
A Critical Study Of Richard Rorty's Post-Philosophic Culture

Francis O.C. Njoku

Abstract

Richard Rorty argues that a pluralistic culture is a way forward in a post-modernist or post-philosophic culture, a world, according to him, that does not privilege the objectivist tradition of truth and morals. Its truth or moral foundation is anchored on agreed convention that does not appeal to any entity outside of itself to justify its being or relevance. Rorty then asks participants in such a culture to privatise those views of theirs, like objective truth, religion and God, that will upset conversation with others, seeing themselves as people with no link to the divine or objective moral standard. This article assesses Rorty's claims for a post-philosophic culture, insisting that he reads philosophical tradition in relativist's terms, and that he does not place the whole cards of discourse on the table. His ideas, therefore, should be treated with cautious optimism.

Introduction

The modern period of history of philosophy was convinced of the role of reason, and the rationalistic universe of meaning: the Enlightenment extolled the power of reason to order human affairs and shape the world we live in, insisting that reason can apprehend reality and prescribe for both theory and practice. The insistence that reason has answer to most of humanity's problems or to the structuring of reality reached became too eloquent in Immanuel Kant. But postmodernists such as Richard Rorty disagree with Immanuel Kant and the modernists, contesting "the assumption about the universality of human reason," (Gordon 1997: 41).

This essay examines Richard Rorty's post-modernist intuitions for a Post-philosophical culture. Without claiming to be an exhaustive treatment of Rorty's post-modernist thoughts, it attempts to indicate some of the main thrusts of his search for pluralism against the background of an epistemological anti-foundationalism. One could say that what has inspired Rorty's philosophical project is a quest for relevance of philosophy in a pluralistic society: contemporary society urgently asks intellectuals for a hand in social project. According to Rorty, the call at the door of philosophy to lend a helping hand in social project is constantly being blurred by philosophy's image as a classroom or professional discipline. Such an image, in Rorty's judgement, seems to be relegating the role of philosophy and philosophers to that of a historical interest or lone rangers closed in their own world.

Rorty argues that the continued allegiance to the Kantian epistemological foundation has stiffened the move for an alternative culture vision that is sufficiently pragmatic. He alleges that Kant created a rationalistic universe of meaning that was far removed from a practical appeal in daily living; hence, the need for deconstruction and circumvention to usher in a

state of affairs in which the intellectual achievements of the contemporary man will bear hand in shaping socio-cultural realities of the epoch. Thus it is a quest for a post-philosophical culture, a reshaping of our traditions to suit our present conditions.

According to Rorty, Post-modernists see in Kant the clearest expression of the enlightenment project. For them, Kant's philosophy is hugely a historical: Kant appeals to deep rooted distinctions between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, the conceptual and the empirical, the necessary and the contingent in order to construct a philosophical foundation just as Rene Descartes sought help in clear and distinct ideas. Post-modernists insist that Kant's historic foundationalism is no less an illusion than the rationalism which preceded it.

Rorty will maintain that Kant's misconceived ambition to transcend the historical situatedness of culture failed as a historical passage of idea. He claims that the modernist was obsessed with foundation and failed to give all round understanding of culture. New descriptions are therefore needed; hence he claims that "old metaphors are constantly dying off into literalness and then serving as a platform and foil for the new metaphors," (Rorty 1989: 16). Rorty reads history in the grand narrative of decline when he asserts that the intellectual intuitions of the past have been a failure in bringing about enhancement in our cultural activities. In any case, past history must be recognised as a product of contingency of being, life, circumstance and language, Rorty asserts. Thus, the cultural metaphors of the past, in Rorty's evaluation, do not just speak to us anymore; but their inadequacy, he claims, has demonstrated that there is no design or purpose in history. There is, therefore, a need for 'metaphoric re-descriptions' of nature. The recognition of the contingency of ourselves, language, community, consciences and culture will help us to see that we are the 'makers' of ourselves, Rorty argues. In this light, Rorty asserts that the accepted definition of freedom is recognition of contingency rather than of necessity (Ibid., 40). The hermeneutics of culture-image and contingency, for Rorty, becomes 'conversation' - the relevance of 'de-ideologization' of philosophy and making philosophy continuous with the literary tradition. Post-modernist hermeneutics intends then to create an environment of encounter where poets, engineers, painters, the so-called philosophers are linked together in social project.

