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

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Introduction

1.

The present book is devoted to "European connections of Richard Rorty's neopragmatism". The theme, chosen carefully and intentionally, is supposed to show the motivation behind the writing of the present work, as well as to show its intended extent. Let us consider briefly the first three parts of the theme, to enlighten a little our intentions. "European" is perhaps the most important description for it was precisely that thread that was most important to me, being the only context seriously taken into account, as I assumed right from the start that I would not be writing about rather more widely unknown to me - and much less fascinating (even to Rorty, the hero of the story) from my own, traditional, Continental philosophical perspective - American analytic philosophy. So accordingly I have almost totally skipped "American" connections (to use the distinction I need here) of Rorty's philosophy, that is to say, firstly, a years-long work within analytic philosophy, secondly struggles with it on its own grounds, and finally attempts to use classical American, mainly Deweyan, pragmatism for his own needs and numerous polemics associated with it - the questions that are far away from my interests and that arise limited interest among reading and writing philosophical audience in Poland, and perhaps also among Continental philosophers. It did not seem possible to me to write a book on Rorty in his American connections for they are insufficiently known to me, demanding knowledge of both post-war American analytic philosophy as well as pragmatism of its father-founders. I could see, setting to work on Richard Rorty, that a book on his American connections (leaving aside the issue that it would not be a philosophical

problem but rather, let us say, the one of writing a monograph) written by a Polish philosopher in Poland and then in the USA was not a stimulating intellectual challenge but rather a thankless working task. Besides, having spent much time on Rorty's philosophy, writing extensively about him and translating his works, I already knew that the "Continental" context was extremely important to his neopragmatism, and that thinking about it could be relatively prolific (as opposed to the context potentially given by American philosophy).

The next term from the guiding theme that would require some explanation is "connections". It is rather a non-philosophical term but it seems to be suitable considering a specific character of Rorty's work. For the fact is that Rorty can be connected to numerous controversies, polemics and discussions with European philosophy and within its framework, from Plato to Kant to Hegel to Habermas to Derrida. Rorty gets into European discussions with American freshness and intellectual breadth and therefore he is listened to carefully and read with great interest. His connections with European philosophical tradition are manifold, complicated and diversified; with a part of it he remains in a serious, deep controversy (Plato, Kant), with another part of it he remains in a cheerful agreement (young Hegel from *Phenomenology*, Nietzsche, the early Heidegger, the late Wittgenstein). It is also the case with his connections with contemporary European philosophy - apart from favourites (Derrida, Habermas) there are those he dislikes (the late Heidegger, Foucault). Rorty as a philosopher of unprecedented erudition - surely, as many commentators admit, the greatest in the USA as far as the two traditions, American and European together, are concerned - in his philosophizing takes a stance towards the whole philosophy which, from our perspective of more than twenty five hundred years and Greek origins of philosophical conceptuality is European first and foremost. Therefore writing about Rorty, in my view, seems to require to take him in the broadest philosophical context he deserves - rather than a narrow, though institutionally perfectly well developed, context of analytic philosophy (or of no longer exciting classical pragmatism). "Connections", finally, refer to a polemical context of Rorty's writing, its context of discussion, give the possibility of showing him from the perspective of others and in comparison with others, of whom he writes in his texts. Let us put it at the beginning, before we will discuss the issue in more detail: the present book never had monographic intentions, it does not want to tell a complete story of its philosophical protagonist in the manner of a German *Bildungsroman* that presents its hero from the perspective of passing time, nor does it want to present the whole of Rorty's work from a unifying viewpoint or

to present particular stages of Rorty's development (particular books), starting with the "early" Rorty, with the "medium" one to the "late" Rorty, if the first would be supposed to be Rorty until *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the second - Rorty from that book, and the latest - Rorty from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* onwards.¹ The book presented here intentionally is not a monograph, hence its poetics and architecture are different. We do not believe in the possibility (not to mention - desirability) of a reading and showing of the whole work in an innocent and objective way, so we are merely showing the part that also interests us, in an entanglement with other parts of today's philosophy that interests us. There is also a practical reason: Rorty is a philosopher who is still writing, providing his past writings with a new dimension, presenting recontextualizations and redescriptions of them in the light of what he is thinking at the moment (which is testified most strongly in his autobiographical essay "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids"). The monograph of what is not only does not say what is going to be but also, furthermore, does not say anything about what was but is still evolving together with Rorty's self-description, with his changing self-image.

And finally the third term from the theme mentioned in the opening sentence of the book: "neopragmatism". It is a useful but not too revealing term; it is a label useful on a big scale, useless if one takes a look at it in detail. The most important for me is the prefix "neo-" which suggests difference from and contrast to what the American philosophy has been proud until today. I get the impression that there are many other terms that would be equally telling, for Rorty's work is very broad and would require many descriptions at the same time; Rorty is to some extent a pragmatist, perspectivist, contextualist, postmodernist, antifoundationalist, conversationist, ironist, historicist, nominalist (similarly, as he says in various places, he is a "Wittgensteinian therapist", "postmodern bourgeois liberal" or a "Deweyan"). It is hard to tell

¹ I will be referring to Richard Rorty's books in the following way:

PMN - *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, London: Blackwell, 1980,

CP - *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1982,

CIS - *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989,

PP 1 - *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth. Philosophical Papers*, vol. I, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991,

PP 2 - *Essays on Heidegger and Others. Philosophical Papers*, vol. II, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

which of these descriptions suit best to the whole of his work (each of them is good to some extent, in the case of one theme, one book, one side of a polemic with one group of his opponents etc.). Let us say that "neopragmatism" in our description results first of all from the frequency of usage on Rorty's part of his favourite "we pragmatists" and from the frequency of usage of that already well established term in publications devoted to his thought. Surely, the terms "pragmatist" and "neopragmatist" do not say a lot about the philosopher, they say a little without mentioning the rest but it seems to me that it is also the case with all the other aforementioned terms.

The book, to sum up, approaches Rorty's work in a specifically chosen way and does not intend to go beyond what was sketched in the title and in the guiding theme (and whoever looked in it something else, or more, be it a monographic guide to the whole of his work or to his discussions with American analytic philosophy would be disappointed, of which I am loyally warning). The task has been outlined - what we meant was exposing and problematizing, putting in context and enlightening the European side of philosophy of one of the greatest living American philosophers.

