


On the Achievements and Limits of Rorty's Understanding of Solidarity

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This paper deals with Richard Rorty's notion of solidarity and its limits. I contend that although Rorty makes an earnest attempt to expand on what is to be understood from being part of a "we-group," he still perceives solidarity as a phenomenon confined principally within national borders. After presenting the theoretical shortcomings of Rorty's idea of "national pride" in the aforementioned context, I critically investigate the possibility of a broader sense of solidarity without disregarding Rorty's mostly cogent criticism of traditional philosophy.

Keywords: contingency; national pride; solidarity; traditional philosophy; we-group

1. Introduction

An appreciation and rereading of the American pragmatists like Richard Rorty is obviously helpful, if not outright necessary, in grasping and evaluating the remarkable "mentality change" witnessed in contemporary philosophy as well as the socio-political milieu of today's world. In addition to criticizing some rooted ideas in the history of philosophy, Rorty presents another way of interpreting core notions like truth, self, and language by taking strength from his precursors such as Nietzsche, Quine, Sellars, Wittgenstein, Davidson, and Kuhn. Instead of relying on philosophical orthodoxy and the unchangeable, stable, and universal definitions of its central concepts, Rorty follows a strikingly different path, drawing inspiration from a group of mavericks as exemplified above. Thus, many philosophical notions and theses viewed as foundations of epistemology, morality, and politics by the overwhelming majority of thinkers of the past are toppled from their thrones in Rorty's philosophy. More precisely, Rorty can reasonably be characterized as one of those philosophers who question the tyranny of the metaphysical tenet that

there exist universal and necessary grounds underlying perennial philosophical controversies. What is more, and in the same critical vein, Rorty's critique vis-à-vis traditional philosophy's dependence on universality also shapes his political and moral vision.

In this paper, I will dwell on and further Rorty's notion of "solidarity" which has a crucial place in grasping and assessing his political and social philosophy. Moreover, the analysis of solidarity will also amount to the exposition of Rorty's criticism against the ideas like moral responsibility towards others due to shared universal values. However, a more important reason for bringing Rorty's solidarity into question is to discuss the limits of his understanding of this notion and to ask about the possibility of a more inclusive definition for it.

I will start with one of the pivotal terms in Rorty's philosophy, "contingency," in order to be able to discuss the meaning of solidarity in more detail. The idea of contingency is crucial to understand why Rorty rejects the idea of humanity as a universal ground for morality. Secondly, I will continue with Rorty's notion of solidarity in its relation to contingency which is proposed as against the idea of universal humanity. I will also expose his distinction between "the desire for solidarity" and "the desire for objectivity." Next, I will show that when Rorty chooses "the desire for solidarity," he implicitly limits the scope of "solidarity" by maintaining that having moral obligations to a fellow human being is chiefly related to sharing something in common, i.e. being a member of a nation. Finally, rather than limiting "solidarity" mainly to the concept of national attachment, I will suggest that, when Rorty offers an account of solidarity, it would have been much more fruitful had he placed the discursive emphasis on *sympathy for pain and humiliation* rather than on the emotion of national pride. Accordingly, I will propose to extend the scope of solidarity by holding on to Rorty's own distinction between "us" and "them" with respect to feeling sympathy for the pain of others. Hence, I will try to defend a *broader* sense of solidarity without falling back to the obsolete position of grounding this notion in terms of some universal humanity.

2. Contingency: Embracement of the Groundlessness

In his controversial book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*,¹ Rorty discusses what he means by contingency and how it represents, in his terminology, a counter-attack on the idea of a truth-to-be-discovered. In *CIS*, Rorty first discusses the distinction between the idea of making the truth and the idea of discovering the truth (Rorty

¹ Hereafter *CIS*.

