INTRODUCTION

The Specter of Auschwitz

Fascism and communism developed in the twentieth century as reactions against the inequalities of early capitalism, which facilitated race and class struggles and called for social engineering at a considerable scale. Their leaders, assigning themselves the role of the arbiters of truth, subordinated their societies to ideological moralities based, on the one hand, on class struggle, and on the other, on racial superiority.[1] Any actions that supported their historical mission were, in their opinion, justified. They created totalitarian regimes whose aim was a better future, regardless of the costs. Consequently, violence, pain, and suffering became a common experience that marked millions of people.

In the light of these experiences—still somehow vivid, from our perspective—we ask ourselves what to do in order for us and future generations to never again partake in anything like them. "[A]t times like that of Auschwitz, when history is in upheaval and traditional institutions and patterns of behavior are collapsing, we want something which stands beyond history and institutions. What can there be except human solidarity, our recognition of one another's common humanity?"[2] This question has been posed by Rorty but also by many others. All try to tackle the tragic experiences of the twentieth century in different ways. They wish, among other things, to indicate such forms of coexistence that would allow for preserving dignity within a community.[3] This is in fact what has shaped the thought of Habermas. There are also those, including Rorty, who tried to indicate forms of coexistence devoid of coercion and that do not cause suffering.

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They all share a disapproval of what has happened and the desire for it to never happen again.[4] Haunted by the specter of Auschwitz, they create utopian visions of a better future, bearing in mind that someday they may spread.[5] The situation they are in is not, however, favorable. Habermas has written that today it looks like the utopian energy has expired: as if it has evaporated from historical thinking. Thus, the future does not appear optimistic. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, we encounter a somewhat terrifying picture of common life interests being threatened: the never-ending arms race, the dissemination of nuclear weapons, systematic impoverishment, unemployment, increasing social inequality in developing countries, and environmental pollution—these are the slogans that permeate public consciousness via mass media.[6] The reactions of intellectuals and of politicians equally prove their helplessness.[7] And it is by no means merely a realist perspective to accept helplessness so eagerly and let it substitute for attempts at acting for the sake of the future. Perhaps the situation is, indeed, objectively opaque. But opaqueness can still be a part of a willingness to act, of which societies are capable. The point is that Western culture should trust itself.[8] Were we, in light of Habermas's words above, indeed to talk of a surrounding opaqueness, such a situation should not make intellectuals give up. Certainly, this is not the case with thinkers, such as Rorty and Habermas, who wish for hope to take the place of knowledge in our social interactions.[9] This hope should be based on the conviction that we are able to deliberately and consciously change ourselves and our surroundings.[10] It should be followed by the renunciation of the search for the one and only truth. This renunciation is characteristic of American pragmatism, but not only of that tradition. Rorty observed that the belief that it is social consensus, and not the attitude toward nonhuman reality, that is of the utmost significance, is characteristic not only of American pragmatism but also of the works of Habermas,[11] whose thought can be also described as belonging to the pragmatist tradition.

Pragmatism

As far as Habermas is concerned, the above statement may seem surprising, though it should not be so.[12] For when we ask in what sense it can be articulated, we will have to answer that it is in the sense of the pragmatic categories and views that appear within Habermas's philosophy, which are crucial for pragmatism—despite its many guises—and in the sense he himself has used when referring

