ON THE CONCEPT OF IRONY IN RORTY

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ABSTRACT

ON THE CONCEPT OF IRONY IN RORTY

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Irony has for long been on the boundary between philosophy and arts owing to its both verbal/logical character and its aesthetic appeal. Recently, Rorty proposed irony as the main discursive attitude in a liberal society. In this study, I investigate liberal irony from a philosophical perspective. More specifically, I demonstrate that irony is representative of a certain view of subjectivity and an ethical stance, a critical tool that is of special importance in a coherence view of truth and a rhetorical form that appeals both to the rational and irrational.

ÖZ

RORTY'DE İRONİ KAVRAMI ÜZERİNE

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Yüksek Lisans, Felsefe Bölümü

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İroni, hem sözel/mantıksal karakteri hem de estetik boyutu sebebiyle uzun zamandır felsefe ile sanat arasındaki sınırda görülegelmiştir. Son zamanlarda Rorty, ironiyi liberal bir toplumda temel söylem tavrı olarak önermiştir. Bu çalışma liberal ironiyi felsefi bir bakış açısından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. İroninin belirli bir öznellik ve etik anlayışının temsilcisi olduğu, uyumluluğa dayanan bir hakikat anlayışında özel öneme sahip bir eleştirel araç olduğu ve hem akılsal olana hem de akılsal olmayana hitap eden bir söylemsel biçim olduğu gösterilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: ironi, eğreltileme, biliş, Rorty, Davidson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Richard Rorty (1931-2007) was an American pragmatist philosopher. Although his diverse philosophical interests throughout his carrier needs to be considered for an adequate understanding of his thought, his final position turned out to be highly critical of what he calls the Plato-Kant tradition that dominates western thought. This tradition, which assigns itself a privileged role to measure the rest of the culture, striving to find firm unities and timeless truths, is for Rorty, problematic with respect to a liberal political and ethical stance. Siding rather with values such as self-creativity and individual freedom, Rorty's whole philosophical project can be seen as a response to, or a dialogue with, the major ontological and epistemological threads of this tradition.

Rorty started his philosophical career in the analytical branch. His first book *The Linguistic Turn (1967)* was a rich collection of essays on philosophy of language with a forty page introduction written by Rorty. In the following years, he also became occupied with continental philosophy as well as with American pragmatism. His thinking became gradually critical of the western philosophical tradition, both analytic and continental. In his magnum opus *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979),* he attacks the prevailing representational model of philosophy, i.e. thought seen as the *mirror* of the world, a model which always leaves behind a further task of establishing - or *securing* - the correspondence between the two. Rorty puts into question the old metaphysical distinctions of western philosophy such as mind vs. body, objective vs. subjective, knowledge vs.

interpretation, etc. He rigorously examines such distinctions to demonstrate that they cannot be maintained coherently in the way they are conceived up to now; noting also that their conception among philosophers almost always involve ambiguities and differences. Instead of attempting to provide more exact definitions of such basic terms, Rorty proceeds to inquire into them in a way to *blur* such distinctions. By relaxing the tension between the opposing terms, Rorty first aims to waive the pretensions of old metaphysics, and second, wants to take a step towards getting done away with such distinctions altogether.

In his later work *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (1989),* he presents his metaphilosophical outlook and explains in detail the major terms of his model as put in the book title. He proposes a new place for philosophy in the culture, which is closer to literature than it is to epistemology. Indeed, his model is more than a philosophical model, with its political implications already made apparent in the book.

Contingency is Rorty's first move to loosen ties with the Plato-Kant tradition which is characterized by an insistent attitude to bring metaphysical explanations and to specify conditions of possibility of what is given in reality and experience. The view of the current state of the world and human thought as contingent (which can be taken to be the opposite of *necessary)* implies that the current state of affairs could have been otherwise and the prevailing metaphysical presuppositions governing science, society, philosophy and language in this historical epoch is *only one among* many other possible. This language, that relates one to the world, which varies over time, over geography and over individuals, is what he calls a *final vocabulary.* It is final in the sense that, it the *best* one has, given one's historical and personal circumstances and it is crucial with respect to one's relation to the world. It is contingent in the sense that, we can find no necessary link between that language and an *eternal truth.* Recognition of this contingency, according to Rorty, will *first* result in a critical stance towards established vocabularies. It will in turn raise interest in other people's, other times' and yet-unborn vocabularies; which amounts to an openness to the possibility of changing the vocabularies for *better* ones (in the sense that we

find them better). The sustainability of communication and a non-finalizing attitude is essential for Rorty. He grants, so to say, an ontological primacy to the social. (Rorty 1991a: 10)

Solidarity is the social glue Rorty proposes to hold society together when such openness and contingency are acknowledged. He argues that what is in *common* in all of us is more than what is *different*, and we are all sensitive to others' suffering. This is what keeps the society together rather than our metaphysical convictions. There is no way to avoid cruelty completely, but he thinks, borrowing from Judith Shklar, we can at least agree on saying that "cruelty is the worst thing we do" (Rorty 1989: xv).

The rhetorical tools Rorty proposes to implement the above-said critical and open attitude in the private domain are irony and metaphor. Rorty links irony with *questioning* and metaphor with *change* (of the existing language).

In this study, I attempt to highlight certain aspects of irony as a general rhetorical device and link those aspects to Rorty's thought. Irony is a broad concept with numerous cultural and artistic manifestations such as criticism, sarcasm, humor, parody and even tragedy. It may be representative of various intellectual and emotional states such as criticality, self-criticality, inquisitiveness, amusement, resentment, anger, boastfulness, etc. It is therefore important to isolate the sense of irony that is relevant to a Rortian critical and liberal attitude. Identifying this sense of irony which is critical and inquisitive, but not sarcastic or boastful, is I think, crucial to an understanding the place of the term in Rorty's philosophy and as a more acceptable discursive form. In the next chapter, I examine various senses of irony, to figure out which of the senses Rorty has in mind when talking about an ironist. I will lead this discussion with references to Nehamas' discussion of Socratic irony, which I think is an involved account of irony as a general attitude of questioning. Having identified the sense of liberal, critical irony appropriate to Rorty's thought, I will examine in Chapter 3 Rorty's modified conception of objectivity and subjectivity; and attempt to demonstrate how irony would function in support of Rorty's view, representing as well a certain ethical

position. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the value of irony as a tool of inquiry and questioning which is of special importance under a coherence view of truth. To do this, I will first briefly present Davidson's theory of truth and meaning, which is also adopted by Rorty. In Chapter 5, I will examine irony as an aesthetic matter, a speech or textual act that also appeals to the non-conceptual. I will perform this discussion along with another trope, metaphor, and with references to Davidson's and Heidegger's conception of metaphor and poetics. The last chapter presents my conclusions regarding the place of irony on the growing edge of language, as a specific ethical stance and a general cultural and aesthetic matter.

CHAPTER 2

IRONY AS A RHETORICAL TOOL

In this section I will first give a very general overview of irony as a literary and dramatic tool. Then, by taking Nehamas' discussion of Socratic irony as basis, I will attempt to elucidate Rorty's conception of the term, in order to clarify my use of the term in the rest of the thesis.

2.1 Irony in General

Irony: Latin *ironia,* from Greek *eirōnia,* from *eirōn* dissembler[1] (to hide under a false appearance)

Modern theories of rhetoric distinguish between these types of irony (Cuddon 1998: 427-432, Colebrook 2004: 13):

> *Verbal irony* is a disparity of expression and intention: when a speaker says one thing but means another (e.g. "All generalizations are false.", "Health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die.")
> *Dramatic irony* is a disparity of expression and awareness (e.g. Oedipus, seeking the murderer of the king, who is actually himself)
> *Situational irony* is the disparity of intention and result (e.g. a pick-pocket whose pocket is being picked)

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[1] Webster's Third New International Dictionary, p. 1195, Massachusets: Merriam-Webster, 2002

Common to all three types is a *disparity,* an *incongruity* or a *contrast* between the appearance and reality. So the interpretation of irony will have to involve a kind of *undoing* of the uttered expression or the apparent situation. This undoing is not a straightforward procedure, nor is it a simple reversal, as I will discuss later.

Irony can also be classified on the basis of what the *ironist* expects from his semantic displacement. These are:

- *Classic irony* (or *Socratic irony*)
- *Romantic irony*
- *Critical irony* (or, *skeptical irony;* or, *pure irony*)

In *classic irony*, usually employed in the course of a dialogue, the speaker intends to contrast his reasoning to the interlocutor's, thereby pointing to a disparity between the two. But the disparity is intended to resolve immediately on the speaker's side, giving way to further dialogue, so as to make the interlocutor follow the speaker's reasoning. Thus in classic irony, "we find a certain return to self as thought […] and a sophistic insistence on the human self as the measure of being." (Desmond 1992: 295)

Romantic irony is characterized by the spirit of *romanticism*: a conception of "universe founded in chaos and incomprehensibility rather than in a divinely ordained teleology" (Mellor 1980: vii). This conception, however, is not nihilistic, as it may sound. Although the romantic has lost faith in the traditional morality and believes that everything is in vain, he still preserves a belief in a final reconciliation. He "feels" that there is a *way out*, thus a romantic ironist employs irony to constantly undermine given meanings, with the hope that this undoing will eventually result in a state of privilege and security he has been longing for (Lang 1996: 576).

The third type of irony, in terms of the ironist's intention, is the *critical irony*. Rorty and Derrida represent this school of irony. Critical irony still wants to

displace the meaning in traditional and grand narratives, but it differs from the romantic irony in that it does not hope and aim for a greater narrative. If one *great ideal*, ironically, could be attributed to these philosophers, it would be the *openness* they aim in the text. For them, each discourse should open new possibilities for further discourses, instead of restricting them.

2.2 Liberal Irony

Although Rorty avoids giving a categorical definition of irony, he describes liberal ironist in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* as:

> I shall define an "ironist" as someone who fulfills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself (Rorty 1989: 73).

In this section, I will attempt to clarify the sense of irony that is appropriate to a correct reading of Rorty's texts. I will first examine some commonly accepted senses of the term in order to check their relevance to Rorty's conception. I will lead this discussion with frequent references to Nehamas' *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault (1998),* which involves a comprehensive discussion of the concept of irony in general and Socratic irony in particular. I think, a kind of Socratic irony as outlined in Nehamas' book correspond to Rorty's conception of the term because Rorty sees irony as a form of *non-finalizing inquiry,* as suggested by the above quotation. Plato's Socrates also uses this kind of irony in his early dialogues, Nehamas will suggest.

