CHAPTER-VII
EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The divergence between Rorty, Derrida and Habermas certainly produces an open-ended play of positions and counter positions in regard to postmodern and Modern critique of knowledge. Rorty’s non-foundational position on linguistic practices of communities jibes well with Derrida’s emphasis on the irreducible structure of difference in any postmodern experience. Contrarily Habermas’ position on linguistically mediated social practices as repository of normative basis of societies structures language as something in the world and grounds it in actual practices. If postmodernity is characterized by employment of a plural, multiple and self-referential structure of difference in understanding and knowing the world, which Rorty converts into a matter of redescription of the old in a new name, then the question is, can language be thought as an autonomous and thoroughly free medium that makes it all that possible? Taking Habermas as a contrast one can ask the question, why language(s) should look like repository of norms through which humans are able to mutually understand each
other? Two basic contradictory theses, therefore, emerge in the divergence between postmodernity and modernity:

(i) Language can operate free from any determinations in order to give a plural description/representation of the world.

(ii) Language bears all those norms and rules that govern the actual world in order to be able to effect communication in the world.

A version of (i) is Rorty’s ultimate court. Of appeal in the beliefs of the individual and community and Derrida’s rejection of a causal account of the irreducible structure of difference that language embeds in itself. Rorty and Derrida put together makes multiple and plural uses of language possible quite in contrast to grammatical, conventional, lexical or morphological rules by prescribing a rather simple free choice of language. A version of (ii) lies in Habermas’ discourse ethics in which discourse in language must proceed through observation of universal norms and principles.

The question that one asks here is following, how could there be use of language possible without agreement in concepts, definitions and judgements? As Wittgenstein
puts it, to have agreement in language, we must not only agree on definitions, but also there must be agreement in judgments, which clearly fixes two conditions of any agreement: (i) agreement on definitions, and (ii) agreement in judgements. Does Rorty and Derrida follow these conditions of possibility in making their claims about language? Obviously not. The result is Rorty's radical incommensurability thesis that rejects the possibility of minimal agreement on the use of language. For Derrida, it is a thesis of freeplay that never allows any determination of referents of the signs. Further Rorty's incommensurability thesis bases itself upon a rejection of 'mirroring' or 'standing for' relationship between 'signs' and 'world', which is a sequel of Derridean rejection of 'presence' as well. The problem that crops up because of such radical rejection of all referential bases of language is that a minimal condition of intelligibility is 'lost' in uses of language. The danger is two-fold: one, what a statement says remains unrecognizable, even what emanates following postmodernist thesis of the play of language remains undecipherable in the very language which produces it. Secondly, one cannot understand the 'other' without a
minimal understanding of what 'other' is trying to 'mean' in language.

The first danger manifests in Derrida's thesis of difference which has two moments of operation: one, it locates a chain of difference between signs in which metaphysical opposition are opposed and later transformed into a higher order 'play' and the second lies in the operation in which difference comes to reinscribe the terms in a different order. What Derrida does not locate is how to recognize difference if there is no agreement on definitions preceding the play of difference. As Derrida places difference as the transcendental condition of possibility of signification without any determination of a place of the knowing subject, how can one know those conditions of possibility from which difference begins? Without any ontological and metaphysical determination of 'concepts' and their 'referents', Derrida puts forth the claim that there is a fundamental difference between western metaphysics and its non-human outside that produces metaphysics or epistemology as an 'explanation' of the difference without being able to explain it. This is what Derrida considers as being caught within the hermeneutic circle. What Wittgenstein proposes is
something dissimilar in its methodology: an agreement on definitions brings about an agreement on judgements, put in an inverse manner also includes the possibility of difference through agreement on conventions of use of language. Derrida recognizes this when he characterize language as something that eludes the 'play of difference'\(^2\) and questions the possibility of finding out a site or a non-site outside philosophy from where one can question the inside determinations in Philosophy.\(^3\)

Therefore, a Wittgensteinian intervention in Derrida's notion of difference does much of a therapy by retaining the criteria of intelligibility in language. Following these, one can agree with Derrida in case one agrees with the definitions of 'presence', 'inside', 'outside' etc. through which his judgements about western philosophy could be understood, which could be an agreement on meaning of those judgements.

