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A Review of Agency and Structure: Where does Rorty's Ironist Stand?

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Abstract

This paper intends to reread what Richard Rorty introduced as ironist in the context of one of the most contested topics in the realm of social sciences; i.e. agency and structure. Rorty maintains that ironist is the potential citizen of utopian liberal democracy. An ironist, in his words, is a person who a) has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, b) realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve possible doubts, and c) she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others. The main question of this study is where this conscious subject stands within the context of agency-structure dispute. First, relevant literature on the dichotomy is going to be examined, and then, while discussing other relevant terms in his philosophy, this paper will show how Rorty solves the agentic problem of his ironist with his introducing of the public-private distinction.

Keywords: Agency, structure, ironist, Rorty, public-private distinction

Introduction

There has been a seemingly everlasting debate over years within the scope of social sciences to set a balance between structure and agency. Different schools and figures of sociology have set forth a variety of reasons and justification on the importance or primacy of one over the other (See below). Not only have all these debates not reached a consensual conclusion, but an exact definition of the dichotomy and the importance of each wing highly depend on one's theoretical orientation and their inclination toward a school of thought in sociology. All these orientations, however, attempt to find whether there are patterned arrangements (of different natures) which determine human behaviors and thoughts or it is the individuals' autonomy (agency) which owns the capacity to act independently and to make their own free choices.

On the other hand, ironist has been introduced by the American thinker Richard Rorty. Ironist, in his words, is the citizen of utopian liberal democracy. Such quality makes it plausible to quest ironist's location in the above mentioned dichotomy.

Hence, the following sections intend to first shed some light on this very dichotomy. It is going to briefly review the literature exists around the structure-agency debate. Then, Richard Rorty's neopragmatism will be discussed, and finally capability of his notion - the ironist - as the citizen of utopian liberal democracy will be examined in terms of his ability to deconstruct the structure-agency binary.

Literature on the dichotomy

Many sociologists and schools of sociology have come up with different responses to this ontological question (i.e. agency vs. structure). One of the first schools of thought in modern times which began to provide some answers for the abovementioned dichotomy was Marxism or as it is called by some sociologists, including and mainly Randall Collins (1994), *the conflict tradition*. This tradition claims that "what occurs when conflict is not openly taking place is a process of domination" (Collins, 1994: 47). The conflict, according to this tradition, happens because of clashes between classes and the power differentials. Their assumption of the nature of conflict is mostly concerned with the economic phenomenon and moreover, according to Marx, *exploitation of labor* is the most significant manifestation of the materialistic dynamic of system. However, from Marx himself to later Marxist figures of twentieth century like Louis Althusser, two other considerations of the structure-agency dichotomy can be traced.

First, based on Marx (1852, 1932, and Marx and Engels, 1932), materialistic dialectic proves that history moves as a whole and there are inevitable sequences of history which have occurred and some are to come. Second, a less seen notion in Marx's work which was widely developed by Althusser (1971) is the concept of *ideology* which disguises the exploitive arrangements of capitalist society. In Althusser's opinion, ideology is "endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality, i.e. an omni-historical reality, in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we can call history" (Althusser, 1971: 161). States are able to control subjects as they themselves believe that their position within the social structure is natural. "Ideology, or the background ideas that we possess about the way in which the world must function and of how we function within it is, in this account, understood to be always present" (Lewis, 2014). He includes social institutions such as family, schools, churches, and so on as parts of society which are designated with the

function of reproduction of ideology. Prior to such description of structural ideologies, there was Marx as the forefather of *conflict tradition* who himself had referred to ideology. Marx and Engels (1932) believe that the superstructure of a society is determined by the ruling class and an ideology is devised to justify the state of affairs. This class employs religious, legal, political systems to control means of production. The dominant ideology can be religion (for example during feudalism period) or liberalism or democracy (during capitalism period) and it creates a form of false consciousness for the dominated class.

Nevertheless, it is true that orthodox Marxism tends to opt for *structure* rather than *agency* in their analyses by describing materialistic dialectic and the importance of the dominant ideology, however, they are revolutionary in prescription. They all, particularly Marx, appraise the potentiality of working class to start a revolution to succeed the dictatorship of proletariat. As a result, while he believes in a form of superiority of social structure in the movement of history, Marx not only acknowledges but also provokes agency of the subordinate class in a collective form to revolt. For example, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx writes: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (1852: 5). It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.

