
Richard Rorty and European Philosophy: A Fruitful Relationship

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Abstract

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Panel Title: **Richard Rorty and European Philosophy: A Fruitful Relationship**

Chair: Emil Višňovský, Comenius University & Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovak Republic

Speakers:

1. Alan Malachowski, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa
2. William M. Curtis, University of Portland, Oregon, USA, Rhetoric Between Philosophy and Poetry: Rorty as Essayist
3. Alexander Kremer, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary
4. Krzysztof Skowronski, University of Opole, Opole, Poland

General abstract:

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The philosophy of Richard Rorty (1931-2007) represents an attempt to make pragmatism matter in the global conversation of mankind. His pragmatism is a creative "amalgam" of Dewey, on the one hand, and Wittgenstein and Heidegger, on the other, but also the result of his exchanges with Gadamer, Foucault, Derrida, Habermas and many others on the forefront of the European philosophical scene at the turn of the millennia. His deep interest

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in and knowledge of key European philosophical and intellectual traditions from Plato to Descartes to Kant and beyond allowed him to make pragmatism attractive again for the heirs of these traditions in Europe, as well as to challenge them with a new self-image of our philosophical identity. He tried to show what it is to be a philosopher in our more and more troubled era. And his was the effective bridge-building over mutually isolated, or even hostile philosophical traditions up-to-his-date, as well as efforts to bring them in a fruitful dialogue. He was fulfilling this particular mission of "a global public intellectual" while travelling and lecturing in countries from South America to Europe to Asia, as well as personally communicating with a host of his contemporaries in these countries. Within this framework, his special interest (no doubt motivated by his left-wing political leanings) was given to the former Central European, post-Communist countries like Czecho-Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, etc. The inspirations went both ways, from him to philosophers, intellectuals and public actors in these countries, and vice versa.

The contributions in this panel focus on relatively unexplored tenets of Rorty's philosophy with a focus on his ethics and politics as inspired by European philosophers – both historical and contemporary figures.

Individual contributions:

1. Alan Malachowski: "Richard Rorty: Imagination over Truth".

For Rorty, pragmatism functions best as an 'instrument of cultural change'. And thus cultural change is where the philosophical action ought to be. But, pragmatism so functions only when it recognizes that the imagination provides a better map of the future than truth. On Rorty's understanding, the imagination, in operating, as it must, over the domain of language, never operates in complete isolation and hence can never operate without constraints. However, the constraints it meets are contextual, causal and holistic rather than representational. This gets to the heart of Rorty's contribution to pragmatism. And this is best understood in the context of Rorty's preference for a Romantic conception of philosophy. The paper will apply this general interpretation of Rorty's philosophy to his ethics and politics.

2. William M. Curtis, University of Portland, Oregon, USA, Rhetoric Between Philosophy and Poetry: Rorty as Essayist

Abstract to come

3. Alexander Kremer: "Rorty and Hungarian Philosophy".

There were several European philosophers from Plato to Derrida who influenced Rorty's philosophy in a negative or a positive sense. In the first part of my paper I will focus on Rorty's ethical views in relation to Kant's ethics. In the second half of my paper I will analyze Rorty's influence on the Central European philosophical and political atmosphere, especially on the Hungarian philosophers. Namely, he visited Hungary several times as a professor in the philosophy doctor school of Pecs (2002-2005), and had a great effect not only on his colleagues, but also on his Hungarian readers' philosophical and political views.

4. Krzysztof Skowronski: "Rorty in Polish Philosophy".

Some Polish philosophers provide us with an interesting interpretative perspective on Rorty's moral and political thought. Rorty's sense of freedom, optimism, and solidarity can stand as the most expected ideas; yet, the Polish experience of Communism and post-Communism makes it difficult for them to accept such ideas as relativity, contingency, and irony. A debate between Rorty and Leszek Kolakowski well exemplifies this; Kolakowski writes about Rorty's pragmatism's "undesirable cultural consequences" and Rorty replies by saying that freedom

"is not a well-defined social practice, any more than is writing or reading poems or falling in love."

Keywords: Rorty