

## MARTIN HEIDEGGER'S INFLUENCE ON RICHARD RORTY'S PHILOSOPHY

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### I) Introduction

In order to shed more light on the following train of thought I have to start with three general preliminary remarks about my topic.

1. *Philosophical influence appears mostly in the interpretations of the influenced.* It is almost always possible to write a monograph on the relationship of two world-famous philosophers. This is especially the case if they belong to essentially the same culture and one of them has confessed the other's influence. In addition, the earlier thinker had also evaluated openly the philosophical background of his latter „colleague,” i. e. pragmatism. In the Heidegger-Rorty case, we can easily recognize such a situation.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the interpretations under consideration are also rich, multi-faceted, and show historical changes. As we have recognized in similar cases, it is also possible that the earlier philosopher's influence is more considerable than the interpreting philosopher acknowledges it to be. (We can recognize this even in the case of Heidegger if we remember, e. g., Kierkegaard's influence.) Nevertheless, it is extremely easy to get lost in the field of hypotheses if we base our theory only on guesses. That is why I reconstruct first of all Rorty's own intentions, for he wanted to write a book on Heidegger, but he never completed this Heidegger monograph. However, he wrote on Heidegger many times independently from this intention. It has occurred in his writings from the 1970s in *Consequences of Pragmatism (CP)*, through the pages of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (PMN)*, *Essays on Heidegger and Others (EHO)*, *Contingency, Irony and*

*Solidarity (CIS)* and *Philosophy and Social Hope (PSH)* to his posthumous work, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics (PCP)*. We can also mention his interviews and lectures, in which Rorty evaluated and criticized Heidegger several times. Unquestionably, Heidegger is one of the thinkers who influenced Rorty's philosophical development very strongly: both his confrontation with analytic philosophers and his neopragmatic renaissance.

In the present case, however, I naturally have to limit the scope of my research. I am focusing, therefore, only on Rorty's interpretation of Heidegger's philosophy. I could have chosen several other special topics (truth, history, world, language, etc.), but I am persuaded that on a general level we can understand a relationship between two philosophers mostly through examining their interpretations of philosophy, since this provides a sort of frame for their thinking. On the following pages, using the method of philosophical hermeneutics, I will provide a general survey of Rorty's Heidegger-interpretation in the above mentioned field on the basis of his main books and papers.

2. *Our philosophers.* There might be lots of readers who do not know too much about Heidegger and Rorty. Let me summarize for them, in a short form, the main philosophical views of our philosophers.

Martin Heidegger (Sep 26, 1889 – May 26, 1976) achieved the ontological turn in Western philosophy and wanted to answer the question of Being (*Sein*) throughout his whole life. He combined his ontological approach with his transformed version of Husserlian phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics. (The latter was established by Heidegger himself in the 1920s.) The early Heidegger (1919-1929) wanted to fulfill his project in *Being and Time (BT)*, that is, to create a fundamental ontology through an existential analysis of *Dasein*, but his work remained a torso. After „the Turn” (*die Kehre*, 1929-1935), the late Heidegger (1935-1976) evaluated his early work, *BT* as a subject-centered philosophy, and absolutely neglected the existential

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<sup>1</sup> See Heidegger's and Rorty's main works and abbreviations in references

analysis. The late Heidegger focused directly on Being, on the history of Being and *Ereignis*.

Richard McKay Rorty (Oct 4, 1931 – Jun 8, 2007) is the founder of neopragmatism, an American, leftist patriot, who had a long and varied career. He thoroughly criticized analytic philosophy in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (PMN, 1979) and after leaving the analytic tradition he established neopragmatism (CIS, 1989) as an anti-metaphysical, anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, and naturalist, pan-relationist, meliorist philosophy. Rorty is one of those American philosophers, who also knows well the Continental tradition of philosophy in addition to Anglo-Saxon philosophical movements. He was influenced, first of all, by a tradition of post-Darwinian American philosophy (James, Dewey, Kuhn, Quine, Putnam, Davidson) and a tradition of post-Nietzschean European philosophy (Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer, Derrida, Foucault).

3. *The structure of my paper.* Rorty's relation to Heidegger shows a historical change. It is worth distinguishing at least two main periods within Rorty's Heidegger-interpretation. Essentially, this distinction gives the structure of my paper together with the final chapter:

- II/A Heidegger's influence on the early Rorty (1958-1979-1982)
- II/B Heidegger's influence on the late Rorty (1983-1989-2007)
  - 1. Rorty on the early Heidegger after 1989
  - 2. Rorty on the late Heidegger after 1989
- III Heidegger's Nazism from Rorty's point of view

## II/A) Heidegger's influence on the early Rorty (1958-1979-1982)

a) *The early Rorty had already read lots of texts from the late Heidegger.* As we know, the late Heidegger did not think highly of traditional pragmatism, nevertheless the neopragmatic Rorty for the whole of his life treated Heidegger as one of the exceptional thinkers of Western philosophy. Rorty considered Heidegger the most influential European thinker regarding his own neopragmatic turn, although Heidegger received different emphases in different periods of Rorty's oeuvre due to the historical dimension of his interpretation. In one of his interviews in 1994, Rorty confessed the following:

BORRADORI: Who is the „Continental“ author who has had the most influence on your philosophy?

RORTY: I would say, Martin Heidegger. I first read him in the late fifties because I was curious about what was happening in Europe.

BORRADORI: Which Heidegger interested you most: the existential Heidegger of *Being and Time*, or the hermeneutic Heidegger of *Holzwege*?

RORTY: At the beginning, the only work we knew about was *Being and Time*. Until the early sixties, even in Europe, Heidegger meant *Being and Time*.

BORRADORI: In Italy today, some philosophers, like Gianni Vattimo, tend to unite the two phases of Heideggerian thought into a single curve, thereby incorporating the existential Heidegger into a new postmetaphysical perspective. What do you think?

