Philosophia (2008) 36:29–41
DOI 10.1007/s11406-007-9091-7

Literature, Ethics, and Richard Rorty's Pragmatist Theory of Interpretation

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Received: 1 March 2007 / Accepted: 29 June 2007 /
Published online: 1 September 2007
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Abstract This article considers the validity and strength of Richard Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation in the light of two ethical issues related to literature and interpretation. Rorty's theory is rejected on two grounds. First, it is argued that his unrestrained account of interpretation is incompatible with the distinctive moral concerns that have been seen to restrict the scope and nature of valid approaches to artworks. The second part of the paper claims that there is no indispensable relationship between supporting Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation and the important place that is attached to literature in the liberal society outlined by him. A reading of Donald Davidson's texts on literary language and interpretation implies that an intentionalist theory of interpretation can accommodate those features that Rorty values in literature as well.

Keywords Pragmatist theory of interpretation · Intentionalist theory of interpretation · Ethical issues

I

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the various questions in which the fields of literature and ethics intersect. Although reflecting on the way in which literary works can function as modes of moral investigation has been of primary interest, another question has elicited interest as well. This second discussion extends moral questions to the realm of the philosophy of interpretation, more specifically to the question concerning the nature of valid interpretation. The way this latter issue has been addressed has led to a more profound understanding of what the assessment of validity ultimately involves. It has been argued that

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interpretations should be constrained by the author's intentions not only because they determine what the work ultimately means, but because we have a particular kind of moral responsibility to approach artworks in such a way that takes them into account.[1]

These respective questions meet in an interesting way in Richard Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation and in his reflections concerning the position of literature. Rorty's approach to literature is connected to his goal of reworking the nature moral philosophy to a more narrative form, and especially to the high value that is attached to the enhancement of solidarity in his postmetaphysical, liberal culture.[2] By providing their readers with descriptions of "strange people (Alcibiades, Julien Sorel), strange families (the Karamazovs, the Casaubons)," literary works can be a source of unique encounters and, thus, make us realize the kinds of suffering the world contains and reflect on unfamiliar situations to which people have drifted.[3] These features, in turn, can give rise to more refined descriptions with which we relate to other human beings, and, hence, in Rorty's opinion, enhance the presence of solidarity.[4] Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation has a role in this development as well, because it is meant to clear the way for the specific approach to literature embodied in his social goals. Most importantly, Rorty denies that the author's intentions restrict the scope of valid interpretations.[5] Since the pragmatist minded critic "asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions but simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose," it is not surprising that Rorty sees Harold Bloom's "strong misreader" as an heir of the pragmatist in the field of literary theory.[6] This view gives the literary theorist himself a creative role, since his or her aim is not to accurately reflect what the author intended, but to approach a literary work as a possible source for creating further descriptions and to draw narrative connections between issues that have not been drawn before.

Now, this description of Rorty's theory suggests that the respective ethical questions concerning the position of literature and the nature of valid interpretations mentioned above not only meet in it in an interesting way, but that they, in fact, appear irreconcilable with one another. For Rorty's pragmatist account of interpretation, which is meant to establish his specific approach to literature, runs noticeably counter with the recent formulations that see moral considerations as restricting the scope of valid approaches to works of art. The moral considerations these views raise are aimed precisely against the sort of account of interpretation Rorty supports.

In this article, I shall consider the validity and strength of Rorty's position in the light of these ethical issues. The first part of this essay is devoted to the question, whether moral considerations, such as those currently invoked, can truly serve as forceful arguments against Rorty's unrestrained pragmatist account of interpretation.

[1] See especially, Hirsch (1976), Haapala (1999, 2003), Irwin (2000). I believe that Danto's notion of deep interpretation can also be seen to entail moral considerations for interpretation (Danto 1986). See especially Danto's short discussion of deep interpretation in Danto (1993, 201–203).

[2] Rorty (1989, 60).

[3] Ibid. (80).

[4] Ibid. (107).

[5] Rorty (1991, 84–90).

[6] Rorty (1982, 151).

