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What Kind of Politics Do We Need? Toward Freedom as Responsibility in Habermas's and Rorty's Visions of Democracy²

ABSTRACT

Isaiah Berlin said that it is part of the human condition to make choices between absolute values. Obviously, this choice cannot be easy. To be well informed, it has to be made in full awareness of the contingency of our criteria. This ability to make choices between absolute values in the light of contingencies is what distinguishes a civilized man from a barbarian, says Berlin, following Joseph Schumpeter. Similar ideas can be found in the philosophy of Richard Rorty, who believes that our liberal societies create more people who understand the contingencies of their vocabularies, but at the same time are still faithful to them. He calls this “freedom as acknowledgement of contingency.” This freedom is bound by the existence of a plurality of voices, which does not mean that it is bound by the existence of chaos. In such a spirit, Jürgen Habermas emphasizes the fact that in spite of the plurality of contingent views, we can find a unity of reason. In spite of plurality of views, we can still come to an agreement thanks to dialogue. The close analysis of Rorty's and Habermas's philosophy allows us to see that they share a common stance: thanks to disenchantment of the world, as Rorty says, or thanks to decentralization of the world, as Habermas says. Both are seeing such stance as a precondition to use our freedom in a way to be more tolerant, more open to dialogue and responsible for it. Further analysis allows us to see that there is a possibility to present a new understanding of the notion of freedom – freedom conceived as responsibility.

Keywords:

pragmatism, Habermas, Rorty, democracy, responsibility, freedom

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² Parts of the article and some of the arguments appeared previously in the article *Ku wolności jako odpowiedzialności*. See: M. Kilanowski (2009).

ON SOCIAL HOPE AND THE NEED FOR “NEW NARRATIVES”

What kind of politics do we need? This is a question that we hear very often nowadays. I believe it is possible and beneficial to answer this question by referring to the philosophical thought of today’s two major philosophers, i.e., Rorty and Habermas.³ Rorty believes that what we need is a politics based on common hope and the faith created by this common hope.⁴ This is also what we need to shape our sense of community. In order to retain that hope, members of modern society themselves have to be able to tell one another a story about how things can change for the better. He maintains that they depend on the existence of “reasonably concrete, optimistic and plausible *political* scenarios” (Rorty, 1989, p. 86). Does he himself offer such a scenario, and does the other subject of this paper, Jürgen Habermas? I shall seek to present an answer to this question.⁵ However, before I discuss this issue, I would like to say a few words about the hope Rorty is mentioning, about hope, which is not easy to find these days.

Social hope, Rorty (1991, p. 26) observes, has recently become a greater challenge. This is because the course of events after World War II made it more difficult to narrate a convincing story of this kind of hope and “as the century has darkened we find it less and less possible to imagine getting out of our present trap.” Even our wealthy democracies give no particular cause for optimism. Despite the fact that our culture of liberal democracies “has become very conscious of its capacity for murderous intolerance, and thereby perhaps more wary of intolerance, more sensitive to the desirability of diversity than any other of which we have record” (Rorty, 1991, p. 81), it still affords us an opportunity for self-criticism and reforms. Fortunately, Rorty (1989, p. 63) maintains, the contemporary liberal soci-

³ There is a body of literature on both Rorty and Habermas, however it does not focus on the convergence of the views of both philosophers on the issue of ethics and politics. Please see for example: R.B. Westbrook (2005); J.M. Green (2008); J. McCumber (2000).

⁴ Referring to “hope” has become a crucial element of many modern-day political speeches, as in the case of the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, which shows the need for hope expressed in the philosophical thought of both Rorty and Habermas was not exaggerated. See: J. Shively (2016).

⁵ There has been much controversy and a number of misunderstandings around philosophy of Rorty and Habermas: all due to somehow superficial reading of pragmatists’ texts and thought, based on reconstructing other critics’ considerations without verifying the value of such statements at the source. Such problems – creating “interpretations of interpretations” – can be avoided by careful reading of the texts of the authors as such. And it is this strategy that has been adopted while writing this article. Thus, it shall include numerous references to source texts in order to minimize the possibility of understatement and overinterpretation. It is important to add here that a great work that allows to overcome some of the difficulties in reading both Habermas and Rorty was done by Józef Niznik. Please see: Niznik & Sanders (1996).

ety contains institutions of self-repair. That is why he finds “J.S. Mill’s suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people’s private lives alone and preventing suffering” to be “pretty much” the last word in the conceptual revolution in Western social and political thought.⁶

Rorty (1992, pp. 587–588) writes that Dewey’s generation may have been the last to trust the future, yet he himself does not entirely give up hope and presents his liberal utopia as an alternative, as a new vocabulary which should cope with present difficulties.⁷ Good pragmatists inhabiting this utopia would not think of themselves as embodying the true nature of humanity but only as those who are happier and freer, and who live richer lives than those inhabiting earlier human communities. They would just stand for themselves, “equal inhabitants of a paradise of individuals in which everybody has the right to be understood but nobody has the right to rule” (Rorty, 1991, p. 75), because we are all just human, we all make mistakes, we are all historically conditioned, and none of us can claim a higher status than the status of an interlocutor in conversation (Rorty, 1993, p. 101).

