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## Rorty's Elective Affinities. The New Pragmatism and Postmodern Thought

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### *Chapter III*

#### *Anti-Platonism of Rorty's Thought*

One can consider right at the beginning whether the so-called postmodern thought is anti-Platonic, or maybe it is just non-Platonic, that is to say, whether the thought in question is created in opposition to Plato, against him, or maybe it just omits certain questions that are foundational for philosophical thinking in general and that determine the course taken by reflection in the whole, as Rorty calls it, "Plato-Kant sequence". It might appear, and many commentators of recent cultural transformations do get such an impression, that philosophical postmodernism merely abandons traditional issues, abandons attempts at answering traditional questions as useless, fruitless, sterile or uninteresting. That is, in fact, the case with many questions and that is also what one can clearly see in postmodernists' general declarations. But it is also the case that part of those problems ("perennial, eternal problems of philosophy", as Rorty calls them in the opening section of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) haunt postmodernists and even if they do not attack classical answers to certain questions, they nevertheless question the meaningfulness or usefulness of questions themselves.

Is thus postmodern philosophy (and let me hasten to explain that I am using here the term for the sake of convenience, in an ambiguous, very broad sense, being aware that the word itself gradually ceases to mean much) - "footnotes to Plato"?<sup>1</sup> Sure

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<sup>1</sup> Rorty tries not to use the word "postmodern" because it has been annexed (in the USA, not in Europe) by radical, ultraleftist - and socially ineffective - literary

it is, I will attempt to show below specifically postmodern anti-Platonic themes in Rorty; I will try to show that some Platonic ideas are an extremely topical, *negative* point of reference, bringing about both epistemological, as well as ethical and cultural consequences.

1.

From the perspective of subsequent books and texts by Richard Rorty it can be clearly seen that to have a look at his anti-Platonism and anti-essentialism, it is not enough to read either only *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, or only *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, Consequences of Pragmatism* and both volumes of *Philosophical Papers*. I see as more and more illusory statements about some "Rorty to *Philosophy*..." and his "post-PMN-writings" (as some his Anglo-Saxon commentators call them). For me it turns out that the impression given by various readings of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in *Reading Rorty* - the first serious collected volume devoted to the American pragmatist - is totally misleading, or at least extremely one-sided. The book, it is claimed there, is merely criticism of traditional epistemology carried out on the grounds of American analytic philosophy not too interesting to a wider public (and, possibly, a loose project of philosophy as "conversation", some of them add). And yet it can only be seen retrospectively that the book provides most interesting philosophical "foundations" to later, often more metaphilosophical, literary and cultural ideas. To put it in a nutshell: one can find there the idea of solidarity and self-creation, there is the fundamental question about the place of philosophy in culture rather than merely that about the place of epistemology in philosophy; as well as there is a question about the future of the philosopher in culture, about mechanisms of production and collapse of his self-image, there is also

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theorists. The European meaning of the term is much broader, while in the USA it may be the case that its connotations are narrow and unambiguous: postmodern are "red-hot centers of political radicalism", as Rorty says, and "postmodernists" are "cynical outsiders" who not so much have abandoned rationality in favour of irrationality, not so much even politicize the universities within "political correctness" attitude, but rather abandoned a certain idea dear to liberal intellectuals. The idea in question is "mobilizing moral outrage in defense of the weak, of drawing upon a moral vocabulary common to the well-educated and the badly educated, to those who get paid for analyzing symbols and those who get paid for pouring concrete or dishing up cheesburgers". Therefore Rorty on numerous occasions regretted having happened to use the term - although he used it in a European, especially Lyotardian sense. See Richard Rorty, "Intellectuals in Politics: Too Far In? Too Far Out?", *Dissent*, Fall 1991 (a typescript, pp. 14, 20).

the germ of the project of the "post-Kantian culture", "philosophy without mirrors" and criticism of merely cognitive - and deriving from Plato - paradigm of human activity (and from there there is only a step towards discussions of suffering, pain, novels, redescriptions, recontextualization, private/public etc. - as a matter of fact, the whole "turn" seems to me to be a change of rhetoric to the one culturally better understood).

For our purposes here it will be necessary to present briefly the dichotomy between edifying (borrowed from Gadamer's *Bildung*) and systematic philosophers, preceded by some general remarks on *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Let us say at the very beginning that the book is "therapeutic" (in the sense of the late Wittgenstein) rather than "constructive", thus it is unavoidably "parasitic", for it uses means worked out by e.g. Quine, Davidson, Kuhn and Putnam to ends deriving from Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey.<sup>2</sup> The reason for which the book was written in the vocabulary of analytic philosophy is banal, contingent and - as Rorty himself says - "autobiographical". owing to familiarity with this rather than that philosophy, the author can be parasitic on "constructive efforts of analytic philosophers". The purpose of the book is

To undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations", and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the reader looking in that book for a new *theory* about any of the aforementioned issues would be disappointed. Rorty presents in it a traditional, Kantian view of philosophy (as the so-called "epistemologically-centered philosophy") according to which it would be supposed to be "foundational" with respect to all other domains of culture, to "ground" claims to knowledge of other disciplines of culture, in a word - it would be supposed to be such a domain in which the central place is occupied by a general theory of representation, dividing up culture into the areas which "represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so)".<sup>4</sup> The Kantian ideal of philosophy as a "tribunal of pure reason" was still strengthened by Russell and Husserl with their ideals of "scientific" and "exact" philosophy. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* -treating Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy as "one more variant of Kantian

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.

philosophy", still constructing a "permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture" - engages in a daring deconstruction of hegemony of analytic philosophers (and let us bear in mind that the book was published in 1979 and it was a long road to a wider acceptance of Continental theories of e.g. Derrida, Lyotard or even Foucault). Rorty puts forward the most serious reproach, uncontested as it cannot be contested - namely the *escape* of all these philosophies, from Plato to Kant to analytic philosophers, *from history*... Positive protagonists of the book are Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger (in their second, later incarnations) - the philosophers who contributed to gradual setting free our philosophical beliefs from the picture of the mind as a great mirror that contains various, more or less adequate, representations. The ocular metaphors was criticized by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*, Heidegger was supposed to provide us with historical awareness of its origins and Dewey was supposed to add a "social" perspective. It was them in Rorty's view who made it possible to think of the "post-Kantian" culture in which there is no all-encompassing discipline providing legitimation or grounding all other disciplines; they rejected epistemology and metaphysics, ignored them instead of - in a traditional manner - arguing against them... These are the most general remarks to outline a background without which anti-Platonism in Rorty's thought might remain incomprehensible.

