

Postmodernism, relativism and the future of philosophy

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Abstract

Text analyzes the two main themes. Firstly, the treatise attempts at an philosophical analysis of the category – public space. It points out the dissension between the traditional and postmodern definition of this conception and the consequences resulting from these different attitudes. As far as the methodology is concerned, the study is based on French postmodern philosopher J. F. Lyotard, presenting the postmodern approach as a greater contribution. In postmodern public area we can meet two basic types of dissensions, while only the first of them can be solved by further grow of specialization and the expertlike know. The second part of the study discusses Richard Rorty's philosophy, influence of Rorty's ideas on solving some traditional philosophical topics, especially the question of relativism. Richard Rorty's untraditional, provocative and inspiring version of neo-pragmatism enables us to view all the theories created so far by human culture as a case with tools. The main motto of the article is the statement that if we take care of free and critical public space, the truth will take care of itself.

Key words: Postmodernism, relativism, truth, antidualism, decoding, representation, fragmentation, public space

1. Introduction

Herbert Marcuse in his book *One-dimensional Man*, a cult text of the sixties, described “the trick of the consumer system”, which enslaves us by the fact that everything is at our disposal, but only as part of status quo. Plato, Saint Augustin, Kant, Marx, Debord, Kafka, Kundera, whose texts can be bought in pocket edition in every supermarket. These texts emerged from the rebellion against the discrepancies of status quo and to understand them means to arouse the sense of reasons of such rebellion. To understand classical texts of our tradition means to “see through the discrepancies of the present day”, to be in conflict with its surface, have a “critical detachment” from the functioning of the system and from its goals. One-dimensional consumer universe gets constituted by integrating these great texts directly into status quo. In our intellectual tradition, everything that makes discrepancies of the society a “scandal for our reason” and changes them into inexcusable accusation of this society, is trivialized and drawn into status quo. Every criticism is reduced to “therapeutic problem”, dealt with as a symptom of a mental disorder that should be “commended in the charge of the professionals” or as a demonstration of political irresponsibility and social rootlessness of intellectuals.

A prerequisite of the story is plurality of truths, something like this could be the first message of Richard Rorty’s humanistic philosophy. In the Western public space, plurality of truths and their clashes has its own unique historical form - it consists of arts and humanities. This is where stories are born, in which information and facts gain weight, do not leave us indifferent, become historical energy. Thanks to literature, for example, foreign and distant experience becomes the experience of our own. On the other hand, humanities encourage us to engage in historical worlds of other beings, without them the entropy would prevail over any information. As far as philosophical issues are concerned, nobody is an expert, there is just an old European tradition of defiant questioning that suddenly comes to life within us. “What is the last number before infinity?” a first grader asks his father. He or she philosophizes. The reader who has become absorbed in Rorty’s philosophical stories, emerges as a different person with a different relationship to the surrounding world, different opinions of it.

Nowadays, all definitions of philosophizing could be summarized as follows. In all its historical forms, including pubertal questioning concerning the meaning of life and café radical criticism of the world, philosophizing is an attempt to answer this very question. In what sense can we legitimately say that we live in a common world? What rights, what threats, what hopes does it imply? The question - in what sense we can say that we live in a common world - cannot be formulated in any professional language, and therefore it seems illegitimate in the epoch in which the legitimacy coincides with specialization. “The whole manifests itself as violence against its own parts,” Hegel once observed, and he invented a language that could depict magnificently how a whole wins over blind independence of its parts. Never before have the forces that divert us from the common world been so powerful. We live in an age of special offer of our own consciousness and the worlds. At present, many ferrymen can quickly and easily transport us from the dirty and disobedient common world to a pure and obedient world of our own.

The ancient rhetoricians claimed that understanding moves in a circle: we understand the sense of a whole through its parts, and those parts can only be understood in the light of the whole. However, this light is never constant, it is just twinkling, and it only becomes brighter and brighter in the “works of the classics”. The term sense refers to a way in which parts and a whole mutually illuminate. Such illumination, however, is not a peaceful process, a unit always asserts itself against the objectives and interests of a part, which is represented by each of us is; the higher understanding we achieve, the more we doubt our objectives. To have “humanistic education” means having a sense of circular movement of understanding in