Similarly, Habermas does not give up this hope and presents a utopian project for an ideal communicative community in which the fundamental values are the freedom of speech and equality of parties taking part in the dialogue. Thus, despite the fact that in the intellectual arena nowadays there are more and more voices arguing that utopian energies have been depleted, Habermas (1981), in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, undertakes to present a utopia and reconstructs the concept of reason in the spirit of communicative rationality, and shows that it is possible to rationalize worldviews. He is not surprised, however, that the voices which speak of the depletion of energies find more and more eager ears these days. He believes there are good reasons for this. Earlier social utopias, which were blended with historical thinking and which joined in the historical disputes, aroused realistic expectations. They presented science, technology and planning as highly promising and reliable instruments for the rational control of nature and society. These expectations, however, were undermined by many facts (Habermas, 1985, p. 144). The same forces from which modernity derived its consciousness and its utopian attitudes did not, in consequence, bring autonomy but dependency, repression in place of emancipation, irrationality instead of rationality, while the forces of production contributed to destruction instead of construction. Despite this state of affairs, Habermas (1985, p. 145) argues that utopian energies are still present. If any utopia was exhausted, then it would be one built around a society

⁶ More on that please see: M. Bacon (2012). Please also see: E. Gander (1998, p. 71).

⁷ More on Dewey’s faith in democracy see: M. Eldridge (1996, pp. 11–30).

based on work. He certainly believes that we witness the abandonment of illusions connected with the projection of concrete totalities of future life opportunities. He does not think, however, that we should discount modernism and its project. We should rather “learn from the aberrations which have accompanied the project of modernity, and from the mistakes of extravagant proposals of sublation” (Habermas, 1997, p. 51) (embodying its ideas).

Thus, we can say that both Habermas and Rorty hold on to some intentions of the Enlightenment. They do it insofar as their crucial categories consist in communicative rationality understood as tolerant, unconstrained communication, and progress. Both believe that utopias can still be created and are worth creating, that we need new perspectives, or “new narratives”, as Rorty would say. At the same time, they are aware that one cannot discover some ultimate, ideal form of life. The difference between them in this area is not significant, and we could essentially say that it consists in the fact that one of them declares openly that he is not giving up the project of modernity and continues to pursue this objective, albeit in different way to his predecessors, while the other pursues it but names it differently.

LIBERAL SOCIETY

To continue, we should say that Habermas, like Rorty, subscribes to the idea of a liberal society and presents concrete proposals concerning the character of our institutions, the values which should motivate our actions, as well as the way in which we should proceed. Rorty aptly notices these similarities, also pointing out that they both share a convergent conception of rationality. Like Habermas, Rorty (1996d, p. 85) combines this rationality with the political and moral virtues of tolerant societies and higher-order audiences that are possible in such societies. What is also characteristic of the two philosophers is that they are worried by any disbelief in liberal democracy. Rorty (1990, p. 220) writes that Habermasians and pragmatists cannot figure out how one can say that “May 1968 refutes the doctrine of parliamentary liberalism.” They argue that “nothing could refute this doctrine except some better idea of how to organize society”. They believe that “no event – not even Auschwitz – can show that we should cease to work for a given utopia. Only another, more persuasive utopia, can do that.” Rorty, being a pragmatist, is more reluctant – more than others in fact, to see the state of affairs as a fiasco of attempts at reforming society, as well as to interpret progress, be it in politics, in economy, or in technology, as a definite demarcation of a historical shift; doing so, he casts doubt on the idea of “the universal history of humanity”. Any complications that occur on