The examination of Rorty's project for post-philosophical culture will be conducted under the following headings: (i) the problem of description, that is, 'the meta-philosophical disagreement of recent times', (ii) departure for a post-philosophical culture: and (iii) How credible is Rorty's project?

The Meta-Philosophical Disagreements of Recent Times

Regarding the problem of description, Rorty sustains that philosophers in the western philosophical tradition do not seem to agree as to whether philosophy is to be regarded as a science, metaphor, or politics. According to Rorty, the scientific answer is characteristic of Edmund Husserl and his positivist opponents who model philosophy on science. Their consideration seems to be remote from politics and art. Martin Heidegger prefers a poetic answer to the scientific one; and pragmatists see in science and philosophy a tool for social progress (Rorty 1991b: 19); hence political. And each group is suspicious of the other. Rorty goes on to present how they stand to one another.

Although Heidegger has sympathy with the Husserlian view that a philosopher has to liberate himself from all prejudice and the dangers of a technologized pragmatic culture, he sees “pragmatism and transcendental phenomenology as merely two further products of the objectivist tradition,” (Ibid., 10). As one may realise, pragmatists do not want to be drawn back to the old strategies that have outlived their practical utility. Rorty insinuates that Husserl thinks that the suggestion to drop a universal ideal, a historical, and fundamental philosophical knowledge proposed by pragmatism and Nietzsche invites one to turn away from questions that are decisive for a genuine humanity. Although both Husserl and Heidegger see the European crisis as having roots in a misguided rationalism, Heidegger treats objective scientific knowledge as secondary and gives primacy to being-in-the-world, that is, the affirmation of social practice as datum. In the thoughts of Husserl and Heidegger, Rorty sees sympathy with Dewey’s Baconianism (a need to pursue a philosophy that will be fruitful to human life). But Husserl and Heidegger together part company with the philosophers of the ‘God’s eye view’ (system builders, especially Hegel and Kant), except they conceive the project of philosophy under different visual metaphors. Be it as it may, Rorty strongly asserts that we need to go beyond scientific philosophy, that is, a philosophy that is bedevilled by too much insistence on objective reason; hence the need for new metaphors or new language for re-description.

Rorty discusses three ways in which old belief can be added to our previous belief, namely: perception, inference and open-ended-metaphor. Perception changes our beliefs by intruding a new belief into the network of previous beliefs, and inference changes our beliefs by making us see that our previous beliefs commit us to a belief we had not previously held. These two leave our language unchanged, Rorty argues. And to insist that these are the only ways we ought to change our beliefs is fall into the mathematical attitude which, according to Rorty, Heidegger laments about. Rorty judges that the weak point of Husserlian view “to map out all possible logical space, to make explicit an implicit grasp of the realm of possibility” thereby limiting philosophy to a mere project of clarification.

The third way in which old beliefs can be added to previous ones is by thinking of language as open-ended-metaphor; hence the need to abandon the “God’s-eye-view” position and realise that truth is not always a matter of fitting data into a pre-established scheme or adherence to a correspondence theory. Rorty writes that “a metaphor is a voice from outside logical space or a logical-philosophical clarification of the structure of that space. It is a call to change one’s language and one’s life rather than a proposal about how to systematise either,” (Ibid., 13). A metaphor consists in knowing that truth is not within us but to be seen as something that may become available to us. Such a conception of truth, in Rorty’s judgement, legitimizes auditory metaphors, listens to a voice out of darkness, and makes room for irrational intrusions. These metaphors may make for the no sense, but they are “conceptual revolutions,” (Ibid., 15). needed for the description of culture. There is in metaphor a recognition that there is a distinction between meaning and its use. This approach, Rorty claims, makes meaning to be neither Platonic essences nor Husserlian *noemata* but rather *patterns of habitual use*; it is a belief that prides on the understanding that meaning has a “linguistic role,” and there is no need to lay a permanent neutral matrix of possibilities of language use.

