

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
CLUJ-NAPOCA**

FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY STUDIES
DOCTORAL SCHOOL**

Richard Rorty’s Pragmatism

DOCTORAL DISERTATION ABSTRACT

Scientific advisor:

PROF. UNIV. DR. ZĂPĂRȚAN LIVIU-PETRU

PhD Candidate:

CRISTIAN FLORIN ȚIPLE

2013

Abstract	page
Abbreviations.....	4
Introduction	5
Bibliography and methodology	22
Chapter 1	
1.1. An intellectual biography.....	26
1.2 College.....	29
1.3 Doctoral Studies.....	33
Chapter 2	
2.1. Early writings: exercises in metaphilosophy.....	36
2.2. The analytic context.....	39
2.3. The Princeton environment	43
2.4. The Linguistic Turn.....	45
Chapter 3	
3.1. The critique of epistemology and the pragmatic turn.....	57
3.2. The critique of the conception of a glassy essence and of the criteria for a mental-physical distinction.....	61
3.3. Functional, phenomenal, immaterial.....	63
3.4. The mind-body problem.....	65
3.5. Thinking as access to universality.....	67
3.6. The existence of mind independent of the body.....	68
3.7. Dualism	70
3.8. Antipodeans.....	71
3.9. The problem of phenomenal properties.....	72
3.10. Incorrigeability	73
3.11. Behaviorism	74
3.12. Materialism without mind-body identity.....	77
3.13. The mirroring of the world in knowledge and the idea of a theory of knowledge.....	79
3.14. Debunking privileged representations.....	89
3.15. Epistemology and psychology.....	91
3.17. Epistemology and the philosophy of language.....	94
3.18. Hermeneutics and edification	99

Chapter 4

4.1. The pragmatic turn. From hermeneutics to the consequences of pragmatism.....	111
4.2. Professionalized philosophy.....	112

Chapter 5

5.1. The ironist turn of an organic intellectual	119
5.2. The contingent individuality	123
5.3. Neohumanism.....	136
5.4. Solidarity and social hope.....	145
5.5. A dispute with Habermas.....	153
5.6. The refuse of the theological turn: religion in the private space	162
Conclusion	179
Index	182
Annex 1 Chronological Table	187
Annex 2 An extended list of Rorty' publications	189
Bibliography	209

Keywords: Richard Rorty, neopragmatism, linguistic pragmatism, metaphilosophy, American philosophy, linguistic turn, analytic philosophy, antirealism, linguistic holism, liberalism

The present thesis is intended to be a monograph on the life and work of Richard Rorty (1931-2007), one of the most remarkable American philosophers from the second half of the last century, who identified himself as promoter of a linguistic form of pragmatism, also called neopragmatism. Richard Rorty's neopragmatist philosophy, admired but largely contested, had brought the attention of researchers interested in contemporary philosophy, but also of a different sort of intellectuals, closer to literary criticism.

The revival of the pragmatist philosophical current initiated by Charles S. Peirce owes a great deal to Rorty's great influence in the American cultural medium. But it is not out of the question that the resurgence of pragmatism will become important outside the United States for the evolution of philosophy, through the efforts of thinkers who try to put into dialog different schools of thought, in the metaphilosophical way Rorty tried to develop the dialog between analytic and continental philosophy.

In a context in which philosophy became very professionalized in relation to the rest of the culture, Rorty's critics to the philosophical tradition reached a broad audience, beyond the philosophical circles, and this can be explained simply by the fact that he taught, after he got tenured at Princeton, in the comparative literature departments in Virginia și Stanford.

In general it can be said that Rorty was more appreciated by his letter colleagues than analytic philosophers, being one of the promoters of a thinking marked by postmodernism in an analytic environment which was not receptive to contemporary French philosophy, and due to its positivistic legacy, it saw it as relativistic.

But if relativistic is any conception that denies the existence of traits in objects, independent of the relations with other objects, and in general of the universal truths, Rorty is, although he denies it, a relativist philosopher.

