

Richard Rorty and the transcendental paradox di Domenico Cortese

Abstracts

Rorty condivide con Derrida la visione del fenomeno linguistico come una dinamica di relazioni che manca di un "centro" interpretativo. Egli ha inoltre in comune con l'autore Francese una concezione dell'esperienza per la quale viene rigettato il concetto classico di *referenza*: il nostro uso del "linguaggio" e la nostra percezione di ciò che chiamiamo "fatti bruti" funzionano come e coincidono con equivalenti sistemi di forze, giochi i cui elementi esistono per il loro riferirsi a certe convenzioni. Tuttavia, un fondamentale quanto sottile disaccordo sorge circa la questione se considerare o meno tale posizione stessa come una sorta di *transcendentalismo*. Da qui, la necessità di analizzare come il neo-pragmatismo Rortiano, sottraendosi dal riconoscere una sua propria inevitabile preferenza interpretativa verso un certo tipo di linguaggio, si sviluppa in una contraddizione e un paradosso. Lo stesso paradosso per il quale, *paradossalmente*, Rorty aveva criticato il *quasi-transcendentalismo* di Derrida.

Rorty shares the view of the linguistic phenomenon with Derrida as a dynamics of relations which lacks an interpretative "centre". He also has a conception of experience in common with the French author whereby the classical concept of *reference* is dismissed: our use of "language" and our perception of what we call "brute facts" function as and coincide with equivalent systems of forces, games whose elements exist because they refer to some conventions. Nevertheless, a disagreement as fundamental as it is slight arises on the question of whether to consider this position itself as a sort of *transcendentalism* or not. Hence, the necessity to analyze how the Rortyan neo-pragmatism, in avoiding an acknowledgement of its own inevitable interpretative preference towards a certain type of language, develops into a contradiction and a paradox. The same paradox for which, *paradoxically*, Rorty had criticized Derrida's *quasi-transcendentalism*.

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Rorty partage avec Derrida l'opinion d'un phénomène linguistique comme dynamique de relations qui manque d'un "centre" d'interprétation. Il partage aussi avec l'auteur français une conception de l'expérience selon laquelle la conception classique de *référence* est rejeté: l'utilisation que nous faisons du "langage" et la perception que nous avons de ce que nous appelons "faites bruts" fonctionnent comme et coïncident avec un système de forces, des jeux dont les éléments existent parce qu'ils se réfèrent à des conventions définies. Cependant, un essentiel aussi bien que léger désaccord se produit sur la question si considérer ou non cette position comme une sorte de *transcendentalisme*. D'où la nécessité d'analyser comment le néo-pragmatisme de

Rorty, évitant de reconnaître sa propre inévitable préférence interprétative pour un certain type de langage, il se développe dans une contradiction et un paradoxe. Le même paradoxe pour lequel, *paradoxalement*, il avait critiqué le *quasi-transcendantalisme* de Derrida.

It is meaningful how the comment by Richard Rorty on the «problem about fictional discourse» in the *Speech Acts theory*¹ seems to recall, at least formally, the argumentative pattern of the criticisms made by Jacques Derrida - in his analysis of Austin's *How to do things with words*² - about the interpretation of "non-serious" and "citational" utterances as *language exceptions*. In order to examine such resemblance, we intend to underline three points in particular.

In the first instance it is appropriate to show how the objection of Derrida to the notion of «citation - (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) - » interpreted as an anomaly of language³ is based on considerations of what the *conditions of success* of an utterance are in general. Those considerations, taking into account the equivalent parasitic structure of *citation* and iteration of any performative utterance⁴, would suggest that maybe a difference of 'status' between an *ordinary* discourse and an "abnormal" one is not given - with specific ethical consequences.

Within a similar argumentative model Rorty - while contesting the way in which Searle 'rearranges' the so called «axiom of existence» in his analysis of fictional and 'real world' talks⁵ - remarks how, while uttering any illocutionary act "in which a definite description is present", «one can successfully refer to something if one can conduct a coherent conversation about it»⁶. This seems to be, for Rorty, the *only* criterion and *condition of success* of a description and, therefore, both «references which entail that what is referred to 'exists'»⁷ and references to fictional characters and object can be - or, more precisely, should be - studied not by wondering «how words relate to the world»⁸, not by assessing the status of their "reality", but by just considering them as equivalent *linguistic games* created for different purposes.

What is plain, so far, is the character of sheer *convention* which both authors read as coincident with the existence of any linguistic meaning. And in both cases it is basically the feature of *relationality* and the rejection of any character of *intrinsicity* of a meaning which the functioning of a conventional game implies.

Both Rorty and Derrida employ a telling lexicon to display that feature: while the former talks about language «in terms of use rather than meaning», as «just a form of life in a Wittgensteinian sense»⁹ and about words as «being counters used in games of assertion and denial, where any game can be played as long as there are conventions to tell one what moves to make»¹⁰ the latter, to depict the same condition of working, the same “essence” of the existence of an institution like language, formulates rhetorical questions like «could a performative utterance succeed [...] if it were not identifiable as *conforming* with a an iterable model, if it were not identifiable in some way as a “citation?»¹¹.

Austin, Derrida says, finally excludes the classical, *representationalist* concept of communication as “transport of a content of sense” in favor of a vision of language as «communicating a force through the impetus [impulsion] of a mark»¹². In fact, as in Rorty’s quote of the notion of language-games, for which words are not something representing an external reality but forces and tools which *constitute and transform* reality by a relation with other tools¹³, what Derrida notes is the necessity to dismiss the classical sense of “reference”: «the performative does not have its referent outside of itself or, in any event, before and in front of itself. It does not describe something that exists outside of language and prior to it. It produces or transforms a situation, it effects»¹⁴. But although he acknowledges this merit in Austin, Derrida asserts that the theory of performative missed recognizing what the conditions of functioning of such system of citations leads to. A relations of forces as iterable – *self-decontextualizing* - marks, in fact, brings about the impossibility of talking about a *pure transmission* of an ‘original’ intention of the speaker. Given the citational nature of all language, in fact, any iteration of an expression in a different context is subject to an inevitable loss of the talker’s “ordinary”, original sense - as a citation made by an actor on a stage¹⁵.

We could say that in their papers both Rorty and Derrida are interested in denouncing an illegitimate “difference of status” which is hypothesized in formulations of the *Speech Acts Theory*: a difference between a *more real* and *original* level of language and a *derived* one. That presupposition would manifest itself in Searle through his fundamental *realism* - «Searle has defended all along a basic realism, resting not just on respect for the facts of how the world is and how it works, but also on a view to the effect that realism and the *correspondence theory of truth* are essential presuppositions of any sane philosophy»¹⁶ - and in Austin through his urging on the consideration of an «ordinary language» while excluding an «abnormal one»¹⁷. The structure of the linguistic phenomenon that Rorty and Derrida try to illustrate -its being a system of elements or, more exactly,

forces which act in equivalent games of relations¹⁸ – would allow us to refuse such distinctions of level. Nevertheless, despite what we could call, apparently, a surprising affinity, it is really by looking into an issue like the possibility of arguing about an *essence*, a fundamental *structure* of the linguistic phenomenon that we can find the most acute and key disagreement between the position of the two authors.