1989, 3). According to this distinction, there are still some philosophers who stick to the remains of the Enlightenment idea that science can discover the ultimate truth of the world, and philosophy must take side with this view. For such philosophers, there is a higher truth that organizes and bestows significance on the lower, more mundane truths of our world in a manner rather independent of human activities. There has been, however, a different kind of approach among many philosophers, at least since Nietzsche, which yields *inter alia* the idea that truth is made rather than found. One notable corollary of this new approach, from Rorty's perspective, is that science too, just like poetry and philosophy, is a "human activity" (Rorty 1989, 4). Rorty explains this way of thinking as follows:

On this view, great scientists invent descriptions of the world which are useful for purposes of predicting and controlling what happens, just as poets and political thinkers invent other descriptions of it for other purposes. But there is no sense in which *any* of these descriptions is an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself. These philosophers regard the very idea of such a representation as pointless. (Rorty 1989, 4)

Rorty is one of those philosophers who defend the idea that any successful claim would come with some sense of usefulness for certain purposes rather than that it represents or describes the truth in a better way. By saying so, Rorty announces that truth is not something that exists independently, rather it is relative to our expectations, circumstances and so on. Therefore neither science nor philosophy are superior to any other branches in terms of being able to determine the correct criterion for discovering the ultimate truth. For Rorty, searching for such a criterion would mean to understand the world or the self as the creation of a divine being.

The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature... is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation, the work of someone who had something in mind, who Himself spoke some language in which He described His own project. Only if we have some picture in mind, some picture of the universe as either itself a person or as created by a person, can we make sense of the idea that the world has an "intrinsic nature". (Rorty 1989, 21)

Accordingly, those who search for a universal ground for answers to all philosophical, moral, political, or scientific questions are actually looking for a divine being that gifted the world and the human self with an intrinsic nature.

Contrary to this idea, Rorty defends the contingency of the way we see the world and our own selves. In this regard, there is no ground, no definite criterion that can provide the ultimate answers to questions regarding how to lead an ideal ethical life, how to arrive at real (as opposed to apparent) knowledge, which language interprets the reality as it is, and what constitutes the true nature of self or the world. Rather, for Rorty, it is crucial to adopt a new strategy other than looking for a divine will that determines the essentiality of our own selves and the order of the world: a strategy other than searching for a language which can be the link between the world waiting to be known and the self desiring to know and pursuing the highest intellectual path in order to discover such an independent, unchangeable, and unshakeable truth. This new strategy is to be one that dissolves the questions of a bankrupt tradition and liberates us from a fake shelter made of ghostlike ideas. Rorty, by embracing contingency, hopes for a new path through which “we try to get to the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as quasi divinity, where we treat *everything*—our language, our conscience, our community—as a product of time and change” (Rorty 1989, 22).

In *CIS*, rather than presenting a definite explanation for the term contingency, Rorty seems to discuss it by showing its being a new way of understanding the world, language, selfhood, and community. This is the way that Alan Malachowski explains why Rorty chooses not to define contingency as a determinate notion:

This notion carries a great deal of weight in Rorty’s overall scheme of things, yet it is never explicitly defined. It is given an implicit, ‘contrastive’ definition *en passant*: things and events are ‘contingent’ in the sense that they do not fall under traditional philosophical descriptions which make reference to concepts such as ‘necessity’, ‘essence’, ‘reality’, ‘truth’ and ‘obligation’. Clearly Rorty is reluctant to provide anything more than a contrastive definition because he does not want to risk turning the notion of ‘contingency’ into a fully fledged *philosophical* notion, something which displaces concepts like ‘necessity’ but offers philosophers an excuse to carry on working within the same old problematic. (Malachowski 2002, 110–11)

As Malachowski expounds, what makes Rorty refrain from taking contingency as having a sharp definition is the possibility of falling into the same mistake that traditional philosophy has made. Since what Rorty suggests is “changing the way we talk, and ... changing what we want to do and what we think we are,” (Rorty 1989, 20) it would be much more suitable to discuss the implications of the term contingency and what it changes in our way of thinking and living, rather than following the

footsteps of traditional philosophy by turning contingency into a new ground for philosophical knowledge.

When the implications of contingency are at stake, it is plausible to question whether there is any possibility of hope for a unified community, given that there is no ground for relying on the idea of universal humanity. In other words, if what is understood as humanity is contingent, can there be any way of believing in a “we” that is a part of that humanity? In the next part, I will discuss how Rorty maintains such a hope without falling into the trap of supporting the idea that he criticized by advocating contingency; I will also explain why it is still possible to hope for more without betraying Rorty’s idea of contingency.