To the original intention of the work, the architecture of it is strictly linked. We have assumed here the following principle: the work consists of chapters followed by "philosophical excursions". The former are focused on Rorty's philosophy, the latter show his philosophy in struggles with other contemporary and past philosophers, providing a more general philosophical background. Philosophers from "excursions" as well as polemics with them throw light to his philosophy as much as chapters themselves. But they show it in a slightly different, wider perspective, necessary in my view for a more general and culturally significant understanding of importance of his philosophy (let us also add that there is no rigid distinction, some excursions might become chapters and at least one chapter - might become an excursus, it merely allows generally and in rough terms to make the reader's expectations more concrete). Thus, heroes of the excursions presented here will be Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Zygmunt Bauman, as well as such great past figures as G.W.F. Hegel and Plato, if we were to treat one chapter as lying "in between" the two conventions. Why not Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dewey - those three "most important philosophers of our century", as Rorty calls them in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* - and Nietzsche? Dewey is for me a part of "American context" in which I am not going to be engaged. Heidegger and Wittgenstein are key figures for understanding Rorty (who, when asked by Giovanna Borradori who influenced

his philosophy most, answers: "I would say, Martin Heidegger²). But contemporary contexts of which I am writing here are contexts of living, changing (except Foucault) philosophies, therefore polemical contexts. Although Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein are present in the whole book, they are not as serious heroes of it as heroes of separate philosophical excursions. The choice was mine and within "European connections" I chose most recent connections, within which often appear the omitted figures. Why these philosophers rather than others? First of all, due to their importance to the development of Rorty's philosophy - by means of defining its position with reference to their philosophical settlements or by means of philosophical tensions born between them. Two factors were decisive: the role played in Rorty's philosophy as he can see it and the role played in it as I can see it. That is as far as contemporaries are concerned, and as far as Plato and Hegel (opposed to Kant) go, the choice was so obvious, considering the fact against whom Rorty's antiessentialism and historicism are directed and the definition of philosophy he refers to most often, that I do not feel obliged to justify it here. Let us mention the relations between Rorty's philosophizing and philosophizing of heroes of my excursions: Derrida wrote next to nothing about Rorty, Rorty merely mentions Bauman, the Rorty-Lyotard exchange is scarce, Foucault never managed to write a single line about him and, finally, the Habermas-Rorty exchange has not been developed more fully yet. But the other side of these relations were so interesting to me that I decided to deal with them in this book. It is rather excursions that provide most contextual material to Rorty's work, it is them that trace in detail his European connections. The picture that emerges from them is fascinating due to Rorty's versatility because it is something totally different that is at stake in Rorty's struggles for fame and immortality with Derrida (as I am trying to outline the debate here), something else it at stake in political discussions with Lyotard, and something still else in "merely philosophical", as he calls them, debates with Habermas - which one has to bear in mind. Without these contextual pieces I might be afraid that the book would be dry and devoid of the cultural surrounding of postmodernity in which Rorty's work has been written. Let me put it in the following way: if Rorty's philosophy takes its life juice from controversies with European philosophy, it is hard to imagine for me to cut them off in the present work; and they are essential in my view to show the significance of Rorty's

² Giovanna Borradori, *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 110.

neopragmatism, they are in tune, I hope, with Rortyan way of practising philosophy.

2.

Let us pass to an attempt of sketching a general background for reflection on Rorty, of some natural environment in which his philosophizing - and my discussion of it - are coined. That will help the reader in reception of his philosophy in general as well as in reading more detailed parts of the work, especially parts of "philosophical excursions". One can come reflexively to postmodernity - the culture of our times, of the world that surrounds us - from many different perspectives, asking a multitude of philosophical questions. But a part of these questions are more common, they appear in the thought of more than just a few philosophers becoming questions that are overtly associated with the spirit of the times, with *Zeitgeist*. One of them is the question of the status, role and place in culture of an intellectual - a writer, artist, philosopher, at least in a traditional, modern sense of the term. That is a metaphilosophical question, the question not only about topicality of one's own thought (which gave rise to modernity in Kant, in the text "What is Enlightenment?", at least in Michel Foucault's view), but precisely the question of topicality of oneself as a philosopher, writer... According to an until recently firm ideal - and project - of the Enlightenment, the place of an intellectual in culture was somehow superior in advance, being given the credit of trust *ex officio* that was being legitimized by a direct touch with the universal. An intellectual spoke in the name of universality as opposed to all that was merely contingent, historical, particular and individual. He spoke with a loud voice - and was heard with humility and attention - as he was supported by an Enlightenment project with its main part: great "metanarrative of Emancipation" (as Lyotard says). The authority of a modern intellectual was founded upon the idea of history that is developing toward its "natural" end - toward emancipation of humanity from "poverty, ignorance, superstition and lack of entertainment", Lyotard will say. He was listened to as a "spokesman of universality", "conscience of us all", Foucault will say. Or, as Rorty will put it in a different way, philosophy since the times of the Enlightenment became for an intellectual a substitute for religion, became that part of culture in which he "would find the vocabulary and the convictions which permitted one to explain and justify one's activity as an intellectual, and thus to discover the significance of one's life".³

³ Jean-Francois Lyotard, "An Interview" (with Reijen), *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 5 (1988), p. 302; Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" in

An intellectual *par excellence* until recently was a writer speaking from the position of man, humanity, nation, proletariat etc.; describing and analyzing the current situation from the point of view of the above mentioned entities, identifying himself with a subject endowed with a universal value and telling in the name of it what people should do for the progress to last. "Responsibility of an intellectual is inseparable from a (shared) idea of a universal subject".⁴ But that *idée d'un sujet universel*, just like the idea of unquestionable universality, belongs to the times from Zola to Sartre (at least in France). These are the times of modern commitment legitimated by the metanarrative of emancipation, that seem to be already over. What is perhaps the case is that a cultural fertility of a certain historical proposal has been exhausted, and thus the role of an intellectual legitimated within that project and by that proposal collapsed. And it is precisely due to that fact that what Max Gallo from the French government was looking for (during a famous debate of 1983 on the "silence of intellectuals") - calling them to open a discussion on the transformation of France and asking for "concrete implications of their reflections" - comes not from that epoch in a shared opinion of French postmodernists. *Ce qu'il cherche est d'un autre âge*, Lyotard will comment the case brutally.⁵ The questions for today are questions arising in the face of the end of something that was supposed to be firm and permanent, but turned out to be just contingent and historical. These are the questions that are worth being answered together with fundamental questions, if not before them. I would be inclined to think that passions associated with deconstruction and Jacques Derrida personally, or with the "affairs" of Heidegger and de Man, come from the urgency of thinking through the questions of the place of a philosopher in culture (and that they are not just substitute discussions of some philosophers who are bored with "real" problems of the end of the century).

It is rather not an accident that probably most energy of philosophers in Europe (and a lot of it in the United States) is spent on debates on other philosophers of the last fifty years or so, on debates - through an image of them - on their own image, a self-image of the philosophical profession (just to give

Power/Knowledge (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 126; Richard Rorty, PMN, p.4.

⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Tombeau de l'intellectuel et autres papiers* (Paris: Editions Galilée), 1984, p. 12.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

an example, it is enough to mention a few philosophers who felt that they "must" express their views on the subject of Heidegger's Nazi involvements: Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard, Gadamer, Habermas, Steiner, Rorty, Ferry, Baudrillard, Finkielkraut and many others.⁶ And these are discussions not only about the body of Heidegger's works (with a famous and widely commented on statement from "Introduction to Metaphysics" about *inner Wahrheit und Grösse dieser Bewegung*, internal truth and greatness of the Nazi movement), but about Heidegger himself, as a philosopher, as an intellectual, and it is perhaps only Richard Rorty who resists that dominating tendency by separating Heidegger's "life" from his "work", which has to be understood in a broader context of what he calls "the private/public split".⁷

3.

The common thread of all chapters and philosophical excursions presented here can also be shown in the form of the opposition between the private and the public that plays a significant role in all of them. In all the essays the following question can be read - as well as the temporary answer to that question can be found: what an intellectual (a philosopher) is supposed to do today, who is he supposed to be? It is a metacritical question about his own writings, his own work, a question of pursuits where to inscribe this work to, how to put it in a context of culture. For apart from the fact that one can be read or not as a writer, one can also be useful or not (useful today - or in the future),

⁶ See e.g. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit. Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Lyotard's Vienna conference *Heidegger et 'les juifs'* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1990); George Steiner, "Introduction - Heidegger in 1992" in *Heidegger* (London: Fontana, 1992); Jean Baudrillard, "Necrospective" in *The Transparency of Evil. Essays on Extreme Phenomena* (London: Verso, 1993); Rorty's Heideggerian PP 2 as well as a chapter on Proust, Nietzsche and Heidegger in CIS; the text of Christopher Norris about Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in *What's Wrong with Postmodernism?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990); Jürgen Habermas' interventions in *Historikerstreit - Historikerstreit - the controversy about the place of the Third Reich in German History* (London: Aneks, 1990), as well as in Poland some texts from the volume *Heidegger Today* (Warsaw: Aletheia, 1992).

⁷ Richard Rorty, CIS, p. 111, n. 11.

create one's self or unite a community, create one's life through one's work or one can give an example to others through one's work - as a model of self-creation or as an algorithm of changes in the external world. It may be the case that a simple and radical private/public dichotomy does not exist. That a longer perspective of time or the power of a public influence of a self-creating individual on the one hand, and an individual aspect of public engagement on the other hand, have to be taken into account. Both roads may lead to self-fulfilment and - at the same time - to changes in the surrounding reality. But regardless of the acuteness of the opposition of both spheres and purity of their separation, the question about the place and role of a philosopher is stubbornly present there, which makes one think that perhaps culture is worth being looked at from the perspective of that dichotomy. One can also wonder whether that does not happen to be some postmodern account of the traditional moral/aesthetic distinction, that is to say, of a radical division between the publicly moral (as the privately moral had not existed basically until the times of the late Foucault's projects of "ethics" and - recently - Bauman's "morality without ethics") on the one hand, and the privately aesthetic on the other. What might be heard in these questions are e.g. distant echoes of Kierkegaardian "ethical" and "aesthetical" mode of living, echoes of the twentieth century controversies about "moral message" of literature, "utility" of the avant-garde" etc. etc.⁸ If one were to ask how far the origins of the split in question go, one would have to point to the Ancient Greece - at least in Hegel's readings from *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Philosophy of Right* - where for the first time appeared the division between man and citizen, a private person, owner of slaves etc. and a public person who performs his civic duties (before Stoicism came, there had only been a citizen, the equation was simple: man = citizen, and it had been almost totality of his identity). The private/public dichotomy sends us also back to a number of classical dichotomies e.g. *bios teoretikos/bios praktikos*, thinking/acting, theory/practice, "interpreting the world"/"changing the world", "engagement"/"the ivory tower" etc. All of the above oppositions

⁸ One has to bear in mind, though that the moralist/aesthete opposition with reference to an intellectual was coined in the context of French debates, in which either a French intellectual was "committed", or he justified himself for not being "committed". It is a narrow and specific perspective, determined by the French culture more significantly from the times of the "Dreyfus Affair", but it nevertheless deserves great attention today. The oppositions presented here shed light merely on a section of the whole, allowing intellectuals (mainly from the left) to produce narratives about meanders of their own biography.

are equally ambiguous, refer to different spaces of meaning connected with the origin of terms being opposed.

Before we pass to detailed analyses and settlements in particular sections of the book, we would like to make a number of introductory remarks concerning Rorty's view of the role of the philosopher in postmodern world. That will not be the picture as it emerges from his books, as it is well known and widely discussed (also in further parts of our book). We will be dealing in that introduction for a moment, for a change, with tiny texts, uncollected interviews, occasional statements and even (published) philosophical correspondence. Thus, from a more traditional perspective, we will be dealing with the margin of his work. But that margin in question, owing to its clarity and openness, is extremely interesting, showing things that the so-called work sometimes only hints at. In most general terms, Rorty from among all philosophers referred to in that introduction is most concrete - he writes about the American intellectual of the end of our century who is well known, rich and works at the university, saying, for instance the following: "I think the solution in the rich North Atlantic democracies is that the intellectuals have their natural home in the University".⁹ Bauman, Lyotard or Foucault write or wrote about the intellectual "in general", basically by abstracting from a local situation in England or in France (whether they would be "legislators" and "interpreters" of the first, the "intellectuals" for whom there remains only a "tomb" of the second, or "specific" and "universal" intellectuals of the third); although Rorty on numerous occasions reminds of a different situation of the intellectual in America, Poland or in the Third World countries, he restricts his reflections to the American intellectual. We will be writing here about his attitude towards "humanistic intellectuals" and to "philosophers" who may, but do not have to, be included among the former. Who are intellectuals in question according to Rorty? - these are people who read a lot of books in order to "enlarge their sense of what is possible and important - either for themselves as individuals or for their society".¹⁰ What matters most to them is - the theme that reappears in almost all Rorty's statements on the subject - reading lots and lots of books, obviously, as *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* explains, to become a different person, not to get stuck in the vocabulary one has been socialized in,

⁹ "Interview with Richard Rorty" (Jorge Secada), unpublished typescript, p. 15.

¹⁰ Richard Rorty, "The Humanistic Intellectual: Eleven Theses", *ACLS Occasional Paper No 10*, American Council of Learned Societies, 1989, p. 9.

not to view that vocabulary as the only possible. Tasks that "philosophers" face in Rorty's account depend on an account of "philosophy" itself. If it is seen as one of peripheral humanistic disciplines, a discipline that used to play an important role in culture and whose role is getting smaller and smaller (although there is a lot of rhetorics on his part, let us add), then also the role of the philosopher is small and insignificant precisely as a philosopher, a representative of his discipline (which, incidentally, does not mean his small role as an educated and enlightened, cultural humanist). The curse of philosophy, bringing about an undeserved amount of criticism from outside the academy is that it happens to have this "big, important name attached to it"¹¹, with which traditional obligations and duties, questions and "philosophical" problems are inextricably linked.