We need to consider, in fact, how Derrida goes so far as to denote the notion with which he identifies the inevitable dynamics of relations, the differences and references to something else which forms any meaning – the *différance* – as a «*quasi*-transcendental»¹⁹ 'concept' – namely, a kind of "concept" that transcends any single signifier and meaning but that is implied by all determinations of meaning, whilst Richard Rorty «believes that the attempt to determine a supposed essence – or, we can say, *origin* – of language would be something which really makes no sense»²⁰ and cannot help but interpret it simply as a danger to a philosophy of pure "pragmatic conversation"²¹. In fact, he writes that «the fact that language is a play of differences, as well as an instrument useful in acquiring knowledge, gives us no reason to think that words like *différance* and *trace* can do to, or for, philosophy what Heidegger failed to accomplish with his own magic words — *Sein*, *Ereignis*, and so forth»²². Our main aim will be, therefore, to try to understand the deep reasons of that apparent contradiction. For to concentrate ourselves on the root of that disagreement, once we have recognized a significant familiarity of purpose in some of the most analytical texts of Rorty and Derrida, may lead us to state whether and how a conciliation is possible – and if it would be really philosophically relevant or only an adjustment of some linguistic misunderstanding. And such an attempt of conciliation would involve an important question: is it possible that what Rorty, in the wake of Quine, disapproves of as being a «foundationalist attempt to derive our theories – our way of assessing reality – from a more basic source of knowledge, i.e. from 'privileged representations'»²³ could be considered similar or coincident with what Derrida calls «*logocentric attitude*»²⁴?

II

Rorty's criticism of an approach which desires to search the essential and fundamental way in which we are "linked" to the world holds a double importance. That tendency is contemplated both, as a historical concern, as a peculiar feature of the "tradition" from which the American philosopher claims to be an heir and, as a theoretical concern, while clarifying

the reason for which to base a theory on the idea of an *essence* of language is, for Rorty, useless and distracting. He equates several authors – like Husserl and Russel - in the attempt to achieve the same Kantian goal, «to give sense to the idea of “theory of knowledge” as a specifically philosophical discipline»²⁵. When «Russel discovered “logical form” and Husserl discovered the “purely formal” aspect of the world which remained when the non-formal had been “bracketed”»²⁶ they both express the need to outline a «distinction between what is “given” and what is “added by the mind”, or between the “contingent” (because influenced by what is given) and the “necessary” (because entirely “within” the mind and under its control)»²⁷. Once this distinction between something which is intrinsic in the structure/essence of our ideas/language and what is an empirical and ‘external’ data is accepted the aim of any philosophy becomes to state what is the most *correct*, the most *rational* and the least deceiving picture of reality – and, therefore, the most *suitable* behavior to face it – which we can achieve.

In particular, we find the way in which Rorty evaluates the utility and the convenience of what he called the *linguistic turn*²⁸ to be very interesting. In one of his articles in which he is absorbed in dealing with different interpretations of the two main works of Wittgenstein, Rorty draws the reader’s attention to the difference which exists between his position and the position of those whom he calls “Wittgensteinian therapists” – like Thomas Rickett and Warren Goldfarb²⁹. These latter «take seriously the suggestion of Wittgenstein that what philosophers do “is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use”»³⁰ For them «the importance of the linguistic turn lies in helping us to realize that philosophers have failed to give meaning to the words they utter»³¹. They seem to accept, in substance, the proposition of Ayer for which «analytic philosophy was concerned only with clarifying the underlying logic of language, and on the other hand, metaphysics, which was to be exposed as nonsense, and hence eliminated»³². Consequently, «the therapists take the last pages of the *Tractatus* very seriously indeed»³³.

Those who are called “Wittgensteinians therapists” by Rorty agree with Wittgenstein that any problems we find ourselves dealing with, substantially, derive from some misinterpretation of our form of language. When we do not target the ordinary usage, the “correct” use of our words we ineluctably end up employing a metaphysical, inept, empty language. The therapists in fact, Rorty goes on to say, «do their best to tie them [the last pages of the *Tractatus*] in with the metaphilosophical portions of *Philosophical Investigations*»³⁴. Some of them, in fact, associate many passages of the *Tractatus* and of the *Philosophical Investigations* in their

proposing an alternative view of what we should intend for “nonsense sentences”, in contrast with Frege or Carnap. Wittgenstein, in James Conant’s opinion, would not believe that «there were such things as “syntactical rules.”»³⁵ In effect, «when Wittgenstein is confronted with an utterance that has no clearly discernible place in a language game, he does not assume that he can parse the utterance; rather, he invites the speaker to explain how she is using her words, to connect them with other elements of the language-game in a way that displays their meaningfulness [...]. When Wittgenstein criticizes an utterance as nonsensical, he aims to expose, not a defect in the words themselves, but a confusion in the speaker’s relation to her words – a confusion that is manifested in the speaker’s failure to specify a meaning for them»³⁶. Rorty also declares that he has been convinced by Conant and Witherspoon that even the *Tractatus* itself was written by its author in order to get its *sense* not by “understanding its sentences”, but rather by understanding “the author” himself, «and the kind of activity in which he is engaged»³⁷.

The American philosopher agrees with this latter reading of Wittgenstein - which shows how, into the bargain, the Wittgensteinian holism for which «to know what inscriptions and sounds mean is just to know about the various ways in which they are used in relation to other inscriptions and sounds»³⁸ has a lot to share with a Derridian conception of syntax and meaning³⁹.

But – Rorty seems to maintain a little later – it is really a partial and weak interpretation of Wittgenstein’s operation by the “therapists” that makes his philosophical interests and the interests of the latter to diverge. It would indeed be the notion of sense seen as the result of the *understanding of a kind of activity* – of certain type of game – which would bring us to leave any effort of “elucidation” in the sense of *clarification of the form of language* we use. That notion would show us how to try to «explode illusions of sense from within» and to «find a way of altering one’s inner state»⁴⁰ - so as to fix any misunderstanding of one’s use of language, as the “therapists” intend – would be an attitude which would hold little philosophical interest or, even, a deceptive attitude. The motivation is easy to grasp. In fact, when the “therapists” point out even only the concept of what would be an “illusion” of sense, they are just missing the most significant ‘ethical’ outcome which can be drawn from a view which analyses language as getting its meanings from several different typologies of ‘games’.

Let us see what Rorty considers this to be. Soon after distancing himself from the project of the therapists he reminds us that, once one accepts the refuse of what we call an essential ‘syntax’ of language, there would be no sense to «draw a clear line between the cognitively meaningful

and the cognitively meaningless»⁴¹. Basically, what Rorty does is to create a discourse which concerns the danger and the fear of the possibility of unfairly discriminating certain kinds of language-games, of conversations whose sense cannot be irrelevant, given the differences between various contexts and historical periods. If we have to read the theory of Wittgenstein while forgetting any “Carnapian” attitude, we have necessarily to assert that «when we are unable to read off intentional properties from physical inscriptions and sounds, this is only because we are unable to place the inscriptions and sounds within a wider context»⁴².

