

Rorty's Pragmatic Conception of Truth

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ABSTRACT

As we know philosophy as epistemology in its recent incarnation inherited from Descartes, and given its clearest formulation by Kant which try to reclaim the ultimate form of knowledge which will serve as the unbounded paramount for all the area of enquiry. However, this temperament of philosophy has been challenged by Richard Rorty who as a philosopher maintains the supremacy and priority of literature over modus operandi of foundational philosophy. He try to argue that philosophy is nothing but a kind of literary genre, a voice in human conversation. He regards philosophy as literature. To me it appear that philosophy is nothing but a written Literature in response to a dire historical instance at the advent of the new vocabulary which has been given the status of majesty to preside over other culture by foundationalist mode of thought. Since, we are evolutionary being we are in constant search of new vocabulary to define certain socio-political-historical instances; it is this instances which needs new outfit every time it takes the form of new phenomenon and afloat.

Key Words : Ironist Theorist, Ironist writer, Evolutionary Philosophy, Pragmatist, Truth, Irony, Metaphor, Edifying, Emotion

INTRODUCTION

Rorty supposed to be most controversial rather most influential figure in an American academic enquiry. While philosophy tend to follow unilateral and monolith approach, at this juncture Rorty freely moves in and took up the burden to free us from such a inflexible endeavor and in fact influenced areas like literary theory, law, Historiography, Psychotherapy, Education and Social theory. Rorty however, argues that epistemologically-centered philosophy classically assumed that our primary objective as a philosopher is to find a set of representational theory that can transcend the bounds of doubt, and if any among these theories identifies as a privileged representation, immediately entitled as a basis to determine justifying beliefs that makes a claims to be knowledge. The quest for "Ultimate realty" is as old as philosophy itself but philosophy-as-epistemology give the impression of being its recent incarnation. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, in particular stand out to be

rudimentary compositions which unfold some of the core assumption about foundationalism and representationalism warmly received by the philosophical mainstream. It also risk to challenge a conception of philosophy that was universally accepted by the mainstream Anglo-American philosophical community in 1970s.

However, this conception of philosophy, inherited from Descartes and given its clearest formulation by Kant, which holds the view that before engaging in speculation about what is and what ought to be, philosopher should get prior clearance as to what they can know and what they can't. This standard version of philosophy claim to be the adjudicate and all other area of philosophy should adhere to its judgment about the limit of knowledge. Therefore, philosophy seeks to be "a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the area which represent reality well and, those which do not represent it at all (despite its pretense of doing so)" (Rorty, 1979, 3).

In this paper, following Rorty's rendition I try to argue how philosophy in the pretence of becoming sovereign authority unfolds nothing but contributing a voice in the conversation of humankind, a kind of literary genre. It is nothing but a overflow of emotion and sentiment in any dire situation having taken place around. In this scenario literature took over philosophy as a "presiding cultural discipline" as a science in the 19th century replaced by the philosophy as a secular substitute for religion and yet again science is being replaced in 20th century by most of the intellectual as theologian were pushed apart before, because in twentieth century philosophy try to imitate science to its best.

Role of Ironist theorist and Ironist writer:

Let's draw a distinction between *Ironist theorist* and *Ironist writer* and the opposition between Public and private. Ironist writers like Proust remain so private and idiosyncratic in his approach, refigure people, public and events and sought to redescribe it and their surrounding in their own vocabulary, in their own terms. They sought for autonomy. He broke free from external authority unfolds their relativity, finitude and transitoriness. Whereas, on the other hand Ironist theorist are not content with ordering small things like (details, accidents, narratives etc.), they preferably tries to describe something bigger and more important than themselves-as Rorty puts it-"a larger-than- self hero " and perhaps drawing their power out of it (Kwiek, 1996, 204). He further adds that Heidegger thought he had knew few word which resonance to the entire world audience or rather "*public fate of the world*" but he fails to capture the fact that the word which he use to describe the event is not endowed with different significance than other words rather a private sets of favorite words.

