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Rorty's Approach to Cultural Difference: The Conflict between Solidarity and Procedural Liberalism¹

Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi

Abstract *Although Richard Rorty's controversial thought has been the subject of many works, there has not been much discussion about his approach to cultural difference. The purpose of this article is to examine how Rorty sees cultural differences philosophically and how he deals with them politically. For him, rationality, morality and even the scope of moral responsibility towards others are defined in terms of solidarity with a particular community and 'ethnocentrism', rather than in terms of a universal and metaphysically derived set of criteria. It can be argued that since language, language games and values are mainly components of culture, the latter is one of the most significant communities with which Rorty is concerned, though he is not explicit about it. Nevertheless, Rorty does not think that the moral and philosophical significance of communities, particularly cultural communities, should be reflected in politics. The main argument of the article is that there is an unresolved tension in Rorty's thought between philosophical, moral and emotional attribution of significance to communities and arguably cultural communities, and a disregard for them in the political sphere. This paves the way for outlining an approach to cultural difference that is more just and even more in harmony with Rorty's own philosophy.*

Introduction

Richard Rorty's views, whether in epistemology and philosophy or in political philosophy, have given rise to many controversies. For instance, it has been a concern of many discussions, how liberalism, ethnocentrism and pragmatism can be combined in a coherent philosophy. However, less attention has been paid to his approach to cultural difference. This might not be surprising, given that in Rorty's procedural liberalism there is no place for communal and cultural solidarities. He finds the 'politics of difference' unpatriotic, and argues that it would be better if cultural differences are neglected in a liberal polity. This is, however, inconsistent with his

¹I would like to thank Professor Bhikhu Parekh, who kindly supervised the development of my PhD thesis, of which this article is a part. I am also grateful to Professor Noël O'Sullivan for his valuable comments on this article.

'solidarity'-based approach to philosophy and morality. For him, rationality is no more than solidarity with the community with which we identify. Our sense of 'moral responsibility' is also confined to what we consider to be our moral community. Since the cultural community is the community to which we owe our language, and which gives our definition of 'true' (Rorty 1998b: 3) as well as most of our values and practices, it must have a crucial part in Rorty's philosophy. In other words, it can be argued that the cultural community is one of the most eligible candidates to play the role that he allocates to communities, viz., providing us with a sense of solidarity, although he is not very specific about *culture*.

In this article, an attempt is made to examine Rorty's views on cultural difference. My main argument is that there is a conflict between Rorty's political stance of ignoring cultural differences and his philosophical view, which accounts for rationality, morality and the sense of responsibility in terms of solidarity and 'ethnocentrism'. In order to work out the place of culture and cultural difference in Rorty's thought, I will examine, first, his general philosophical approach. In his philosophical works, Rorty is not, most of the time, explicit about culture, nor is he much concerned with cultural difference. Thus, an attempt is made to explore the implications of his philosophy in this regard. Then, his political views and, particularly, his account of liberalism are considered, and it is discussed whether or not he has dealt with the issues of culture and cultural difference accordingly. Finally, I outline an approach to cultural difference that I think is not only more just, but also more consistent with Rorty's own philosophy. To begin with, the philosophical views that Rorty upholds will be considered.

1. Pragmatism

Rorty calls his philosophical approach 'pragmatism'. This approach can be divided into three inter-related parts, namely, 'antirepresentationalism', a 'solidarity'-based account of inquiry, and 'antifoundationalism'.

Rorty's philosophical view is centred on what he calls the 'anti-representationalist' view of inquiry, which denies that 'rationality' and 'objectivity' can be explicated in terms of accurate representation of the nature of truth and goodness and the nature of man and the universe. His argument is that there is no test for assessing the accurate representation of an 'antecedently determinate' reality, independent from the test of predictivity (Rorty 1998b: 4–5). Representationalists look for ahistorical truth, transcending our interests and cultural context (Rorty 1980: 8–9). Representationalism is based on the distinction between reality and appearance, or things-in-themselves and things-in-relation-to-the-human-mind. However, Rorty argues, such a distinction is difficult to maintain, because it is impossible to distinguish 'the world's' contribution to cognition from the agent's. Our knowledge of things cannot be free of human interpretations.

Rorty rejects the idea that truth is 'out there', because it is no more than a human description of world mediated through language, which itself is a 'human creation'. For Rorty, in the absence of reality and truth, language 'goes all the way down'. Concepts are only available through language. Language is 'ubiquitous' (Rorty 1982: xix). Rorty's antirepresentationalism, by discrediting

an account of knowledge of things-in-themselves and introducing elements of human mind and situation, particularly language, paves the way for a *culturally contextual interpretation* of reasoning.²

For Rorty, the term 'true', if used, would mean no more than 'justified' (Rorty 1998b: 2). Hence, the Rortyan pragmatist does not buttress his conviction by 'objective truth', but by its overlap with that of others. What distinguishes warranted from unwarranted assertions is that they enjoy wider consensus; and this is grounded not on epistemological or metaphysical reasons, but on an ethical one (Rorty 1991: 24). Therefore, 'justification' is essentially another normative notion. It is about feelings of solidarity, about the moral need to justify our beliefs and desires to ourselves and to our fellow agents, not a need to search for truth or things-in-themselves (Rorty 1998b: 26). This leads us to the second element of Rorty's pragmatism, namely, his solidarity-based account of rationality.

