

Philosophical Practice Through the Lens of Post-Metaphysical Thought

In this paper, I argue that one important quality of philosophical practice, understood primarily as a proceduralist therapeutic discipline, can be grasped through the notion of *post-metaphysical thought* as articulated by Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty in their dealing with the relationship between philosophy and social critique. The aim of the paper is modest: to point out the 'post-metaphysical spirit' of the fundamental methodological premises of philosophical practice, which I consider to be independent of the actual substance of therapy, and to address some broader implications of this post-metaphysical spirit. My analysis is intended as an external reflection on philosophical practice with individual clients (philosophical dialogue) outlined in the works of Lou Marinoff, through the optic of the Habermasian-Rortian epistemological perspective. Jürgen Habermas' and Richard Rorty's work provide two influential and partially opposed answers to the question whether a post-metaphysical theoretical social critique is possible, or whether we should relegate social critique to other fields, such as art (Habermas, 1992, 1990, 1987, 1984; Rorty, 1999, 1989). The two authors present different modalities of the term 'post-metaphysical', which I define as the 'weaker' and the 'stronger' version in light of their respective epistemological and ontological implications, while attempting at the same time to identify their common ground.

The optic of social critique and normative foundations is chosen as the point of entry into the post-metaphysical problematic for the reason that such a perspective throws into starkest relief the fact that Habermas and Rorty, as exemplars of post-metaphysical thought, are by no means anti-rational, disengaged from the public or opposed to the practical use of philosophy. Their shared ambition is to theoretically safeguard rational argumentation, reflexivity and dialogue from any kind of foreclosure by an exercise of authority that would be above dispute (religious, metaphysical, or expert). My intention is to show that post-metaphysical thinking understood along these lines is not antithetical to philosophical

practice; quite the contrary: the anti-metaphysical methodological spirit of philosophical practice that I will attempt to reconstruct could be seen as a guarantee of its vitality in the face of the challenges of professionalization and politicization.

My approach to philosophical practice as a dialogue with individual clients is grounded primarily in the work of Lou Marinoff, the author who has so far offered the most elaborate and systematic theorization of philosophical practice as a therapeutic procedure (Marinoff, 2002, 2000). Upon presenting the two conceptions of post-metaphysical thought, Habermas' and Rorty's, I will examine some crucial traits of philosophical practice with individual clients against the background of Rorty and Habermas. I will argue that philosophical practice as a discipline is characterized by a basic pragmatic, proceduralist and anti-authoritarian methodological spirit, which contributes to its ability to resist all kinds of rigidifying tendencies. This methodological trait of philosophical practice makes it an attractive non-authoritarian alternative to disciplines such as psychoanalysis or psychiatry, and even equips it with a certain non-conventional 'political' potential in terms of the pragmatist anti-essentialist conception of 'edifying' philosophy (after all, sustained work on the enhancement of people's self-reflexivity is an intrinsically political activity). By way of conclusion, I suggest that the post-metaphysical spirit of philosophical practice itself can in certain situations become a substantive contribution to therapy. Let me first present my understanding of post-metaphysical thought as articulated in Habermas' and Rorty's work.

I Habermas and Rorty: Post-metaphysical thought between immanence and contextualism

Situated reason: Habermas' linguistic turn

Within the contemporary debate about the proper normative foundations of theoretical social critique, two influential conceptions of post-metaphysical thought have emerged: Jürgen Habermas' and Richard Rorty's.

The first conception has been articulated within the context of Jürgen Habermas' 'linguistic turn' in critical theory, more precisely his attempt to normatively ground critical theory in a historically 'immanent' conception of reason defined as the property of human linguistic interaction. This approach is opposed to the first-generation Frankfurt School's reliance on a 'monological' and subject-centred concept of reason understood as a property of human consciousness (Habermas, 1990). As Joel Anderson argues,

whereas the first generation had (at least initially) looked to various forms of economic, political, cultural or psychoanalytic 'crisis' as sites of emancipatory impulses, Habermas focused on free interpersonal interaction as it was found in ordinary life and, specifically, in the pragmatics of coming to an understanding with someone about something, to serve as the key source of emancipatory impulses (Anderson, 2011: 36).

