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THE PRAGMATIST LIBERAL UTOPIA.
THE IRONY OF SOLIDARITY

Abstract

Following Rorty in his political ambitions through "Contingency, Irony and Solidarity", some gaps appeared from his argumentative framework. The separation between private and public place stressed out the incommensurability of what it was hoped to provide a groundless ground to a new liberal community, which is solidarity. For, it is hard to have a private irony and a public liberalism melted into the same person without the "paternal" help of same ideology. The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the difficulties of Rorty's political schema and to rise some questions upon his liberal solutions.

Key words: Irony, Solidarity, Ideology, Liberal Community, Rorty

Through the concept of "liberal utopia" coined by Richard Rorty, we should recognize that solidarity is not something shared by all of its members. Solidarity is not a mere analogue of some others structural concepts that built up the utopias of modern politic philosophers, it has neither a foundation based on Reason or a systematic theory as support for a social nexus. Solidarity is obtained with the help of imagination via which we became more sensible in respect to the concrete details inflected on human beings, of the suffering and humiliation that surround us[1]. For such a sensibility to be work out is more important that our reading agenda contains literary critics and novelist rather that philosophers and specialists in social sciences.

In the forth coming of this liberal utopia, our goals would not be set by an inquiry attempting to decipher the nature of reality gaining with this an ultimate vocabulary, but the romantic achievement of one self. The line started with this *bildung* goal is covered by the line of historicism and nominalism and could be easily reduced at an attitude that twits the search for the essences of reality or human nature. The poets, the self creators would become the heroes of this new community, for having made out of the contingency of their own life's and

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[1] Nancy Frazer, "Solidarity or singularity?" In Alan. R. Malachowski (Ed.), *Reading Rorty, Critical Responses to* Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature *(and Beyond)*, Basil Bleckwell, U.K, 1990, p. 307.

encounters a novel of seductive facticity. Thus, in a liberal utopia, the obsessive search for Truth, Objectivity, Reality, and Rationality will be replaced by joyful existential play and metaphor[2].

We see with Rorty's *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* that the persona filling the civil space of the liberal utopia is opposed with the standard liberal, for the reason that the former is the product of a public rhetoric that is embedded with metaphysics[3]. What is at stake here is the form and finality of a political action, because the institution providing the necessary status of a liberal community will act in accordance with what enacts a citizen to behave as a liberal. In our liberal community, the metaphysical requirements of abstracts rights and the play of economical interests conceived as modalities of self enjoyments is making a fragile and undisputed separation amid private and public. In the case of Rorty's liberal community the political space begins with the separation of the private and public, being that public affairs are only for the sake of providing more ground to the private sector, thus letting free the naïve play of self-creation: modalities of expression and existence.

We can envisage the opposition between ironist and liberal in the way they work the nexus of social norms of encounters. The former one will attempt to found a common ground, a unifying principle, a deep intuition regarding our nature that would justify his norms of tolerance and by this an assay of joining the public and private in indistinction. The first one affirms that keeping public and private separated would amount to have a person who is both liberal and ironic. What bound these political domains – political because the nature of both is grounded on a political evaluation – although incommensurable through each other it, is the human solidarity in respect to some values and institutions, even if those are not theoretically justified in the framework of the ironic liberal community, that support the mitigation of social practices generating suffering, pain, and humiliation. The ironist suggests that "[…] recognition of a common susceptibility to humiliation is the *only* social bound that is needed"[4]. Even if we cannot theoretically justify this kind of binding we must glue it to the necessary form of a political desire who can allow a branch diversity of private creation and a root dimension of public liberal liberty.