What specific should be today about one of many humanistic disciplines as he views philosophy to be, and what would be social utility of it, Rorty asks. He discusses and rejects two answers given by some philosophers in self-defence acts: first, philosophy teaches the ability of clear thinking (what does not? he adds), second, it provides us with professional expertise necessary in social politics (which can be done by any educated humanist because philosophers do not have any special knowledge on the subject at their disposal, he answers). The fault of philosophers is responding to the society's challenge when it asks, for instance, through financing federal agencies, "what for" philosophers are. "The general reply to the question, what are philosophers for? is, don't raise questions like that".¹² Generally speaking, answers to such questions provided by philosophers today are harmful because philosophers say strange things and they should rather give a short reply - leave us alone, give us academic freedom (a very important subject for Rorty¹³) that guarantees high standard of education. If philosophers claim that they have access to special knowledge of a special status, then they raise expectations that cannot be fulfilled which, in turn, causes various reactions of unsatisfied society of taxpayers. Rorty defends the humanities against their "politicization" and "radicalization" (which is common mainly in the English and Comparative Literature Departments), he is against attacks on liberal country and liberal universities both from a right side of Straussists (e.g. by Allan Bloom with his

¹¹ Richard Rorty, "What Are Philosophers For?", *The Center Magazine*, Sept./Oct. 1983, p. 42.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 42.

¹³ See Richard Rorty, "Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?", *Academe* vol. 80, No. 6, Nov./Dec. 1994, pp. 52-63.

vision of "Nietzscheanized America" by its "Nietzscheanized left") as well as from the left side - which sees in everything bourgeois degeneration and phallogocentric domination - of literary theorists.

The issue of social utility of philosophy today is one of the fundamental, if not the most fundamental, point of disagreement with the majority of his most serious American critics (such as Richard Bernstein, Thomas McCarthy or Nancy Fraser). Rorty says: "Do not look to philosophy departments for heroic virtues".¹⁴ In recent years the influence of other disciplines has increased, that of philosophy has decreased, and these are facts, he adds. In a fascinating debate between The Third World (Anindita Niyogi Balslev from India) and America (Rorty), whose traces we can find in a recently published book *Cultural Otherness. Correspondence with Richard Rorty*, Rorty responds to accusations of uselessness of his neopragmatism to feminism in the following way:

From the fact that all knowledge is an instrument of power it does not follow that, as you claim, "philosophers matter; their ideas are of consequence". Nor does this follow from the fact that Mussolini used Nietzsche, Jefferson used Locke, Stalin used Marx, or Roosevelt used Dewey. Sure, philosophers have often mattered, but then so have astrologers and shamans. The question is how much they matter - of what consequence their ideas are - for the issue at hand: how to establish a global community.¹⁵

Thus, to accusations directed to Rorty of maintaining the *status quo*, of its apology (Bernstein), Rorty could answer in a pragmatic spirit that they would be pertinent if the *status quo* get transformed only with the help of philosophers who come forward with ideas that change the world. But this is not the case. Rorty asks in this context what is so special in philosophy that while an engineer or a mathematician is entitled to say that he does not have anything useful for social purposes at the moment, a philosopher is not. There is, of course, a broad, etymological sense of "philosophy" as "the love, or pursuit, of wisdom" but - Rorty adds - "who uses 'philosophy' in this sense these days?", adding dramatically:

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, "What Are Philosophers For?", p. 43.

¹⁵ Richard Rorty in A. N. Balslev, *Cultural Otherness. Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1991), p. 81.

Philosophy is not a magic wand which can make dreams come true, and a set of philosophical doctrines (such as pragmatism) is not to be judged on the basis of efficacy in doing so.¹⁶

Thus philosophy should not be expected to be something that is beyond human power, something that goes beyond the very discipline although it was supposed to become for many people a secular religion, just like philosophers were supposed to become secular priests endowed with a privileged access to truth which is denied to regular mortals, to regular scientific and humanistic disciplines. Why philosophy professors should be better in thinking about problems of contemporary world than all other intellectuals, all other educated people of all trades and specializations? Philosophy is, let us remind one of Rorty's memorable expressions, "a matter of telling stories: stories about why we talk as we do and how we might avoid continuing to talk that way".¹⁷ We will return to the idea of philosophy as telling stories on many occasions in this book as this is one of the most widely spread themes in postmodern thinking in general. Rorty answers to a penetrating McCarthy's criticism that one cannot assume that, as philosophers, we can be useful in a specific way - within our professional abilities - for struggles with racism or imperialism. We develop this theme in a chapter on "philosophy and politics", but let us merely evoke in the introduction Rorty's fundamental statement from a text pronounced on a conference in Mexico in 1985: "we should not assume that it is our task, as professors of philosophy, to be the avant-garde of political movements".¹⁸ Instead of developing particular themes in Rorty's thought, as I am doing in further parts of the book, I just intended to outline the contours of his position in most general terms as it reveals itself from the margins of his work. They are interesting (and necessary) and I evoke them here to show Rorty's view of "intellectuals" and "philosophers" from the most general and philosophically non-developed perspective.

Thus the thought of Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault - if looked upon from a certain perspective - puts somehow the same questions, the questions of the spirit of the times. And no matter whether we take Lyotardian poles of art and

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 84.

¹⁷ Richard Rorty, "Philosophy without Principles" in *Against Theory. Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism*, (ed.) W.J.T Mitchell (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 135.

¹⁸ Richard Rorty, "From Logic to Language to Play", *APA Proceedings, Special Reports*, Eleventh Inter-American Congress of Philosophy, p. 752.

politics or art and a critical theory, or Foucault's "ethics" in the sense of *rappport à soi*, attitude toward oneself on the one, and genealogical struggles with power on the other hand, or, finally, Rorty's reading of Derrida and Foucault within the framework of the solidarity/self-creation opposition, the questions I am dealing with here somewhere on the far-away horizon refer to their authors as well. Questions ask about the status of the one who is asking in the question he asks. Those who put questions ask about themselves, about choices they make in their philosophy. The reason for putting such question is a collapse of a distinct and permanent place in culture accorded so far to an intellectual. The monument of unquestionable authority is a little useless and a little impossible: on the one hand, too powerless to change much, on the other not as important as he used to be when immature society was to be kept in order with the help of his intellectual capacities. Perhaps the place of an intellectual in Enlightenment culture (that has lasted in its manifestations until the present) may be derived from the Kantian interpretation of *Aufklärung* as a "passage of man from immaturity in which he has fallen through his own fault" - with the help of reason. Mature leaders (Bauman's "legislators") and immature, yet-to-be-formed "sheep"? The passage to that maturity (*Mündigkeit*) as an act of courage that requires support, offered by those who are already mature owing to their own work? For what Kant had in mind was that everyone, if he is only willing to, can be mature, but not all people want maturity... "Frenchmen, Germans, make another effort..." - one could say. Also Marx's project required carriers of ideas that would be more clever than the proletariat (and let us remember, Marx never crossed the factory gates, as Paul Johnson says in *The History of the Jews*, studying the scandalous prostitution of the capital in cosiness of the British Museum...)