3. Rorty’s Solidarity and Its Limits

In his article “*Solidarity or Objectivity?*” (Rorty 1988), Rorty argues that for “reflective human beings” there are two ways of giving sense to their own selves and lives. On the one hand, there is the way of describing oneself through one’s contribution to the community that one is part of; on the other hand, there is the way of describing oneself in an immediate relation to an ahistorical reality. Rorty defines the former as the “desire for solidarity,” while defining the latter as the “desire for objectivity” (Rorty 1988, 167). For Rorty, this distinction implies an either/or situation that makes it impossible to bring objectivity and solidarity together. As Rorty states, the objectivist “distances himself from the actual persons around him ... by attaching himself to something that can be described without reference to any particular human beings” (Rorty 1988, 167). Here, Rorty’s main concern is to underline that the objectivist tradition of searching for the truth for its own sake cuts one off from one’s attachment to a community. Consequently, one becomes convinced that what is contingent is to be suspended in order to achieve the ultimate truth that lies outside the world we live in. Rorty summarizes the objectivist perspective and motivation as follows:

Objectivist tradition...centers on the assumption that we must step outside our community long enough to examine it in the light of something transcends it, namely that which it has in common with every other actual and possible human community. This tradition dreams of an ultimate community which will have transcended the distinction between the natural and the social, which will exhibit a solidarity that is not parochial because it is the expression of an ahistorical human nature. (Rorty 1988, 168)

Accordingly, objectivist tradition seeks an ultimate ground for solidarity. The objectivist searches for an intrinsic human nature that is necessarily true and independent from historical and socio-cultural circumstances. Contrary to the objectivist inquiry for an intrinsic nature of humanity, Rorty argues that “[a]n inquiry into the nature of knowledge can ... only be a socio-historical account of how various people have tried to reach agreement on what to believe” (Rorty 1988, 171). In this regard, Rorty suggests abandoning the idea of a nonhuman truth that is supposed to explain humanity and determine the ground for moral obligation. Instead, he defends the claim that “what counts as being a decent human being is relative to historical circumstance, a matter of transient consensus about what attitudes are normal and what practices are just or unjust” (Rorty 1989, 189). In this case, being morally good cannot be based on a theory of truth, as a partisan of objectivity would uphold. Thus, if there is no ultimate criterion that would determine the morally good action, how is it possible to construct a better community?

Rorty states that “a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance” (Rorty 1989, 189). For Rorty, what regulates the sense of solidarity is feeling sympathy for another human being’s pain and humiliation. The way Rorty approaches the sense of solidarity is crucial because he does more than just criticize the traditional understanding of morality: namely, he introduces a new path for moral action. The power of Rorty’s understanding of solidarity is the de-divinization of any moral theories that depend on the presupposition of “humanity as such”:

As this vocabulary has gradually been de-theologized and de-philosophized, “human solidarity” has emerged as a powerful piece of rhetoric. I have no wish to diminish its power, but only to disengage it from what has often been thought of as its “philosophical presuppositions.” (Rorty 1989, 192)

Proposing the notion of contingency, Rorty attacks holding on to a solid and ahistorical idea that determines the essentiality of the human self and universal moral obligation. The announcement that solidarity is not a philosophical concept is tantamount to the assertion of the idea that moral obligation is not a theoretical matter but a socio-political one.

The way he discusses the Kantian understanding of moral obligation is a good example of why Rorty refuses to turn solidarity into a philosophical theory:

Kant, acting from the best possible motives, sent moral philosophy off in a direction which has made it hard for moral philosophers to see the importance, for moral progress, of such detailed empirical descriptions. Kant wanted to facilitate the sorts of developments which have in fact occurred since his time—the further development of democratic institutions and of a cosmopolitan political consciousness. But he thought that the way to do so was to emphasize not pity for pain and remorse for cruelty but, rather, rationality and obligation—specifically, *moral* obligation. He saw respect for “reason,” the common core of humanity, as the only motive which was not “merely empirical”—not dependent on the accidents of attention or of history. By contrasting “rational respect” with feelings of pity and benevolence, he made the latter seem dubious, second-rate motives for not being cruel. He made “morality” something distinct from the ability to notice, and identify with, pain and humiliation. (Rorty 1989, 192–93)

