

## RORTY ON SCIENCE AND POLITICS

ALEXANDER KREMER

**Abstract:** In my paper I will prove my overall thesis that Rorty consistently enforces his politically saturated liberal ironic standpoint in the fields of science and politics from his “Contingency” book (1989). As a neopragmatist thinker he gives priority to politics in the sense of a liberal democracy over everything else. Even philosophy as “cultural politics” serves this purpose. He did not want to create a detailed political philosophy, but the main motive of his philosophy is political. He is charged with complacency, relativism and misinterpreting traditional pragmatism, but I show that this is mistaken. Rorty offers “only” a non-systematic, but logical and permanently developed interpretation of our present world on the basis of knowledge he appropriated and improved by building bridges between pragmatism, analytic and continental philosophy. I will analyze briefly in the first part his neo-pragmatist thoughts on science in connection with his political views. In the second part I will interpret Rorty as a liberal ironist who regards almost everything as contingent, except democracy. He outlines a liberal utopia that means first of all a just society in a Rawlsian sense, but he also develops his idea further in a neo-pragmatic way.

**Keywords:** Democracy; liberal; politics; solidarity; truth.

Richard Rorty was attacked from almost every direction. Not only the traditional pragmatists and other, analytical and non-analytical philosophers (e. g. D. Davidson, H. Putnam, R. J. Bernstein, R. Shusterman, C. Taylor, etc.), but also political philosophers (e. g. E. M. Gander, C. Voparil, etc.) were dissatisfied with his intellectual standpoint. To prove the case it would be enough to refer to the specific books where he has responded to the critiques (Saatkamp 1995; Brandom 2000), but—as everybody knows—there are also several other critical papers and books about his philosophy. It is evident, however, that I could not answer all the critics not only in such an article, but it would be impossible even in a monograph. That is why I have chosen to approach it differently. I provide here a positive, although sketchy, explication of his views in two fields (science and politics), to prove the general consistency of his views, and to respond to some of the charges in this way. In my paper I will prove my overall thesis that Rorty consistently enforces his politically saturated liberal ironic standpoint in the fields of science and politics from 1989, and as a neopragmatist thinker he gives priority to politics in the sense of a liberal democracy over everything else. Even philosophy as cultural politics serves this purpose. It follows from this that he did not want to create a detailed political philosophy, but the main motive of his philosophy is political. Rorty offers a non-systematic, but logical and permanently developed interpretation of our present world on the basis of knowledge he appropriated and improved continuously by building bridges between post-Darwinian American philosophy and post-Nietzschean European philosophy (cf. for example Rorty 1999, xix). All this does not mean that I do not have a critical stance on Rorty’s philosophy, but I am persuaded

that we have to reconstruct first as clearly as possible, what we want to criticize, and today I see more misinterpretation of Rorty, than thoroughly based critiques.

If we would like to offer first a bird's-eye view of Rorty's neopragmatist philosophy, we have to emphasize that after leaving analytic philosophy in the 70s Rorty became a liberal ironist. *Liberals, he believes, are people* who "think that cruelty is the worst thing we do." An ironist is a person who

faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance (*ibid.*, xv).

Given this self-definition it is clear that the neopragmatist Rorty is an antimetaphysical, antiessentialist, antifoundational thinker. In his opinion everything is a social construction, and all awareness is a linguistic affair (cf. Rorty 1999, 48). The main pillars of human life (language, self and community) are contingent. We cannot recognize any final reality, we can describe only our radically timely and historical, permanently changing world. Each human interpretation of our world is a narrative that cannot be universal only general. Narratives, or in Rorty's words, vocabularies are essentially Wittgensteinian language games, which can be used minimally on three different levels: a) as wordplay, b) as a form of life and c) as a culture. Rorty uses all these three meanings and claims that we live in the age of narrative philosophy, where, describing our situations, plans, actions, etc. we create not only ourselves, but also our society. According to Rorty, the main pillars of our life (language, self, community) are contingent, but it does not mean that creating a new vocabulary is totally arbitrary. Our new vocabularies have to be in coherence with other ones if we cannot justify the falsehood of them, because without these coherent vocabularies, our life could not function. As a pragmatist, Rorty claims that our life is first of all practice, even theory belongs to practice, and our main aim is to improve our life.