If it is not non-human reality, but audience and fellow-inquirers who impose conversational constraints and rules of inquiry on us, then who are these people? To whom should we justify ourselves? The antirepresentation-ists reply is: the members of the community with which we identify (Rorty 1991: 177); and this is 'ethnocentrism'. Ethnocentrism is the view, according to Rorty, that 'there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society – *ours* – uses in one or another area of inquiry' (Rorty 1991: 23). Nevertheless, we identify ourselves to different extents with different communities, some of which overlap and some of which conflict. The latter case leads to conflicting rules of inquiry or moral responsibility and then to moral dilemmas.

Ethnocentrism is the idea that loyalty to one's community is a sufficient reason to adhere to some beliefs rather than others. It is to privilege one's own culture. 'To be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's beliefs and the others. The first group – one's *ethnos* – comprises those who share enough of one's beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible' (Rorty 1991: 30). We cannot justify our beliefs in different aspects of culture and science to somebody whose views do not overlap with ours to a sufficient extent. For liberals, 'enemies of liberalism', such as Nietzsche and Loyola, are 'crazy', not because their views are 'unintelligible', or because they have a wrong theory of human nature, but 'because the limits of sanity are set by what *we* take seriously. This, in turn, is determined by our upbringing, our historical situation' (Rorty 1991: 187–88).

Ethnocentrism implies that rules of justification are relative to audience. All criteria of rationality and even rules of logic are *created* by people, and are sociological or socially-constructed (Rorty 1998b: 70–71): 'Our acculturation is what makes certain options live, or momentous, or forced, while leaving others dead, or trivial, or optional' (Rorty 1991: 13). However, Rorty's account

² Rorty's antirepresentationalism has been subject to many criticisms. His attempt to do away with reality slides into scepticism, and exposes him to the charge of endorsing non-realism or 'linguistic idealism'. Moreover, he is inconsistent in his antirepresentationalism, and sometimes reserves a role for correspondence to reality in inquiry.

of inquiry must not be confused with relativism or subjectivism. He maintains that ethnocentrism does not mean that all communities and convictions are equally good. On the contrary, it implies that some beliefs are preferable, but this has to be worked out from the contingent position in which we are and by using the standards of the community with which we identify. Not surprisingly, it usually turns out that *our* views are the most cogent ones. This does not mean that we are unjustified in our views; neither does it mean that other people have reasons to accept our views. Thus, for Rorty, ethnocentrism does not mean lack of rational arbitrament. It merely means that 'there is no way to beat totalitarians in argument by appealing to shared common premises' (Rorty 1991: 42).

Despite being ethnocentric, Rorty sometimes argues that his pragmatism is not commonsensical or intuition-based. Pragmatists should change the common sense, the intuitions, and the self-image of the community, in so far they are not useful. Changes can be brought about by appeal to the criterion of 'us at our best' or 'better versions of ourselves', by which is meant those we recognise 'as people who have come to hold beliefs that are different from ours by a process that we, by *our present* notions of the difference between rational persuasion and force, count as rational persuasion' (Rorty 1998b: 54). Hence, the criteria of justification depend not only on who we are, but also on who we want to be.

The notion of 'us at our best' is an attempt to reconcile pragmatic and ethnocentric elements in Rorty's account of understanding. The ethnocentric element of inquiry requires solidarity with one's community, whereas the pragmatic dimension focuses on efficient problem-solving, coping with reality and convenience. The two, however, do not drive in the same direction. Pragmatists do not see any reason for stopping behind the barriers of ethnocentrism, while for ethnocentrists, pragmatism might lead to disloyalty. Hence, it can be argued that there is a tension between the pragmatic and ethnocentric components in Rorty's thought.³

Rorty's solidarity-based account of inquiry is supported by the third component of his pragmatism, viz., 'antifoundationalism'. He argues that moral and political concepts and ideas need not be based on fixed and permanently valid philosophical theories about the nature of man or the universe. The latter beliefs are, Rorty thinks, merely optional or rhetorical, and not closely connected to moral practices. Practices and virtues like academic freedom, honesty, willingness to listen to others and care for them are '*simply* moral virtues' (Rorty 1982: 172). They can only be defended by their resulting in 'successful accommodation among individuals' (Rorty 1991: 184) by 'sociopolitical justifications'. There is no need for 'philosophical foundations', also *partly* because they cannot pass close scrutiny without