Kant's idea of moral obligation depends solely on rationality and excludes everything contingent. Such an understanding turns every emotion into a matter irrelevant to determining the morality of actions. Consequently, Kantian ethics is characterized by indifference to people's contingent lives. Rorty's understanding of solidarity, on the other hand, suggests practical differences. Although Rorty is careful enough to note the importance of Kant's moral philosophy by saying that “[it] was very useful in creating modern democratic societies” (Rorty 1989, 194), he argues that if we wish to make a change in society, we need to choose solidarity that arises from feeling sympathy for pain and humiliation instead of rationally grounded respect for others stemming from a transcendental idea of humanity.

While Rorty does not propose moral philosophy which depends on a universal theory, he does not entirely jettison philosophy either. Rather, Rorty's understanding of solidarity is a kind of Kuhnian “paradigm shift” which amounts to a radical change in moral philosophy. In light of all these points, I would like to maintain that one of the biggest achievements of Rorty's understanding of solidarity is its gesturing towards a new path for moral philosophy, which does not depend on a theory of truth meant to determine and justify the morally good actions, but concentrates on socio-political and historical circumstances.

Not only does Rorty's idea of solidarity propound a shift in philosophical thinking, but it also provides motivation for creating a better community. Rorty explains how the sense of solidarity makes such a change possible as follows:

[I]t is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities

with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of “us.” (Rorty 1989, 192)

Rorty’s idea that traditional differences are ultimately bound to lose their importance does not mean that people who suffer because of their differences are ignored. On the contrary, the sense of solidarity is, in a way, an embracement of the heterogeneity among people. Rorty’s dedication to the idea of sympathy for pain and humiliation suggests that in order for there to be societies based on equality, it is crucial to pay attention to inequalities first. In the Rortian utopia, then, equality arises from the recognition and acceptance of differences, not from the idea of sharing a universal feature. In the contemporary world, where critical international problems like gender inequalities, race discrimination, labour exploitation, and hate crimes are at issue, the Rortian utopia is arguably more efficient than a utopia which depends on the idea of “intrinsic human nature” and which leads to all empirical differences becoming ultimately unessential.

Rather than spelling out a moral theory that is not to be affected by contingent circumstances, Rorty’s concern is to construct a better community by considering the current conditions of the society. With his notion of solidarity, he aims to point out that an earthly feeling, i.e., sympathy for pain and humiliation can prompt the sense of solidarity with people labeled as “others” or “strangers” and can actually make a difference in people’s lives. Therefore, Rorty’s understanding of solidarity can actually be interpreted as a recognition of diversity. It is an *act* of bringing people together without eliminating their differences.

If the dream is to construct a collectivity which preserves diversity, Rorty’s notion of solidarity is reasonably to be adopted and advanced. However, what is more crucial and helpful than reiterating the advantages of Rorty’s understanding of solidarity is to discuss its limits in discourse and action. Although by proposing the notion of solidarity, Rorty aims to reduce human suffering caused mostly by alienation, yet he does very little vis-à-vis the question of the *power* of solidarity. That is why I find it very important to attempt to transcend Rorty’s view in order to make theoretical contributions regarding *his* hope for realizing a better world socio-politically.

First of all, the notion of solidarity creates a “we-group” and according to Rorty, this sense of “us” does not imply humanity in general, but smaller groups:

[O]ur sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as “one of us,” where “us” means something smaller and more local than the human race. That is why “because she is a human being” is a weak, unconvincing explanation of a generous action. (Rorty 1989, 191)