Let us pass now to the opposition of systematic and edifying philosophers that cuts across the whole history of philosophy and that is needed by Rorty, so at least it seems to me, for narrative reasons. The oppositions can be derived from a more original contrast between "edification" on the one hand and "truth" on the other; searching for truth is supposed by Rorty to be *one of many* ways of edifying, being on a par with various descriptions suggested by poets, novelists, anthropologists etc.<sup>5</sup> "Discovering facts" - "knowing" - "search for truth" - is just one from among many projects of possible edification. But how it would be in Western tradition, everyone knows: Greek thought determined for over two years that knowing (with all visual metaphors accompanying it<sup>6</sup>) became privileged. Rorty says that

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<sup>5</sup> See Richard Rorty, PMN, pp. 359-362.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth while reminding here of the criticism of "ocularcentrism" in French thought, of philosophically grounded disinclination to visual metaphors, of violent and broad criticism since Bataille (from *The Story of the Eye*) to Lyotard to Derrida to Baudrillard to Foucault. As "ocularcentrism" of the whole philosophical tradition is one of those "footnotes to Plato", all attempts at questioning it must be seen as anti-Platonic. Let us remind here briefly of that theme in Michel Foucault: it is present from scattered remarks in *Madness in Civilization* to e.g. "A Foreword to Transgression" to a culminating point in his analysis of visual techniques of power in

In every sufficiently reflective culture, there are those who single out some area, one set of practices, and see it as the *paradigm human activity*. ... In the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition, this paradigm has been *knowing* - possessing justified true beliefs, or, better yet, beliefs so intrinsically persuasive as to make justification unnecessary.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, in the mainstream - rather than on the periphery - of the Western philosophy the essence of being human is knowing: "Man's essence is to be a knower of essences".<sup>8</sup> You shall not know, i.e. you are not allowed to take fruit from the tree of knowledge, the Hebraic tradition says, "you shall know" Greeks told us in their legacy. "The rest results from this", Nietzsche, perhaps the most violent anti-Platonist says in the *Anti-Christ* (and it is perhaps that "rest" that Richard Rorty investigated in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and in his subsequent writings). The reduction, or equation, of "humanity" and "knowing" gave birth to the priority of epistemological thinking in philosophy, for that knowing in question had to be more and more strict, methodical, indubitable etc. Two decades ago it was difficult to imagine (outside of France, that is) "philosophy" that would not be dealing with "knowledge", to imagine philosophy deprived of its epistemological hard-core. Platonists, Kantians and positivists share a

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Benthamian Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish*. Madness - is a thing to "look at", an object of medical and political "observation" which under disciplining eye of power hid itself in an asylum opened in Classicism. *Discipline and Punish* shows the passage from "spectacles of power" - from "the spectacle of the scaffold" to theatricality of the guillotine to the silence of death places, it also reveals an overwhelming power of *le regard*, the look, in Bentham's project. To expose an individual to power, one no longer needs sophisticated methods, the look (or just the awareness of it) will suffice. if one adds to that desires for "anonymity" of that *philosophe masqué*, then it will become clear that was paralyzing to Foucault was an objectifying, alienating look of the Other. Under his look it is indeed impossible to "transform oneself" - as he writes in *Archeology of Knowledge* - and "escape from questions somewhere else", "not to be someone they think you are", and that is all important to the philosopher who writes in order "to have no face". See especially Martin Jay's superb study *Downcast Eyes. The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Chapter "From the Empire of the Gaze to the Society of the Spectacle: Foucault and Debord" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), previously published in a shorter version in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, ed. D. C. Hoy.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 366 - emphasis mine.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 367.

belief that "man has an essence - namely, to discover essence", as Rorty puts it. So, what is at stake in anti-Platonism of the author of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in a narrow sense discussed here is not only the rejection of epistemologically-oriented philosophy - and of a superior place of the philosopher in culture associated with it for the good and for the bad - it is also, perhaps first of all, the rejection of a classical, Platonic picture of man. Not so much the Platonic picture of human nature - but rather the very conception that there is something that might constitute that nature. In the problematic that interests us here<sup>9</sup>, Rorty follows two roads and faces two tasks: the conception of *human nature* and the *epistemologically-centered philosophy*. Both tasks are interrelated, both conceptions can fall down owing to the same blows...

One of them is to distinguish systematic and edifying philosophers in the history of philosophy. The former are "constructive", engaged in epistemological issues, the latter are "reactive", taking as their point of departure "suspicion about the pretensions of epistemology". The former present arguments. The latter - satires, parodies and aphorisms, producing transitory works (merely reacting...), they are peripheral in their intentions, often abandoning their earlier foundational and systemic ambitions - like Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey, they are skeptical, working out their writings for their own generations rather than for eternity.<sup>10</sup> They want to get rid of ocular, especially "mirror", metaphors from their philosophizing. They are not willing to accept speech as merely representation, sentences are supposed to be linked to other sentences rather than (exclusively) to the world (by the relation of correspondence). Additionally, they do not want to express their views with respect to some questions - so far obligatory and necessary for every professional philosopher - as they seem insignificant to them.