It is Rorty's conviction that Heidegger was right to call for deconstruction of interested language like "human reason, rationality and sound common sense." This done, it will be then the task of philosophy to remind us now of the historical contingency of the words we use. In this light, Rorty admonishes that "our relation to the tradition must be a rehearing of what can no longer be heard, rather than a speaking of what has not yet been spoken," (Ibid., 16-17). One can then read the past, not as a mere record of events, but as a springboard for shaping our present circumstances. Our reading of the past, therefore, has some theoretical aims; hence Rorty's insistence that the understanding of the intellectual assessment of the past must suit our contingent cultural condition, that is, our metaphors must be responsive to our historical positions.

A post-modernist view of the world must take seriously poetry and politics. Rorty intends to link the post-modernist to the pragmatist. But such a linkage will not be accomplished without smoothening up of some rough edges that hold them apart. In examining the likely contribution of poetic and political intuitions to culture, Rorty underlines the bond between the Heideggerian and the Pragmatist. He thinks that the American pragmatist has a political view as far as his relationship to the tradition is concerned; however, Heidegger and Carnap and the pragmatist school see no point in discussing pseudo-problems (e.g., other mind, the external world etc..) that make no difference; in this way, they are sympathetic to the pragmatist ideal; except that, whereas Carnap and the pragmatist think of traditional philosophy as a pseudo-science, Heidegger opts for a hackneyed poetry, a bid to unveil being smothered by forgetfulness.

Heidegger, however, observes that the pragmatist way debases the genre called 'philosophy.' Given that Heidegger may accept the pragmatist view that the thinker serves the community, how do the poet and the pragmatist stand to each other? In the final analysis, Rorty argues that the issue between Heidegger and the pragmatist is a matter of "scratching where it itches" (Ibid., 18); it is largely a difference in attitude towards recent history. The scratching, the pragmatist claims, calls for the liberation of culture from obsolete vocabularies, especially from a metaphysics that can no longer serve the community. Against this backdrop, J. Dewey and G. W. F. Hegel would seem to have worked for a social freedom that was hoped for by the French Revolution. In any case, Rorty entertains the view that when Dewey's pragmatism and Hegelianism are cleared of the scientific rhetoric that obscures their basic romanticism, the total revolution as was hoped for by the French Revolution will have been realised. But the implications for the claim, in Rorty's estimation, will be enormous: i) New metaphor will have its chance for self-sacrifice; ii) the language in which we state our beliefs and hopes will be as flexible as possible; iii) democratic society will no longer be pursued on the condition that we have philosophical foundation grounded in human reason, (Ibid., 18) but appropriate foundation for culture becomes "a conviction by its citizens that things will go better for everybody if new metaphor is given a hearing, if no belief or desire is held so sacred that a metaphor which endangers it is automatically rejected" (Ibid., 19); iv) It is a rejection that we know what we want in advance; that we have more than a tentative and revisable agenda for social project; v) Scientific pronouncements which take for granted that we have a secure grasp of the nature of society, or the good will become suspicious; vi) There will always be room for new metaphors, new jargons and new logical spaces. With this frame of mind, Rorty is convinced that Heidegger's purpose would

have yoked to that argued for by political movements; the pragmatist attempt to help achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number, by facilitating the replacement of language which impede happiness, would have been realised. It is Rorty's belief that both the pragmatist and the Heideggerian listen to the voice of (vii) the past, save that each sees and hears differently. The pragmatist agrees with Husserl and Heidegger that scientific technology has not got it all, but he hopes that his venture might turn out to be that in which the democratic community "becomes the mistress, rather than the servant of the technical rationality," (Ibid., 20).