³ An important difficulty with Rorty's ethnocentric account of morality and knowledge is that the concepts of 'we' and 'our community' are fluid, and it is difficult to demarcate their limits. More importantly, cleavages within a community defy arrival at consensual views on rationality and morality, which are crucial for a solidarity-based account of rationality. Contrary to Rorty's non-realism, there is more to true statements than 'sociological' justifiability. They need *epistemical* justification with regard to reality out there, in the first place.

becoming problematic. They usually turn out to be merely circular or even irrational, in the sense that they are not neutral and free from bias. Rorty sometimes finds philosophical arguments 'sterile debates', and even 'stumbling-blocks' to effective political organisation, when we think of our public responsibilities in their terms (Rorty 1998a: 92–97).⁴

1.1. Final vocabularies and cultures

One's views and judgements in different areas of life are encapsulated in 'language games' or 'final vocabularies'. Rorty apparently uses these terms interchangeably to convey one's basic epistemic, scientific, moral and aesthetic theories and concepts such as truth, rightness and beauty. We have seen, however, that his antirepresentationalism and ethnocentrism reduce all truth claims, in both ethical and scientific areas, to the justification to, and the feeling of solidarity with, *our* community.

Arguably, cultures are the most obvious candidates for playing the epistemic role that Rorty attributes to communities, because we owe our language, criteria of inquiry and moral options to our culture. While he is not explicit about this inference, such an impression can be supported tacitly by his various arguments. Rorty states that, in ethnocentrism, the word 'true' is an expression of commendation in all cultures. The identity of the point conveyed by the term does not, however, amount to denying that there are different procedures and different references in various cultures, in order to warrant the truth of a claim (Rorty 1991: 23). Endorsing Tarski's 'discovery' that 'we have no understanding of truth that is distinct from our understanding of translation', Rorty concludes that 'there is no possibility of giving a definition of "true" that works for all ... languages' (Rorty 1998b: 3). 'Language games', as Rorty describes them, go beyond 'languages' in their ordinary or linguistic meaning, as collections of words, grammatical rules and the like. The former are closely tied to culture that he defines very widely as 'a set of shared habits of action, those that enable members of a single human community to get along with one another and with the surrounding environment as well as they do' (Rorty 1998b: 188).

Given Rorty's ethnocentric account of rationality and lack of trans-cultural criteria, he recommends dropping 'the distinction between rational judgement and cultural bias' or between 'natural' and 'cultural'. He argues that such distinctions, which are meant to mark off the centre of the self from its periphery, should be replaced by 'self-consciously ethnocentric' terms that demonstrate our affiliation to a particular group, such as: 'being a Christian, or an American, or a Marxist, or a philosopher, or an anthropologist, or a postmodernist bourgeois liberal' (Rorty 1991: 208). Consequently, we are confronted with 'alternative language games – the vocabulary of the ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson's, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden', as merely incompatible

⁴It should be mentioned that Rorty's antifoundationalism has been criticised for depriving politics of philosophical theories about the nature of the human being and society, as valuable tools for recognising and criticising deficiencies and inequalities in a society.

and not reflections of truth or external reality (Rorty 1989: 5). There is no neutral vantage point from which to adjudicate impartially between these languages and language games. Also, regarding morality, Rorty does not think that there is a single set of values and beliefs appropriate for all societies and historical periods (Rorty 1991: 190).

Nevertheless, lack of a metanarrative, a single universal language to which all other languages are translatable, on the one hand, and the incompatibility of languages and language games, on the other, are not tantamount to the impossibility of conversation between different languages and cultures. This is mainly because there is some degree of overlap between them; and there is an enormous number of platitudes upon which they can agree (Rorty 1991: 215).

Overall, then, if there is no truth out there, and all we have are different descriptions that are mainly based on our language and sense of solidarity, all descriptions and all languages are on a par. None is more true than, and so privileged over, another. For Rorty, a pragmatic culture is one in which 'neither the priests nor the physicists nor the poets nor the Party were thought of as more "rational", or more "scientific" or "deeper" than one another' (Rorty 1982: xxxvii). The same, one may say, is the case with different cultures. This does not mean that we cannot adjudicate between different claims, but means that our judgements, though pragmatic, are inevitably circular and ethnocentric. The point is that there is no rational way, in the sense of an Archimedean point of view, to adjudicate between competing sets of practices, values, and beliefs. They are on a par to the extent that there is no reason that those holding any set of beliefs can be convinced to accept another set. They are on a par, not from their believers' point of view, but due to lack a neutral point of view, acceptable to all human beings. Relying on various solidarities, of which cultural solidarities are the most significant ones, different language games are merely incompatible, though of equal standing.

1.2. Role of communities in confining the scope of feeling moral responsibility

Solidarity not only determines the content of our moral obligation substantively, but more importantly, Rorty points out, sets the limits of our 'moral community', that is, the society towards whose members we hold ourselves morally responsible. In other words, the basic explanatory notion of the *feeling* of moral obligation to somebody is 'ethnocentrism', viz., he or she is 'one of us'. The point is that 'our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as "one of us", where "us" means something smaller and more local than the human race' (Rorty 1989: 191). Rorty argues that people usually appeal to local and concrete rather than to universal and abstract solidarities. He denies that the largest group with which we identify 'is "humanity" or "all rational beings" – no one, I have been claiming, *can* make *that* identification' (Rorty 1989: 198).