which a whole is asserting itself against blinded objectives of its parts, this is the second theme of Rorty's humanistic philosophy.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy represents one of the keys to understanding the 20th century. For him, the world is what we are able to express in the form of speech. But the speech itself is like an old town, full of narrow, winding streets, corners and shadows, where we often encounter something we are not able to say. Sometimes we do not mind such meeting, we like remaining silent, sometimes, on the other hand, we are scared of missing words and start looking for them. Wittgenstein claimed that his aim in philosophy is "to show the fly hitting the glass the way out". We philosophize when we are looking for a way out of our own world in which we are caught like a fly in a bottle. Those who seek always find their way out of their own world in speech. The speech is never private. The German philosopher H. G. Gadamer lived to be more than a hundred years old, and his way of philosophizing fundamentally influenced the concept of liberal education in the second half of the last century. According to him, those who philosophize are those who give its most original form back to the speech - the form of a dialogue, which is suppressed by the science and power, which always have a monologue nature. None of our sentence makes sense, other than as a response to the sentences of others, other than in troubled connection with them. Sense holds them together, although they often defiantly clash with each other, contradict each other, or group together in surprising sentence units.

Richard Rorty argued that philosophizing is the art of bringing ideas – in a dialogue with their possible meanings - to the twilight, the time when they lose the right to eternal applicability, when they are sinking like the sun. Summoning such twilight of ideas is the mission of the Western civilization. Those who philosophize are those who consider what we call the "reality" to be an interpretation game, in which you cannot distinguish once and for all between appearance and being, and where the "sense of reality" spreads like circles on the water surface, after we have thrown a stone. And like those circles, it also disappears. Thirdly, therefore, Rorty's humanistic philosophy shows us that none of us can hide from the knowledge that every fact is as leaky as human memory, and wastes away like the human body - after all, ideas are nothing without bodies, in which they have settled. Thus, according to Rorty, those who philosophize are those who are looking for ways to hijack this fluctuating existence and retain it in what Nietzsche called "good character". I am firmly convinced that all three humanistic messages - the plurality of truths, hermeneutics of understanding, and anti-dualism - shape the sense that Richard McKay Rorty encoded into the word philosophy.

2. Postmodern public space

The whole generations of schoolchildren all over the world spoke about something that is now official: William Shakespeare is said to be - boring, all-fashioned, untrustworthy, even ridiculous. At least this is the opinion of a teachers' board appointed by the most important province of South Africa, Gautenberg. It suggested to erase from compulsory reading lists at all the state schools some of the playwright's works. They are said to have an unhappy ending very often, they do not express cultural diversity in a sufficient way, they do not condemn racism and sex discrimination, all these principles being included in the South African constitution. The works in question included e. g. Julius Caesar, because it allegedly did not correspond to the equality between sexes. Other Shakespeare's plays - Antonius and Cleopatra and Taming of the Shrew – did not do well either. Both of them we labeled undemocratic, sexist and racist. Hamlet was marked off undesirable because the play lacks optimism and it is not encouraging enough. King Lear was considered as too havenless. According to the board, the play is also full of violence and despair, its plot is unlikely and ridiculous. All the same, some Shakespeare's plays managed to escape such judgment, such as Romeo and Juliet, although it does not have a happy ending, Mackbeth and the Merchant

of Venice. However, Shakespeare was not the only one to catch a Tatar. Gulliver's Travels were crossed out as well – for containing a sort of humor which is a far cry from what is close to South African mentality.

Let us take this seemingly funny story as a metaphor suggesting one of the significant problems of the present era. This problem can be expressed by the question: “What is the principle of the public area in postmodern society and how can it be measured?” What is the purpose of the public area functioning? Is it creating the mass loyalty or restoring the idea of the society as a whole, which none of us as an individual really has, into our versions of the world?

There are a lot of keen supporters of the first option nowadays. Many European intellectuals think that at present, an idea prevails in the West that none of the intellectual constructions has a universal acceptance. We often read warnings against the influence of such philosophers as J. F. Lyotard, G. Deleuze, J. Baudrillard or Richard Rorty. These thinkers preach an unacceptable thesis that is reducing the European civilization to one of many cultures. The history of the West is depleted, it resigns to the universal nature of Western thought, laws and institutions. Postmodernism is said to be relativistic, politically dangerous and morally irresponsible. The base of the approach is such a conception of public area which assumes a possibility to give definitive reasons for your options by grounding them in some undisputable evidence or universal system of rules, which must be acknowledged in itself by every sensible person. Such a conception of public area therefore looks for absolutely just view where our version of the world is not conditioned by anything, so we can see the truth or we can see the things as they are in reality.