## Science

What created science at the beginning of the modern age? Truth and method were the special criteria that made science. Rorty denies both in a traditional sense. Regarding method, Rorty refutes the necessity of every kind of privileged method not only in philosophy but also in science. He wrote that there are two great differences between the classical pragmatists and the neopragmatists. The first I have already mentioned: it is the difference between talking about 'experience', as James and Dewey did, and talking about 'language', as Quine and Davidson do. The second is the difference between assuming that there is something called 'the scientific method', whose employment increases the likelihood of one's beliefs being true, and tacitly abandoning this assumption. Peirce, in his essay on 'The Fixation of Belief', one of the founding documents of pragmatism, tried to describe what he called 'the method of science'. Dewey and his students, notably Hook, insisted on the importance of this method. That insistence was the principal area of overlap between Deweyan pragmatism and the logical empiricism which briefly replaced it in American philosophy departments. But as American philosophy moved into its postpositivistic stage, less and less was heard about the scientific method, and about the distinction between science and nonscience.

That distinction was undermined by the most influential English language philosophical treatise of the past half-century: Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, published in 1962.

“Although Kuhn did not explicitly attack the notion of ‘scientific method’ (as Feyerabend later did), the effect of his book was to let that notion quietly fade away” (Rorty 1999, 35).

Rorty knows well that method is always object dependent. It is possible to shoot at sparrows with a canon, but it is not the most appropriate gun. So, we have to choose an adequate one from existing methods or create a new one if the former ones do not function. He knows and accepts the necessity of special scientific methods, but in his opinion we do not need a privileged method, because the virtues we first of all need are *curiosity*, *open-mindedness* and *conversability* (cf. *ibid.*, xxi).

The various contemporary contributors to the pragmatist tradition are not much inclined to insist on either the distinctive nature of philosophy and science or the pre-eminent place of philosophy and science within culture as a whole. None of them believes that scientists and philosophers think, or should think, in ways dramatically different from the ways in which politicians think. They would all agree with Thomas Kuhn that science and philosophy, like politics, are *problem-solving* (cf. *ibid.*, xxi).

As to the truth, Rorty denies any form of final, absolute Truth. According to him, there is not even any metaphysical intrinsic nature of things or human beings. It follows from this that we cannot support not only the metaphysical, but also the correspondence theory of truth. We can speak only about relative, situational and contextual truths; that is about the coherence theory of truth. From these premises it is possible to infer at least two conclusions: a) the aim of the scientific inquiry must be changed, and b) justification is more important than truth.

If metaphysical Truth cannot be proved consistently, and language is contingent, we can view intellectual history as the history of metaphor. To see the history of language, and thus of the arts, the moral sense and the sciences as the history of metaphor results in a nonteleological view of intellectual history, including even the history of science (cf. Rorty 1989, 16).

In a pragmatist account, scientific inquiry is best viewed as the attempt to find a unified, coherent description of the world—the description which makes it easiest to predict the consequences of events and actions, and thus easiest to gratify certain human desires (cf. Rorty 1999, 149) As to scientific inquiry, in Rorty’s opinion:

we are inclined to say that truth is the aim of inquiry. But I think we pragmatists must grasp the nettle and say that this claim is either empty or false. Inquiry and justification have lots of mutual aims, but they do not have an overarching aim called truth. Inquiry and justification are activities we language-users cannot help engaging in; we do not need a goal called ‘truth’ to help us do so, any more than our digestive organs need a goal called health to set them to work. Language-users can no more help justifying their beliefs and desires to one another than stomachs can help grinding up foodstuffs. (...) There would only be a ‘higher’ aim of inquiry called ‘truth’ if there were such a thing as ultimate justification—justification before God, or before the tribunal or reason, as opposed to any merely finite human audience. But, given a Darwinian picture of the world, there can be no such tribunal (*ibid.*, 37-38).