How come they avoid the paradox of self-reference, it could be asked? For instance, when they say "man has no essence, no nature" or when they say "truth is ..." or "the essence of philosophy is..."? They avoid it for they do not put forward the "theory of truth", nor do they discover some objective being of "philosophy", nor do they present a belief about non-existence of human nature as a recently discovered and the only adequate representation of reality. The traditional game of discovering how it

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<sup>9</sup> For the context of Rorty's discussions in PMN is much wider: generally speaking, he blows a strike at the philosophical tradition of Plato, Descartes and Kant, that is, at the same time, at Plato's conception of truth, knowledge and rationality, Descartes' account of mind as an internal "mirror" and, finally, Kant's account of the role of philosophy as investigation and grounding of "foundations" of science, morality, knowledge and art. For the needs of the present chapter, we just take a tiny fragment of the context in which the book is immersed.

<sup>10</sup> See Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 366, pp. 365-372.

is *really*, what is objective and what is more and more accurately presented in the "mirror of nature" i.e. in the mind, is of no interest to them! (obviously, I am summarizing in my own words complexities of many pages of detailed Rortyan considerations). Rorty opposes the Platonic view of philosophy, the equation of humanity, rationality, knowing, *inquiry* - to *conversation* (and several years later - *recontextualization*), when he writes of edifying philosophers that they

do not think that when we say something we must necessarily be expressing a view about a subject. We might just be *saying something* - participating in a conversation rather than contributing to an inquiry. Perhaps saying things is not always saying how things are.<sup>11</sup>

Edifying philosophers are thus such "conversational partners" who, to use Rorty's memorable phrase, "prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into an exchange of views".<sup>12</sup> Edifying philosophers do not seek for objective truth but protest against attempts to finish conversation that might lead to - and here is an ethical motivation - "freezing-over of culture" and the "dehumanization of human beings".<sup>13</sup> They protest against claims that man is able to know himself in an atemporal and ahistorical manner, that he can get to know his nature rather than get to know himself by means of certain vocabularies and descriptions. Edifying philosophers are the later Wittgenstein and the later Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche; systematic philosophers are Husserl, Russell, Descartes, Kant and Plato.<sup>14</sup>

That is an introductory outline of an anti-Platonic theme in Rorty's (anti)-epistemological discussions. It is not accidentally and comes as no surprise that the result of a detailed construction (destruction) from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* with respect to epistemology found its continuation - after developing the metaphysical tradition in "the Plato-Kant canon" from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* - after a dozen or so years in ethical deliberations. Here the perspective is different: it is not only so that epistemology as a core of philosophy is "uninteresting", culturally "insignificant" or merely "useless" for social issues and we can therefore abandon its questions - following the lead of those greatest edifying philosophers of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 371 - emphasis mine.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 372.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 377.

<sup>14</sup> Although in PMN Rorty still hesitates as to the place of Plato in that dichotomy, then later he has no doubts about it. See "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in: *Human Rights*, ed. S. Hurley & S. Shote, New York: Basic Books, 1993.

the twentieth century, abandoning the chance of getting answers to classical questions; the point is, rather, that now Rorty shows us how the conception of rational man derived from Plato leads directly to the most serious *ethical* problems. It is from there that comes Rorty's - still playful, still within rhetorics, still with the cover of two sides of irony - opposition of *reason* and *sentimentality*. To be sure, the ideas presented in "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" do not form any clear-cut theory, nor a conception. These are, I suppose, first attempts at showing ways of thinking that remain opposite to Plato and (almost) whole philosophical tradition, clearly appearing also in discussions about the role of the novel in sensitizing us to pain and humiliation (that is, to everything that matters to the liberal in Rorty's account). But that is the issue deserving a separate section.

## 2.

Let us note first that the possibility of ethical consequences of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was not exposed by Anglo-Saxon commentators (unless in the direction of nihilism, skepticism or relativism) from *Reading Rorty*, the most important collective critical reader devoted to that book. Perhaps it was only Charles Taylor who saw such a possibility but not in the text from that volume<sup>15</sup> but in a later contribution to *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?* He says there that the *epistemological* tradition is strictly linked to the *moral and spiritual* one, and at stake in struggles "over the corpse of epistemology are some of the most important spiritual issues of our time".<sup>16</sup> That it is the case one can see from consequences drawn by Rorty after some time. Here the judgement of Plato appears in its full light.

The text "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality", as the majority of Rorty's essays, is occasional and born out of contingent circumstances, but, as usual, serves the purpose of presenting the most important questions of Rorty's post-Philosophical discourse.<sup>17</sup> At stake is Bosnia at war; at stake are Plato, Aquinas and Kant. And finally reason and feelings or sentiments. But we in the present chapter will only be dealing with a gloomy picture of Plato.

While in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* there appeared Rorty's serious doubts concerning the human nature - the protest against thinking that we possess "a

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition" in: *Reading Rorty. Critical Responses to 'Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature' (and Beyond)*, A. Malachowski (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1990, pp. 257-278.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology" in: *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?*, K. Baynes et al (eds.), Massachusetts: MIT Press 1991, pp. 464-488; p.485.

<sup>17</sup> For the philosophy/Philosophy distinction, see "Introduction" to CP.

deep, hidden, metaphysically significant nature which makes us 'irreducibly' different from inkwells or atoms"<sup>18</sup> - the ethical significance of that question was to be more fully thought over later on. Rorty developed his conception of "contingency of selfhood" - apart from contingency of language and contingency of community - e.g. in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. What would be human self? - according to Rorty's well-known phrase, it is a "centerless web of beliefs and desires" or a "coherent and plausible set of beliefs and desires".<sup>19</sup> In Rorty's view such an account of the self was enabled only with Freud - it was only him who rejected the idea of a paradigmatic human being, and thereby the very need of a theory of human nature.<sup>20</sup> The Nietzschean superman is not more "human", nor is so the Kantian dutiful fulfiller of common moral obligations, nor is so Harold Bloom's self-creating "strong poet". Freud was to discredit the idea of true human self, and thereby the idea of the search for a permanent and unchangeable self behind ever changing accidents. As Rorty puts it: Freud helped us "to see ourselves as centerless, as random assemblages of contingent and idiosyncratic needs rather than as more or less adequate exemplifications of a common human essence".<sup>21</sup> Rorty saw today a growing willingness to disregard the question of our nature and replace it with the following one: "What can we make of ourselves?"<sup>22</sup> With Darwin and Freud, the sense of our *malleability* was closer and closer to us. Rorty says: "WE are coming to think of ourselves as the flexible, protean, self-shaping, animal rather than as the rational animal or the cruel animal".<sup>23</sup> That is to say, we are not content either with Plato's answer, or with Nietzsche's, the very controversy between them becomes insignificant. What was supposed to be specifically human and to "ground" morality was (traditionally, since Plato) "rationality". To be human was to be rational, and to be rational, at the same time, was to be moral.