to pragmatism, and when utilizing it, acknowledging his affinity with this tradition of thought.[13] In the case of Habermas's thought, the affinity lies in both the first and second case. Many of the categories appearing in Habermas's philosophy are present also in pragmatist thought; he himself is well familiar with pragmatism and has taken into consideration its output with respect to reflecting on the theory of democracy or, by and large, sociopolitical thought, though not only on those topics.[14] This output is of much importance for Habermas's theory of communicative action, which—as he himself has suggested—rests upon pragmatist presuppositions. It is the output of both American and Kantian pragmatism.[15] Habermas has interpreted American pragmatism as follows: "From the outset I viewed American pragmatism as the third productive reply to Hegel [. . .], as the radical-democratic branch of Young Hegelianism, so to speak. Ever since, I have relied on this American version of the philosophy of praxis when the problem arises of compensating for the weaknesses of Marxism with respect to democratic theory."[16] What does Habermas uncover in American pragmatism that is of so much significance? When asked about it, he has answered that it is the antielitist, democratic, and egalitarian attitude that shapes and permeates pragmatists' projects. He has added that this attitude has been more important for him than any particular essay on politics or democracy. And this is not all. Habermas's thought, just like American pragmatism, can be characterized by antipositivism, antiessentialism, fallibilism, pluralism, a critique of dualisms and industrial societies, sensitivity to ambivalences, and approaching philosophy as a tool for tackling human problems. They both can also be characterized by how they treat the categories of development and progress, and maintain hope that social change may occur. What is also common between Habermas's ideas and American pragmatism is some convergence in the approach to the discursive structure of the public sphere as something necessary for democracy to develop.[17] And Habermas has admitted to that convergence when he said that the pragmatic approach to language helped him "to develop a theory of communicative action and of rationality. It was the foundation for a critical theory of society and paved the way for a discourse-theoretic conception of morality, law, and democracy."[18]

In the light of the aforesaid convergences with American pragmatism, though not only its American variant, referring to it or "resting" on it, as Habermas himself has written, as well as in light of his articulating American pragmatism as an "American variant" of pragmatist

philosophy, it seems plausible to call his own variant of sociopolitical thought "continental pragmatism."

On Sources and Crucial Issues

There has been a great deal of controversy surrounding, and many misunderstandings of, pragmatism. They are all due to, in one way or another, superficial readings of pragmatists texts and thought, based on reconstructing the considerations of other critics without verifying the value of such statements at their sources. Such problems—creating "interpretations of interpretations"—can be avoided by careful reading of the texts of the authors as such. And it is this strategy that has been adopted while writing this book. Thus, it shall include numerous references to source texts in order to minimize the possibility of understatement and overinterpretation. It is obvious, however, that all of our actions are accompanied by a preliminary interpretation of a situation, and the result of this interpretation does somehow depend on one's attitude. And this is what has happened in the case of the actions accompanying the writing of this very work.

This volume is underpinned with an intention that is reflected in both the selection of literature to be studied and the fact that only some threads found in it are to be traced and analyzed. The purpose of that is to prove the accuracy of the initial intuition that accompanied the author of these words while studying pragmatist thought, namely that the perspectives of Rorty and of Habermas are convergent. Such a statement may seem surprising for those who tend to think of Rorty as a "postmodernist," and of Habermas as a "universalist."[19] However, such a classification would not be correct, for the postmodernism of the former is not in fact such a radical departure from previous philosophical considerations, nor is the universalism of the latter blindly attached to them.[20] All this becomes clear when, while analyzing their thought, we take into consideration each word and expression. Such an approach is not an exaggeration, for the aim at stake requires particular carefulness. The aim is to prove that those who are often deemed opponents are standing in the same place and speak to a large extent in one voice.

Rorty's and Habermas's philosophical output comprises many significant works, among them those crucial for the realization of the aforesaid tasks, that is, especially, Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* and Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. These texts will be analyzed to a considerable extent in the following pages.

As far as the *Theory of Communicative Action* is concerned, Habermas

touched upon many issues that appeared also in his previous texts. Here, however, they are reexamined in accordance with the debates in which Habermas himself has been involved.[21] Numerous polemical discussions led the philosopher to move from the categories of cognition and interest, crucial for his previous way of thinking, toward the categories of "society and communicative rationality."[22] He has realized the feebleness of the epistemological/methodological program of grounded critique. The move toward new categories culminated with the *Theory of Communicative Action*, in which Habermas presented the theory of action and of society. Its main subjects are communicative rationality, the concept of a society—embracing the theory of action and the theory of systems—and a critical theory of modernity that tries to respond to the problems of present times: the problems of postindustrial society. And these problems are just a few of all that we face, for "occasions for discontent and protest arise wherever a one-sided process of modernization, guided by criteria of economic and administrative rationality, invades domains of life which are centred on the task of cultural transmission, social integration, socialization and education."[23] Therefore, Habermas has continued to believe that social modernization should turn not only in the direction of capitalism but also in a direction that would allow for institutions hindering unrestrained expansion of economic and administrative systems to emerge from the world of everyday life.[24] He has defended the position that it is necessary for different domains of life to be based upon communicative rationality. Accordingly, he has presented a critical theory of society and wished to point out that due to communicative rationality, which is the basis for the processes of constituting an ideal communicative community, we shall come closer to the idea of conciliation and freedom. This theory is an attempt at proving that the normative concept of rationality reconstructed here—that is, communicative rationality—makes conspicuous what at the same time guides the process of modernization understood as a process of societal rationalization. This process is supposed to lead to the emergence of a more just and freer community of human beings.