The critical focus of the second part, on the other hand, will be on the specific way in which Rorty draws support for his theory. Once Rorty's theory of interpretation is set up against his social goals it turns out to be manifestly "a recommendation," as we will see. It suggests that certain topics have become unprofitable, and that they should be abandoned in favor of questions, which are more relevant in the light of our current needs and concerns.[7] In this respect, Rorty's account of interpretation and his societal goals meet. At the end, his theory of interpretation may be seen as "just one more terminological suggestion made on behalf of the same cause, the cause of providing contemporary liberal culture with a vocabulary which is all its own, cleansing it of the residues of a vocabulary which was suited to the needs of former days."[8] Evidently, Rorty considers a literary theory, which is grounded in intentionalist terminology and which understands validity in these terms, as this kind of obsolete theory. The author's intentions should be discarded as yardsticks for valid interpretations, so that literature's capacity to illuminate moral issues and to provide new descriptions for the enhancement of solidarity can come to its fullest. Rorty's pragmatist theory receives its support from clearing the way for this specific approach to literature. However, I shall argue that there, in fact, is no essential connection between Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation and the fulfillment of his social goals. Thus, to regard literature as an important medium for addressing moral issues does not presuppose holding the sort of account of interpretation supported by Rorty. This conclusion, too, calls for a re-evaluation of the validity of Rorty's general interpretive position, since it entails that Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation may possibly turn out to be a recommendation that can be rejected without loosing anything in particular.

II

The importance of moral considerations for interpretation is drawn from a particular conception regarding the construction of an artist's identity. According to this view her identity is not separable from her artistic activity and the character of her works, but it is, actually, expressed through them. In other words, the themes a given artist has decided to consider in her works, the way she approaches them, together with the way in which her works relate to the history of art, all contribute to the formation of her identity, i.e., what kind of an artist and, eventually, what kind of a person she is. This sort of connection means that when we encounter an artwork, we are reflecting on an object that is tightly connected to its creator's identity. Because of this, it is argued to be morally reprehensible to approach artworks in any way we please.[9]

Since Rorty explicitly states that the pragmatist oriented interpreter does not care about the author's intentions, but only about what he can get out from the work at hand, his theory of interpretation is clearly in risk of violating those moral principles that have been seen to hold an important position in interpretive activity. Thus, if one

[7] Ibid. (154)

[8] Rorty (1989, 55).

[9] See especially, Haapala (1999, 172–173).

accepts the primacy of these principles, one should reject Rorty's theory. However, the issue isn't as straightforward as this. For the problem with the present formulations is that almost all of them are underlain by a Kantian normative view of ethics, that is, an approach to moral issues whose very foundations Rorty seeks to undermine. This background is most explicitly present in E. D. Hirsch's views, for he thinks that the interpreter should be guided with "a fundamental ethical maxim," according to which, the interpreter has a "basic moral imperative... to respect an author's intention."[10] As Hirsch notes, this formulation maintains the spirit of Kant's categorical imperative.[11] However, because of Rorty's skeptic attitude towards Kantian moral philosophy, it would seem to beg the question against Rorty to rely on principles derived from it in this specific context. Yet, a question worth considering is, whether the values, on which Rorty's liberal society is founded, in fact, entail moral principles for interpretation. If they do, and if Rorty's theory of interpretation is in contradiction with them, its ultimate validity must be reassessed.

Rorty, in fact, develops his idea of solidarity as the foundation of a liberal culture in direct confrontation with the main tenets of Kant's moral philosophy. Rorty's main point against Kant is that moral judgments need not make a claim to universal validity in the way Kant maintained. Beliefs can still regulate action and be "thought worth dying for" even if it is acknowledged that they are "caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstances."[12] Although one possesses a skeptic attitude towards the existence of a common human nature, this does not, in Rorty's opinion, remove the fact that we have a particular kind of "moral obligation to feel a sense of solidarity with all other human beings."[13] This is an important principle particularly for Rorty, because the liberal society outlined by him rests on its wide-ranging recognition.