The most commonly found dictionary definition of verbal irony is "saying something but meaning the opposite." Although this definition may help to explain many cases of irony (cases of sarcasm), I think, it leaves out more than it

explains and fails to capture the subtlety and complexity of many cases of irony. Take Nehamas' example:

> Such an explanation does not apply even to some of the simplest cases of irony. Consider, for instance, Vlastos's example . . . of Mae West's refusal of an invitation to dinner at Gerald Ford's White House: "It's an awful long way to go for just one meal." We do know that the distance from New York to Washington is not that great, but that is not the whole point made by her quip. There is no function that takes us from what West said to its contrary: all we know is that she is not going to dinner—not on account of the distance but for reasons that we, and perhaps she herself as well, can only guess. (Nehamas 1998: 207)

Apart from failing to explain even such simple cases, the above definition is inappropriate as a key to the use of the term in Rorty's works. Note that, according to this definition, by simply taking the opposite of what the speaker says we can discern his intended meaning exactly. However, such a certainty would not make much sense in a discursive style intended for *inquiry,* in which a certain degree of indeterminacy is essential. Nehamas takes this argument one step further by associating irony even with silence:

> I argue—against the common view . . .—that irony does not consist in saying the contrary of, but only something different from, what one means. In the former case, if we know that we are faced with irony we also know what the ironist means: all we need to do is to negate the words we hear in order to understand what the ironist has in mind. In the latter, even when we know that we are confronted with irony, we have no sure way of knowing the ironist's meaning: all we know is that it is not quite what we have heard. Irony therefore does not allow us to peer into the ironist's mind, which remains concealed and inscrutable. Socratic irony is of that kind. It does not ever indicate what he thinks: it leaves us with his words, and a doubt that they express his meaning. That is why I think of Socratic irony as a form of silence. (Ibid.: 12)

The next widely accepted conception of irony is "feigned ignorance." Questioning this conception in the case of Socratic dialogues amounts to asking whether Socrates really pretends to be ignorant, or is he really ignorant of the virtues that

constitutes the subject matter of his dialogues? Nehamas, interestingly and contrary to the general conception, argues that the latter is the case, at least in the early Socratic dialogues. After pages of discussion and comparison of different accounts of Socratic irony, Nehamas concludes:

> I do want to appeal to Kierkegaard in order to develop Quintilian's notion that Socrates' whole life was characterized by irony without also accepting Quintilian's further view that Socrates' irony is nothing but feigned ignorance. This most common understanding of Socratic irony must be rejected. Socrates does not feign the ignorance we find him avowing in Plato's early works. I cannot, for example, accept Norman Gulley's view that Socrates already knows what piety, courage, or temperance is but pretends he does not so that his interlocutors will endeavor to discover it for themselves. His ignorance is genuine, and that is perhaps the most important fact about him. (Ibid.: 72)

This model of irony on which "the ironist is not always in clear possession of a truth he is holding back" (Ibid.: 72) fits well, I think, into Rorty's description of the ironist in the passage given at the beginning of this section. Rorty's ironist is one who admits the contingency of his own vocabulary, has doubts on it and is open to new vocabularies. An immediate corollary of the "ironist's ignorance" is one which also covers our previous concern: Since the ironist may not be in hold of a truth, he might not be meaning the contrary of what he is saying, but merely be casting doubt or a question mark regarding the subject matter. Nehamas argues that the *ironist's uncertainty* may be more essential to the spirit of his discourse than we might think: "Irony often communicates that only part of a picture is visible to an audience, but it does not always entail that the speaker sees the whole. Sometimes, it does not even imply that a whole picture exists. Uncertainty is intrinsic, of the essence." (Nehamas 1998: 67)

If we admit Nehamas' interpretation of early Socratic dialogues, it is natural to ask then, what the whole point of Socratic irony is, if it is not a concealment intended to get the interlocutor to find truth for himself? Why does not Socrates plainly confess that he does not know what virtue is and initiate a mutual non-ironic inquiry with the interlocutor? I think that Socrates' knowledge is still

superior to the interlocutor, because although he cannot tell what virtue is, he can tell what *it is not.* This gives Socrates a legitimate position (in terms of superiority) to perform irony towards his relatively ignorant interlocutor. However his use of irony cannot be explained with this legitimacy alone. There is a deliberate commitment on Socrates' side to his *subject position as a teacher,* i.e. he is the one leads the dialogue and directs the interlocutor to his own understanding. In short, he assumes the role of a philosopher and comports himself so. This maneuver is indicative of a certain ironic mindset - that of commitment - which is also appropriate to the Rorty's ironist:

To sum up, the citizens of my liberal utopia would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community. They would be liberal ironists . . . , people who combined commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment. (Rorty 1989: 61)

Rorty's skepticism is thus a milder form of skepticism "which holds that anything is, in principle, revisable if reason to do so is forthcoming," rather than a radical skepticism "which holds that there is no reason to prefer one position on any question to any other" (Bacon 2007. 87).

Going back to the case of Socrates; although he cannot not tell what virtue is, he still acts as a teacher because "he combines his commitment with a sense of the contingency of his own commitment." But unlike his interlocutor, Socrates is aware that he is himself in an *ironic situation;* the irony being in teaching virtue without knowing what virtue is. According to this interpretation it can be said that, Socrates commits to be a teacher and exposes his "ignorance" only to highlight his own situational irony. Actually he is inevitably ironic to himself as well as to his interlocutor because of the very ironic essence of the situation. If Socrates' mere superiority as a teacher comes from his knowing that he does not know, his truthfulness as a philosopher comes from his daring to express this fact in verbally ironic terms.

Whether or not we accept Nehamas' interpretation of this kind of Socratic irony,

we can use his model of irony, together with my additions, as representative of the Rortian irony in the rest of our discussions. Such an ironist has both a sense of *commitment* to and *doubt* in the present cultural artifacts*;* and when he commits irony, he neither necessarily means the contrary of what he is saying, nor feigns ignorance. He uses irony to cast doubt on and initiate mutual inquiry on a given subject matter.

Irony, in short, is not a way of saying the *opposite* of what is apparently said. Irony is a way of *unsaying* what is apparently said. In this regard, it is a critical tool for undoing of a previous statement. By negating without positing anything new, irony opens up a ground for interpretation. A powerful irony, I think, like any other aesthetic expression, is one with subtle associations which are difficult to restate in literal language.

CHAPTER 3

IRONY AS A MODE OF SUBJECTIVITY

3.1 Traditional Distinction of Objectivity/Subjectivity

The traditional notion of objectivity, as Rorty sees it, rests on the mental-physical distinction. As long as this distinction is kept in place, epistemology will always be challenged with the question of how the mind could correctly mirror the world; that is, how our mental representation of the thing would fit the thing, and moreover, how the correctness of such a correspondence could be secured. It is clear that, such a correspondence cannot be secured unless something *beyond* both the mind and the world is posited, since the mind only has access to its own contents. The rationalist tradition attempted to solve this problem by assigning special representing powers to the mind and by positing God to secure the correspondence of the mental to the physical. The empiricist tradition restricted abilities of the mind, making it an unproblematic mirror, thereby alleviating the correspondence problem, but still, leaving behind a kind of skepticism - pertaining to the categories of mind - intact.

It was with Kant that the efforts to ensure a "hard" mind-to-world correspondence were done away with, dispensing with the attempt to know the thing as it is. Although, according to Kant, the mind could never adequately represent the thing, a reduced representation could still be coherent, explanatory and predictive of the world. An objective science of the world could be found upon this representation,

objective in the sense that, the so-called perceptive and conceptual scheme of experience is invariant over time, space and other variables. Although the quest for correct-mirroring is given up by admitting a somewhat distorted picture of the world, nobody knows what the undistorted picture looked like. Meanwhile, that part of reality which cannot be judged by theoretical reason was left to the imaginative powers of the mind.

As a result of these efforts to found science and a secular modern society, the realm of human knowledge was divided up into two: Objective judgments, studied by natural and formal sciences; and subjective judgments studied by the rest of humanities, i.e. "softer" disciplines.

According to this division, the truth values of objective statements are forced by the so-called external reality. For subjective statements, on the other hand, there are no entities in the external world to correspond to. The meanings of objective statements were usually taken to be independent of the context of utterance, while the meanings of subjective statements were context-dependent, where "context" is defined in the broadest sense to include factors such as who speaks, who listens, time and place of speech, speaker's and listener's identities, speaker's and listener's intentions, beliefs, fantasies, imagination, etc.

This list may be further extended to include virtually anything that may alter the meaning of an utterance.

A subjective statement may thus be quite accurately defined as a statement, the meaning and truth of which varies largely over those determinants that make up the relevant context; and that has no specific and obvious connection to the so-called empirical world.

3.2 Rorty's View of Objectivity

Rorty's distinction of objectivity/subjectivity is radically different from the traditional view. Being a pragmatist philosopher, Rorty thinks that, the difference

between 'the objective' and 'the subjective' is merely a matter of *degree*, the degree being that of *agreement* among inquirers, i.e. social human subjects. An objective statement is one on which there is a great deal of rational agreement, while a subjective statement is one on which the inquirers differ largely in their views. As *more* of us start to think *in the same way* on a given matter, the statements we hold true regarding that matter get *more* objective in the sense given by Rorty (the "social" definition of objective).

> … [This] confusion is aided by our use of 'objective' to mean both 'characterizing the view which would be agreed upon as a result of argument undeflected by irrelevant considerations' and 'representing things as they really are.' (Rorty 1979: 333-334)

By doing away with the urge to define "objective" in terms of "accurate representation of what is out there", Rorty at the same time does away with the *qualitative* distinction between the two terms. Rorty's move here is twofold: First, he combines the criteria for being "objective" and "subjective" into a single measure (the extent of agreement), thereby robbing off the privileged status of the "objective" as a "correct mirror of the world." Second, he does this consolidation in the domain of what was previously held to be subjective: i.e., an inquirer is free to hold any view on a given matter, yet his view will still have a chance to be objective, given that sufficiently many other inquirers hold the same view on the given matter. The "freedom to hold true virtually *any* view" is very definitive of conventional subjectivity. Thus, Rorty lifts the sharp distinction between the two terms, while at the same time, taking side with what we used to call "subjective."

A phenomenological investigation of subjectivity will definitely reveal many distinctive features and modes of the term and will aid understanding the approach and philosophy of Rorty. However, I will narrow my focus here to explore irony, as a specific mode of subjectivity. Rorty's promotion of a rhetorical style borrowed from literature is understandable given his issues with the "hard" sense of objectivity held by the traditional epistemology. Keeping in mind that irony is only one among many literary tropes, its closer examination may help reveal to a

certain extent what Rorty understands from subjectivity. This, I want to accomplish in the following by examining a sample case of irony.

3.3 Rorty's Conception of Subjectivity (A Sample Irony)

Consider this example: In one of his movies, a porn movie actor utters this sentence: "I am the last Italian romantic." Let us follow how one among possible interpretations of this statement is generated in the listener.

