

THE POSTMODERN AMERICAN LIBERALISM BETWEEN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

SORIN PUREC

Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences University Constantin Brancusi of
Targu-Jiu, Romania

Abstract in original language

This article discusses two major approaches of the American, contemporary liberalism became traditions in the contemporary, political thinking. The first type of approach is the pragmatism and the relativism specific to the analytic philosophy as we find it in R. Rorty's thinking. The second type is that of Fukuyama and it is a socio-historical and economic analysis of the political problems.

Key words in original language

Contemporary liberalism; pragmatism.

To speak of liberalism in America, outside scientific circles, is somewhat risky, given the popular perception of this old political doctrines which is close to the incomprehensible extremism. It is true that this kind of "understanding" has been greatly facilitated by Libertarianism current and their eccentricity related to the state, the law, morals, economic relationships, etc. However, what we are interested in this article is something else: the vision of the great American liberal theorists. In a strange way, what brings new to today's liberalism comes from America, where liberalism is incomprehensible, where there is no liberal party, but all parties are liberal.

We will refer here to two of the major currents of thought in Anglo-Saxon thinking of the contemporary world. The first is the postmodern, full of pragmatism and relativism characteristic for the practical analytical philosophy especially in the last half century, and the second is the quasi-economic side, structured on the award-winning new social sciences: anthropology and sociology. In order to achieve this, we will make a brief overview of important ideas, with main reference to two eloquent works on fundamental characteristics of these currents: Richard Rorty's essay entitled *Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism* and work - more extensive, but not richer from a theoretical point of view - Francis Fukuyama's, *The Great Rupture. Human nature and social order restoration*. The aim is to underline a full compatibility between these two trends, compatibility designed to reveal a concept difficult to conceptualized, but easily found in the philosophy of the last century: the lowering of morals in a market dominated by the rules that have an economical origin, functional in a delimited space and at a certain moment of time, ensuring only those deliberative tools to the human being, tools that are necessary for his living in the community that he is part of.

Rorty called postmodern bourgeois liberalism the attempt to defend North-Atlantic democratic institutions without using a transcultural and ahistorical morality and the resonance of the expression is justified through the necessity of defining as comprehensively this current, meaning, stating that this power granted exclusively to justify practices and social organizations only under certain historical conditions (and therefore can be called bourgeois) and that shows a total distrust regarding the "meta-stories" (and thus, according to Lyotard meaning of this term, it can be called postmodern). Rorty proposes to suggest "how these liberals could convince our society that loyalty to itself is morality enough, and that such loyalty does not need an ahistorical fundament" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 349). According to Rorty, the most moral dilemmas are consequences of the fact that we identify with multiple groups and that we are reluctant to give up one or another of these identifications, or to significantly promote any of them. The diversity of identifications increases with education and the number of communities with whom a person can identify and increase together with the civilization. (Rorty, 2000a, p. 350).

The political discourse of the democrats consists in enouncing the effects of practices and in the construction of predictions about what would happen if the practices should be changed. Such a discourse is the expression of the moral deliberation of the postmodern bourgeois liberalism, so that it avoids the formulation of general principles, "except situations in which a certain special tactic is required - for example when writing a constitution or in case of the rules of storage for children" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 350). These are manifestations of postmodern bourgeois liberalism in the field of morals. The main objections to this way of seeing things would be, according to Rorty: 1) failure to grant human dignity to an individual isolated from the community (child lost in the forest) and 2) ability to identify postmodernism with relativism which auto traces itself. The first is removed by stipulating capacity (included in the tradition of community) of "giving back dignity to a foreign human being" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 351). The second is removed by the observation that postmodernism can not be accused of relativism unless a meta story is attached to it. Or, this is a vicious way to define postmodernism, which means that the relationship of postmodernism with philosophy must be redefined.

Let us now explain what meta stories are, in order to determine more precisely the position of Rorty. Perhaps more accurate would be to call them story with meta characters; Divinity; Historical necessity or categorical imperative of meta characters. We are not interested who are the characters - if the story comes from networks and communities with whom we identify, putting even a simple relationship above them by which to judge different communities, then we are dealing with the simplest case of narrative with meta characters. The relationship is the meta character and the story is a contemplative one becoming a meta story. Thus, postmodernism with the meta story become a relativism which is auto tracing itself (through the inconsistency of the historical relationship – the intra communitarian one –

and the one that stands as a meta character). The error, indicates Rorty, comes from the fact that postmodernists do not propose any meta character and therefore no meta story. If we insist on the necessity of the identification relationship between meta character and philosophical position, "then the postmodernism is post philosophical" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 352). But, says Rorty, it would be much better to give up this relationship of identity. We have to give up the idea of giving a meta story to the post modernists and to lower the signification of certain terms like 'rational' and 'moral' inside the community.

Approaching the topic of Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism (Rorty, 2000), Richard Rorty distinguishes between people of Kant and Hegel people. The first are those who "believe that there are things like anything intrinsic human dignity, human intrinsic rights and an ahistorical distinction between morality and prudence requirements" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 344). The others, Hegelians, say that "humanity is rather a biological concept than a moral one, that there is no human dignity that does not derive from the dignity of a specific community or a call to impartial criteria beyond the relative merits of different present or possible communities criteria that help us evaluate these merits" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 345).