RORTY: I agree. I prefer to think that Heidegger struggled all his life to reach one objective: self-overcoming. The *Letter on Humanism* repudiates *Being and Time* in the same way that *What Is Thinking?* repudiates the *Letter on Humanism*. This is significant for the „Heidegger case“ and his relationship to Nazism. (TFT 38-39)

*Rorty regarded Heidegger's permanent self-transcendation as the inducement and essence of his oeuvre!* However, we can recognize that Rorty did the same, but in a more radical way. There is obviously a self-conscious self-transcendation also in Rorty's oeuvre, but he does not stop there, where Heidegger does. Rorty admired talented, imaginative, provocative, and innovative thinkers, because he himself had a similar

personality. Rorty had a double vein, and during his whole life he always consciously tried to harmonize the dimensions of his private self-creation and his public life that was constantly connected to the purpose of a liberal democracy, that is, to solidarity, social justice, and freedom.<sup>2</sup>

In his very personal autobiography, „Trotsky and the Wild Orchids” (1992) Rorty has recollected the early results of Heidegger's philosophical influence in this way:

About 20 years or so after I decided that the young Hegel's willingness to stop trying for eternity, and just be the child of his time, was the appropriate response to disillusionment with Plato, I found myself being led back to Dewey.<sup>3</sup> Dewey now seemed to me a philosopher who had learned all that Hegel had to teach about how to eschew certainty and eternity, while immunizing himself against pantheism by taking Darwin seriously. This rediscovery of Dewey coincided with my first encounter with Derrida (which I owe to Jonathan Arac, my colleague at Princeton). Derrida led me back to Heidegger, and I was struck by the resemblances between Dewey's, Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's criticisms of Cartesianism. Suddenly things began to come together. I thought I saw a way to blend a criticism of the Cartesian tradition with the quasi-Hegelian historicism of Michel Foucault, Ian Hacking and Alasdair MacIntyre. I thought that I could fit all these into a quasi-Heideggerian story about the tensions within Platonism. The result of this small epiphany was a book called *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (PSH 11-12)

b) *The early Rorty had not interpreted the early Heidegger as a pragmatist yet.* The first period of Rorty's Heidegger-interpretation is the epoch of *PMN* and *CP*. When Rorty launched the *PMN* (1979) and when the *CP* was published (1982), it was just after his „conversion”: he converted from analytic philosophy to neopragmatism that he had established. In those days we *cannot* speak about his pragmatist interpretation of *Being and Time*, because he recognized this possibility only after reading Robert Brandom's article in 1983<sup>4</sup> and

Mark Okrent's book in 1988.<sup>5</sup> While writing the *Mirror*, Rorty had already known Heidegger after the 'Turn' (Kehre), for he had read Heidegger's works after the *Kehre* from the beginning of the 1960s, but he had not interpreted *Being and Time* as a pragmatist work.

c) *According to PMN, Heidegger is a revolutionary and edifying philosopher.* At the time, Rorty celebrated Heidegger, together with Dewey and the late Wittgenstein, only as one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century:

It is against this background that we should see the work of the three most important philosophers of our century—Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. (...) I present Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey as philosophers whose aim is to edify—to help their readers, or society as a whole, break free from outworn vocabularies and attitudes, rather than to provide „grounding” for the intuitions and customs of the present. (*PMN* 5, 11-12)

As is well-known, Rorty had shaken the whole traditional philosophy in the *Mirror* from his new meta-philosophical point of view. He brought into question not only the concept of 'analytic philosophy' by developing further the self-critique of the best representatives of that philosophical movement in those days (Sellars, Quine, Davidson, Ryle, Malcolm, Kuhn and Putnam), but even that of 'philosophy' itself. After analysing and repudiating the traditional concepts of 'mind', 'knowledge' and 'philosophy' in the three main parts of *PMN*, in its last chapter he classified philosophers with Kuhnian words into *normal* and *revolutionary* types. Then Rorty made a distinction within the revolutionary type between the *systematic* philosophers and the *edifying* philosophers:

The mainstream philosophers are the philosophers I shall call „systematic,” and the peripheral ones are those I shall call „edifying.” These peripheral, pragmatic philosophers are skeptical primarily *about systematic philosophy*, about the whole project of universal commensuration. In our time, Dewey,

<sup>2</sup> See my treaties in references.

<sup>3</sup> Thus, it happened in the middle of the 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Brandom, „Heidegger's Categories in Being and Time,” *The Monist*, 60 (1983)

<sup>5</sup> Mark Okrent. *Heidegger's Pragmatism*. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988.

Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are the great edifying, peripheral, thinkers. All three make it as difficult as possible to take their thought as expressing views on traditional philosophical problems, or as making constructive proposals for philosophy as a cooperative and progressive discipline. They make fun of the classic picture of man, the picture which contains systematic philosophy, the search for universal commensuration in a final vocabulary. They hammer away at the holistic point that words take their meanings from other words rather than by virtue of their representative character, and the corollary that vocabularies acquire their privileges from the men who use them rather than from their transparency to the real. (*PMN* 367-368)

But we cannot speak about a pragmatist interpretation of the early Heidegger's philosophy neither in Rorty's *Mirror*, nor in Rorty's *CP*, which has first of all historical reasons. *CP* primarily contains Rorty's articles from the period of 1972-1980, that is those articles which were written before the *Mirror* or during the time he was writing the *Mirror* (e.g. "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey" from 1976 and "Dewey's Metaphysics" from 1977). It would allude to a schizophrenic state of mind if the *CP*'s Heidegger-interpretation were greatly different from the *Mirror*'s one.

d) *Heidegger's main contribution is his recounting of the history of ontology.* Husserl and Russell belong to the systematic philosophers, but Heidegger belongs to the edifying philosophers, and his greatest contribution is, according to Rorty, the historical awareness and critical distance achieved by his descriptions of the history of ontology. It has created historical distance from, and awareness of, the tradition of the history of ontology:

But Wittgenstein's flair for deconstructing captivating pictures needs to be supplemented by historical awareness – awareness of the source of all this mirror-imagery – and that seems to me Heidegger's greatest contribution. Heidegger's way of recounting history of philosophy lets us see the beginnings of the Cartesian imagery in the Greeks and the metamorphoses of this imagery during the last three centuries. He thus lets us „distance“ ourselves from the tradition. (*PMN* 12)