As far as Rorty is concerned, Rorty's thesis on radical incommensurability of paradigm talks about the possibility of having a plural discourse relative paradigms, the definitions and judgements of which could be understood only by reference to those paradigms. But the question is, does Wittgenstein's criteria imply a
paradigm specific agreement or an agreement in general that makes understanding possible. If it is paradigm specific agreement on definition and judgement, it would imply that we would not ever be able to understand other paradigms from one's own standing in a certain paradigm. The case of having multiple paradigms of reality, for example, Science as a paradigmatic expression of culture and language as a paradigmatic expression of social mores makes a simultaneous possibility of plural understanding of reality, out of which one's choice for a particular paradigm would preclude understanding of other paradigms if there is no common protocol of using language. This means that the radical incommensurability between paradigms would imply incommensurability because of unintelligibility. In other words, Rorty's incommensurability thesis would mean just one way of using language in a certain paradigm that makes other ways un-understandable. One can term it as a closure in just one domain, from where other domains remain invisible and unknowable. To quell such an implication, one must take the position of retaining a general criterion of understanding for even the other paradigms by having a common language in which a minimal agreement on definition and judgement in terms of their
understandability would be obtained. Wittgenstein's thesis about language that, 'To understand a sentence means to understand a language. To understand a language means to be master of a technique' makes it possible to have a general understanding of the terms and concepts of a language, which could be employed variously. The various employment of language for various paradigms could be explained by two basic facts about language: one, defining concepts etc. in language does not give it a foundational basis and two, there could be the possibility of sharing a common paradigm of language by way of mutual agreement on terms, concepts and definitions.

From this position, one can delve a little more into Rorty's incommensurability thesis. Incommensurability has to be understood as a presupposition of understanding each such incommensurable paradigms in their own terms and then in terms of difference of meaning that such paradigms produce. If there is incommunicability between one paradigm and the other, one can neither understand each paradigm in its own terms nor can understand their difference. Therefore 'incommensurability' may mean total or partial untranslatability as between various languages.
and cultures, but this does not mean incommunicability. The reason is that incommunicability between languages is only an initial phenomenon till one has not gone into definitions and concepts of a different language. When one has gone into such definitions and concepts, only then one can realize the difference. This further shows that even difference should be communicable. Incommunicability in a total sense makes the difference unintelligible. Hence a minimal criterion of intelligibility need to be retained for an appreciation of different approaches and frameworks, without which Postmodernism as a different philosophical approach would also remain unintelligible.

Now one can extend further this criterion of intelligibility to Habermas' conceptualization of communication. Habermas' conceptualization involves a strict norm following behaviour in the use of language. Habermas' thesis that language is the medium of negotiating norms, values and cultural conventions in a rational procedural mode of following certain universal rules in the use of language is stretching Wittgenstein's criterion too far. The way Habermas formalized norms that regulate the use of language present a more austere and
strict criterion of truth and meaning without allowing any possibility of incommensurability. Wittgenstein alters incommensurability by showing that meaning can’t be wholly decided but it could be decided only by an agreement on definitions and in judgements. Habermas stretches it to evolve universal norm and rules to be followed while using language, which is a different interpretation of Wittgenstein in which rule following in the use of language is conceptualized in term of actual norms of life that must be followed in conducting a discourse. Wittgenstein does not extend use theory of meaning to the construction and participation in discourses, as he confined it to ‘form of life’ argument or mastering a technique case. Habermas closes upon such ‘form of life’ argument in terms of certain stable life world norms that are preserved in language and practiced along with the use of language. Habermas’ thesis of communicative action, therefore, turns language into a rule following medium, rules of which can be justified by appealing to actual practices of a community. But universalization of such rules in terms of a common set of universal principles presupposed in any discourse of ‘intersubjective rules’ is a formalization of Wittgenstein’s openended rule-following thesis of
language to use it to a universal criterion of truth and knowledge. Rule-following thesis merely retains a minimal criterion of intelligibility without a rule on interpreter's radical interpretation of discourses, which should be based on this minimal agreement on definitions.

