopes about things that I *know*.[3] The life of omniscience, the life lived in omniscience would therefore be a life without hope, that is, a *hope-less* life in the emphatic sense of the word and in each of its multiple senses: perhaps not unthinkable for Gods, but hardly conceivable for humans.

Translated by Emese Czintos

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[1] CIS 92. Cf. ibid., 89, where Rorty writes about the little things of the child that he fantasizes about, and that some adults would tend to describe as "trash" and throw them away.

[2] Cf. PSH 201ff. quote on 205.

[3] And what I hope for cannot be the object of my knowledge. The statement "I know that twice two is four" can hardly be meaningfully replaced by the statement (which is doubtful as it is) "I hope that twice two is four". The latter cannot be deduced from the former, nor is it some kind of weakened form of the former. Knowledge may have its gradations ("I know", "I don't know", "I am certain", "I am uncertain"), but I cannot be connected to the object of my knowledge by a practical – hopeful – interest. In other words: what has got into the scope of knowledge, cannot get into the scope of hope, and *vice versa*. In his writing discussing the parallels between the Bible and the Communist Manifesto, Rorty claims: "there is a difference between knowledge and hope. Hope often takes the form of false prediction, as it did in both documents [...] When reading the texts themselves we should skip slightly past the predictions, and concentrate on the expression of hope." (see PSH 204f.)