To hold these preliminary considerations in strict frames of traditional descriptions, we can ask whether "postmodernists" are not trapped within still another opposition, namely the opposition between the moral and the aesthetic, or more generally, between moralism and aestheticism, that is, between being a moralist and being an aesthete. I am gradually coming to the conclusion that it may be the case that they want to be both the former and the latter, which considering a certain redefinition of both notions and fitting them to our postmodern world might be possible (a classical example is the late Foucault's "ethics" as an "aesthetics of existence"). If ethics becomes that Foucauldian "attitude toward oneself", then - just like in Bauman's idea of "morality without ethics" (without legislative ethics, to be exact!) - the Socratic "care of the self"

becomes fully ethical rather than "merely aesthetic". Life and philosophy understood as a "work of art" (from Nietzsche to Foucault) is another idea breaking the traditional distinction. Foucault's "philosophical ethos, philosophical life"¹⁹ cuts across the distinction in question. It is a way of life that is both moral and aesthetic: "from the idea that the self is not given to us there comes, I suppose, just one practical consequence: we have to make a work of art of ourselves".²⁰ What may become an ethical task of a thinker is an aesthetical attitude toward oneself - that "stylization of existence" that Nietzsche wrote about in *The Gay Science*.²¹

4.

Let us pass on now to more detailed considerations focusing on the questions (accusations?) whether postmodernists taken care of here are "aesthetes" and what might be possible consequences if they were. We would mean here, obviously, "aesthetes" in the traditional sense of the term, although without traditional, pejorative surplus senses (thus "dandies", Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, and many more). "Aesthetes" compared with "writers", opposed to those who are "committed", compared with philosophers, poets... Further: aesthetes radically opposed to politics and politicians (as they have no longer dealt with science, at least since the times when they - as Rorty - came to the conclusion

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que les Lumières?" (published as an *inedit* in France as late as in 1993), *Magazine littéraire*, No. 309, 1993, p. 73.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of a Work in Progress" in *The Foucault Reader*, (ed.) Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 340.

²¹ Foucault said: "... the most important work of art that has to be taken care of, the main field to which we have to apply aesthetic values, are ourselves, our lives, our existence" (*The Foucault Reader*, p. 234). "We need one thing - Nietzsche says. To provide our character with a "style" - it is a great and rare art" (*The Gay Science*, 290).

Recently written, often monumental Foucault's biographies usually end with chapters about "life as a work of art" - cf. e.g. Didier Eribon's *Michel Foucault*, trans. B. Wings (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991) or the English book by David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon, 1994).

that it is not "the most interesting, promising or exciting field of culture", as he puts it in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*²²). Aesthetes, finally, opposed to traditional "intellectuals", figures of the kind of Emile Zola and Jean-Paul Sartre, especially, almost paradigmatically, opposed to the latter. Thus, instead of explaining who was that nineteenth-century aesthete and what was his attitude to culture, we shall deal here with his today's potential oppositions, imposing to an extent the term that has no longer been used, that has lost clear reference - on figures analyzed here and attitudes represented by them. And I am going to do that in order to consider whether - appearing from time to time - descriptions of postmodernists as "aesthetes", as well as (helplessly often) attempts of the latter to show that they and their works are not "merely aesthetic", may mean anything and whether they should be treated as an insult and attempts to be safe from it, respectively. For one could also say the following: yes, precisely, as a philosopher I am also an aesthete in the situation when I do not like (for it is no longer possible?) the engagement of an intellectual in a traditional, Enlightenment-based sense of both terms. But would being an aesthete in such a redefined sense of the term exclude me from the circle of moralists? Does such an opposition still make sense?

So who will we be dealing here with? Richard Rorty's figure of a "liberal ironist" (or rather - an "ironist" only), a "marginalized" intellectual, Bauman's account of an intellectual (philosopher, sociologist of postmodernity and postmodern one, at the same time) who suffers from "political irrelevance": who can - as Derrida says²³ - tout dire, say everything, endowed with unprecedented freedom, but only within a closed, magical circle of the Academy, without an exit to the so-called "world". We shall also deal with Foucault's account of the role and tasks of an intellectual within his "aesthetics

²² Rorty nevertheless deals with science in his philosophy, I skip over these questions altogether in the present book, referring those interested to the article of Anna Palubicka and Jerzy Kmita "The Question of Utility of the Concept of Experience" in *The Search for Certitude and Its Postmodern Denigration*, Jan Such (ed.), as well as to a text by Anna Palubicka, "Richard Rorty's Conception of Science" in *Postmodern Inspirations in the Humanities*, Anna Jamroziakowa (ed.), Poznan, 1993.

²³ See the discussion preceding the volume of Derrida's texts on literature, entitled *Acts of Literature*, (ed.) Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), e.g. p. 36, or the conversation with Derrida and Francois Ewald "Une 'folie' doit veiller sur la pensée" (*Magazine littéraire*, Mars 1991), p. 23.

of existence", and, finally, with the Lyotardian figure of a "libidinal aesthete" and "aesthete of the sublime" in his later texts, the one who seeks "resistance through writing" (painting etc.).

All the above philosophers were "growing" to "aestheticism" in the sense being vaguely outlined here, just as the evolving world was growing to it starting from, say, May '68. Both Rorty and Lyotard used to think in the past, at the beginning of their philosophical careers, that some "mission" or "vocation" of a philosopher is to change the world, to be radically opposed to the status quo (distant echoes of Conrad's "dispensing justice to the visible world"). Rorty was charmed with Platonism (that could link "reality" and "justice", as well as "virtue" and "wisdom"²⁴), Lyotard was charmed with radical Marxism, then Marxism and Freudianism, grand philosophical visions in which philosophers were ascribed particular roles and where they were judged on the basis of their utility: a philosopher was supposed to become a king, or a king - a philosopher, and a "committed" individual was supposed to "change the world", rather than to "interpret it", according to a well known thesis of a bearded man from Trewir. That is testified by their philosophical texts, as well as autobiographical fragments, redescribing the past in the name, and from the point of view, of the present. Lyotard: "Socialism ou barbarie", Algerian texts, polemics with Souyri, Castoriadis, "Pouvoir ouvrier", until *Economy libidinale* where, finally, within the framework of the Marxian opposition in question it is clearly said: "to interpret the world, damn!", as well as where the first realization of the danger of aestheticism and elitism is formulated. Rorty: how to reconcile "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids", how not to be ashamed of being interested in "socially useless flowers"²⁵ - the questions that did not fit into the philosophical vocabulary of analytical philosophers and which could be explicitly articulated after final settling accounts with analytical philosophy and - broader - with the whole "foundational" kind of philosophy (in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) in a new constellation of philosophical questions of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. The questions found their answer embodied in "privatized philosophy" of Jacques Derrida, in "idiosyncratic visions"²⁶ of a philosopher-

²⁴ Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids", *Common Knowledge*, vol. 1, no. 3.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 141.