What does relativism argue for, since Protagoras? That the nature and the existence of the elements of knowledge, the values and the logical entities are defined by the convictions and human activity, through the background of linguistic and cultural determinations.

Between the individual determinations, found by Protagoras: man is the measure of all things, and the cultural and historical determinations – analyzed by Hegel, and reiterated by Rorty, the difference is not one between a radical and a moderate position, because the ancients had the custom of exaggeration of ideas in order to bring them in the consciousness of others. When Rorty tries to dodge the relativist label, he reduces relativism to the conception that no descriptive vocabulary is better than any other in telling us how the world really is. While he acknowledges the fact that there is not and cannot be a language that puts us in contact with a pre-human, language independent reality, he argues that the criterion of

vocabulary selection is the utility in serving our purposes better. He defends himself arguing that admitting the utility criterion is what makes him not being a relativist. Rorty is a relativist in the measure his reader is a foundationalist. For Rorty, no vocabulary represents the correct or final description of reality, and can not do that because human knowledge is always mediated. The observation to which Rorty adheres – that the mind cannot map the reality independent of its linguistic instruments and practical interest of adaptation to this reality, comes in the footsteps of continental tradition appropriated by the American culture after the significant moment of the publication of Darwin's *On The Origin of Species*.

In the American intellectual medium, Rorty has the reputation of a philosopher who, after he managed to master the technical language of analytic philosophy, turned to debunk philosophy as a program of investigation of truth, in the epistemological manner of modern science, questioning the actual role that philosophy can still play in the culture.

The biographical data found in his correspondence show that since during his college his preferences were focused on the history of ideas and that he was not inclined to turn into an analytic philosopher, after his disappointment regarding his mathematical skills he tried to develop in order to study symbolical logic.

The impact of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* on Rorty occurred as a therapeutically anti-metaphysical discourse for the young undergraduate student of Chicago who was detaching from his initial influence of a Platonism perceived as an alternative to religion. The linguistic holism proposed by Wilfrid Sellars in *Empiricism and The Philosophy of Mind*, and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* offered Rorty a new image of the relation of language to the world, image he will never abandon, but rather always tried to consolidate. This image presupposes the abandonment of a realist conception that draws on the correspondence theory of truth, a commonsensical theory of whose utility was valuable in the period in which modern science tried to free itself from the ecclesiastical authority and the conception that values revelation. Rorty discovers pragmatist antecedents of the holistic theory of meaning. His neopragmatism was built only on a partial reading of Dewey and James that allowed a fusion with hermeneutics. We cannot say that Rorty built a new philosophy starting from Sellars and Wittgenstein. Rorty's strategy was rather to rehabilitate and consolidate Deweyan pragmatism with their findings, in order to support the idea that pragmatism synthesizes the philosophical and scientific evolution of the West.

There has been much debating in the past century about the gap that moves more and more away the literary from the scientific culture. Between these two cultural areas the socio-political options intervene. In our century, their relation is more complicated by this criterion.

A part of the literary culture with left wing preferences has been recently manifesting a theoretical approach to the Christian legacy, while the scientific culture moves visible toward a positivist version of secular humanism. Rorty seems stuck in the middle between the two tendencies. But he came with his own propositions, perceived in general as weak, a reason for which he became the target of criticism from camps of both cultures. Few of contemporary philosophers have been criticized as much as Rorty was. He replied to them all with patience and without exhibiting any sign of capitulation, recognizing sometimes minor strategic errors in support of his theses or interpreting texts so that they can be of use for his thesis. He never seemed that he is taking a step back. Even if all the edifice of philosophy would fall, he would tell them he would have preferred to send us the same messages, and it would have been preferable, as a matter of fact, to have done it under literary form, without philosophical pretensions, but he thought that he had not enough talent in this respect.