Repudiating universal arguments, Rorty doubts that some people can be convinced either by the Kantian point that the faculty of deliberation is sufficient for membership in the moral community, or even by the utilitarian argument that 'all pleasures and pains felt by members of our biological

species are equally relevant to moral deliberation' (Rorty 1993: 125). What counts is membership in '*our* moral community'. In other words, one's moral community does not go beyond the (local) community with which one identifies. It must be noted that, in this sense, the role of solidarity with a community is not so much cognitive as impulsive, *viz.*, it gives rise to the feeling of sympathy towards others, rather than to common convictions or moral beliefs. Here again, a *cultural community* is one of our most significant moral communities, towards whose members we feel moral responsibility. Hence, we owe cultural communities our sense of morality in cognitive terms as well as in terms of its scope. Rorty, nonetheless, does not expressly mention such a role for cultures.

Despite his emphasis on the significance of the local sense of solidarity, for Rorty, moral progress is nothing but expanding our moral community. It is to see more and more 'featherless bipeds' as members of that community. The more efficient way to expand the reference of 'people like us' is, however, not philosophical and moral 'inquiry', but 'sentimental education'. It can be achieved through 'imagination' or 'manipulation of feelings', and by hearing 'sad and sentimental stories' (Rorty 1989: xvi and 1993).⁵

Having examined Rorty's philosophical viewpoints, we have seen that solidarity with communities plays two crucial roles, cognitive and impulsive. First, it determines what is considered to be rational and, in particular, moral. True statements are no more than what is justified for the community with which we identify. Second, solidarity sets the boundaries of people's moral community, that is, those towards whom they feel moral responsibility. Thus, it seems to me that a cultural community, given the importance of issues such as language and upbringing, is one of the most salient communities for providing people with the kind of solidarity with which Rorty is concerned. In the following section, we turn to his account of liberalism to see how Rorty deals with the issues of culture and cultural difference in politics. The question is, have the cognitive and impulsive roles of cultural communities, particularly in culturally diverse societies, any moral and political significance? We begin with his ideal of postmodern bourgeois liberalism.

⁵ Rorty's view about local sense of solidarity, however, has been criticised, firstly by some counterfactual statements. Based on the relevant literature, Norman Geras says that the rescuers of Jews during World War II, contrary to Rorty's claims, explained their deeds in universal, rather than local, terms (Geras 1995). Besides, it has been said that there is no reason for inability to expand the feeling of solidarity beyond our locality to others and finally to the human kind. Expressing such inability flies in the face of Rorty's liberal desire for an ever expanding sense of solidarity. While Rorty acknowledges the existence of 'similarities' among humans, such as using language or, more importantly, susceptibility 'to pain and humiliation', which allows extensive solidarity despite 'differences', it is not clear why he downgrades the role of these universal features in *feeling* solidarity with others. It is only a presumption of universality that makes sensational stories about the suffering of other people comprehensible. What persuades Rorty to go for sentimental education through sad and sensational stories, rather than inquiry into universal features, could be the fear of exclusion on the basis of metanarratives, as postmoderns argue. Nevertheless, sensational stories can be as subject to exclusionist attempts and even distortion as universal theories are.

2. Procedural liberalism

If there is no truth, moral order or human nature to draw upon, and if there is merely 'justification to a particular community', liberal theory has to construct a coherent conception of political justice around basic intuitions and settled beliefs in liberal democratic societies, such as religious toleration and denunciation of slavery (Rorty 1991: 180). Perhaps, one of these ideas is Rorty's belief in 'a firm distinction between the private and the public' (Rorty 1989: 83).

Facing up to the contingency of the self and their beliefs and desires, according to Rorty, liberals in the private sphere are concerned with self-creation and redescription. On the other hand, what is crucial for the liberals in the public realm is to avoid cruelty. This is because, liberals believe, 'cruelty is the worst thing we do' (Rorty 1989: 197). Human beings are also susceptible to a particular kind of cruelty that is 'humiliation'. Moreover, Rorty believes that the liberal society should provide everybody with the opportunity for self-creation, and hence with the requirements of making a self for him/herself, such as democratic freedoms and rights, relative social equality, wealth and peace (Rorty 1989: 84).

Maintaining the 'firm distinction between the private and the public', Rorty points out that continuing redescription and self-creation are reserved for the private life, without giving rise to a public action. Such a distinction is necessary in order to avoid others' 'actual and possible suffering' and humiliation. This is because, 'by threatening one's final vocabulary, and thus one's ability to make sense of oneself in one's own terms rather than hers, [the redescriving liberal] suggests that one's self and one's world are futile, obsolete, *powerless*. Redescription often humiliates' (Rorty 1989: 90). Humiliation, in turn, wounds one's self-image.

