RICHARD RORTY'S METAPHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT

1. *The path to Deconstruction*

What happens when philosophy makes an ' upward revision ' or it becomes metaphilosophical, in exactly the same way as science does ? [1] Will it be possible for us to get an integrated view of human rationality, once the existence of paradigms [2] in philosophy is affirmed to be true ? These are the two important questions around which much of the deconstructive programme of Rorty takes shape. While Rorty wants to play down the answer to the first, by simply denying the very possibility of a coherent metaphilosophical discourse, he seeks to endorse the answer to the second question by evoking an ideal of integrated rationality. The way he achieves it is by advancing what is called a texualist case for deconstruction of philosophy understood as a professional discipline (Fach), and by nominating ' literature ' as the successor discipline. In my understanding, Rorty's pro- gramme does not succeed to present a convincing case for de- construction as there is an obvious contradiction between the two answers. Rorty may try to justify his programme by calling attention to the view that philosophy has lost its ' archimedean ' role assigned to it by Kant in his own meta–enquiry, but in the end, he ends up by Kantianising his own, that is by trying to delimit the metaphilosophical discourse itself.

What I want to show here is that there are a number of stages in his enquiry that force him to apply the idea of decon- struction, but he does not succeed because in the end he replaces

it with his own alternative paradigm, which is supposed to supercede the systematic philosophy of the past. In other words, his texualist case does not succeed beyond saying that it is yet another search for an alternative vocabulary a sort of 'neo-pragmatism' so to speak, thrusting its way forward through romantic pathways, to reach the terminus of Post–philosophical culture. (159) This is what in brief one gathers from his two titles. [3]

2. *From Dissolution to Deconstruction*

For Rorty, therefore, the question about the coherence of metaphilosophical discourse has to be tackled at a number of levels, each of which represents an important feature of his own discourse. I shall identify at least four of these features below. To begin with the most prominent of them, namely the therapeutic side, in which the metaphilosophical discourse is supposed to determine the ways of dissolving philosophical pro-blems, in the way it has been recommended by later Wittgenstein. For Rorty, the historicist message of later Wittgenstein is inter-preted to consist of dismantling the very foundations of philo-sophy, thus extending the Quinean or Sellarrsian 'no–foundations argument' to a step further so as to dismantle the very structure of professional philosophy. This must be the dialectics af analyti-cal philosophy on Rorty's view, even if it involves the sqeezing out its 'pragmatic' turn. On the contrary, its Kantian limits are determined by the non–pragmatic conversation of mankind. [4]

3. *Philosophy Vs. Anti–philosophy*

The second feature follows from the first in that it turns such a mode of enquiry into an philosophical one, though it has its roots in pragmatism for the very reason that such an anti-philosophical stance itself is a direct consequence of pragmatism. It becomes somewhat clear that the pragmaticist's search for a viable logic of enquiry should constitute one of the earliest

phases of the dialectics of analytical philosophy. Later, however, it acquired its synthetic character of pragmatism. Likewise, Rorty's paradigm of philosophy too acquires its synthetic character, at least in three important ways, each of which is of comparable interest to pragmatism. Firstly, his vision of conversation aims to steer clear off the lead of concrete reasonableness sans blockages, for the very reason that it does not manifest the constraints immanent to it. Second, it trades on the unifying character of the two poles of human rationality, while at the same time avoiding the metaphysical tangles caused by truth as correspondence, and truth as coherence, fact and value, or morality and science, thus showing its positive merit of resolving these issues in the manner of Jamesian unification of the tender and tough-minded, for example. Thirdly, by taking the Deweyan vision of the unity between the Lockean naturalism and Hegelian 'upbeat' historicism as not too radical enough, it tries to demonstrate that they all looked at the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes as something caused by the increasing ' pragmatisation of analytical philosophy '. (8 and 13) In summary, though the synthetic character is recognised to be one of the important consequences of pragmatism, it is not the best. One way of superceding this is to take the unity of two paradigms of rational enquiry, namely explanation and understanding. This does not strike true as it is the synthetic character which blocks any deconstruction.