²⁶ Also Rorty himself being "homo idiosyncraticus", as Lech Witkowski is writing of him in the text "Homo Idiosyncraticus. Richard Rorty or the Debate

writer who - as Proust in literature - "have extended the bounds of possibility" and who relegated philosophy - together with poetry - to the private sphere and radically separated it from the political, social or ideological (in the manner of Jürgen Habermas). In a word: let politics be made by "social engineers" on an experimental rather than theoretical basis and let philosophy be made by philosophers in a full separation from public matters (thus "de-theoreticized politics" on the one hand, and "de-politicized philosophy" on the other hand, as Thomas McCarthy puts it²⁷). That is the sense of radical incommensurability of "self-creation" and "solidarity", the private and the public, the sense of "the private/public split", as Rorty calls it. And it is close from here, let us add, to the Foucauldian account of philosophy as a "work of art" (it was already in Lyotard's *Economy libidinale*, in the most provocative and attacked chapter at that time, "Desire Named Marx", that Marx was treated as a "work of art" rather than as a "theoretician") - it is close also to the account of philosophy as "transforming one's self", that is to say: "self-creation". (It is also worth adding at that point that the whole conception of philosophy of Ancient Greece of Pierre Hadot from *La Philosophie comme l'exercice spirituel* goes precisely in that direction - a philosopher "takes care of a soul", as Socrates puts it, of his own soul, by means of spiritual exercises, just like he takes care of his body by means of physical exercises).

And finally Zygmunt Bauman from his recent texts, for instance from *Intimations of Postmodernity*, in which he recognizes a fundamental powerlessness of philosophers and sociologists - to whom their own "canons of works", "texts from the history of philosophy" are left, of which they are supposed to take care, in the manner of Jacques Derrida's metaphilosophical analyses of classics of philosophy.²⁸ Bauman who is clearly against "legislative reason", represented as a standard by Kant and who supports "interpretive reason" devoid of socio-transformative aspirations. That is as far as the evolution of today's postmodern (the term that no longer means much) thinkers is concerned in the most general terms. Lyotard will protest against the word

over Significance of Irony" in *Postmodern Inspirations in the Humanities*, Warsaw, PWN, 1993.

²⁷ Thomas McCarthy, "Ironie privée et décence publique" in a splendid collective volume *Lire Rorty. Le pragmatisme et ses conséquences*, (ed. par) Jean-Pierre Cometti (Paris: l'éclat, 1992).

²⁸ See e.g. Bauman's interview closing *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992).

"postmodernist" - saying that there are two senses of "postmodernism", that something else is an artistic and commonly accepted in the culture of today sense of the term, and something else is his own philosophical, normative project etc.; Rorty will protest - saying that he is merely a "neopragmatist", a "pupil of Dewey" and that he does not wish to be associated with Frenchmen too much, and finally Bauman will express his opposition against the term - saying that what he does is just "sociological hermeneutics" and if at all, he could only be associated with Foucault's account of modernity as a "march towards prison" or with Baudrillard's accounts of *la société de consommation*... And they will all be right, obviously. Let us then put it in another way: we are writing here about aesthetes (in different, studied here sense and degree), and if "postmodern" at all, then "postmodern" in the sense of belonging to "postmodern epoch", "postmodern times", that is to say - "times of today". And the only question is whether an "aesthete" as a name will not be in their eyes a greater insult - and might not raise more vivid protests - than a "postmodernist"... Another choice might be that of a "moralist" but, as we shall be trying to show, the difference aesthete/moralist is becoming more and more blurred nowadays.

5.

Let us remind - by way of a contrast - a couple of thoughts that only recently revived fervor for changes made by philosophy and owing to it - of perhaps the last - great philosophical optimist of the twentieth century, Edmund Husserl. Who would be able to give expression - as Husserl did in Vienna and Prague of 1935 - to such convictions, who would share them today... Let us listen to Husserl: "In that ideally directed all-community [Europe], philosophy preserves a guiding function and its particular infinite task: the function of a free and universal theoretical thought that includes also all ideals and an all-ideal, that is, a universe of all norms. In the humanity of Europe, philosophy ought to perform its function as an archontic function of the whole humanity". Further on Husserl writes of "philosophy as an idea, an idea of an infinite task" and, finally - what sounds so horrifying in that place and at that time - of "rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy through the heroism of reason". How quickly "Europe" - that "unity of spiritual life, action, creation" - has lost faith in its *entelechia*, and philosophers - in its spiritual mission... Husserl

would be furious seeing the "irresponsibility" of contemporary philosophy (not only "postmodern" one - with exception of post-Marxist and feminist - but also analytical one, isolated from the world and culture in an absolute way, the ivory tower of the end of the twentieth century). Philosophy in its postmodern version (just like "postmodernists-aesthetes" considered here) has renounced its "guiding", "archontic" function in the world, considering as "metanarrative" the past belief that philosophy is a "universe of all norms". It no longer believes in its "infinite task". And "rebirth of Europe from the spirit of philosophy" (through "heroism of spirit") sounds so fantastic to philosophers responsible for their words that their hands begin to tremble... Husserl's belief in philosophy can be envied today, in the situation in which no longer being a substitute for religion, it stops or has already stopped being a substitute for science (cf. Charles Taylor's articles about "post-epistemological age"²⁹). Philosophy used to turn to politics in the fervent sixties, for some people it is still a "weapon" for their fight (as Rorty puts it in his response to Christopher Norris) with capitalism, exploitation, alienation of work and disciplinary society. (It is precisely such "postmodernists" - mainly American and Marxist disciples of Derrida - that Rorty has to repudiate, it is perhaps mainly due to them that he does not want to be called a "postmodernist", he, a professor of philosophy devoted to liberal democracy and proclaiming the United States of today "the best of possible worlds"). But the awareness of being cut from the possibility of changing the world is becoming more and more common (in a most explicit way its is presented, apart from Rorty, by Zygmunt Bauman who provides the picture with a sociological support: the "need" for intellectuals is over, rulers no longer need legitimacy as rulers, no longer need narratives legitimating power, Leviathan does perfectly well without intellectuals' background. The background thus returns to - subsidized and independent because no longer significant and influential - Academies³⁰). A philosopher no longer feels he is a

²⁹ Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, (eds.) K. Baynes, J. Bohman, T. McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 464-488; "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition" in *Reading Rorty*, (ed.) A. Malachowski (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 257-277.