It should be noted here that the work that further articulated Habermas's social theory is the volume *Between Facts and Norms*, published in 1992, which contains Habermas's deliberations on the development of the paradigm of law, the rule of law, the role of civil society, and different concepts of the political public sphere. These issues will not be presented in this book, and therefore I will pay only limited attention to the role of law in the context of the progressive

"juridization" and reification of various areas of the lifeworld about which he writes in the *Theory of Communication Action*. The problems which are discussed by Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms* were not the subject of a wider debate between Rorty and Habermas, except for the issue of the type of policy we should choose after deciding on what grounds we should base our functioning in society, and on what understanding of the concepts of truth, rationality, and objectivity. They both advocate politics that Habermas has called a proceduralist deliberative politics. I will present how Habermas has understood it in the volume *Between Facts and Norms*, when it will be important to answer the question as to what kind of policy both philosophers chose. At the same time, it should be noted that Habermas tried to build on his arguments contained in the *Theory of Communicative Action* in later works, especially when it comes to the universality of valid claims or communicative rationality transcending here and now. But whether these arguments "withstand the test of strength" in direct comparison with Rorty's arguments can be observed on the pages of Habermas's *Truth and Justification* from 1998, and when analyzing the exchange of views of both philosophers contained in the work *Rorty and His Critics* from 2000. I will also refer to these two key sources when the views of Rorty and Habermas are juxtaposed later in this work.

In the case of Rorty's thought, however, the texts essential for this work, and for the realization of the task outlined in it, include *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*. When writing these books Rorty wished to initiate a transformation in our way of thinking and attitude, which is to be based on replacing the need for objectivity with the need for solidarity by incorporating detailed epistemological and semantic analyses at several points. In his opinion, what is necessary is a change in the rhetoric that our community uses, a change in its own image of itself, in its thinking, and a renunciation of elaborate edifices based on one or another understanding of truth. Moreover, in the mentioned works Rorty gave the most attention to the categories crucial for his sociopolitical perspective: contingency, irony, solidarity, and freedom. One of his objectives was, as he himself argued, to point to the possibility of presenting a liberal utopia in which "human solidarity would be seen not as a fact to be recognized by clearing away 'prejudice' or burrowing down to previously hidden depths but, rather, as a goal to be achieved."[25] This goal could be achieved not through investigation but by means of imagination, the imaginative ability to acknowledge our contemporaries as suffering fellow beings. This solidarity would be constituted not by discovering some sort of truth about

our own selves but by making us sensitive to particular instances of suffering and humiliation. This process would consist in the gradual recognition of other human beings as not "other" but "one of us."

This stance held by Rorty and Habermas is rooted in the tradition of pragmatic thought, especially that of John Dewey, which Rorty explicitly pointed to, inter alia, in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* as well Habermas in *Between Facts and Norms*. Rorty drew on Dewey extensively in a number of his texts, writing, for instance, that he wished to consider his thought a continuation of Dewey's stance. Though their perspectives differ in some respects, the differences are small, especially as far as the issues dwelled upon in this work are concerned.[26] For our purposes, it is important to note that what in Rorty's opinion is valuable in Dewey's perspective, and what he himself tried to extract from Dewey's philosophy and to retain in his own considerations, is an account of gradual change in humans' self-image "which has taken place in recorded history—the change from a sense of their dependence upon something antecedently present to a sense of the utopian possibilities of the future, the growth of their ability to mitigate their finitude by a talent for self-creation."[27] He also appreciated Dewey's attempts to overthrow the doctrines of representationalism; and he agreed with Dewey that they impede winning the sense of one's own independence. Rorty wanted to continue this project and to prove it is due to this greater independence that we shall be able to build a liberal society that shall realize to a greater extent, among other things, the idea of freedom.[28]