4. The Synthetic Character of Deconstruction

On Rorty's view, it is this synthetic character of science and philosophy that demands the introduction of hermeneutics. Consequently, this should be marked off as the third important feature of Rorty's metaphilosophical discourse, but yet with a curcial difference. The difference consists first in the rejection of hermeneutics as a method, while at the same time introducing

it as a successor subject to epistemology. Secondly, hermeneutics should be understood in a 'polemical' sense (357) in which it is identifiable with the species of criticism. Apart from the strain it shows with the textualist assumption, Rorty pleads for a sense of hermeneutics that should take the role of skepticism for the very reason that it is yet another species of criticism. How far this feature could be reconciled with the metaphilosophical discourse needs a little explanation. Endorsing the synthesis made by Apel[b] by mediating them, Rorty holds the distinction between the 'causal–explanatory' and 'interpretative human' sciences as one between hermeneutics (normal) and epistemological (abnormal) interests. This is again seen as a consequence of commensurating and incommensurating paradigms. Now Rorty thinks that it is a mistake to think of them as competing paradigms, and says that they only 'help each other out' (347). Therefore, each is right in what they say, not for Apelian semiotical reasons, but for Taylorian hermeneutical reasons. In his later book on *Consequences of Pragmatism,* they are treated as merely stylistic variants so as to drive home the point that Dilthey was wrong in his understanding of the cleavage.

A further point of the synthetic character is seen in his taking the two traditions of American naturalism and the continental hermeneutics are two proto-paradigms, and assuming that the former's attempt to reduce human sciences to scientistic categories, and the latter's resistance to it, are not as irreconciliable as they are often thought to be, to prove that they have potentiality for synthesis Besides the question–begging character of the above, Rorty wants to maintain their unique character, and it follows, therefore, the synthesis appears to be a misnomer. The reason for maintaining this is that he wants philosophy not to become a 'hand–maiden' or 'underlabourer' for science.

This becomes no less explicit than in his account of texualism, which he regards as invariably antagonistic to science. Now, clubbing this along with the trait to suspect the philosophical enterprises, he wants to reach the conclusion that philosophy has lost its pristine colour, and it must give up its place to literature. This is briefly the conceptual historiography he presents. Even the 'legal' image of the post-positivistic philosophy, on his reading, has nothing more to offer, than what could equally be offered either by literature or by history.[6]

At times, Rorty gives the impression that the two traditions he has in mind roughly correspond to 'existentialism' and 'analytical philosophy' which are therefore understood to lead respectively to a non-and a neo-Kantian paradigms respectively. Both are detestable. The Jamesian impulse to 'pragmatise' the apparently conflicting paradigms is to be curbed because that tradition is not to be perpetuated.[7] Hence, one must compensate it with the introduction of structural elements of the history of analytical philosophy. I suggest that one should interpret Rorty's paradigmatic expressions like 'mind' and 'language' only in the above way. This is radically different from the structuralist elements one finds in Derrida, who fulminates a particular paradigm of Philosophy namely the speech - act philosophy of language.[8] The question why Rorty should push it to the extreme does not therefore evoke any particular answer within his programme of deconstruction.

5. *The sense of Hermeneutics*

I shall combine the sense of 'hermeneutics', which has already been touched with the sense of 'paradigm' as the fourth feature of his programme. An overview of the former gives the impression that Rorty's use in a gloss on the earlier Gadamerian use of it, as the fusion or mediatian between past and present. However Rorty prefers to highlight its negative aspect which,

therefore, lends an anti-methodological strain to his approach as seen from the way it is applicable to the paradigms of 'mind' and 'language'. Synchronising this with the anti-methodological attack on 'dogmas', Rorty sees the need to develop this further into a view which could enable us to see how things hang together in the Sellarsian way, as others say about them, even while standing in opposition to the above paradigms. This is the 'hermeneutics of the opposition' as he prefers to term it.* Rorty assings two important functions to it. It should show how things hang together with the rest of what they say; it should also secure an alternative idiom. Rorty's use of 'strong' and 'weak' texualism are identified with the former and the latter respectively.[19]