First of all, this sentence does not have a standalone meaning like a formal or factual statement. Therefore, it cannot be meaningfully written into a book and put in a library without specifying the speaker's profession. It turns out that the given statement takes its meaning from the facts that the speaker is of a specific identity and the listener is aware of this identity. The resulting meaning is dependent both on the speaker's identity and the listener's cognitive history.

Once we know enough so as not to take the actor's sentence literally, we are in a position to interpret it. On thing that is certain is that the actor is not a romantic in the sense found in a courtly love. Then, is he being critical of romanticism? Probably not, because given the actor's non-intellectual public identity, he is not someone to do such a critique, least, in such a movie. Examining the utterance further, we see that the word "last" has a powerful contribution to the meaning. Is the actor being critical of the faint but obstinate hope for the last romantic, wishfully believed to be surviving somehow, somewhere; but is never able to be encountered, in an age reigned by pornography in all its disguises? This might be one of the points, though, I think, not one held consciously on the actor's side. Considering his power position – as an actor – in the current culture, the actor naturally leads one to ask the question: who is losing power as he is gaining power?

Carrying the interpretation further and considering the light and funny atmosphere the utterance is made in, can we maybe say that the actor is creating a "vacuum"

concerning the meaning of apparently contrasting concepts, "romantic" and "pornographic", putting both concepts in doubt at once; thereby allowing a set of further possible interpretations concerning their meanings to fill in the vacuum? Whether this is so or not, there is a clear touch of humor in what he has said emanating from the contrast between simultaneous expositions of two opposing terms.

In the above, I attempted to follow a path to a possible interpretation of the given ironic statement, demonstrating by the way a non-cognitive side-effect (that of amusement). Although there are other possible interpretations for the above example, what is certain is that, the creation of the ironic effect requires active involvement of the interlocutors in the meaning generation process, an involvement which is not as straightforward as one required for objective statements. Linda Hutcheon, a literary theorist who studied irony argues:

> Irony rarely involves a simple decoding of a single inverted message; . . . it is more often a semantically complex process of relating, differentiating, and combining said and unsaid meanings – and doing so with some evaluative edge. It is also, however, a culturally shaped process. No theorist of irony would dispute the existence of a special relationship in ironic discourse between the ironist and the interpreter; . . . I want to turn that around here, and argue instead that it is the community that comes first and that, in fact, enables the irony to happen. (Hutcheon 1994: 85)

Here, Hutcheon uses the concept of "membership" in explaining irony; which I have called "identity" in the above discussion. She also says that, this membership is a membership in a "discursive community" (Hutcheon 1994: 17), that is, a *linguistic* community made up of subjects having common concepts, terms, language usage and specific ways of expressing themselves. An irony addressed to the outside of a given discursive community will probably not be understood and interpreted well enough.

Another point Hutcheon stresses is the "process" nature of irony, which is of course a subjective process in the interlocutor. This process requires participation

of the listener, his act being "relating, differentiating and combining". I can extend this list by other terms, such as "contrasting." In her article, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern", Hutcheon, after arguing that irony and nostalgia are closely related (a thesis which I will not go into here), says: "… This may in part be because irony and nostalgia are not qualities of objects; they are responses of subjects–active, emotionally- and intellectually-engaged subjects." (Hutcheon 1989)

The above is a restatement of the fact that, in irony, we are not talking about qualities of the objects, i.e. we are not making objective statements. For irony to effective, the subject must respond actively, and this response is not only intellectual, but also *emotional*. This is no surprise given that irony is a literary trope. What is surprising is that Rorty proposes irony as a rhetorical device in *all human* discourses outside the public domain, philosophy being one among. How irony could suit philosophy would be a lengthy but fruitless discussion at this point, because there may be different views on what philosophy is, but clearly, Rorty's metaphilosophy is one of the most radical ones. So, what I am trying to do here is to discover some more characterizing features of irony, so that we can better understand how Rorty combines irony with a broad range of discourses outside the public domain.

Let me repeat the key terms in my discussion as well as Hutcheon's discussion of irony (which are anyway in agreement), in order to see what they altogether point out to. First of all, the irony's meaning depends both on the speaker's and listener's *identities and linguistic idiosyncrasies*. Moreover, irony requires active *involvement/participation/interpretation* of the receiving subject. This involvement is both *intellectual-cognitive* and *emotional-non-cognitive*. Remembering that *truth* is what is central to an objective statement, and looking at the above italicized terms, we can now ask what is central to an ironic statement? I.e. what do the above terms all together point out to? I would say it is *communication*, at the most basic level. Considering that irony's message is interpreted at its destination and its meaning is not final, we can go further and say that this is not *only* a communication of an objective message, but one in the form

of a *conversation.* Rorty sees this as:

> The notion of culture as a conversation rather than as a structure erected upon foundations fits well with [the] hermeneutical notion of knowledge, since getting into a conversation with strangers is, like acquiring a new virtue or skill by imitating models, a matter of *phronesis* rather than *episteme* [Greek letters converted to Latin]. (Rorty 1979: 319)

Taking also into account that irony usually invokes non-cognitive responses as well as cognitive ones, we can further characterize it as a form of art, that is, *literature.*

Indeed, Rorty himself announced that future philosophy better be *less* of epistemology and more of literature. Where we have arrived (literature) at the end of the foregoing discussion should therefore be of no surprise. But what we have found meanwhile is more telling about what Rorty holds important, if not ontological, regarding subjectivity. *Communication* rather than *declaration*; *openness* rather than *finalization*; *interpretation* rather than *representation*; and *emotional* along with *intellectual* engagement.

Having explored some aspects of subjectivity held by Rorty, I will now move to "the aspect of criticality" in Rorty's philosophy, and try to explain what function irony renders with regard to this aspect.

CHAPTER 4

FUNCTION OF IRONY IN A COHERENCE VIEW OF TRUTH

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Rorty frequently refers to Davidson's work – particularly to *Truth and Meaning (1967)* and "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1973) – and draws conclusions from his theory of meaning. To put it very briefly, Rorty sees parallels between his own view of philosophy as a non-epistemological system and Davidson's view of language as a self-contained semantic scheme, and appeals to Davidson's arguments in theoretical support of his own position.

In this section, I will first summarize the relevant parts of Davidson's model, by contrasting his closed semantic system of *coherence,* in which truth and meaning result from intra-linguistic relations, to a semantic system of *correspondence*, in which truth and meaning are determined by virtue of the linguistic objects' correspondence to external reality. I intend this discussion to make more understandable how irony facilitates meaning (and truth) generation in Davidsonian (and so, Rortian) semantics, while it is almost forbidden in an objective discourse.

4.1 Davidsonian Semantics and Linguistic Holism

Davidson's main idea was to use a theory of truth (as stated by Tarski) as a basis

for a theory of meaning. More specifically, for Tarski, a theory of truth for a language would generate one statement in the following form for each sentence in the language.

The sentence 's' is true if and only if s,
e.g. 'Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white.

Davidson extends this approach where one can write any sentence in quotes to the left hand side, to give its meaning (and truth) in terms of the existing meanings (and truths) on the right hand side. The crucial observation here is that, no linguistic object (word or sentence) used on the right hand side has a *preset* meaning. They also participate in truth conditions of the above form by appearing on the left hand side. It may so happen in a possible world that 'white' is defined *only* with reference to 'snow', while one of snow's references being 'being white', thereby giving rise to a circularity. In this case the meaning of 'white' can only be resolved by further truth conditions involving sentences such as, say, 'Snow cover the mountains", and "Mountains are not blue", etc. This illustrates that a Davidsonian semantic system is constructed by enumerating as many such truth conditions as possible and by relating them inferentially. Only after sufficiently many of these conditions are compiled, the meaning of each and every sentence in the language emerges. Davidson says:

> If sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as an abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language. (Davidson 1967: 308)

From this brief overview of Davidson's theory of truth and meaning, a couple of interesting observations can be made regarding Rorty's view of philosophy or of any kind of discourse. First, truth and meaning are highly interdependent. One cannot, in most cases, play with truths in a language without changing the meanings of words and sentences, and vice versa. For example, in quantum

physics, new theories (thus, truths) about the position and velocity of particles, devised to explain new observations that cannot be explained with old physics, have led to changes about the meanings of the involved terms. The position of a physical particle is no more a single point at a time in the coordinate system; rather, a particle is said to exist at every point in the space at every time with changing probabilities, the probability being highest at the point where the particle is according to Newtonian physics. Hence, the notion of *position* became more "cloudy": not a single sharp point in space but a set of probable points. This in turn led to a change in the notion of an *object*, making it fuzzier as well, because one of the basic characteristics of an object was to occupy a single position in space at a time.

Although the interdependence of truth and meaning is not specific to Davidson's theory of meaning, it is still important when reading Rorty, since it has significant consequences regarding the objectivity of a language, possibility (or, inevitability) of interpretation, and so on. Therefore I would like to provide here another example regarding this point, from Davidson:

> The way this problem is solved is best appreciated from undramatic examples. If you see a ketch sailing by and your companion says, 'Look at that handsome yawl,' you may be faced with a problem of interpretation. One natural possibility is that your friend has mistaken a ketch for a yawl, and has formed a false belief. But if his vision is good and his line of sight favorable it is even more plausible that he does not use the word "yawl" quite as you do, and has made no mistake at all about the position of the jigger on the passing yacht. We do this sort of off the cuff interpretation all the time, deciding in favor of reinterpretation of words in order to preserve a reasonable theory of belief. . . . The process is that of constructing a viable theory of belief and meaning from sentences held true. (Davidson 1973: 18)

This has an important consequence: If you are a realist and claim that, by compiling sufficiently many empirical truth conditions, validity of which is forced by the external reality, then you can say, you can fix every possible meaning in the language and the possibility of interpretation drops out. This is the limiting case, but still worth imagining: a case in which all non-empirical synthetic

knowledge claims are ignored, so the whole body of meanings in the language are determined solely by the objective, external reality and intra-linguistic inferential relations. We know that this is not the case, because there is a part of language used by the social sciences, religion, literature, etc., truth conditions of which are not fixed by empirical content.