2.1. Ignoring cultural differences

Rorty's postmodern bourgeois liberalism ignores the issue of cultural difference. No cultural difference is recognised in the public where the ideal of avoiding cruelty is pursued. Rorty suggests that we:

think about cultural diversity on a world scale in the way our ancestors in the seventeenth and eighteenth century thought about religious diversity on an Atlantic scale: as something to be simply *ignored* for purposes of designing political institutions. (Rorty 1991: 209)

He argues that the liberal ideal of procedural justice is designed precisely to deal with cultural diversity. Procedural liberalism does not provide a *community* in the strong sense, but a *civil society* of the bourgeois democratic sort, in which ethnocentric selves, who do not see any way of espousing each others' convictions, cooperate on the basis of procedural justice. Rorty sometimes pictures his ideal plural liberal society as a 'Kuwaiti bazaar', a term he borrows from Clifford Geertz. In such a bazaar, which is surrounded by exclusive private clubs, people do business with those whose convictions they find utterly unacceptable (Rorty 1991: 209). According to Rorty,

procedural liberalism accommodates cultural differences, because it does not presuppose, and thus does not require or sanction, any particular philosophical approach to human nature and the meaning of life. In other words, 'one does not have to accept much *else* from Western culture to find the Western liberal ideal of procedural justice attractive' (Rorty 1991: 209).

In procedural liberalism, cultural differences are ignored in designing political institutions, in the sense that members of all cultures are treated uniformly in the public sphere. Although Rorty argues that procedural liberalism does not presuppose any philosophical standpoint, it deals with members of various cultural communities according to liberal principles. As seen, Rorty's politics is not limited to avoiding cruelty, but requires provision for self-creation, which his type of liberals pursue in the private sphere. Ignoring cultural differences in treating people in Rorty's liberalism appears to have an ethnocentric reason, according to which we are not duty-bound to treat others in their own terms. In ethnocentrism, *we* determine the limits of sanity, and, on this basis, not only assess others' claims, but also conduct our treatment of others. We deal with others in our own terms, Rorty maintains. He argues that:

We have to insist that not every argument needs to be met in the terms in which it is presented. Accommodation and tolerance must stop short of a willingness to work within any vocabulary that one's interlocutor wishes to use, to take seriously any topic that he puts forward for discussion. (Rorty 1991: 190)

Given antirepresentationalism, generally speaking, Rorty is not interested in others' accounts epistemically, unless they stretch the imagination and open up new pragmatic ways of viewing the world. However, he acknowledges that everybody's account of his own behaviour is morally, rather than epistemically, 'privileged'. As liberals, trying to expand our moral community, he argues that '[w]e have a duty to listen to his own account, not because he has privileged access to his own motives but because he is a human being like ourselves' (Rorty 1982: 202). For Rorty, 'moral seriousness is a matter of taking other human beings seriously, and not taking anything else with equal seriousness' (Rorty 1998b: 83).

However, according to Rorty, even our moral obligation to others does not oblige us to respond to their moral needs in their own terms. 'Moral commitment, after all, does not require taking seriously all the matters that are, for moral reasons, taken seriously by one's fellow citizens. It may require just the opposite. It may require trying to josh them out of the habit of taking those topics so seriously' (Rorty 1991: 193). The reason for joshing them is, perhaps, mainly pragmatic. Sometimes, it is only in this way that breaking cultural narrowness and achieving moral progress are possible.

Nevertheless, Rorty's view on treating others by liberal standards in the public domain is incoherent. There is an inconsistency in the claim that we take other people morally seriously, while not taking seriously what they take seriously. This is because human beings are, as Rorty himself remarks, no more than webs of beliefs and desires. Disregarding constituting components of the webs cannot be considered as taking their holders morally seriously. Such a disregard may work in discussions as well as in moral assessments,

but as an overall political strategy would be untenable. If we are to take other people morally seriously, we cannot, *pace* Rorty, ethnocentrically deny the seriousness and significance of their claims or the terms in which they have been couched. Seen from another angle, the refusal to take others' vocabulary seriously sounds like the Nazis' view that, to use Rorty's own words, 'We have no concern for legitimizing ourselves in the eyes of others' (Rorty 1991: 214).⁶ Taking others' fundamental values seriously does not mean accepting them or even finding them worthwhile. It merely means that such values should be taken into account, when we deal with people whose lives are formed by them. These values should be recognised not only in interpersonal relationships, but also in the public realm of the society.

Refusing to take into consideration others' vocabulary and working only within our own final vocabulary are thornier when our interlocutors constitute a separate community, and particularly a cultural community. Given the significant roles of such communities in Rorty's philosophy, there is no justification for disregarding the cognitive and moral terminology of other cultural communities with which we share our public realm. In disputes between different cultural solidarities, the criteria for adjudication should not be those of one of them. It seems that Rorty does not see any problem in interfering with the life of other communities on the basis of ethnocentric beliefs 'we' happen to have. This amounts, however, to openly humiliating other communities, and to suggesting that their culture is 'futile, obsolete, powerless', what Rorty himself is so keen to avoid.