³⁰ Writing about the figure of an intellectual, one cannot omit several crucial Zygmunt Bauman's considerations, that is to be more exact, his redefinition of the intellectual's role and place shown in the form of the passage from the metaphor of "legislators" to the one of "interpreters" - as one of the ways of looking at postmodernity, interpreters, today's intellectuals, being granted

"functionary of humanity", as Husserl said in *Crisis* in 1937, he often may feel a "private philosopher", as Rorty writes of Derrida in and after his *The Post Card*. Perhaps that is the role - outsiders of a system, although taken care of and bred by it - to be played by aesthetes (or moralists). One would like to speak of "the power of taste", in favorite expression of Zbigniew Herbert, a great Polish poet, but that is as worn out bit of words as the figure of a committed intellectual is worn out: the power of aesthetic taste, the power of aesthetic judgement devoid of rules, the power of singularity of an event, the role of *phronesis*, hidden potencies of the "wisdom of the novel", the return to the Aristotelian judge from *Nicomachean Ethics* who judges without rules, as well as producing works and rules for an evaluation of it at the same time. And also a philosophical ethos - the criticism of, as Foucault puts it, "what we are saying, thinking and doing on the basis of a historical ontology of ourselves".³¹ These are just several catchwords - answers provided by Lyotard, Rorty and Foucault to the end of traditional attitudes in philosophy.

"autonomy devoid of practical significance out of a closed world of intellectual discourses" (*Intimations of Postmodernity*, p. 16). Then one has to mention a highly idiosyncratic account, specific perspective and a significant choice of figures of intellectuals in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, where a modern intellectual - Shestov, Mannheim, Kafka, Simmel - is "outrooted", is an "eternal wanderer and universal stranger" for whom exile is a "blessing" (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991, p. 83). It is similar in an essay on Benjamin where the author says that a common fate of an intellectual is "exile".

It is obviously a motive of a famous saying of George Steiner: My homeland is my typewriter, just like in Hannah Arendt when she says - in *Thinking* - that "thinking ego ... is nowhere. It is homeless in the full sense of the term"... But it seems to me that the author reads in his works one of ways the twentieth century intellectuals have chosen, but there was also another, excessively public, too much committed - the whole "French" road, so to speak, which forms a margin of the present book... It seems to me that none of them is universal and both Zygmunt Bauman for his narratives about modernity and postmodernity, as well as me for my story about postmodernity, need proper heroes: "outrooted" - and "committed", respectively...

See my "philosophical excursus" on Rorty and Bauman for details.

³¹ Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que le Lumières?", p. 70.

6.

Thus, returning to fundamental questions here: as an intellectual is no longer *engagé*, is it possible that he is gradually becoming an aesthete (for, as we noted, the very term "intellectual" ceases - in such a post-Enlightenment account - to mean much)? Is such an opposition meaningful, is commitment an opposite pole to aestheticism (and it was commitment that perfectly well defined French post-war intellectuals)? Does the turn from the public to the private, to use Rorty's distinctions from *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, from the public today, that is to say, from current political questions - not egoistic but rather associated with an *exhaustion of a certain cultural project* (the one of *Aufklärung*), at least in that part of it - mean, among other things, the turn to aestheticism? And perhaps the turn to moralism? These are very important questions that will appear in the book many times, finally reaching an (uncertain and ambiguous) answer.

An aesthete loves art and literature. He is not satisfied with the so-called struggles for a better tomorrow (and that is not accidental that Habermas - one of those "philosophers with a public mission", as Rorty might call him - does not take interest in art). He is many-sided, while a committed philosopher is selective and flattening, reducing the multitude and complicacy of questions to a simple and single formula: what interests does it serve? French philosophers prefer painting to music, the domain of Germans - is not it therefore that Mann's *cold* Adrian Leverkühn is a composer, although he ought to have been rather a philosopher... - Lyotard in his texts constantly refers to the avant-garde painting (e.g. Barnett Newman, Valerio Adami, Jackson Pollock), while Derrida and Foucault write more about literature. And finally Rorty who writes about literature (Nabokov, Orwell, Kundera, Dickens), avoiding visual arts. A work and a commentary become closer to each other, as do a critic and an artist. Critics of aesthetes will say - how "playful", "useless", "elitist" and "care-free". An entertainment of aesthetes while what is at stake (in philosophy, literature, theory...) is preservation of the *status quo*/ overcoming of the *status quo*. While "Titanic" is sinking... There appears the motive of "irresponsibility", the most favorite motive of critics of postmodernism... What comes to mind are Richard

Rorty's words about his own philosophical youth: "I was uneasily aware, however, that there was something a bit dubious about this esotericism - this interest in socially useless flowers ... I was afraid that Trotsky would not have approved of my interests in orchids".³² And one knows that "Trotsky" and the "wild orchids" cannot be reconciled, they one can either be an intellectual snob or a friend of humanity and fighter for justice... Much more was done for the sake of better living of people by novels than by philosophical theories, Rorty says (which I examine carefully in a chapter on Rorty and literature).³³ And in the view of critics, it is only an aesthete (irresponsible jester, *homme des lettres*, paraphilosopher) that can say things like these, that can choose literature before philosophy, narrative before theory, detail before the universal, irrationality before reason (unity of reason, be it even in "diversity of its voices"). Literature, art - these are domains unworthy of being explored by philosophers. For there are those "perennial problems of philosophy"... Philosophy still would like to be a foundational "queen of sciences", the first lady on the postmodern scene... There are things, though, that probably - today - cannot be done. And that results from a purely contingent set of circumstances rather than from a progress of human spirit in the course of human history, as Hegel or Husserl dreamed, or from teleological deepening of consciousness, coming of Spirit on a higher level etc. It so happened, Rorty would say (following Kundera both from *The Art of the Novel* and from his recent *Les Testaments trahis*), that "the wisdom of the novel" gives culture more today than hypostasied "wisdom of philosophy". and that is not any revenge of Plato after the ages.

An aesthete. He does not want to influence directly - does not imagine he might have such authority and such right - the shape of the surrounding world. He provides the shape to himself instead and provides himself as a model for others rather than shapes the historical-political matter of the present. He acts slowly and deliberately. He does not engage in current socio-political debates and does not solve the so-called "pressing problems of contemporaneity". If he speaks of the present, he does it indirectly, in a vague and ambiguous manner. He may wait for his readers, for his time, like Nietzsche. He does not participate in struggles for the shape of the state, although it often happens that he engages himself in fights for the shape of education, especially of universities. He

³² Richard Rorty, "Trotsky and the Wild Orchids", p. 143.

³³ That is one of constant motives of Rorty's thought of recent years. See the text "Brigands et intellectuels" from *Critique*, p. 468 or "Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" from PP 2.

interprets the world, perhaps with the intention that other people, later on, might change it to a little bit better. He reinterprets the philosophical tradition, writes the history of philosophy in his own idiom, coins his own vocabulary, according himself - following Nietzsche - a "lordly right of giving names", practicing like the latter "active philology" (Deleuze): "active philosophy". An aesthete. Today's hero of Richard Rorty and Jean-Francois Lyotard in his multiple embodiments?