Evidently, the overall contention of Rorty is that the "meta-philosophical disagreements" or problem of recent times are political, which our philosophical intuition should have alerted us to. It is a politics that is obscured by meta-philosophical scientism. It is not different, according to Rorty, from those of our forefathers – a situation "in the midst of a struggle for power between those who have it and those who are starving or terrorised because they lack it." The problem, Rorty indicates, is not science itself but those who are using science to dictate the pace and values of the culture. This understanding opens our vistas to a whole new frame of mind. The past inaction of the philosophical tradition, in Rorty's thinking, should no longer be tolerated; the sense for urgency in searching for a new vision is expressed in the fact that we are approaching a time "we shall no longer turn to the philosophers for rescue as our ancestors turned to the priests. We shall turn instead to the poets and the engineers, the people who produce startling new projects for achieving the greatest happiness of the greatest number," (Ibid., 26). Where do we go from here? Rorty thinks that there is an irreversible move towards a post-philosophical culture by our contemporaries: a culture that employs knowledge pragmatically as tool for social change. According to him, this will deflate philosophy's presumptuous image as the foundation of culture.

Rorty alleges that philosophy has been taken by philosophy-professors not only to be a discipline but also a foundation of knowledge and of culture, and "it purports to do this on the basis of its understanding of the nature of mind," (Rorty 1979: 3). It was the general concern of philosophy to present a general theory of representation, which, he judges, divides and pigeon-holes various aspects of culture. Rorty believes that this attitude is traceable to John Locke and Rene Descartes. In Rorty's judgement, Descartes prided to have all reality in his rational-pocket under the banner of clear and distinct ideas (Descartes) and Locke limited our knowledge to experience (Locke); but the work of philosophy to set guides and limits to our steps became drastic in Immanuel Kant who set the tribunal of pure reason as upholding or denying the claims of culture; hence in the 19th century, "the notion of philosophy as foundation discipline which 'grounds' knowledge-claims was consolidated in the writings of Kantians," (Ibid., 4). It is Rorty's thesis that the notion there is an autonomous discipline called 'philosophy,' distinct from, and setting in, judgement upon religion and science, is of quite recent origin. Descartes and Hobbes, though seen as "beginning modern philosophy," had not in mind of finding a new philosophical system; they saw their own cultural role as a fight to make the "intellectual world safe for Copernicus and Galileo," (Ibid., 131). Rorty claims that the idea of philosophy as a distinct science in our modern philosophy, in Rorty's understanding, came after Kant. In any case, the presumption of philosophy as the foundation of culture, assured philosophers by Kant, according to Rorty, is being seriously challenged.

The rising culture of the men of letters – poets, novelists, and politicians – queries the self-image of the philosopher as an intellectual avant-garde. People are seeking the opinions of poets and politicians rather than those of philosophers. In the face of this, philosophy, in Rorty's judgement, senses itself as more obsolete and less to do with the rest of culture. Thus, the "big show down" to philosophers and phenomenologists in their claim to ground, criticise and dictate for the rest of culture adds up to the feeling of irrelevance because "philosophy as a whole was shrugged off by those who wanted an ideology or self-image," (Ibid., 5). There were exceptions, nevertheless, that act as redeeming voices within philosophical quarters, according to Rorty. Among them are L. Wittgenstein, M. Heidegger and J. Dewey. Wittgenstein tried to construct a new theory of representations which would have nothing to do with materialism; Heidegger constructed a new set of or philosophical categories which would have nothing to do with science, epistemology, or the Cartesian quest for certainty; and Dewey saw the unreality of epistemological problems, and truth as purported correspondence; and knowledge as accuracy of representations; Dewey then tried to construct a naturalised version of Hegel's vision of history by taking the line of a social-reformer, (Ibid., 5-6). Instead of arguing against the Kantian doctrines, Rorty observers, these redeeming philosophical voices set them aside in order "to assert for the possibility of a post-Kantian culture, one in which there is no all encompassing discipline which legitimises or grounds the others..." (Ibid., 6). They introduced new maps or terrain, thus, paving the way for new shapes in the culture – a post-philosophic culture.

