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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2657>

DOI: 10.4000/ejpap.2657

ISSN: 2036-4091

Publisher

Associazione Pragma

Electronic reference

Emil Višňovský, "Review of David RONDEL (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rorty*", *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online], XIII-2 | 2021, Online since 20 December 2021, connection on 07 October 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/2657> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.2657>

This text was automatically generated on 7 October 2022.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Contract no APVV-18-0178.

- 1 Richard Rorty has left us with an extremely rich legacy, albeit both a contradictory and controversial one. Nonetheless, it is full of meaning and still inspires us and provides material for further investigation and fresh interpretation. Of course, a lot of the stuff in Rorty studies repeats itself like an old hurdy-gurdy, but that has in no way diminished the occasions that have arisen for us to rethink – or indeed have a conversation – based on his *œuvre* and since his demise more than a decade ago. Quite the opposite. Besides the series of volumes that discussed Rorty during his lifetime and included his own reflections, more have come out posthumously, and most recently another three collective volumes have appeared in short succession. One is edited by Auxier, Kramer and Skowroński (2020), another by Malachowski (2020) and then we have the one reviewed here. They may serve as evidence that Rorty's legacy has yet to be exhausted or definitively settled and elicits a lively interest. While the first of these most recent volumes aims somewhat ambitiously at getting “beyond Rorty” and the second is intended as a “groundbreaking” source for a new reassessment, the third one

aspires to examine the “unity” of Rorty’s thought, as the editor David Rondel states in his introduction.

- 2 The volume comprises 14 self-standing chapters (with no information regarding how or by whom these were commissioned) written by 17 authors altogether (two being joint chapters). Among the contributors one can find some of the “older guard” (S. Blackburn, J. T. Kloppenberg, G. Warnke, R. Westbrook), well-acknowledged Rorty scholars (B. Allen, N. Gascoigne, M. Bacon, A. Malachowski, C. Voparil) and the new generation of Rorty interpreters (D. Rondel, S. Dileleman, A. Mahon), who are joined by several newcomers to this camp (S. T. Bush, A. Dianda, E. O’Brien, P. Patton). All of them take Rorty seriously and most are rather sympathetic or try to be balanced readers, who besides the criticism find important portions of this work that are worth extending and developing further. The predominantly critical chapters are those by Allen, Kloppenberg, Patton and Westbrook, who each have their own arguments for dismissing Rorty’s nominalism, anti-representationalism, interpretations of Continental philosophy and linguistic idealism, among others. This gives them reasons to consider his philosophy as a nonstarter (at the very least). In this review I will not comment on each chapter but select some that concern the central topics constituting the axis on which the proceedings sit. The following three are the quintessential ones: *anti-authoritarianism*, *metaphilosophy* and *the experience/language dichotomy*.
- 3 David Rondel’s *Introduction* deserves special consideration of its own. He provides a fresh summary of the key characteristics of Rorty’s polymathic and idiosyncratic work, such as Darwinism, anti-authoritarianism, pragmatism, anti-representationalism, ironism, liberalism and metaphilosophy culminating in cultural politics. The result is that we encounter many figures within one person – multiple Rorties rather than just one: “a thrusting analytic philosopher,” “a world-famous man of letters,” “a postmodernist,” “a bourgeois liberal,” “a non-reductive physicalist,” “a devoted follower of Dewey,” “a Nietzschean,” “an ironist,” etc. However, according to Rondel’s account, there is a demonstrable continuity between all of these based on Rorty’s “hedgehog idea” that expounds his radical “anti-authoritarian humanism,” as I would call it (rather than an anti-authoritarianism that is separate from humanism). It is a complex idea that Rorty expresses in many ways (not all of them appropriate) and it requires further analysis and interpretation. The gist of the idea concerns the relationships between humans and the nonhuman world as well as other humans. Clearly, I think, Rorty wanted to urge “we, humans” to care most about humans (both ourselves in our private lives and other humans in our public lives) rather than nonhumans. But even if humans are to be the highest value and the only authority for humans, that does not mean that nonhuman creatures and entities – the nonhuman world as a whole – are merely “instruments” for human purposes. This quasi-Kantian moment in Rorty should not be taken simply as an expression of his anthropocentrism or anti-environmentalism, but as part of his focus on “global egalitarianism” in his conception of the human world (as Rondel argues in detail in his monograph *Pragmatist Egalitarianism* published in 2018). Rorty also demonstrably respected (and even admired) nature via e.g. his passion for wild orchids or birdwatching (as a few of the contributors to the volume have stressed), despite not thematizing it specifically in his “public philosophy.” However, Rorty did not want any of the human creations, such as God, Truth, History, Human Nature, Science, Reason, Social Norms, State, etc., to be stubborn authorities for human. He rather took these to be human instruments for

serving the purposes of human life and the historical products of “chance and time,” that could easily be changed (and re-described) if proven useless or harmful. Rondel’s contribution contains many more cogent claims, hence, I consider it one of the finest in the volume.