The significant position of solidarity, in turn, entails that certain maxims and values should guide the attitudes with which the members of a liberal society relate to their fellow inhabitants. Thus, while Rorty's liberalism is not established on such universalist terms, in which the normativity of certain principles is explained in terms of a relationship to a common human nature people share, it must still endorse particular principles as more acceptable and desirable than others. To assess values in these terms, actually, goes well with Rorty's philosophical holism. According to this view, theories and belief systems do not contain foundational bedrock premises, but certain beliefs are considered more crucial than others, because they inhabit a more essential position in the total web of beliefs. In the case of Rorty's liberalism, those values, which constitute the idea of liberalism such as, say, various forms freedom, possibility for self-development, open-mindedness, should be considered primary to less crucial and constitutive principles, which are located farther away from the core.[14] The former sorts of values are primary in the sense that they cannot be eradicated without destructing the very idea of liberalism.

[10] Hirsch (1976, 90–92).

[11] Haapala (1999, 2003) also acknowledges the Kantian background of his views.

[12] Rorty (1989, 189).

[13] Ibid. (190).

[14] Ibid. (51–52).

Rorty upraises a person he calls "the liberal ironist" to an important position in his liberal culture, defining him or her as such an individual "who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires..."[15] That is, a person who does not justify her actions by relating them to unhistorical, universal or theological principles. This type of person, thus, embodies those values, which are important for Rorty's liberalism. Rorty also sketches an active role for the liberal ironist. Not surprisingly, he regards "literary critic" as an alternative name for this type of person, for redescriptions inhabit a similar position in their respective activities.[16] Like those critics that Rorty considers the heirs of pragmatism, the liberal ironist, too, acknowledges the force of redescriptions in the sense that her efforts are underlain by a belief "that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed."[17] This recognition serves to establish the important position that Rorty attaches to their activities in his liberal society.

However, once approached through the short account of liberalism given above, the ideality of the liberal ironist and the pragmatist critic turns out to be a more complex matter than Rorty seems to realize. The ironist pursues to create new descriptions in order to free those around her from old prejudices and outworn conceptions that she finds posing obstacles for the functioning of her community. For Rorty, the enhancement of solidarity is intimately related to the effort of expanding our sense of "us" as far as we can. Redescriptions have an important role in this development, because they are potential causes for discovering unnoticed similarities between different human groups, and for seeing certain differences as irrelevant when compared to these.[18] While this kind of process should be considered valuable, in my view, redescriptive activities cannot be carried out as unconditionally as this admirable description concerning their role may imply. For when all the possible outcomes of this activity are drawn Rorty's trust on the power of redescription becomes, as Jean Bethke Elhstain also maintains, a "genuinely troubling [claim] – ethically and politically."[19] Although Rorty wishes to create an arena for the activity of the ironist and the literary critic as unbounded as possible, the creation of new descriptions must, ultimately, have certain boundaries, because, otherwise, the very foundations of Rorty's liberal society are, in fact, in danger of being dashed. For this very reason, Rorty, too, must accept that interpretations should have particular constraints.

The holistic way in which Rorty's liberalism is grounded implies that such course of actions must be found deplorable whose outcomes can obstruct the realization of its central values. Now, the problem faced by Rorty is that the unfastened methods given to the liberal ironist and the pragmatist minded literary critic for achieving their goals, i.e., redescriptions, are, in fact, in danger of turning their vocation precisely into such an activity. Rorty overlooks the possibility that certain redescriptions and approaches can ultimately lead to unjustifiable humiliation and subjection. If

[15] Ibid. (xv).

[16] Ibid. (80).

[17] Ibid. (73).

[18] Ibid. (107).

[19] Ehlstain (2003, 146).

redescription truly is the kind of powerful medium Rorty maintains, these sorts of negative outcomes are possible. Redescriptions may not only lead to an awareness of unnoticed similarities, but they can be a powerful tool for pursuing precisely opposite goals as well. Processes, which have these outcomes, do not enhance solidarity, but, rather, shrink its breeding ground. Thus, Rorty's liberal culture must reject the very doctrine that makes these sorts of redescriptions possible. In other words, if a particular process of redescribing is in contradiction with the high value that a liberal society attaches, say, to various forms of freedom, not only must the description itself be rejected, but the very scheme on which the justification of the process is grounded. Given the lack of restrictions, which Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation provides for the literary critic, it may possibly turn out to be precisely such a scheme.