Departure for a Post-Philosophical Culture

Rorty expresses the conviction that the quest for a post-philosophic culture does not take off from "an impossible attempt to step outside of our skins – the traditions, linguistic and others, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism – and compare ourselves with something obsolete," (Rorty 1982: xix). He searches for a culture in which science/literature distinctions will no longer matter; it will ignore the pretence, in Rorty's estimation, that there is 'truth' or 'good' out there or a denial that human languages are human creations, (Rorty 1989: 5). As a pragmatist culture, it will be a place for co-operation among all kinds of intellectuals. Such is a conviction Rorty cherishes when he proclaims: "This would be a culture in which neither the priests nor the physicists nor the poets nor the party were thought of as more 'rational' or more 'scientific,' or 'deeper' than one another. No portion of culture would be singled out as exemplifying (or signalling or failing to exemplify) the condition to which the rest aspired, (Rorty 1982: xxxviii)." In other words, no aspect of knowledge or institution will be privileged. People will become heroes, not because they have 'secret' knowledge of things, but because they have become exceptional in being good to human beings. One would understand Rorty as saying that people prove themselves 'heroes' by being competent in their service to the human community. Thus such a culture will have nobody called 'philosopher' but will have specialists known as "all purpose intellectuals who are ready to offer a view on pretty much anything, in the hope of making it hang together with everything else," (Ibid., xxxix). All the same, Rorty warns that this hypothetical culture will win the admiration of neither Platonists (who look for an eternal guide) nor the positivists (who insist on science for a temporal guide).

Is Rorty's post-modernist culture possible? Rorty would argue that to deny its possibility is a way of saying that there is only one way of describing reality. Implicitly, this position would lead to another denial: that history has many shapes. In the post-modernist culture, one resorts to a "description of description, which the race has come up with so far, hence, the post-philosophical culture would agree with Hegel that philosophy is 'its own time apprehended in thought,'" (Ibid., xi) The post-modernist culture is the era of "culture criticism"; it does not take as its starting point that propositions and beliefs have been shown to be true "once and for all and for all time." Rorty claims in the culture in question, there will be, according to Rorty, wider logical space in expressing communal convictions and hopes that "we shall always need new metaphors, new logical spaces, new jargon, that there will never be a final resting-place for thought ...," (Rorty 1991b: 19).

The conditions for such a culture in the pragmatist conceptual schemes, as a "temporary resting" for specific utilitarian ends, abhor a rigorous argumentation that looks for an absolute criterion which eventually blocks the road of inquiry; such a culture, Rorty claims, will search for 'toeholds' of new initiatives that will help us transcend our acculturations for "our best chance for transcending our acculturation is to be brought up in a culture which prides itself on not being monolithic – on its tolerance for plurality of subcultures and its willingness to listen to neighbouring cultures," (Rorty 1991a: 14) The post-philosophical culture then will abandon the search for some final vocabulary as though we know in advance what we are looking for, (Rorty 1982: xlii).

There are different purposes for describing something; hence the differences in the vocabularies used in descriptions. It is in this light that one will partly understand Rorty's insistence on the contingency of our language: our vocabularies, the tools of description, and the contingency of the human condition itself. Rorty insists that to use universalistic notions as a fulcrum for current moral convictions overlooks our historical contingencies; it is like trying to do the impossible, to look for skyhooks instead of toeholds, (Rorty 1991a: 14). Our venture is a social problem or task, like the quest for a just society; the resolution of a moral dilemma and social conflicts. These are not mathematical problems, but social issues in a contingent world that understands language as a social tool in the light of Wittgenstein, (Rorty 1991b: 61) Rorty is urging that we create ourselves, our vocabularies, and thus can transform our inherited world. Having grasped the fact of the limitedness of our linguistic tools, there will be need for an intellectual reconstruction and openness to listen, according to Rorty, to "irrational irruptions" from outside of the logical space of culture – that is, no source of human experience will be dismissed before hand as irrelevant. The merit of pluralistic society, one can say, is to welcome the suggestions and contributions of all no matter where they come from. Consequently, a pluralistic vision of a post-philosophical culture saves us from the culture of a totalitarian society, Rorty claims.

Furthermore, Rorty accepts the maxim that man is the standard or measure of all things, arguing that "there is no rigorous argument that is not obedient to our own conventions," (Rorty 1982: xlii). In the light of the preceding conviction, Rorty claims that men and women feel themselves finite and have no links to the beyond. He tersely remarks: "Think of human minds as webs of beliefs and desires, of sentential attitudes – webs which continually reweave themselves so as to accommodate new sentential attitudes... All there is to human

self is just that web, (Rorty 1991a:93).” Rorty argues that neither recourse to the Beyond nor to scientific method can solve problems of political and moral choices. He observes that this is not a debate that the pragmatist wants to substitute God or make ethics relative, but only to make us see science and other camps of knowledge as genres of literature that help us cope with the human lot. The Rortian pragmatist strongly believes that the relevance of all projects is in helping us get what we want (See Rorty 1982: xlii); hence Rorty proposes they that issues about God and religion be privatised since he thinks they are irrelevant in his particular vision of social project.