the way, he writes, should be considered the bottom line – it is only after such an acknowledgment that it becomes possible to follow Dewey and Habermas, and, when specifying the political goals, rely on the conceptions of ‘consensus’ and ‘persuasion rather than force’ (Rorty, 1990, p. 220). Rorty takes this line, thus becoming part of an intellectual tradition that speaks of possible progress which he believes would lead to “planet-wide democracy, a society in which torture, or the closing down of a university or a newspaper on the other side of the world is as much a cause for outrage as when it happens at home.” Therefore, he persists in the vision of a utopian future in which “cultural traditions will have ceased to have an influence on political decisions. In politics there will be only one tradition: that of constant vigilance against the predictable attempts by the rich and strong to take advantage of the poor and weak” (Rorty, 1995, p. 195). In this future, society will be as multicultural as it is now and will affirm its identity not through the systematic processes of excluding other people, but it will find it in the willingness to expand its imagination and join with other groups until an almost inconceivable cosmopolitan society of the future is created (Rorty, 1996d, p. 85). Taking precisely this line and writing about “joining with other groups” and about the possibility of one tradition coming into being, Rorty is close to the motivation that shaped Habermas’s thinking, namely the reconciliation of modernity having fallen apart, the idea that “without surrendering the differentiation that modernity has made in the cultural, social and economic sphere, one can find forms of living together in which autonomy and dependency can truly enter into a non-antagonistic relation; [...] that one can walk tall in a collectivity...” (Habermas, 1992b, p. 125). This dignity (or walking tall) would be based on such values of our community as freedom and equality, and it is through our conduct in accord with them that progress would be possible.

DEMOCRACY

In light of what has been discussed so far, it is clear what the answer to the main question will be: “what kind of politics do we need?” For Rorty, it is democracy that is of paramount importance; this is why he writes about its primacy over philosophy, whose search for constant and immutable truths should no longer be, he believes, the center of our culture. Regarding himself an advocate of parliamentary democracy and the welfare state, he wants to praise them, “but only on the basis of invidious comparisons with suggested concrete alternatives, not on the basis of claims that these institutions are truer to human nature, or more rational, or in better accord with the universal moral law, than feudalism or totalitarianism”

(Rorty, 1990, p. 211). This might well be accepted by Habermas, too, who likewise opposes discussions on democracy in the context of the existence of some universal moral laws. In chapter *Three Normative Models of Democracy*, Habermas presents his proceduralist definition of democracy and its characteristic deliberative politics, which is more compatible with complex social and political relations. He does this after having first outlined two other kinds of politics, from which he then distances himself, i.e., liberal politics and republican politics. Habermas (1994, p. 1) shows that in the liberal conception, the function of politics is “bundling together and bringing to bear private social interests against a government apparatus that specializes in the administrative employment of political power for collective goals”. In the republican view, politics should reflect the forms of “substantial ethical life.” It is the medium through which community members become aware of their dependence on one another and “acting with full deliberation as citizens, further shape and develop existing relations of reciprocal recognition into an association of free and equal consociates under law” (Habermas, 1994, p. 1). In this interpretation, as Habermas emphasizes, an important role is played by communication, which validates the citizens’ opinion and will-formation. The role of political discourse is also significant, as it makes deliberations on values, needs, deficiencies and making changes in them possible. The problem that he recognizes, however, is that contemporary republicans tend to impose ethical constraints upon this political discourse and view the communication process through the prism of communitarian ideology, which conceives of the democratic process as dependent on the virtues of citizenry dedicated to the collective interest.

Habermas cannot accept this communitarian view, because he believes that while working out compromises between conflicting interests and values, one should take into account the interests and values that do not constitute the foundations of the identity of the whole collectivity. Likewise, Rorty cannot agree that there should be any requisite connection between the notion of democracy and a particular integrated, ethical community. Criticizing the communitarians on these issues, Rorty is also against statements like that of M. Sandel (as cited in Rorty, 1990, pp. 181–182) who maintains that we need to obtain an explanation of “the nature of the moral subject,” something that is inalienable, not accidental and prior to any individual experience.⁸ Rorty does not think that human beings possess a natural, ahistorical center which could be located and illuminated. He believes that “we can dismiss the distinction between an attribute of the self and a constituent of the self, between the self’s accidents and its essence, as ‘merely’

⁸ More on Sandels view see: M. Sandel (1998).

metaphysical” (Rorty, 1990, p. 188). Although Rorty grants, as a philosopher of liberal democracy, that one can develop a theory of the human self corresponding with the institutions he admires, this does not mean that he thereby justifies these institutions by adducing deeper premises, by referring to universal values. He gives priority to politics, to which he adjusts philosophy. Where there is a conflict between democracy and philosophy, he maintains that priority should be given to democracy. He sees democracy as an experiment from which our descendants will have a chance to learn something vital. They will not learn much about philosophical or religious truths from the age of democratic revolutions, but perhaps they will remember that “social institutions can be viewed as experiments in cooperation rather than as attempts to embody a universal and ahistorical order” (Rorty, 1990, p. 196). This cooperation can occur, in Rorty’s view, when there are specific conditions conducive to communication, which, in consequence, leads us to arrive at a consensus and to broadening our community.