Rorty and Davidson are, however, more ambitious in questioning the connection of language to the world. They hold that, not even a single entity in the language can be warranted to correspond to the world out there. Davidson leads a discussion, by drawing upon the problems of ostension, where a foreigner visits a totally alien world without having the slightest idea about their language, and no linguistic tool such as a dictionary or translator is available to him. Without going into details of Davidson's discussion, his conclusion is: Not even the simplest ostension is unproblematic. When a native of this world points to a rabbit meanwhile uttering a word, we cannot know whether this word designates the particular rabbit, the rabbit's tail, or rabbit-ness as a concept. To resolve his intention (meaning), we need to get familiar with more of his language and beliefs, which in turn requires knowledge of the rest of the words and utterances. This shows that, in order to understand even a single sentence hosted by a language, we need a certain grasp of the whole of language. (Davidson 2005: 40)

This, we may call *linguistic holism* in Davidsonian sense, which holds problematic any non-intentional procedure that attempts to render trivial the relation of words to the things (be it ostension, neural pathways, etc.). According to this view, the truth and meaning of no subset of linguistic entities are determined by their relation to the world, but by their inter-relations; that is, by virtue of their constituting a coherent linguistic system. By coherence, one means that the sentences held true by this language be inferentially consistent; with existing meanings leading to, and resulting from these sentences be well-established and firm in place. Any such system is *true* in Davidson's model, where truth is defined in a looser sense of being *linguistic truth.* Tartaglia argues for the recantation of the idea of a *trivial correspondence* to reality in *The Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Rorty and the Mirror of Nature* as:

. . . Any naturalistic account of the relation between theory and evidence will necessarily be intra-theoretical, and hence trivially self-justifying, since the 'evidence' and the 'relation between evidence and theory' will already have been understood according to our theory anyway, as indeed will 'our theory'. (Tartaglia 2007: 169)

Rorty stresses this point as:

No roads lead from the project of giving truth conditions for the sentences of English (English as it is spoken, containing all sorts of theories about all sorts of things) to criteria for theory choice or to the construction of a canonical notation which 'limns the true and ultimate structure of reality.' Correspondence, for Davidson, is a relation which has no ontological preferences it can tie any sort of word to any sort of thing. This neutrality is an expression of the fact that, in a Davidsonian view, nature has no preferred way of being represented, and thus no interest in a canonical notation. Nor can nature be corresponded to better or worse, save in the simple sense that we can have more or fewer true beliefs. (Rorty 1979: 300)

One important consequence of the foregoing discussion is that, one can, without need to seek any empirical justification, insert any statement into a language as true (assert it). Or, one can, without need to seek any correspondence to the external reality, insert a new word into the language, by giving together a set of truth conditions that make the new word meaningful. The introduction of new truths (i.e. beliefs) into the system may require the adjustment of a subset, or the whole set, of truth conditions in the system, so as to maintain the coherence of the system. The resulting system may be more useful or less useful in terms of a given interest (say, survival), may be more complex or simpler, or may have more or fewer truths. Whether the "proposed change" is to be accepted may depend on the intended use of the language, or some other criterion of choice.

By holding a view that radically cuts the connection of language to the world, Rorty and Davidson opens a large ground for interpretation. In such a world, no one will be able to claim that his theory (of whatever) is "final", in the sense that

it captures the true nature of its object. This point is especially important for Rorty, because his whole philosophical project can be said to be a counter-argument for the over-confident tone of traditional philosophy (epistemology in particular) regarding matters *it holds basic*, such as knowledge, reality, truth, etc. These are not useless terms for Rorty either, being central to a certain worldview that dominates the western culture for the last five hundred years, but as much as being so, they are the terms that have been over-emphasized by the philosophers. Philosophers have over-emphasized them, because, by a Foucaultian reading of a claim to truth as a claim to power, they wanted to fortify their power position within the culture, Rorty implies in much of his writings.

How, then, is communication possible between different persons and cultures, if external reality is not a common ground? The commonality, for Davidson, may only come from the language itself; that is, from the commonality of the meanings allocated and the beliefs held true. Thus, in order for communication to occur, we need to share with our interlocutors roughly the same; we need to assume that they hold, like ourselves, a coherent belief system, and that that they "cut" the external reality as we do it, thereby producing similar meanings to ours. Without need to say, we also need to see consistently that our assumptions are not broken. It may so happen that, our interlocutor's linguistic scheme (meanings and beliefs) is altogether different from ours. In this case, we will not be able to communicate at all. Their linguistic scheme may still be true, but untranslatable (Rorty 1979: 301). It is still true, because truth in Davidsonian semantics is an intra-linguistic issue. Untranslatable in this context means 'incomprehensible to us'. Davidson puts this as:

> What matters is this: if all we know is what sentences a speaker holds true, and we cannot assume that his language is our own, then we cannot take even a first step towards interpretation without knowing or assuming a great deal about the speaker's beliefs. Since knowledge of beliefs comes only with the ability to interpret words, the only possibility at the start is to assume general agreement on beliefs . . . . Charity is forced on us; - whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters. If we can produce a theory that reconciles

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charity and the formal conditions for a theory, we have done all that could be done to ensure communication. Nothing more is possible, and nothing more is needed. (Davidson 1973: 18-19)

The view that I attempt to formulate above is called *the principle of charity*. It sets a necessary condition for communication and interpretation to be possible. Rorty says:

[This] holist line of argument says that we shall never be able to avoid the "hermeneutic circle" –the fact that we cannot understand the parts of a strange culture, practice, theory, language, or whatever, unless we know something about how the whole thing works, whereas we cannot get a grasp on how the whole works until we have some understanding of its parts. This notion of interpretation suggests that coming to understand is more like getting acquainted with a person than like following a demonstration. In both cases we play back and forth between guesses about how to characterize particular statements or other events, and guesses about the point of the whole situation, until gradually we feel at ease with what was hitherto strange. (Rorty 1979: 319)

The principle of charity also has special importance for the ethics and politics of Rorty's philosophy, because by cutting off the language's connection to an external reality as a unifying principle, the coherence principle brings about more variation and difference in language as compared to a correspondence principle. Then how would we account for the similarity of concepts required for understanding and living with our fellow humans? The answer is the principle of charity. This principle also lies at the heart of Rorty's political philosophy. He thinks, we already have enough in common that we do not need an external principle to force uniformity onto us (be it God, objectivity, transcendental ego, etc.)

So far, I have given a brief summary of Davidson's view of truth, meaning and interpretation; which is also endorsed by Rorty. In the following part, I will try to examine what valuable function irony renders as a rhetorical tool under this linguistic strategy.

4.2 Irony with respect to Coherence Theory (An Example)

Zizek! (2005) is a documentary movie exploring the eccentric personality and esoteric work of the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Zizek. Somewhere in the movie, Zizek says the following:

> The worst thing is to play this 'We are all humans' game that some intellectuals like to play. You project a certain intellectual persona... cold thinker, whatever... but then you signal, through small details, 'You know, but nonetheless, I'm basically like you. I like small pleasures of life. I'm human like you.' I'm not human. I'm a monster, I claim. It's not that I have a mask of a theoretician, and beneath, I'm a warm, human person. I like chocolate cake, I like this, I like that, which makes me human. I'd rather prefer myself as somebody who, not to offend others, pretends... plays that he's human.[2]

In the following, I will present an analysis of the above irony with respect to the linguistic principles mentioned in the foregoing discussion. I assume the ironic part of the above text is the sentence "I am not human. I'm a monster." . Actually, Zizek in this text is in part speaking in the name of other "cold thinkers" in an exaggerated manner. That is called parody and parody also involves irony in the sense that the speaker imitates someone else in an exaggerated manner, or there is a disparity between his manners and his identity. For a discussion of how parody uses irony as a rhetorical strategy, see Hutcheon 1991 (p. 52).

The dictionary definition of "monster" is "a dangerous, cruel, non-human creature of abnormal shape." First of all, Zizek's use of the term is metaphorical, so what he has in mind is actually human beings. Therefore let's concentrate on the "danger" and "cruelty" aspects of being a monster. In the following, I will use the term "linguistic system" to denote a "system of established truths and meanings."

When we hear a statement from one of our interlocutors, the most usual response is to take it true and insert it "as is" into our own linguistic system. The principle of charity is already at work here. If we do not think that the speaker is particularly insane or ill-disposed, we tend take what he says to be true so as to keep our linguistic system *tuned* to his. Of course, inserting another truth into a system has a potential cost: we should update our system, if necessary, so as to preserve its coherence. A philosopher's claim that he is dangerous and cruel is actually assertible, because we have no reason to say that a dangerous and cruel person would not produce sensible philosophical theories. Yet, there will still be an inferential violation by the assertion of this claim: that is, from his previous manners and style, we know *inductively* that Zizek is a person who does not express personal, non-philosophical matters just so in the course of a philosophical conversation.

One might next think that the speaker is not sane and uttering a false statement. This is again not very probable because we, as his readers, had inferred, again inductively, that Zizek is a person who is not insane either.

As soon as we rule out the literal meaning and conclude that the statement is not a fallacy either, we are in the domain of tropes; that is, figurative meanings. How to go from the stated meaning to the intended meaning is a complex process involving pragmatic considerations, however some distinctive and recurring features of the relation between the stated and intended meaning lets us classify tropes into sub-genres; such as metaphor, metonym, hyperbole, irony, etc. Without the concern to name the involved tropes for the time being, let's continue our interpretation.

What message does the speaker want to convey by uttering the sentence "I'm a monster?" Going a few lines back, we see that he is imitating some cold thinkers' manners and speeches. The thinkers Zizek targets "signal, through small details" that they are human like us since they like small pleasures of life, like eating a

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[2] *Zizek!* Documentary, Zeitgeist Films 2005, 19m

chocolate-cakes, etc. Then we can say that, he is continuing his parody when he is claiming he is a monster, but at this moment, the parody also becomes a confession on the part of the parodied. A confession is basically an assertion, but its meaning goes beyond the truth expressed by the assertion. It also involves the information that, what is said was for long time kept a secret, a fact which in most cases is as important as the said truth. The dependence of meaning on such informal factors as context, intent, speaker, etc. is studied by the branch of linguistics called *pragmatics.*

So far, we have concluded that Zizek points to a thinker who feels or knows that there is something monstrous in what he is doing, and he is trying to convey a message, either to himself or to others, contrary to what he feels or knows. Why a thinker would be uneasy with a certain aspect of his profession is a psychological and political discussion. Without going into a detailed discussion, my interpretation is that, in being a theoretician, there is a certain attitude of imposing truth onto others, justifying this imposition by appealing to something non-personal (objectivity, God, etc.), seeing oneself as the "watchman" or truth, a compulsion for finalization, and a claim to power even though this power may be violent to others. If violence is not inherent in theorizing, it is in the manners of some thinkers who look like claiming something more than knowledge (say, a social status, or power over others, etc.). I think we can safely say, buy even understating, that "Being a theoretician in the current cultural states of affairs involves some kind of violence," and continue our discussion by this assumption.

The logical structure of the part of theoretician's linguistic system, which is the target of this irony, is:

1. I feel or know that, what I do, as a theoretician, involves a kind of violence.
2. So I am a kind of a monster.
3. Yet, I like chocolate cakes
4. Monsters don't like chocolate cakes.
5. So I am not a monster.

What irony does here is to *expose a contradiction* in the belief system. The thinker is being untruthful either to himself or to his interlocutor. This case of irony does this by bringing to the fore, through interpretation, an unnoticed or deliberately hidden truth in the system: "the monstrous dimension of the thinker's professional practice." When this truth is made explicit, that is, inserted into the system, the system becomes incoherent as it also contains the contradicting belief that the thinker is not a monster because he likes chocolate cakes. Once this contradiction is exposed, the thinker may admit the contradiction and stop talking about chocolate cakes; or, his interlocutor may start to ignore the message of the chocolate cake talk when it is made; or they might take completely different courses of action. It is important to note that, whatever course of action is taken, they all serve to update the linguistic system so as to make it coherent again.