One notices that this way of evaluating culture has some obvious implications for the post-modernist conceptual schemes: it signals in Rorty’s project that “a certain cultural tradition might die out. If this change occurs, one would no longer think of the standard list of Cartesian problems as a *fach*,” (Ibid., 35). It does not mean that the traditional problems are nonsense, Rorty adds. There was a time when neither theology nor religion was questioned, but the discussion shifted from God to nature and man. Rorty wants us to know that “our language is just one more name for the device which is supposed to let us jump the Cartesian gap between mind and its object,” (Rorty 1982: 33). Arguably, Rorty rationalises that the issues of mind-body problem, God and truth – problems inherited from Descartes – will no longer border us; hence he indicates that a post-philosophical culture/institution will show that truth as correspondence will come to be replaced by the idea of truth as what comes to be believed in the course of free and open encounters, (Rorty 1989: 68). Rorty supposes that the hermeneutics of the post-philosophical culture is to listen and participate in the conversation without prejudice of a predetermined foundation. The hope of agreement is never lost as long as the conversation lasts. He writes: “The notion of culture as conversation rather than as a structure erected upon foundations fits well with the hermeneutical notion of knowledge, since getting into a conversation with strangers is like acquiring a new virtue or skill by imitating models is a matter of (*phronesis*) rather than (*episteme*),” (Rorty 1979: 319). Since conversation is a significantly practical tool in the social project, the post-philosophical culture should not lose sight of that sense of community which only impassioned conversation makes possible, (Rorty 1984: 74).

But what will be the fate of philosophers in the new culture? Rorty clearly denies that there is a “metaphysics of experience” as philosophical basis for a criticism of culture. This denial is in line with his post-modernist “distrust of meta-narratives,” (Rorty 1991a: 198). The philosopher’s criticisms of culture, Rorty insists, are not more ‘scientific,’ more ‘fundamental’ or ‘deeper’ than those of labour leaders, literary critics, retire statesmen or sculptors. The philosopher becomes an actor rather than a spectator, whose contribution will have impact on history and contemporary life (Rorty 1982: 87), whose ideas must be tested by their practical and adaptive relevance within community, (See Thayer 1982: 255-259). The post-modernist culture is purely a product of human creation, in which one realises that the creation of new descriptions, new vocabularies, and new genres are essentially human activity. And within this forum, the philosopher or the so-called professional philosopher, in Rorty’s designation, rather than poet, the engineer, and many others, risks being obsolete, if he does not realise that philosophy is just a tool for social project.

How Actually Credible is Rorty’s Post-philosophical Project?

Rorty eloquently opens our vistas to a passionate concern for the literary culture's or philosophy's isolation from common human concerns. There is no doubt that Rorty searches for a condition for living in solidarity in a pluralistic society. It is interesting to see the bold step he takes to look for a non-confrontational way - *conversation* - to live and co-operate mutually in a pluralistic setting.

Rorty's attack on any claim by individuals or groups to dominate under the pretext of a politics, religion, theology, philosophy or privileged knowledge is enlightening. Any person or group that posits a predetermined 'ground' that blocks communion and conversation with others will be doing harm to the community and prolonging the resolution of modern crisis of sense and meaning; hence he suggests that such moral, religious or epistemological grounds are 'better' privatised.

It is legitimate to reason that a philosopher should not isolate himself from the joys and sorrows of his contemporaries. And if he cannot in any way contribute to social project, one can rightly ask of what use is his philosophical knowledge or enterprise. And if a philosopher is closed up in his own discipline and see no need for solidarity or/and collaboration with others in the literary field but takes the sole position of a judge of all under the tribunal of pure reason, it will at once be an intellectual arrogance to claim to possess already all that can be known. Such pretence will hamper intellectual progress and growth in the post-philosophical culture. Progress in knowledge and common solutions are found through interdisciplinary approaches and encounters.