Rorty's idea of a smaller "we-group" is clearly understandable in the sense that the feeling of sympathy for pain and humiliation starts in smaller groups: for instance, in such a group one is typically more up to date with the current life circumstances of an acquaintance. Besides, genuine and deeper sense of solidarity is more likely to emerge when – due to being a part of a smaller group – people have a strong feeling of attachment towards each other. Another reason why Rorty employs the idea of smaller "we-groups" wherein solidarity is expressed is his rejection of the traditional understanding of universal humanity. Simon Derpmann *et al.* emphasize this point by stating that "Rorty rejects the traditional understanding of 'human solidarity' that implies the existence of something specifically and naturally human that we can relate to, if we recognize it in others" (Derpmann *et al.* 2005, 61). Accordingly, a broader sense of solidarity worries Rorty because for him it carries the risk of turning the notion into something he totally rejects. For Rorty, a "we-group" is also based on having something in common socially; however, the common ground cannot be an essential feature shared by all human beings. This "we-group" can reasonably be larger than a family or a social circle which consists of people who have direct emotional attachment to each other, but it cannot extend so broadly as to comprise some essential features that necessarily bring people together. Although Rorty's concern is to expand the "we-group" as much as possible, he confines himself to smaller "we-groups" because of his strong belief that a broader sense of solidarity will most likely to depend on an ahistorical idea.²

The question to be asked in this context pertains to the limit of the sense of "us" for Rorty. The answer is inevitably related to another notion employed by Rorty, i.e., "national pride." At the very beginning of his book entitled *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, Rorty discusses the ways of creating a better version of American society and declares that the possibility of realizing this hope depends on the idea of "national pride":

National pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement. Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism, just as excessive self-respect can produce arrogance. But just as too little self-respect makes it difficult for a person to display more courage, so insufficient national pride makes energetic and effective debate about national policy unlikely. Emotional involvement with one's country—feelings of intense shame or of glowing

2 I will elaborate on why we do not have to re-adopt the traditional idea in order to expand our sense of solidarity in the next section.

pride aroused by various parts of its history, and by various present-day national policies—is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive. (Rorty 1999, 3)

Some crucial implications of Rorty's ideas on "national pride" can now be discussed. To begin with, when we consider Rorty's insistence on contingency and his criticism of the divinization of concepts in traditional philosophy, it becomes apparent that the way he presents national pride is rather inconsistent with his own critique of traditional philosophy. While challenging our traditional way of philosophizing by asserting de-divinization of all concepts, Rorty gives the impression that he regards the concept of national pride as virtually having some *divine* status. Derpmann *et al.* discuss this point by saying that "the nation-state...still seems to play the role of a political equivalent of the self-contained subject, in order to be the only remaining guarantor for integrity and wholeness, the only remaining divinity" (Derpmann *et al.* 2005, 59). As a matter of fact, more than being just a guarantor, national pride becomes a necessary condition for private and public progress. In order to fully understand Rorty's criticism of the traditional theory of truth that depends on the presupposition of a necessary and universal ground, it is critical to be cognizant of the sense in which Rorty uses the term "necessity." In this context, necessity is a pragmatic and political term instead of an epistemological one. However, even if this is the case, Rorty's assertion still remains fairly problematic. Since Rorty distances himself from presenting a final vocabulary for his ideas of contingency and solidarity because of the danger of reifying them, he would not lean towards making his idea of national pride a necessary condition. However, one can still ask some questions to get a clearer idea about the pragmatic and socio-political consequences of his understanding of national pride.

First of all, if national pride is a necessity at the intersubjective level, what could serve as the criterion for determining the right *degree* of such a feeling? Although, for Rorty, determining such a criterion would be nothing more than adopting the remains of the traditional way of thinking, this question becomes inescapable since national pride is presented as a necessary condition for socio-political *progress*. Derpmann *et al.* point out the same problem by saying that "one might wonder how he wants to prevent national pride from turning into bellicosity and militaristic chauvinism—things he avowedly wants to avoid" (Derpmann *et al.* 2005, 59). Accordingly, the idea of national pride will always carry with it the danger of turning into a set of activities which might beget cruelty that Rorty actually fights against. In this case, Rorty's warning about the extreme feeling of national pride is inadequate to prevent cruelty between people who do not have the same emotional attachment to their

countries or those who do not have the same historical background. Consequently, Rorty's discussion seems to lead us towards a search for some criterion that will determine the socio-psychological limits of the feeling of national pride, while it is obvious at the same time that such an inquiry is exactly what Rorty reacts against.

A few remarks are in order at this point about the consequences of national pride in its relation to a sense of solidarity. Both in *SO* and *CIS*, Rorty refers to the locality of solidarity through a careful consideration of the risk of reverting to the idea of humanity in general combined with his understanding of national pride. In *SO*, the relation between solidarity and national pride is evident in Rorty's arguments on the criticisms about his ethnocentrism:

Either we attach a special privilege to our own community, or we pretend an impossible tolerance for every other group.