Rorty (as a pragmatist) asks about effectiveness of such thinking in the context of attempts of bringing about utopias sketched by European Enlightenment. According to him in the last two hundred years most of the work of changing our moral intuitions, vast part of transformations of our "vocabulary of moral deliberation"<sup>24</sup> was done not by increasing our moral *knowledge* but by - as he calls it - "manipulating our

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Rorty, PMN, p. 373.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection" in PP 2, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection", p.155.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 115.

<sup>24</sup> See "Freud and Moral Reflection" in PP 2.

*feelings*".<sup>25</sup> From a pragmatic point of view, there appears here a fundamental opposition between rationality and sentimentality, reason and feelings. Plato, Aquinas, and Kant, claiming their rights to knowledge of human nature, had failed; hence the following Rorty's conclusion: "since no useful work seems to be done by insisting on a purportedly ahistorical human nature, there probably is no such nature, or at least nothing in that nature that is relevant to our moral choices".<sup>26</sup> His doubts, as can be seen, are about the efficacy rather than epistemic status of moral considerations.

Rorty contrasts rationality and moral knowledge with "sentimental education" (which, incidentally, refers us back via Flaubert to novelists contrasted with philosophers). The education in question takes its power from a well-documented belief that today's Western culture has been shaped by "hearing sad and sentimental stories"<sup>27</sup> rather than by moral knowledge. What would be that Plato's fault, repeated later on by generations of moral philosophers, I have been looking for here? Plato according to Rorty was to turn the interest of philosophy to extreme cases (like Thrasymachus and Callicles), seeing his task in answering such questions as, for instance, "Why should I be moral?", "Why is it rational to be moral?", why being moral is in the interest of human beings? He tried to convince egoists, neglecting in Rorty's liberal (referring to "pain" and "humiliation") view a much more common case: that of a person *indifferent to the suffering of others*, and, whose relation to others is, at the same time, *morally impeccable*. So Plato was supposed to make a turn towards rationality to fight with extreme, rare cases instead of trying to sensitize us to common suffering of others, often pseudo-humans to us (unfaithful dogs during the Crusades, slaves, Blacks etc.). The main point of accusation of Plato is exactly the following:

By insisting that he could reeducate people who had matured without acquiring appropriate moral sentiments by *invoking a higher power than sentiment, the power of reason*, Plato got moral philosophy off on the wrong foot.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, let us say it right now, we are dealing here with a narrative strategy - Plato, to be sure, could not behave in a different manner in the situation of the common birth of *logos* and *polis*, rationality and socialization, reason, to be sure, *was* the greatest achievement of Ancient Greece, and it is only from current perspective that we are

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 118 - emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 119.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 118. That is to say, for instance, reading novels. See "Brigands et Intellectuels", *Critique* 493-494, Juin-Juillet 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem, p. 123 - emphasis mine.

able to look at Plato considering possible priority of sentiments to reason in shaping liberal consciousness in recent two centuries. Within that strategy, one can find the source of that denigration of sentimentality, locate in the history of philosophy and at the beginning of the narrative about sentiments and reason. One also has to bear in mind that it is one of many narratives about Plato, the aim of which is making us sensitive to dangers deriving from reason itself. And it was to that particular persuasive story that the very founder of the philosophical discourse was useful.

For discussions of Plato are to lead us directly to discussions of the present. Rorty binds the two with a violent summing-up when he says that our problem is not the (Platonic) rational egoist: "The problem is the gallant and honorable Serb who sees Muslims as circumcised dogs".<sup>29</sup> And today, after the experiences of the Holocaust and other nightmares of the twentieth century coming to an end, to be effective, it is not enough to refer to what is common to people - to rationality. And neither Jefferson writing about inalienable human rights ever thought about his own slaves (a classical example of Rorty's from his numerous texts), nor the Nazis thought of the Jews they murdered as fully human<sup>30</sup>, nor the sides of the Balkan war see one another as human beings. For what really matters, as Rorty says, is who we think of as fellow-human. The history teaches us that Platonic-Kantian dreams of common, rational human nature are not efficient enough to stop a conviction common out of our (subtle, civilized, and post-Enlightenment) cultural sphere that to belong to common biological species *does not suffice* to belong to a common moral community.<sup>31</sup>

It is just that aforementioned sentimental education, development of sentiments rather than merely reason, that is to bring closer and familiarize people with others so that they were not treated as non-human. "The goal of this manipulation of sentiment is to expand the reference of the terms 'our kind of people' and 'people like us'".<sup>32</sup> So

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<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 124.

<sup>30</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman's remarks on "racial hygiene" in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1989 and *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1992.

<sup>31</sup> Let us note that Rorty's thinking breaks with "humanism" in Heidegger's sense of the term: each humanism (metaphysically) assumed the "essence" of man - man was precisely *animal rationale* (see the "Letter on 'Humanism'"). Rorty is antimetaphysical, anti-Platonic, antihumanistic. He also breaks with an "antropologicistic" (as Derrida calls it in "The Ends of Man") reading of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, popularized in France owing to Kojève and Sartre. It comes perhaps as no surprise that the Derridean tradition of the "Western metaphysics" is parallel to Rorty's "Plato-Kant canon".