It should be added that the reception of the thought of both philosophers is also a focus of this work, but only insofar as it concerns their reading of each other and the issues in question. This research strategy has been accompanied to a great extent by the thought of Theodor W. Adorno; that is, to paraphrase, when coping with philosophies or particular thinkers, one needs to refer to their own texts.[29] The phrase "to a great extent" does not appear in the above sentence without a reason, for, as it should be mentioned, works of such authors as John McCumber, Matthew Festenstein, and Richard J. Bernstein were of much help in the initial stage of investigating the philosophical output of Rorty and Habermas.[30] It was, inter alia, while studying them that I first had the intuition of the similarities between their views. The work itself, however, in its reconstruction and critical parts rests on direct reading and analysis of Rorty's and Habermas's texts, so as to point, at the very source, to the compatibility of the central elements of their philosophical perspectives, to indicate on what basis we should rest democracies, and, additionally, to present that on the basis of their thought there is a possibility to develop an

understanding of freedom as responsibility in the future. Paving the way toward such a possible understanding of freedom is yet another aim of this work.

Step by Step

In writing this book I have been accompanied by some intuitions, among these that the perspectives of Rorty and of Habermas are convergent and that we need an original reading of the dialogue between Rorty and Habermas to show the convergence of the positions of both thinkers. In other words, I will focus in this book on the dialogue between Richard Rorty and Jürgen Habermas, which has been going on intensively since the 1990s until the death of Richard Rorty in 2007. This exchange concerned fundamental philosophical issues: the nature of reality, the status of truth, the understanding of modernity, and the universality of philosophical concepts, as well as the implications of these for the issues of freedom, democracy, and the present and future of liberal societies. Adversaries have often emphasized the mutual sympathy of the two philosophers, personal and philosophical, as well as the fact that they do not differ much in practical terms, in particular regarding the social and political consequences of their positions. Their discussion took the form of a dialogue between the great philosophical traditions of European continental philosophy represented by Habermas, with particular emphasis on critical theory, and the tradition of American pragmatism represented by Rorty.

The fact that quite a bit of time has passed since the dispute was conducted between the two does not mean that the issues raised at the time have lost their relevance. Issues such as truth, reason, freedom, and the role of philosophy are timeless. Addressing these issues in this book is thus a value in itself, but there is another aim as well: to show that not only are the conclusions of the positions of Rorty and Habermas convergent but also their positions themselves, much more than both thinkers were sometimes ready to admit. I will, therefore, go against the tide of schematisms seeking to show connections between Rorty's pragmatism and Habermas's philosophy. I will, however, not limit myself to the task just mentioned; I will also try to indicate which elements of Rorty's and Habermas's positions may prove to be crucial for developing the concept of society that is modern, liberal, and based on diversity and tolerance. Therefore, I am interested in the relationship between Habermas's and Rorty's philosophy from the

practical perspective too—the social and political perspective—and in the practical implications of Rorty's and Habermas's positions. To implement such a research concept I will draw basic problem areas and concepts from the philosophy of John Dewey.[31]

To show both the extent to which Rorty and Habermas are convergent with respect to philosophical perspectives and their sociopolitical views, and to show that there is a possibility of developing on their basis a new understanding of freedom as responsibility (chapter 3), first, the following pages shall be devoted to reconstructing the central threads of Rorty's and of Habermas's thought (chapters 1 and 2). These threads have been selected in such a way as to present the basis of their thinking as accurately as possible, as well as to point to the elements that are important when explaining their particular choice of appropriate political form.[32]