Much insistence on the traditional epistemological problems can distract our attention from man in his social existential setting (here and now) - the problem of social and moral reform: hunger, poverty, suffering, injustice, political instability, a worry, some say, motivated Rorty which he expressed near the end of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Giugnon and Hiley 1990: 339). Furthermore, Rorty's introduction of the notion of contingency of ourselves and of the community gives a vision of the structure of our relationship in mutual accommodation and loyalty. Human beings must not run away from giving a hand in constructing their destiny. Thus, "the pragmatist point of view offers a way of strengthening liberal institutions by encouraging diversity, tolerance and freedom," (Ibid., 340). These are credits, on one hand, that should not be denied Rorty's work.

On the other hand, Rorty sweeps under the carpet some critical issues, which also interest us, and are part of the foundation of our culture. One can maintain, as said above, that the project of a post-philosophical culture is a search for an alternative culture-image not dominated by Kantian and neo-Kantian metaphors. Rorty attacks the Kantian notion of a "complete philosophical" system; hence he proposes an alternative on which morality was 'grounded' on something less controversial and more scientific. Well, one may not accuse Rorty of being very scientific in the sense of clinging to a scientific system but his vision of philosophy as "conversation," claimed to be something less confrontational, where people come to participate, having privatised those notions and convictions which Rorty thinks will upset the conversation, is not consistent in the sense that it does not throw the whole card on the table.

The suggestion to drop certain vocabularies just because they will upset discussion will treat the members of Rorty's utopia as children, who will always be taught what they are supposed to be talking and thinking about. Freedom should also extend to the area of allowing people to choose, and freely express themselves in their own vocabularies, and against the backdrop of their cherished tradition. One has the strong feeling that Rorty marks out some "no-go areas" for his interlocutors and imposes on them only the pragmatist standard, even when he pretends to have no pre-conditions set before hand. Therefore, the political precondition of his post-philosophical culture -- his conversation -- is ideological. The subject matter is limited. We can ask: what kind of people will participate? "Is conversation limited to ironist specialists? In short, what determines the style and content of conversation, and who gets to take part?" (Burrows 1990:323). Rorty has no precise answer to this. His kind of a 'democratic philosophy' does not seem to be democratic enough!

One may not worry so much if Rorty's use of the word 'contingency' leads to relativism understood just as the ability to recognise that one's point of view is one among the many that can be taken up. But if it is a sceptical stand - a counter position against foundationalism - that is, relativism *per se*, then it is equally suspicious. It is also ideological in the sense that contingent beliefs become only the "grounded beliefs." Since, as Giugnon and Hiley rightly criticise, "what counts (in the post-philosophical) as cruelty and injustice is a matter of language that is spoken, to find that a practice is cruel is a matter of re-description rather than of discovery," (Giugnon and Hiley 1990: 354); a call for moral commitment for such a culture is too artificial because it is a matter of playing with contingent vocabularies! There is no root-metaphor or enduring anchor to which one can have prolonged and consistent adherence.

Rorty accepts the saying Plato attributed to Protagoras, through the mouth of Socrates, that "man is the measure of all things." If man is the measure of all things, we must inevitably arrive at the same conclusion drawn by Socrates that leads the proponent of the aforementioned view to the cul-de-sac of ethical and epistemological relativism. Ironically, on this ground, we take it that the rest of mankind has come of age. Rorty can as well privatise his conversation model. No one is more enlightened to tell the other to privatise some of his or her cherished convictions. There is nothing to converse about. People already know what they can do; why must one man impose his views on others since others who are, by their own capabilities, equally informed? There is no need to gather people to engage in conversation because what each man considers right is right, as taught by sophists, whose doctrines Rorty implicitly subscribes to. Rorty's adoption of the Sophist creed argues against what he intends to affirm.