Rorty makes us conscious of the always present threat of taking into consideration values and criteria of significance of a certain context-situated theory/language-game while judging them by means of the criteria drawn from *our* context of pragmatic needs, histories and values. For it would really be our context or our type of *conversation* that would determine the building of any of our theories about the essence and the structure of language. Therefore, it would be partial and unjust to assess the quantity or the quality of *sense* of a language-game by submitting it to schemes of a peculiar vision of the nature, the purpose or the functioning of language, because the latter would reflect only what would be the specific needs of a specific pragmatic situation-conversation. Such an attitude would provoke a tendency to make (arbitrary) *adjustments* of certain kinds of ‘questions’ with the intent of getting a presumed ‘greater order’ and a smaller ‘confusion’.

This threat proves itself to be real even within the text of Wittgenstein himself. Rorty holds in fact that the holistic notion of language as an *activity* «regulated and formed by different rules depending on different ‘forms of life’»⁴³ formulates, on one hand, arguments «that anticipate, complement, and reinforce Quine’s and Davidson’s criticisms of the language–fact distinction» - as we said, one of the distinctions which traces the Kantian attempt to draw an exact theory of knowledge. On the other hand, it is evident how such a conception of language – which carries with it the necessity and the desire of making it well distinguished from any traditional or ‘metaphysical’ conception and activity – leads Wittgenstein to establish a clear division between what would be the “everyday use of words” - «what philosophers are out of touch with»⁴⁴ - and the “misuse of language”, that we undoubtedly need to reform.⁴⁵

It is interesting to grasp that in Rorty’s illustration of the consequences of the philosophy of Wittgenstein we can identify a ‘double’ function which is ascribed to Wittgenstein’s thesis, not necessarily attributable to the author’s ‘intention’.

This is the first ‘role’ of this thesis: simply to make us aware of the inevitability of seeing language as “social practice”. To make us conscious of

the inevitability of the holistic view which thinks «of our uses of words, and of our beliefs, as just worldly objects in constant casual interaction with other worldly objects»⁴⁶ which, therefore, draw their sense just from this interaction. This function is the ability, already recalled, to anticipate the arguments of Quine and Sellars for the «social and conversational justification of belief», of meaning, which therefore does not need the highlighting of some special kinds of «relations between ideas or between words and objects» in order to be justified⁴⁷.

The second side of the intellectual function of Wittgenstein's thesis seems to be, however, to make us see it as acting like a sort of 'pragmatic device', like a certain strategy aimed to help a thinker – a human – placed in our philosophical and cultural context to choose his behavior or language-game according to its utility. A device, in any case, which really *because of its proper theoretical sense* and structure would not demand, paradoxically, to hold a greater ontological value than other schemes of behavior and language-games arisen in other cultural periods.

This is perhaps the main reason of the distance which marks the position of Rorty from Wittgenstein and the therapists. Rorty's first reaction to the interpretation made by the therapists – namely, their application of the discovery of a certain sense and structure of language for the purpose of cleaning linguistic confusions - is in fact, as we have hinted, to establish that a use of the notion of language as "activity practice" which is oriented to «explode illusions of sense» would be only a matter of «self-transformation», of «altering one's inner state»⁴⁸. It would be again, in other words, an application of a certain "transcendental" point of view which would have the 'narrowed' effect of just changing someone's conception of what is meaningful. Nevertheless, the pragmatist's goal is the 'broader' and more important attempt of «creating a better human future»⁴⁹. And in order to do that, a conception of language cannot prefer and cannot recommend any peculiar sense of language, structure or language-game except by taking into account its "utility" – and not its 'intelligibility' – within a certain context⁵⁰.

With these words, and by showing the circularity of this latter sentence, we are trying to extrapolate from the text of Rorty what would be, *pragmatically*, a recourse to a 'transcendental' approach. Given the *equivalent* ontological dignity and "relativity" of any conception of language as linguistic game – Rorty shares Quine's conviction whereby any theory and *universe of discourse* can be interpreted only as 'parasitic' of another universe of discourse⁵¹ - how can we discern a situation or a context where it is operating a philosophical attitude, a philosophical interpretation of the world which assumes a «notion of philosophy of language as first philosophy» and «a notion of philosophy as having foundations»⁵² from a

situation where we can identify a pragmatic interpretation of reality? Are we not, in any case, up against some *total interpretations* of the world which are, to use Rorty's lexicon, equivalent «voices in the conversation of mankind»⁵³, equivalent constructions of relations and references to other «networks of terms and predicates»⁵⁴, constructions «which center on one topic rather than another at some given time not by dialectical necessity but as result of various things happening elsewhere in the conversation[...]»⁵⁵? How can we distinguish between a *need in mankind of a certain kind of conversation* which would be coincident with a "transcendental" attitude and a need which is not or is less involved in it? Is it not consequential to the fact that a certain kind of conversation assumes "one topic rather than another at some given time as result of various things happening" that any typology of discourse coincides with a "privilege of certain types of 'representations'" rather than others? And that that typology of discourse tends to assess reality by means of "criteria" which are just those kinds of 'representations', that is of *meanings*?

Rorty agrees that a pragmatic difference between a "foundationalist" thought and a discourse which prefers a mere 'conversation' cannot be made in terms of different quality of sense, clarity or meaning. As we said by recalling a certain «second side of the intellectual function of Wittgenstein's thesis», for Rorty *any* typology of language is in that sense intrinsically equivalent: «[...] The language game in question is one that Heidegger deliberately and self-consciously created. It is utterly implausible to think that Heidegger might have been led, by a process of elucidation, to find himself "confused about his relation to his own words." Like Descartes, Locke, Kant, Newton, and Einstein, he gave a technical sense to familiar terms, and invented neologisms, hoping thereby to expand our linguistic repertoire in ways that would bear fruit»⁵⁶.

Once no essential answer can be given to the question "what is philosophy?"⁵⁷ or, at most, once its function is read as that of being a mere «cultural genre»⁵⁸, the consequential equivalence of "pragmatic sense"⁵⁹ – in the sense of any language-game owning an equivalent dignity of sense as being just the expression of pragmatic questions - which we have to confer on any interpretation of the world leads us to assert that, in the text of Rorty, the difference we are debating about can be clarified only by examining the justification which is given by the author for any intellectual and practical choice.

This justification is, obviously, the one concerning the mere *utility* of a type of thought: taking into account only this factor would make a decision to be based on 'conversational' and 'pragmatic' criteria and not on what he calls "privileged representations". In the end, «the characteristic idea of

philosophical pragmatism is that ideas and practices should be judged in terms of their usefulness, workability, and practicality and that these are the criteria of their truth, rightness and value»⁶⁰. We have seen that, eventually, what Wittgenstein can suggest to “pragmatic Wittgenstenians” is that one can only «distinguish more useful from less fruitful ways of speaking, and thus better scientific or philosophical theories from worse theories»⁶¹. It seems to be the pure act of judging only by the usefulness that would convert any theory – from being a ‘transcendental’ position - into a mere pragmatic “conversation of mankind”.