While the first-generation critical theorists (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, Benjamin, Löwenthal) developed powerful forms of social critique through the normative lens of a philosophy of history, Habermas' theoretical efforts were directed toward a less radical but more philosophically plausible variant of social critique. Habermas' linguistic-pragmatic foundation of critical theory, the 'linguistic turn', allows for an intersubjectivist, dialogical and historically situated conception of reason to take shape: as Habermas argues, 'the reciprocal interpersonal relations that are established through the speaker-hearer perspectives make possible a relation-to-self that by no means presupposes the lonely reflection of the knowing and acting subject upon itself as an antecedent consciousness. Rather, the self-relation arises out of an *interactive* context' (Habermas, 1992: 24).

Communicative reason, Habermas argues, is situated and 'transcendental' at the same time. It is historically situated by virtue of being the property of our historically evolved capacity for linguistic interaction, i.e. the interpersonal exchange of assertoric, normative and expressive statements within the practical context of everyday social interaction oriented toward reaching a consensus. Communicative reason is 'transcendental', on the other hand, in the sense of presupposing some universally valid 'strong idealizations' as the very preconditions of linguistic interaction. These idealizations consist in the interactive partners' claims to the *trans-contextual validity* of their statements: as Habermas' points out, 'what the speaker, here and now in a given context, asserts as valid transcends, *according to the sense of his claim*, all context-dependent, merely local standards of validity' (Habermas, 1992: 47).

The crucial premise of Habermas' theoretical perspective is that these counterfactual idealizing presuppositions of communication operate as *social facts* within the empirical reality, structuring the rules of linguistic interaction and thus our entire social world. According to Habermas, the 'validity claimed for propositions and norms' is 'accepted or rejected with real implications for social interaction' (Habermas, 1992: 139). The three universalizing claims to the validity of our linguistic statements: to the factual truth of our assertoric statements, the normative rightness of value-rational propositions, and the 'truthfulness' of expressive ones, constitute the essence of the situated, yet context-transcending rationality of language: they constitute an *empirically effective* communicative reason (Habermas, 1992, 1987, 1984). Habermas thus manages to attain a very important goal of critical theory: to anchor the social critique of modernity in its very legacy, or rather, in its normative *potentiality* already present (effective) in our institutional reality.

The fundamental premise of the empirical effectiveness of communicative reason enables Habermas to construct an entire social-theoretical system (the theory of communicative action) on the grounds of this central conception in the form of a 'reconstruction' of the logic of everyday linguistic interaction. 'The universal pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action', Habermas argues in a social-ontological vein, 'constitute semantic resources from which historical societies create and articulate, each in its own way, representations of mind and soul, concepts of the person and of action, consciousness of morality, and so on' (Habermas, 1992: 192). Moreover, the explanation of the structure of social reality by means of an empirically effective communicative reason enables Habermas to reformulate the project of critical theory, i.e. the normative anchoring of social critique in an anti-essentialist, proceduralist and immanent foundation: in the conception of rational communication oriented toward the reaching of an 'uncoerced consensus'. For Habermas, communicative reason is the 'standard for evaluating systemically distorted forms of communication and life that result when the potential for reason that became available with the transition to modernity is selectively utilized' (Habermas, 1992: 50). On the basis of the sophisticated normative foundation of critique defined by the concept of communicative reason, Habermas has been able to theorize social domination as a complex of the 'systematic distortions of rational communication' by 'power' and by the imperatives of material social reproduction (Habermas, 1987, 1984).

Habermas' linguistic-pragmatic conception of post-metaphysical thought is free of substantive philosophical speculation regarding the essence of human subjectivity; however, as we have seen, Habermas does not give up the task of identifying universal, trans-contextual properties of *social reality* (communicative reason as the universal logic behind all concrete 'semantic resources' of social action) and the corresponding universal causal mechanisms in history (rationalization of worldviews, the emergence of the 'systemic' logic of action-integration, etc.) (Habermas, 1987). These traits of Habermas' perspective imply that he is still positivist to a considerable extent, even if he is no longer 'metaphysical' in his understanding of language, self, and the normative criteria of social critique.