Rorty stresses that "there is no nature of literature". He try to pursue writers like Plato, Heidegger, Proust and Nabokov as exploring "Private perfection" and others like Dickens, Mill, Dewey, Orwell, Habermas, Rawls toiling for "Human Freedom". To evaluate them on common parameters is to overlook the quest of human creativity which is individual in nature and ignoring the social reality in particular which advances this different expressions in different time in historical and geographical reality. Writers aiming at "Self Creation and Justice" on the one hand and "Self Perfection and Solidarity"; on the other cannot be synthesized under one panoramic view. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* he argues that

the alleged vocabulary of self creation is private and non-shared, whereas the vocabulary of Justice is public and common is a sheer misconception, for aforementioned writers both seek for the common good and therefore requirement of Solidarity and Self Creation are "equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" in Rorty's word.

Evolutionary philosophy and the role of language:

An alternative approach has been put forward by various Philosophers like Richard Rorty, John Dewey and so on. Such an approach has also been indicated by Heidegger, Donald Davidson and later Wittgenstein and others. Human being are evolutionary beings so far as they are creative, the moment they abstain from being so, in taking recourse to unilateral approach to life, assuming that there is no possibility to human progress he ceases to be evolutionary and hence, they no more remain a creative being. Since, they are evolutionary being they are in constant search of new vocabulary to define certain socio-political-historical instances; it is this instances which needs new outfit every time it takes the form of new Phenomenon and afloat. Once, it gets defined and expressed it becomes the "paradigm shift" for the scientific community. Human beings are always in a desperate need of new vocabulary, they are curious enough to express their sentiments and emotions in language and to do that they need to develop a prolific imaginative caliber to represent it. After developing a new vocabulary for expression they tend to fall into grave fallacy in believing that this vocabulary correspond or express outer reality as it is but Rorty on the other hand refrain from following this mode of approach rather he alerts us to maintain a distance from such expectation and fantasy which will eventually lead us nowhere.

Following, the Gadamer's line of argument in *Truth and Method*, Rorty suggests us to take recourse to hermeneutics which is not "a method of attaining truth" (Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 357), in fact not a method at all, rather it's a Bildung (education, self-formation, self-creation). What is more important to him is the way things are said than the possession of truth. Following, Donald Davidson, Rorty thus make an emphasis that the world does not speak, but it can cause to hold certain belief, to think, to act, to cope oneself with the world, but it does not offer language nor vocabulary to speak for itself (Philosophy and social hope). It is solely advanced by human creative self. In Rorty's mind, "The human self is created by the use of vocabulary rather

than being adequately or inadequately expressed in vocabulary” (Rorty *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, 7). To me it appears that the idea of self creation implies the truth is human capacity to create it. There are no such things as transcendental, ahistorical, neutral or objective truth. Since, truth is a property of sentences and sentences are dependent for their existence on vocabulary and since vocabulary are made by human being and so are truth. It will be committing blunder on our part if we believe that language is a clear window, transparent medium or mirror peeping through which one can get hold of reality because if we do so in any manner we are unexpectedly spray painting our shop window . Therefore, it’s a medium or tool which helps us to cope up with our society and our living.

Irony, Metaphor and Vocabulary:

In *Redefined Philosophy as Literature* Rorty regard Philosophy as Literature. The only problem appear to him is that he sees Philosophy as a foundation over other culture as a fallacy human being has ever committed. Philosophy is nothing but a written Literature in response to a dire historical instance at the advent of the new vocabulary which has been given the status of majesty to preside over other culture. There are experiences which foundational culture fails to capture, therefore it seeks the support of metaphor, poet, and vocabulary and so on to express itself in the conversation of the human kind. And hence it follows that, it is a culture, but certainly not the adjudicate over all other cultures. As Philosophy falls in Rorty’s argument, literary culture rises. (Rorty takes the label “*Literary culture*” from C.P Snow’s well-known two cultures). More so Literature is considered marginal, frivolous, and inexact when contrasted with putative centrality, seriousness and exactitude of Philosophy, but Rorty reject this notion.

Friedrich Nietzsche for instance with his famous definition of truth, makes an interesting reverberation as a movable host of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms. Therefore, he goes on to believe that, it is a sums of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished. Martin Heidegger in his early 1930s tries to advocate for the poetical language. He further extends that it stand out to be a precious repository for a new kind of non-metaphysical thought and literature.