A different approach to understanding the conception of public area can be found with philosophers who are usually called postmodern (Baudrillard 1988, p 70-71). The plot of the story offered to us by these authors in different varieties could be summarized as follows: Let us found the open society of the Western type on the assumption of fallibility of all its participants. The fallibility in private, political or economic decision-making means that every purposeful and intentional behavior has some consequences which have not been considered before (Deleuze 1983, p. 149). Therefore, the sensibility of our conduct is not guaranteed by the perfect state of our theoretic ground, which is always imperfect. However, it can be brought about by institutions like free market, independent public opinion or effective public area – compelling us to a change, quick recognition and rectification of those unintended consequences of our decisions. Our sensibility is measured not only by finding a suitable solution, but also by our flexibility – that is how quickly we are able to react to the crisis of our initial ground caused by the fact that the society as a whole never reacts according to the assumption of the theoretical ground.

I would like to use the following example to illustrate as the case would stand if we described them by means of postmodern mode of speech. In his successful book Sperm Wars, an American zoologist Robin Baker describes the ability of sperms to attack the sperms from the previous copulation which fertilizes the ovulum. Baker came to the conclusion that human sperms – like male generative cells of a number of other animal species – not only can compete with each other. The sperms of one male also have a destructive effect on his “predecessors”. Individual species from dragon fly to chimpanzee have developed various methods to ensure that the last male's sperms suppress other males' sperms the female copulated with shortly ago in her organs. Baker expressed an assumption that men produce special “kamikaze” sperms exploding in close proximity of other individual's sperms and destroying them by this. This feature, for the rest as everything in nature, must have had some cause. If we bring it to a close, Baker deduces from this that men are in their biological nature used to changing partners. Many colleagues do not agree with him and claim that in a

woman's organism, there are mechanisms checking the quality of the received sperms. Namely the quantity of waste is high and woman organs test the sperms carefully.

In public area of postmodern society, we solve problems of two kinds. Firstly, there are problems that can be solved by further growth of specialized knowledge. The dispute whether men produce "kamikaze" sperms or not can be untwined by increasing the disputants' competence. R. Baker and his colleagues can then settle their argument e. g. by more careful observation, more complete documentation of the problem, more thoughtful generalization of the facts, broadening the comparative sample, enforcing a miniature camera, using a revolutionary scientific method, etc. Similar situation concerns the questions – whether organized criminal activity grows, whether the inflation increases or decreases, whether T-neutrinos exist, whether the influx of foreign investment rises or falls, whether the drug abuse among teenagers grows – and so on. Secondly, in the public area, we meet problems that cannot be solved by further growth of specialized knowledge. Since 1996, the inhabitants of Iceland, a small island in the north part of the Atlantic, have unwillingly become involved in a unique and controversial experiment. The Iceland's government sold the genetic information and lines of descent of all the Icelanders to the commercial firm Decode Genetics, which will use this material to try to disclose the genetic ground of the inherited diseases and prepare new procedures to cure them. The government in Reykjavik was offered by the firm to be paid 200 million dollars in the course of the next 5 years for the overall information about DNA, inheritance carrier.

The Island's population, whose language belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family, is regarded as one of the most homogenous populations in the world. Since the 9th century when the Vikings' fleet from Norway landed on the island, its genetic ground changed as late as 100 years later – at that time several hundred Scotsmen and Irishmen settled on the island. Settlement records, church registers, regular census and even carefully kept lines of descent cannot be compared to anything else in the world. The Islanders collect their long ago deceased ancestors as others collect stamps. The transaction between the government and the Decode Genetics arouses a number of questions. Besides the ethical questions concerning commercial use of genetic heritage of a nation, there are issues of the privacy and agreement of the individuals, their rights against the state, etc. According to Thomas Zoega, the chairman of the ethical board of the Iceland's Medical Association, the government took an illegal action by selling sensitive personal data without the approval of the people concerned. Doctor Kari Stefansson, a charismatic founder and boss of the Decode Genetics, avows that he has bought a treasury of genetic information. He is absolutely confident that accessing the information will signify revolution not only on Iceland, but all over the world. The above stated questions, similar to the questions – whether we should reconcile to overwriting DNA with plant and animal species, whether education system should be considered private or public property, whether globalization brings about economic growth and well-being or ecologic degradation, what is progress or whether the existing abortion law should be made more strict – cannot be answered by further growth of the specialized knowledge, referring to universal truths or a more complete enumeration of facts.