Contingency: post-metaphysical thought in Rorty's neo-pragmatism

A stronger, contextualist and thoroughly nominalist conceptualization of post-metaphysical thought within the debate on social critique can be found in the neo-pragmatist perspective of Richard Rorty (Rorty, 2007, 1999, 1989). From Rorty's perspective of a 'liberal ironist', a theorist who is constantly aware of the ultimate contingency of his own deepest normative commitments but treats them as no less valuable and legitimate for that, Habermas' grounding of critique in a universalist explanatory and normative concept of communicative reason is still an example of metaphysical thinking, despite the historical situatedness of the rationality of language. 'As seen by contextualism', Habermas admits, the concept of communicative reason is 'too strong because even the borders of allegedly incommensurable worlds prove to be penetrable in the empirical medium of mutual understanding' (Habermas, 1992: 116). Rorty does not agree with Habermas on the universality of communicative reason: in Rorty's own words, the difference between his and Habermas' visions of post-metaphysical thought boils down to the fact that Habermas

still insists on seeing the process of undistorted communication as convergent, and seeing that convergence as a guarantee of the 'rationality' of such communication. The residual difference I have with Habermas is that his universalism makes him substitute such convergence for ahistorical grounding, whereas my insistence on the contingency of language makes me suspicious of the very idea of the 'universal validity' which such convergence is supposed to underwrite (Rorty, 1989: 67).

Rorty's conception of post-metaphysical thought is founded on nominalism and historicism: for Rorty, a 'metaphysicist' is an epistemological realist, a historical teleologist and a normative essentialist, someone who 'believes in an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities' (Rorty, 1989: xv). While language in Habermas' perspective already loses its representational essence, Rorty goes much further: he subscribes to Donald Davidson's nonreductive behaviourist view of linguistic practice presented in 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', which develops the concept of 'passing theory' to explain the irreducible contingency of linguistic practice, and to argue that there is no universally identifiable logic of communication (such as Habermas' 'idealizing presuppositions' embodied in validity claims). As Davidson explains,

I have distinguished what I have been calling the *prior theory* from what I shall henceforth call the *passing theory*. For the hearer, the prior theory expresses how he is prepared in advance to interpret an utterance of the speaker, while the passing theory is how he does interpret the utterance. For the speaker, the prior theory is what he believes the interpreter's prior theory to be, while his passing theory is the theory he intends the interpreter to use (Davidson, 2006: 261–2, emphasis added).

The crux of Davidson's argument is that *passing theories* (the way we interpret concrete linguistic statements) ultimately cannot be derived from *prior theories* (the internalized structure of the rules for using language) because we develop passing theories over the course of interaction in order to grapple with contingent aspects of speech, such as the use of 'malapropisms' (words that our interlocutor wants us to interpret differently from their literal meaning), as they arise: 'we must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language users acquire and then apply to cases' (Davidson, 2006: 265).

The appropriation of Davidson's radically contextualist account of language allows Rorty to take post-metaphysical thought further than Habermas, as Rorty treats the rationality of our practice of language as not only 'immanent' in the sense of historically 'situated', but also as historically and procedurally *contingent*. Rorty advises us to 'limit the opposition between rational and irrational forms of persuasion to the interior of a language game, rather than to try to apply it to interesting and important shifts in linguistic behaviour' (Rorty, 1989: 47). Davidson's argument is the foundation for Rorty's conceptual apparatus centred around

the binary opposition of the *literal/metaphorical use of language* (corresponding to Davidson's prior/passing theory distinction), whereby individual as well as social change depends on the actors' ability to 'literalize new metaphors', i.e. to *redescribe* themselves and the surrounding world, rather than their ability to 'understand' a reality independent of themselves by applying new concepts that better correspond to it.

In terms of grounding social critique, Rorty's Davidsonian perspective argues for a thoroughly contextual and pragmatic understanding of our 'normative foundations' of critique. Rorty cites in this respect an excellent passage from Oakeshott's *On Human Conduct*: 'a morality is neither a system of general principles nor a code of rules, but a vernacular language. General principles and even rules may be elicited from it, but (like other languages) it is not the creation of grammarians; it is made by speakers' (Oakeshott, 1975: 78–79, in: Rorty, 1989: 58). A particular moral worldview, in Rorty's terminology, presents the 'final vocabulary' of a given person, a set of normative propositions that cannot be justified in a noncircular manner (Rorty, 1989: 73). For the 'liberal ironist', Rorty's ideal social critic, 'nothing can serve as a criticism of a final vocabulary save another such vocabulary' (ibid: 80). Rorty's perspective on social critique, in comparison to Habermas', can be defined by three main imperatives:

1) The distancing from both realism (a trait Rorty shares with Habermas), in the sense of the theorist's claim to an insight into the structure and dynamics of the social reality that exists prior to, and independently of, any 'ordinary' actor's interpretation of this reality; and from the social-scientific *positivism* of conventional social critique, represented by a theorist's ambition to provide a generalized causal explanation of the structure and dynamics of the social reality which would be valid across time and space. At this point Rorty goes substantially beyond Habermas, who holds on to a positivist imperative of articulating a 'grand' social theory. In *Re-Presenting the Good Society*, Maeve Cooke, for example, argues in a Rortian vein that critical theory should treat social-theoretical considerations as auxiliary with respect to the more fundamental 'ethical vision' that the theorist puts forward (Cooke, 2006). 2) The second criterion of the strong, Rortian definition of post-metaphysical thinking requires social critique to be grounded in a *fully historicized* (non-teleological) perspective on social change, i.e. it requires the full acknowledgement of the contingency of history and social dynamics; and 3) the normative foundations of a post-metaphysical critique in the Rortian sense would also have to be free of any *substantive philosophical speculation* (e.g. a

theory of the subject and/or a social ontology), as any such speculation would be incompatible with the premise of a thoroughly historical, contingent nature of the human self, social reality and moral progress.

The principal disagreement between Habermas and Rorty, as one might observe, concerns the nature of language and situated reason: the counterfactual 'universalizing presuppositions' of linguistic interaction, the three types of 'validity claims', constitute for Habermas the trans-contextual, universal rules of linguistic practice. However, the distancing from the realist, representational approach to language and the endorsement of a 'consensual' theory of truth and an immanent view of rationality constitute the common ground of Habermas' and Rorty's critiques of 'metaphysics' and what I would call their shared post-metaphysical sensitivity. Both authors strongly subscribe to a proceduralist critique of social domination: a critique of any attempt at restricting a rational debate about social arrangements or any individual normative commitments by means of 'power', the exercise of irrational and indisputable authority, as well as by 'totalizing' forms of social critique and visions of the good society that claim an epistemologically privileged access to the world.

Let us now take a look at the methodological orientation of philosophical practice as presented in the works of Lou Marinoff against the background of this shared Rortian-Habermasian outlook that I have tried to reconstruct.

II The post-metaphysical spirit of philosophical practice

Lou Marinoff proposes that we understand philosophical practice, to an extent, as a reaction to the post-metaphysical turn in philosophy and its multi-faceted consequences, some of the most prominent ones being the excessive professionalization and academic isolation of philosophy in the analytic tradition and the expanding 'political indoctrination' in the continental one (Marinoff, 2002: 43–45). Wittgensteinian language philosophy, as well as different contemporary currents belonging to the continental tradition such as deconstructionism and neo-Marxism have, according to Marinoff, contributed (in different ways) to a contemporary marginalization of philosophy and the loss of its appeal to the broader public. The common denominator of these analytic and continental developmental

trends in philosophy that Marinoff's critique points at is anti-realism, a central tenet of post-metaphysical thought.

In my understanding of Marinoff's perspective on philosophical practice, however, the defining trait of this therapeutic discipline, as opposed to disciplines such as psychoanalysis, lies in its foremostly *proceduralist* and *pragmatic* rather than substantive and diagnostic approach to the human subject. 'By getting a handle on their personal philosophies of life, sometimes with the help of great thinkers of the past', as Marinoff explains, '[people] can build a framework for managing whatever they face and go into the next situation more solidly grounded and spiritually or philosophically whole. They need dialogue, not diagnosis' (Marinoff, 2000: 4). A fundamental characteristic of philosophical dialogue is its methodological plasticity and adaptation to the client's idiosyncratic circumstances, rather than scientific standardization and the subsumption of the client's case to a generalized pattern of diagnosis: 'philosophical practice is more art than science and proceeds in a unique fashion with each individual' (ibid: 37).