The introduction of the thesis represented an attempt to place Rorty's philosophy in contemporary context and in relation to analytical philosophy and classical pragmatism. In the first Chapter we followed Rorty's biography from his childhood up to the completion of his doctoral studies. We have identified four highlights in the developing of his thought. A youthful Platonism with Gnostic nuances marked the thinking of his teenage years until the completion of his MA in philosophy, when he was approaching Whitehead's philosophy. His graduate studies represented a period of transition in which the historicism of both Hegel and Lovejoy causes him a serious questioning on what is philosophy, and determine him to approach the new wave in post-positivistic analytical philosophy. As biographic data shows that Rorty was not at all inclined to become an analytical philosopher, we have shown that Rorty has been forced to join the analytical tradition for legitimacy, and towards which, once legitimated, turned critical.

Starting with the graduate studies, Rorty sought, for a while, to discover a thematic continuity and to identify overlaps between different philosophical traditions, searching for a higher level of philosophical synthesis, brought in particular from the identification of possible bridges between continental philosophy and the analytical school, effort that he framed as metaphilosophy. As a translator between analytical and non-analytical approaches his first studies signed by Rorty represented attempts at comparison of the themes discussed by major figures in the history of philosophy with questions in recent analytical philosophy.

We have reviewed these studies in Chapter 2, in which we have presented Rorty's evolution until the moment when he was tenured at Princeton, after the publication of *The Linguistic Turn*.

Chapter 3 is dedicated entirely to *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature* (1979). Having tried for a decade to make contributions in the sphere of analytical philosophy, starting from Wittgenstein and Sellars, with *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature*, Rorty has tried to convince us of the failure of analytical philosophy, starting from a critique of Cartesian representationalism and the realism adopted by a series of philosophers of language, and then arguing, in the end, in favor of overcoming the presuppositions of analytical philosophy in favor of a less rigid and more creative hermeneutical approach, liberated by the influence of idealistic thinking and closer to the opening of multiculturalists cultural anthropology. Rorty has tried to dismiss the idea that philosophy can play the role of a Court in which other academic disciplines scientific pretensions may be judged, describing the ways in which philosophical concerns were and are determined by historical cultural contexts.

Chapter 4 seeks to clarify the perceived betrayal act towards the analytical community, apparently converting all of a sudden to pragmatism. This is the third moment in the development of Rorty's thinking. From the '70s Richard Rorty will participate as the major actor in bringing pragmatism in the area of academic "respectable" debate. His strategy involved a critical report on epistemology and analytical philosophy, both now considered irrelevant to public life and human needs, and an approach to cultural relativism and philosophical hermeneutics. Rorty joined pragmatism also because, unlike the tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger, characterized by pessimism, pragmatists have not took distance from the scientific community and have continued to make the figure of the naturalist a hero, and to advocate the social and scientific progress. This is lost from sight by Rorty's critics that considers his work entirely postmodern, with some good reasons. Rorty outlines a new conception of the intellectual: up to Kant, for an intellectual was essential the accumulation of knowledge in natural history, then the 19th century, still keeping this respect for science, gave rise to a form of distrust in the promises of science, or more specifically in the industrial revolution. Gradually, by deepening this gap, along with scientific culture took shape a mainly literary culture - the highbrow literary culture. The gap has been maintained as a result of the manner of construction of university curriculum during the period specified above, a problem which has been debated at that time around the report from 1828 requested by an American senator from the president of Yale University with regard to the possibility to adapt higher education for a country traversing changes. He was concerned that there should be established a priority to training engineers, and educated artisans of technology, not specifically science, to the detriment of the study of Classical languages and literature,