<sup>32</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights...", p. 123.

there is no point in writing of some Rorty's "irrationalism" (and in criticizing him on principle), for that is merely intraphilosophical label that allows to keep in order the ranks of philosophers, the label coming directly from Plato. To be just in the evaluation of the idea of contrasting reason and sentiments, one has to look at efficacy of such tactic. And let us state that this is the tactic successfully used in a different domain of culture since last century - in literature. It is there that instead of formulating general schemes of human duties, developing abstract theories of morality etc. etc., the writer appeals to the very same people by metaphors, pictures, smuggles humanitarianism by means of tears and laughter. What is worth considering here is the whole pleiade of great writers of recent one hundred and fifty years... And one can get the impression that Rorty the pragmatist had been moved by the awareness of real successes of the novel and novelists on the one hand, and sterility of cultural efforts of traditional, "Kantian" philosophers on the other. Therefore he is no longer willing to ask following Plato, Kant and others the question "Who is man?" and "What is his nature?" - but, for instance, "What sort of world can we prepare for our great-grandchildren?".<sup>33</sup>

If we can create ourselves and shape the surrounding - after Darwin and Freud - we are no longer obliged to play the game of *theories* of what we *really* are. Instead of looking for answers to the standard question of the (Platonic) rational egoist - why he should be moral - perhaps one could think of a more important question - "Why should I care about a stranger, a person who is no kin to me, a person whose habits I find disgusting?".<sup>34</sup> Coming to an end of that section, one could say the following: if we want to realize our dreams and prophecies (e.g. the Enlightenment utopia), we will not be helped by classical discussions of human nature, the essence of justice (the famous theme of opposing Aristotle to Plato in Lyotard's discussion of justice<sup>35</sup>) or moral obligations of man as man. What is Rorty's advice? He sees a hope in educating generations of tolerant, rich, safe and respectful students in all corners of the world. Perhaps one more point is important here: Rorty's questions presented above may be a beginning of a "new reading" of Plato, but they cannot be a new "discovery" of Plato or a new "truth" about him (as that of Karl R. Popper - Plato is totalitarian!). It is rather, as I can see it, the method of engaging the present in philosophy, looking contemporariness or outmodedness of old thoughts, it is a "recontextualization" that needs for a given problem a dark and a fair side, positive and negative protagonists, heroes and villains. Also - not to be a boring, dull, empty story... For the point is not

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<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 122.

<sup>34</sup> Ibidem, p. 133.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

being fundamental, but being effective... Even if these discussions are not accepted in their entirety in a common philosophical discourse, they are nevertheless extremely fertile and stimulating for culture, even if one will have to wait until culture redefines in common consciousness what philosophy, at our moment and in our culture, is.

### 3.

Who could have helped Rorty in realization of the significance of anti-Platonism? it is often repeated that the constitutive element of American thought is its *pluralism*. But pluralism, the multitude of perspectives and points of view ("perspectivism") is at the same time one of the fundamental descriptions of Nietzsche's philosophy, especially in the shape it was read by the French humanities since the sixties, mainly owing to Gilles Deleuze. His book *Nietzsche et la philosophie* (1962) shows that Nietzsche is simply incomprehensible if "fundamental pluralism of his philosophy" is not taken into account".<sup>36</sup> Pluralism is for both of them a guarantee of a concrete mind - as Deleuze puts it: "Gods died but they died of laughter hearing that some God said there was just one God". If each thing has *many meanings* - then Nietzsche questions in Deleuze's reading the distinction between a model and its copy, the reality and its appearances, that has been born with Greek rationality and permeated the culture for over twenty centuries. His deep anti-Platonism, an attempt to question the whole building of Western metaphysics, by means of its "untimely" influences on (mainly French) postmodern thought, shows how to break with writing footnotes to Plato: that method may be, for instance, the multitude of perspectives that manifests itself in the multitude of stories told (with the famous one about the "true world" and the "fable" from *The Twilight of Idols*) and the aim may be that hidden pluralism. (At the same time, one has to bear in mind that Nietzsche's work in that reading is equally anti-Hegelian and anti-dialectical).

The *anti-essentialism* of Rorty's thought - an objection to all, especially contemporary attempts to look for the hidden "reality" under a layer of "appearances", to look for anything deeper and more important than the contingent reality of here and now - may also take its roots from e.g. Nietzsche's philosophy. For essentialism in his account is just asking metaphysical questions and looking for metaphysical answers about: the essence of truth, beauty, justice etc., that is to say, questions beginning with "what is...?" And like Deleuze remarks how "Nietzsche seems to be close to Callicles and Callicles supplemented by Nietzsche"<sup>37</sup>, we would like to note how Nietzsche in the narrow sense of objecting to Platonic foundations of our philosophical thinking is

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<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, a Polish translation by B. Banasiak as *Nietzsche i filozofia*, Warsaw: Spacja 1992, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup> G. Deleuze, *ibidem*, p. 64.

close to Rorty. (on the other hand, one has to admit, Nietzsche is never a fully positive protagonist for he lacks that liberal component of sensitivity, the question about pain of others closely looked with the *hope* that the pain in question can be avoided. His relation with Michel Foucault is similar, to some extent - although he wrote thick volumes about suffering and humiliation, he lacked hope for the better future which today, incidentally, is one of the main aims of attacks directed to his philosophy).

"What is truth? - Nietzsche asks in "On Truth and Lies in an Ultramoral Sense" - a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, antropomorphisms..." And that description suits Rorty's anti-essentialistic convictions, one often finds that definition of truth in Rorty's writings. Just like Deleuzian belief that what is at stake in criticism is not justification but feeling otherwise - "other sensitivity"<sup>38</sup> goes hand in hand with Rorty's conception of rhetorical and persuasive philosophy which role is to make us sensitive to others' pain rather than produce sophisticated and abstract, and insignificant for culture, speculative systems. To summarise that theme, let us say that anti-Platonism in neopragmatic thought can be derived directly from, for instance, peculiarly reinterpreted Nietzsche's thought.

#### 4.

We shall be dealing now with the possibility and meaningfulness of polemic with such a reading of Plato, passing then to a picture of Greece sketched by Pierre Hadot and Giorgio Colli which is more appealing to us. Then we shall pas to more general remarks about readings in philosophy. Their Plato will appear here as an alternative vision, an equally justified account. Instead of engaging in polemic with details of Rorty's reading, we shall try to show very briefly two other readings, for various reasons still more in tune with postmodern thinking in order to, as a matter of fact, to show the variety of perspectives and multitude of attitudes and viewpoints. That will be an implicit way of saying: if one can write like Hadot and Colli, eminent French and Italian historians of philosophy, respectively, why postmodernists should not be allowed to use the Ancient Greece for relatively less controversial readings, which is the case with Richard Rorty?