If by "solidarity" we are to understand the mechanism through which we can unify both ironical and liberal dimensions of a person, and if among an attitude of sympathy concerning human suffering we obtain the necessary type of motivation for the social construction of institutions inspiring liberal practices, than

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[2] Richard J. Bernstein, "Rorty's Inspirational Liberalism" in Charles Guignon & David R. Hiley (Ed.), *Richard Rorty*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 129-131.
[3] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 84.
[4] Ibidem, p. 91.

the philosophical impulse for deductive argumentation starting from "objective" principles in favor of some institutions or liberal practices must be abandoned[5]. What must substitute this kind of moral philosophy would be an attempt registered as a pragmatic handling of specific problems; social or political, guided by ethical stimulus of the occidental liberal cultural tradition on one hand, and one the other by the ways implied through the ironic's corrosive spirit dissolving given bias of the same tradition.

What must steerage us with this ironic ordeal is that rigorous philosophical argumentation concerning the liberal status of a community will not suffice for the presupposed lack of prejudice and the evident axiomatically ground on which it was fixed, either order of nature or human nature. In simple terms, if solidarity becomes the only social bound, than and only than we can talk of a democracy prior to philosophy[6].

The separation between public space and private space stipulated by Rorty in *Contingence, irony, and solidarity* can be persuasively synthesized by solidarity, giving an aloft tone to the private perfection. Reducing in terms of who ground who in respect to the political space separated into private and public, we see that the private one has an ontological preeminence and determination, being the brand new prototype of a political process fabricating nomadic samples of subjectivity. But you can be nomadic not having a home or living one for another, having a case of public folding inside, you mistakenly took for granted the socius as you're never fix exteriority and you found yourself searching for the real interiority of the private space, gaining only a tribe. Which is, then, the function of the private space? Clearly, the private space is the only one leading to solidarity for the openness of this space is the sole correlate of Rorty's minimal morality: the tolerance or the sympathy in respect with the suffering of the other.

The question which has to be raised regards the sufficiency of this minimal morality, being that that it is a mere auto-affection relegated univocally to a sensible locus worked by its own making as a political condition of the entire social liberal nexus. What's the regime of this suffering acknowledging that we always start from the norms of an ironic liberal community?
Observing how Rorty stipulates the "consumer price index" of our liberal democracies, he sees the slip-up of our community as being due only to the intrusion of metaphysical vocabulary in public rhetoric. Focusing on this, his suggestion for social improvement is a good nominalist "bath", an ironic infusion, a pragmatist approach for exotic social engineering.

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[5] James J. Winchester, „Aesthetics and Morality", in *Nietzsche's Aesthetic Turn*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1994, p. 162.

[6] Giovanna Borradori, „After Philosophy, Democracy: Richard Rorty", in *The American Philosopher, Conversation with Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Nozick, Danto, Rorty, Cavell, MacIntyre and Kuhn*, translated by Rosanna Crocitto, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.

I will discuss in the rest of the paper the issues that I found to be problematic in Rorty's political recipe. If a person is an incarnated vocabulary[7], a coherent network of beliefs and opinions[8], and opinion can be excluded for being an expression of a belief, thus we must assume that a given community shares some common beliefs. We presume that these common beliefs constitute only the directives of the ironic community being that liberal democracy is the only game in town. If the only ideological justification of this political regime is given by solidarity and that the legitimacy regarding private perfection is given also by solidarity, we must have a guided form of reading and perfection. The social role of the intellectuals is in this ironic community exclusive political; they have to mend common sense, to form an epistemological level of common sense, a *milieu* of social ironic maturity, to be the sole tutors of social binding[9].

> „Pragmatist shoud see themselves as working at the interface between the common sense of their community, a common sense much influenced by Greek metaphysics and by patriarchal monotheism [...] They should see themselves as involved in a long-term attempt to change the rhetoric, the common sense, and self-image of their community"[10].

Does not the issuance of licences regarding the reading grill of future ironist's be ideological deduced? An entire philosophical tradition expeled by the sole reason of flirting or not with democratic liberalism. For just being only a vocabulary in an Rortyan logic, we must understand that the work of the philosophers is just an attempt to formulate a new set of words recoding the common vocabulary[11] and by this, the comon beliefs even liberal ones. So we obtein an ideological obtuseness living philosophers outside the walls of the ironic city, for no one in this domain will sing the same song over and over again.