and man of high culture felt that they start losing their prestige. The separation of cultures has been stressed by Charles Percy Snow, chemist and writer at the same time, in an already famous conference in 1959, in which he was lamenting about the gulf between scientists and literary scholars. The opposite poles of these two cultures are marked by physicists and men of letters, which both have a distorted image of each other, there is not much they can communicate, and even come to look at each other with some hostility. One looks with disdain on the other for he has not read Shakespeare, and does not fully understand the tragedy of human destiny, being still tempted by the idea of progress, and the other one can no longer look at him as a man claimed seriously educated that cannot explain nor even the second principle of thermodynamics. Rorty takes over a part of C. P. Snow's remarks, which in their turn have produced an important debate, and translates them in the situation of the gap between continental philosophy, presumably close to literary culture, and the analytical philosophy, influenced by positivism, close to the scientific culture. If positivism made a service to American philosophy, as Rorty claimed, distinguishing between philosophy as explanation of scientific knowledge and the philosophy as something else, for the literary culture it is important it is important what professionalized philosophy loses if she is ignoring Nietzsche, Heidegger or Foucault. In Rorty's point of view, this is an unnecessary dispute, because there are no common standards by which to judge who is a true philosopher, because although it has a history, philosophy doesn't have an essence or object. Since its origins, philosophy was distancing from mythical thinking by trying to build a rational discourse about the world, but in our days, the canons of rationality does not cover only philosophy, and more than that, there are more types of rationality. For Rorty from the period of *Consequences ...*, the philosopher is remarked only by scholarship erudition and the depth with which he leans on the philosophical tradition which he interprets or critiques.

Rorty notes that at the beginning of the 20th century the Academy had to be restructured to accommodate other departments and in this move Dewey has contributed to „securing the world for the social sciences“, as Kant did for modern science. American Academy has become the place for the reconstruction of American society, and American philosophy, believes Rorty, became a call for such a reconstruction. Rorty agrees with Dewey that moral philosophy don't have to search for universal principles which should replace biblical commandments, but rather to search for intelligent means to solve social problems. What Dewey thought that was going to happen to the philosophy, a re-orientation from science, toward social planning, Rorty thinks happened in the literary culture, men of letters taking over the interest to the philosophy of history, while philosophy professionals (such as

Carnap) have come to treat the philosophies of the past as examples of conceptual confusion. The clearest example is the way in which Carnap deals with poetical statements of Heidegger as nonsensical.

Rorty considers that both Dewey and Heidegger have contributed to the overcoming of metaphysics. In 1974 Rorty was publishing the article "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey", included afterward in *Consequences of pragmatism*. Here he tried to attack the assumption that without discipline and rigor, philosophy would be reduced to a variety of literature-based inspirational poetic metaphysical speculation, which would eschew the responsibility which is characteristic for intellectual rigorous argumentation. Rorty considers that Heidegger has showed us that the vision of philosophy as arena of argumentative dialogue is a Platonist inheritance whose legacy movement is in fact positivism, tributary to the technicist interpretation of thinking as *telos*.

Rorty accepts therefore Heidegger's influence in becoming aware of the fact that the characterization of thinking as *theory* is derived from the technicist interpretation of thinking that was going to dissociate it from action, and he includes Heidegger among the philosophers that did not attempt to solve the old problems of philosophy, and started using a new vocabulary to dissolve them, raising question about what could be the future of philosophy, and reaching the conclusion that there is no interesting future of a self-contained philosophical discipline that would be able to pursue a clear independent research program.

The literary culture in which Rorty wishes to include most of the texts of edifying philosophy goes in the direction of hermeneutics, being interested in the interpretation of both philosophical as well as literary texts. Rorty places the beginning of the literary culture as a distinct phenomenon identifiable in the 19th century, which occurs in conjunction with the development of a kind of writing which does not address either the value literary creation, which is not intellectual history, nor moral philosophy or social prophetism, but all these together, considering that in the 19th century literary imagination has replaced religion and philosophy in the formation and consolidation of consciousness of the educated young, and poetry and literature have become the means by which they could affirm their moral character. In the literary culture, the criticism does not seek to establish whether a poet has written more beautiful verses than the other, or if one said more moral truths than the other; the truth and good are left aside in favor of understanding.

It can be noted that these considerations regarding the literary culture, published in 1976 in the "*Professionalized Philosophy*" stand as a foreshadow of what Rorty was to say in the last chapter of *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature*, with some differences, which

advantages philosophy. Emphasizing the edifying role of hermeneutical philosophy, Rorty does nothing but give philosophy a major role in the literary culture, by suggesting that those areas of philosophy which affects in one way or another science should migrate toward actually scientific inquiry. Rorty's suggestions since *The Linguistic Turn* were aimed at the passage of philosophy of language in the field of linguistics, and then, in *Philosophy and The Mirror of Nature*, the passage of the philosophy of mind into neuroscience.