To speak in more detail, in the first chapter of the monograph I reconstruct Rorty's views and explain among other things the proper sense of the category of ethnocentrism used by the American pragmatist and indicate that, despite Rorty's declared belief in the compatibility of the idea of respect for private spheres with any political model, ultimately only liberal democracy turns out to be the right framework for pluralism of the private spheres. I also devote a lot of space to Rorty's key category of contingency, as well as to his specific understanding of the concept of rationality, which in his understanding is equated with tolerance, understood as patience and understanding for views that differ from his own. In this chapter I also confront the objection of relativism frequently raised against Rorty's concept and indicate that Rorty himself rejected this position. It can be said that relativism as a position can be formulated only from a universal perspective, which Rorty consistently questioned. As Rorty put it, if you have no epistemological concept, you also do not have a relativistic epistemological concept. Rorty follows a similar path, rejecting the accusation of irrationalism in his own position. I also consider other key concepts from Rorty's thought, namely the concept of solidarity being a result of specific historical, social, and institutional processes, as well as the concept of communication, understood as the replacement of coercion by persuasion. I regard his antirepresentationalism as the key to understanding Rorty's position correctly.

In the first chapter I will also present and refer to other accusations that were formulated regarding Rorty's position. The pragmatist himself referred to most of these accusations, such as the question of whether irony can lead to the erosion of a liberal society, that is,

whether it can be limited to the private sphere only so that it does not threaten the values of the public sphere, such as tolerance, free communication, and solidarity. In addition to the accusations accepted by Rorty, I will also present my own criticisms. In particular, I will point to the possible inconsistency of Rorty, who seems on the one hand to insist on the division into the public and private sphere, postulating the limitation of all philosophical narratives to the latter; on the other hand, however, he treats the innovative dictionary of "liberal ironists" as the target language of the public sphere of a utopian liberal society.

In the second chapter of this volume, I will present the key categories of Habermas's philosophy, primarily on the basis of the *Theory of Communication Action* published in 1981, but also other works, among those *Truth and Justification*. Analysis of this work allows the reader to learn about Habermas's main arguments regarding the foundations on which we should base our thinking about freedom, communication, politics, and democracy. I will present the categories of the lifeworld, of communication rationality, communication action, and the role the validity claims play in it. In other words, I will start with a different approach than other researchers and I will focus primarily on the philosophical bases of Habermas's vision of democracy and politics.[33] Is there any truth as a point of reference? Can we refer to some universal values? What is the role of rationality? I will thus not focus on the question of whether Habermas's concept of democracy is possible.[34] The basis of his concept of democracy—which he called radical democracy—is his discourse theory, and that theory will be a main concern in this book when Habermas's thought will be considered.

It is important to say that Habermas has wanted his concept of radical democracy, read in terms of discourse theory, to have a practical significance, and that is why in *Between Facts and Norms* he also analyzed the role and development of the political public sphere and indicated the role of civil society, but not only as normative demand. That is why he said that the concepts of the political public sphere and civil society "are not mere normative postulates but have empirical relevance. However, additional assumptions must be introduced if we are to use these concepts to translate the discourse-theoretic reading of radical democracy into sociological terms and reformulate it in an empirically falsifiable manner."[35] He tried to do so by analyzing the role of law and the rule of law. I will not focus here on this matter, firstly because I want to present what are the necessary philosophical bases for democracy to occur in Habermas's view, and later to analyze whether they are justified in light of the

debate with Rorty, who also presented in his works the necessary philosophical basis for his vision of democratic politics. Secondly, I will not focus on them because, as I have said above, they were not part of the Rorty-Habermas debate.