Thus, the social philosophy of the "English-speaking world" is divided, according to Rorty, between the positions of Kantians and their critics. The result? A dispute over social responsibility. We have here a fictional dispute: the Kantians criticize any attempt to build moral on the interest of the community, while Hegelians deny the need of reporting to a "common interest of mankind".

Fukuyama's approach concerns the relationship between social order and human nature as it appears (or as it is built, even if we refuse to accept its existence) in the general social sciences: through sociology statistical scaffolding, plus explanations quasi - unreal of anthropology. The major premise of this approach is the great rupture produced in the social values (with emphasis on those values that cover morals) in the second half of the twentieth century. Fukuyama is the father of the famous thesis exposed in *The End of the Last Man's History* according to which, the institutions of liberal democracies of the late twentieth century represent the form of social organization sufficient for the end of history, understood not as a way of developing events, but in the Hegelian sense of dialectics of social tensions, considered both at level of individuals but also of groups (regardless of their aggregation criterion). The author does not definitely abandon his thesis concerning the end of history and does not radically change his discourse. There is no alternative to liberal democracy, so any society that tends for an order that would ensure prosperity should adopt the institutions of liberal democratic societies, however, if the thesis of the end of history was built on the concept of optimal social equilibrium (provided, in view of Fukuyama, by the institutions of liberal democracy), the thesis of this big break has as a background the concept of social capital, brought to the fore in the last quarter of the twentieth century by the sociologist James Coleman. We are

dealing with an old concept, representing a social phenomenon perceived as such by all thinkers who were bent on social organization, but never covered under a single name. Defined succinctly, social capital is a set of informal rules that enhance cooperation in a social group, creating what we call externalities in terms of economic thought - positive or negative effects outside the group, according to the dominant vector: the radius of trust or size group.

This concept allows a treatment of the issues of informal norms through certain parameters which become traditional exponents of social order: crime, deviance of the family (disturbance of birth and divorce rates) and confidence. Great tribulation that it bears with it the concept is the impossibility of quantifying, either as a value belonging to a past historical moment. However, there are many cases where, for justifying the existence of such a concept, statistics are being used. This happens not only to determine the social capital or a similar concept which is concerned, how to distinguish between a capital-rich and a poor one.

An observation which is invariably reached is that the same institution in different societies operates differently. Robert Putnam concludes his study on local government in the regions of Italy (Putnam, 1993) that networks of reciprocity and solidarity are not the product of socio-economic modernization, but its conditions. Douglass North, in the historical analysis of the relationship between institutions and trade (North, 1991), finds a relevant discrepancy between the institutions of Western Europe and those of Latin America and puts it on the account of the relations between individuals: in Europe they are impersonal - allowing and even encouraging interaction between individuals who do not belong to the same group - and in Latin America are "personalized" (North, 1991, p. 111), which prevents the formation of an institutional framework related to economic and technical needs. We must retain the fact that North called institutions throughout the range informal constraints (customs) and that of formal rules (the Constitution) designed for individuals in order to create order.

In terms of social capital, these observations (which we have sufficient reason to call them genuine hypotheses) (Zaicu, 2006) can be aggregated and regrouped as: where the radius of trust does not cover the group (and so there is even members of the group not receiving the trust and in relation with them, informal norms are not respected), and this occurs in a significant number of groups, you can not create an institutional framework which leads to a "socio-economic modernization, in the sense of developing interactions between society's individuals at the same rhythm with technological and economic development acting normally on contemporary societies, externalities are mainly negative and do not allow the development of institutions and the socio-economic progress. The main idea is that the state is no longer able to maintain order through the legal system, can no longer support order when it comes to morality, and it no longer needs this order to legitimize itself, and thus, it no longer wishes to have

this role. Thus, non attributes enter the stage: aggregated groups based on functional criteria that tend replace the nation-state.

Fukuyama's considerations on the social order are a detailed analysis of the atomic structure of the social order. From this perspective, Putnam, Coleman, Mancur Olson et. al. performed tests on molecular structures. The novelty would be so this 'jump' to a lower structural level, which is of particular relevance in the current context in which multiculturalism and globalization, the miracles of contemporary moral – political chemistry, tend to focus the discourse of social philosophy people to a higher structural level.

The steps taken by Fukuyama are:

- 1) Parameters of social order show us that it is going through a crisis.
- 2) The real causes of the crisis are found in the social capital which, for various reasons, declined sharply (causing negative externalities).
- 3) In history there have been many such ruptures, usually as a result of technological leaps, overcome with the biological mechanisms of socialization (e.g. human nature), but also with the non-biological mechanisms of socialization (e.g. practice trust); an interim conclusion is that the relationship between village and social capital (with direct implications on social policy) has historically followed a sinusoidal path - this invalidates the hypothesis that places the capitalism as a consumer that runs out of social capital.
- 4) Starting from historical data (which shows that organic and non-biological mechanisms that can not be significantly affected by this crisis is working to restore social order) and social order parameters can be measured in real time (e.g., adjusting to new requirements of which the social order must take into account, such as the unprecedented growth of information flow), we must be optimistic: the reconstruction of social order is possible (and maybe even started, but we can not have this certainty until the drained time allows quantification of certain parameters).