It appears as though the different senses of textualism Rorty uses could all be arranged on a spectrum as it were; starting from the Heideggerian onslaught on the dialectical growth or western ontology, and Wittgenstein's own polemic which is bordering on a satire, on the one hand, and the Deweyan constructionism to build on the "earth's crust as coalmine, the soil as the source of minerals" on the other. The former leads to the extreme terminus questioning the very possibility of alternative schemes, and the latter to a 'weaker' sense of hermeneutics. Rorty's sense of hermeneutics lies in the middle of the above extremes, so to say. It is neither Heideggerian, nor Wittgensteinean, nor Deweyan, more negating than Gadamerian, and less positive than that of Derrida, so to speak. Looked at from the polemical sense introduced previously, Rorty cannot give a Heideggerian historiography, in which past is analysed in a more systemmatic fashion than it were possible to carry it to a Wittgensteinean extreme, which rules out the very possibility of alternative frameworks in philosophy. Of course, one can find solace in the contrapositive of the latter, according to which

there would be as many conceptual frameworks as they are permissible; a position which is more coherent than the satirical, and less damaging than the latter's relativism, is of course available in the geneology of Nietzsche, which could, therefore, be admitted on the condition that it should not make philosophers a culturally isolated race.[11] The moral objection against the strong texual sense can thus be sustained on the one hand, at the same time one need not also fully embrace the weak sense. From Rorty's point of view, pragmatism gets sandwiched in between the above because it tries to adjudicate between two rival schemes; and hence it has a 'dangerous' consequence.[10]

For Rorty, both the possibility of constructing a conceptual scheme as well as the very possibility of conceptualising about a rival conceptual scheme, are 'non-starters'. Such a stance on his view could be backed up by a systematic transformation of the so-called 'transcendental argument'.[13] Thus, one can turn the above argument to show that the sceptic cannot have even a starting point. Extending the same in the opposite direction, one may argue that both of the above, that is the one which argues that knowledge rests on foundation, and the counter argument which denies it, cannot have starting points. If scepticism is understood as a species of criticism, one may also cut off the umbilical cord and disallow any form of criticism whatsoever. In fact, Rorty shows signs of strain here as he wants to admit such a premise into his deconstructive scheme. This means that he has to cut off the only connecting link of a conceptual scheme with another; and hence Rorty does not want to go the whole hog with such a Cavellian premise,[14] as he wants to preserve the function of criticism in a weak textualist way. That is to say, he wants to preserve the hermeneutical function of criticism by identifying it with the weak sense, because he wants to see how things hung together in the past in the way he does. How this

particular sense of hermeneutics strengthens a case for deconstruction, does not seem to be a total mystery if taken in the Derridean way; taken in the Rortian way, neither the parleys with criticism, nor the sense of criticism, are of any help.

6. Rorty's Idea of Deconstruction

In the light of the above, one can surmise that though Rorty's idea of deconstruction looks like a metaphor at first sight, it shows streaks of originality. To some extent such deconstructive programmes have already engaged the attention of philosophers. Probably it makes its appearance in Richard Bernstein's work too, who shares similar thoughts under Gadamer's influence.[15] However, what brought Rorty close to the brink is the negative stance suggested by him. On the contrary, Bernstein turns it into a positive transcendence, or a Hegelian *aufgehoben*. But in the case of Rorty, the donning of the Derridean mantle, which originally proposed to 'dismantle the greatest totality' has strongly motivated him to bring down the greatest totality of the linguistic paradigm. Rorty's avowed aim is to throw out of gear the idea that language can represent the non-linguistic, by taking the Wittgensteinean, or the Sellarsian dictum which asserts that 'everything is a linguistic affair', into its extreme conclusion; accordingly, the very paradigm of philosophy of language is one grand illusion. Rorty draws the sexiest interpretation, more by Rortianising Derrida, than by anything else.