It is not a coincidence that almost all dictionary definitions of irony refer to one or another of these aspects: *disparity, incongruity, contradiction, negation.* I think many instances of irony have the effect of exposing a contradiction in the belief system of a person, a group of people, or even in discourses held to be true by everyone (objective discourses). Irony does this by making explicit what was hitherto implicit, by bringing to the fore an unconsciously held belief, or, by exposing a logical contradiction in the system yet unnoticed because of the complexity of the inferential relations leading to it, etc. Once a contradiction is made apparent by irony, some of the truths and meanings in the linguistic system of interest will have to be updated so as to keep the system coherent.

This kind of an irony is an inquiry into the consistence of a belief system. It is a quest to update the system (though not necessarily to expand it) when an inconsistency is found. It is a quest to deconstruct apparent truths. It is a strategy to let check the coherence of linguistic systems. This kind of a check is more valuable for a coherence view of truth than for a correspondence view. In a correspondence view, many of the truths in the system are already secured by their very connection to external reality. In a coherence view, however, the internal relations of the system are all one can count on. Since there is not an

outside "warrantor", there should be an internal mechanism to check for the coherence of system. Irony is one of these mechanisms. It is no coincidence that, Rorty, who clearly has coherence view of language, delegates irony for this task. Note also that, being a *mere inspector* of existing truths, irony is critical, that is, it never attempts to insert a new truth into the system. That would be the task of other rhetorical strategies.

CHAPTER 5

IRONY AND METAPHOR AS A METALANGUAGE

Chapter 3 presented a discussion on the relevance of irony to the ethics of Rorty's pragmatist philosophy. Chapter 4 examined the possible function of irony in and its special contribution to a model of meaning and truth Rorty and Davidson sides with. In this chapter, I will try to look into the subjective cognitive and non-cognitive experiences associated with irony along with another literary trope frequently used, *metaphor.* More specifically, I will first consider Davidson's account of metaphor which has entertained a good deal of interest. Then I will discuss irony in some of the respects Davidson discusses metaphor. Finally, I will attempt to place both tropes in a common model which views mind as a combination of irrational and rational forces. My discussion will involve references to Davidson's model of the mind as well as Rorty's account of metaphor and poetics in Heidegger.

A trope is a "word or expression used in a figurative sense"[3]. Although the term *figurative* in many contexts evokes *metaphor,* modern linguistics studies all figurative usages, including metaphor, under the category of trope. Irony (which works through an opposition), metaphor and simile (through resemblance), metonymy (through a part-whole relation), hyperbole (through exaggeration) all fall under this category. If we associate the term *literal* with qualifiers such as *ordinary, primary, definite, manifest, direct;* then all usages falling short of these associations can be said to be figurative, thus a *trope*. This is not to say that a

trope does not have a literal meaning, it certainly does; and even more, the literal meaning is essential to the working of the trope. So, a further criterion is required to characterize a trope, and that is hidden in its very definition, that is, *its use and context*. A trope, in general, is not perhaps as much characterized by its meaning as its use. Take an example: "The earth revolves around the sun." This sentence usually counts as a literal scientific statement in our times, whereas it could count as a metaphor (or, even a lie) in medieval times. The primacy of use in metaphor has been thoroughly emphasized by Davidson and Rorty.

Looking back to the history of philosophy, one can discern a tension on the use of tropes in philosophical discourses. The tension is due to two contending forces: on one side, the general conviction that philosophy should be plain and unambiguous, and on the other, the deliberate use of certain tropes by some representatives of the philosophical school. To name some, Plato in Socratic dialogues, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Rorty and much of other postmodern thinkers use, or promote use of metaphor and/or irony as a general rhetorical style. One reason that metaphor and irony have been two tropes that escaped the mold of *literality* in western thought is that by their very character, they bring to fore two of philosophy's most fundamental occupations: similarity (sameness) and opposition (negation). The other reason is philosophy's understandable urge to look beyond the *logos*, to find out what is out there that limits, conditions, evades the domain of words and definite meanings; i.e. whatever that transcends the "tidy house" of literal language, reason and knowledge. This search has usually resulted in some sort of a liaison with the realm of the arts or the sublime, i.e. something that is *felt* but cannot be expressed by the means of the existing language. Both irony and metaphor have been tools to test, investigate and push the limits of established meanings, because they lie on the very boundary between the linguistic/cognitive and the non-linguistic/non-cognitive, i.e., the boundary between logos and the arts. If some day, we happen to extend our view of knowledge so that arts, in general, are accepted as a

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[3] Webster's Third New International Dictionary, p. 2452, Massachusets: Merriam-Webster, 2002

legitimate source of knowledge, literature will probably be the first discipline to enter this fusion because of its liaison with both domains.

5.1 Metaphor as a Link to Images

Davidson's 1978 paper "What Metaphors Mean" provides a good discussion of existing views on metaphor, then presents the author's own theory which attracted a great deal of attention following its publication. This work is important for the purposes of this thesis for several reasons. First, it is a good exemplary discussion on one of the literary tropes, which have for long been thought to be outside the scope of philosophy. Some of Davidson's arguments in discussing metaphor may be inquired into for their relevance to other types of tropes as well (specifically irony). If such relevance may be argued for, then it will mean that more of literary forms, which were once taken to be irrelevant, may have to be relevant to philosophy. Second, Davidson's theory of metaphor is a radical turn-away from the then-existing common-sensical (yet philosophical) views on metaphor. His arguments have also been taken up by Rorty in support of his view of philosophy as being more like "literary criticism" and less like "epistemology."

Davidson objects in his article to the idea that "a metaphor has, in addition to its literal sense or meaning, another sense or meaning" which haunts many accounts of metaphor in some way or the other (Davidson 1978. 32). Proponents of this view talk about a "metaphorical meaning", or a "figurative meaning", or a "special cognitive content" of metaphor in addition to its literal meaning. This implied meaning can be brought to fore by a so-called *paraphrase* of the metaphor. According to this account, "Man is a wolf" may be restated as "Man is *like* a wolf because men and wolves share such and such common characteristics."

Davidson rebuts this view right at the outset of his paper by saying that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (Ibid.: 32). This claim, as striking is as it sounds, is not a denial on Davidson's side of the rhetorical power of metaphor (as it would otherwise render

all poetry and other successful accounts of metaphor pointless). What Davidson rather does is to *place* metaphor outside the realm of linguistic meaning. For Davidson, metaphor's real *effect* is non-cognitive and non-verbal. When one attempts to give the meaning of a metaphor, what he is actually doing is telling us something about the effect of that metaphor (Ibid.: 45). What qualifies *metaphor's* effect if it is not linguistic meaning then? Davidson does not provide a detailed answer to this question, yet he calls in some analogies:

> What I deny is that metaphor does its work by having a special meaning, a specific cognitive content. I do not think, as Richards does, that metaphor produces its result by having a meaning which results from the interaction of two ideas; it is wrong, in my view, to say, with Owen Barfield, that a metaphor 'says one thing and means another'; or with Black that a metaphor asserts or implies certain complex things by dint of a special meaning and thus accomplishes its job of yielding an 'insight.' A metaphor does its work through other intermediaries - to suppose it can be effective only by conveying a coded message is like thinking a joke or a dream makes some statement which a clever interpreter can restate in plain prose. Joke or dream or metaphor can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact - but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact. (Ibid. 46)

In his next analogy, Davidson has clearly in mind an *aesthetic experience:*

> If someone . . . mentions the beauty and deftness of a line in a Picasso etching, how many things are drawn to your attention? You might list a great many, but you could not finish since the idea of finishing would have no clear application. How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? None, an infinity, or one great unstatable fact? . . . Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture. (Ibid. 47)

Of course, Davidson arrives at this conclusion after carefully examining and arguing against existing accounts of metaphor. I will shortly include here some of his arguments along with my interpretations, which I find relevant to irony and other tropes as well.

One of the ideas is that in a metaphorical usage, words take on a new, extended meaning apart from their usual meaning. Take Davidson's example, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of waters." If we accept the extended meaning view, so that waters really do have faces, then "all sense of metaphor evaporates", Davidson argues, then "there is no difference between metaphor and the introduction of a new term into our vocabulary." So, we must keep our appeal to the original meaning of the words in place (Ibid. 34-35). What Davidson wants to argue here is that, what matters in the above metaphor is not only that, the surface of water can be *likened* to a face, but also that the surface of water *is not* a face. In a metaphor, the *difference* of the constituent terms is as much important as *their resemblance.* It is this tension between difference on one hand, and similarity on the other, that the metaphor takes its special effect from.

All antecedent accounts of metaphor had somewhat focused on the aspect of similarity in metaphor. It was first Davidson to emphasize the aspect of difference. He did this by constantly appealing to the literal meaning of the metaphor. ". . . most metaphorical sentences are patently false . . . Absurdity or contradiction in a metaphorical sentence guarantees we won't believe it and invites us, under proper circumstances, to take the sentence metaphorically" (Ibid.: 42). What Davidson has in mind is not a simple falsity, because for such sentences, we have a large unproblematic reservoir in language, apart from metaphor. Davidson's calling attention to what was so far ignored does not mean that he downplays what was pronounced. Rather, by playing together "literal falsity" and "implied truth" , he points, I think, to a third category: that of the *absurd.* Although the term "absurd" is found only at two places in his paper, I think it is a crucial aspect of his theory, because it supports Davidson's attempt to push the "metaphorical effect" outside the domain of linguistic meaning. Recall that, the category of "absurd" is usually employed by art forms; such as literature, humor, painting and even music. The absurd clearly has a dimension beyond an apparent incongruity: that, it appeals to senses or emotions. "What we call the element of novelty or surprise in a metaphor is a built-in aesthetic feature we can experience again and again, like the surprise in Haydn's Symphony no. 94, or a familiar deceptive cadence." (Ibid.: 38)

The inadequacy of the notion of "similarity" in explaining metaphor is further argued for in Davidson's discussion of simile in comparison to metaphor. A simile is basically like a metaphor with an additional "like" inserted somewhere in the expression. But why, if they both pointed out to a similarity, are there two different literary forms called *metaphor* and *simile?* What makes them different? Why, a poem woven with a lot of similes is usually considered a poor poem, while metaphor is the most frequently used and powerful poetic form?