From all of this we can see that Rorty focuses on justification instead of truth:

What we have learned, principally from Kuhn and from Davidson, is that there is nothing like Descartes’ ‘natural order of reasons’ to be followed when we justify beliefs. There is no activity called ‘knowing’ which has a nature to be discovered, and at which natural scientists are particularly skilled. There is simply the process of justifying beliefs to audiences. None of these audiences is closer to nature, or a better representative of some ahistorical ideal of rationality, than any other (*ibid.*, 36).

These quotations speak for themselves, but we have to look also at the relationship between science and politics in Rorty's philosophy. Unlike traditional pragmatists who hail the social role of science, Rorty sees that politics has a priority to science. It was clear to him that modern societies have been living in a permanent scientific-technological revolution since the middle of the 20th century. It means that we can pretty well satisfy basic human needs. From a scientific, technical-technological point of view we can solve almost any problems regarding basic human needs, and this will be increasingly so in the future because of the social tendency already mentioned. The main question no longer concerns the production but distribution and re-distribution of social goods, and it is not a scientific, but first of all a political question.

And what is more, we can say—and Rorty knows it well—that politics decides not only about the social goods produced, but even about the main directions of scientific inquiries and the usage of scientific results. Politics decides how and where they are used. As Rorty told me in an interview, in Palo Alto, in December 2005:

“AK: So, according to your opinion, the future is first of all in the hands of the politicians, and...

RR: I would say the rich.

AK: Yes, in the hands of the rich, and it means that, if they don't want to change the future of the mankind, it won't be changed...

RR: ...and they don't.

AK: How do you see the role of the science? It is clear, of course, that first of all the rich rule the world, because they can also influence politicians and the most important political decisions in the world, but the development of sciences is also in the hand of the rich people?

RR: Yes, pretty much. They make most of the decisions about the directions of scientific and technological progress.

AK: I am thinking of such things as the internet, for example. Perhaps we cannot deny that the internet has made public life much broader and more transparent.

RR: I don't see that it made public life more transparent.

AK: Why?

RR: The government is still as good as keeping everything secret as it was.”<sup>1</sup>

That is why politics is now much more important than science. Politics, that is the structure and dynamics, the organization and function of social power, is much more important today for social development and even mankind, than science.

## Politics

### *Rorty's Political Philosophy in General*

Rorty has defined his own standpoint in political philosophy as a middle way between Habermas' and Foucault's views. He rejects Habermas' persuasion that democratic institutes need a philosophical foundation. But he believes, unlike Foucault, that some ideal—democratic—social institutional system is possible (cf. Rorty 1988). This means that not

---

<sup>1</sup> This interview was published in Hungarian (Richard Rorty. *Filozófia és társadalmi remény*. Bp: L'Harmattan, 315-332, 2007), and it will also be published in English soon: *Self and Society*. A. Kremer, J. Ryder (Eds.). Amsterdam – New York: Rodopi, VIBS, 216-230, 2009.

everything is contingent for Rorty. He has used irony against everything, except one thing: *democracy*.

Pragmatist meliorism, making our life continuously better, means that on the social level we have to promote the building of democracy. The central place occupied by liberal democracy in the neopragmatic philosophy of Rorty is not open to question. His image of democracy is a *liberal utopia*, and he makes its meaning clear not only in different articles and books but also in an interview:

I mean the ordinary notion of equality of opportunity, which Rawls describes in his book, *A Theory of Justice*, the idea of a society in which the only reason for inequalities is that things would be even worse if they did not exist (Mendieta 2006, 43).