Rorty maintains that "all we can do is to work with the final vocabulary we have, while keeping our ears open for hints about how it might be expanded or revised."[20] However, this principle alone entails that certain ways of redescribing cannot be accepted, for our ears are not properly open, if we choose to describe a person's actions and its outcomes in terms that distort them too much. The importance of lending an ear follows from one of the central values of Rorty's liberal society, the freedom to be heard. While redescription can be a source of freedom and discovery of important, unnoticed similarities, it can also be a powerful medium for suppression, and, hence, a possible source for the obstruction of those values found central by Rorty. Therefore, the very foundations of liberal culture entail that Rorty must ultimately accept certain boundaries for any type of redescribing activity, for literary interpretation as well.

Now, to get back to the issue of interpretation more specifically, if Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation truly provides the literary critic with such unrestrained tools for approaching literary works as is expressed in his writings on interpretation, it seems to ultimately run counter with Rorty's idea of liberalism. Thus, there are strong grounds for rejecting Rorty's account of interpretation. However, the more interesting result, which follows from the previous discussion, is that it implies that to see moral concerns as constraining the assessment of validity of interpretations need not be formulated in terms of Kantian moral philosophy, as they currently are, but the claim can be established on principles, whose force Rorty must, in the end, accept as well. Not only does it follow from Kant's account of personhood that it is morally reprehensible to subject the artist's work to "our whimsies" or to treat the specific creation only as a means for satisfying our purposes and desires,[21] but the importance of this position follows also from Rorty's account of liberalism. This conclusion means that the ultimate validity of Rorty's pragmatist account of interpretation must be re-assessed even on Rorty's own terms.

At the end, Rorty's theory of interpretation and his picture of liberalism are troubled by an inconsistency, for the kind of unrestrained account of interpretation he supports is to a considerable extent incompatible with the very foundations of the liberal culture outlined by him. The values, on which this kind of society is

[20] Rorty (1989, 197).

[21] Hirsch (1976, 90–92), Haapala (1999, 172),

founded, entail that people's intentional actions cannot be described and approached in such an unconstrained way, as Rorty's theory of interpretation allows. At this point, he has two options. Rorty must either give up his version of liberalism or modify his account of interpretation. Since outlining the idea of a postmetaphysical, liberal culture has been so important for him, Rorty would hardly be willing to sacrifice this part of his theory. However, this entails that he must instead modify his account of interpretation into a more moderate form. Thus, Rorty can no longer hold a view of interpretation, which is expressed in his writings on literature and literary interpretation, that is, the kind of view that allows the critic to beat the text into any shape that suits his or her purpose.

III

As became apparent, Rorty's way of defending his pragmatist theory of interpretation is highly dependent on seeing it as a recommendation; it should be preferred not because the theory accurately reflects the inherent nature of literature and culture, but because it is an appropriate means for achieving certain social ends. However, an issue Rorty leaves virtually untouched is, whether his own account truly has an exclusive relationship to satisfying those ends outlined by him. Perhaps an intentionalist account of interpretation, which assigns an important position for the author's intention, could, after all, satisfy Rorty's demands. Given the way in which Rorty defends his interpretive position, it is, in fact, vital for the legitimacy of his position that his pragmatist theory alone has this kind of connection to these social issues. Since intentionalist theories argue that the author's intentions restrict the scope of valid interpretations, they have no problems in fulfilling the moral principles considered important in the previous part. Thus, if they can meet the importance of Rorty's social ends as well, the final validity of his pragmatist theory of interpretation is severely reduced.