PROCEDURALIST DELIBERATIVE POLITICS

Arriving at a consensus is also a goal for Habermas. This can be achieved in light of the multiplicity of communicative forms of rational political will-formation, through justly regulated bargaining processes and various forms of argumentation, which allow us to speak of the proceduralist conception of deliberative politics and the view of society which it influences. This proceduralist perspective, based on the discourse theory, stresses that the democratic process of a citizen’s will-formation is not legitimized by earlier established ethical beliefs, but by the rules of communication that allow better arguments to be employed and by procedures that guarantee the fairness of bargaining mechanisms.

While analyzing Habermas’s thought, we can observe that in the formulation of his proceduralist definition he uses certain elements of the liberal definition (attempts to reach compromise between diverse interests; fairness guaranteed by election laws) and the republican one (will-formation manifested in the form of ethical-political discourse; deliberative processes based on the consensus of all citizens), and integrates them into a conception of the ideal procedure for deliberation and decision-making. In this conception, the democratic process has more normative features than in the liberal model, but fewer than in the republican. It contains the elements of both definitions and combines them in a different way. Consequently, a new conception of democracy emerges, which needs neither to describe the status of collectivity as part of the system of constitutional norms that mechanically

regulate interactions of forces and interests as the market model does, nor deal with the notion of social collectivity, which is state-oriented and treated as a free subject striving to achieve his goal. Habermas (1973, p. 401) rejects restrictions on the individual self-realization of the subject and the practice of a collectivity deciding for him/her what is in his/her best interests. He is aware of the fact that what is conducive to the efficient control of human relations need not necessarily be conducive to human freedom. He also rejects the view of the individual acting without certain rules of conduct and taking part in chaotic social processes. He therefore chooses the freedom of the individual and his/her self-realization, the need to define the rules of social conduct, and consequently, he supports a concrete vision of society, which differs from the existing one, since it is connected with his proceduralist conception of democracy. Habermas stresses, however, that this idea arose in specific historical circumstances together with the idea of bourgeois democracy. In other words, the formal idea of a society is not the ideal of a form of life. As it has been said before, there is no such ideal. Habermas argues that it is impossible to derive the idea of adequate life with dignity from the formal conception of reason, which is given us with the decentered understanding of the world in the postmodern age.

In the light of the above, we can only name specific formal conditions of rational life. Owing to these formal conditions, it is possible, by means of the process of language communication, to detect, identify and interpret problems that appear within our decentered society. In this process, “popular sovereignty” or, as Habermas (1994, p. 10) puts it, “communicative power,” is generated. This power “springs from the interactions among legally institutionalized will-formation and culturally mobilized publics ... [that] find a basis in the associations of a civil society quite distinct from both state and economy alike.” The emergent sovereignty employs democratic procedures and refers to the legal implementation of their complex communicative premises. It is the institutionalization of appropriate procedures and conditions of communication that, as Habermas emphasizes, the conduct of deliberative politics in accordance with discourse theory depends on. Such politics can be called “proceduralist deliberative politics.”

It is largely owing to such institutionalization of appropriate procedures and conditions of discourse, which Habermas writes about, that Rorty’s “romantic intellectual” finds a sense of relationship with the majority of other human beings (Rorty, 1991, p. 193). Rorty (1990, p. 209) believes that we should confine ourselves to showing the practical advantages that arise from the democratic, liberal institutions in which we participate, and which allow individuals and cultures to coexist without invading one another’s privacy, without influencing other people’s conceptions of good. These democratic political institutions constitute

a community which Rorty (1990, p. 43) believes is the only goal we need. Such a community is not the means to some end, it is the end in itself. This end is its own preservation and self-improvement, the preservation and enhancement of civilization. Rorty (1990, p. 45) thinks that this community “would identify rationality with that effort rather than with the desire for objectivity.” It would thus not need a foundation more solid than reciprocal loyalty in the execution of this historic goal. According to Rorty (1991, p. 78), questions would no longer be asked about human nature, the purpose of human existence, or the sense of human life, but rather about what we can do so that we can live peacefully with one another, how we can arrange our affairs so that we could feel good together, which institutions can be transformed so that everybody’s right to understanding will be more likely to hold good. In such an ideal community, in such an ideal society, the discussion of public affairs would revolve around, Rorty (1989, p. 85) writes, “how to balance the needs for peace, wealth and freedom when conditions require that one of these goals be sacrificed for the others, and how to equalize opportunities for self-creation and then leave people alone to use, or neglect, their opportunities.” In short, thanks to the institutionalization of appropriate procedures, it would be possible to build a sense of community and to cope with arising problems by means of communication, which can be regarded as undistorted when we have “democratic political institutions and the conditions for making these institutions function” (Rorty, 1989, p. 84). We should remember that this “futuristic romanticism” will be of little use, as Rorty (1996a, p. 124) stresses, until regular institutions of constitutional democracy are established, which will allow communication to occur, whereby it will be possible to arrive at a consensus.