How far it is from here to the old Lyotardian desire to be - to recall that painful metaphor indeed - "salt of truth in the wound of alienation", to the desire of "real criticism of the system that may take place ... through interventions of the here and now types", to the task in the form of "questioning and overthrowing the reality that is evidently unbearable". How far it is, finally, to the Algerian texts!³⁴ The breakthrough for Lyotard appears to have come with *Economie libidinale* in which he finally admitted that his words were not going to change the world, but, as we have already mentioned, to interpret it.

A couple of words about Michel Foucault now that we are coming to an end of that introduction. In one of his last texts he is writing about three poles of analysis in his reflection: knowledge, power and ethics; let us mention the specifically seen "ethics", these *relations à soi*, referred to here several times, the title "care of the self". What is most important in the context that interests us here is the following: the author tries to derive his thinking from Kant's text on Enlightenment (also from it, let us say), inscribing his reflection into the current running up from Nietzsche, Weber to the Frankfurt school. But that is a peculiar reading, as the author seems to put an emphasis on an individual - rather than only collective - side of the Kantian reaching "maturity". At the same time, "ethics" in his account is one of four parts of morality, consisting e.g. of self-forming practices.³⁵ It is me who becomes the object of ethics. In his conversation with Dreyfus and Rabinow, Foucault says the following:

³⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 45, 57, as well as the citation from the introduction to *Libidinal Economy* (London: Athlone Press, 1993), p. xxvi.

³⁵ See the diagram summarizing Foucault's story from his conversation with Dreyfus and Rabinow in *The Foucault Reader* from Arnold I. Davidson's text in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, p. 229, as well as "Introduction" to II vol. of *Histoire de la sexualité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), especially the fragment about "Morale et pratique de soi", pp. 32-39.

What strikes me is the fact that in our society art has become something associated with objects only, and not with individuals or life. The fact that art is something specialized or something to be dealt with by experts who are artists. But cannot life of each man become a work of art? Why a lamp or a house might be objects of art, and our lives might not?³⁶

Precisely, these are questions directly from Baudelaire. They are returning today, but in a different context.

Foucault, that *philosophe masqué*,³⁷ coins his way to affinity with Enlightenment and Kant in a specific reading of the latter. He tries to show that Kant's lecture also opened another way of practicing philosophy. As, he will say, in Enlightenment there is rooted such a philosophical investigation that problematizes at the same time the relation of man to the present, his historical way of life and "constitution of oneself as an autonomous subject".³⁸ The important question thus might be the following: is the Foucauldian "philosophical way of life" - his last project of philosophizing - really to be derived from Kant? The French philosopher puts an emphasis to the last of the mentioned philosophical triad, to "constitution of a self", so far rather neglected in philosophical reflection. Let us recall Kant's key sentences (not recalled by Foucault, though): "So it is difficult for each single man to get out of immaturity that has almost become his second nature. He has even started to

³⁶ *The Foucault Reader*, p. 350 - emphasis mine.

³⁷ As he says about himself, for anonymity was one of his numerous obsessions of a writer, starting with a famous text "Who is an Author?" (1969) in which there is a vision of literature disseminated anonymously (with the closing question of "what is the difference who speaks?"), through a well-known interview - programmatically anonymous - for *Le Monde*, to numerous interviews from the volume *Politics, Philosophy, Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990). Foucault says: *Why anonymity? Pourquoi l'anonymat? Par nostalgie du temps ou, etant tout à fait inconnu, que je disais avait quelques chances d'etre entendu*. But, on the other hand - how to be an anonymous "founder of discursivity", like Marx and Freud? See Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory. A Reader*, (ed.) D. Lodge (London: Longman, 1988) pp. 196-210 and "Le philosophe masqué" in *Entretiens avec 'Le Monde'* (Paris: La Découverte, 1984), pp. 21-30.

³⁸ Michel Foucault, "Qu'est que les Lumières?", p. 69.

like it, that immaturity of his ... - and Kant's conclusion - So only few people managed to get out of immaturity owing to the work of their own spirit, and to stand on their own feet".³⁹ To conclude once again, it is possible to enlighten "the public", but individual enlightening pertains to "few only", to those who owe it to "the work of their own spirit". Foucault's last questions, paradoxically enough, appear as "Enlightenment" questions, taken directly from Kant, although in a version forgotten and rather absent from our modern culture. If the Enlightenment is to be read also from an individual's point of view, then Foucault would be just exemplarily Enlightenment-like with that respect, and he would realize ethical tasks drawn also in Kant's text by way of an aesthetic constitution of himself... That is just a suggestion that I am not going to develop here, wishing just to mention such a possibility when one considers the moral/aesthetic distinction.

It is perhaps also worth while saying a few words about Foucault's "ethics" in connection with "morality without ethics" recently sketched by Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman, suggesting that an ethical crisis does not have to mean a crisis of morality, expresses his distrust in ethically decreed morality (in a traditional sense of the term). He says that "Legislators are incapable of thinking of the world without legislating; ethical legislators are capable of thinking of the world without ethical legislating".⁴⁰ What results from that situation - perhaps analogously to Foucault's conclusions - is the "ethical paradox of postmodernity", as he describes it in his *Intimations of Postmodernity*: "moral responsibility comes together with the loneliness of moral choice".⁴¹ Man, freed from an ethical smoke-screen, from a metanarrative haze that covers ethical choices, receives the burden of his own moral dilemmas. Although he is morally independent (from ethical codes) and morally responsible (before himself and others), it is his burden - and chance? - to "face a 'bare truth' of moral dilemmas".⁴² Paradoxically, both project, Bauman's and Foucault's, making use of different vocabularies, say almost the same, namely - choosing *via negativa* in a description - they say what ethics or moral

³⁹ Immanuel Kant, "What is the Enlightenment?", p. 160.

⁴⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality* (Warsaw: The Institute of Culture, 1994), p. 74.

⁴¹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. xxii.

⁴² Zygmunt Bauman, *Two Essays on Postmodern Morality*, p. 84.

philosophy still keeps silence about.⁴³ But about reasons of absence of traditional ethics in culture and its present possibilities, I am writing in more detail in the chapter on Rorty's anti-Platonism and about Bauman and realtions between Rorty and Bauman, I am writing in a separate chapter.

Here comes the end of the introduction to my book and to my discussions of "intellectuals" and "philosophers" today. Here is the end of comments on the senses of the terms "aesthete" and "moralist" with respect to postmodern philosophers. It seems to me that the former is not an insult to a philosopher any more, the latter no longer sanctifies him. Both of them can be meaningful today as long they are not read as opposite to each other. It turns out that while the opposition between the private and the public could be reasonably used in reflection on today's culture, the pair aestheticism/moralism ceases to mean much. Therefore the essays contained here make use of the former opposition; the other dichotomy remains in the hands of opponents of postmodern reflection.

⁴³ Arnold I. Davidson says that after Foucault's "ethics" there is no longer an excuse for the poverty of contemporary moral treatises that omit "proper ethics, the relation of self to itself, accounted for independently from a moral code", "Archeology, Genealogy, Ethics" in (ed.) David C. Hoy, *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 232.