Yet, we find here a last tangle which needs to be unravelled. We need to ask ourselves about the possibility that such a judging act itself, and its products, would depend on and be conditioned by a previous “transcendental” point of view which Rorty cannot help but assume. In other words, it is necessary to investigate the ‘operative’ relation and the inevitable interference between the two sides of the function of the “thesis” about what we should mean with “language”, which we have drawn from Rorty’s dialogue with the Wittgensteinian heritage. Namely between the consideration of *any* ‘point of view’/language-game as an *equivalent* sense construction and social practice (since each of them gets its sense and practical use from a different context) and, on the other hand, the “more basic” ‘point of view’ about language seen as an *holistic construction* of tools and objects equivalent to other objects and as *social practice*.

Can we perceive, inside the texts of Rorty and his concrete ethical proposals, the fear that the previous, general intellectual consideration of that ‘basic’ point of view has already altered, confined and influenced in some way the range of available choices of language-games which the author decides to further as suitable for our historical and political context?

III

In order to find out how much the sense of Rorty’s conception of language and of the “quasi-transcendentalism” of Derrida’s *différance at the Origin* resemble one another, although the American philosopher distanced himself from the latter so manifestly, we should be interested in understanding whether the danger Rorty felt in considering philosophical positions like Derrida’s could be also located, by assuming paradoxically the sight of Rorty himself, inside a simple pragmatist behavior, despite all ‘intentions’ of the American philosopher.

In order to evaluate the concrete potential usefulness which is inherent to the ethical outcome of a pragmatist's works, we should ask ourselves whether there can be a boundary between:

1-what we can consider an elucidation of what our use of language in the end is, so that we can allegedly base our behavior just on the 'utility' of our language-games and not on other external criteria, and

2- what we can consider a "clarification of the form of language", which would coincide with an *a priori* - "unfair" - privilege of *certain* kinds of syntax or - as a pragmatist would surely prefer - certain areas of language-games in spite of others.

For we cannot deny, in first place, that Rorty's pragmatist route led him to explicitly privilege a particular "area" of language-games present in our historical-political context, specifically the 'area' he incarnates in the figure of the *liberal ironist*⁶².

He coherently defines the *ironist* as one who considers her arguments and her vocabulary as different descriptions or re-description of the world aimed toward practical goals, rather than the fruit of a research toward some fundamental logic of our language and reality. An ironist «hopes that by the time she has finished using old words in new senses, not to mention introducing brand-new words, people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words. So the ironist thinks of logic as ancillary to dialectic, whereas the metaphysician thinks of dialectic as a species of rhetoric, which in turn is a shoddy substitute for logic»⁶³. The «culture of liberalism» is also declared as «one which was enlightened, secular, through and through. It would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinized world or a divinized self»⁶⁴. Our intention is obviously not to open a political debate, but rather to notice how a rate of potential harms - due to the privilege given to certain philosophical 'attitudes' and 'language-games' - is present, in an equivalent way - "structurally" - , in a 'mere pragmatist' position.

For this purpose, can we by any chance explicitly show or demonstrate, by quoting examples of current and recent events and studies, that «liberal societies of our century»⁶⁵ have caused or have been causing specific harm, "unsuitable" situations between people, unfair political decisions, imbalanced rapports between groups of persons, or economical shortages? This would be a too heavy an aim for this work. We can, though, by proposing a different interpretation of the concrete attitudes Rorty talks about, make a consideration about their working and their *structure*.

We can notice first of all that, on a *practical* level, what Rorty opposes to a «divinized world or a divinized self» is a world in which men, instead of acting with the purpose of achieving some 'general values', act

while they «are able to recognize the contingency of the vocabulary in which they state their highest hope»⁶⁶. This clear distinction seems to be the concrete upshot of the contrast between positions which claim to demonstrate the existence of a fundamental structure and of «statements capable of being justified to all those who are uncorrupted»⁶⁷ and positions which are not obsessed by “metaphysical needs”⁶⁸. A man who is member of a liberal society should not act and, therefore, have beliefs, because he is persuaded of their Truth and «absolute validity»⁶⁹, but rather, pragmatically, he should «be content to call “true” whatever the upshot of the worldly encounters turns out to be»⁷⁰.

The intrinsic dynamics of formation and the ‘nature’ of the results of such “encounters” reveal themselves to be, using the lexicon of the texts we have surveyed so far, the dynamics of an encounter between «an ‘old’ and a ‘new’ vocabulary»⁷¹. And by taking into account «language as a historical contingency»⁷² - and historical contingency as changing languages, we could add – we are free from the traditional tendency of considering any transformation or ‘evolution’ of values as a kind of dialectic or stream of meanings guided by a ‘rational’ explanation, intention or sense. As Rorty points out, no criterion is able to warrant any general, ‘philosophical’ or ethical justification for a decision, given the total – ‘empirical’ – contingency of the encounters between language-games. It becomes impossible to state whether a mutation of vocabulary is a reasonable persuasion or a forced cultural imposition⁷³. There is no method for deciding between these two alternatives – *any individual could be able to decide, and be ‘justified’ in deciding, in the former or the latter sense.*

In order to describe the general feature which a (liberal) community and its individuals should own, Rorty says, «if we accept the opposition between reason and passion, or reason and will, we liberals will be begging the question against ourselves. It behooves those of us who agree with Freud and Berlin that we should not split persons up into reason and passion to drop, or at least to restrict the use of, the traditional distinction between “rational conviction” and “conviction brought about by causes rather than reasons»⁷⁴. The restriction Rorty talks about is the device of considering “rationality”, what is “reasonable” and warranted, only as typical and unique of *one* certain language-game/vocabulary: «the best way of restricting its use is to limit the opposition between rational and irrational forms of persuasion to the interior of a language game, rather than to try to apply it to interesting and important shifts in linguistic behavior»⁷⁵.

The criterion of “reasonability” simply gets its sense inside a certain circumscribed vocabulary: the same term or concept, in effect, can assume a different weight and assessment inside different contexts and language-

games and, above all, in no way can we discover a general method or scheme which would be capable of describing, predicting, or creating a general *sharing* of sense between the various contexts, simply because that would suppose the existence of a «standpoint outside the particular historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are presently using»⁷⁶. Any supposition of a method of this sort could not help but recall what Rorty would denote as a “metaphysical” force, a force which would own the capacity of “balancing”, of “making harmonized” values of various contexts from some “outside standpoint”.

The ideal pragmatist figure seems to be drawn by the author with the purpose of respecting – by definition - and being aware of all the above-mentioned theoretical premises. To sum up, the citizens of his liberal utopia «would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community. They would be liberal ironists»⁷⁷. And what the contingency of his time persuaded Rorty to assess as the “pragmatically best” system to live in is Western liberalism: «He grants a special privilege to the Western liberal democratic community - this privilege is what he refers to as 'liberal ethnocentrism'. If liberals acknowledge that they can only work by their own lights, Rorty believes that it follows that they should recognize that liberal democracy is the best possible form of government»⁷⁸.