FREEDOM

In order to determine what kind of politics we should consider as right for us at the present time, it is important to know that Habermas and Rorty focus on regular institutions of constitutional democracy. However, one more thing is necessary for both philosophers. This is the right understanding of the notion of freedom that we have. We find reflections on the notion of freedom in both Jurgen Habermas and Richard Rorty’s socio-political thought. They touch upon how widely freedom should be understood, and who is entitled to decide about using it in a given way. Consequently, their reflections integrate themselves with the discussion led by Isaiah Berlin in his essay *Two Conceptions of Freedom*, and because of this fact, before I refer to their philosophy and their understanding of freedom, it will be

valuable to say a few words about Berlin's perspective, which will function as a point of reference later on.

In his essay *Liberty*, Berlin discusses two definitions of freedom, or its two meanings – the *positive* and the *negative* freedom. The first, according to Berlin, stems from the question of how far stretches the area within whose limits a subject, be it an individual or a group of people, has or should have full freedom to exist and to act according to their will, without other people interfering. The second meaning, which Berlin (1991, p. 34) refers to as *positive*, is related to the answer to the following question: Who or what is the source of the power or integration which decides that someone is supposed to do this rather than that, or be like this, and not like that?

In the negative understanding of freedom, being free means that no one else interferes with one's business. Freedom thus conceived is synonymous with freedom *from* – from intrusions into our activities. The larger the area of this non-intrusion, the greater our freedom. Berlin (1991, p. 35) says that freedom lovers assume that there should exist a minimum scope of personal freedom, which must not be violated in any event. This is because violating it inevitably results in one having insufficient space to allow at least the smallest development of one's innate talents. Moreover, without this development, it would be impossible even to become aware of the various goals considered by people to be good, just, or sacred, much less to pursue those goals. Nevertheless, such freedom must not be unlimited: an individual must not be absolutely free, as this would result in infringements on other people's freedom in the name of one's own freedom, or vice versa. What must be done then is to specify how large the area of freedom should be. It is necessary to describe the notion of freedom and limits of freedom.

In his essay *Two Concepts of Freedom*, Berlin (1991, p. 47) goes on to point out that these conceptions of freedom are derived directly from the views of the Self, a person, and a human being. Moreover, he says that definitions of a human being and freedom can be freely manipulated, depending on current needs. In fact, such manipulations, as well as the threats they entail, occur when *those who think they know best* appear on stage. In this context, the following question becomes important: "Who is entitled to decide what I am supposed to be, what I am supposed to do, and what I am not allowed to do?", or "Who is in charge of *me*?" It is in attempting to answer these questions, and not the question "What am I allowed to be and what am I allowed to do?", that the *positive* sense of freedom manifests itself.

One may, however, entertain a certain doubt at this juncture. After all, freedom consisting in being one's own master and freedom consisting in others not interfering with one's doing what one wants, may seem like two fairly close logical conceptions, no more distant than uttering the same idea once by means of a statement and

once by means of a negation (Berlin, 1991, p. 44). Still, they do differ. This is due, as Berlin claims, to a split in their historical evolution. Namely, the metaphor of being one's own master, capable of steering one's own fortunes, grew into something of a division into *higher* and *lower* human nature. This was accompanied by a belief that it is of course *higher* nature that we must aspire to. Thus appeared the conception of the true Self, the transcendent and independent supervisor, as opposed to the empirical plexus of desires and passions, which must be controlled and suppressed. Today, as Berlin (1991, p. 45) says, this conception may be understood as something broader than the individual, as a social *totality*, an element or aspect of which is the individual: this may be a tribe, race, religious community or a state. This entity is considered to be the *true* Self, which by means of imposing its collective or limited and unified will on the recalcitrant members achieves its own, and at the same time, *their* own *higher* freedom. In such circumstances, the drive to achieve *higher nature* and *higher freedom* serves as a legitimization of coercion: coercion that is exercised only by some, those who supposedly see more than the rest and who are therefore privileged to act on their behalf in the pursuit of their "well-being."