Edification of Philosophy as Literature: A different

views:

Stephane Mallarme Literature no longer seeks to reflect the world to be “a copy of a copy”, to stand in the other world but in this world itself, instead venture to become a integral part of the world rather than merely being a mirror of nature. Barthes (*in his inaugural lecon*) tries to argue that Literature does not represent reality - there appears a awareness of a “fundamental inadequacy” between the linguistic order and of the world. Milan Kundera writes of Novel that it invents its own imaginary-democratic utopia, where people are not anxious thinking of God, Truth, and Nature of Thing etc-etc. In this scenario the important virtue of mind would be tolerance and curiosity- rather than seeking truth. Rorty writes “The unifying social order of this utopia would be a balance between the minimizing of suffering and the maximizing of rationality [=tolerance]-a balance between pressure not to hurt others and tolerance of different ways of living, between vigilance against cruelty and reluctant to set up a panoptic state” (Rorty, “A Pragmatist View of Rationality and Cultural Difference”, 587). Kundera calls tradition Philosophy as “The world of a single truth”, which he feels it adds to the totalitarian temperament in the people on the other hand, excluding relativity, doubt, questions in opposition to the spirit of Novel.

Husserl recognizes ancient Greece as the birthplace of Theorization, which, perhaps much later in the work of Cervantes, fielding and Richardson the new emerging art began to deliberate on human existence and so on but since Descartes and Galileo modern Philosophy tend to “forget” this deliberation under the influence of “stray rationalism”. Foucault’s conformity can be sensed in the following line “I am fully aware that I have never written anything other than fiction”, in the same breadth Maurice Blanchet explains it “I am a fabulist composing fables whose morals one would unwise to wait for” (Foucault/ Blanchet Zone books, 94). According to Hegel’s ameliorating prescriptions philosophy can dare today as “Grasping one’s time in thought”. According to Rorty “temporalization of rationality” discovered by Hegel in his *Phenomenology* is a significant advances pragmatic incredulity make towards- atemporal and ahistorical Philosophy.

Rorty’s pragmatic theory of truth:

Rorty writes of pragmatist theory of truth; “Truth is not a sort of thing one should expect to have a

philosophically interesting theory about” (Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, xiii), it’s neither a goal of inquiry. Therefore, his anti-foundationalist approach is that inquiry should aim at utility for us instead of pretending to reach the accurate account of how things are and so forth. In Rorty’s opinion the purpose of inquiry “is to achieve agreement and solidarity among human being about what to do, to bring about consensus on the end to be achieved and the means to be used to achieve those end” (Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, xxv). Therefore, one should only consider his/her urgency at the moment, which should be the priority of people, which is the suggestion even Dewey seems to be making in his pragmatist approach to Truth. He offers a new picture in the place of glassy essence of the man, where he substitute quasi-essentialism view of a man as a inventor of a meaning and value, beings who are “generator of the new description rather than one who describe things accurately” (Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 278). That’s why we find a scientific theory relevant at one point of time and stand irrelevant or less relevant at another point but they are nevertheless the products of socio-cultural, spatial-temporal, historical laden phenomenon.

They cannot be evaluated or understood without the reference to the larger context in which they occur. Therefore, Rorty believes that to dissolve the claimed Philosophical problems, we ardently need a thorough historical search to figure out what are the circumstances which gave rise to this theory. Subsequently, he convinces his reader that this supposedly perennial problems is a repercussion of socio-political, spatial-temporal and historical events and incident occurred in our society, it traces its roots back in history. The theme and metaphor upon which our philosophical problem rest is being completely ignored or rather marginalized. Philosophy should be subject oriented rather than being objective. According to Rorty, “there is nothing to be known of object except what sentences are true of it” (Rorty *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 55).

Literature as the first philosophy:

Philosophy probably expresses whatever it picks from the empirical phenomenon in the form of memes and later it objectifies that specific event into the language. Not to create a rift between two major Philosophical standpoints, I should submit that before it gets its final outlet it does process itself in the brain. Now, Platonic

tradition always accused and has been the grave critique of poetry that mimesis is a false and second-hand account of reality, it’s twice removed from the reality, it has never been a first-hand account of reality. Well, poets and literary people have never bothered about it because they knew that this expression is directly derived out of their feeling and emotion which is the genuine and “original existence”. Because our emotion and feeling are what respond first to any historical or empirical phenomenon in particular occurs around us. Now, if we consider Philosopher, they themselves severely fail in following what they always endorse, because if we apply their own criteria and parameters on them and make an observation, they appear to be doing the same, hideously, very craft fully they seems to be following their emotion which help them to pick an specific historical events or empirical phenomenon and representing it through a self created metaphorical vocabulary to express it, which they always pretended in doing so, but eventually they represented their emotion through self-created vocabulary and termed it as a foundational to other culture, through their self-created “Theory of epistemology”. Therefore, the basic essence behind any Philosophical theory coming into being is the products of the emotion, in the form of metaphor, irony, satire, allegory and so on.