The question I am putting here is thus whether one should engage in defence of *particular*, individual readings of Plato's work - or perhaps in defence of the *right* granted by postmodern culture (but not only of that - as we shall see in a moment) to produce radically new readings of past philosophy. The first task is hopeless, for how is one to compare with philosophical authorities who spent years and years in reading Plato and his subsequent interpretations. The other task is somehow metaphilosophical. That is an open question that is faced not only by readers of Plato,

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<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, p. 100.

but by readers of any other philosophers as well. That is a universal question about the right to particularity within the philosophical discourse, and let us remember that perhaps - to make a metaphoric use of Hegel's ideas - his "cunning of reason" will make the general shine through the particular, that is to say, an obsessively new reading in a longer perspective will contribute to a new widely-shared view of Plato, and any other philosopher, writer or artist. (Let us remind here of Rorty's original Nabokov, Derrida's protagonists, the Hegel as is read by Taylor and Pelczynski, let us look at the Lyotardian Diderot, "Western" Bachtin, the renaissance of the Kantian - almost forgotten - aesthetic of the sublime redescribed by Lyotard in recent years. Let us also compare, by way of an example, the Kafka of Bataille's *Literature and Evil*, of Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Derrida's "Devant la loi/Before the Law", Bauman's book on modernity and ambivalence, to stick just to several readings by philosophers. And what about psychoanalytic, feminist, structuralist or reader-response criticism? And so on and so forth. The possibilities are practically almost inexhaustible. One can ask whether the same "methods" cannot be applied to Plato the philosopher? And then Rorty's reading of him will turn out as a relatively most philosophical in a traditional manner...)

Let us pass to details, though. From the point of view of the *rhetorical* strategy used by Rorty, from that of the persuasive rather than argumentative nature of his philosophizing, everything is all right as long as he is pragmatically effective. His rhetoric needs narrativity, telling stories set in philosophy and narratives, as is well known, require good and bad characters.<sup>39</sup> Rorty, especially in the period following *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, changed his style of philosophizing the moment he turned to a wider public. He became less dialectical and analytical and more narrative; as he put it once: "We cannot get along without heroes. ... We need to tell ourselves detailed stories of the mighty dead in order to make our hopes of surpassing them concrete".<sup>40</sup> As David Hall says in his excellent book, Rorty engages in "allegorization of history" - heroes become names of certain virtues and vices - and he makes metaphysical "lists" of his heroes and villains, prior to narratives themselves.<sup>41</sup> And it is on such a list that Plato appears and such a role as described in the preceding sections is ascribed to him.

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<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the first to write about it was Charles Taylor in the aforementioned text from the *Reading Rorty* reader; it is also David L. Hall from the book entitled *Richard Rorty. Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994).

<sup>40</sup> Richard Rorty, "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres", in *Philosophy and History* ed. Richard Rorty et al. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> David Hall, pp. 59, 60.

Let us return for a moment to Ancient historians. According to Giorgio Colli for Plato as we know him (and hence for the Plato that has influenced Western thought) everything he wrote "*was not something serious*".<sup>42</sup> That conviction fundamental for us here comes from an analysis of a myth about invention of letters by an Egyptian god Teut from *Faidros* and from the passage of The Seventh Letter devoted to writing. According to Colli, Plato's view of his own works may be ironic and distancing. And in such a case all "footnotes to Plato", taken so seriously, may turn out to be footnotes to just one, serious pole of Plato, omitting his non-serious pole. And irony derives from the tension between two poles taken into account at the same time. Obviously, such a Plato could never be presented as a "foundational" and "systemic" philosopher in Rorty's sense of the terms. Plato could be defended against such criticism in the same way Rorty defends himself - responding to criticism with the other side of irony (the serious one when attacked on non-serious grounds, or the non-serious one when attacked on serious grounds).

Such a picture of Plato is still more difficult to be acceptable if we view ancient Greece following Pierre Hadot (whose influence on the late Michel Foucault was very strong), the French historian of philosophy who accounts for ancient philosophy as the "spiritual exercise". Key words dominating his analysis are, for instance, "self-improvement", "self-realization", "self-modification", "therapy", "healing one's soul", "transformation of one's personality", and "conversion". Ancient philosophy viewed from the perspective of the spiritual exercises in question appears not as a theoretical construction but as a method of shaping one's own life and one's own vision of the world, as an attempt to transform one's personality.<sup>43</sup> That is, in a word, ancient philosophy is conversion, that changes whole life of the one who undergoes it. Philosophy became abstract, theoretical procedure no sooner than in the Middle Ages when spiritual exercises became part of mysticism and philosophy became a conceptual maid of theology. And although in modern times it regained its autonomy, it took place together with the whole theoretical luggage and it was only Nietzsche,

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<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Colli, *The Birth of Philosophy*, a Polish translation by S. Kasprzysiak (Warsaw: Res Publica, 1991), pp. 98-99.

<sup>43</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Spiritual Exercise*, a Polish translation by P. Domański (Warsaw: IFIS PAN, 1992). Hadot remarks that "the aim of all philosophical schools [of Ancient Greece] is self-improvement, self-realization. ... The parallel between physical and spiritual exercises can be guessed here: just like repeating physical exercises the athlete provides his body with a new shape and power, by the same spiritual exercises the philosopher develops powers of his soul, changes internal climate, transforms his vision of the world and, finally, his being", p. 45.

Bergson, existentialists who made it once again a way of life.<sup>44</sup> Then - to finish that narrative - after structuralist attempts that trend, let us add, gained some response in postmodern thought. And although Rorty never says that, in his discussions of self-creation he could find significant and powerful allies among Ancient Greeks (of which Foucault with his "aesthetics of existence" and "life as a work of art" was fully aware<sup>45</sup>). Reading Plato in such an unambiguous way - the way presented in this chapter - Rorty deprives himself of the possibility of allying with Greeks. But let us stress that his texts are smaller or greater pragmatic narratives in which parts do not function in the same way as they do out of the whole, which have local aims and local priorities.