As is well-known, John Rawls's book, *A Theory of Justice* (1972) and its later authorizations cannot be disregarded if one wants to deal with political philosophy nowadays. Rawls intentions are clear. He wants to build a theoretical model, with the help of the hypothetical methods of *original position* and the *veil of ignorance*, in which he can create an ideal point of view for establishing the formal principles of social justice. With the veil of ignorance he eliminates from the start every natural and social circumstance that could make partial the people who hold the original position who are capable of making rational decisions and cooperating with each other. They know neither their prospective bodily and intellectual features nor their prospective social circumstances, moreover they do not even know anything about the "good" they will prefer later. They will create in such an original position the principles of justice, which are right not only according to Rawls but also to Rorty. In Rawls's opinion two principles will be created:

1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged..., and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Rawls 1972, 60).

Rawls focuses in his book exclusively on social justice, and the primary subject matter of this justice is the basic political and institutional structure of society. He understands the creation of principles of justice as fairness, as a social contract theory. The expression "social contract" shows the public nature of political principles, and political plurality and publicity. Furthermore we have to emphasize that the first principle of justice as fairness makes impossible the bartering away of liberty for social or economic benefits. The basic liberties are always inalienable. The second principle governs the distribution of social goods other than liberty. This principle of justice is created according to the strategy called "maximin" in game theory. It says that if we have to choose in uncertain situations, this strategy directs us to select from the alternatives the one whose worst possible outcome is better than the worst possible outcome of the other alternatives. Rawls argues that people in the original position would not choose an egalitarian society. Instead, they would opt for the afore-mentioned second principle of justice. This means that in a just society differences in wealth and social position can be tolerated only when they can be shown to benefit everyone and to benefit, in particular, those who have the fewest advantages. A just society is not one in which everyone is equal, but one in which inequalities must be demonstrated to be legitimate. Furthermore, there must be a genuine opportunity for acquiring membership in a group that enjoys special benefits.

In fact, Rorty relates to this Rawlsian theory in a twofold way. On the one hand, he agrees with it, while on the other hand, he continues to develop it. Rorty, thus, accepts the two Rawlsian principles of justice and puts, on this basis, democracy identified with justice and freedom before philosophy. Rorty made clear in one of his articles, *The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy* (1991, 190-192) that:

Truth, viewed in the Platonic way, in terms of what Rawls calls ‘an order antecedent to and given to us,’ is simply not relevant to democratic politics. So philosophy, as the explanation of the relation between such an order and human nature, is not relevant either. When the two come into conflict, democracy takes precedence over philosophy.

However, Rorty not only agrees with several liberal views of Rawls, but he also develops them further. Namely, he knows quite well the inherent paradox of justice. He clearly believes that to handle unequal people as equals that is to handle them in a formally just way is absolutely unjust. That is why Rorty develops and improves Rawlsian liberal social theory not only in a communitarian sense, but also in harmony with his own neopragmatist ethics.

The communitarian movement can be considered a very broad, but not canonized, nor unified ideological and philosophical movement. Rorty, in *The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy* enumerates the main types of critiques of communitarianism, and he refutes essentially all of them. The only exception is Charles Taylor, whose views he couldn't agree more with. Taylor—among others—emphasizes that the theory of liberal democracy would need a theory of personality; one that had a Hegelian and Heideggerian sense of the self's historicity on the one hand, and that should see community as constitutive regarding personality on the other hand. Rorty entirely agrees with this:

I shall be arguing that Rawls, following up on Dewey, shows us how liberal democracy can get along without philosophical presuppositions. (...) But I shall also argue that communitarians like Taylor are right in saying that a conception of the self that makes the community constitutive of the self does comport well with liberal democracy. That is, if we want to flesh out our self-image as citizens of such a democracy with a philosophical view of the self, Taylor gives us pretty much the right view (*ibid.*, 179).