For a “pragmatist” all this preference is based only on an «evaluations of facts»⁷⁹. And, apparently, such an “evaluation of facts” gets its *legitimacy* and its *authority* from the assertion of certain structures of the formation, transformation and validity of our meanings and values. The awareness and statement of such fundamental dynamics and *structure* - the empirical and contingent relation of different language-games which constitute different contexts - is the basic argument from which we can visualize the necessity of assessing the suitability of a style of culture only by the efficacy we are able to identify in it, in its current and contingent events. Nevertheless, as we noticed, the “pragmatist” rejects any commitment which could dimly resemble a type of “transcendental” attitude: «I want to illustrate the difference between taking a standard philosophical problem (or cluster of interrelated problems such as free will, selfhood, agency, and responsibility) and asking, on the one hand, "What is its essence? To what ineffable depths, what limit of language, does it lead us? What does it show us about being human?" and asking, on the other hand, "What sort of people would see these problems? What vocabulary, what image of man, would produce such problems? Why, insofar as we are gripped by these problems, do we see them as deep rather than as *reducciones ad absurdum* of a vocabulary? What

does the persistence of such problems show us about being twentieth-century Europeans?"»⁸⁰.

Rorty considers his analysis, which we have called "structural", as a kind of "becoming conscious" of the inevitability of dropping any theorization of essences in favor of more "local" questions which would help to assess the utility of contingent facts and situations. And yet we have to notice that this would-be "local" assessment can only originate from and can only be underpinned by a *general* point of view, a *general* interpretation of the world or, to better say, a general idea of language-game. Whatever range Rorty confers to his analysis of language, "transcendental" or not, this analysis turns out to coincide with an indication toward a general attitude/scheme of behavior, the "one" which sums up, "includes" all different contexts in which one operates and carries oneself 'as when' he considers any communication «to require no more than agreement to use the same tools to pursue shared needs»⁸¹.

This attitude/language-game, which Rorty's position proposes, has *necessarily* to be described "in general". It cannot go into depth and specify a clear content in its pragmatic questions, answers and practical rules. We could say that a pragmatist's position has "by definition" to be formulated *in general*: for it is intrinsic in such a position that «any criterion of "reasonability" of an assertion simply gets its sense inside a certain *circumscribed vocabulary*: the same term or concept can assume a different weight and assessment inside different contexts».

82

The absence of a dominant theoretical explanation, which could conduct us to schematize the way in which a human considers a choice 'reasonable', makes it impossible to formulate in advance the *content* of the questions a pragmatist typically asks himself: «what sort of people would see these problems? What vocabulary, what image of man, would produce such problems? Why, insofar as we are gripped by these problems, do we see them as deep rather than as reductions ad absurdum of a vocabulary? Etc..». To prematurely formulate to whom exactly that "we" refers to, to specify in what sense we are "gripped" by some problems and what exactly these problems are, would mean to outline the figure of the liberal individual by the feature of just a *peculiar* vocabulary. Much less could we give those questions their answers in advance.

We cannot help but notice a *paradox* in the intentions of Rorty. Such intentions are basically to criticize the search of an essence of language, an order and a logic which could be recognized throughout our experience so that we are able to arrange a "general theory". For this "general theory" would not be capable of taking into account *all nuances, all necessities, all intentions which form all various and single contexts taking place "beneath"*

the application of a general order. Such “application” would provoke suitable and unsuitable consequences, according to the peculiar single situation it is going to deal with. For instance, «those who speak the old language and have no wish to change, those who regard it as a hallmark of rationality or morality to speak just that language, will regard as altogether irrational the appeal of the new metaphors – the new language game which the radicals, the youth, or the avant-garde are playing. The popularity of the new ways of speaking will be viewed as a matter of “fashion” or “the need to rebel” or “decadence.»⁸². A general, ideal schematization of the functions of language cannot necessarily fit the specific and ‘existential’ needs of any individual context or event which it claims to include.

But, in order to do that, Rorty has to put the individual of the liberal community in a sort of *ideal* position, where she can put some ideal pragmatic questions from within the *general* and ideal disposition which claims that «there is no pragmatic difference, no difference that makes a difference, between “it works because it’s true” and “it’s true because it works”»⁸³.

To recall a question we had placed earlier, it could be the case that it is not possible to draw a boundary between «what we can consider an elucidation of what our use of language in the end is, so that we can allegedly base our behavior just on the ‘utility’ of our language-games» and «what we can consider a “clarification of the form of language” which would coincide with an *a priori* - “unfair” - privilege of certain kinds of syntax or language-games in spite of others».

For what we cannot help but wonder, in fact, is if Rorty, in his proposition of an interpretation of the world/language game, has considered a *structural* risk inherent in any proposal of a general typology of society, behavior, culture or language-game. That is, the risk of really seeing our very “ideal intentions” lost and misunderstood within the innumerable and indefinite individual contexts across which it is “spread”. In other words, the risk inherent in the fact that a pragmatic and liberal attitude and situation does not exist *except within and as coincident with different individual contexts*, orders, idealizations, logics, or language-games each carrying their own inevitably “privileged representations” with them.

This is a fact which would make any “intention” impossible not to be altered and transformed in something else each time “it” and its “effects” are at work within a different individual context/vocabulary. When we talk about “intentions” we mean everything can be summed up under terms such as meanings, values, beliefs, needs, wishes, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ intentions (here intended in a ‘moral’ account) for which one does something: any little shade of elements which can ultimately determine the communal utility of a context.

What Rorty needs to suppose on the sly, we believe, when he *further*s a figure for whom «true sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to worry about what "makes" it true»⁸⁴ is a kind of “ideal intention” which could be applied to any individual changing context, a ‘good intention’ which is in any case able to decide on the most useful choice for the total context, the intention of the ideal pragmatist. The big risk, in this case, is to place oneself in the presumed safer area, or even ‘ground’, of a general, ideal, or ‘higher’ attitude: the area of the “non-representationalist but pragmatist’s questions”, thanks to which one can definitely get nearer a greater ‘suitability’ of the total situation.

The possibility of such ‘greater fairness’ in recommending a certain kind of ideal figure, culture and (non)structure of language and knowledge, would depend on the possibility of assuming an ideal and good intention which would avoid its otherwise ineluctable alteration – or, more precisely, its being “originally altered”. This alteration would divert any choice towards being an expression of peculiar judgments, meanings, ‘bad/good intentions’ and needs at any time; it would make any choice be an expression of a particular single reason/context⁸⁵. *Really the same failure* which we noted can equivalently occur when we assume a general theory of reality/language - like that of Wittgenstein, Kant, Searle – to represent the essential structure of reality. That is the danger because of which, in the end, we agree with the skepticism of Rorty toward Wittgenstein’s notion of “everyday use of language” – as opposed to a “confused” and “metaphysical” one – and toward Searle’s *speech acts* rules for their success and their ‘relation to the world’. There we can perceive the danger of putting ourselves, by means of a philosophical and theoretical justification, on a safer, “fairer ground”, a privileged area of attitude without taking into account that its alleged ‘reason’ and ideal scheme-of-reality would concretely coincide, in its worldly *applications* and “impositions”, with *innumerable little «encounters between language-games» which can give rise to useful, ‘more suitable’ individual contexts as well as ‘less suitable’ ones* - «no criterion is able to warrant any general, ‘philosophical’, ethical justification for a decision[...] there is no method to decide between these two alternatives [persuasion or a forced cultural imposition], any individual could be able to decide, and be ‘justified’ in deciding, in the former or the latter sense».