These questions can only be resolved by uncovering hidden moral, historical and value prerequisites of the stories in which these issues are assessed and evaluated. A French postmodernist J. F. Lyotard offers us the following methodologist approach. He shows that each perception not only includes imperfection, but that this separation, this selection is absolutely essential for our ability to perceive (Lyotard, 2011, p. 92, 213). To put something on the map means to make something else - the background, outside, against the surrounding – invisible in a way, to force out other structure into the latency state or oblivion (Lyotard 1984, p. 9-10). Every problem, theory or event attracting our attention, offers us something or brings a wide choice of new opportunities, therefore it is a visible shape thanks to the

power of separation. However, in the end the background overpowers the shape, transfigures it by incorporating it into the co-existence with the rest of the world and our preceding experience. Let us use Lyotard's term for the second type of the questions appearing in public area and let us call them the background questions. What we mean is the fact that e. g. the question of cloning men or interfering in human DNA for medical purposes, will certainly have different background for those who live their lives in the creation story and for those of us who believe in evolution.

In the background of these two stories there are two fascinating metaphors with their own poetics, the gracious God the Creator versus a selfish gene, which contradict each other. Public area has its tension because those great metaphors crash all the time while solving various topics, their dispute making us better people and increasing the quality of our decision-making, and making it more legitimate. The questions whose background is created by those great metaphors cannot be solved by a more professional argumentation, the expert's impersonal jargon, or accumulation of universal truths. Postmodern public area emphasizes the second type of the questions, making the dispute of those great metaphors more dramatic (Lyotard, 1984, p. 80-81. Thanks to the conflicts they invoke, these metaphors open up the questions in the background for us, whose charming power we do not realize in the whirl of everyday life. A process called globalization entangles postmodern public area in unsolvable antinomia. It was I. Kant who gave the status of philosophical term to the word antinomy. He denoted it as insolvable issues inherently connected with the existence of mankind. The questions like – Does the world have any beginning or is it infinite? Is it complex or simple? Is everything in it rightful or accidental? – can never be answered in a definitive way, because both thesis and antithesis are acceptable. It only depends on how we envisage the question. According to Kant, a liberal state has its own role which cannot be replaced by anything else. All the time it must guard its citizens against the fanaticism of the searchers for the definitive solutions, who are not able to bear the fact that the situation of mankind is very problematic. Thus the promise of “final solution“ is the archetype and the largest intellectual temptation of modern style of life and thinking.

3. Richard Rorty and overcoming the tradition

A lot of people think that the philosophers tell you what is real and what is nothing but an illusion. As if the philosophers were those who could decide that e.g. the science is right and the religion is wrong. In my opinion, such ideas about the mission of philosophy are misguided. The philosophers have not made a single discovery so far, something like e.g. the astronomers discovering a new planet or the entomologists a new kind of insect, nor have they achieved anything yet, in the sense of the mathematical proof of theorem or the juridical proof of the validity of a document. Therefore we should stop feeling concerned for the purity of our discipline and dramatizing our status. Richard McKay Rorty, is one of the most inspiring philosophers of the second half of the 20th century. For the last thirty years, Rorty has created very original philosophical stories whose echo long ago fascinated the readers on the European continent as well. Richard Rorty (together with D. Davidson) is one of the most discussed contemporary American philosophers within the European philosophical discourse. On 8th June 2007, Richard McKay Rorty died at the age of seventy-five in Palo Alto in the state of California. Rorty was an inspiration for many others. Harold Bloom, a brilliant literary critic, considered Rorty even during his life to be a philosopher who tried to identify the reasons for the decline of his own discipline, using irony and dispassionate point of view. In The New York Times of 11th June, Russell A. Berman, Rorty's boss of many years' standing and the head of the Department of Comparative Literature at the university of Standford, characterized Rorty's lifelong efforts as an attempt to liberate us from the limits of analytical philosophy and focus our attention to the way we as individuals, states or humankind as a whole, form a political community. Jurgen Habermas stated that for him,

Richard Rorty was a permanent source of subtle and very sophisticated arguments, who, at the same time, never forgot that philosophy must not ignore the problems of everyday life. Rorty was a personality who keeps bringing inspiring views and formulations of philosophical problems. For Rorty's irony nothing was sacred.