Next figure who devoted some to literature on the issue was Georg Simmel who pioneered in functional conflict theory. In his most famous work, referring to what we know as structure and agency today, Simmel (1903) begins by saying that “the deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence” (1903: 11). Moreover, in the process of sociability, he mentions hierarchy (superordination and subordination) as a fundamental issue. Throughout this process separate individuals with something that he calls *association* resolve into a state of togetherness (Ritzer, 2007). They are affected by all stimuli they receive from the hierarchical structure, hence become sociable; notwithstanding he does not see the system entirely gloomy for individuals. For example, he considers money as a liberating entity for individuals. Money, he argues, demolishes the omnipresent group controls of traditional society. And about the cause of such situation “nobody can say whether the intellectualistic mentality first promoted the money economy or whether the

latter determined the former.” (Wolf, 2003: 412). Thus, in his opinion structure and agency are both involved and interconnected.

The other figure is Emile Durkheim who is known as the most scientific sociologist. He begins with conducting a study on suicide and its motivations. In fact, he intends to prove that “social structures of high intensity prevent the individual from killing him/herself” (Collins, 1994: 184). Referring to social structures, he means a great deal of ritualism and community control of individuals including all social rituals like the state of being married, of having children, or longing to a religion such as Catholicism. Society determines individuals so that the individual is in some structural situation in relation to other individuals within the structure; “Durkheim means the actual, physical pattern of who is in the presence of whom, for how long, and with how much space between them” (ibid). He also argues that “the individual is dominated by a moral reality greater than himself: namely, collective reality” (Durkheim, 1951: 38). Another important notion in Durkheim’s work (1982) is “social facts”. In his opinion, social facts offer resistance to individuals’ will: they exert power over individuals’ beliefs, forms of consciousness, behavior and cannot be modified by individuals’ actions or changes in their beliefs, consciousness, and attitudes. Social facts include, but not limited to, institutions, social activities, roles, laws, beliefs, social morphology, statuses, population distribution, urbanization, etc.

Furthermore, since we are solidary with the group and share the group’s life, we are exposed to the influence of collective tendencies, but so far as we have a distinct personality of our own we rebel against and try to escape from them. Hence, he perceives suicide as the opposite extreme of social solidarity. Overall, it seems difficult to grasp Durkheim’s position in the debate about structure and agency. Because whereas he believes that the concomitant of a social structure which does not tightly constrain the individual results in the ability of agent to act, to commit suicide, Durkheim (1951) maintains that suicide often happens due to the lack of such social solidarity. In a sense it can be concluded that in case of presence of a strong social morphology, agency of individual is constrained and limited to norms and then society determines the individual.

The other figure who contributed a lot to literature on structure and agency was Talcott Parsons who introduced *structural functionalism*. His assumption of system and structure is something historical which consists of a set of values that are inculcated into individuals and it has the function of socialization through initially family, later also church, and then educational system (Collins, 1994: 201). On the other hand, his view of agency is not a voluntary entity which is based on total free will. However, it is framed within the patterned structure of relationships which are reproduced in social

order and norms. According to Parsons (1961), and based on his theoretical framework, i.e. structural functionalism, (social) institutions are integrated functionally to form a stable society. In fact, theorists of structural functionalism believe in a sense of social determinism which concedes the power of social system to shape individuals' behavior.

On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, there was another tradition which would support human agency and consciousness rather than structure, rituals, or social order and norms. American micro-interactionism was greatly influenced by pragmatism. In pragmatism, it is theorized that practical consequences of our actions determine the truth, meaning is function, and there is an emphasis on the importance of symbols in interactions and communications. Pierce and Dewey, although were not sociologists, paved the way for other American sociologists in this tradition to discuss a social theory of the nature of mind and self rather than social structure.