The importance attached to redescriptions in Rorty's pragmatism involves a view of language, which highlights "the contingency of language," a view he finds most effectively expressed in Donald Davidson's theory of metaphor and in his later philosophy of language in general.[22] Davidson's later writings on language are underlain by an insistence that language cannot be exhaustively explained in terms of rule-governed practices and pre-established conventions. Instead, Davidson concentrates on analyzing the multifarious features that are involved in successful linguistic interaction. Ultimately, Davidson maintains that if certain conditions are met, there, in fact, "is no word or construction that cannot be converted to a new use..."[23] This view of language serves as a satisfactory tool for Rorty's liberal ironist, for it reinforces the resources for redescriptions.[24]

However, a problem with Rorty's reading of Davidson is that he overlooks the important position that the speaker's intentions occupy in Davidson's later

[22] Rorty (1989, 9).

[23] Davidson (2005/1986, 100).

[24] Rorty (1989, 29).

philosophy of language. In fact, Davidson argues that precisely by stressing the importance of intention the innovative potentials of language use properly emerge.[25] Although one maintains that the meaning of an utterance is (roughly) determined by what the speaker intended by it, this does not in any way diminish the possibility for creativity in the use of language. This is because to succeed in using language in a novel way requires a particular kind of creative stage setting from the speaker. As Davidson explains, "you can change the meaning provided you believe... that the interpreter has adequate clues for the new interpretation."[26] Precisely the skill to give these sorts of clues is what creative language use requires.

This kind of connection between intention and creativity suggests that perhaps an intentionalist account of interpretation need not be as incompatible with the kind of social role Rorty attaches to literature, as he seems to assume. In fact, I believe, that Davidson's texts on literary language and interpretation embody precisely such an intentionalist theory. Once its implications for the present discussion have been indicated, Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation will no longer turn out to be the only theory that can highlight the importance of those features connected to the position of redescriptions that Rorty values.

In a similar way to Davidson's theory of language, his account of literature also highlights that the success of communication requires a specific interaction between the author and reader. Since "one can only intend what one believes he has a chance of bringing off," authors cannot neglect, how their readers are equipped to interpret their utterances.[27] Although language users do not have to follow pre-established rules in order to be understood, they do have to conform to a principle that Davidson calls "the requirement of interpretability." While linguistic history and past usages do not limit what meanings can be intended, they do determine the clues that the speaker must give in order to make his novel utterances interpretable for the receiver. That is, the success of intention requires that the speaker proceeds in such a way that he has sufficient reasons for believing that the receiver has a possibility of interpreting his utterances in the way he intends them to be interpreted. Thus, while in Davidson's picture, language is extremely flexible, its use nevertheless has particular limits.[28]

Current modest intentionalists in analytic philosophy of art also stress that intentions have to have certain limits. Paisley Livingston has argued that successful intentions have to be "within natural and logical limits," while Noël Carroll has emphasized that the conventions of language and literature ultimately function as boundaries in the process of intending.[29] Yet, it seems that neither answer would satisfy Davidson. Rather, Davidson explains the successful realization of the intended meaning in terms of its reasonableness; the speaker must have a reasonable belief that his interlocutor has a possibility of grasping the meaning intended by him. From this it follows that for Davidson, successful communication of novel utterances

[25] Davidson (2005/1989, 143).

[26] Davidson (2005/1986, 98).

[27] Davidson (2005/1993, 180).

[28] Davidson (2001, 115–116).

[29] Livingston (1998, 844), Carroll (2001/2000, 198).

requires a specific kind of interaction between the author and reader. While to stress this specific feature isn't by all means incompatible with Livingston's and Carroll's accounts, they do ultimately fail to get hold of it in a proper way. However, it is precisely this feature of Davidson's intentionalism that enables it to form a highly resourceful response to Rorty's challenge.

The decisive difference between Davidson's view and Livingston's and Carroll's respective versions of intentionalism emerges well from Davidson's example concerning the prose of James Joyce. For Davidson, Joyce is a primary example of what the interaction between author and reader can, in the end, involve. Davidson:

> Joyce draws on every resource his readers command (or that he hopes they command, or thinks they should command), every linguistic resource, knowledge of history, geography, past writers, and styles. He forces us both to look at and listen to his words to find the puns and fathom the references.[30]