Rorty harmonizes all of this in his article *Ethics Without Principles* with his own neopragmatist ethics. The essence of his ethics is that Rorty refuses not only foundationalist needs (because—in his view—they are rationally impossible, and morally unnecessary), but also the Kantian priority of reason to emotions. Rorty thinks of a real self with emotions and will as the agent of moral situations, a self with a complex and changing personality, where “selfhood” (except insofar as it has encased itself in a shell of routine) is in the process of being made, and any self is capable of including within itself a number of inconsistent selves, of unharmonized dispositions” (Rorty quotes Dewey here!—A. K.) instead of the Kantian “myth of the self as nonrelational, as capable of existing independently of any concern for others, as a cold psychopath needing to be constrained to take account of other people’s needs” (Rorty 1999, 77). In harmony with this idea, Rorty replaced the unconditional moral obligation of Kant with the concept of prudence, because pragmatists “have doubts about the suggestion that anything is unconditional, because they doubt that anything is, or could be, nonrelational” (*ibid.*, 73). According to Rorty, “moral obligation does not have a nature, or a source, different from tradition, habit and custom. Morality is simply a new controversial custom” (*ibid.*, 76). In his opinion the concept of ‘moral obligation’ becomes “increasingly less appropriate to the degree to

which we identify with those whom we help: the degree to which we mention them when telling ourselves stories about who we are, the degree to which their story is also our story" (*ibid.*, 79).

Rorty holds the same opinion in connection with justice, as can be seen from one of his papers of 1997, *Justice as Larger Loyalty*. If we cannot say that reason has an unconditional priority to emotions; if moral obligation is also only a new community custom, then justice also cannot be anything other than loyalty to a greater community. Michael Walzer's distinction, influenced by Charles Taylor, between *thick morality* (originating from traditions, customs, practice of community) and *thin morality* (originating from theory) is accepted by Rorty. On the basis of this distinction Rorty creates a new interpretation of rationality. If

by rationality we mean simply the sort of activity that Walzer thinks of as a thinning-out process—the sort that, with luck, achieves the formulation and utilization of an overlapping consensus—then the idea that justice has a different source than loyalty no longer seems plausible.

For, on this account of rationality, being rational and acquiring a larger loyalty are two descriptions of the same activity. This is because *any* unforced agreement between individuals and groups about what to do creates a form of community, and will, with luck, be the initial stage in expanding the circles of those whom each party to the agreement had previously taken to be 'people like ourselves'. The opposition between rational argument and fellow-feeling thus begins to dissolve (Rorty 2001, 233).

This new approach of Rorty—applying the Rawlsian overlapping consensus—makes possible not only the interpretation of justice as greater loyalty, but gives us a solution even for the problem of the paradox of justice. For it makes possible the evaluation of different people by different standards, under specific circumstances which are accepted by people of different communities after public political debates.

### *Rorty on "Solidarity"*

As is well-known, Rorty regards not only language and community, but also the self as contingent. From this it follows that Rorty cannot accept the traditional sense of *solidarity*. He creates a new meaning of solidarity, because we cannot consistently prove the existence of a common eternal, spiritual human nature which is the basis of the traditional concept of solidarity:

In my utopia, human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away "prejudice" or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved. It is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people. Such increased sensitivity makes it more difficult to marginalize people different from ourselves by thinking, "They do not feel it as *we* would," or "There must always be suffering, so why not let *them* suffer?" (Rorty 1989, xvi).