This background allowed Cooley (1962) to say that human mind is a collective growth extending across ages, and also it is the locus of society in the broadest sense. He talks about the ability of individuals to shape a society and, unlike the functionalist approach, looks at the phenomenon from the other side of the table. Besides, other figures in this tradition such as Herbert Mead (1934) who are entitled as symbolic interactionist focus on *self* and objectivity of the world within the social realm. He, for example, believes that the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings. They all emphasize on the importance of games to show the essence of agency in collaborations with others. Mead maintains “the ‘I’ always negotiates with other people rather than accepts preexisting social demands” (Collins, 1994: 260, citing Mead, 1934)

The last figure in this tradition, who is relevant to this topic, is Erving Goffman who tries to study the sociology of language and cognition. For him, social structure always comes first and then as a secondary element subjective consciousness appears. In an attempt to criticize symbolic interactionism, he introduces *frame analysis* (Goffman, 1974). Frames are ways to organize experience—structure, an individual's perception of society. By comparing social interactions with a performance stage, Goffman aims to bridge the gap between structure and agency. He believes that among interactions and in those *situations*, the actor can choose his costumes and stage. Thus, he tends to set a balance between the power of structure and the penetration of agent.

Returning to Europe during the twentieth century, structuralism became extremely popular after the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1983[1916]) who introduced the distinction between signified and signifier in the study of a sign, the arbitrary nature of signs, and the relationships

among signs in a given language. Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, and later in the so called post-structuralism, Jacques Derrida were among the main figures of this movement who established a vast literature on structure and agency from different perspectives. In general, they agree that “‘I think, therefore I am’ is disqualified on a number of grounds. The ‘I’ is not immediately available to itself, deriving its identity as it does from its involvement in a system of signification” (Giddens, 1987: 88).

Levi-Strauss, who broadened structuralism to social sciences and especially anthropology, believes that culture, similar to language, is composed of hidden rules which govern the behavior of its practitioners (Levi-Strauss, 1962). What is more, processes of history, which govern human behavior, have been operating within cultures. He suggests that the structure of processes of human thought works the same in all cultures. Then, he goes on to introduce binary oppositions as the building blocks of human’s mental processes. Some of these oppositions include hot-cold, male-female, etc. The historical evaluation of these signs suggests that people are more determined within the boundaries of collective culture.

Michel Foucault is a figure whose name reminds everybody of structuralism. He also shares the idea that the entire system is more prominent than individuals. He attempted to find out how human sciences construct reality, structure and even the subject. He points at *discourse* to be the controller, producer and reproducer of the subject, its awareness and interactions. In *The Order of Things* (1972), he first introduces the overarching atmosphere as something called *episteme* within which the human knowledge emerges. When he reaches to the concept of discourse, power plays an important role. Power is everywhere and it articulates human relations and behaviors. In fact, “power is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa, 2003: 1). Discourse exists everywhere, and no one can live outside because it is dominant over the ways of constituting knowledge, social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations. There are some disciplinary mechanisms as well. Those who do not obey are punished and labeled as mad, sick, prisoners, etc.

Yet, at some levels Foucault became a revolutionary activist and writes about resistance and the chance to become freer. Although the result of his work on the side of agency is mostly gloomy, he utters in an interview: “One did not suggest what people ought to be, what they ought to do, what they ought to think and believe. It was a matter of showing how social mechanisms up to now have been able to work...and then, starting from there, one left to the people themselves, knowing all the above, the

possibility of self-determination and the choice of their own existence” (Spivak, 1996: 156).

The last figure this paper attempts to review is Jacques Derrida who developed the concept of binaries. He primarily says that these hierarchized binary oppositions have an effect on everything from our conception of language to our understanding of racial differences. Then regarding the subjectivity of individual, he concedes that thinkers like Foucault and other structuralists have changed the (ontological) definition of subject’s role (Derrida, 1992). “The ‘classical’ conception of subjectivity deconstructed in Derrida’s work conforms to a certain ‘metaphysics of presence’ or epistemic proximity. It implies a boundary demarcating what is ‘proper’ and proximate to a subject (its mental states, its body, its meanings, etc.) and what inheres in ‘other’ subjects or non-subjective things” (Roden, 2004: 95). There is an overquoted phrase from Derrida where he writes: "there is no outside-text" (Derrida, 1969: 227). He is interpreted to believe nothing exists but words. Here, a shift from *discourse* in Foucault’s idea to *text* in Derrida’s can be traced. It can be concluded that, now, agency is also limited to texts in which an individual lives. However, he puts forth deconstruction as a resolving technique.