I have been arguing that we pragmatists should grasp the ethnocentric horn of this dilemma. We should say that we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no noncircular justification for doing so. (Rorty 1988, 176)

Rorty's emphasis on "our own community" is directly related to the idea of a nation-state. Accordingly, the feeling of attachment to a specific group is derived from a shared historical and cultural background. This idea bears considerable significance because it seems unreasonable to aspire to a broad sense of solidarity without realizing it first at a national level. Richard J. Bernstein argues that Rorty's ethnocentric perspective on the sense of "us" is understandable and it points to a more overarching sense of solidarity:

[Rorty] has been deliberately provocative in labeling his position "ethnocentric." But in doing so, he wants to call attention to the fact that solidarity begins "at home"—that it is typically a local phenomenon that can only gradually be extended. Moral progress comes about when our sense of solidarity, our sympathy with those who are institutionally humiliated, is extended and deepened. So Rorty's ethnocentrism, his localism, his concern to start with building up a new American pride is not incompatible with the social hope for achieving a global cosmopolitan liberal utopia. (Bernstein 2003, 132)

Accordingly, Rorty's ethnocentrism refers to a starting point that will extend beyond national borders when the time comes during our progress in history. In fact, Rorty's own statements support Bernstein's arguments:

“We have obligations to human beings simply as such” is as a means of reminding ourselves to keep trying to expand our sense of “us” as far as we can. That slogan urges us to extrapolate further in the direction set by certain events in the past—the inclusion among “us” of the family in the next cave, then of the tribe across the river, then of the tribal confederation beyond the mountains, then of the unbelievers beyond the seas... This is a process which we should try to keep going. We should stay on the lookout for marginalized people—people whom we still instinctively think of as “they” rather than “us.” We should try to notice our similarities with them. The right way to construe the slogan is as urging us to *create* a more expansive sense of solidarity than we presently have. (Rorty 1989, 196)

At first sight, Rorty’s call sounds rather convincing. What is missing, however, is an account of why and how people would try to create a broader sense of “us” when they achieved or were granted a feeling of being at home. In my opinion, it is not easy to find satisfactory answers to these questions without going beyond Rorty’s own standpoint. In this regard, if we keep holding on to Rorty’s ethnocentric perspective, it is unlikely that his hope for an extended solidarity will ever be realized.

In order to elucidate why Rorty’s notion of solidarity is destined to remain a limited one, I would like to discuss his idea of creating a “we-group” more deeply. The transformative power of the feeling of sympathy for pain and humiliation is the central factor in the distinction between “us” and “them.” However, when the feeling of national pride becomes a determinant in creating a “we-group,” all we can hope for is an ethnocentric sense of solidarity. Although the idea of having an emotional attachment to one’s country sounds unproblematically reasonable and expectable, when it becomes one of the factors which determine a “we-group,” it will also inevitably take a role in labeling people as “they.” More clearly, we can easily conceive that the feeling of sympathy for pain and humiliation will ultimately be circumscribed by the feeling of national pride when these feelings get combined or juxtaposed in creating solidarity. This is mainly because both of them actually create certain “we” and “they” groups which are understandably bound to conflict with each other. For the ones who predominantly have the feeling of sympathy for pain and humiliation, “we” would mean people who are sensitive witnesses or victims of suffering, and “they” would mean people who are the silent witnesses or perpetrators of suffering. In contrast, for those who are mainly filled with the feeling of national pride, the main factor in labeling people as a part of “we” is being a member of the nation or having the same emotional attachment to their country. From the perspective of ethnocentric solidarity, the largest “we-group” will be formed among, for instance, “fellow Americans.” In this case, it is inevitable that

people outside of national borders—or even Americans who do not share the same national attachment to their country—will get catalogued as outsiders. Since, for Rorty, there is no criterion that will prevent the transformation of the feeling of pride into the feeling of hatred, these “outsiders” or “strangers” can easily be perceived as a threat to the national values. In this case, they will be more than just “strangers” whose pain and humiliation are invisible; they will become “enemies,” deprived of the privilege of *our solidarity*. Accordingly, when national pride and solidarity are intermingled, the former becomes a limit point for the latter.