We are concerned here only on the implications of this moral analysis and these are important, because this view operates with rules of behavior on which the social order is based. Moral foundation is fully compatible with the one that Rorty uses in building the concept of postmodern bourgeois liberalism, consisting of the rules of an intercultural and historical morality. We could say that Fukuyama's approach is an exercise in applied ethics, which proves the validity of the conclusion that transcultural and ahistorical foundations of morality are philosophical illusions (meta stories). The problem? Optimism around which this moral perspective is being built is based on a choice according to an arbitrary criterion, which requires a deliberative system too complex for the individual or group that must choose.

Rorty is fully consistent in his optimism, applying, in good pragmatist tradition, the same criterion for classification of useful illusions: between the New Testament and Manifesto of the Communist Party, both failed prophecies but which offer hope, being able to influence for the better the moral behavior, the least harmful can only be the second, because the promise that it makes has an application in the real life, here, not the one after death (Rorty, 2000b). At this level you can see from the best point of view this problem that we are talking about: optimism with regard to an appropriate choice between the New Testament and Manifesto of the Communist Party as an inspiration for an adequate moral behavior means a choice made by the individual. But even this simple choice involves an important effort, which should lead first to the note that these writings are not only failed predictions that they have, beyond interpretable promises, factors that constitute the moral values which we must choose.

We could emphasize some general principles (possibly only one, as in utilitarianism) from which we can deliberate in private cases. But these general principles can not be raised beyond the group, given the conditions of possibility of moral deliberation of postmodern bourgeois liberal and their establishment is considering only special situations (such as writing the Constitution). Moral dilemmas do not come from the fact that "most of us identify with a number of different communities and are equally reluctant to the idea of marginalizing in relation to any of them" (Rorty, 2000a, p. 350), but from the fact that, without the principle, deliberative effort is significantly more demanding. Therefore, Rorty leaves himself, once again consistent in his optimism, these deliberative efforts on behalf of tradition, without noticing that the tradition is based on principles. The possibility that an intruder in the group to which the individual has a moral responsibility can be treated according to its dignity of man is made on Rorty's account of tradition (Rorty, 2000a, p. 351). It is correct the fact that the author refers only to the tradition of the community which is part of the Anglo –Saxon world, limiting in this way the scope of optimism or only to the world and in this way he obtains a strong premise in supporting those sustained by him, but just here should be noted that that tradition is given by an ahistorical moral foundation, which he benefits from in his demonstration. Nothing wrong with this benefit, but what about where the tradition is obsolete? What are the benchmarks for deliberation in new cases? (Let's say, in the case of identification with a community lacked of tradition - and here probably the first and most eloquent example is that of a virtual community).

Turning to the application of Fukuyama, we note the same problem: the belief that trust between individuals will restore and rebuild social capital because history has shown us that this happens. There is one change: this time not only technological leap to post-industrial society was the basis of the fracture, but also those dilemmas which Rorty recalled, due to the identification of the individual with several communities. The individual is asked to deliberate without landmarks. Old sources for landmarks and

behavioral rules have been faced with situations which were not answered or were simply removed. Similar views are quite common in contemporary moral thinking, which makes Zygmunt Bauman to conclude that we face a "postmodern divorce" (Bauman 2000, 151 ff.) between the state as the main social actor and the moral existence citizens. After this divorce, a moral market has been created where goods have a variable standard, with local availability. This is the result of a reconstruction which wanted a smoother transition among the horns of moral dilemma created by the answers to the question what should I do?, crossing which in turn leads to new dilemmas created by answers to the question what to do?

In other words, the problem is that in contemporary society – that is in the most economically developed societies, which we commonly see as exponents of a desirable social order - a moral responsibility stops, quoting from Pascal, in front of the Pyrenees ! How is it that we are so optimistic that we believe that the moral market is compatible with that from over here? Sooner or later, to explain this compatibility will use a common standard, which requires at least a principle to cross any community and to which any individual will have responsibilities, every individual who is responsible to his community. And this operation does not involve granting a rating, but finding a benchmark, other than the community to which we belong. The observation that so far we did have not have the certainty of moral behavior arose from rules, but could be according to the rules, but based on interest is not sufficient to dispense benchmarks. The unfortunate aspect of dethroning transcultural and ahistorical foundations of the pedestal of morality does not consist in this dethronation, but in the fact that fundamentals were given up. What is more, this waiver is considered a progress, given that the optimism of those who seek reconstruction of the moral building, indicates a strong conviction that something completely useless was dropped, since the new foundation were planted in the individual, who will not hesitate to use them. Thus, "the story of progress is the story told by the winners" (Bauman. 2000. 246). True, but we must not forget that it is only a historical narrative.

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Contact – email

sorin.purec@gmail.com