In a simile, we lose access to *literal falsity,* Davidson argues, since "all similes are true and most metaphors are false" (Ibid. 41). ". . . if we make the literal meaning of the metaphor to be the literal meaning of a matching simile, we deny access to what we originally took to be the literal meaning of the metaphor, and . . . this meaning [is] essential to the working of the metaphor" (Ibid. 39). I agree with Davidson in that what matters in a metaphor is not only its *figurative* meaning (that two things are alike in such and such ways), but also its effect. Of course, the figurative meaning can also be seen as an effect, but Davidson refers here to a non-linguistic, sensual effect. Whereas a simile triggers in the listener a search for the ways in which two things are similar by *plainly asserting* that similarity, a metaphor starts its job by triggering an absurd effect, an effect which immediately ties to other feelings or emotions; linguistic as well as non-linguistic associations. In what ways this absurdity leads to further cognitive and non-cognitive mental phenomena is beyond the scope of this study, however one thing is certain that the absurdity itself is created as a result of the *double play of falsity and truth* in the metaphorical utterance. In a simile, this falsity factor is absent. In addition to what Davidson says, I would claim that, even in order to understand a simile, the listener must reproduce in itself the non-cognitive effect which the associated metaphor is supposed to produce This amounts to going beyond the ordinary meanings of words, a kind of access to a different mental state where the words have different effects, effects which were probably forgotten over time as the language evolved. The language apparently evolved to accommodate more difference, but the elementary forces remained intact, although hidden. Phenomenology can be seen as another attempt to return to those primal mental

states. Husserl attempted to invoke more basic mental state by suspending all our knowledge and focusing on the mere content of consciousness, in order to find at the root the basic structure of our experience that is supposed to found our scientific knowledge today. Heidegger, on the other hand, attempted with his phenomenology to restore and expose the force of some elementary words in the language, but he did this without any concern to put science or knowledge on a firm basis. I will come to Rorty's reading of Heidegger with respect to his aesthetic relevance later in this chapter.

An interpretation of the "water-face" metaphor (although not exhaustive of the metaphor's effect) will make my point clear. The initial absurdity felt upon the implication that "waters have face" immediately ties to other non-cognitive and cognitive mental states. When the metaphoric effect settles, i.e. when the initial non-cognitive response fades so that one is able to say something *in language* about the metaphor, one could possibly say that both the surface of waters and the face of a person have in common to be a *plane* standing over against us, calling for our *gaze*; and they are both *endless,* one in space, the other with respect to the person's life, her possibilities, etc. This metaphoric effect was made possible by the recognition of some elementary words enabling the resemblance, namely, plane-hood, gaze and end. In this interpretation, two of the three terms turns out to be mathematical as well, but it did not have to be so. Going back to those elementary words, which are at work but hidden in the constituent terms of the metaphor, was made possible by the listener's imagination, a response which is non-linguistic.

I would like to further emphasize the significance of the aspect of absurdity/falsity in metaphor with other discussions. One is the live/dead metaphor distinction. A metaphor is said to be dead when its association is assimilated into the language. The famous example is "the mouth of a bottle." When this expression acquires ordinary usage, as it is now, the mouth of a bottle will have no metaphorical effect. That is, it will not call for an absurd effect as well as a non-cognitive response. The metaphorical effect ceases because, in the current usage, there is no more the element of "falsity", the bottles literally have mouths.

> What does matter is that when "mouth" applied only metaphorically to bottles, the application made the hearer notice a likeness between animal and bottle openings. . . Once one has the present use of the word, with literal application to bottles, there is nothing left to notice. There is no similarity to seek because it consists simply in being referred to by the same word." (Ibid. 37)

Davidson also points here to a shift in the effect as a metaphor dies: when it is live, the effect is in the active imagination, when it is dead, the effect becomes verbal or passive imagination. What triggers active imagination in the former case is the fact that we cannot make sense of the expression's apparent absurdity by staying at a passive or verbal level.

Another interesting question, though difficult to answer, is "what it is that makes a good or bad metaphor?" Although it is impossible to give a general rule for a good metaphor, we can nevertheless provide one for a bad metaphor: one in which the similarity is all too obvious, or one in which it is all too obscure. The rhetorical weakness of both cases can be explained by the "tension view" of metaphor that I presented above. In the former case, the similarity is so much straightforward that the literal falsity of the metaphor is lost. In the latter case, the terms are so much different that their alleged resemblance is hard to discern. In both cases, we lose one component (either resemblance or difference) that makes up the tension between the constituent terms. When tension is lost, so is the non-cognitive effect. I would say that a necessary, but not sufficient, condition to make a good metaphor is to keep the tension between similarity and difference balanced.

Having given Davidson's and my own arguments regarding metaphor, I will now move to an examination of irony in the same respects as above. Although irony and metaphor are quite different rhetorical tools, I think, they share some common aspects and these aspects explain why Rorty chose them in service of his metaphilosophical project: Irony, to question present language and metaphor, to search for new vocabularies.

5.2 Irony as Confrontation of Opposites

Recall from Chapter 2 that irony can be loosely defined as either a *contrast*, an *incongruity* or a *disparity* between the apparent and intended meaning (verbal irony), between the expression and awareness (dramatic irony), or between the expectation and result (situational irony). Whatever two things the disparity is between, there is one thing common to all three types: the absurdity or incongruence effect produced in the addressee of the irony. I would claim, as in the case of metaphor, this absurdity is essential to the working of irony. Metaphor produces its absurd effect by implying the sameness of what were supposed to be different, whereas irony creates its absurd effect by implying an *occasional identity* between what were supposed to be opposites. Whereas metaphor plays similarity against difference, irony plays identity against opposition. This is the reason why irony is almost always critical while a metaphor is rarely (or, hardly ever). Associated with a conceptual opposition, there is usually a subject position that claims power by the prevailing culture's promotion of one of the opposites (e.g. police vs. thief). So calling into question a conceptual opposition amounts to criticizing a subjective position or subjects who affiliate themselves with that position.

Another difference between a metaphor and an irony is in the way they are paraphrased. A paraphrase of a metaphor involves the description of the aspects in which two things are similar. A paraphrase of an irony, on the other hand, involves a *logical exposition* of the contradiction called into question, in one way or the other.

I think that, as in the case of metaphor, the effect of irony cannot be exhaustively verbalized in most cases. Irony and metaphor both operate through an invocation of a non-cognitive mental response. This non-cognitive response is triggered when an absurdity in the system of established and stable meanings (ordinary language) is exposed. It is likely that this initial non-cognitive response binds to further non-

cognitive mental states and actions on the subject's side. Once this mental reaction is complete, one can go back and attempt to rephrase the subjective experience verbally, but his rephrase will not be a exhaustive expression of what has been experience; there will usually be a leftover that resists verbalization.

One can appreciate this by comparing the effect of an irony with that of a criticism. If a metaphor is similar to a simile with respect to its use, an irony is similar to a criticism. When a critical analysis of a situation is performed by presenting observations and making inferences built upon those observations as well as other suppositions, what is lost is the *absurd effect,* i.e. the *feeling* of incongruity caused by the metaphor and the associated non-cognitive chain reaction. A logical analysis may at times be dull and boring, less appealing to general audience, and less effective when compared to exposing the same contradiction ironically. Kierkegaard, who thought that ethical and religious truths must be communicated *indirectly* , was aware of the importance of this subjective element in communicating certain matters. Kierkegaard wrote narratives as well as philosophical texts and saw irony as the primary attitude characterizing what he calls the "ethical sphere", one of Kierkegaard's three "spheres on the way of life." According to Evans, a Kierkegaardian scholar:

> [For Kierkegaard,] the individual who wishes to communicate ethical and religious truth must then see that the task involves not just the communication of information. . . What is communicated is an art, not a science, and the process of communication must itself be seen as an art. (Evans 2001: 312)

Although Kierkegaard's main concern is the proper communication of ethical and religious truths, his emphasis on irony in the ethical sphere together with his suggestion of literary form in philosophy is indicative of his view that, the subjective, non-verbal element at work in making and interpreting irony is important. This non-verbal element is essential to all forms of art and its characterization is not always easy. In the case of metaphor, this non-verbal domain is clearly the domain of mental images; in the case of music, it is mental representations of sounds; in painting, it is again images as well as more abstract

shapes. But, naming the domain alone does not say too much, because we cannot go further and adequately verbalize the possible events, complex formations and relations in the said domain, i.e. the "grammar" of that domain. In the case of irony and metaphor, the situation is all the more complex because the event which triggers the metaphoric or ironic experience does not even originate from the empirical world; but rather from the domain of language and logic, in the form of an exposition of a rupture in logic or an absurdity. The acknowledgement of the exposed contradiction may trigger in the subject a whole range of other non-verbal responses (including emotions and feelings). Were it not the case, then one would have difficulty in explaining the comic effect (among other possible emotional effects) produced by irony, when it is used in a humoristic context.

Take the following case of irony. A doctor says to his patient who was found fainted on his wheel chair:

> Doctor: When a person faints, it's because they're not getting enough blood to their brain. The act of falling corrects the problem. You faint again strapped into that power chair where you can't fall... You might not wake up.
> Patient: Killed by an assistive device. At least my death would be ironic.[4]

What is ironic here is idea of "being killed by a life-aid device." The exposition of the opposites (life-death), "caught" in an occasion in which they do not look so much like opposites was alone sufficient to create the ironic effect. The doctor's explanation may be seen as a partial logical explanation of the given irony: There is something in the state of being dead (fainting and falling) that supports life (ease of supplying oxygen to the brain). There is something in the state of being alive (standing upright) that calls death (the risk of failing to supply oxygen to the brain because of the bodily state of being upright). This analysis can be carried further to expose more of the logical structure behind this irony and the defect therein, but no matter how far it is carried, there will always remain something absent in the analysis: that is, the emotional response of the subject in the face of irony. This emotional response may range from amusement to discomfort, from

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[4] House MD, TV Series HBO, Season 4, Episode 3

anger to fear; depending on the subject's relation with the conceptual opposition called into question by the very irony.

To put it very generally, metaphor and irony both have the effect of *restructuring language*, by incrementally changing our system of beliefs and meanings. They have the power to rearrange meanings, to introduce new uses, to overthrow oppositions, to introduce new ones, etc.. But every use of irony and metaphor is an intervention to the whole of the language. If language is a network of differences, any change made in the differential structure effects every other element in the structure, however small. When, as an effect of a successful irony, a supposed opposition is being deconstructed, it might be the case that other oppositions are being constructed . When, as an effect of a successful metaphor, a word gains affinity with some other words previously foreign to itself, it may be losing relevance with others previously considered to be relevant. This "double effect" is due to the organic, holistic structure of the language.

But the "structure metaphor", although useful, is inadequate in understanding the effect of those tropes. Part of their rhetorical power comes from their ability to touch the "non-cognitive", i.e. whatever lies beyond the structure, whatever that is absent, yet at work, in the structure. Use of such rhetorical devices is "therapeutic", as Rorty calls it, and he suggests for philosophy (as well as literature) a therapeutic role in the culture. To borrow a metaphor from psychoanalysis; if language is subject's consciousness, then the poet or the novelist is the analyst who aims to restore and re-define the subject's relation to his unconscious (non-verbal).