Thus understood, the freedom to – to act according to the one and only code of conduct – seems a clever guise for tyranny, or, at least, so it is claimed by those who favor *negative* freedom (Berlin, 1991, p. 43), including Berlin, as well as Rorty and Habermas. All are against the idea of our culture being guided by absolute truths. This is also how Berlin, like Rorty and Habermas, sees it, as they oppose submitting our culture to some absolute truths, and perceive the ideal and fully rational form of life as entirely utopian. This critical approach of Rorty and Habermas toward the positive conception of freedom should be analyzed here in greater detail, to make it clear that this is really the case on the basis of their philosophy. That will allow us to proceed in turn to their subsequent specification of the negative conception which, in the context of their philosophy, may be called *freedom as responsibility*. Establishing such an understanding of freedom is crucial for the discussion about the necessary philosophical basis for a well-functioning civil society.

BEYOND "TRUTH" – AGAINST A POSITIVE VERSION OF FREEDOM

Rorty is well aware of the threats that Berlin was haunted by. He sees the fact that the pursuit of one right way of thinking and acting, as well as instituting it in societies, can cause much wrong. He overtly challenges those who place themselves in the position of decision-makers and act on behalf of us all in the name of some kind of truth. In that way, he opposes the *positive* version of freedom as

presented by Berlin. He is against the use of notions such as “the nature of the Self” or “our essential humanity,” as fulcrums for criticism of current social institutions or common moral convictions (Rorty, 1990, p. 14). What we can dispose of are only “common moral convictions.” They lie in the morality of our community, constructed upon the moral identity of its members. They determine our sense of obligation toward other members of the same community, and, by that, affect the public side of our life – a counterpart of our idiosyncratic worldviews and moralities, characteristic for our private sphere (Rorty, 1990, p. 200).

By propagating the above, Rorty (1996c, pp. 43–44) simultaneously tries to refute the accusations of his critics, who hasten to point out that social institutions and practices will not survive without traditional foundations consisting of meta-cultural and metahistoric perspectives on rationality and morality. He opposes them, as he does not believe the proposition that if the younger generation is not attached to unshaken moral principles in the same way as the older generation, this will entail the end of the struggle for human freedom and dignity, and if there is no absolute, nothing that would share divine adamancy in casting away submission to human weaknesses, then we would lose the reason to oppose evil.

Of course, critics of the above statements feel inconsolable due to ever more frequent voices calling on us to relinquish such categories as human nature, to stop attempting to find “ultimate solutions,” particularly after realizing the relative nature of our convictions. As Berlin points out, knowledge that it is impossible, not only in practice but even in principle, to obtain clear and certain answers may ultimately lead to insanity for all those who seek the one all-encompassing, eternally guaranteed system. Nonetheless, he fully realizes that a desire for something more is a deep, insatiable metaphysical need. A desire for a guarantee that our values rest in some heavens of objectivity, eternally safe is, in his view, an expression of longing for the certainty of childhood, or for the absolute values of our primeval past. If such a wish determines our practice, it is a symptom of both deep and dangerous moral and political immaturity. What he considers mature is to be aware that rules do not become less sacred, as one cannot guarantee their permanence, and that we may stand by them resolutely despite being aware of their relativity. This is, according to him, a feature of a civilized person.

Berlin advocates plurality which, when served with the portion of the *negative* freedom it requires, seems to him to be more human an ideal than the purposes of those who in authoritarian structures based on discipline seek a *positive* ideal of ruling over itself by classes, nations or whole humankind. Rorty and Habermas also agree on this, as they realize that in the light of multiplicity and difference, it is difficult to talk of some stable, unchanging center.

According to Habermas, we are dealing with a decentralised image of the world. This loss of center, however, does not need to be a threat to building individual or group identities. In decentralisation Habermas sees prospects for further social rationalization rather than threats to it. In his approach, it may serve to highlight the internal dependencies between the structure of images of the world (culture, society, personality), the life world as a context for the processes of reaching a consensus and possibilities of leading one's life rationally. Such highlighting becomes possible thanks to the communication processes accompanied by consciousness of the impossibility of attaining any stable and unchanging conclusions and solutions. We must satisfy ourselves with the only foundation we have – the shaky ground of a rationally-motivated agreement. In other words, we must agree on the necessity of performing incessant verifications of our views and of the rightness of our actions taken in a world of chance, characterized by change. Life in such a decentralised world requires from us constant readiness to engage in a dialogue on the contentious issues appearing within its scope. This becomes possible thanks to ceaseless questioning and the ability to reach agreements, or even a certain kind of unity by means of rational argumentation. This unity is achieved through the process of arriving at an agreement, by communicative means, by reproducing cultural knowledge, by belonging to a certain group and by defining one's identity characterised by individual responsibility for one's action within this group.