Rorty, one thinks, over reacts in his criticism of universalistic notions when he reduced the self to a mere web of beliefs or Hume's perishing self. For Rorty, there is no standard of what is true or false, and the traditional view of looking at self and morality changes; that the self is not under any moral law. This is too much a reduction, a carry-over from Hume's idea of the self. At least, we know from studies in empirical psychology that motivation is a strong factor in human behaviour. There is no way to rule out certain 'private' motivations of the candidates of Rorty's conversation. This is not all. Human beings also act under certain religious or moral convictions that are not purely selfish; they have the right to express such convictions even when they upset the pragmatist who is afraid of confrontation, and may see the vocabularies outside those he has prejudged as abnormal utterances.

Contrary to Rorty's ideas, it must be insisted that 'sacred history' as a theoretical account of history and culture exists as one of the grand narratives of Western tradition, to which our philosophy owes some of its roots. Rorty's conversational model reads the past as a history of decline; hence he suggests another way of re-reading the past. Again, there is no reason why the theoretical aim in reshaping our present culture cannot be read in ethical-religious terms. After all, even Rorty's reading of the past in terms of decline or decay has some theoretical aims: to usher in a culture dominated by pragmatist ideologies. But why must the rest of us accept Rorty's own ideological reading of tradition!

The pragmatist desire to concentrate largely on the present is not advisable. If the past, future and present are not integrated in the person, who embodies his community values and goals, then the person or community will have to begin afresh every day, every moment; there will be no standards 'reached' since the community responds only to the spur of the moment! Besides, a culture that lacks a spiritual or moral anchor is a judge of itself, and contains the elements of its own disintegration. It needs a moral scrutiny outside of its own self-created fantasy. What models or standards should be used in assessing our achievements today, if we have conserved nothing? Our situation will be no better than the mythical animals that killed their parents in order to be free and died of hunger at dusk, because the hearths were gone with the death of the mothers! Even Rorty's derogation of the contribution of the past is not consistent. The philosophers (Dewey, Wittgenstein and Heidegger) he lauds are relevant, in his consideration, because he thinks they helped in shaping the contemporary world. Thus, his reading of past history is allegedly ideological or on-sided.

A culture built only on a dualistic relationship has not relinquished the power or desire to dominate. Authentic human relationship in which people are seen as collaborators in a social project deserving respect and right, even when they are product of the purported conversation, needs the presence of the 'third,' for one to hold on to anything at all in the so-called contingent setting of our language and community. This 'third' can be a moral agent, a juridical person, God, 'rationality,' persons, and so on who does not need to be (who is not actually) a member of the conversational group. But Rorty would want us to ignore such a fundamental necessity, and let him be the dictator of a discourse whose agenda are solely his own making. Actually, what Rorty asks us to renounce in order to participate in the conversation, in the birth of a post-philosophical culture, is too much a price to pay. In fact, a constant and closer scrutiny of Rorty's conversational model shows that it is another political and intellectual elitism in the cloak of some supposed, value-free conversational-conventional language. There is a genuine need to create conditions for co-existence in a pluralistic society; but such conditions as put forward by Rorty, so far, demand regrettable prices to be paid by the human community. Rorty's conditions for a post-modernist culture are interesting and thought provoking, but they should be treated with cautious optimism.

Works cited

- Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1982). *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays 1972-1980)* Minneapolis: University of

- Minnesota Press.
- Rorty, R. (1984). "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres," in *Philosophy in History*, eds.,
Richard Rorty et al Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1989). *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1991a). *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Paper Volume 1* Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1991b). *Essays on Heidegger and Others: Philosophical Papers Volume 2* Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press.
- Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and Social Hope* London: Penguin Books, 1999,
- Burrows, J. (1990). "Conversational Politics: Rorty's Pragmatist Apology for Liberalism", in
Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond), ed.
Alan R. Malachowski Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guignon, C. B. and Hiley, D. R. (1990), "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality" in
Reading Rorty: Critical Responses to Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (and Beyond), ed.
Alan R. Malachowski Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thayer, H. S. (Ed). (1982). *Pragmatism: The Classic Writings* Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press.
- Graham, G. (1997). *The Shape of the Past: A Philosophical Approach to History* Oxford:
Oxford University Press
- Taylor, C. (2003). "Rorty and Philosophy" in *Richard Rorty* edited by Charles Guignon and David R.
Hiley Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.