Rorty's opposition to the politics of recognition of cultural differences can also be seen in his rejection of any moral or political commitment to preserving various cultures in a society. He acknowledges the importance of preserving the community with which one identifies. He argues that '[t]his community would serve no higher end than its own preservation and self-improvement' (Rorty 1991: 45). He even interprets the appeal to objectivity and ahistorical truth as rooted in 'the hope that something resembling *us* will inherit the earth' (Rorty 1991: 32), and in the fear of the death of our society. Such a hope or fear, however, does not persuade him to approve of political support for cultural survival.

Rorty argues that the idea of preserving all cultures is based on the assumption that they are different realisations of 'rationality' when rationality is defined as 'an extra added ingredient' distinguishing humans from animals, and not implying any pragmatic meaning (Rorty 1998b: 189). Pragmatism's rejection of the latter account of rationality leaves the former idea unsupported. On the other hand, leftist intellectuals, *inter alia*, regard each culture as a 'work of art' and, thus, as valid and worthy of preservation as any other. This approach is 'an attempt to re-create the Kantian distinction between value and dignity by thinking of every human culture, if not of every individual, as having incommensurable worth' (Rorty 1998b: 190). Rorty is also critical of this account, and concludes that 'there seems no particular

⁶ Rorty argues that, unlike the Nazi, the ethnocentrist liberal says 'We admit that we cannot justify our beliefs or our actions to all human beings as they are at present, but we hope to create a community of free human beings who will freely share many of our beliefs and hopes'.

reason to hope for immortality for any contemporary set of cultural differences, as opposed to hoping that it may eventually be supplanted by a new and more interesting set' (Rorty 1998b: 194).

Such indifference to the survival of communities and cultures sits awkwardly with the significant role that Rorty attaches to them. If solidarity with a community, and particularly a cultural community, is the basis of our views of rationality and morality, and also determines the range of people towards whom we feel moral responsibility, then seeking the survival of the community is a justified desire. Moreover, the significance of the preservation of communities justifies putting this desire in moral terms or supporting it through political institutions. This is particularly important with regard to minority cultures that have been the target of humiliation and disrespect. In every society, the majority culture has the upper hand, and the policy of cultural neutrality reinforces its domination, rather than providing a level playing ground for all cultures. In such a situation, a type of positive discrimination in favour of vulnerable cultures might be justified. Political support should not be regarded as an effort to keep dead cultures artificially alive, but to prevent the premature extinction of a culture that can lead to rational and moral disorientation of its member. Providing Native Americans in North America with special rights to the land and fishing in reservations can be justified in this way. Given the significance of cultures, supporting them politically cannot be ruled out, in principle.

Although Rorty sees no need for the preservation of all cultures, he stresses the importance of cultural diversity to overcome the fear that ethnocentrism may turn human communities into 'semantic monads, nearly windowless'. Echoing John Stuart Mill, he sees splits within a culture, engendered by external disruptions or internal tensions, as the only hope of transcending it and initiating new ideas (Rorty 1991: 13–14). Hence, for him, cultural diversity and, particularly, preservation of other cultures are significant in so far as they have some pragmatic use, viz., transcending cultural narrowness and promoting the culture of tolerance and freedom. Nevertheless, he claims that there is sufficient cultural diversity in Western societies, so the extirpated cultures of 'Ur and Harappa are no more to be regretted than are the eohippus, the mammoth, and the saber-toothed tiger' (Rorty 1998b: 194). This indicates that, for Rorty, there is no need for government interference in order to preserve cultural diversity. Moreover, it appears that he looks at the issue of cultural diversity from the perspective of the majority liberal culture, rather than that of minority cultures. Thus, while taking into consideration the pragmatic needs of members of the majority culture, he ignores the need of members of minority cultures for having stable communities of reference, and easily denies a duty to preserve vulnerable cultures. Although the duty to preserve a culture could be subject to the existence of a significant body of members wishing its survival, it cannot be subject to its pragmatic usage, such as providing diversity, for the majority.

2.2. Pragmatic and ethnocentric reasons for disregarding cultural differences

Two kinds of reasoning that may be called 'pragmatic' and 'ethnocentric' can be traced in Rorty's endorsement of a procedural liberalism indifferent

to cultural difference. He is critical of the concentration of what he calls 'the cultural left' on 'politics of difference' or 'of identity' or 'of recognition' at the expense of 'the problems of men', sufferings and inequalities (Rorty 1998a: 75–107). Rorty argues that '[t]his Left wants to preserve otherness rather than ignore it'. He finds this strategy 'disuniting America', and argues that 'insofar as this pride [in being different, black or having a different sexual orientation] prevents someone from also taking pride in being an American citizen, from thinking of his or her country as capable of reform, from being able to join with straights or whites in reformist initiatives, it is a political disaster' (Rorty 1998a: 100). Hence, Rorty castigates the academic left for being 'unpatriotic', due to its insistence on a politics of difference and 'cultural politics' (Rorty 1994: E15).