Rorty agrees with these words. He also pays great attention to causing our communities to be founded on consensus arrived at in the course of successful interaction. However, this can happen only in the reality of heterogeneity. If we rely on the reality of only one truth, such a project will not succeed. As Rorty claims, after Dewey, once we relinquish the absolutes, we can only rely on communication and our effort to understand each other better, which may lead to mutual agreement.

RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR COMMUNITY

On the basis of the above, we can say that both Rorty and Habermas are against the positive conception of freedom and against setting out any superior truths which would be common to all, and to which all would have to submit themselves. Rorty believes that one may not transcend the relative values of real or alleged individual communities in order to seek recourse to some impartial criteria that would help us evaluate those values. For him, *humanity* is not necessarily a concept to be understood solely in terms of morality or *human dignity* – i.e., what

stems from the dignity of a particular community. Rather, it is something to be conceived of within the frameworks of sheer biology. Therefore, he maintains, the liberals “should try to clear themselves of charges of irresponsibility by convincing our society that it has to be responsible only to its own traditions, and not to moral law as well” (Rorty, 1990, p. 199). In another place, Rorty (1990, p. 198) says that one may only be responsible to people and to real or potential historic communities.

In Rorty’s view, our sense of responsibility in society is largely an effect of the socialization process. He says that there is nothing out of order with all sorts of “networks of power” needed to “shape people into individuals endowed with a sense of moral responsibility” (Rorty, 1990, p. 198). Habermas (1987, p. 141) also sees the need for such socialization. He believes that individuals undergo socialization in their interactions involving construction of their own group identities and coordination of efforts. The magnitude of these interactions is measured using the solidarity of the group members, while their interactive abilities can be measured by the responsibility of the respective persons. Such construction and coordination occurring in joint, common action and incessant cooperative effort, as Habermas (1992a, p. 140) says, imposes a responsibility on us, in that it does not free us from the *grace of the times* in which we live. This is related to the modern sense of humanism, which has long found its expression in the ideas of self-aware life – in authentic self-fulfilment and autonomy – a humanism that does not become ossified in the process of its own self-hardening.

In other words, as Rorty suggests, we should abandon our intuition telling us that there exists something outside, to which we owe responsibility. We should do so in favor of the view that we could become better than we are – as scientists/theorists, citizens, or friends. Furthermore, this should happen once we start paying attention to both the people surrounding us and to the consequences that our actions have on them. Such an acknowledgment of paying attention is one of the steps to be taken while working out a consensus. As Rorty and Habermas state, consensus is to be reached in the course of communication, provided that the conditions for it are retained, i.e., the parties will have the opportunity for expressing their needs and desires, as well as their knowledge, so that they can bring into being such a world in which they can live what they imagine as a better and a safer life, which, in this context, is the chief goal to be pursued (Habermas, 1985, p. 169).

Relying on the intuitions of liberals of Rorty’s or Habermas’s ilk, our greatest wrongdoing is causing others to suffer. In order to eradicate it, we should, as Rorty (1996b, p. 49) says, invest in elevating human sensitivity and imagination, for it is these that may mend human relations and that facilitate our progression in terms of

morality. Undoubtedly, such a statement complies with Habermas's views. What is more, in his opinion, phenomena akin to sensitivity and imagination, that is care, compassion, commitment, or openness, are at the root of humanity. And it is only on its account that we can stand in times of conflict (Habermas, 1992b, p. 125). All of this can take place in our decentralised culture – a culture of deepened reflection and feelings (Habermas, 1981, p. 341), in which we make a cooperative effort to ease the suffering of easily vulnerable beings, remove this suffering or thwart it (Habermas, 1992a, p. 140). Thus, not only the new languages and ways of describing that Rorty mentions, and not only better arguments mentioned by Habermas are supposed to lead us to consensus, but also openness, compassion, sensitivity, and a refusal to sanction inflicting pain on others.

Relinquishing violence and the infliction of pain will only become possible once we realize that others suffer the way we do. This awareness will enable us to identify with others. Through this identification with people that our ancestors were unable to identify with, people of various religions, living on different sides of the planet, and people who seem disturbingly different from *us* at first (Rorty, 1996b, p. 48), it becomes possible to attain moral progress to stretch our community to those who were outside it before.

TOWARD “FREEDOM AS RESPONSIBILITY”

Broadening our community will only be possible when our decisions are a result of our free choice between various absolutes. Such a choice is difficult, as it is made in full awareness of the relativity of our convictions. However, despite their relativity, we may stand by them without fail. Standing by them, as Berlin says, quoting Schumpeter, distinguishes a civilized human from a barbarian. This is also the tone of Rorty's words, who claims that “liberal societies of our century produced more and more people who are able to recognize the contingency of the vocabulary in which they state their highest hopes – the contingency of their own consciences – and yet have remained faithful to those consciences” (Rorty, 1989, p. 46). He calls this freedom the acknowledgement of contingency.