In European philosophical discourse, Richard Rorty (together with D. Davidson), is one of the most discussed contemporary American philosophers. Firstly, it is because in many respects, his style of writing reminds us of an essay writing, conceived as original meditation on significant cultural topics. Rorty's essayistic baggage include irony, metaphors, plurality of stories, doubts on the meaning of looking for the principles, anti-philosophical conception of philosophy, etc. It is Rorty's style of writing, together with extensive knowledge of facts originating from his insight into the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophical thinking that makes him attractive and easy to understand even for readers without professional philosophical background. The second reason why Rorty is so popular not only in the Czech Republic, but also in other European countries is the fact that he, as one of few American philosophers, pays attention to Continental philosophy (Rorty 1991b). Two philosophers (Wittgenstein and Heidegger) out of the three Rorty considers the most important philosophers of the 20th century, are Continental counterparts of Rorty's great hero J. Dewey. However, we must not forget Rorty's interpretations of so called postmodern philosophy, that is Derrida, Foucault or Lyotard (Rorty 1991b, p. 119-128).

In this context, I would like to point out that Rorty sometimes professed himself to be a postmodernist (Rorty 1991b, p. 197-202). "Sometimes," Rorty writes, "I profess myself to be a postmodernist, as far as my opinions on the truth and rationality presented through pragmatism are concerned." (Nystrem, Puckett, 1997, p. 35). For example, on pages 41 - 44 in the above mentioned text, Rorty uses the term – we postmodernists, or the philosophers like me, classified as postmodernists – nine times. "I," Rorty writes, "interpret the difference between the Enlightenment rationalist and us postmodernists in the following way. For the rationalists, the Reason has the authority, because the Reality, the real state of thing, has the authority. The reality is worthy of respect and the Reason is the ability which can bring us to the contact with the Reality. For us postmodernists, on the other hand, the reason is viewed in dialogic form. Therefore, we handle it only as a different term for – the willingness to discuss various subjects, listen to the other part, the effort to reach a spontaneous agreement. We do not see the reason as the term for the ability to come to understanding the inner nature of scientific or moral Reality through phenomena. For us, to be rational simply means to be capable of a dialogue, not to be obedient." (Nystrem, Puckett, 1997, p. 43)

The very titles of some of Rorty's essays (Ethics without principles, World without substances and essences, Pragmatism is political through and through, The truth without corresponding to the reality (Rorty 1999, p. 23-46)/, show Rorty's ability to grasp so called traditional philosophical problems in a provocative way, to leave the established stereotypes and let oneself carry away by a stream of arguments that do not end in any postulates. Such Rorty's ideas result in the fact that even the characters well preserved by carefully watched interpretations – Plato, Spinoza, Nietzsche etc. suddenly appear in new, surprising light, inviting us to study the history of philosophy and to contemplate how the arguments and metaphors of geniuses of philosophy influenced our contemporary views of ourselves. Thus Rorty releases great names of philosophers departed long ago into the circulation of philosophical conversation as abbreviations referring to certain argumentation procedures, ways of asking questions, etc. Hence, what is the reason why Rorty, a typical New York intellectual sparkling with irony, now an elderly white-haired man (born in 1931) who optimistically believes in liberal and tolerant society is so unnerving and provoking? Probably mainly because he considers philosophy viewed as academic discipline in the traditional sense to be a hollow and long ago outdated game. The philosophers should finally stop

looking for the truth, as they have no special knowledge, methods or ways enabling them to get insight into the significant issues of human existence. Through his requirement to finish with the professionalization and academism of philosophy, for which he is still reproached and which was considered to be a betrayal, Rorty came with a new view of the very existence of philosophy in contemporary world.

4. Richard Rorty on relativism

According to Rorty, what connects philosophers who seem so different from each other, such as Nietzsche, Derrida and Foucault on one hand and Dewey, Putnam or Davidson on the other hand, is their – anti-dualisms (Rorty 1999, p. 47). They are authors who want to replace the image of the world constructed on the basis of binary oppositions (essence-phenomenon, subjective-objective, fact-value etc.), which was already incorporated into the fundamentals of the European cultural tradition by the ancient Greeks. There are many slogans and mottoes, Rorty points out, expressing this effort, this anti-essentialism. These slogans include e. g. – everything is a construct of the society or the awareness of anything is the matter of linguistics. Thus anti-dualism is present in e. g. - pragmatism, deconstruction, holism, postmodernism etc. (Rorty 1989, p. 73). Because of pure patriotism (great heroes in the plots of Rorty's stories are W. James and J. Dewey), Rorty preferred the term pragmatism to characterize his version of anti-dualism (Rorty 1982, p. xxvi). However, the two above mentioned ones as well as a number of other slogans want to express the same thing. Namely, that we cannot leave the language, that we do not have any direct description of reality which does not depend on the language. Rorty, inspired by Wilfrid Sellars characterizes this attitude as – psychological nominalism. (Rorty 1979, p. 180-181).