Richard Rorty

Richard Rorty was an American philosopher who is known to introduce Neopragmatism (cf. West, 1989; Hildebrand, 2003a, 2003b): It is a “contemporary and revisionary approach to classical American pragmatism committed to exploring the vision of an anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, anti-representationalist philosophy from a broadly naturalist perspective which gives a central role to explaining linguistic practices as a means of dissolving or addressing philosophical problems. From this perspective mind and meaning are understood not as items ‘in the head’ but as abstractions from our practices of mutually interpreting each other’s actions and reactions within specific social and worldly environments.” (Macarthur, 2015)

In his most discussed books, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989), Rorty writes about his tendency to Jacques Derrida, John Dewey, and Donald Davidson. I already referred to Derrida, and a bit of Dewey’s pragmatism as relevant persons to this paper. The other very important figure in Rorty’s thought is Donald Davidson whom Rorty quotes a lot in his books. Davidson is a philosopher of language who starts with addressing mind and intention -- both the phenomenological assumption of intentionality and the agentic intentions of speaker (cf. Searle, 1983). Davidson (1963) claims that an agent’s reasons for acting should not and cannot be considered as the causes of that action, and argues that “rationalization [providing reasons to explain an agent’s actions]

is a species of ordinary causal explanation” (Davidson, 1963: 685). On the other hand, on conventions, which had been argued to be the main aspect of structure especially when it comes to language (cf. Austin, 1962; Strawson, 1964; Avramides, 1999), Davidson (1986) put his idea in a nutshell:

I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered, or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in any important sense is involved in language; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions. (Davidson, 1986: 446)

Based on such conception of conventions and language, four key words could be found in Rorty’s philosophy – which was called *social hope* (Rorty, 1999) by himself: contingency, common sense, ironism, and solidarity. He reasons that contingency is the nature of language, selfhood, and a liberal community. On the contingency of language, he writes: “truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own - unaided by the describing activities of human beings - cannot” (Rorty, 1989: 5). Instead of using discourse (as Derrida or Foucault did), he employs the term *vocabularies* to point out one’s description of the world, in a clear reference to Wittgenstein’s language-games (Wittgenstein, 1953). He claims that these vocabularies are contingent and no one carries the truth: “we try to get to the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi-divinity, where we treat *everything* - our language, our conscience, our community – as product of time and chance” (Rorty, 1989: 22).

He continues with the contingency of selfhood by referring to Nietzsche and writes: “in achieving this sort of self-knowledge we are not coming to know a truth which was out there (or in here) all the time. Rather, he [Nietzsche] saw self-knowledge as self-creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one’s contingency, tracking one’s causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language: that is, of thinking up some new metaphors. For any literal description of one’s individuality, which is to say any use of an inherited language-game for this purpose, will necessarily fail” (ibid: 27). Self-creation is a strategy for an individual who does not need to depend on philosophy to find moral basis for their behavior. Subsequently, he reaches to the contingency of liberal community and puts it in these words: “I shall claim that the vocabulary I adumbrated in the first

two chapters [for the contingency of language and the contingency of selfhood], one which revolves around notions of metaphor and self-creation rather than around notions of truth, rationality, and moral obligation, is better suited for this purpose” (ibid: 44). In his utopian liberal community, nobody needs philosophical foundations to build moral citizens, and “the citizens of my liberal utopia would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community” (ibid: 61). Ironist is one who “is fully aware of the contingency of her own stance, of the contingency of skepticism itself, which is nothing more than a ‘final vocabulary’ among other vocabularies” (Tinland, 2009: 31) and this paves the way for him to conclude that these citizens would be (called) *liberal ironists*.