## II/B) Heidegger's influence on the late Rorty (1983-1989-2007)

Rorty's neopragmatism has changed in the 1980s, because he did not express himself first of all in critiques (as he did in *PMN*), but he worked out his own views. They were published in his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989). His main aim here is to *deny* the possibility of a philosophical *single vision*, that is to refute the metaphysical type of philosophical theories which „allegedly“ describe the essential, unchangeable structure of the world. Instead of this kind of philosophy, Rorty suggested we accept the *public-private distinction* not only in our everyday life, but also in the field of philosophy. In his opinion, we can speak about the philosophers of the public who deal with the questions of social development and about the philosophers of the private who deal first of all with the questions of self-creation, self-perfection. These mean different vocabularies, and we have to handle them separately like brushes and wrenches. They are—according to Rorty—different tools for different purposes, and it is prohibited to mix them. Rorty created also a new theory of *solidarity*, which says that solidarity is not given for us, but it is regarded as a goal to be achieved. He also sketched in *CIS* a *liberal utopia* which is a liberal democracy of the future created by the people who will be *liberal ironists*. This is a new type of human personality. According to Rorty, 'liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do.' He uses „ironist“ 'to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires' (*CIS* xv), that is if he or she accepts the contingency of the main columns of his or her life (language, self and community) (cf. *CIS* Ch 1, 2 and 3). His friend, Richard Bernstein claimed that there was an additional aesthetic strain to Rorty's writings that become more and more pronounced since the 1980s, a claim that Rorty accepted.

The second period of Rorty's Heidegger-interpretation started in 1983, when he read Brandom's above

mentioned article („Heidegger's Categories in Being and Time"). It is important to emphasize that Rorty wrote almost at the same time the Heidegger-texts of the *CIS* (published in 1989) and that of the *EHO* (published in 1991), that is, these text were written or altered in the second half of the 1980s. That is why *they are saturated essentially with the same Heidegger interpretation*. According to my thesis, (a) from the middle of the 1980s Rorty had interpreted Heidegger's *Being and Time* in a pragmatist way and (b) as a representative of the radical historicity. But Rorty had interpreted the late Heidegger first (a) as a representative of the radical historicity (it assured a kind of continuity in his Heidegger-interpretation); second (b) as a defender of poetry who was not radical enough; third (c) as a person who had opted for pragmatism in a wry and ironic way; and finally (d) as the refuser of the public sphere.

### 1) Rorty on the early Heidegger after 1989

a) *Rorty interprets the early Heidegger as a pragmatist from 1983*. The Rortyan evaluation of the early Heidegger is shown nicely in his following sentences:

This qualified sympathy for pragmatism is clearest in *Being and Time*, the book which Dewey described as „sounding like a description of 'the situation' in transcendental German." In Part I of his *Heidegger's Pragmatism*, Mark Okrent has shown, very carefully and lucidly, how to read *Being and Time* as a pragmatist treatise. (...) With Okrent, I read Division One of *Being and Time* as a recapitulation of the standard pragmatist arguments against Plato and Descartes. I read Division Two, and in particular the discussion of Hegelian historicism, as recapitulating Nietzsche's criticism of Hegel's attempt to escape finitude by losing himself in the dramas of history. (*EHO* 32, 33)

Rorty accepts Brandom's, Okrent's and Charles Guignon's interpretation that the center of *Being and Time* is a critique of Cartesianism. These writers agree in thinking—as Rorty says—that „what Brandom describes as the recognition that social practice is determinative of what is and is not up to social practice is Heidegger's crucial insight in this work." (*EHO* 60-61) Brandom interprets as an expression of this recognition even the

claim that the analytic of Dasein is fundamental ontology. As further examples we can mention the relationship between the ready-to-hand and the presence-at-hand entities, and also the question of truth. The existential-ontological primacy of the ready-to-hand to the presence-at-hand is possible exclusively on the basis of the pragmatic circumspective dealing (*Umgang*), which has a priority to discursive recognition. Similarly, the existential-ontological conception of truth can also lay the foundation of the epistemological truth only in the case of a pragmatist approach. Other examples of this from *Being and Time* could also be enumerated. In accordance with all of this Rorty claims that:

One can imagine a possible Heidegger who, after formulating the Dewey-like social-practice pragmatism of the early sections of *Being and Time*, would have felt that his job was pretty well done. But the early Heidegger was driven by the same urge to *purity* which drove the early Wittgenstein. The same drives which led Heidegger to develop the notions of „authenticity" and „being-toward-death" in the later portions of *Sein und Zeit* led Wittgenstein to write the final section of the *Tractatus* – the sections in which the doctrine of showing is extended from logic to ethics. (*EHO* 60-61)

In harmony with this interpretation, Rorty claims in several places that Being does not even have an essential ontological role in *Being and Time*. In his opinion, Heidegger regarded Being only as a good example to emphasize the importance of *contingency*:

The reason Heidegger talks about Being is not that he wants to direct our attention to an unfortunately neglected topic of inquiry, but that he wants to direct our attention to the difference between inquiry and poetry, between struggling for power and accepting contingency. He wants to suggest what a culture might be like in which poetry rather than philosophy-cum-science was the paradigmatic human activity. (*EHO* 36)

In other words, according to Rorty, Heidegger wanted to evocate the feeling of *contingency*, that is, the feeling of fragility and incalculability of the human activity already in *Being and Time*. He wanted to emphasize the feeling, the approach, that was almost absolutely destroyed by the metaphysical ontological tradition. One of the early

Heidegger's methods, formal indication (*formale Anzeige*) served also this aim. Probably not accidentally, but H.-G. Gadamer and J. Grondin characterized similarly formal indication as something that prohibits dogmatism and calls us on „personal fulfilment.“ (Cf. Gadamer 1994, Grondin 1991.) On the one hand, it follows from the basic feature of the Heideggerian phenomenological procedure that it must always be fulfilled personally, and the procedure cannot be shortened without casualties, for phenomena in the Heideggerian sense are always personal. On the other hand, using his conscious procedure of formal indication which prohibits dogmatism, Heidegger demonstrates that contingency identified as chance plays a very important role in our life. Rorty also claims on the basis of Heidegger's texts (including even his early ones), that the role of language has changed during Heidegger's philosophical development:

The stock of language rises as that of Dasein falls, as Heidegger worries more and more about the possibility that his earlier work has been infected with the „humanism“ characteristic of the age of the world picture, about the possibility that Sartre had not misread him, and that Husserl had had a point when he said that *Being and Time* was merely anthropology. More generally, Heidegger's turn from the earlier question „What are the roots of the traditional ontotheological problematic?“ to the later question „Where do we stand in the history of Being?“ is accompanied by a desperate anxiety that he be offering something *more* than, as he puts it, „simply a history of the alterations in human beings' self-conceptions.“ (*EHO* 62-63)

b) *The early Heidegger is still the representative of radical historicity for the late Rorty.* It is obvious if we know that in *Being and Time* human being's (*Dasein*) historicity does not follow from the history of the world, from the fact that we are „parts“ of history. Quite the contrary, according to Heidegger we can create world-history exclusively because we are originally beings characterized by temporality and historicity. We cannot exist in other ways, and – according to the early Heidegger – even the so called „supernatural“ is temporal (cf. *BT* § 5).