The first two chapters are an elaborate, but necessary, introduction to chapter 3, which is devoted not only to the confrontation of the previously reconstructed positions of Rorty and Habermas, although this will also take place, but also to demonstrate that they are not as far apart as it sometimes seemed to the thinkers themselves or to readers of their work. This chapter will be a reconstruction of the real debate between the two philosophers. Recapitulating this debate, I will draw attention to the numerous distortions that appeared in the mutual interpretations of the positions of both adversaries. In particular, I will be critical toward some elements of Rorty's interpretation of Habermas's thoughts. I will also reveal assumptions of their own positions that the philosophers sometimes have not noticed, such as the presence of a moment of idealization in Rorty's philosophy, contrary to his declarations. I will also devote my attention to considerations regarding the status of valid claims, in particular the issue of whether by raising such claims in our communicative actions, we actually refer to the universal auditorium. When referring to these matters I will point out the crucial difference between Habermas and Rorty, but I will also focus on the fundamental agreement between the two philosophers regarding the role that communication plays in building solidarity in modern, liberal societies and what formal conditions must be met for that communication to occur. Both Rorty and Habermas have agreed that communication is crucial and that certain formal foundations are necessary for it to occur. Due to these foundations, appropriate social interaction as well as creating new worlds and new languages are possible. Both philosophers list among these formal conditions the equality of the parties and freedom of speech. In their opinion, these conditions are necessary for undistorted communication to occur. In the light of their crucial role, Habermas has developed his idea of communicative rationality. Rorty, when assuming an attitude toward it, wrote that—as it appeared to him—there is a great deal of convergence between Habermas's idea of replacing subject-centered reason with communicative reason and what he called the Protagorean/Emersonian tradition.[36] This tradition refers to the thesis—as he wrote—"that human beings are on their own—that their own imagination will have to do what they hoped the gods, or a scientific knowledge of the intrinsic nature of reality, might do."[37]

Both Rorty and Habermas make use of their imagination and take things into their own hands. They present their sociopolitical utopias with the conviction that these may spread. In their own unique way, they develop perspectives thanks to which it is possible to designate the way "toward the future." Their approach combines many common elements: fundamental moral beliefs, a vision of a decentralized world, fostering pluralism of world views, seeking a compromise understood as "unforced consent," opposition to all forms of violence in social life, and the role of education in preparing individuals to participate in discourses oriented toward achieving compromise, as well as the role of hope and the vision of liberal utopia. They are also to a considerable extent compatible, as, for example, in the case of their common recognition of the primacy of the category of freedom over the category of truth. The categories of freedom and of communication—crucial elements for the thought of both philosophers—shall be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

It is important to highlight here that these crucial categories and values, which in the case of Rorty and Habermas become the basis for advocating liberal democracy, are to be found also in the thought of Dewey, one of the leading representatives of American pragmatism, who in his works devoted a great deal of time to reflecting on the relationship between philosophy and democracy. It is hardly surprising, since Dewey, as a representative of the previous generation of pragmatists, worked on presenting the benefits of liberal democracy and on developing both the philosophical and pragmatist basis for a "Great Community" or "radical democracy" built upon values such as equality and freedom, long before Rorty and Habermas. Before moving to reconstructing and critically discussing Rorty's and Habermas's thought later, it is, then, worth describing, as a means of making an introduction, the central threads of Dewey's philosophy. In the introductory description of Dewey's views, I will oppose the stereotypical approach to pragmatism. I will refer to Dewey's multiple forms of rooting the individual into social structures, and by that reject a simplified vision of pragmatism as a doctrine based on the atomist version of individualism. I will also discuss Dewey's idea of radical democracy, understood as abandoning society's orientation toward objective truth and replacing it with the idea of dialogue and education aiming at developing individual potentials. Thus presented, Dewey's thought shall constitute a background for reconstructing the life-forms that are characterized by attributing an important role to individual freedom and communication devoid of violence, as presented by Rorty and by Habermas. In other words, Dewey's perspective will

constitute a peculiar anchor in this book. I will begin my considerations by presenting it, but I will also come back to it in the part that is a recapitulation of the most important findings of this work. Thanks to presenting Dewey's thought at the beginning of this volume, it shall become possible to observe later on the numerous similarities between Dewey's, Rorty's, and Habermas's perspectives. Some of these similarities shall be pointed out in the concluding section of this volume, in the context of the already analyzed thought of the two leading thinkers of American and continental pragmatism. This, however, shall be achieved only to such an extent as to see that it is possible to talk not only of convergence between Rorty's and Habermas's thought but also of convergence within pragmatist sociopolitical thought when reading Dewey's as a kind of "common root" of Habermas's and Rorty's positions.[38] Pointing to these similarities shall be the first step toward summarizing the issues most crucial for this work, which shall be highlighted toward the end of this volume.