The above argument, which can be called pragmatic, is complemented by another one which asserts an emphasis on difference might be interpreted as denying other cultures human rights and democracy. He disdains what he, borrowing from Levi-Strauss, calls 'UNESCO cosmopolitanism', and says that:

The most contemptible form of such cosmopolitanism is the sort that explains that human rights are all very well for Eurocentric cultures, but that an efficient secret police, with subservient judges, professors and journalists at its disposal, in addition to prison guards and torturers, is better suited to the needs of other cultures. (Rorty 1995: 203)

The above pragmatic reasons for refuting the politics of difference are, however, questionable. The politics of difference does not 'disunite' the society. On the contrary, its very purpose is unity, though on a defensible ground that respects differences within the society. It is this purpose that distinguishes the politics of difference from separatist movements. On the other hand, recognition of difference is not an excuse for the policy of silence towards the violation of basic human rights in other cultures. All it requires is taking into consideration others' points of view, and avoiding evaluating or acting from a God-like position.

Now, we turn to the ethnocentric reasons for advocating procedural liberalism, in Rorty's works. Cultural differences should be ignored in devising political institutions simply because it is a liberal conviction that these differences are irrelevant for such a project. Given his solidarity-based account of rationality, Rortyan liberals do not look for philosophical foundations for liberal politics. They do not ask why cultural differences should be neglected, just as they do not ask why cruelty should be avoided or why self-creation is recommended. There is no non-circular way of answering these questions. They are taken for granted. The only available explanation is the pragmatic sense of solidarity and ethnocentrism.

However, what makes liberal ethnocentrism peculiar is its denial of the political, or even moral, significance of differences, whether they are religious, ethnic, cultural and so forth (Rorty 1998b: 11–12). For liberals, it is a duty to expand the sense of solidarity and the scope of inter-subjective agreement. Rorty argues that, although '*w*e' have to start from where *we* are', from

ethnocentrism, it is a liberal wish to expand the sense of 'we', a historical and contingent wish that liberals happen to have. 'What takes the curse off this ethnocentrism is . . . that it is the ethnocentrism of a "we" ("we liberals") which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an ever larger and more variegated *ethnos*' (Rorty 1989: 198). Hence, Rorty's liberal ethnocentrism calls for being less ethnocentric. The desire to extend the reference of 'us' is not only a desire to feel moral responsibility towards as many people as we can, but also a desire to expand the scope of our community of inquiry, viz., to achieve as much intersubjective agreement as possible (Rorty 1991: 23).

Since being non-ethnocentric or disregarding differences is a crucial ingredient of liberal ethnocentrism, Rorty maintains that a commitment to a procedural politics is 'a moral commitment when made by members of some clubs (e.g. ours) but a matter of expediency when made by members of others' (Rorty 1991: 210). This, however, gives rise to the question as to why non-liberal cultures have to accept procedural liberalism as a matter of expediency, while for liberals it is an integrated part of their culture. Rorty's response would again be that we are not duty-bound to treat others in their own terms. As we have already seen, such a reply is implausible. It can also easily lead to intolerance. Hence, it is not very surprising that Rorty not only regards Nietzsche and Loyola as 'crazy', because *we* determine the limits of sanity, but also finds 'no way to see them as fellow citizens of our constitutional democracy, people whose life plans might, given ingenuity and good will, be fitted in with those of other citizens' (Rorty 1991: 187). Rorty's liberals cannot see people like Nietzsche and Loyola as their fellow citizens, while procedural liberalism is supposed to provide the public framework of cooperation among people who prefer to die than share each others' beliefs.

3. Conclusion: need for political recognition of cultural differences

We have seen that Rorty's procedural liberalism accepts cultural differences in the private realm, but is not ready to recognise them publicly. In other words, it merely tolerates them, rather than providing them with legal status or supporting them through legislation or state policy. Rorty thinks that benign neglect is the pragmatic way to deal with cultural diversity in order to increase toleration and accommodation within the society. He does not translate the moral and philosophical significance of communities and particularly cultural communities into politics. Nevertheless, such a stance is inconsistent with the place assumed for communities in his philosophy, according to which solidarity with the community, and arguably cultural communities, accounts for the meaning of rationality and the definition of morality as well as for the scope of moral responsibility towards others. This shows the tension between the pragmatic and ethnocentric elements in Rorty's thought.

If people's sense of rationality and morality are defined by their communities, and arguably cultural communities, then our appraisal of people's moral behaviour and our expectations of them irrespective of their cultural background cannot be fair, particularly if they are going to be held morally or legally responsible. Hence, we should be *sensitive* towards what people see as the cultural background against which they decide and choose

among different value options. Judging and treating people in the public life should not be carried out irrespective of the moral standards that their cultures have made available to them. This means that people's fundamental cultural beliefs should be respected, accommodated and recognised in state policy and law.