One could ask about the purpose of my writing these brief remarks on Hadot and Colli. The answer is simple - I am opposing Rorty's American story with different (Italian, French) stories on the basis of the assumption that it is no use to criticize its explicit details or implicit assumptions. It may be the case that one story can only be opposed with another story, one philosophical narrative with another philosophical narrative, the one more useful, persuasive, different. More useful on an individual or social grounds (perhaps it was the reason for inability to counter-balance so convincing, so persuasive Popper's story of Plato?). With ironist methodology, criticism in a traditional sense of the term does not exist for one has to accept tentatively rules of the criticized. And it was Rorty who favoured "changing the subject rather than granting the objector his choice of weapons and terrain by meeting his criticisms head-on".<sup>46</sup> A direct struggle with the ironist is not possible. Two sides of his irony will always allow him to save his face: so perhaps it is better to "change the terrain" right at the beginning and show a glimpse of extremely useful account of ancient thought. It is neither the time nor the place to provide broader remarks, for these are not what is essential here, we just intend to show the possibility of a potential method of criticism of Rorty's account of Plato.

What appears here is a question about differences, if any, between "twisting philosophy"<sup>47</sup> and what Harold Bloom labelled "strong misreading". How far are we

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<sup>44</sup> Pierre Hadot, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. "An Aesthetics of Existence" in: *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1990; "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?", *agazine littéraire*, No 309, Avril 1993, pp. 63-73 (in a series of *inédits*) or "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress", in: *The Foucault Reader* (ed. P. Rabinow), New York: Pantheon, pp. 340-372.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> My reflections about "twisting (Plato's) philosophy" were born not without stimulating conversations with Piotr Juchacz, and for that impulse I am grateful.

entitled to both in writing philosophy and where, possibly, is the boundary, if there is one? It is, for sure, a metaphilosophical question; the answer probably depends on what we are looking for in philosophy: if we are seeking (absolute, non-historical, atemporal and even philological) truth, then both attitudes to philosophical texts are out of the question. If we are looking for "self-creation" - to use a key word from Rorty's opposition between solidarity and self-creation - then we merely privatize the philosophical discourse, loyally warning the reader about it (stating e.g. that it is "my Plato", "the Plato as I can imagine him" in the manner Maurice Blanchot wrote "Michel Foucault as I Imagine Him".<sup>48</sup>) But what if we want "solidarity", the other part of the pair? it may turn out that also new strong misreadings, contributing to topicality of Plato, may be more revealing for the contemporaries than (seeming) faithfulness to his "spirit and letter". How is one to pass a judgement? Perhaps on the basis of effects, proposals, interest born or revived, response of philosophers from the professional guild (but there are also various "untimely" meditations). The questions have been put, we are leaving the answers open.

So, thinking of "postmodern" readings of Plato, or of that by Rorty in particular, one has to remember about their *current* nature. Also about the fact that they are written by philosophers rather than traditional historians of philosophy (to stick to that distinction for a moment). The historian of philosophy, let us say, stepping now on a very slippery ground, may be looking for unambiguous senses of a work (i.e. senses involved with *current* culture only); the philosopher, on the other hand may - sketching his new culture (like Rorty his "liberal ironist", postmetaphysical, post-Philosophical etc. etc. one) - use another (usually past, but not only) philosopher for his project, his vision of the future. He needs specially prepared past for his projected future, he goes back and makes recontextualizations, transforms the surrounding of chosen figures from the history of philosophy. He takes a look at a closed, written work from a totally different level than the historian of literature, to use acute Foucault and Deleuze's metaphor, he takes it as a "toolbox". And that is not a manifestation of relativism for certain things cannot be done by a hammer from that toolbox. It is similar to the *possibility* of choice of various views given by postmodernism which is not equivalent to relativism by any means - from a pragmatic point of view - for not every view turns out to be an effective tool, not every view can be made use of (which, obviously, is determined by e.g. culture).

It is also worth remembering that constructing the history of philosophy in a narrative form, as Rorty does it for his own purposes, paradoxically enough, requires temporary *suspension* of the irony of the one who is writing it - for one cannot say that a Kant or a Plato is, and at the same from the other side, non-serious side of irony, is

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<sup>48</sup> See *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York: Zone Books, 1987).

not, a foundational philosopher.<sup>49</sup> And that unavoidable *suspension of irony* (depriving of the possibility of defence by saying: I said this seriously and that non-seriously, here I was a serious philosopher and there a non-serious philosophical jester; here - a philosopher, there - a poet, etc. etc.) potentially forms a crack, opening Rorty's reading to polemic and criticism.

But one has to remind here of one more thing: Rorty has already produced several parallel stories (narratives) of modernity - in *Consequences of Pragmatism* there are narratives about growing "professionalization" of philosophy, about struggles between "Kantians" and "Hegelians" and, finally, about a philosophical sequence of Kant-Hegel-Nietzsche/pragmatism in a text about "nineteenth-century idealism and twentieth-century textualism".<sup>50</sup> So it is hard to assume that what we are writing about here will be *the only* Rorty's story about Plato. Three parallel narratives about modernity from *Consequences of Pragmatism* are a strong example of Rorty's narrative way of thinking about history - therefore one has to avoid being trapped and thinking that this is the only, unchangeable and well-founded picture of Plato in Rorty's thinking. Perhaps there will be more pictures of him, as necessary links in another, parallel narrative from the history of philosophy. For the very evolution of modern thinking itself has so far found three accounts in his writings.