Derpmann *et al.* also point out the danger of national pride for solidarity as follows:

Rorty's *national pride*, the emotional involvement with a country and its inhabitants, is a form of solidarity which is insufficient, even hindering, when it comes to creating institutions and bringing about action within the global order that influences more and more spheres of human life. (Derpmann et al. 2005, 61)

Actually, for Rorty, national pride becomes more than just a form of solidarity. It is precisely the discursive ground for solidarity and it is expected to extend its limits gradually. However, as Derpmann *et al.* argue, national pride is so obstructive that Rorty's hope for global solidarity is destined to remain in the realm of the imaginary. This is because, as it has been argued above, the role of national pride in creating a “we-group” implies an *otherness* that involves not only people who inflict pain and cause suffering but also those who are deemed (by the relevant “we”) to fail in sharing the same sort or degree of national attachment. Within this context, national pride will always carry with it a risk of betraying the very idea of solidarity, i.e. reducing the suffering caused by discrimination. At this point, there is an inescapable bifurcation: on the one side, there is national solidarity reserved only for a certain “we-group” that consists of “fellow citizens,” and on the other side, there is a broader sense of solidarity for a “we-group”—or even, “we-groups”—created by people who can feel attachment to each other not on the basis of being a member of the same nation but because of their awareness of, and sensitivity for, each other's pain. For the ones who share Rorty's hope for creating a “more expansive sense of solidarity,” the only path that might herald such a possibility would arguably be the latter.

Rorty's notion of solidarity is powerful enough to include more than just a “national sense.” His ideas definitely refer to a radical change in morality to the extent that we, according to Rorty, do not need any ahistorical principles to ground moral obligation toward one another, and consequently, contingencies can evidently be

the basis of moral progress. As a matter of fact, Rorty's understanding of solidarity implies a transformative act which can also be a central and determining component in the creation of more democratic societies. That is why we need to hold out for more and explore the ways of realizing a broader sense of solidarity, rather than letting it remain merely a hope.

4. Is a Broader Sense of Solidarity Possible?

Rorty's final statement in *CIS* explains why he keeps away from arguing a broader sense of solidarity and leaves it as a hope:

*We have to start from where we are... What takes the curse off this ethnocentrism is not that the largest such group is "humanity" or "all rational beings"—no one, I have been claiming, can make that identification—but, rather, that is the ethnocentrism of a "we"... which is dedicated to enlarging itself, to creating an ever larger and more variegated *ethnos*. (Rorty 1989, 198)*

Accordingly, For Rorty, the main obstacle before even starting to discuss a broader sense of solidarity is the idea of some intrinsic human nature as the ground for humanity in general. This idea assumes that there are just two ways of talking about an extended sense of solidarity. The first one, rejected by Rorty, is identifying an essential human nature as the ground for human solidarity in general. The second one is his own moral/political proposal, to wit, an ethnocentric solidarity which, he hopes, will be extended gradually in time. However, as we are not obligated to maintain the essentiality in the manner Rorty defends it, we do not, in my opinion, have to be content merely with the hope for an extended solidarity which is born out of ethnocentric concerns. In fact, we have another option for realizing solidarity that transcends national borders while remaining faithful to Rorty's notion of contingency. Instead of giving a central role to the feeling of national pride in creating a "we-group," the pivotal move can be envisioned as maintaining Rorty's idea of feeling sympathy for pain as the basis of the sense of "us" and, eventually, of solidarity.