Ironist

Rorty begins his description of the ironist with a really interesting evaluation of two figures of sociology: “To put the differences crudely: Michel Foucault is an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal, whereas Jürgen Habermas is a liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist” (ibid: 61). Then he furthers to elaborate his definition of a liberal ironist. First, Rorty defines what he means by *final vocabulary*:

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's *final vocabulary*. (ibid: 73)

This is the limit an individual can go, and there is hopeless passivity over the limit. It is final because “if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse” (ibid). Then he jumps to the definition of an ironist, a person who fulfills three conditions:

(1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. (ibid)

Such an ironist is aware that her words are subject to change and sees the contingency and fragility of her final vocabulary. Meanwhile, Rorty attacks common sense as the opposite pole of irony. If one believes in

common sense, it means that they take for granted a final vocabulary in its totality. Furthermore, an ironist is a nominalist who does not search philosophy for a foundation for nation-making or morality. Being ironist is not enough for such a citizen, thus she must also be a liberal. So, Rorty “borrows his definition of a “liberal” from Judith Shklar” (Bernstein, 1990: 37) where he reiterates that a liberal believes in two moral principles that first, they do not harm others and second, they should not be indifferent to others being harmed (Rorty, 1989: 74). Instead of metaphysics, ironist is interested in dialectic to play off different final vocabularies. Rorty claims that the modern form of dialectic is literary criticism by which the ironist can play off texts and vocabularies.

Agency of the Ironist

It is difficult to drag the concept of ironist, which has not been fully instantiated, to the larger context of structure-agency. Nevertheless, Rorty’s definitions and examples can be employed for the sake of analysis. While Rorty concedes that language, or in his words, vocabularies with which and in which ironist understands and lives the world, he puts a great deal of emphasis on the self-creation of ironist. In the definition of ironist, he refers both to Mead and Dewey when he is describing the quality of self-creation, and to Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Derrida when describing language. However, it seems the most prominent feature of ironist is that she acknowledges her agency. Rorty writes: “I call people of this sort ironists because their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies, puts them in the position which Sartre called “meta-stable” (ibid: 73).

Therefore, he does not believe that there is only one final vocabulary (or discourse or even structure) to live in. He encourages the agent to select and built his cognition by reading literature and employing literary criticism. In this regard and from such a point of view, he criticizes structuralists and their focus on structure. He describes Foucault (though he is named by Rorty as a non-liberal ironist) in these words:

“[Foucault] accepts Mead's view that the self is a creation of society. Unlike them, he is not prepared to admit that the selves shaped by modern liberal societies are better than the selves earlier societies created. A large part of Foucault's work - the most valuable part, in my view - consists in showing how the patterns of acculturation characteristic of liberal societies have imposed on their members' kinds of constraints of which older, premodern societies had not dreamed. He is not, however, willing to see these constraints as compensated for by a decrease in pain, any more than Nietzsche was

willing to see the resentfulness of ‘slave-morality’ as compensated for by such a decrease.” (ibid: 63)

He gives a reason to Foucault similar to his defence of liberal democracy against Marxists’ criticism. He usually avoids using philosophical justification to prove liberal democracy, but he draws his left critics’ attention to the experienced history. As soon as one looks back at history, they will notice all the progress human society has made. In Rorty’s opinion, the credit must be taken by human endeavor; agency. Yet, he can understand the power relations which are described in Frankfurt school and Foucault’s texts. He notes:

I agree with Habermas that Foucault's account of how power has shaped our contemporary subjectivity filters out all the aspects under which the eroticization and internalization of subjective nature also meant a gain in freedom and expression. More important, I think that contemporary liberal society already contains the institutions for its own improvement – an improvement which can mitigate the dangers Foucault sees. (ibid: 65)

Hence, according to Rorty, liberal society enjoys some institutions which work to improve conditions of living. Rorty does not phrase exactly how much these institutions can introduce limits and boundaries for individuals. However, it seems that he takes them for granted. He does not like to go back to what thinkers like Hobbes or Rousseau said about the social contract and the state of nature. He admits that there are some institutions and also language. After all human efforts, we are improving in a liberal democracy. But, still one might wonder how we can neglect the existing structure.

To answer this question, we had better introduce another binary in his mind; i.e. the public-private distinction. Rorty (1989) suggests that public sphere is where structure governs and the private sphere in where agency (aka irony, self-creation, etc.) plays the main role. “We have two irreconcilable final vocabularies: one where the desire for self-creation and autonomy dominates, and another one where what dominates is the desire for community” (Mouffe, 1996: 3). Thus, his philosophy of hope is a description of a path: as human society is improving, the private sphere is becoming broader and the public one is dwindling.