Davidson draws a connection between James Joyce and the famous case of Humpty Dumpty, who in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Class* claims to Alice that he can make any utterance mean whatever he likes. In this respect, both Joyce and Humpty sought to be innovators of language, but only Joyce succeeded. This is because unlike the latter, Joyce gave subtle, often hard to get clues as to how his utterances should be interpreted. Humpty, on the other hand, was an unsuccessful innovator because he did not give the required clues. He was not an innovator because his utterances were not, ultimately, meaningful language. But, "it's clear that when Joyce was flying by the net of language, he did not intend to leave us entangled."[31]

This discussion brings out an important point for my criticism of Rorty. To my mind, the decisive difference between Davidsonian intentionalism and Livingston's and Carroll's respective versions is in the way in which the former highlights the specific interactive nature of intending. Since the reasonableness of the intended meaning, and its success thereof, involves a relation to the reader's possibilities of understanding, intending a specific, novel meaning for a familiar utterance or inventing a completely new one can be a highly fine-grained and delicate process. That is, its success requires that the author has the ability to proceed in such a way that the reader can recognize the intended meaning. Otherwise, the attempt for novelty falls short. Yet, these qualities related to the use of imagination aren't limited to the activity of the author alone, but they extend to concern the reader as well. As the longer quote from Davidson shows, the disentanglement from the web weaved by Joyce may involve highly delicate and unique bits of knowledge. However, since these clues are hard to dig up "as much is demanded from the reader as of the author." "By fragmentating familiar languages and recycling the raw material Joyce provokes the reader into involuntary collaboration... The center of creative energy is thus moved from the artist to a point between the writer and his audience."[32]

[30] Davidson (2005/1989, 147).

[31] Ibid. (153).

[32] Ibid. (156–157).

Evidently, the use of imagination is highly valued in Rorty's liberal society, since it can develop such capacities in human beings as seeing differently, an ability to weigh different options, as well as a capacity to find, in Rorty's terms, an adequate description for the needs of a particular situation. John Dewey, one of Rorty's chief inspirations, not only saw the use of imagination as an essential part of aesthetic experience, but also its development as the distinctive outcome of this form of experience. Now, it could be argued that intentionalist theories of interpretation should be rejected, because they may not only diminish the role and amount of imagination involved in the act of interpreting, but also ultimately prohibit its development, thus, obstructing the imagination related social outgrowths that literature can offer. While Rorty's pragmatist theory can embrace the importance attached to imagination, since it unleashes the reader to acquire from the work anything that her imagination is capable of, intentionalist theories confine the reader to stay within the boundaries that are set by the author's probable intentions. Because of this difference between the two approaches, together with the importance of imagination, Rorty's pragmatist theory should be favoured. However, this argument rests on a mistaken assumption. For to stress that interpretation should be constrained by the author's intention does not inevitably lead to diminishing the significance of imagination or the amount of aesthetic experience elicited by the work.

For Dewey, aesthetic experience involves an interaction between the viewer and object of experience that is not stable but involves an "ordered change" and "participation." It is by nature "cumulative," proceeding from "suspense" to "fulfillment."[33] However, there is no ultimate reason why an intentionalist theory of interpretation could not embrace these features. Take Davidson's example of Joyce, for instance, in which the unfolding of his works demands a sufficient amount of creativity and use of imagination from the reader. One can easily find from Dewey a description of an experience that corresponds to the structure of this form of activity. For instance, Dewey maintains that "the spontaneity of art is not one of opposition to anything, but marks complete absorption in an *orderly* development. This absorption is characteristic of esthetic experience; but it is an ideal for all experience..."[34] Furthermore, the case of Joyce, in fact, suggests that in many cases, the unity and orderly developing character of the experience that the work elicits, is achieved precisely by an understanding of what the author meant. The different parts of the work are united into an organic unity by this understanding. Otherwise the experience would lack unity and order, and, hence, would not be an aesthetic one, at least as this notion is defined by Dewey. A lack of understanding of the structure of the work may, ultimately, hinder our imaginative engagement with it.

Rorty's view of the liberal ironist seems to be underlain by a conception that creative acts and the use of imagination imply creating something radically new and unparallel. For example, Rorty maintains that "ironists specialize in redescribing a range of objects or events in neologistic jargon, in the hope of inciting people to adopt and extend that jargon."[35] However, a Davidsonian reply to this portrayal

[33] Dewey (1980, 3–4; 16–17; 35–37).