Rorty wants to promote the realization of this new solidarity, the realization of his liberal utopia. However, he cannot be sure of its future existence<sup>2</sup>, because he also regards history as contingent. There is no final Truth or Aim towards which history should develop. History is

---

<sup>2</sup> Although it is worth trying it as a historical experiment! (cf. Rorty 1991, 196).

considered by Rorty to be a nonteleological process. It follows from this that we will never know the exact starting point nor the end of human history, only the knowable part of its process.<sup>3</sup> In this sense our historical future is also contingent. However, it does not cause any problem to Rorty's political and historical aims, nor to his moral standpoint that he would be willing even to die for his actual values and principles (cf. Rorty 1989, 189). As to the contingency of our historical future, I have to say, that it does not mean that we could not support it in the present even the most unlikely social goals. As we know, there are different political parties which obviously do this, and Rorty's historical hopes of a liberal democracy are further backed up by socio-historical tendencies. Concerning Rorty's moral standpoint, I would emphasize that in his opinion only the birth of our given circumstances (language, self, community) can be regarded as contingent, but not our personal decisions. Rorty is not a representative of indeterminism. Our conscious decisions refer to our contingent circumstances and rely on our relative freedom, which is the basis of our responsibility. The more conscious and successful decisions we make, the less contingent our life becomes. The contingency of our self does not mean that we cannot create any inherent continuity of it. But we always have to keep in mind that we never can absolutely liquidate the contingent dimension of our life.

### *Relationship between Politics and Philosophy*

Although Rorty chose western democracy over the existing social alternatives, since he held it to be the best, he had not only a Rawlsian, but first of all a Deweyan concept of democracy. We can assert this claim, among other things, because he along with Dewey admired the fact that Americans believe in the priority of democracy to philosophy. The following statement from his article, *The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy* (1991, 194): Dewey "admired the American habit of giving democracy priority over philosophy..."

Modern political mass democracies are not at all perfect. We can point to many of their negative features (from the decline of Spenglerian culture into civilization; through the revolt of the masses as described by Ortega; to the culture industry of Adorno and to the critique of the existing social order by Foucault and more...), but it would be difficult to deny some of their extremely important positive features. First, these kinds of mass democracies alleviated so much of the suffering and pain caused by nature and society that it compensated for the remaining old and new social constraints (Rorty 1989, 63). Second, the western type of political democracy is the best socio-economic formation, because there is no other that works, or functions any better today. Finally, it is the best one, because it holds within it the potential for its own development, which means that it may be even better in the future.

On the basis of his historical experiences and theoretical considerations, Rorty was a believer in western democracies:

People like me see nothing wrong with any of these -isms, nor with the political and moral heritage of the Enlightenment—with the least common denominator of Mill and Marx, Trotsky and Whitman, William James and Václav Havel. Typically, we Deweyans are sentimentally patriotic about America—willing to grant that it could slide into fascism at any time, but proud

---

<sup>3</sup> Rorty is right to reject the charges of his conservative opponents. They say that one has to believe that democratic societies are Objectively Good, that the institutions of such societies are grounded in Rational First Principles. Rorty refutes this, since objectivity is simply an intersubjective agreement and in his opinion metaphysical Truth and Reason cannot be proved (cf. Rorty 1999, 4-5, 15).

of its past and guardedly hopeful about its future. Most people on my side (...) have, in the light of the history of nationalized enterprises and central planning in central and eastern Europe, given up on socialism. *We are willing to grant that welfare state capitalism is the best we can hope for* (the author's italics; Rorty 1999, 17-18).

According to Rorty, history is also contingent, and the change of vocabularies (Wittgensteinian "language-games") cannot be taken as a result of human will or argumentation. Rather, human beings as finite and radically timely and historical beings lose and acquire the habit of using some vocabularies. As Rorty put it:

Europe did not *decide* to accept the idiom of Romantic poetry, or of socialist politics, or of Galileian mechanics. That sort of shift was no more an act of will than it was a result of argument. Rather, Europe gradually lost the habit of using certain words and gradually acquired the habit of using others (Rorty 1989, 6).