On the other hand, although procedural liberalism may ignore cultural differences, it can hardly be culturally neutral. All liberal states are, in one way or another, engaged in supporting cultures. Establishing state-owned radio and TV channels, subsidising cultural activities such as fine arts, theatre, orchestra, opera, promoting national language, family life, social network of care, teaching cultural values at schools and so on are examples of this support. Moreover, through determining official languages, public holidays, state symbols and similar matters, states promote certain cultures. In a culturally diverse society, in principle, there is no reason to privilege one culture over another, when providing state support. While Catholic, Protestant and Jewish schools in Britain enjoy public funds, there is no reason to deny such funds to Orthodox, Muslim or Hindu schools. Similarly, there is no reason for the anti-blasphemy law in Britain to be restricted to Christians (Parekh 1997: 148–49). Such a law should cover either all the religions and denominations in the UK, or none of them, as in the US, where there is no constitutionally established religion. Thus, in so far as particular demands of a culture are publicly and legally recognised in a society, similar demands of other cultures existing in that society should be *equally* recognised (Kymlicka 1996: 108–15).

Rorty's model of civil society in which various communities, as private clubs, regulate their public affairs on the basis of procedural liberalism does not treat liberal and non-liberal cultures on an equal footing, and is not sensitive to moral demands of the latter cultures in public. Whereas liberal procedural justice is a part of the liberal culture and morality, other cultures existing in the society have to accept it as a matter of 'expediency'. Ethnocentrism may be plausible in assessing others' claims and particularly in the private realm. It is tenable not to take others' vocabulary and claims seriously in inquiry. However, it is a requirement of taking others 'seriously morally as human beings' that their *vocabulary and claims* are taken seriously in making moral and political decisions that affect them. In other words, others' final vocabulary should be recognised in the public realm of the society. If there are various cultural solidarities in a society, all 'products of time and chance' and exhibiting 'sheer contingency' (Rorty 1989: 22), there is no reason to privilege the vocabulary and moral claims of one over those of others in the public realm.

Sensitivity towards and equal treatment of all cultures requires devising a system of justice based on the overlapping values and desires of all relevant cultures. As Rorty himself argues: 'there is no supercultural observation platform to which we might repair. The only common ground on which we can get together is that defined by the overlap between their communal beliefs and desires and our own' (Rorty 1991: 213). However, a *fully* consensual concept of political justice is not feasible. All states are inevitably to some extent culturally partial. Hence, some compensatory mechanisms for those cultural groups that are at a disadvantage are necessary. Moreover, a politics of equal treatment of all cultures might be insufficient or unfair in

certain circumstances. It needs to be supplemented by what is sometimes labelled as 'the politics of difference' or what Iris Young calls 'differentiated citizenship', and covers measures that Will Kymlicka describes as 'group-differentiated rights' (1996). One of these measures is flexibility in enforcement of law on people whose culture is at odds with the morality behind the political and legal system. Some cases of flexibility have already been accepted in some states. For instance, Sikhs are exempted from a British law requiring motor-cyclists to wear a crash helmet instead of the traditional turban. There has also been some flexibility in implementing laws regarding public holidays and uniform dresses in public institutions. In Britain, for example, Jews were exempt from the law that banned trading on Sundays.

The obligation to support vulnerable cultures cannot be denied, even if the state follows the policy of cultural impartiality. If a culture has been a target of disrespect and ridicule, that is, if the background culture that provides a community with a sense of morality and identity have been humiliated, states have a responsibility to support the culture. Affirmative actions are needed to support endangered cultures. These include providing state subsidies, changing school curricula, and helping the establishment of cultural institutions for different cultural communities. Minority cultures should also be allowed to regulate some aspects of their members' lives. For instance, religious minority cultures might be authorised to implement their own personal law, viz., family and inheritance law, as it was the case in the Ottoman Empire, and is currently followed in countries like Iran or India. If minority cultures are territorially based, it is possible to grant them more self-regulatory rights.

Finally, it should be emphasised that political recognition of cultural differences should not lead to sanctioning those cultural norms and conducts that violate basic human rights. People, whatever their communal affiliations, are entitled to basic human rights, such as rights to life and to basic goods as well as freedom of conscience, and prevention of torture and slavery. Moreover, recognition of cultural differences cannot be carried out without taking the social and political context into consideration. Politics has some requirements, such as peace, solidarity and harmony within the society, which have moral implications, and should be observed. Politics of difference should not lead to ghettoism, to inequality among cultural communities, to hostility among communities, or to the domination of the minority over the majority, as it was the case with the former South African regime of apartheid. Moreover, if the main body of the members of a minority culture do not wish to preserve the distinctness of their culture or to be treated differently, a politics of difference will be not only futile, but also unjust.

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