Understanding that Rorty has, as Nietzsche would say, "a little truth hiding in his soul", since solidarity is a mere reification of what should only stand as a premise for a new regime of power. To propose a list of what can or cannot be read as a way of describing the benefices of private space into a public ironist community is analogous to a naive that takes the words of a parrot for pure Dadaist poetic creation. Although anti-foundationalist when he is speaking of epistemology, he is becoming the opposite of that when he bestows the community

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[7] Richard Rorty, *Contingency...*, pp. 23-44.

[8] Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth, Philosophical Papers Volume 1*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 93-95.

[9] Richard Rorty, *Contingency...*, pp. 82-83.

[10] Richard Rorty, "Response to James Conant", in Robert B. Brandom (ed.), *Rorty And His Critics*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden, Massachusetts, 2001, p. 344.

[11] Richard Rorty, *Contingency...*, pp. 97-99.

with a higher truth and a real representation - solidarity becomes a labyrinth with all doors locked.

In the terms described by Paul Ricoeur in respect to the main characteristics of ideology[12], the Rorty's community is mechanically engineered by ideology, for ideology, is in the same time, a representation of reality and an obstruction of the possible becoming. Although, in his hermeneutical spinning around authors or themes, he uses a lax taxonomy, to the question what should an ironist read, he is making a strong commitment with liberal ideology, purifying the list of authors worthy of reading by their inclination towards democracy[13]. Rorty is not making an explicit statement about the forthcoming of this liberal utopia but he is speaking precautious about a hope, one that is similar with the Kantian regulative ideas, a directory hope, about the fulfillment of solidarity. There are at least two strategies of argumentation used by Rorty used to blackout his prophetic claim.

A. The first one regards the separation between public space and private space, observing the constitutive role of this separation in maintaining the status quo of liberty.

> "The part of a liberal ironist's final vocabulary which has to do with public action is never going to get subsumed under, or subsume, the rest of her final vocabulary"[14].

This statement in which the final vocabulary is situated on the side of private affairs will not be disrupted by the set of believes that are acting in public space, but it seems that we have a problem, if applying the converse of the situation we obtain that the public vocabulary cannot by modified by a private one even if it is leading or requesting a change in the public realm.

Social cohesion is expressed by an epistemological standard intertwined with an ideology, emerging as common opinion, as common set of beliefs postured as fabric of public vocabulary. To request that the public beliefs remain unaltered by the private ones and that they remain separated under political testimony is - albeit that they must somehow manage to be a coherent whole of beliefs and opinions - an obstruction of the possibilities engendered by the spring of private into public given that Rorty sustained the contingency of vocabularies and with this the impossibility of picking one as determinative in respect to others.

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[12] Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics And The Human Sciences: Essays On Language, Action And Interpretation,* edited & translated by John B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 225- 229.

[13] David Hall, *Richard Rorty, Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism*, State University of the New York Press, New York, 1994, pp. 113-129.

[14] Richard Rorty, *Contingency...*, pp. 120-121.

"[…] the pragmatist's ethnocentric solidarity in public life would tend to breed an uncritical conformism to the status quo which would block out meaningful reflection on the worthiness of our community's convictions"[15].

So, with Rorty's endeavor, a public realm, granted by his own distribution on the sole requirement of solidarity, but what once was a minimal request demanded by public interest, ended as a limit of self-creation demanded by the private nest – furthermore a condition for the stability of a democratic community. Is this not the promulgation of an end of political-becoming, for the end of history? We can say than that the justifiable and integrative function of solidarity becomes one of coercion working only with the material, legitimating only a regime of power. Or better put it with the words of P. Ricoeur that the pretention of legitimacy of a system of power always exceeds our own inclination for believing in its natural legitimacy[16].