## 2) Rorty on the late Heidegger after 1989

a) *Radical historicity.* In the second epoch, the late Rorty continued to interpret the late Heidegger as a representative of radical historicity. What is more, Rorty saw the late Heidegger as a more radical representative of historicity than the early Heidegger, because not human being (*Dasein*) but Being (*Sein*) itself is characterized first of all by historicity according to the late Heidegger. Existential analysis was refuted by the late Heidegger as a kind of subject-centered philosophy. After his philosophical Turn (*Kehre*), that is after the period of 1929-1935, Heidegger did not see Being through *Dasein* (as he did in *BT*), but approached directly Being, which he regarded *ab ovo* historical and saw from here the entities. This is the period in Heidegger's oeuvre (1935-1976), when he deals with the history of Being, with different epochs of this history, and *Ereignis*. *The late Heidegger focused directly on Being, on the history of Being and Ereignis.* From his Turn on he has abandoned philosophy as *fundamentum absolutum et inconcussum*, and the *ab ovo* historical Being has become his philosophical starting point. In the frame of this history of Being, the history of the European culture and philosophy appeared as a procedure of the increasingly deeper and deeper oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*).

However, the general frame of his Heidegger interpretation (and that of the interpretation of other philosophers) is the age-long competition of philosophy and poetry in this period. Rorty interpreted even Heidegger's pragmatism within this frame. This connection, on the one hand, is emphasized in several of his texts (*CIS*, *EHO*, etc.) as his general philosophical intention. On the other hand, it also holds true with regard to his own intellectual development. Looking at his whole oeuvre from his analytic philosophy to his neopragmatism, it is obvious that he emphasized not only contingency and dominance of metaphors, but also the importance of literary culture.

b) *Competition between philosophy and poetry.* When comparing philosophy and poetry, the latter (and later – as we are going to see – the novel) is favoured by Rorty. In his opinion, from the 19th century on neither the theologian, nor the philosopher, nor the scientist, but much more the poet characterizes our epoch. As long as procedures, initiated by the French Revolution, Romantic poetry and classic German Idealism, made clear the idea that truth is made rather than found, the theologian, the philosopher, and the scientist were replaced by the poet as the main intellectual character of society. In one of his essays of 2004, „Philosophy as a transitional genre” – at the beginning of an earlier version of this article, accepting his friend and colleague, Richard Bernstein's claim, that the aesthetic feature is getting stronger and stronger in his oeuvre – Rorty expresses his viewpoint as follows:

Equipped with these definitions of “redemptive truth” and “intellectual,” I can now state my thesis. It is that the intellectuals of the West have, since the Renaissance, progressed through three stages: they have hoped for redemption first from God, then from philosophy, and now from literature. Monotheistic religion offers hope for redemption through entering into a new relation to a supremely powerful non-human person. Belief in the articles of a creed may be only incidental to such a relationship. For philosophy, however, true belief is of the essence: redemption by philosophy would consist in acquiring a set of beliefs that represent things in the one way they truly are. Literature, finally, offers redemption through making the acquaintance of as great a variety of human beings as possible. Here again, as with religion, true belief may be of little importance. (PCP 91)

The center of the literary culture is the so called *strong poet*. Thus Rorty in his *Contingency* book has showed the contingency of language with the help of Wittgenstein and Davidson, as he utilizes Nietzsche's and Freud's help for justification of the self's contingency. Everybody has a contingent personality, but only the strong poet can recognize in this the possibility of freedom, that is, the possibility of self-creation. Only the strong poet can transfer the freedom of recognized necessity into—as Rorty says—the freedom of „recognized contingency” (cf. CIS 40).

Who is the „strong poet”? As Rorty puts it, the strong poet is „someone like Galileo, Yeats, or Hegel (a „poet” in my wide sense of the term – the sense of „one who makes things new”)” (CIS 12-13). Hence it follows that the „strong poet” is someone who is able to redescribe things in a way that creates a new vocabulary and changes human practice. It means that the strong poet can be regarded as the possible peak of the freedom understood as self-creation, someone who renews our way of approach, our social practice. It is true, however, also in connection with the strong poet, that his self is a center of narrative gravity, but he is more than an everyday person. He is more, because he creates the new redescrptions, the new narratives that are—with Rorty's words—the new *vocabularies*. The strong poet creates the new vocabularies with the help of *metaphors* that are expressions without clear and publicly accepted meanings. A metaphor is essentially a sign without a publicly accepted, common meaning. It will require a habitual use, a familiar place in a language game, and it will thereby have ceased to be a metaphor. It will have become a dead metaphor.

In Rorty's opinion, the strong poet's fear of death is always much stronger than that of everyday people. That is why Rorty ascribes far bigger possibilities to *poetry* than to philosophy in connection with the self-creation belonging to our private sphere, which can stand not only in harmony with the public sphere, but also – in several cases – in contradiction with it. As Rorty puts it:

Only poets, Nietzsche suspected, can truly appreciate contingency. The rest of us are doomed to remain philosophers, to insist that there is really only one true lading-list, one true description of the human situation, one universal context of our lives. (CIS 28)

In the second chapter of his *Contingency* book, which is entitled „The Contingency of Selfhood,” Rorty analyses the relevant views of Nietzsche and Freud. According to Rorty, Nietzsche gives an antidemocratic, but – at the same time – radical interpretation of individual freedom understood as self-creation (CIS 27-28):

Nietzsche saw self-knowledge as self-creation. The process of coming to know oneself, confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language - that is, of thinking up some new metaphors. For any literal description of one's individuality, which is to say any use of an inherited language-game for this purpose, will necessarily fail. One will not have traced that idiosyncrasy home but will merely have managed to see it as not idiosyncratic after all, as a specimen reiterating a type, a copy or replica of something which has already been identified. To fail as a poet - and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being - is to accept somebody else's description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations on previously written poems. (CIS 27-28. - Emphases added.)