Rorty's incommensurability thesis therefore must base itself upon mutually agreed upon judgements of various discourses, which are different in meaning. This also makes possible a thesis of radical untranslatability as there cannot be a common scheme of translation, because a common scheme of translation would simply mean the possibility of translating concepts in corresponding concepts available in a different language, which that language may not have following its conventions. But the question arises; does radical untranslatability imply 'incommunicability'? Wittgenstein's answer to this question comes from his notion of 'family resemblance', which is 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' between radically incommensurable discourses and their homologs or analogs with whom they bear some family resemblance. Such 'family resemblance' again retains a minimal possibility of similarity out of total dissimilar discourses, which
in themselves remain dissimilar while they resemble something in common through their similarities with some other discourses. For example, similarity, between Wittgensteinian 'use theory of meaning' and Habermas' communicative action in terms of 'rule following' and ultimate appeal to 'conventions' could be a 'criss-cross', but they remain incommensurable in terms of Habermas' translation of rule following in the language as an equivalent case of following a set of universal rules by various human individuals engaged in a discourse. While Wittgenstein's position resembles with Habermas and vice-versa, they remain incommensurable: as in Wittgenstein, there are no such universal rules to be followed in the use of language, while in Habermas there are such universal rules that must be followed in the use of language. They are incommensurable in their theory of meaning, while they are communicable as both the theories maintain a general agreement on use of terms and concepts despite their disagreement on definitions and judgements. Such disagreement gives rise to 'incommensurability' while it does not make it impossible to understand each other's positions. Therefore, Rorty's thesis of incommensurability entailing 'incommunicability' has to be rejected following Wittgensteinian criterion of
'agreement'. Derrida thesis of an irreducible structure of difference implying a play of meaning could only be understood in terms of a prior understanding of difference in terms of meanings agreed upon, as Derrida explains it.

II
Rorty's thesis on end of philosophy based upon a critique of foundationalism further problematizes the notion of Philosophy. Postmodernism's general rejection of foundationalism and principle of reasons imply a radical rejection of philosophy in general and its replacement with the possibility of freeplay of language. But the question that should be asked here, what kind of freeplay postmodernism contends, is it absolute or confined within some discourse and conceptual framework. Rorty's rejections of foundationalism in the form of world totally lost except to be found in language imply the causal power of the world to produce representations. But this counter thesis to 'Representationalism' itself takes a metaphysical form as Representations are caused by the world already captured in language. This is a strange metaphysical circle in which world remains as representation, while simultaneously existing...
'representations'. Is it then 'representations' cause 'representation' without any correlate in the world? Rorty obviously gives a picture of correlation through a pragmatic invocation of 'social practice' that gives rise to the causality between world and language, thereby meaning that social practices enforce a kind of world-language relationship which does not allow world as a knowable unless it is represented within language. If that be so, the contingency of social practices would never let us move out of this hermeneutic circle between social practice-world-language chain and vice-versa and thereby closing us upon a sense of irreducibility of this relationship. In a reverse way, this would mean that meanings in language are reducible to this circle. Anti-foundationalism of this nature gives a criterion of truth in terms of 'success' of a particular social practice in a 'community', which is a matter of sharing a 'common interpretation'. Does not this anti-foundationalism give rise to an extreme form of metaphysical representationalism that removes all worldly criterion in social practice and language, as if social practice and language are already there without being caused by anything? Therefore, Rorty had to give an anti-anti-foundational definition of causes in term of a 'brute
fact' that is something 'out there', an example of eating the humble pie in which 'most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states'. Rorty elucidates the notion of world as a causal force that precedes the world as we know it and therefore anchors our mental representations in terms of a causal role of the world represented as a 'brute force' in us. This anti-anti-foundationalism of Rorty is just a rejection of a claim of veracity or verificationism of representations, generally advocated in Realism, but it only provides a different causal picture of Reality. Therefore, the Postmodernist position of situating everything within the text or representation does not give it a determinate 'closure'; rather it is open to contexts in general. Derrida's famous dictum that 'there is nothing outside the text' simultaneously presume the world within the text as well as rejects 'world' outside the text. This formulation is 'ambivalent' the way Rorty is also 'ambivalent' on giving a causal picture of the world because it turns out to be a world standing outside. Similarly, the case of freoplay in language can only generate and problematize world by way of producing different descriptions of it in various discourses,
cultures and languages without giving a specific criterion of meaning and truth about it.