The philosophical practitioner expresses what we might call a 'hermeneutic' interest in the meaning of a particular act, dilemma or problem of her client, in contrast to the psychiatrist's or psychotherapist's positivist interest in understanding the *causes* of these phenomena. The practitioner is focused on the present and future implications of the client's own understanding and possible rearticulation of such meaning. For example, in the context of a chess game, Marinoff points out that instead of asking the causal, psychiatric and psychoanalytic question 'what made you make that move?' the philosophical counselor asks 'what meaning, purpose or value does this move have for you now?' and 'what bearing does it have on your next move' (Marinoff, 2000: 18). The counselor takes seriously the client's perspective much like the post-metaphysical, anti-positivist social critic who takes seriously the normative commitments and perspectives of 'ordinary' social actors. Both figures are decidedly 'anti-authoritarian' in their epistemological outlook, and are not prone to reducing the meaning of an individual's act or pronouncement to more or less hidden causes (or 'interests', in the case of the social critic).

The premises and guidelines of philosophical practice as a therapeutic process are not based in a substantive theory of the subject or the social world, but are informed by a pragmatic, anti-essentialist aim of tackling everyday human problems without providing an

explanation of the mechanisms of subject-formation, the pathologies of the self, and the requirements for their overcoming. On the one hand, philosophical practice, as conceptualized by Marinoff, is *not* substantively post-metaphysical in either Habermasian or Rortian sense: the therapist should not try to convince a client to adopt a nominalist, historicist and contextualist epistemological and ontological outlook. A substantively post-metaphysical philosophical practice would amount to something akin to the late Wittgenstein's conception of 'philosophy as therapy' (Wittgenstein, 2009): it would require the therapist to demonstrate to the client that her 'philosophical' problems are no more than instantiations of a confused and unclear use of language. The therapist in question would have to act in a strongly epistemologically authoritarian way.

On the other hand, philosophical practice is also not substantively 'metaphysical' in the sense of being epistemologically and ontologically realist, positivist and essentialist, as such a foundation would require an equally 'authoritarian' role of the philosophical practitioner. The practitioner would have to either present to the client the correct (presumably their own) metaphysical worldview as the guideline to the solution of the client's philosophical problems, or would have to teach the client the best possible 'methods' for conducting an independent investigation into metaphysical truths. A 'metaphysical' philosophical practice would be characterized by a plurality of schools; however, this pluralism would be of a different kind than the one we actually find in the discipline today. It would not be based in disagreements as to the best procedures for tackling human problems in everyday life, but would result from disputes regarding metaphysical truths and the conceptual apparatus that best correspond to them, much like the positivist disagreements within contemporary psychiatry regarding the 'true' scientific understanding of human psychology and the best methods for influencing the causal mechanisms behind it.

Due to its proceduralist and pragmatic orientation, philosophical practice is thus neither metaphysical nor post-metaphysical in substantive terms; however, I would argue that, for this very reason, philosophical practice is characterized by a *post metaphysical spirit*. Due to its orientation towards the concrete, the contingency of everyday life, its experimentation with methods, a commitment to non-structured and egalitarian dialogical reasoning, a rejection of the psychoanalytic concern with causes, a focus on the present and an imperative of resisting standardization and scientization, philosophical practice can be considered post-metaphysical in its methodological orientation, regardless of a particular practitioner's

epistemological and ontological convictions or the particular philosophical contents (arguments, concepts, perspectives) he or she uses in therapy to 'awaken' the client's 'inner philosopher' (Marinoff, 2000). The very commitment to awakening a person's inner philosopher points toward the therapist's conviction that the client has a capacity for reflexive self-transformation, a capacity we have encountered in the Rortian perspective under the name of 'self-redescription'.

The imperative that the practitioner refrain from imposing a particular philosophical outlook on the client corresponds to the post-metaphysical rejection of epistemological authoritarianism, a rejection shared by Habermas and Rorty. The imperative is entirely in agreement with the Rortian warning that one should not attempt at delegitimizing or destroying the earlier mentioned 'final vocabularies' of ordinary people. As Rorty argues, 'most people do not want to be redescribed. They want to be taken on their own terms – taken seriously just as they are and just as they talk' (Rorty, 1989: 89). The crucial point for Rorty is that the unwarranted authoritarian 'redescription' of a person's final vocabulary can be perpetrated by metaphysical and anti-metaphysical ('ironist' in Rorty's terms) philosophers alike, albeit from opposite directions: 'but notice that redescription and possible humiliation are no more closely connected with ironism than with metaphysics' (ibid: 90). There could hardly be a better justification for the procedural character of philosophical practice and the role of the therapist as facilitator rather than 'lecturer' of the client's reflexivity in either a metaphysical or post-metaphysical sense. The anti-authoritarian outlook of philosophical practice corresponds with the neo-pragmatist conviction that our normative judgement of other people's standpoints, and normative argumentation in the public space in general, should limit itself to pointing out the internal inconsistencies in our interlocutors' arguments. Instead of telling a client what to do, the therapist attempts to 'help a client ascertain whether a proposed action is consistent or inconsistent with the client's own belief system or worldview' (Marinoff, 2002: 13).