Within Derrida's scheme, the deconstructive show of the vacuity of first philosophy seems to take 'all philosophy is language' a step further than this, or more precisely, to a level more foundational than this, as attested to by remarks like 'language is a kind of philosopheme'.[16] While Derrida's programme may be understood to hold that language has a certain linguistic base of philosophy, Rorty airs a thesis according to which philosophy is the literature (or poetry) of language–a

a vast difference ! To some extent, the former goes to prove that Derrida is not as much deconstructionist as he is often thought to be, and the latter is of comparable interest to Apel's programme of semiotical transformation of philosophy; ilkewise, Derrida seems to represent a positive goal of grammatical transformation of philosophy, which is very different from deconstruction. Rorty's texualist ambition thus overlooks the text.

7. Rorty's Sense of Paradigm

The Rortianisation of Derrida is paradigmatic in that it takes mind as a mirror in much the same way as Derrida takes philosophy is a kind of writing; the wittgensteinean dissolution of mind and language must be replaced by a positive ' edifying ' one; the latter cannot be deconstructed, and thus it leads to a paradox. Rorty makes much of Derrida's front against the ' metaphysics of presence '. One may identify the former's enterprise with ' deconstructing ' epistemology in exactly the same way Derrida has done for metaphysics. Such *mutatis mutandis* appeal cannot, however, be sustained unless it is shown that epistemology can give rise to a negative paradigm. Nor does it become clear after this, whether one can show how these two can exhaust philosophical texts, systems, or philosophers for that matter.

As Rorty sees it, there is close link between paradigm and deconstruction; thus, if it is paradigmatically true that knowledge has no foundations, then the way is open for deconstruction. Both mind and language belong to this genre, because they issue out either in a theory of knowledge, or in a theory of reference. Rorty's animus is directed more against the source points in both. What about his own edifying paradigm—does it stand for deconstruction ? It seems that he confronts a paradox here or he overworks the metaphor of deconstruction, or else he wants his

own paradigm to hang in the air without support. At one point, he is forced to confess that his own paradigm cannot be brought into its proper focus (364).

It appears as though Rorty is caught up in the tangles by his struggle on the one hand and the failure to generate a viable area of metaphilosophical enquiry on the other. Nevertheless, he is clearly operating within a paradigmatic enquiry of commensurating theory of knowledge, or the commensurating hermeneutics, as we can call it, holding at the same time that the opposite poles such as natural and human sciences, fact and value, nature and spirit are ' artificial diremptions.' The attempt to unite them begs the question because it assumes that the talk about any such distinction is at best a confusion. Such pretensions of unity remains midway between the unity of the above poles on the one hand and the lack of unity on the other. An important sidelight of this view is, therefore, that it misrepresents the relation between theory and practice; that is to say, it tries to mediate the relation by ' deconstructing ' *theoria* and leaving *praxis* for the purpose of sustaining the conversation, in strange contrast to approaches like Bernstein's, which makes an attempt to elevate the discussion of the dialectics of analytical philosophy to a new height of metaphilosophical discourse by setting aside theoretical speculations (a spectator theory of knowledge) and adopting a *lebenswelt* view or a praxiological theory of knowledge. [1]

8. The Deweyan Argument

In my understanding, what blocks Rorty from carrying on the process of deconstructions is the Deweyan *praxis*. More precisely, it is the praxiological strain of his theory of knowledge that acts as an anti-dote. This means that even if one grants the efficacy of both Wittgensteinean and Heideggerian proof of

the falsity of all previous philosophy, this need not be the only way to interpret the dialectics; on the contrary, as Bernstein has pointed out, Deweyan reconstruction has certain positive features to recommend. Accordingly, epistemology could still thrive by spreading its wings so as to include not only the cognitive, but also the noncognitive; it could replace 'interaction' of subject–object paradigm by the 'transaction' of all elements of experience; knowledge that is given may be combined with that which is 'anticipated' on the one hand; that which is lived through may be combined with that which is 'lived forward', and finally, the spectator account of knowledge may give place to an 'agentive' type. Contrary to what Rorty believes, there is no Deweyan argument for deconstruction and consequently, this shows the weakness of the deconstructive programme more than anything else. [18]