The same also happens in politics, since it is already clear to the supporters and representatives of western democracies that ideological and political vocabularies change from time to time. If we want to maintain democracy, we have to insist on certain principles and institutions built on these principles. However, it is not fortuitous to choose or build these main political principles from moral values and basic moral principles for two reasons. On the one hand, these values will break down in the first, serious social crisis. On the other hand, there is a theoretically unbridgeable gap between the generality of moral values, principles and the individual situations of particular decisions, actions, and it always makes it difficult to apply these values and principles. (As is well-known, Aristotle pinpointed this problem in the field of morality and tried to solve it with the help of *phronesis*.) That is why it is much better to build a democracy on procedural rules and structures, institutions of power empirically accepted by the majority of people, and which have already been proved to be good and function in practice. These procedures, structures and institutions will always be filled up with specific political, ideological content by the participants of the political, ideological arena.

It follows from this that Rorty held that with democracy it is identified justice and freedom that are more important in society than some kind of philosophical truth. He stated that the priority of democracy was not only to the metaphysical type of foundational philosophy but also to his own, self-creating philosophy, in other words to every philosophy. His imagination regarding liberal utopia was an ever changing, developing Freedom:

More important, it would regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an endless process—an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth (Rorty 1989, xvi).

Finally I shall emphasize here that the first paper of Rorty's posthumous volume of his "Philosophical Papers", "Cultural Politics and the Question of the Existence of God", which has almost the same title as the volume itself (*Philosophy as Cultural Politics*), only strengthens his above mentioned views.

Let us consider the title, "*Philosophy as Cultural Politics*"! Rorty indicates that politics is the most important thing for him in *the public sphere*. He handles each philosophy as a special type of politics. Why? The reason is as follows:

I want to argue that cultural politics should replace ontology, and also that whether it should or not is *itself* a matter of cultural politics. Before turning to the defense of these theses,

however, I want to underline the importance of such issues for philosophers who, like myself, are sympathetic to William James' pragmatism. James agreed with John Stuart Mill that the right thing to do, and a fortiori the right belief to acquire, is always the one that will do most for human happiness. So he advocated a utilitarian ethics of belief. James often comes close to saying that *all* questions, including questions about what exists, boil down to questions about what will help create a better world (Rorty 2007, 5).

With this standpoint ("philosophy as cultural politics") Rorty not only drew on the consequences of the latest developments in European philosophy (late Wittgenstein, Heideggerian and Gadamerian phenomenology, Derridian approaches, etc.), *not only* made philosophy a kind of politics, *but* he created philosophy connected directly to *morality*, because in this way social welfare (that is the *social good*) becomes *the highest moral good, the main goal of philosophy*, in the public sphere.

That is why Rorty supported liberal democracy; a society where philosophy really can become cultural politics. He saw this type of society as an open society: open to challenges, open to change, open to the future. This is a society which includes even the possibilities of its own future development.

However, Rorty himself did not want to create a detailed political philosophy, because he saw that it was not the task of a single philosopher. In a liberal democracy it is rather the task of clever and decent men and women who "sit down around tables, argue things out and arrive at a reasonable consensus" (Rorty 1999, 112).

## References

**Brandom, R. B. (Ed.).** *Rorty and His Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

**Mendieta, E. (Ed.).** *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself. Interviews with Richard Rorty*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

**Rawls, J.** *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972.

**Rorty, R.** *Solidarität oder Objektivität? Drei Philosophische Essays*. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1988.

**Rorty, R.** *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

**Rorty, R.** *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

**Rorty, R.** *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999.

**Rorty, R.** *Justice as a Larger Loyalty*. In M. Festenstein, S. Thompson (Eds.). *Critical Dialogues*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.

**Rorty, R.** *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

**Saatkamp, H. J. Jr. (Ed.).** *Rorty and Pragmatism—The Philosopher Responds to His Critics*. Nashville-London: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995

Department of Philosophy  
University of Szeged,  
Faculty of Arts,  
6722 Szeged,  
Petőfi Sándor sgt. 30-34,  
Hungary  
Tel.: +36 62 544-532  
Fax: +36 62 544-179  
alexanderkremer2000@yahoo.com