As Marinoff argues, 'philosophical dialogue between counselor and client is a vehicle for exploring the client's noetic world, with a view to developing a philosophical disposition that enables the client to resolve or manage his problem' (Marinoff, 2002: 81). The counselor's exploration of the client's philosophical outlook with a pragmatic intent, as well as his strategy of pointing out the internal inconsistencies in the client's 'final vocabulary', are quite incompatible with a 'metaphysical', representational and essentialist climate of

dialogue. The incompatibility is perhaps best captured by the following Rortian distinction: we could say that the anti-authoritarian philosophical therapist does not ask the client the 'transcending' realist question 'how do you know', she asks the immanent question 'why do you talk that way' (Rorty, 1989: 51).

The practitioner's attitude of exploration and her pragmatic readiness to experiment with the sources in the philosophical tradition as she addresses the idiosyncratic problems her clients are facing, together with the rejection of standardized procedures and scientization of therapy, correspond to the Rortian distinction of the 'metaphorical' and literal uses of language, where experimental, 'metaphorical' use of concepts and arguments is the motor of personal change. Philosophy is used within the therapeutic process as the facilitator of the client's self-transformation, since, as far as I understand Marinoff, the overcoming of a particular philosophical problem always requires some degree of the client's 'redescription' of herself and her circumstances in the Rortian sense.

Philosophical practice as conceptualized by Marinoff is definitely opposed to certain implications of the strong, Rortian post-metaphysical position which seems to favour a general withdrawal of theory from everyday interactive life, and the restriction of theorizing to the realm of individual 'self-creation'. Quite the opposite, philosophical practice retains confidence in dialogical reasoning as the best means for personal self-transformation and improvement. What philosophical practice is particularly successful at, however, is precisely the transformation of Rortian solitary process of 'self-redescription' through linguistic innovation into a dialogical enterprise. This is why philosophical dialogue, in its methodological orientation, manages to synthesize the best aspects of the Rortian and Habermasian post-metaphysical thought.

The main reason behind Rorty's scepticism towards any employment of philosophy beyond the context of individual reflection and redescription is his strong *liberalism*: his conviction that the private/public distinction cannot be superseded through any philosophical efforts, and his view that philosophy has little to contribute to the public realm as the motor of progressive social change. 'The closest we will come to joining these two quests [for private perfection and justice] is to see the aim of a just and free society as letting its citizens be as privatistic, "irrationalist", and aestheticist as they please so long as they do it on their own time – causing no harm to others and using no resources needed by those less advantaged',

Rorty argues (Rorty, 1989: xiv). Any attempt to employ philosophy in a quest for the good society would necessarily come at the expense of our individual freedom and the quest for 'self-creation'. Philosophical practice again shares to a considerable extent this liberal post-metaphysical sensitivity with respect to the private/public dichotomy, given its individualist approach to human problems and its aim of facilitating the client's attainment of a private 'equilibrium' rather than greater social justice or a more acute consciousness of injustice (Marinoff, 2000).

Just as the philosophical counselor does not attempt to explain her client's problems causally in light of her individual past, she does not try either to trace the 'noetic' problems of her client to wider social-structural conditions and determinants, as does, for example, critical theory or neo-Marxist social critique. I suspect this is because the latter approach would definitely require at least a residuum of a positivist 'diagnosis' of social reality and epistemological authoritarianism, still present for example in the 'weaker' post-metaphysical outlook of Habermas. Philosophical practice, with its stress on open-ended dialogical reasoning, is, I would argue, closer to the pragmatist, Deweyan notion of the 'edifying' role of philosophy, in which the philosopher does not provide blueprints for social change but contributes, as an engaged intellectual, to a gradual general rise in the level of the citizens' self-reflexivity, the only long-term guarantee against injustice, domination and irrationality.