Anti-dualists persist on such description of sensory perception, thinking and language, which try to liberate from the difference between the essence and the phenomenon. I would like to point out that this opposition is based on the possibility to distinguish the things as they are as the opposite, when we are describing them in view of some purpose. The background of this idea is the predisposition that there is an inner essence X, a core of some kind, or the very character of X, which we can put in the opposition to the edge or the periphery X, which is constituted by the fact that X can be found in relation to other parts of the reality. Rorty calls the effort to escape from this dichotomy – anti-essentialism. Hence, Rorty (and not only in this passage), consistently takes an opinion that there is no description of what X really is, which would not be connected to human need, conscience and language.

Rorty proves what things would be like if we tried to describe them through anti-essentialism speech using the example of number seventeen. If you ask what is the essence of number 17 then, what is this number in this very essence, you are expected to be able to offer such description of number 17, that will be qualitatively different from the following descriptions. Smaller than 22, bigger than 8, the total of 6 plus 11, square root of 289, the difference between 1,678,922 and 1,678,905, square power of 4,123,105 etc. (Rorty 1999, p. 52-53). The basic characteristics of the above mentioned anti-essentialistic approach to the descriptions of number 17 is the fact that none of them is not a more adequate representation of what is number seventeen in reality than the other descriptions. None of them captures something like "inner essence" of number 17. The choice between them is the matter of deciding, which of the descriptions is a better tool in view of the purpose we have in mind in the particular case.

It is really difficult to be an essentialist in case of number 17. However, Rorty suggests that it is equally difficult to be an essentialist in case of – tables, values, the truth, stars, electrons, human beings, academic disciplines, social institutions, etc. He states that there is nothing we could learn even in these cases (similarly like in the case of number seventeen), apart from the network of relationships of these objects of our interest towards

other parts of the world. Thus all the statements about the objects are implicit or explicit expression of their relationship to one or more parts of the Universe. Therefore, Rorty's untraditional version of neo-pragmatism enables us to view all the theories created so far by human culture as a case with tools. That is e. g. to see physics as a literary genre or if you like, from another point of view, to see literature or philosophy as a way of doing research having the same basis as physics. Physics can be seen as a way to cope with some aspects of the Universe, philosophy or literature as ways that help us cope with other aspects of the Universe. One form of research results in statements, another in images, metaphors or stories.

What Rorty novel and inspiring response to the issue of relativism (Rorty 1998, p. 43-62), offers, can be summarized as the following story. In the 1980s, the activists against the nuclear movement spread the following story: the Japanese monkeys belonging to Makaka Fuskata (*Macaca fuscata*) kind, living on the island of Košima, were given sweet potatoes by research workers who studied them. However, the monkeys did not like the potatoes, because they were dirty. One of the females, whose name was Imo, learned to wash them in a nearby stream. Her mother as well as the monkeys she played with together with their families learned it from her. The cultural innovation was slowly beginning to spread. Between 1952 and 1958, 99 monkeys learned to wash their potatoes in the stream. One day in autumn of 1958, the hundredth monkey learned to wash the potatoes in the stream. And then something unexpected happened. The added value of the hundredth individual's awareness brought about the qualitative leap in the collective consciousness and the following day all the monkeys started to wash their potatoes. The research workers were surprised to find that the art of washing potatoes crossed the sea on the same day and spread also among the monkeys on other islands and on the mainland. The moral of this story can be summarized in the following way:

There is a certain threshold number of the individuals' awareness and when it is reached, a breakthrough in the collective consciousness occurs. Each of us can be the hundredth monkey. This story concerns a significant aspect of the postmodern public space – the importance attributed to the awareness of every individual by our educational and socializational institutions. The postmodern public space must be full of strong stories and all the individuals are trained to try hard to become the hundredth monkey, because it can be their awareness that can bring about the change of status quo. Anybody can be the hundredth monkey.