What I certainly feel is, by metaphor and themes he means the emotions and sentiment of people which overflow and takes the form of literature and poetry through metaphorical language and this overflowed emotions are genuine in nature which has nothing to do with correspondence theory of truth, neither it recognizes anything of that sort, question like the outer reality is represented through our inner faculty is real or not? Rather the “original existence” (Hume “A treatise on human nature”), comes into play in the form of words, metaphors, jargons, and ironies immediately after something seriously unfortunate happen to humankind as a whole during various historical instances. Hume warns us to be cautious and recommend us to believe something which is audacious and vivacity in nature because these entities are much effective, genuine and trustworthy and moreover, it’s free from any mental construction. Now, within this human conversation, various Philosophical ideas and epistemology actually evolve itself which claims to be the foundation and sovereign over other culture at the end of it, which is eventually not the case. Philosophy is a voice of human conversation; therefore it shouldn’t impede anything from flowing. Because there is no

absolute foundation upon which every theory and discourse is based. Hence, a conversation should go on, there is no end to it because there lies an enormous possibility within a human creativity which give rise to new human inventions and discovery and that's how human species evolves and progress. We are evolving every now and then. Hence, commensurating everything under a single epistemological umbrella parameter is no longer an appropriate act to do rather a blunder we commit time and again.

Conclusion:

Rorty certainly does not hide his intentions towards literature. He exposes it's past, present and future to a sincere and simple examination- to the question of its *utility* and benefits that can be derived for emerging new world order- a liberal democracy. He seconds Kundera's arguments that it is novel which stand out to be a "fascinating imaginary space where no one is an owner of a truth and where everyone has the right to be understood" (Kundera *Art of the Novel*, 130). For Rorty philosophy is a "kind of writing". By taking into consideration emotion as the first philosophy and utility, let's hope for the comprehensive unifying principle of social order where suffering is minimized and rationality in relation to tolerance maximizes. For Hume passion is very important which is analogous to emotion and sentiments. If for Hume passion is "An Original Existence" (p.5, A treatise of human nature, Book ii-of the passions, book iii- of the will and direct passion , section iii-of the influencing motive of the will; British moralist, 1650-1800, Hackett publishing company, INC. Indianapolis/Cambridge) then on the other "Sentimental Education" (Rorty "*Human Right, Rationality and Sentimentality*", 129) bothers Rorty so much, more so he wants elementary education to endorse sentimental education so that when a child becomes adult he/she or any subsequent gender establish oneself as a sentimental agent such that his response comfort someone so as his words and actions. Emotion is a original existence because it needs no one authority, permission so as to expose itself, and therefore make huge impact on one's life. It is a integral part of literature, literature rather breathe it in its every single expression, because it flows out of emotion and sentiments, it indeed recall rational little late for the assistance. Therefore, the philosophy as the final epistemological tribunal which summoned decree to all other area of enquiry collapses

to its core. It no longer remains the sovereign authority over other cultural scrutiny in fact it has never been one.

Talk, it's only talk
 Arguments, agreements, advice, answers, articulate
 Announcements [...]
 Babble, burble, banger, bicker bicker bicker, brew
 ha-ha,
 boulderdash, bally-hoo [...]
 Comments, clichés, commentary, controversy,
 chatter,
 chit-chat, conversation, contradiction, criticism [...
]
 Debates, discussions, these are words with a D this
 time,
 dialogue, diatribe, dissention, declamation, double talk
 [...]
 Too much talk, small talk, talk that trash
 Expressions, editorials, explanations, exclamations,
 enfadulations
 It's all talk

Adrian Belew. *Elephant Talk*

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