Booknotes

Of articles which are submitted for publication in *Philosophy*, a surprisingly large proportion are about the views of Richard Rorty. Some, indeed, we have published. They, along with pretty well all the articles we receive on Professor Rorty, are highly critical. On the perverse assumption that there must be something to be said for anyone who attracts widespread hostility, it is only right to see what can be said in favour of Rorty's latest collection of papers, entitled, *Truth and Progress*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Rorty might agree with our motivation, even if it were not in his interest to do so. Serbs, to whom Muslims seem no longer human, homophobes and male chauvinists escape his outright condemnation. On at least three occasions he approvingly refers to Dewey's view that there are no intrinsic evils, only outdated goods: 'action(s) good once, but bad if persisted in under changing circumstances'.

There is a lot in Rorty, as in Dewey, about outdatedness. In the terms of the collection's title, Rorty is in favour of progress but against truth. He thinks that outside misguided philosophical discussion we can get on perfectly well without truth. Invoking truth or some notion of 'the way the world is' is not helpful in explaining why science works, nor should we think of our inquiries as getting nearer a fixed or pre-ordained goal. Atheists in religious cultures once looked forward to a time when people would realize that most of what they wanted could be got without sacrificing to the gods; so pragmatists will expect the rhetoric of objective truth to give way to a rhetoric of social solidarity, 'unforced agreement among larger groups of interlocutors'. Those who worry (fruitlessly) about what this agreement will be about, if not about the way the world is, should shut up and let history and the conversation take its course.

Progress is about increasing inclusivity among human beings (those Serbs again). Rorty wonders whether any kind of genuine male-female inclusivity will be possible so long as homosexuals are feared. On this Rorty is surely right. Only an essentialist view of human nature can support what we now have to call gender differences, and once essentialist views of sexuality are abandoned, there can be no grounds for decrying homosexuality. Rorty, as is well known, is against essences. No more than science needs truth to support it does morality require human (or divine) nature. Darwin has taught us that human beings have no special ingredient, marking them off radically from other animals. Nor do we have purposes except those we dream up as we go along.

Some might worry about the philosophical justification of Rorty's Deweyesque dream of greater flexibility, greater freedom, greater variety, and universal sharing. But we should relax. What is at issue is not argument but rhetoric. The bad people (Serbs?) are not irrational; against them argument won't work. What they lack are security and sympathy. Actually they are not really to be blamed. They probably lack sympathy *because* they are insecure. What they need is security, our sympathy and

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an *éducation sentimentale. Moral* education is not a matter of reasoning about rights, foundations and human nature, but of hearing 'sad and sentimental stories', and of watching television journalism. For many all this will be tremendously liberating. We should all forget about what seemed difficult and intractable problems in ethics and epistemology, and just be nicer to each other. We can even push aside Nietzschean worries about the mediocrity of the last man. Someone who thinks like that is clearly lacking in inclusivity, in sympathy and in sentiment: anyone who despises the globally inclusive tastes of ordinary people can't be very nice.

The conclusion is that if you want to understand the world as envisaged by Princess Diana, say, you should read Rorty. Destructive as he is of philosophy's traditional aspirations, and disparaging as he is of philosophy's role in real science and real politics, Rorty's humanism is consistent, thoroughgoing and radical. Criticism of Rorty has to start by showing that humanism can actually construct the notions of truth, justification and rationality he is still, after all these years, at pains to undermine. In what is certainly one of the more puzzling remarks in the book, Rorty says that he sees writers such as Eliot, Pound, Mann, Lawrence, Joyce, Proust, and Rilke as 'edifying examples of how to be merely human, rather than as ... people who open us up to something other than ourselves.' An insupportable reading of Eliot, Lawrence, Proust and Rilke, at least; but not a bad summary of Rorty's own enterprise.

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