In the next section, I will further examine the transformative aspect of irony and metaphor with references to Rorty and Heidegger.

5.3 Irony and Metaphor as Links to the Irrational

In the previous sections, I discussed the non-cognitive element at work in the

perception of metaphor and irony. I also argued that this element is not merely a side-effect, but is essential to an adequate theory that sets out to explain the known practical aspects of these tropes. I used in turns terms such as *non-verbal, aesthetic* to refer to this non-cognitive mental experience in question and terms such as *absurdity, incongruence* and *inconsistency* to qualify the verbal triggers (i.e. acts of metaphor or irony) of such experiences.

This all amounts to postulating a mental domain exterior to the domain of words, reason and the linguistic meaning. Such a domain has for long been acknowledged as the host of aesthetic experiences. It is with the philosophical study of artistic as well as linguistic forms such as metaphor and irony that an inquiry into the relation with the linguistic and non-linguistic started to be pursued. This relation can obviously not be modeled on the concepts of rational mind alone and will necessarily involve some kind of an irrational element; since otherwise we would not be talking about two different domains of mental experience. The term *rational* denotes here whatever that pertains to *definite meanings, inferential relations, reasons, purposes* and *intentions.*

In his 1992 essay "Paradoxes of Irrationality", Davidson sets out to answer a different question but comes up with a model of the human mind, inspired by Freud's division of human psyche into substructures, which Rorty thinks has direct implications to a theory of aesthetic, non-verbal experience. Rorty is, of course, interested in the critical and transformative aspect of such an experience. In the following I will attempt to examine the relation of the rational to the irrational in the light of the division of the mind and involved interactions as suggested by Davidson's theory. Then I will discuss the relevance of his conclusions to Rorty's view of the relation between the rational and the aesthetic.

Davidson's aim was to give a theory that explains irrational behavior, which is *known* to exist in practice, but inexplicable under the view of the subject as being rational. Examples of such behavior are "wishful thinking, acting contrary to one's own best judgment, self-deception, believing something that one holds to be discredited by the weight of the evidence" (Davidson 2004: 170). Another

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example which is of special significance, as it concerns self-criticism is "our desire to change our habitual acts." This disposition is paradoxical since, if we thought an action was wrong, we would not be doing it; if we thought it was right, we would not want to change it. This cannot be explained with a monolithic model of mind in which an "autonomous reason" encompasses all that happens in the mind. Therefore, Davidson argues, we have to stipulate a parted model of the mind and he goes on to explain his model, with deliberate references to the features of Freud's psychoanalytic theory:

> The first feature [is] that the mind is to be regarded as having two or more semi-autonomous structures. This feature we found to be necessary to account for mental causes that are not reasons for the mental states they cause. Only by partitioning the mind does it seem possible to explain how a thought or impulse can cause another to which it bears no rational relation.

> The second feature assigned a particular kind of structure to one or more subdivisions of the mind: a structure similar to that needed to explain ordinary actions. This calls for a constellation of beliefs, purposes, and affects of the sort that, through the application of the Plato Principle, allow us to characterize certain events as having a goal or intention.
> . . .
> The third feature on which we remarked was that certain mental events take on the character of mere causes relative to some other mental events in the same mind. (Davidson 2004: 184-185)

Let me restate Davidson's model: First, the mind is made up of two or more semi-independent parts; second, at least one of those parts is rational *within itself,* that is, it can be adequately modeled on concepts such as beliefs, purposes, intentions, etc; and finally, the relations among parts are cause-effect relations, reason (purpose) explanations do not apply at the transition from one part to another. The boundary between parts is defined by the "breakdown of reason relations" (Ibid.). Actually, that is the whole point of the model, because Davidson wants to come up with a theory that explains irrational behavior. "Mental causes which are not reasons" (Rorty 1991a: 13) help to explain such behavior, because a subject who

decides to act in a certain way by rational considerations within a mental subdivision, may act to the contrary as a result of a causal stimulus coming from another subdivision, which may in itself be rational or irrational.

The remarkable purpose-cause distinction in Davidson's model naturally evokes Kant's philosophy of nature. Kant introduced against the causal nature a purposive nature - in which cause-effect relations do not hold - thereby opening a realm for human freedom. Davidson seems to be doing for the human subject the reverse of what Kant did for the nature: imposing causality over the rational, purposive subject; thereby restricting the applicability of reason explanations. Although this at first seems to be a compromise to human freedom, Davidson thinks, only such a mental division could explain subjective self-criticism and self-improvement. Note that Davidson's model does not eliminate the rational mental element, rather restricts it. He ends his essay by saying that "a theory that could not explain irrationality would be one that also could not explain our salutary efforts, and occasional successes, at self-criticism and self-improvement" (Davidson 2004: 187).

Rorty takes on from this point and emphasizes the significance of the irrational element in Davidson's model. He argues that this element is important not only for individual self-criticism but also for self-criticism of cultures:

> The 'irrational' intrusions of beliefs which 'make no sense' (i.e., cannot be justified by exhibiting their coherence with the rest of what we believe) are just those events which intellectual historians look back upon as 'conceptual revolutions'. Or, more precisely, they are the events which spark conceptual revolutions. (Rorty 1991a: 14)

Note that the above quotation appears in Rorty's essay titled "Philosophy as Science, as Metaphor and as Politics", in which he discusses metaphor as a source of belief and as a tool to search for unusual vocabularies. I would like to examine a little further Davidson's concept of irrational with respect to metaphor and irony, because I think that Davidson's theory of mind reconciles rational and irrational elements in a single theory of mind which is also elucidative with

respect to the cognitive and non-cognitive elements said to be at work in the acts of these tropes.

Let's go back to Davidson's model once more. He assigns causality not to any one mental subdivision but to the interactions between subdivisions. He assigns purposiveness, on the other hand, to *at least* one of the subdivisions. The others may be purposive or non-purposive. I interpret his model, on an account of aesthetic experience, such that the purposive, intentional subdivision corresponds to the rational, cognitive mind; while the other possible subdivisions correspond to non-cognitive mental states and experiences, including that of the aesthetic. Whether these other sub-domains are structural (have an internal grammar) or chaotic does not matter so much as far as my discussion is concerned. What is more important is that, the transition from one domain to the other is *causal* so that the overall mental operation is not purely rational. There are events in the cognitive subdivision that causes events in the non-cognitive ones, and there are events in the non-cognitive subdivisions that cause back cognitive states in the rational mind. On this account, metaphor and irony start their job in the cognitive domain, but by only firing an *absurdity* which immediately causes further events and states in the non-cognitive domain, which are not "propositional in character" (Davidson 1978: 46). The chain of events and states in the non-verbal domain links back to the rational domain, again through causation, and lead to further states there. Although it is always possible to verbalize and analyze the beginning and end states in the rational part, one cannot find an adequate verbal expression of the overall process that goes on in the mind. In his 1991 paper "Unfamiliar Noises: Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor", Rorty comments, with respect to metaphor, on Davidson's view of mind as a collection of events, causes and subdivisions:

> . . . by putting metaphor outside the pale of semantics, insisting that a metaphorical sentence has no meaning other than its literal one, Davidson lets us see metaphors on the model of unfamiliar events in the natural world – causes of changing beliefs and desires – rather than on the model of *representations* of unfamiliar worlds . . . He thereby makes it possible to see [other] metaphors as causes of our ability to do lots

of other things . . . without having to interpret these latter abilities as functions of increased *cognitive* ability. Not the least of the advantages of Davidson's view . . . is that it gives us a better account of the role played in our lives by metaphorical expressions which are not sentences. (Rorty 1991b: 163)

I think, a similar statement goes for the irony: As an entity whose effect cannot be fully verbalized, we can as well see metaphor "on the model of unfamiliar events in the natural world – causes of changing beliefs and desires." Recall that irony is not always verbal (situational irony). There are situations, without words, "out there in the world" that calls for irony and these situations fit perfectly into the *event* metaphor. If language is a system with a semantic and logical structure, then metaphor and irony can be seen as overlay events intervening with the internal structure of language. The target of metaphor is the semantic structure, i.e. the way the language "partitions reality (words)", while the target of irony is the logical structure, the propositions and their internal inferential relations built thereupon. Recalling the inter-dependence of truth and meaning from Davidson's theory presented in Chapter 4, we can say that both irony and metaphor are interventions to the whole of the language, which means, a change of meaning is coupled with a change of beliefs (propositions held to be true), and vice versa. This view, if it is right, adds metaphor and irony (and possibly other literary forms) as a third source of beliefs; along with conventional ones; perception and inference (Rorty 1991a: 11). They are basically uses of language which transform language, the distribution of meanings and beliefs within language, an ability which Rorty takes essential to the self-creation of the individual and liberal society.

It is at this point helpful to advert to Rorty's comment on Heidegger with respect to metaphor and Heidegger's "poetic answer to the question of our relation to the [philosophical] tradition" (Ibid.: 15). As is well known, Heidegger plays with words, etymologies in attempts to recover *words behind words*, to access more elementary words, *root moments,* a moment when our relation to the world was less mediated by all the weight of present language. Rorty identifies "what finds no echo in the present with the sort of metaphor which is *prima facie* a pointless

falsehood, but which nevertheless turns out to be what Heidegger calls 'a word of Being,' one in which 'the call of Being' is heard" (Ibid.). Thus, Rorty thinks, Heidegger sets as the task of philosophy to return to those elementary words, to what we might call a *metaphoric moment* in which the "call of Being" is heard. "On [Heidegger's] account," writes Rorty:

> the aim of philosophical thought is to free us from the language we presently use by reminding us that this language is not that of `human reason' but is the creation of the thinkers of our historical past. . . To remind us of these thinkers, and to permit us to feel the force of their metaphors in the days before these had been leveled down into literal truths, before these novel uses of words were changed into familiar meanings of words, is the only aim which philosophy can have at the present time. . . Our relation to the tradition must be a rehearing of what can no longer be heard ["Stimme des Seins"], rather than a speaking of what has not yet been spoken. (Ibid.: 15-16)

Note Heidegger's constant occupation with physical metaphors such as *force and sound.* I think, they correspond to the irrational element in Davidson model. Recall once again that Davidson defined irrationality *only* with regard to intra-mental causality and the "breakdown of reason relations" on the boundaries of mental subdivisions. Both Heidegger and Davidson seem to be pointing to a rational, conscious sub-domain (language) which is under the effect of forces, sounds and other causes emanating from other sub-domains. What Heidegger says, in addition to Davidson, is that these sounds are "no longer heard", forces "no longer felt" in the ordinary language. I think this amounts to positing an unconscious mental subdivision, but its discussion is beyond the scope of this study. What is more relevant is that Heidegger advocates, for reasons specific to his philosophical project, a return to those mental states in which the "sound of Being" is heard and "elementary forces" felt *again.* This, I think, corresponds to a historical moment when reason was newly being "invented" and the language was newly being "born" under the forces of non-verbal. Good metaphors are attempts to return to those primal moments, by the force of their very *sounds,* for Heidegger, and the force of the *images* they invoke, for Davidson; if one reads Davidson with Heidegger.