- 4 Other contributors have also indicated that Rorty’s *anti-authoritarianism* is the quintessence of his work in epistemological (Allen), pragmatist (Voparil), ethical (Malachowski), feminist (Dieleman) or even personal (Westbrook) contexts. The latter claims that Rorty “was born into a family with a disposition for anti-authoritarianism” (310) and that he “was drawn to the classical pragmatists, and to Dewey in particular, because he saw them as fellow anti-authoritarians” (312). Nonetheless, Westbrook (like others) considers his “anti-authoritarianism and conception of human autonomy at times so extreme” as to make him anti-realist “and to vault the human species outside the rest of nature” (314).
- 5 The second quintessential feature of Rorty’s thought is the pluralism imbedded in his *metaphilosophy*. Despite it being disputed (and misunderstood) by some, Colin Koopman (ch. 1) argues that his “metaphilosophical pluralism”/“pluralistic metaphilosophy” (19) is of key importance. Philosophy is pluralistic through-and-through, and always has been. Nonetheless, there has always been a misguided “monomania” for proposing “the only one and true philosophy.” Rorty was radically opposed to this. To understand why, one has to see that for Rorty philosophy is a special sort of linguistic practice consisting in the creation and use of vocabularies similarly to Wittgenstein’s “language games” or “forms of life” (23). This is consistent not just with historicism, but especially pragmatism as applied to itself, since being a pragmatist means being a metaphilosophical pluralist (although not *vice versa*). Pragmatism as metaphilosophical pluralism does not hold itself to be “the only one true philosophy” either. It is merely one among many and approves itself (or not) through ongoing conversation. Koopman joins some recent authors in corroborating the view that one of Rorty’s teachers, Richard McKeon, was an important source of his metaphilosophy (33-5). The impossibility of there being any final vocabulary (which Rorty dubbed “ironism”) is one of the illustrious consequences of this metaphilosophy.
- 6 Further contributions in the volume claim that it should be clear that in Rorty there is no gap between philosophy and metaphilosophy. Rather his philosophy (with a small “p”) includes metaphilosophy, that is, the search for an answer to the question of the meaning of philosophy (“what is it good for?”). It also includes “eliminativism” (Gascoigne, ch. 2) as a strategy for dissolving the traditional futile philosophical problems *via* a change in linguistic practice (redescription, change of vocabulary). This is by no means a common task (like getting rid of nonhuman authorities), however, it is central enough for philosophers to try.
- 7 And Rorty did try, working under the Deweyan “reconstruction” label in regard to pragmatism. Christopher Voparil (ch. 3) convincingly shows that it is a mistake to set Rorty against classical pragmatists, no matter that their versions differ (sometimes substantially). But who would expect or wish the philosophy of pragmatism to be the same today as it was in the past? Of course, there have to be contrasts, even deviances, but that does not mean discontinuity. For Voparil one such common denominator uniting all proponents of pragmatism is the “social practice” account, which includes both “linguistic and nonlinguistic behavior” (68). This is crucial despite Rorty shifting his focus from the latter to the former due to which he does not deserve the title

“pragmatist,” according to some critics. But Rorty used each of the classical pragmatists in different ways to develop his own version, creatively responding to the challenges of his own time. Given his “metaphilosophical pragmatism” he could hardly feel restricted by what his predecessors had done. There are many more points of commonality between them than is traditionally perceived, e.g. between Peirce’s semiotics and Rorty’s lingualism (74), Dewey’s and Rorty’s “culturalisms” (80-1) and James’s and Rorty’s pluralistic ethics (83). Be that as it may, Voparil’s contribution leads us to the plausible view that without classical pragmatism and Rorty’s undogmatic reading of it there would hardly be a viable neopragmatism today.

- 8 The third and most debatable point of Rorty’s legacy is the *experience/language dichotomy*. Barry Allen (ch. 4) is utterly clear on this. For him, the classical pragmatists were empiricists without being nominalists, whereas the direct opposite applies to Rorty. His nominalism is “higher,” “consistent,” “quintessential,” “utilitarian,” and even “demoralized” (101-8). One also has to understand (as some other contributors to the volume have pointed out) that this “linguistic reduction” (100) has its roots in Rorty’s anti-epistemologism and the rejection of experience as the final authority for knowledge. Allen, in particular, demonstrates that the sources of Rorty’s anti-pragmatism – as if all pragmatists have to be empiricists and nothing else – were Sellars and Davidson (93-7). Or, put differently, as if it was impossible to be a pragmatist about linguistic practices unless one connects these with nonlinguistic practices. This, I think, is an issue that is far from resolved, since to take human experience in isolation from language, and *vice versa*, would appear to be the very first mistake. Likewise, the thesis “language in place of experience” (like the reversal one that preceded the linguistic turn) is untenable. But, explaining how these two basic kinds of human (social) practices – nonlinguistic and linguistic – intertwine and interact remains one of the tasks ahead, for us pragmatists. However, if Allen wants to show that this was not Rorty’s aim, given that he opted to ignore nonlinguistic experience (practices) as opposed to classical pragmatists, then he is obviously right (despite there being recent works, e.g. by Tobias Timm, that attempt to demonstrate the experiential elements of Rorty’s work). Rorty’s style was to exaggerate (intentionally or unintentionally) for the sake of provocation and to underscore the hitherto neglected aspects in human thought. Certainly, he himself was not incorrigible.
- 9 So who gets Rorty right? And is there one way of getting him right? I consider the picture of Rorty that emerges out of the contributions to this volume to be one that contains no great surprises (for Rorty scholars at least). It further illuminates some well-known aspects of his attitude toward truth and knowledge (Blackburn), his ethics (Malachowski) and political philosophy (Bacon, Dianda), his alliance with feminism (Dieleman) and his leftist intellectual patriotism (Warnke). Additionally, it may offer outsiders insights into his understanding of religion (Bush), his attitude to continental philosophy (Patton), his reliance on literary culture (Mahon, O’Brien) and interpretations of his personal history, life and career (Kloppenberk & Westbrook). All in all, the present volume complements those previously published along with additional relevant bibliography.

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