This is what Heidegger did not want at all! He did not want to become a new philosopher in a queue. He wanted to create a philosophy which could *not* be transcended. From the 1930s, when he became preoccupied with Nietzsche (who had barely gotten a look-in in *Being and Time*) until his death, Heidegger concentrates - according to Rorty - only on one question

"How can I avoid being one more metaphysician, one more footnote to Plato?" (...) For Heidegger, this task presented itself as the task of how to work within a final vocabulary while somehow simultaneously "bracketing" that vocabulary - to keep the seriousness of its finality while letting it itself express its own contingency. He wanted to construct a vocabulary which would both constantly dismantle itself and constantly take itself seriously. (CIS 110 and 112)

However, Rorty says, this is exactly what Heidegger could not manage. One of the examples of the strong poet, worked out in the fifth chapter of the *Contingency* book, is Martin Heidegger himself. In this chapter, Rorty distinguishes the ironist theory and the ironist novel from metaphysics, and from the competition of the two former ones the ironist novel wins, which also is able to avoid the metaphysical features. The ironist artist creates his works according to the standard of beauty, but the ironist theorist always wants to grasp the universal presuppositions of *sublimity*, and he always suffers a defeat in this way. *Sublimity always creates metaphysics*. It follows from this - in Rorty's opinion -

that Heidegger himself had also suffered a defeat in this sense. He could not solve the paradox: „how can we write a historical narrative about metaphysics - about successive attempts to find a redescription of the past which the future will not be able to redescribe - without ourselves becoming metaphysicians?“ (CIS 108) It means that Heidegger could not become a defender of such radical poetry.

At that time, Rorty had undoubtedly already read the early Heidegger as a pragmatist and the late Heidegger as a radical representative of historicity. In Rorty's opinion, however, the late Heidegger—„thinking from the *Ereignis* (the event, the happening, the appropriation),“ instead of telling a narrative on the History of Being and Truth—is still a Nietzschean ascetic priest, since his procedure remains essentially the same as that of Plato and Augustine. Heidegger also creates the distinguished place of his own thinking and claims his story as *the only remarkable* story. Meanwhile, he leaves his fellow humans alone, because he does not deal with their problems and features himself as the savior of his epoch precisely by his abstention from action. As an ascetic priest, however, he hopes that he will be able to cleanse himself of, and to distance himself from, what he is looking at. This hope drives him to the thought that there must be some kind of cleansing *askesis* which makes him able to contact with the Wholly Other, to be saturated with the *Openness to Being* (cf. *EHO* 70).

It is enough to recall the charge of the oblivion of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) and the question of Being (*Frage nach dem Sein*) or later this Wholly Other, and Heidegger's essentialism becomes entirely obvious, which is—in Rorty's opinion of the 1990s—already a characteristic of philosophy and poetry. Rorty contrasts with this the novel and its Kundera's interpretation, that is, he opposes the essentialist culture to the narrative culture, because the former one is featured by philosophy and poetry, but the latter one by novel. As long as the former one is the society of the Thinker and the Poet, the latter one is the society of the intellectuals

who are able to renew themselves permanently by the force of imagination. (Rorty offers a longer description of that story in his article, „Heidegger, Kundera, Dickens,“ published in *EHO*.)

But Rorty is also disturbed by the reification of language in the philosophy of the late Heidegger. As we have already seen, the value of language rises as that of *Dasein* falls in Heidegger's eyes. While language does not have a distinguished role in *Being and Time*, in the 1947 *Letter on Humanism* it is already „the house of Being,“<sup>6</sup> and from 1951 sentences of the following kind can be read:

Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. (...) For, strictly, it is language that speaks. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. (*Poetry, Language, Thought* 213-214)

Rorty understands that Heidegger wants to grasp language not merely as a tool, as Dewey and Wittgenstein did, but as something more than a tool. The late Heidegger treated language as if it were „a quasi-agent, a brooding presence, something that stands over and against human beings.“ (*EHO* 3) It means that Rorty criticizes Heidegger in *EHO*, because he does not handle language in a naturalistic, Darwinian way, but—in some sense accepting still the Diltheyan distinction between *Geist* and *Natur*—he looks at language as if it would be a kind of „God.“ Critiques written in his article, „Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and the reification of language“ mean Rorty's protest against „letting „Language“ become the latest substitute for „God“ or „Mind“ – something mysterious, incapable of being described in the same terms in which we describe tables, trees, and atoms“ (*EHO* 4). The next sentences summarize the essence of Rorty's actual Heidegger-critique clearly:

But although the younger Heidegger worked hard to free himself from the notion of the

philosopher as spectator of time and eternity, from the wish to see the world from above „as a limited whole,“ the older Heidegger slipped back into a very similar idea. The limited whole which that Heidegger tried to distance himself from was called „metaphysics“ or „the West.“ For him, „the mystical“ became the sense of himself as „thinking after the end of metaphysics“ – as looking back on metaphysics, seeing it as a limited, rounded-off whole – and thus as something we might hope to put behind us. The old Heidegger's final vision was of the West as a single gift of Being, a single *Ereignis*, a chalice with one handle labeled „Plato“ and the other „Nietzsche,“ complete and perfect in itself – and therefore, perhaps, capable of being set to one side. (*EHO* 51)

The exceptional philosophical importance of the late Heidegger's thoughts is without question, but his self-overestimation cannot be accepted from a pragmatist point of view, because it is still burdened with metaphysical remains:

*But the reification of language in the late Heidegger is simply a stage in the hypostatization of Heidegger himself – in the transfiguration of Martin Heidegger from one more creature of his time, one more self constituted by the social practices of his day, one more reactor to the work of others, into a world-historical figure, the first postmetaphysical thinker. The hope for such transfiguration is the hope that there is still the possibility of something called „thinking“ after the end of philosophy. It is the hope that the thinker can avoid immersion in the „always already disclosed,“ avoid relationality, by following a single star, thinking a single thought. (...) From the later Wittgenstein's naturalistic and pragmatic point of view, we can be grateful to Heidegger for having given us a new language-game. But we should not see that language-game as Heidegger did – as a way of distancing and summing up the West. It was, instead, simply one more in a long series of self-conceptions. Heideggerese is only Heidegger's gift to us, not Being's gift to Heidegger. (*EHO* 64 and 65. – Emphases added.)*

c) *Heidegger and pragmatism.* We can see in the late Heidegger not only a change in his relation to the Western philosophical tradition, but also to pragmatism. His relative sympathy with pragmatism in *Being and Time* has changed into a wry and ironic opting for pragmatism. Rorty starts his article, „Heidegger,

<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger. *Basic Writings*. (ed. by David Farrell Krell) San Francisco: Harper, 1992, 217.

Contingency, and Pragmatism" (1991) with a claim regarding Heidegger after his philosophical Turn (*Kehre*):

One of the most intriguing features of Heidegger's later thought is his claim that if you begin with Plato's motives and assumptions you will end up with some form of pragmatism. I think that this claim is, when suitably interpreted, right. But, unlike Heidegger, I think pragmatism is a *good* place to end up. (EHO 27)

In this article, Rorty shows the possibility for a pragmatist to go together with Heidegger, and also the point where they have to split their ways. Rorty analyzes first Heidegger's charge against pragmatism, then refutes the philosophical presuppositions of Heidegger's charge, and in this way – in the end – the defendant becomes the accuser, and the accuser becomes the defendant. According to Heidegger's charge, the history of Western philosophy looks like an escalator moving down, and nobody can get off before the end station, which is pragmatism. Heidegger summarized these conceptual transformations in the second volume of his Nietzsche book, under the title, „Sketches for a History of Being as Metaphysics.“ This condensed the history of Western philosophy stretches from the Greek researches of final principles and substances greater than human beings, to the American conviction that its ultimate goal is a technologically developed society with things dominated by humans. If somebody accepts Plato's starting point, then she will wind up on this downward moving escalator with Nietzsche and, as Rorty ironically says, „worse yet, Dewey.“ According to Plato's starting point the only sense of human thinking is the search for unconditional certainty. That is why Aristotle also claims in *Metaphysics* that above all, philosophy is a science of „ultimate reasons.“ The entire history of metaphysics, in the sense of this onto-theological tradition which cuts out chance and contingency, is only a sequence of such interpretations of things, which aims at the ultimate certainty and wants – with Kant's expression – to lead philosophy on the safe way of sciences. However, after centuries it became obvious that at the end of these philosophical attempts „the only thing we can be certain about is what we

want“ (EHO 29). But, it means that Plato's requirement of the absolute certainty leads us necessarily to pragmatism, that is – according to Heidegger – we can consequently fulfill Plato's aim only as pragmatists:

Once we take this final step, once human desires are admitted into the criterion of „truth,“ the last remnants of the Platonic idea of knowledge as contact with an underlying nonhuman order disappear. *We have become pragmatists.* But we only took the path that leads to pragmatism because Plato told us that we had to take evidence and certainty, and therefore skepticism, seriously. *We only became pragmatists because Plato and Aristotle already gave us a technical, instrumental account of what thinking was good for.* (EHO 30. – Emphases added.)

In Rorty's interpretation, Heidegger says that „if one is going to stay within this tradition, then one might as well be a pragmatist... So, if the only choice is between Platonism and pragmatism, Heidegger would wryly and ironically opt for pragmatism.“ (EHO 32) The direct reason of his recognition – in Rorty's opinion – that can already be read in his works at the beginning of the 1920s and on the pages of *Being and Time* is that Heidegger woke up to the truth that *contingency* is a permanent part of our lives. The signs of this recognition are, among others, that the early Heidegger became a *philosophical atheist* (cf. GA 61); he used consequently the above mentioned *formal indication*; and, within the so called ontological difference, he understood *even Being only as a phenomenon*. It is clear from all of this that Heidegger wanted to preserve the force of the most elemental words already in *Being and Time* (cf. EHO 34), and language became more and more important in his philosophy. Rorty understands these distinguished, most elemental words as metaphors, and that is why this tendency of Heidegger's philosophy means for him the victory of poetry over philosophy in the late Heidegger (cf. EHO 34-35).

Focusing now on a thought that seems to be a mistake at the first glance, it is Rorty's opinion that Being is not essential for the early Heidegger. I am persuaded that this short excursus of his article, „Heidegger,

contingency, and pragmatism" (cf. *EHO* 36-39) has a dominant role in Rorty's line of thought, because he here offers us Heidegger's philosophical presuppositions of his charge against pragmatism, and Rorty shows the contradiction within Heidegger's viewpoint. This context gives the reason for Rorty's strong, neopragmatic Heidegger-interpretation, and it would be difficult to question, from this point of view, that it is a just interpretation. At the same time, it is clear to him what he is doing in his critical Heidegger-interpretation:

I think that Heidegger goes on and on about „the question about Being" without ever answering it because *Being is a good example of something we have no criteria for answering questions about.* (...) The crucial move in this redescription, as I read Heidegger, is his suggestion that we see the metaphysician's will to truth as a self-concealing form of the poetic urge. *He wants us to see metaphysics as an inauthentic form of poetry, poetry which thinks of itself as antipoetry, a sequence of metaphors whose authors thought of them as escapes from metaphoricity.* He wants us to recapture the force of the most elementary words of Being – the words on the list above, the words of the various Thinkers who mark the stages of our descent from Plato – by ceasing to think of these words as the natural and obvious words to use. We should instead think of this list as as *contingent* as the contours of an individual cherry blossom. (*EHO* 36 and 37. – Emphases added.)