Philosophical practitioners are *educators*, Marinoff argues: 'the philosophy professor and the philosophical counselor are both educators. The contemporary difference, not drawn by the ancients, is between theoretical love of wisdom, literally *philosophy*, and practical applications of wisdom, literally *phronesis*' (Marinoff, 2002: 94). This is precisely the post-metaphysical approach to bridging the gap between the public and private, in comparison to the 'Enlightenment rationalist' one where philosophy is the direct 'handmaiden' of emancipation. I would argue that philosophical practice in the broad sense, including different forms of group therapy, such as 'Socratic dialogue' and 'Philosopher's Cafe', has a potential to develop further in the direction of an 'edifying' discipline relevant to the public sphere, and I would definitely agree with Marinoff that the 'relevance of original pragmatism to philosophical practice deserves a volume of its own' (Marinoff, 2002: 44).

III Post-metaphysical spirit as a therapeutic component and socially emancipatory trait of philosophical practice

I have tried to show that the methodological orientation of philosophical dialogue, with its interwoven communicative-rational and neo-pragmatic tenets, can be adequately explained and normatively justified precisely as the expression of the Rortian-Habermasian common post-metaphysical outlook, informed to a greater (Rorty) or lesser (Habermas) degree by a scepticism towards an epistemologically authoritarian, positivist, correspondentalist and hierarchical temperament of disciplines such as psychiatry or classical psychoanalysis. I would even suggest, by way of conclusion, that the post-metaphysical spirit of philosophical practice can under certain circumstances itself become a therapeutic component of the dialogical process, if its fundamental premises, as discussed above, are made more explicit in the context of the counselor-client interaction without at the same time transforming them into the *substance* of a dialogue, i.e. imposing them on the client.

The cases I have in mind are those (I presume not so infrequent) situations in which the client is inclined to treat the counselor in a 'consciousness-philosophical' manner: to observe her from a 'metaphysical' point of view as someone more 'rational' (in an essentialist sense of the word) and therefore in closer contact with timeless truths independent of human beings. In such cases, even if the therapist shares the realist temperament of the client's 'final vocabulary' and has nothing to object to it, what is at stake are the crucial procedural premises of philosophical dialogue which I identified as post-metaphysical in spirit. The dialogical reasoning inherent in philosophical practice and the facilitating of the client's self-reflexivity, I have tried to argue, can hardly be conducted within a 'metaphysical' (realist, positivist, and essentialist) climate which fosters hierarchy, expertise, and epistemological authoritarianism. The therapist could then resort to a strategy of drawing attention to and making more explicit the underlying premises of the dialogical process, while at the same time conducting a 'substantive' conversation on a given topic. The danger of transforming the form of the dialogue into its substance would of course be there, but it would certainly be in the experimental and improvisation-affirmative spirit of philosophical practice if the therapist exercised an 'art' (rather than 'science') of balancing the procedural and the substantive in order to safeguard the vitality of the therapeutic process.

Marinoff's arguments that philosophical practice is a counterweight to, even a remedy (a 'social judo') for the negative social effects of anti-metaphysical developments within contemporary philosophy might suggest that philosophical practice is incompatible with a predominantly anti-realist orientation (Marinoff, 2002: 46). I have tried to show that philosophical dialogue as a *procedure* can actually be considered as more compatible with the Habermasian-Rortian post-metaphysical outlook than with the more conventional representational-positivist paradigm of therapy which would, in my opinion, inevitably press the discipline (even if only in the long run) toward standardization, hierarchy, and epistemological authoritarianism, all the negative tendencies of professionalization that the movement very much strives to avoid. However, my argumentation has not at all been opposed to Marinoff's view of philosophical practice as 'social judo'. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is precisely the post-metaphysical procedural *spirit* of the discipline which enables it to counter, within public space, both of the most socially detrimental, anti-rational consequences of the *substantive* post-metaphysical turn in 20th century philosophy: the excessive professionalization of education exemplified by contemporary analytic philosophy, on the one hand, and the ever greater turning of education into 'political indoctrination' represented by epistemologically authoritarian 'post-metaphysicists' of all provenances. The post-metaphysical spirit, I would argue, is what keeps philosophical practice from gradually sliding into either of the two camps.

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