I am inclined to think that one need not have an aversion to the distinction between "us" and "them" in the present context. Derpmann *et al.* explain why this differentiation is inevitable for Rorty as follows:

Rorty wants humans to extend their "we-groups" as far as possible, but nevertheless he thinks that this process soon finds its limits. According to him, the "we" derives

its strength from a contrast. So if the “we” extended to all humans, there would be no one to be part of the “they” and a solidarity felt universally would cease to have identificational and motivational force... Even if a factual difference were essential to Solidarity, why would it depend upon national boundaries? One could probably find strong grounds for solidarity with others independent of the arbitrary bounds of a nation. (Derpmann et al. 2005, 62)

If the central aim of solidarity is to reduce suffering, and the contrast between “us” and “them” is crucial for this purpose, the conceptualization of these groups should be accompanied, in my view, by a respective awareness of the existence of two categories of individuals: those who inflict and those who suffer from pain. In this regard, as long as there are people who torture or humiliate other humans, there will always be, properly speaking, a legitimate distinction between *us* and *them*. However, what is problematic in Rorty’s account is the basis of this labeling. As we do not have to revert back to some sort of universality as the “basis,” we do not have to determine the sense of “us” according to arbitrary national boundaries in order to escape from the traditional idea of essentiality. On the contrary, contingencies *other than ethnocentric ones* can very plausibly lie at the basis of these groups. In short, if we agree that we need solidarity in order to annihilate—or at least reduce—suffering, there is no justifiable reason to confine the idea of solidarity solely to the notion of nation-state.

5. Conclusion

Rorty’s idea of solidarity in relation to his notion of contingency bears considerable significance in the context of the debate revolving around the notions of philosophical endeavor and political action. I must stress that Rorty’s idea does have the potential to alter the way we think and act by offering a notable alternative to the traditional tenets of moral philosophy which spring from the transcendental idea of universal humanity as the ground for moral obligation. One can add that Rorty’s proposal is an almost Nietzschean call for getting back to the finitude of our *Terra* through the realization that our moral obligations to others do not depend on any ahistorical principles but, rather, on the contingencies of the existing *Zeitgeist*. By modifying how we philosophize, Rorty seems to socio-politically pave the way to *acting differently*. In this sense, being more than a mere philosophical notion, solidarity becomes tantamount to efficacious and vigorous political action.

However, when the notion of national pride is made to play a pivotal role in the determination of the scope and efficiency of solidarity, Rorty’s claim for thinking and

acting differently is seen to lose its strength vis-à-vis the socio-political and discursive agenda he has promoted through his ideas of solidarity and contingency. Philosophically, national pride has a virtually divine position which allows that feeling to fashion the direction and limit of solidarity. Accordingly, Rorty seems to set boundaries to his desire for solidarity by introducing national pride almost as a “given” notion. Consequently, since the desire for solidarity somehow implies the embracement of contingencies, adhering strictly to the concept of national pride appears to ultimately mar the very idea of thinking differently. Socio-politically, on the other hand, national pride limits the possibility of embracing differences amongst people and, eventually, determines for whom we can show solidarity. As a result, instead of sympathy for others’ pain, national pride becomes decisive in creating a “we-group.” Therefore, the insistence on national pride also collides with the hope for acting differently.

The abovementioned philosophical and socio-political consequences indicate that Rorty’s notion of national pride does not go in line with his hopes and dreams for a broader solidarity. If we are to adequately pursue the latter ideal, our starting point should, I maintain, be a radical questioning – and perhaps even the overthrowing – of “national pride” as characterized by Rorty. In this sense, challenging the limits of Rorty’s understanding of solidarity would mean giving the notion a chance to fulfill the promised task of making a difference in our way of thinking and living. That is to say, for realizing a broader and more tenable idea of solidarity, we need to surpass Rorty’s evidently limited notion of solidarity, just as he attempts to surpass the limitations of traditional philosophy and politics.³

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Abstrakt

O zaletach i ograniczeniach pojęcia solidarności w ujęciu Rorty'ego

Artykuł dotyczy pojęcia solidarności i jego ograniczeń w ujęciu Richarda Rorty'ego. Twierdzę, że chociaż Rorty dokonuje poważnej próby rozszerzenia tego, co wynika z przynależności do grupy „my”, to nadal postrzega on solidarność głównie jako zjawisko ograniczone granicami państwowymi. Po przedstawieniu słabości teoretycznych koncepcji dumy narodowej w ujęciu Rorty'ego w powyższym kontekście badam krytycznie możliwość szerszego rozumienia solidarności bez pomijania, w większości przekonującej, krytyki tradycyjnej filozofii u Rorty'ego.

Słowa kluczowe: przygodność, duma narodowa, solidarność, filozofia tradycyjna, grupa „my”

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