What is Being then? „*Being is what vocabularies are about...* More precisely, Being is what *final* vocabularies are about" (*EHO* 37). We can learn from the *Contingency* book and also from *EHO*, that final vocabularies are not created by the individuals. Final vocabularies are given in a historical way, and we only grow into them, and that is why we can also become aware of their contingency only after acquiring them. If Being cannot be anything else as the final vocabulary of the actual philosophy (e. g. *physis* or *subiectum* or *Wille zur Macht*, which are just abbreviations for whole vocabularies – cf. *EHO* 37), then Being is not the same thing under all descriptions, but is something different under each. It follows from this, that *none of the descriptions of Being could be more or less a true understanding of Being than any other.* If this claim is acceptable, then Rorty is right to ask whether

Heidegger „has any business disliking pragmatism as much as he does"? (*EHO* 39) Rorty's answer seems very clear. Sometimes Heidegger seems to accept this logical consequence, „but often, as his use of the term „Forgetfulness of Being" suggests, he seems to be saying the opposite." (*EHO* 39)

d) *Heidegger and politics.* All of the preceding leads us to the political dimension of Rorty's Heidegger-interpretation which is very consistent. Both in the *Contingency* book and in the *EHO*, Rorty presents his viewpoint that Heidegger has never been a believer of solidarity or democracy. In one of his articles, „Philosophy as science, as metaphor, and as politics" Rorty wants to show not only the three main versions of how we conceived of our relation to the Western philosophical tradition in the 20th century, but he also emphasizes the similarities and differences between Heidegger's and Dewey's philosophy (cf. *EHO* 9). They both refused foundationalism and visual metaphors, but the refusal itself took radically different forms in their works. Rorty examines these differences under two headings. On the one hand, Rorty analyzes their different treatments of the relationship between the metaphorical and the literal. On the other hand, he analyzes their different attitudes towards the relation between philosophy and politics. Only the latter thorough analysis is important for us now:

The pragmatist would grant Heidegger's point that the great thinkers are the most idiosyncratic. They are the people like Hegel or Wittgenstein whose metaphors come out of nowhere, lightning bolts which blaze new trails. But whereas Heidegger thinks that the task of exploring these newly suggested paths of thought is banalistic, something which can be left to hacks, the pragmatist thinks that such exploration is the pay-off from the philosopher's work. He thinks of the thinker as serving the community, and of his thinking as futile unless it is followed up by a reweaving of the community's web of belief. That reweaving will assimilate, by gradually literalizing, the new metaphors which the thinker has provided. The proper honor to pay to new, vibrantly alive metaphors, is to help them become dead metaphors as quickly as possible, to rapidly reduce them to the status of tools of social

progress. The glory of the philosopher's thought is not that it initially makes everything more difficult (though that is, of course true), but that in the end it makes things easier for everybody. (...) Whereas Heidegger thinks of the social world as existing for the sake of the poet and the thinker, the pragmatist thinks of it the other way round. For Dewey as for Hegel, the point of individual human greatness is its contribution to social freedom, where this is conceived of in the terms we inherit from the French Revolution. (*EHO* 17 and 18)

It is obvious for Rorty, that the essential difference between the Heideggerian and pragmatist attitude towards the philosophical tradition stems from a difference in attitude towards recent political history. As I above mentioned, Rorty always had a double vein and kept himself as the heir of Dewey in some sense. As a precocious child, Rorty had dealt both with the natural but ominous beauty and botanic characteristics of the North American wild orchids, and – according to the Trotskyist tradition of his family – with the life of the oppressed, the poor. (cf. *PSH* 6-7). During his entire life, Rorty tried to reconcile the private and the public dimensions of his personality. As for Dewey, he was admired not by the philosopher who discussed for decades the nitty-gritty questions of truth, but the thinker who was able to give visions for his audience and readers. Essentially the meliorism of the traditional pragmatism and Dewey's social democratic commitment belong to the heritage, which is undertaken consciously by Rorty. Dewey and Rorty are both philosophers of democracy. Rorty's true political commitment can be seen first of all in his *Achieving Our Country*, but he gave voice to his liberal utopia (do not forget that in Europe „liberal“ means *social democratic*) in several of his works (*CIS*, *EHO*, *PSH*) and interviews.

As for Heidegger, Rorty admired his philosophical talent, but disliked his anti-democratic attitude and political and social awkwardness. Heidegger „was a miserable human being, but he was also a man of great imaginative power, whose influence will endure“ (*TFT* 94). What Rorty wrote on Nabokov in his *Contingency* book (*CIS* 141-168) is valid also – *mutatis mutandis* – even in connection with Heidegger. As Nabokov was chasing artistic perfection,

so Heidegger was chasing the perfection of the philosophical self-creation and became cold-hearted toward the pains of the others in some sense. However, Nabokov was aware of it, and he suffered even from its possibility, but Heidegger visibly did not care about that. According to Habermas, in 1945 Heidegger saw the Holocaust and the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe as two instances of the same phenomenon (cf. *EHO* 69). In accordance with all of these Rorty says that

although Heidegger was only accidentally a Nazi, Dewey was essentially a social democrat. His thought has no point when detached from social democratic politics. His pragmatism is an attempt to help achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number by facilitating the replacement of language, customs, and institutions which impede that happiness. Heidegger dismissed this attempt as one which we can no longer take seriously. (...) The pragmatist agrees with both Husserl and Heidegger (and with Horkheimer and Adorno) that the age of scientific technology *may* turn out to be the age in which openness and freedom are rationalized out of existence. But his reply is that it *might* turn out to be the age in which the democratic community becomes the mistress, rather than the servant, of technical rationality. (...) My preference for Dewey over Heidegger is based on the conviction that what Heidegger wanted – something that was not a calculation of means to ends, not power madness – was under his nose all the time. It was the new world which began to emerge with the French Revolution – a world in which future-oriented politics, romantic poetry, and irreligious art made social practices possible in which Heidegger never joined. He never joined them because he never really looked outside of philosophy books. (*EHO* 19 and 20, plus 48 and 49)

### III) Heidegger's Nazism from Rorty's point of view

Heidegger's Nazism is naturally also part of the Heidegger-Rorty relationship. The first reason is that questions like „Has Heidegger's politics influenced his philosophy?“ and „Can we evaluate his philosophy according to his personality?“ belong indirectly to the whole of Heidegger's philosophy. The second reason is that Rorty himself took up a position on the question of Heidegger's Nazism, where the turbulent debates

contained many exaggerations. *These debates will not be dealt with here.* On the one hand, I neglect them, because the analysis of those arguments would need a monograph. On the other hand, I am persuaded that the *philosophical* essence of the debates does not rest on a choice of whether or not Heidegger was a Nazi. It is a question of „facts“ first of all. The only interesting question here is from a philosophical point of view, namely, to what extent and how Heidegger's Nazism influenced his philosophy. *This* is the really important question that needs serious consideration, because we can exclusively understand the merits of the problem only if we have thoroughly thought through the relationships between personality and its intellectual products. Specifically, the relationships between personality and philosophy, and between morality and philosophy.