[34] Ibid. (280). Italics mine.

[35] Rorty (1989, 78).

would be that even the ironist must conform to the requirement of interpretability, that is, her redescriptions must be formulated in such a way that they become intelligible for her interlocutors, and, of course, all the more if that jargon is intended to be further extended. Yet, the preceding discussion implies that the inevitability of this kind of limit should not be taken as an unfortunate result, for intentionalist approaches to literary works of art do not inevitably diminish the role of imagination involved in the reading process. Rather, one can maintain that in some cases our imagination does not even get of the ground without some understanding of what the author intended. Thus, if aesthetic experience is a key element in the development of imagination, as Dewey maintains, there is no reason to suspect the prospects of an intentionalist theory of interpretation to accommodate the sort of importance that is attached to imagination in Rorty's postmetaphysical culture.

Already this discussion subtracts the final validity of Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation, for it is now emerging as a recommendation that can be forsaken without losing anything in particular. However, there is still one question brought up by Rorty's views that I wish to discuss before I draw my final conclusion. This issue concerns the relationship between redescription and obtaining a freedom for self-creation from the possible inherited impediments of ones society and ones past. Yet again, the liberal ironist serves as Rorty's principle example; that is a person who rejects "the will to truth" in favor of "the will to self-overcoming." She is ultimately a person who seeks for such resources that enables her to describe the past in such a way that "the past never knew, and thereby found a self to be which her precursors never knew was possible."[36] Thus, the force of redescriptions highlights the possibility for transformation.

However, also in this case it is unclear, whether Rorty's pragmatist theory receives exclusive support from the kind of task attributed to redescriptions in this passage. It does not seem necessary to let the reader beat the text into any shape she pleases to acquire those factors valued by Rorty. In fact, this point is, yet again, revealed by Davidson's reading of Joyce. Davidson:

> As we, his [Joyce's] listeners and readers, become familiar with the devices he has made us master, we find ourselves removed from a certain distance from our own language, our usual selves, and our society. We join Joyce as outcasts, temporarily freed, or so it seems, from the nets of our language and our culture.[37]

Evidently, this passage embodies the sort of features that Rorty wishes literature to provide, that is, resources for the liberal ironist's redescriptions. For Rorty, irony is inherently "reactive" in the sense that "an ironist cannot get along without the contrast between the final vocabulary she inherited and the one she is trying to create for herself."[38] However, Rorty's pragmatist theory of interpretation is not the only approach to literature that is able obtain the resources required by this purpose. Davidson's reading of Joyce implies that an intentionalist theory of interpretation can ultimately be a productive approach even on Rorty's own terms. However, if an

[36] Ibid. (29).

[37] Davidson (2005/1989, 157).

[38] Rorty (1989, 87).

intentionalist account of interpretation has these kinds of fruitful prospects, the status of Rorty's pragmatist theory must instead be re-assessed.

The ultimate problem for Rorty's theory entailed by the discussion presented in this part is that his theory of interpretation no longer occupies an exclusive relationship to the fulfillment of those goals regarded as important by him. This is a grave result for Rorty, since he argues that the sort of pragmatist theory he supports receives its justification precisely from this sort of connection.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have introduced two reasons for rejecting Rorty's pragmatist account of interpretation. First, I argued that Rorty's theory breaks the moral principles involved in the assessment of valid interpretations, the presence of which even his own image of liberalism must accept. Second, the discussion of Davidsonian intentionalism implies that an intentionalist account of interpretation need not be as incompatible with Rorty's social ends, as he seems to assume. Thus, Rorty's manner of drawing support for his theory of interpretation from the urgency of those societal needs does not work, for an intentionalist theory of interpretation can fulfill them as well.

Rorty has become famous for suggesting a distinctive way of refuting theories; not by referring to logical inconsistencies or to knockdown counterexamples, but rather by making the vocabulary in which the objection to ones position is formulated "look bad." In this article, I hope to have managed to put Rorty's own position in just that kind of light.

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