It must be said that ideology for Ricoeur bears a double function, a positive one acting as justifying a political schema of a community, laboring the social binding and a negative one comprehended as a function of coercion used by a regime of power to sustain his dominance, dissimulative in respect with the community it binds[17].

The authenticity that is solicited by the work of self re-creation comprehended as, and having as purpose a final vocabulary is given by means of a necessary trajectory furnished by the refuse to be re-described by the public-impersonal vocabulary. Re-creation is by this a form of resistance and a recognition of a power machine that records and folds sovereign a publicly web vocabulary.

For the reasons offered till now[18], I cannot believe that the problem loom with the separation between private and public has only a range described by Wittgenstein as the problem of private language. Even if the private vocabulary is constantly developing and the public one being fixed becomes incommensurable with the private one, we can have a chance of making them visible for each other assuming as a paradigm of understanding the way we utilize metaphors[19]. Once

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[15] Charles B. Guignon, "Pragmatism or Hermeneutics? Epistemology after Fundationalism", in David R. Hiley, James F. Bohman and Richard Shusterman (eds.), *The Interpretative Turn*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1991, p. 92.

[16] Paul Ricoeur, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

[17] I have focused on the negative aspects to emphasize the perils of Rorty's political requirements.

[18] I have showed that this separation is more important for his political consequences.

[19] Richard Rorty, *Essays on Heidegger and others*, *Philosophical Papers*, Volume 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 18-24; and in Idem, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, pp. 162-175.

being caught in a communicational process and having as a stake - understanding, we will get along with our comprehension on a base of intuitive prediction regarding the context the communication occurred or by former linguistic interaction. The problem of re-creation made possible by the private space could be translated here as a problem risen by the fact that a complete aesthesis[20] of private space will make communication impossible because the unpredictable gestures of a person are a consequence of total "privatization"[21]. But we must not forget that the concept of re-creation enacts on a common ground for this is the reason of the "re-"; irony is exclusively private and reactive.

The aim of the separation between public space and private space implies an ideological turn more disturbing than the range of difficulties it (the separation) implies in respect to the analytic philosophy tradition. Rorty's purpose for engendering this separation is the increase of civil liberty, and his prevision that we will attain this liberty when there will be no more constrains regarding the manner of our interpretations about ourselves, other than that we choose, that is aesthetic standards admitted or produced by ourselves. The private manners of our re-creation are multiple, every one of them being equal in respect with the standard we assume, and the fact that we cannot settle ourselves in a stable vocabulary - one that would give as preferable aesthetic standards for a chosen mode of re-creation - drives our options under the directive of mere predilection.

> "Freedom is indistinguishable from compulsion. Thus, there is no reason to accept Rorty's experimentalist faith that expanding our sense of the available options will lead to genuine freedom just by liberating us from a narrow and one-sided view of things. For where there is no pre-given moral map to help as identify the paths worth following, the endless multiplication of possibilities in the quest for <self-enlargement> seems to lead to the kind of distraction and dispersal that destroys genuine freedom"[22].

Another problem that the separation between public and private is raising concerns the place from where Rorty is speaking. It seems that an objectifying look, a God's view exterior to our social practices is needed for surprising our individualities caught in continuum traffic amid absorption in a public vocabulary

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[20] Re-creation assumes the possibility of picking or creating any mode of existence, so it renders free expression and beliefs.

[21] Richard Schusterman, „The Problem of Aesthetics", in Mitchell Aboulafia, Myra Bookman and Catherine Kemp (eds.), *Habermas and Pragmatism,* Routledge, London, 2002, pp. 173-174.

[22] Charles B. Guignon, "Pragmatism or Hermeneutics? Epistemology after Fundationalism", *op. cit.*, p. 93.

and inventing new ways of private discourse. By this "fair site", Rorty is conducting an attempt of improvement on the topic of social practices. The irony is certain because exactly this type of social epistemological grounded project was just the method that he was trying to put aside.

> „ […] his critique of the epistemological tradition therefore must surreptitiously presuppose the initial validity of the very tradition as a basis for developing his pragmatist descriptions"[23].