In my opinion, Rorty's viewpoint is worth mentioning for at least four reasons:

1) On the one hand, Rorty claims clearly that Heidegger was a Nazi. It is part of their relationship, because Rorty sees the main difference between their personalities in their different relations to politics and democracy:

I would grant that Heidegger was, from early on, suspicious of democracy and of the 'disenchanted' world which Weber described. His thought was, indeed, essentially anti-democratic. But lots of Germans who were dubious about democracy and modernity did not become Nazis. Heidegger did because he was both more of a ruthless opportunist and more of a political ignoramus than most of the German intellectuals who shared his doubts. Although Heidegger's philosophy seems to me not to have specifically *totalitarian* implications, it does take for granted that attempts to feed the hungry, shorten the working day, etc., just do not have much to do with philosophy. For Heidegger, Christianity is merely a certain decadent form of Platonic metaphysics; the change from pagan to Christian moral consciousness goes unnoticed. The 'social gospel' side of Christianity which meant most to Tillich (a social democratic thinker who was nevertheless able to appropriate a lot of Heideggerian ideas and jargon) meant nothing to Heidegger. (*EHO* 19)

2) On the other hand, Rorty makes it clear in several places that personality and philosophy do *not* stand together necessarily and directly. In his opinion, we cannot justify a perfect and direct congruence of personality with philosophy, although they surely influence each other:

QUESTIONER: Habermas has been active in the current debates over Martin Heidegger's Nazism, arguing that a deep connection exists between Heidegger's fascism and his philosophy. Others, such as Derrida, have downplayed the connection. Where do you stand on that question?

RORTY: I think Heidegger's philosophy and his politics can be explained on the basis of some of the same biographical facts. But I don't think the politics contaminate the philosophy. You can explain Sartre's Stalinism by reference to the same biographical facts that gave rise to *Being and Nothingness*, but I don't think that book is contaminated by the Stalinism. (*TFT* 32-33)

3) It follows from all of this that Rorty does not share those arguments that reject Heidegger's philosophy just because of political and/or moral reasons.

4) Finally, Rorty has ascribed a distinguished role also to *moral luck*. It follows first of all from his conception of personality which says that every personality is a center of narrative gravity, and its negative content is the exclusion of any kind of final, metaphysical center of personality. *Self* – as it has been shown in the 2nd chapter of *CIS* – is only a permanently changing, narratively centered network of beliefs and desires without any final, metaphysical center or essence. On the basis of this, Rorty thinks that *one's moral attitude can be considered also a case of luck in many situations*. It is much easier to keep our moral attitude if we do not get into such situations where difficult moral decisions should or must be made among extreme circumstances. If we want to demonstrate moral luck in the simplest way, we should perhaps take an example from the field of bioethics. One of the best examples is organ transplantation. As long as you are not asked to donate one of your kidneys to your son, whose life is at stake (or at least you could free your son from the misery of dialysis), you can easily keep your moral attitude when

telling others about your hypothetically positive decision. What is more, you are absolutely lucky if such difficult moral situations can be avoided during your entire life. In this case, you could evaluate your own moral attitude very positively and never learn what the situation would be like if you personally experienced such an extremely difficult moral situation or you had to live through your moral failure.

Rorty is persuaded that even Heidegger's personality would have been different if his way of life had a morally luckier proceeding. Imagining for Heidegger another fictive, but possible way of life, Rorty shows, on the one hand, that there is no direct and necessary connection between one's personality and one's philosophy. On the other hand, he gives a special example of his contingency principle with this witty solution, because he shows that chances are not only much more important in our life than we believe, but we cannot eliminate them.

If we take a longer quote from Rorty's article, „On Heidegger's Nazism” (1990), it will demonstrate exceptionally well the content of the first three points:

In our actual world, Heidegger was a Nazi, a cowardly hypocrite, and the greatest European thinker of our time. In the possible world I have sketched, he was pretty much the same man, but he happened to have his nose rubbed in the torment of the Jews until he finally *noticed* what was going on, until his sense of pity and his sense

of shame were finally awakened. In that world he had the good luck to have been unable to become a Nazi, and so to have had less occasion for cowardice or hypocrisy. In our actual world, he turned his face away, and eventually resorted to hysterical denial. This denial brought on his unforgivable silence. But that denial and that silence do not tell us much about the books he wrote, nor conversely. In both worlds, the only link between Heidegger's politics and his books is the contempt for democracy he shared with, for example, Eliot, Chesterton, Tate, Waugh and Paul Claudel – people whom, as Auden predicted, we have long since pardoned for writing well. We could as easily have pardoned Heidegger his attitude towards democracy, if that had been all. But in the world without Sarah, the world in which Heidegger had the bad luck to live, it was not all.

To sum up: I have been urging that we can find in the early Heidegger's pragmatic antiessentialism reasons for abandoning the attempt to see the man and the books in a single vision, and perhaps even the attempt to see the books as stages on a single *Denkweg*. If we take that antiessentialism more seriously than Heidegger himself proved able to take it, we shall not be tempted to dramatize Heidegger in the way in which he dramatized his favourite thinkers and poets. We shall not assign thinkers and poets places in a world-historical narrative. We shall see both them and their books as vector sums of contingent pressures. We shall see Heidegger as one more confused, torn, occasionally desperate, human being, someone much like ourselves. We shall read Heidegger's books as he least wanted them read—as occasions for exploitation, recent additions to our *Bestand an Waren*. We shall stop yearning for depth, and stop trying either to worship heroes or to hunt down criminals. Instead, we shall settle for useful tools, and take them where we can find them. (PSH 196-197)

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