This freedom is also related to the existence of a multitude of voices, which does not mean that it is connected with the existence of chaos. This is because, despite the multitude, it is possible to reach a consensus based on dialogue. Thanks to it, we are able to tell other people about what seems true to us. The contents we express should not be treated as permanent and unchanging, or as reflecting some truth. Instead, they should be negotiated and specified in the process of commu-

nication. This is a particularly difficult requirement to implement, as it requires the parties involved in the dialogue to express readiness to carry it on and to treat their convictions and intentions of future actions as tentative and requiring discussion. In a nutshell, we should rely on dialogue. This dialogue is possible thanks to specific values. The values in question also determine the course of action regarding the relations between what is important to an individual and his or her obligations to the community. Turning towards these specific values constitutes a further specification of *negative* freedom. In accordance with the words of both Rorty and Habermas, freedom presupposes a compromise. Our societies are compromises of this kind: they are not merely collections of individuals, but rather (at least when they are liberal and social-democratic) consist in a compromise among these individuals (Rorty, 1990, p. 196). The compromise comprises both formalized regulations as well as their underlying beliefs. If these include freedom of speech and freedom of action, we are more likely to become better as individuals and as societies. Such a freedom is of utmost importance as far as undisturbed communication is concerned. Without it, there will be no undisturbed communication, no individual self-fulfilment, and no novel ideas or actions. This is the kind of freedom that we can call “freedom as responsibility.” It consists in taking responsibility for supporting our communities and societies on the way to shaping the right relations among their members. This comprises taking responsibility for common effort and cooperation. This responsibility is, to a great extent, affiliated with us being responsible for our own deeds, for our actions and their consequences in the public sphere. We should be careful not to hurt or humiliate others (Habermas, 1992a, p. 140). But in order to do that, we first need to acknowledge them. The responsibility that we take on ourselves with respect to others, with whom we share our communities and societies, does not stem from an absolute truth or a law of some utmost paramountcy. It stems from and concerns another human being. After all, we are all, by and large, points in the very same networks of relations. Through them, we are able to act and interact with others. This is why, when thus understood, freedom, i.e., freedom as responsibility, is so crucial for the development of a society which will be actually civil. The goal here is not to invent or create anything, but simply to facilitate to the greatest possible degree the attainment of people’s fantastically different, private goals without them hurting each other. The conditions conducive to this will certainly develop when our culture is based on dialogue rather than on the use of force; once we abandon violence.

CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing words allow us to answer the main question posed at the very beginning of this paper. Both Habermas and Rorty recognize the value of democratic institutions and freedom from rule. Furthermore, the “kind of politics” which both philosophers would accept is “proceduralist deliberative politics” based on the institutionalization of appropriate procedures and the creation of conditions for free communication. Thanks to these conditions, it will be possible to work out a consensus without coercion within this politics. However, one more thing is necessary for that: we have to use them (procedures and conditions) responsibly. This responsible use of the sphere of freedom from rule which we are provided with may be the manifestation of a new understanding of the category of freedom. Rorty’s and Habermas’s philosophy allows to make a first step in presenting such an understanding of freedom: *freedom as responsibility*.

We can say that Rorty and Habermas’s idea is for us to become better towards each other, more responsible with respect to each other, to be more aware of our actions and their consequences, as well as the fact that in taking actions, we may make mistakes and our responsibility is to include our ability to admit to our mistakes. We will better ourselves as well as our actions once the world becomes decentralized and once we realize two premises. Firstly, we need to comply with the formal conditions without which undisturbed communication cannot occur. Once it does occur, we need to raise responsible individuals, who will pursue a consensus ranging even further than before, and who shall use for this purpose more valid argumentation and amended, novel narratives.

For Rorty (1990, p. 193), we are to become more liberal, more tolerant, and more pragmatic due to our “disenchantment” with the world we live in, while for Habermas, the way to greater tolerance, as well as loyalty and willingness to partake in and take responsibility for dialogue, is by way of decentralization. The two philosophers hold that a human being can only be free in a world which is decentralized and detached from its ‘magical’ façade. They reject the idea of positive freedom. They reject the idea of *higher* freedom: the freedom to be instituted with the aid of such abstract concepts as class, nation, or race. Instead, what they argue for is plurality and negative freedom: freedom that is to be understood as freedom as responsibility – a notion to be worked out in due course.⁹

⁹ It is still rare for the authors analyzing pragmatic tradition to focus together on the notion of freedom and responsibility, however there are such attempts. Please see: J.R. Koons (2009, pp. 152–186).

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