Language was formed through acknowledgment of similarities and differences (categorization) and setting up of oppositions. If categories (concepts) are essential to meaning, oppositions are essential to logic and reasoning. I will contend that, if the effect metaphor is to return to a non-verbal moment in which the *differences* were not yet as definite, the effect irony is to return to the same or a similar non-verbal moment in which the *oppositions* were not as definite. By calling into question a purportedly sound opposition hosted by the present language, irony makes us return to a primal, more "vulnerable" moment in the face of Being and forces of nature, as then, we did not have the determinations and tools of rational language to keep us "secure" as now.

As a final word in this chapter, irony and metaphor both "target the basic setup" of language. Metaphor concerns the semantic structure while irony concerns the inferential, logical structure. If by their very effect, even occasional and small, they are successful in transforming meanings and redefining oppositions, it would only point out to the historical contingency of our language.

5.4 A Broader Conception of Cognition

In the foregoing discussions, I frequently used the terms such as "non-verbal" or "non-cognitive" to qualify mental responses that fall outside the well-defined linguistic and rational activity. Such responses, I argued, are produced in response to irony and metaphor. The list, I think, is not limited to irony and metaphor, and may be extended to include other literary tropes, other artistic forms and other natural impulses; the criterion being the lack of verbal equivalent that adequately characterizes the lived mental experience. Recall that, Kant identified such experience with the "beautiful" or "sublime", for which there exists no determinate mental concept.

Moran, at the end of his 1997 essay "Metaphor", resorts to an extended model of cognition and communication borrowed from Wilson and Sperber, in an attempt to reconcile the cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of metaphor. The

extended model "ostensive-inferential communication" considers "cognition and communication outside the context of strictly linguistic activity." It is called "inferential" in the sense that "a communicator provides evidence of her intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided", rather than the classical view that a communicator codes his message into a signal which is decoded by the audience using the exact replica of the sender's code (Sperber 2002: 249). It is called "ostensive" to emphasize that aspect of the communicative behavior "which makes manifest an intention to make something manifest" (Moran 1997: 265). According to this model, the only thing that is communicated with full determination and unproblematically is the *intention to communicate,* that is, the ostension. The rest is open to interpretation and the meaning reproduced on the receiver's side is based on the whole host cognitive and non-cognitive responses triggered by the evidence sent. Moran borrows a case from Wilson and Sperber that exemplifies such a communicative act:

> Two people are newly arrived at the seaside, and one of them opens the window of their room and inhales appreciatively and 'ostensively', i.e., in a manner addressed to the other person. This person thus has his attention drawn to an indefinite host of impressions of the air, the sea, memories of previous holidays, etc... "[Although] he is reasonably safe in assuming that she must have intended him to notice at least some of them, he is unlikely to be able to pin her intentions down any further. Is there any reason to assume that her intentions were more specific? Is there a plausible answer, in the form of an explicit linguistic paraphrase, to the question, what does she mean? Could she have achieved the same communicative effect by speaking? [ref. to Wilson and Sperber]" (Moran 1997: 265-266).

Note that Wilson and Sperber point out by this example to a communicative content that cannot be exhaustively verbalized, neither on the sender's nor the hearer's side. Such a content is "to a significant degree indeterminate, resistant to paraphrase, and open to elaborative interpretation of the hearer" (Ibid.: 266). The message of the communicative act, so to say, *is itself.* Moran models metaphor as such an act of communication. Most cases of irony, I think, can be seen on the same model, considering its resistance to a full paraphrase, its non-cognitive

effect, the logical indeterminacy it invokes and by its "twist of the rational" in simultaneous exposition of the opposites.

This view of communication can also be seen as a view of cognition because it accounts for non-verbal mental states on both sides of the message. All mental states that we are *aware of* but cannot adequately verbalize (mental images, emotions, experience of beauty and sublime, etc.) fall under this definition of cognition. Although this view of cognition offers a more holistic account of the mind, any theory that attempts to explain such extra-verbal mental activity will have to consider and involve more than what is so far thought to be "normal linguistic activity." More specifically, such an attempt may have to explain the irrational, causal relations among the subdivisions of the mind (according to Davidson's model); or, it may have to give an account of the "forces and sounds" of Heidegger which are forgotten in the operation of ordinary language. This model extends the limits of cognition to include arts and, for Rorty, this means reconsideration of "what is already present in culture" but disregarded as a source of knowledge and somewhat excluded from such activities as philosophy, science and politics.

Rorty's whole project can be seen as a suggestion to lift the strict distinction between the different paradigms of cognition, discourse and communication. Rorty sees such clear-cut distinctions as a threat to liberal society, as they impose cultural rules that are held to be final about what can and cannot be said in a given context. The role he foresees for philosophy in such a model is a cultural criticism rather than being a judge that sets the conditions of possibility of objective knowledge.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study focused on various aspects of irony as a general rhetorical style by establishing connections with the philosophy of Richard Rorty. Actually irony enjoys such a deep penetration into the modern and postmodern culture through various art forms, criticism, humor and daily conversation that it is impossible to enumerate and study all of its uses and applications in such a limited space. I further believe that irony characterizes a certain individual emotional response to the current states of affairs in culture rather than being a mere discursive tool, making it difficult to come up with a theory that comprehensively covers all of its aspects. This thesis attempted to frame a specific sense of irony, reveal the ethical stance it represents and study it as a critical tool as well as an aesthetic matter.

The specific sense I mentioned above is the liberal irony which stands for a critical individual outlook according to which the subject is aware of the contingency of the current cultural states of affairs, including his language and knowledge. He is also aware of the strengths and problems of the current cultural setting, knows that he has the option to be critical of it and to describe another world through another language. Yet although he knows that his description will be only one among all past and possible future redescriptions, he knows he still has the right to find his redescription better, or more useful, or more beautiful than the other ones. But he does not think that his redescription will be final and closer to truth than the others. Such an individual is the Rortian aesthetic self-creator who is unpretentious, yet critical, enthusiastic and perseverant. Such an individual

uses irony not to mean opposite of what he says but to raise a question or expose a hidden contradiction regarding the subject matter of his irony. It is this sense of critical irony that I refer to throughout this thesis.

This attitude amounts to an acceptance of the primacy of the social and communication as an ethical stance and a positive reception of the irrational in all of its cultural manifestations. It aims to keep the conversation going, encourages as much freedom as possible in the individual domain and promotes liberal cultural forms such as literature and art as means to realize individual self-creation and redescription.

By adopting a coherence view of truth and meaning, Davidson and Rorty dispenses with the notion of external reality to set and secure the concepts and truths in the language. Under such view, there are many possible true formal semantic systems each with its peculiar way of "cutting up the reality." There is no single privileged true representation of the world. Just as experimentation is a means to test the truth of a system under a correspondence view of truth, so are intra-linguistic testing mechanisms under a coherence view. Irony is one of those mechanisms which usually plays on the logic of the language and helps to transform, however small, the logic of the semantic structure of the language. Here we take language to denote broadly the public language as well as the languages of linguistic communities.

That irony lies on the growing edge of language can also be seen from the linguistic and cultural competence required in making and understanding verbal irony. Note that, an otherwise successful irony may sound as a simple falsity or a pointlessly absurd statement to an incompetent hearer (e.g. a new language learner). Thus a successful interpretation of irony requires on the hearer's and speaker's side competence of the language, its grammar, its vocabulary as well as the cultural environment which harbors the language. This competence condition marks a boundary with respect to the possibilities offered by the existing linguistic structure. Only when those possibilities are exhausted, an expansion or transformation of the structure is timely and meaningful.

One of the common charges against verbal irony is that it is loaded on the performer's side with a sense of superiority or boastfulness. Although it is true that there are cases of irony which gives good reasons to this charge, I think such a conception of irony is too narrow and far from explaining many cases. Boastfulness is ruled out in liberal irony by the acceptance of the contingency of one's language. I admit that there is a specific sense of superiority that usually accompanies verbal irony, however I think, what is taken to be as ironist's superiority in many cases is actually a competence on the present language and the challenge to change it, so the superiority may as well be directed to the structure that make up the subjects rather than the subjects themselves. Even when it is directed against subjects, it is not so much problematic I think, because irony first and foremost is a critical tool. However the real fact that makes irony ethically acceptable is that *irony is a fair game.* There are always chances that the ironist becomes the victim of his own irony. What if the alleged victim is feigning ignorance? The arrow of irony is directed back to ironist. What if the ironist is feigning being ironical? Then the direction of irony is reversed again. What if, on Nehamas' account, it is true that Socrates does not know what virtue is and the reader identifies with Socrates in mocking the interlocutor? Nehamas sees this as the double irony in early Socratic dialogues. Just as the interlocutor identifies with his false knowledge of virtue and becomes the victim of Socrates' irony, so may the reader may identify with Socrates (in thinking to know what virtue is and looking down on the interlocutor) and become the victim of Plato's irony directed at the reader. "Ironists are vulnerable to their own tactics because their assumption that they are superior to their victims proves to be their fatal weakness," concludes Nehamas (Nehamas 1998: 43-49). This aspect of fairness, I think, is what makes irony ethically less problematic.

Among the different aspects of irony that have been studied in this thesis, I think the most important is the one that places irony on the model of an event, force or cause, which appeals to the *irrational* as well as the rational mind. Irony's criticality or its calling upon a logical analysis are features that are not specific to irony and may also be found in other forms of literal language. What gives irony

its special power is the fact that it has an aesthetic appeal, that its effect cannot exhaustively be met by a determinate mental concept or a logical analysis. I tend to see all tropes, including irony and metaphor, on the model of linguistic events (in analogy with natural events). Just as natural events happen in the physical structure of nature that is governed by natural laws, tropes happen on the linguistic structure which is governed by grammar and logic. I analogize such linguistic events with the words of another language, a language that hosts as its *words* tensions, resolutions, absurdities, absences, repetitions, silences, etc. which all appeal to the irrational mind. It is like an overlay language that works on the ordinary language, just as the ordinary language works on the nature. The words of this language are vast as there are so many verbal combinations in the ordinary language that sets the tension at work. Whether this language has its own grammar, and if it has one, whether there is anything that evades this grammar (just as this language evades ordinary language) is the subject of further aesthetic study. I can argue only so much here that, if this language has its own structure, there will be something evading this structure because this language will not be able to specify its grammar by using its own grammar. It is the acknowledgement of this incompleteness that made many recent philosophers, like Rorty, focus on the contingency, subjectivity and hermeneutic aspects of language.

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