Rorty is having a bit of problem trying to reserve a stabile spot meant for administering a pragmatic cure to our social practices. Therefore, the ethnocentrically position of the liberal community can be sincerely understood only as an idiosyncratic commitment towards Illuminist liberty ideals, and not as a consequence of a constitutive impossibility of a community to justify it political options, „ […] our ability to see everything we do as <play> undermines our ability to see why we would *want* to see things in this way"[24]. And lastly, his socio-historical perspective is implausible being that he cannot make clear the conditions that make our social practices possible.

B. The second one concerns the supposed incapability of irony to sustain a political utopia.

> "I cannot go on to claim that there could or ought to be a culture whose public rhetoric is ironist. I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such' a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization"[25].

Such an affirmation seems to winnow every effort that will burden Rorty with the status of social engineering, but unfortunately we cannot sustain it as such. If Rorty's liberal utopia is melting "[…] intricately – texture collage of private narcissism and public pragmatism"[26], than the public vocabulary in which are wedged the stakes of the new society, makes the object of the pedagogical-ideological content and correlatively, the irony will become a "method" of assuring/producing solidarity. Irony is the new propedeutic of the liberal community, eliminating from the public rhetoric the metaphysical residual elements, and supporting the foundry game of solidarity.

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[23] *Ibidem*, p. 94.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 96.
[25] Richard Rorty, *Contingency…*, p. 87.
[26] *Idem*, "Response to Jacques Bouveresse", in *Rorty and His Critics*, p. 148.

The curative virtues of the irony should compose the public welfare facilitating the achievement of the public-private separation and the purpose of it – solidarity. Another thing achieved is the whole mechanism of sensibility with the pragmatic list of lecture. While the separation amid private and public, *c'est-à-dire* public vocabulary and private vocabulary, is kept disjointed, the doubt concerning the process of socialization remains suspended. Whilst the direct effects of private vocabulary cannon affect the status quo of the public one, how could Rorty sustain that irony is a constitutive impediment of his liberal community?

The autonomy assured by private space has a liberal reference because the operational limits among which it can endure are derivatives of the requirements imposed by a *res publica*. In this sense, autonomy has aesthetic repercussions and not moral ones. The manners of our re-creation belong to a private modulation of liberty, but when we are dealing with social interaction and institutional practices, we appreciate them under a regulated norm in which the public vocabulary labors. Better said, we should be interested on how a public vocabulary formally interweaves the conditions of legitimization belonging to a liberal authority.

In the end, I will mark with questions some reserves concerning the practical consequences of Rorty's political epic.

If a person is a coherent system of beliefs and opinions, an ingrown vocabulary, it means that the modalities by which a community "conceives" to speak is determinative for the manners we wish to re-create ourselves. If the public vocabulary has an unchanging ideological insistence, how can the condition of coherence be sustained by a person who is a liberal ironist in the public realm and a religious fundamentalist in the private one? How can the separation between public and private be maintained, being that we retain a constant public vocabulary, if not by an ideological apparatus?

If a taxonomic framework cannot be sustained for an adequate interpretation of a text, why should the ideological hermeneutics which penalize authors for flirting or not with liberalism be supported?

How could the understanding of the other, if there is an opacity output by the rigidity of our ethnocentrism, be possible? How much plurality or tolerance a community that has as starting point-"we the liberals" can open/support? If there is just one regime of suffering, how a Christian, a Muslim or a Hindu understands this regime?

How can Rorty guaranty for the preeminence of the liberal vocabulary being that all vocabulary are contingent and an exterior point of view cannot be found for making a qualitative suggestion among them? How much liberty can a private space assure, knowing that no moral criteria are to be found? The modifications which transpire on the ground of private space are the fruits of mere predilections and so what can be choose and on which terms/criteria?

Is it sustainable an all liberal in-regimentation of philosophy? Why and how is it possible to ground solidarity only on the background of liberal institution?

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