5. The tyranny of big goals

In the middle of Wenceslas Square in Prague an advertisement promoting Adidas company was hanging for a long time. There was a large photo of the boxer Muhammad Ali in fighting posture and the slogan below stated: The impossible is just a strong word that small people spread... There is nothing like the impossible. At the beginning of the 20th century, one of the founders of European sociology, Emile Durkheim invented a new word for the key problem of modernness: anomy (from a-nomos, lack of regulation, lawlessness). Anomy is the consequence of the fact that modern societies develop under pressure of two contradictory imperatives: firstly, the growing functional differentiation, division of labour that is the condition of growing productivity; secondly, the growing need for standards that will ensure mutual cooperation of specialized sectors for the common good. However, in modern societies, the awareness of the community and solidarity among the people is constantly delegitimized by corporations whose strategic goal is expansion at all other's expense. Anomy is imperialism of parts, "lack of solidarity", weakening the standards that make society out of specialized individuals. Anomy is the way of existence of corporations, therefore they are mortal danger for democratic societies. They continually invest in discrediting every representation of the community, every limitation of their expansion

The announced most frequently quoted sociological text of the twentieth century was the study – *Anomy and social structure* by an American sociologist Robert K. Merton. He depicts the tyranny controlling the most modern society in the world – the American society. To be an American means to have great goals and to struggle relentlessly for them to come true. However, the goals are only one pole of every social structure, the other pole are the ways the people may reach these goals. Merton showed that the American way of life is characterized by tragic imbalance between the goals that are worth living – and the ways that may be used to reach these values. In industrial cities, in those temples of modernness, strict ethics of great goals is preached: Move on, try harder, achieve everything, the future is yours!

Since the First World War, the general background of modern society is the conviction that the meaning is nothing but a great goal and meeting it depends on the strength, diligence and determination. You can achieve everything, all you need to do that is will and strength. Modern people are tyrannized by a great goal that we refer to as – economic growth. If this tyranny controls the state and changes it into a means of uncompromising defence of the highest Goal, if political rules start deriving the legitimacy of their power from the greatness of this goal, they start behaving like a model reader of the advertisement promoting Muhamed Ali's Adidas trainers. As "our goal was set by rating agencies", the political elites consider it ethical to take all paths to pursue them. The impossible must not exist, only – lazy people, saboteurs, leftists, or the enemies of "our values" speak about the impossible. The pursuer of values assesses all beings and things with respect to their usefulness for meeting goals he rates to be the highest ones. Value and assessment are economic terms, "therefore the problem is not degradation of values, but the fact that everything has become just a value", said the German philosopher Martin Heidegger.

Jean Jacques Rousseau in his reflection essay on the origin of enequality among the people attributes only one natural virtue to the mankind – compassion: We can observe it with animals as well, for example a horse refuses to step on live body. The natural tendency to compassion precedes all the rational thinking and all ethical systems, people would be mere monsters if they were not endowed with compassion to support intellect; all the social virtues like – great-heartedness, humanity, generosity originate in compassion. According to Rousseau, the extent of the compassion depends on how much an animal observing a suffering animal identifies itself with it. Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America* shows deep relationship between equality and democracy: the basic characteristics of equality is imagination, which immediately puts us in the position of other people, because when there is an equality of classes, each individual understands feelings of others, he/she only needs to cast a quick look at himself/herself.

6. Conclusion

In public area of postmodern society we solve problems of two kinds. Firstly, there are problems that can be solved by further growth of specialized knowledge. Secondly, in public area we face problems that cannot be solved by further growth of specialized knowledge. Let us use Lyotard's term for the second type of the questions appearing in public area, and let us call them the background questions. Antimonies highlighted by public area do not have a definite solution then, they can only be stabilized, i.e. be deprived of their potential destructiveness. Within the present paradigm, an attempt at their final solution would lead to unbearable cultural, political and social conflicts. Richard Rorty's untraditional version of neo-pragmatism enables us to view all the theories created so far by human culture as a case with tools. Physics and astronomy can be seen as a way to cope with some aspects of the Universe, philosophy, religion or literature as ways that help us cope with other aspects of the reality. One form of research results in statements, another in images, mathematical models or stories. The problem of relativism is a consequence of essentialism, the belief that the world,

reality or universe, has some inner essence which cannot be grasped by a language. The contradictions of late industrial society cannot be overcome, nevertheless, the trust in positive results, their visualization in the public area of democratic societies is still the goal and the purpose of the Western cultural tradition and maybe the last legitimate source of the intellectuals' authority.

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