IV

What we recalled about the inevitable dispersion and alteration of what we summarized with the term «intentions» is, in effect, a reference

toward the criticism made by Derrida toward the *speech acts theory* of Austin and Searle. We could now ideally come back to the start of the present paper by saying that *it is meaningful* that such danger coming from a sort of “transcendental” attitude, such as that which we have just described, is densely discussed in the work by Derrida (*Limited Inc.*) which we recalled then.

We noticed that “surprising affinity” between the *condition of success of formation of sense* of a sentence stated by Rorty and Derrida: both of them suggest the necessity for a *meaning* of being an element which gets its value in a *conventional* and *relational* way – for any scientific, aesthetic or ethical feature exists only as relational in a changing environment⁸⁶. These two characters indicate the impossibility of “drawing out” from experience any general and “more rational” scheme to assess reality independently from single contexts. We now just want to shed a light on how the text by Derrida, while talking about such character of *relationality*, proves itself to be in a sense more *extreme* than what the proposal and the intentions of Rorty seem to concede.

In the central pages of *Limited Inc.* and in its *afterword*, the relational character of the sense of utterance is discussed by Derrida to specify the danger which would result from the theory of Searle - the danger of assuming a certain ideal ‘reason’ and bunch of rules to assess the effectiveness of language. In fact, for Derrida to assume that «[would mean] tantamount to state, in a normative or prescriptive manner, that towards which language ought to tend»⁸⁷ and to «reproduce, under the guise of *describing* it in its ideal purity, the given ethical conditions of a given ethics»⁸⁸.

To prevent such danger in the best way possible, we should become aware of the dynamics of dispersion and *iteration* – coincident with the character of *relationality* in changing contexts - which forms the meaning of an intention and which allows this latter to be “effective” in a community. Such dynamics makes it impossible - for the sense which is ‘carried’ by the intention - to spread over linear and coherent contexts-vocabularies. The ‘force’ of an original intention, just in the act of being uttered, is already transformed in something else by the different events-contexts within which it is working: «would a performative utterance be possible if a citational doubling [doubleure] did not come to split and dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event?»⁸⁹.

This impossibility to rest on a ‘safer’, linear and privileged “area of language” in which «encounters between language-games» do not continue to create different suitable and unsuitable events-contexts is the consequence of the *relational structure* of any meaning. As Derrida writes, «[the] essential absence of intending the actuality of utterance, this structural

unconsciousness, if you like, *prohibits any saturation of the context*»⁹⁰. From that we can go on to state that any general rule for the success of performative is unnecessary and unsuitable.

Elsewhere Derrida called *dissemination*⁹¹ the *nature of the sense* as relentlessly changing in single events-contexts and «hyperbolite généralisée»⁹² his habit to *radically* reject the possibility to lie on the integrity – we can say ‘on the existence’ - of a theory and of a concept if only it shows the risk of losing its – if ever owned - original sense in different innumerable single events.

We noticed that perhaps Rorty missed calculating that risk. We now allow ourselves to interpret such shortcoming as a consequence of the lack of an essentially more *radical* and *structural* attitude in analyzing the nature of language and language-games, even more once considered that the conclusion of Derrida, even if argued through a different lexicon, seemed to be *implicit* in the texts of Rorty, as we saw.

Rorty tried to prevent the same danger Derrida perceived by reading the theory of Austin and Searle, but his fear of the possibility to «draw a clear – and unfair - line between the cognitively meaningful and the cognitively meaningless»⁹³ manifested itself in him in the reasoned refusal to confer any type of *direction*, *method* or *seriousness* to philosophy – including Derrida’s criticism of *logocentrism* - which might coincide with a preference of a ‘local’ language-game and privileged area of sense, privileged local kinds of ‘philosophical’ needs, wishes, tensions or struggles⁹⁴.

But, paradoxically, that refusal was only illusory, as we saw. For the *structural* risk to cause harm and ‘misunderstandings’ which *one* can diagnose within the various encounters between local reasons which form any application of a typical *pragmatist’s questions* and liberal behavior unveils that Rorty’s escape from privileging a certain structure of the world and a certain language-game ends up being itself a privilege of a *certain* structure and ‘point of view’. A certain structure of language and ‘area of sense’ which, once privileged, cannot help generating the same structural potential of risk as any privileged particular structure and “reason of the world”⁹⁵ does.

What is more, we can now quote Derrida and say that «that risk is an internal and positive condition of possibility»⁹⁶: the condition of the construction of any language, discussion or ‘language-game’. It is because of that that we ultimately find it is equivalent to maintain that Rorty inevitably fell in a “transcendental” attitude by trying to avoid it himself – signaling, therefore, a conception of language as an inevitable dialectic between transcendental attitudes – and to maintain that, in the end, Rorty always

needed a basic *principle* upon which to build his texts, but the dread of *explicitly* recognizing it and its consequences was intrinsic to such a principle.

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¹ RORTY R., *Consequences of pragmatism*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1982. Pp. 118-223.

² J. DERRIDA, *Limited Inc*, tr., Samuel Weber, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988 [1977]. Pp. 11-21

³ Ivi, p.17

⁴ Ibididem

⁵ See R. RORTY, *Consequences of pragmatism*, pp. 118-223 and J. Searle, *Speech Acts – An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969.

⁶ R. FREADMAN, *Seumas Miller*, *Re-Thinking Theory: A Critique of Contemporary Literary Theory and an Alternative Account*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, p.221.

⁷ Ibidem, Inverted commas are ours.

⁸ R. RORTY, *Consequences of pragmatism*, p. 119.

⁹ R. CARR, *Rorty, Metaphor, and Language Games*, *Macalester Journal of Philosophy*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 5., 2010, p. 2. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/philol/vol5/iss1/5>.

¹⁰ R. RORTY, *Consequences of pragmatism*, p. 119.

¹¹ J. DERRIDA, *Limited Inc*, p. 18.

¹² Ivi, p. 13.

¹³ See, for instance, R. RORTY, *Dewey between Hegel and Darwin*, in R. Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 290-306. («[Dewey] should have forgotten about epistemology [...] My alternative Dewey would have said that we can construe "thinking" and simply the use of sentence – both for purpose of arranging cooperative enterprises[...]»).

¹⁴ J. DERRIDA, *Limited Inc*, p. 13.

¹⁵ «For, ultimately, isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, "non-serious," citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality-or rather, a general iterability-without which there would not even be a "successful" performative? So that-a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion-a successful performative is necessarily an "impure" performative, to adopt the word advanced later on by Austin when he acknowledges that there is no "pure" performative» (*Limited Inc*, p. 17).

¹⁶ B. SMITH, *John Searle: From speech acts to social reality*, p. 2, in Barry Smith, *John Searle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003. «Without the belief that the world exists, and that *this world is rich in sources of evidence independent of ourselves* – evidence which can help to confirm or disconfirm our theories – the very project of science and of building theories has the ground cut from beneath its feet.» (Ivi, Pp. 2-3, our emphasis).