Therefore, his utopia is where the ironist lives in the broadest possible private sphere, where they can practice self-creation. This ironist now is aware that his final vocabulary does not carry truth and it is limited. So, they are able to redescribe anything with their relative vocabulary. “Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which

certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which a few actually do” (ibid: 65).

Conclusion

While Mouffe (1996) inimitably puts it that, in Rorty’s opinion, there are one final vocabulary where the desire for self-creation and autonomy dominates, and another one where what dominates is the desire for community, Bernstein (1990) notices a contradiction here. He writes: “It seems curious that Rorty, who shows us that most [metaphysical] distinctions are fuzzy, vague, and subject to historical contingencies, should rely on such a fixed, rigid, ahistorical dichotomy” (Bernstein, 1990: 65-66). Rorty, on the other hand, answers the same criticism from Laclau (in Mouffe, 1996) by admitting that he might not have offered adequate theorizing about this distinction. So he explains:

“I do not see how to ‘theorize’ the nature of the partition between the private and the public, except to say that by ‘the private’ I mean the part of life in which we carry out our duties to ourselves, and do not worry about the effects of our actions on others. By the public I mean the part in which we do worry about such effects.” (Rorty, 1996a: 76)

In fact, he returns to his definition of the liberal aspect of ironist which is a kind of ‘moral courage’. He also describes the contingency of language, selfhood, and community to show that “society is pulled together not by any philosophical grounding but by common vocabularies and common hopes” (Laclau, 1991: 88) which both are undertaken *by* ironist, and not *on* her.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Rorty would agree with part of structuralism to analyze the contemporary world. Moreover, he shares some of the structuralists’ viewpoints on language, discourse, or texts, in addition, he does agree to the importance of social institutions in a democracy. Nonetheless, the private-public distinction is necessary for ironist; the private demands for self-creation and the public for human solidarity (Mouffe, 1996) and both are upon the will of ironist. Even the solidarity he mentions is not similar to what Durkheim says, i.e. a social morphology which keeps citizens attached and in harmony, but it is the ironist who brings about solidarity.

Thus, it is important to see Rorty in the context of American schools of thought (e.g. pragmatism and interactionism) rather than European approaches which are more engaged with the study of structure. However, he does borrow some ideas from Derrida or Foucault, because he believes that they both are partly acceptable ironists and they seem to have “shared Nietzschean suspicions about the tradition of Western philosophy—suspicions which they share with the American pragmatists” (Rorty, 1996b: 13). As a matter of fact, such a reading of those European thinkers is for the

sake of the agentic aspect of ironist; that means, to cast (Nietzschean) doubt on philosophy. He does not even consider this quality strange to American pragmatism. Rorty obviously inclines towards the American side of sociology which vouches for human agency. On the other side, he acknowledges the significance of work done by European (in-favor-of structure) thinkers, even conflict theorists and structuralists (Rorty, 1989, 1996a). Ironically, He even wishes Marx did not take a degree in philosophy and had remained the genius political economist as in his early career (ibid: 77).

Based on Rorty's idea of favorable citizens of a (utopian) liberal democracy, ironist is the exact appropriate citizen of such a society where the private sphere is at its maximum size. He does think that this liberal utopia is coming soon. Rorty thinks he succeeds in justifying the location of ironist in the context of structure-agency dichotomy when his critics ask how this democratic agency possible (Mouffe, 1996). Because he is referring not to philosophy to answer the question but to the practice, that liberal democracy (for example, America) is an ongoing experiment (Rorty, 1991) which has evolved for the better and freer. Although it might sound like the dialectic of history, he emphasizes on the role of agents in this process. He is also prescribing for today while describing the future. An individual who is aware that their final vocabularies do not hold the truth and it is going to change encountering other final vocabularies, is a tolerant agent, and a more preferable citizen. Rorty pictures a wide scope of autonomy for ironist: she believes in contingency of language, selfhood, and language, she casts doubt on her (and any other) final vocabularies, she is aware of private-public distinction, she is a liberal, and she builds solidarity and common hope.

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