The final Chapter (5) is focused on what we called the ironist turn of an organic intellectual. For about three decades (between the 1950's and 1980 's) Rorty's thinking has been marked by a skepticism which prevailed as a reaction to his own redemptive expectations for the philosophy. It has to be said that since the beginning of the '80s and afterward, Rorty remained a neopragmatist philosopher. But the '80s and his move to the University of Virginia and then Stanford transforms him from a philosophy professor professional into a public intellectual, more precisely into a liberal ironist who will support the abandonment of the ideal of knowledge, and its replacement with the hope for a more just democratic world, the priority to solidarity in relation with objectivity, assuming the finitude of human contingency in relation to transcendental reflection and, in a post-metaphysical culture, for the priority of democracy in relation to philosophy. It was only after the changes that took place in his personal and professional life Rorty managed to pull away from academic pressure and to build a discourse which takes in both the historicist understanding of philosophy gained during this period, as well as the ideological fingerprint inherited from his parents. Shortly before reaching the age of 50, Rorty became the apostle of a moderately humanism, proposed in the form of now more academic respectable neopragmatism. And here we must point out that, although he talked about pragmatism and in texts of the '60s, when he announced that pragmatism becomes again respectable (after thirty years of eclipse), the humanism that informs his neopragmatism begins to take shape in the second part of his university career. This humanism is an ethical non-theist life philosophy which affirms that people have the right and the responsibility to lead their own destiny, to seek to create a society based on ethical natural values, in the spirit of rational investigation, rejecting the supernatural outlook on life.

In the context of an increasingly obvious polarization in contemporary discourse, showing again a growing distance between the scientific and humanistic culture, when the attempts to insert creationism in education in the form of the so-called intelligent design started to get critical responses by the most virulent followers of radical naturalist positivism

we have been trying to discuss Rorty's belonging to a humanist stream from which, however, he kept a considerable distance, from the point of view of he's own cultural policies.

The conclusions of our thesis affirm that if in the past Rorty was much more appreciated by the letters` colleagues than the philosophers, as it happened with Derrida, Rorty being one of the promoters of a thought marked by postmodernism in an analytic environment, hardly susceptible to French and German philosophy, after the charting of neopragmatism as a contemporary school of thought, we can't discuss Rorty in terms of marginality. Richard Rorty will remain a controversial but influential intellectual at international level, and, by now, also in the Romanian intellectual environment.

In the strategy of cultural policy in which he conceptualized the priority of democracy in relation to philosophy, Rorty has been forced to sacrifice the rigorous interpretation of text, totally true to alleged intentions of recycled philosophers in the final product of bricolage. Rorty has been successful, even if not by himself, to bring pragmatism into debate in American academic environment. And the new generation of neopragmatist, in which Rorty has its defenders, but most of which are trying to distance themselves from "rortism", legitimates as capable to continue the philosophical conversation by a confrontation, before all, with Rorty. But most of the times, these critical conversations are transformed into technical debates which miss their target, because the importance of Rorty's work lies in the first place in the continuation of the project for liberating the Western culture from it's inherited metaphysical interpretation of the world, by decanting the foundationalism and the claimed transcultural rationality of enlightened liberalism. The route of his intellectual biography, his own autobiographical confessions, cannot not raise question on the manner in which to read him.

For the philosophers outside the continental tradition or strongly oriented towards analytical philosophy, will persist the suspicion that Rorty was addressing, in the second half of his career, to an audience of literati, which probably tried to seduce, giving them a stronger self-image. This very audience, which considers Rorty as "one of them", is the most apt to take him for granted, as they are prone to ignore the texts of the heavy philosophical tradition. We do not think it is a good interpretation, because it ignores the fact that philosophers like Habermas or Putnam turned to agree on different levels with the theses of neopragmatism, and they did not have any literary parti pris.