¹⁷ «Language in such circumstances is in special ways - intelligibly – used not seriously but in many ways parasitic upon its normal use-ways which fall under the doctrine of the etiologies of language. All this we are excluding from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances» (J. L. AUSTIN, *How to do things with words*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 55).

¹⁸ See R. RORTY, *Daniel Dennett on Intrinsicity and Dewey between Hegel and Darwin*, in R. Rorty, *Truth and Progress*.

¹⁹ «I am not a transcendentalist: I am an ultra-transcendentalist or a quasi-transcendentalist» (J. DERRIDA, in T. BALDWIN (Ed): *Arguing with Derrida*, Oxford 2001, p. 107); See also J. DERRIDA, *Margins of philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984 and Gabriele Piana, *Le scene della scrittura nell'opera di Jacques Derrida*, Mimesis, Milano 2001.

²⁰ M. VERGANI, *Jacques Derrida*, B. Mondadori, Milano 2000; Pp. 181-186.

²¹ See, for instance, R. RORTY, *Deconstruction and circumvention*, in R. RORTY, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, (Pp.108-121). «On my view, the only thing that can displace an intellectual world is another intellectual world — a new alternative, rather than an argument against an old alternative. The idea that there is some neutral ground on which to mount an argument against something as big as "logocentrism" strikes me as one more logocentric hallucination» (Ibid, p. 120).

²² «The big esoteric problem common to Heidegger and Derrida of how to "overcome" or escape from the ontotheological tradition is an artificial one and needs to be replaced by lots of little pragmatic questions about which bits of that tradition might be used for some current purpose» (R. RORTY, *Essays on Heidegger and Others*, p. 86).

²³ J. TARTAGLIA, *Rorty and the Mirror of the Nature*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007; p.138; see also David Columbia, *Quine, Derrida and the question of philosophy*, in The philosophical forum, Volume XXX, No. 3, September 1999, § 2.

²⁴ GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, English translator of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, defines logocentrism as «the belief that the first and last things are the Logos, the Word, the Divine Mind, the infinite understanding of God, an infinitely creative subjectivity, and, closer to our time, the self-presence of full self-consciousness», in J. DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1998; p. 68.

²⁵ R. RORTY, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, Princeton University, New Jersey, 2009; p.168.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 167.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 169.

²⁸ See R. RORTY, *The linguistic turn*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

²⁹ Id., *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007; p. 163.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 161.

³¹ Ivi, p. 163.

³² J. TARTAGLIA, *Rorty and the Mirror of the Nature*, p. 37.

³³ R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 164.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 168.

³⁶ E. WITHERSPOON, *Conceptions of Nonsense in Carnap and Wittgenstein*, in Alice Crary and Rupert Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2000, p. 345 (see R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 168).

³⁷ R. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 169.

³⁸ J. TARTAGLIA, *Rorty and the Mirror of the Nature*, p. 49.

³⁹ «If words and concepts receive meaning only in sequences of differences, one can justify one's language, and one's choice of terms, only within a topic [an orientation in space] and an historical strategy. The justification can therefore never be absolute and definitive. It corresponds to a condition of forces and translates a historical calculation.» (J. DERRIDA, *Of Grammatology*, p. 70).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 169.

⁴² J. TARTAGLIA, *Rorty and the Mirror of the Nature*, p. 49.

⁴³ See L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigation*, John Wiley & Sons, Malden , 2010; §§ 1-64.

⁴⁴ R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 167.

⁴⁵ It is still while talking about the confrontation between the “therapists” and himself that Rorty highlights the “pragmatist’s” and his own point of view on what we can call, in the end, the ‘ethical’ aspect of Wittgenstein theory: «They [the pragmatists] regard sections 89-133 of the *Investigations* as an unfortunate left-over from Wittgenstein’s early, positivistic period – the period in which he thought that “The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science.” They have no more use for the claim that “The results of philosophy are the uncovering of one or another piece of plain nonsense” than for the earlier claim that “Most of the propositions and questions to be found in philosophical works are not false but nonsensical.”» (*Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 164). According to the American thinker, it is enough to have a look at those passage of Wittgenstein’s text to realize how his intellectual intentions originate from a wrong presupposition about what would be confused, unclear, nonsensical language-games and contexts of conversation, which would be like an ‘engine idling’ and would need to be fixed and ordered: «We can avoid ineptness or emptiness in our assertions only by presenting the model as what it is, as an object of comparison [...] The confusion which occupies us arise when language is like an engine idling, not when it is doing work [...] It is not our aim to refine or complete the system of rules for the use of our words in unheard-of ways. For the clarity we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should completely disappear» (L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigation* , § 131-133).

⁴⁶ R. RORTY, *Truth and Progress*, p.108.

⁴⁷ ID., *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, p. 170. The American author also talks often about the fact that such a conclusion was – not without ambiguity - reached by Dewey’s instrumentalism: «Dewey saw perfectly well, except when he was sidetracked into doing “metaphysics,” that we can eliminate epistemological problems by eliminating the assumption that justification must repose on something other than social practices and human needs» (R. Rorty, *Dewey’s Metaphysics*, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. 82).

⁴⁸ ID., *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 169.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 170.

⁵¹ «We can find no clear difference between *specifying* a universe of discourse-the range of the variables of quantification-and *reducing* that universe to some other» (W.V.QUINE, *Ontological Relativity*, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 65, No. 7. (Apr. 4, 1968), p. 197).

⁵² R. RORTY, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, p. 264.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ W.V.QUINE, *Ontological Relativity*, p. 200.

⁵⁵ R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, p. 264.

⁵⁶ ID., *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 169.

⁵⁷ «Rorty seems to dislike such questions. In an extremely interesting conversation with Giovanna Borradori (from a telling volume of interviews *The American Philosopher*), to the last question “Then, what is philosophy. A testimony to the survival of a community of readers of philosophical texts?” (we must admit, sounding due to its formulation

"what is...?" terribly metaphysical), Rorty gives a simple answer: I don't think one should ask that question.» (M. KWIEK, *Rorty's Elective Affinities. The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe IF UAM (Scientific Publishers of the Department of Philosophy of Poznan University, Poland), Poznan, 1996, p. 63).

⁵⁸ R. RORTY, *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*, p. 264.

⁵⁹ «Pragmatists like myself typically find most of the language games Heidegger invented unprofitable. We think it unlikely, for example, that there is anything useful to be said about the relation between Being and Nothing. But we also suspect that there is nothing interesting to be said about the distinction between sense and nonsense. If we adopt the social-practice view of language, there seems no way to reconstruct the relevant idea of "confusion." Anything will have a sense if you try hard enough to give it one» (R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 170).

⁶⁰ P. REASON, *Pragmatist Philosophy and Action Research: Reading and Conversation with Richard Rorty*, in *Action Research*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, California, July 2003, vol. 1 no. 1, p. 103.

⁶¹ R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 172.

⁶² ID., *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; R. Rorty, *Philosophy and social hope*, Penguin Book, London, 2000, especially part IV and V.

⁶³ ID., *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 78.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 46.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 46.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 47.