Let us ask whether Rorty's discussions of Plato and on the margins of him are non-objective, twisted, essentially insignificant (as some historian of ancient philosophy might put it)? I seriously doubt it; they come to the problem from various sides, looking at it from various angles, each time making use of a different perspective - they somehow approach their object, forming and shaping it. That is the method called "perspectivism" in Nietzsche and "recontextualization" in Rorty. Let us put forward a question: what does it mean that discussions are "false" if there is no truth of the text, or that they are "essentially insignificant" if their significance can reveal itself after many years? (Quite useful here can be Derrida's considerations of "responsibility" for every reading expressed, for instance, in "Toward an Ethic of Discussion" from *Limited Inc.* or in a collection of essays in literature entitled *Acts of Literature*<sup>51</sup> - so there is no "freeplay" as Alan Bass mistakenly translated French *le jeu* in the title of the first Derrida's American essay, which for many years influenced hostile attitude towards him). It is not "free play of intertextuality", irresponsible

<sup>49</sup> On the two sides of irony, see David Hall, pp 129-168.

<sup>50</sup> R. Rorty, in "Professionalized Philosophy and Transcendentalist Culture", "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida" and "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism", respectively, from CP.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1988), pp. 111-154, Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. D. Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992).

fantasies, that are at stake here - for an end is put by *ethics*, or rather morality, to refer to Zygmunt Bauman's "morality without ethics" from his superb *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality*.<sup>52</sup> The choice is individual - as is responsibility.

Discussions about Rorty's neopragmatic (or, more generally, postmodern) reading of Plato opens way to a more serious discussion of readings in general, and strong (mis)readings in particular. There would appear here (Derridean) questions about parasites and hosts, Hillis Miller's questions from his "Critic as a Host", some Paul de Man's texts as well as a famous book by Geoffrey H. Hartman - *Literature/Derrida/Philosophy*.<sup>53</sup> Finally, there would be some place for two conceptions of practising philosophy - a "scientific" and a "poetic" or "literary" one; two different readings of Heidegger that gave rise to Derridean and Gadamerian branches<sup>54</sup>, at least two extreme readings of Derrida: a radical one *à la manière* Christopher Norris et al. and a more private and idiosyncratic reading by Rorty based on Derrida's *The Post Card* etc. etc., without developing that theme here. That is the case today, how about yesterday? Let us think of a brutal reading by Popper from *The Open Society and Its Enemies* of Plato, Hegel and Marx - a criticism almost "paranoid" (as Charles Taylor, perhaps the greatest authority in Hegelian studies in the last two decades, says). And it was - as Popper put it - "my contribution to the war". There is a question whether it is worth while reading such complete misinterpretations, a book written with a negative thesis right from the start (although sincere and written out of depths of Popper's heart, late at night, as he reminds in his *Unended Quest*). Let us add that still more than Plato deformed - crushed - with New Zealand pen was Hegel, the great Hegel of *Philosophy of Right* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*, today's hero of civil society, especially in England. It is a book which is published and read, it can be viewed as an extremely personal, born out of hard war years, reading of history of philosophy. We can say - incorrect, subjective etc. But let us have a look at Russell's *The History of Western Civilization* - it just a monster of subjectivity: I like this, I do not like that, is perhaps the leading principle of the book...

But these are books read rather than rejected as "false", for they provide the reader with an insight to some (exaggerated) sides of their protagonists, reveal their

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<sup>52</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments. Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 10-43.

<sup>53</sup> See Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Saving the Text. Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1981).

<sup>54</sup> The degree of misunderstanding between the two can be testified by a failed book *Dialogue & Deconstruction. The Gadamer - Derrida Encounter* (New York: SUNY Press, 1989), a report of and commentary to the meeting of Gadamer and Derrida in Paris in which almost all contributors speak of a complete impossibility of a dialogue.

unknown (be they only potential) faces. They provide us with *perspectives* born out of the time in which they are written, i.e. by culture. Perhaps it is only in this context that it is worth while thinking about criticism of, for instance, Rorty's account of Plato. Popper, Russell and many others just needed for their own purposes past philosophical figures. And that is still the case. There is no moon-like history of philosophy, written out of time and out of place, out of culture, *sub specie aeternitatis*; it is possible to defend philosophers against twistings and misreadings remembering that it is also defence itself that is supported by one perspective, currently chosen - more or less consciously - by the defender. Readings rejected today can be canonical for the next generation. Like the revolution devours its own children, philosophical readings devour their predecessors. That is a theme of a violent, (para)Oedipal fight of Sons with their Father, of construing one's place in history by means of a radical gesture with respect to others... And like Nietzsche struggled with Socrates, that "theoretical man", Heidegger with Nietzsche, that "last metaphysician", and Derrida with Heidegger, Rorty struggles with Derrida. And that is probably the only secure road to immortality... when Jean Baudrillard reduces (in the time "after the orgy"- for, as he says in *Amérique, aujourd'hui, l'orgie est finie*) "the future" to "now" and Zygmunt Bauman reads the deconstruction of "immortality" as a postmodern "life strategy".<sup>55</sup>

All these lead us, to be sure, to an ever-present, although sometimes in a implicit form, question of the roads of the humanities, and of philosophy particularly, today, when old roads do not seem fertile at worst and interesting at best... Obviously, one can imagine a response that philosophy *does not necessarily have to* be interesting, or read, or culturally stimulating for it has superior tasks, from which laymen or all non-philosophers should stay clear. Maybe that is the case; but perhaps the case is something else. There is no ready answer for which one could reach because there is no - as one is inclined to think in the world of free thought - "truth" of philosophy, no independent being of philosophy, pre-existing like Platonic ideas. Philosophy is made by *philosophers* with the help of surrounding culture. And nostalgic beliefs in lost unity and unambiguity of it are futile. Maybe it is a little bit like in Proust - it is only in the last volume, *Time Recovered*, that the significance and meaningfulness of seemingly hopeless life of Marcel the bon-vivant is revealed, for it is only there that it turns out that all the time he was sketching his great work. I hope that with a passage

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<sup>55</sup> See Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 1988), p.105 and his "After the Orgy" in *The Transparency of Evil* (London: Verso, 1993), Zygmunt Bauman, *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); also Albrecht Wellmer, "The Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism" in *The Persistence of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

of time that will happen to (anti-Platonic) postmodernism; the question is, which volume we are stuck in at the moment...