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NOTES

1. The most interesting way of countering Rorty's metaphilosophical argument is by not accepting the 'symbiosis' of the history of philosophy and the history of science on the basis of paradigmatic development of each on a linear scale, while at the same time accepting their confluence as involving a synthesis of their methods. Rorty formulates the maxim : " We should treat history of philosophy as we treat the history of science ". See his "The Historiography of Philosophy for Genres " in *Philosophy in History* (Ideas in Context Series) Ed. by R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner, (Cambrigde, Cambridge University Press, 1984), esp. p. 49; see also pp. 55-6, when Rorty

explains why both of the above 'genre' should not be treated as different and calls the resolution of these debates is a philosophical (metaphilosophical) rather than a historical question.

2. See fn. 1 : It is doubtful whether Kuhn's concept of paradigm is directly applicable to philosophy; even if a symbiosis of the above type is granted, it does not follow that there must be a synthesis. If the above account is correct, then both Apel's thesis about the complimentarity and Bernstein's thesis about the 'going beyond' *(aufhegoben)* are enterprises quite different from that of Rorty's, though all of them lie on the side of hermeneutics. The *locus classicus* is Bernstein's book *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1983).

3. The two titles are : *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1979) and *Consequences of Pragmatism : Essays 1972-80* (University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

4. Rorty is currently passing through a 'quasi-transcendalist' phase as evidenced by his late " Beyond Realism and Anti-Realism " and to some extent, this shares Bernstein's Hegelian 'agon-dialectic' or *aufhegoben* view. see also f. n. 2. Consequently, the recent attack on Rorty concentrates more on the 'freedom of spirit' rather than the 'above-battle position'. One may surmise that these are the two distinct phases of Rorty's thought. See Ernst Sosa's article, " Serious Philosophy and Freedom of Spirit " *Journal of Philosophy* (Dec. 1987), pp. 707-726.

5. For Apel's exposition see his *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy* (German in 1973) trans. by Glyn Adey and David Frishy (London : Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1980).

6. A very similar point is expressed in Rorty's 'philosophy in America Today' (mimeographed).

7. Lately Rorty refers to it again by recruiting Donald Davidson also for the neo-pragmatist cause. See his " Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth " in *Truth and Interpretation* : Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson ed. by E. Le Pore (Oxford : 1986), pp. 333-35 see also f. n. 4 above.

8. For the debate between Derrida and Searle, see Derrida " Signature Event Context " in *Glyph, I*, pp. 192-97 : and Searle's reply in " Reiterating the Differences " *(ibid.,)* pp. 198-208 (1977); and see also Derrida " Limited Inc abc " in *Glyph*, II, pp. 162-254 (1977).

9. This phrase occurs in his *Philosophy and Mirror of Nature*, p. 365.

10. For the distinction between the 'weak' and 'strong' texualism, see COP. see f. n. 3 above.

11. For a positive account of Neitzsche's geneology, see Michael Foucault's seminal essay on "Nietzsche, Geneology, and History" as discussed in chapter 5 of Michael Foucault *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (106 ff.) ed. by P. Rabinow and H. Dreyfus (Basil Blackwell : Oxford, 1983).

12. For Rorty's comment on pragmatism as 'dangerous', see f. n. on p in COP ; see f. n. 3 above.

13. Rorty's development of the argument is found in his "Transcendental Arguments, Self-Reference and Pragmatism" in *Transcendental Arguments and Science*. ed. by P. Bieri and R. P. Horstmann and L. Krug (Dordrecht : Reidel, 1979) pp. 77–103.

14. Rorty's remarks on Cavell appears in Essay 10 in COP; see f. n. 3 above ("Cavell's Skepticism").

15. In this and in what follows I am very much indebted to R. Bernstein's *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Basil Blackwell : Oxford 1983).

16. See Rorty's essay on Derrida in COP; see f. n. 3 above.

17. Again, my indebtedness to Barnstein's remarks on Dewey, see f. n. 13.

18. This is an improved verson of the paper presented in the Indian Philosophical Congress (1981) titled "Rorty's Paradox of Philosophy".

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