⁷⁰ See ivi, p. 52.

⁷¹ See ivi, p. 52.

⁷² Ivi, p. 50.

⁷³ See Ivi, part I.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p. 47.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 61.

⁷⁸ K. MACASKILL, *The Subject and Consensus: A Critique of Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Defense of Liberalism* (2002). Open Access Dissertations and Theses. Paper 5984, McMaster University, p. 10.

⁷⁹ R. RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 84.

⁸⁰ ID., *Consequences of pragmatism*, Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy, p. xxxiii.

⁸¹ See ibidem.

⁸² R. RORTY, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 84.

⁸³ ID., *Consequences of pragmatism*, Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy, p. xxix.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. xvi.

⁸⁵ What we are arguing is not the result of an empty theoretical speculation, but it is rather a legitimate need of enquiry due simply to the perception that the 'neo-pragmatism' professed by Rorty led him to praise, as "more suitable human attitude

currently needed”, certain modern events, behaviors and dispositions which apparently turned to be really ineffective at the end of communal human utility and benefit. This is an assessment which originates not from an ‘external’ philosophical position, but from concrete practical and current events: from facts, as Rorty was pleased to suggest to us. We are obviously referring, firstly, to “Western liberalism” and the figure of the *liberal ironist*: what we can get from what is called “economic crisis”, from how it started and from what are «inequities resulting from new right policies – including the deregulation of labor markets and the reduction of government spending – reduced consumer demand which had to be propped up with consumer credit and mortgage debt» (S. Beder, *Neoliberalism and the global financial crisis*, in *Social Alternatives*, 8(1), 2009, Maroochydore DC, Queensland, p. 17-21) is a reflection upon how inevitable the risk to pacify ourselves on a general, ‘more modern’, less ‘divinized’ area of sense and guideline is. It should be inevitable to take into account that the risk of “misunderstandings within encounters of vocabularies” is structural – and so equivalent - in any historical, political or economical context. If we agree with Bonn Juego and Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt when they write that «first, crises play a *constitutive* role in the evolution of neo-liberalism» (*The Political Economy of the Global Crisis: Neo-liberalism, Financial Crises, and Emergent Authoritarian Liberalism in Asia*, (p. 22), paper presented at the Fourth APISA Congress (Asian Political and International Studies Association), “Asia in the Midst of Crises: Political, Economic, and Social Dimensions”, 12-13 November 2009, Makati City, Philippines) it is not convenient for us to suppose, from that, an existence of a ‘stream of sense’ which, necessarily in a dialectical way, develops itself toward a hopefully “more post-metaphysical”, more pragmatic and less transcendental attitude (which would be the “Rortyan *telos*”). Perhaps it is more convenient to think about this ‘*constitutive* role’ as an indication, a sign that any *development* cannot be safe from the risk of producing “harms”. The possibility of such risk could be considered, according to Derrida, the condition of any transformation of contexts as dynamics of indefinite, individual and different vocabularies. The process of development of a historical scenario would recall more, in this way, the ‘evolution’ process in a Darwinian sense, namely a clash between elements which carry *casual* – without a specific order – qualities and forces. Niall Ferguson points out such resemblance in his book *The ascent of money*, analyzing the course of modern and contemporary financial institutions from Renaissance to contemporary globalization and American liberalism: «‘The survival of the fittest’ is a phrase that aggressive traders like to use [...] But the American crisis of 2007 has increased the frequency of such language.[...] Financial history is essentially the result of institutional mutation and natural selection. *Random* ‘drift’ (innovations/mutations that are not promoted by natural selection, but just happen) and ‘flow’ (innovations/mutations that are caused when, say, American practices are adopted by Chinese banks) play a part» (Niall Ferguson, *The ascent of money*, Penguin Books, New York, 2008, p. 352). Another excellent illustration of the de-contextualization of a *generic* and alleged convenient and positive attitude and “area of sense” – this time the “America dream” – can be found in the work *Capitalism hits the fan*, by Richard Wolff (R. WOLFF, *Capitalism hits the fan*, Olive Branch Pr, New York, 2009).

⁸⁶ «One will be able to defend the claim that there are intrinsic, nonrelational features of objects only if one can claim that knowledge of those features is *not* the same as

knowledge of how to use the words one employs to describe those features» (R. RORTY, *Truth and Progress*, p. 101).

⁸⁷ J. DERRIDA, *Limited Inc.*, cit., p. 122.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, p. 17.

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, p. 18.

⁹¹ J. DERRIDA, *Dissemination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1983.

⁹² See M. FERRARIS, *Introduzione a Derrida*, Laterza, Bari 2008, § 1.2.2 .

⁹³ R. RORTY, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, p. 169.

⁹⁴ «Early Derrida shares in Rorty's view Heidegger's faith that the fate of the West depends on the fate of philosophy - thus "metaphysics of presence" must be overcome, binary oppositions must be deconstructed, our culture must be freed from metaphysical burden that Heidegger was still supposed to carry. So the cultural role of deconstruction would be extremely important, as metaphysics "permeates everything" (as Christopher Norris wants to believe), is present everywhere (just like Foucaultian Power which "penetrates everything", being capillary by its very nature). Early Derrida allies with Heidegger owing to their belief in seriousness of the task in hand (i.e. of philosophy), the conviction of its cultural significance, its mission, be it even (anti)-philosophical and (post)-metaphysical one» (M. KWIEK, *Rorty's Elective Affinities. The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought*, Wyd. Naukowe IF UAM, Poznań, 1996, p. 52). We can indicate *logocentrism* as the belief in the integrity and efficiency of a fundamental structure of sense, of a basic theory, 'reason' and of a whole sense – even if considered as a *telos* - over changing single contexts. Such *telos* always supposes the *absolute* validity of *that* theory and 'reason' in its task to schematize reality. Given such "definition", we cannot help but agree with Rorty that a philosophy which is eminently based on the criticism and the identification of such a feature – as functioning throughout the history of philosophy – is inevitably a kind of "logocentrism" itself. Therefore, the answer we give to the question we had initially put (is it possible that what Rorty disapproves of as being a «foundationalist attempt to derive our theories – our way of assessing reality from 'privileged representations'» could be considered similar or coincident with what Derrida calls «*logocentric* attitude»?) should be "Yes, it is" – if we consider the fundamental and paradoxical "quasi"-transcendental input, which is very similar to Derrida's, which we diagnosed in the whole behavior of Rorty. The "sense" of his criticism and the consideration of the fault of what is criticized seem, in the end, to match Derrida's 'philosophical intentions' (if we are allowed to use this term). But our answer should be "No, it is not" as well, once considered that it is really a lack of "awareness" in Rorty about his transcendental position which is the 'cause' of that resemblance itself (as well as being the cause of that *apparent* dissimilarity).

⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that in our argumentations the expressions *peculiar*, *particular* and *general* "structure of the world" hold the same value. We intend to mean, in fact, just how a structure of sense which owns its peculiarity and changing features/consequences is *supposed* and envisaged to have some general validity and efficacy. Using the second expression we aim to emphasize the real act and existence of such conferment.

⁹⁶ See J. DERRIDA, *Limited Inc.*, cit., p. 17.