Habermas' neutralization of the world in terms of those rules that govern our relationship with the world and preservation of those rules within language as a guarantee for 'communicability' further reifies the world or the language by broaching language - world relationship in some formal descriptive categories. This makes 'communication' an effect of this relationship between language and world by a total objectification of communication. Paradoxically enough Habermas reduces the human subject through such linguistically mediated communication, which makes his thesis vulnerable to subjective freeplay, which in his account a language cannot accommodate. So, the question comes back, what do we communicate? Is it a set of rules which are shared intersubjectively or those conditions of possibility to communication that act as transcendental presuppositions of communication?
To give an answer to this question of communication, which neither Postmodernist nor Modernist seem to give in clear terms the thesis should take a step beyond this divide between world and language and chart out an alternative understanding of communication. The common lesson that could be drawn from both Postmodernist and Modernist positions are that communication only divides: it says what it says and it does not say. It differentiates the two and connects them with a boundary that separates the two sides of what is communicated and what is not. No communication can take place beyond what it says and what it does not say, that is to an unmarked space. Further no backward bending from what it says or what it does not say is possible to lead us to something primordial. If these limits are accepted, then communication acts like a repetitive reproduction of such limits.

Therefore, the world cannot appear just as a piece of information, for it could be a choice from among different possibilities by human subjects. The world is only that which endures the 'limits' and the boundary
between what is said and what is not said and which further makes impossible any regress from this distinction. Communication only reproduces these distinctions by reference to entities in the world in such a manner that we exercise regularity in the act of referring.

Now, the question is how to thematize this 'difference' and 'reference' within communication itself. Difference must be thematized as a unity between communication and non-communication, that is, as a paradox. Within communication, the world is given only as a paradox. The act of communication serves its unity and affirms its unity implicitly by serving it. It negates this unity by reconstructing it at the level of representation. 'Implicitly' is only to indicate that an observer can see and describe things in this way. Statements about existence and negations belong to signifiers of linguistically constituted communication, but this can only take place on this side of boundary that is being renewed by such use, but not transgressed by it. This is what brings forth Wittgenstein's motion of 'rule following' and 'agreement'.
A society which includes all possible communications, such a closure bifurcates the world into two, either a meaning is communicated or it is not. The communicated meaning and the uncommunicated one are known only through a prior division of the world, which is explicitly communicated in it. Any alternative to something that is communicated is communicated within the implicit sense of being a communication, a division of the world. Any third possibility of an instance of communication not communicating anything could be ruled out. But does this allow us to distinguish a case of silence? Within communication, silence could be marked by an observer as a case of 'failure' or as a case of withdrawal of the distinction between what is communicated and what is not communicated. This also becomes a problem of distinction leading to a distinction of distinctions: (i) distinction between communicable and not communicable, and (ii) distinction between what is communicated and what is not communicated. What is communicated can be incommunicable if it maintains a distinction that is transgressed in the same act of communication and what is not communicated could become communicable if what it does not say is distinguishable in what it says. Therefore, one should draw a distinction
between the problem of reference and problem of communication in terms of the boundary between what is said and what is not said in it. This could be best understood in Derrida's language of deconstruction:

Violently inscribing within the text that which attempt to govern it from outside, I try to respect as vigorously as possible the internal, regulated play of philosophemes by making them slide ... to the point of their non-pertinence, their exhaustion, their closure.  

So what comes back is the notion of a certain 'closure', borders of a language fame which assumes both conditional and un-conditional character. This makes possible both thinking through reason and through unreason which becomes a task of interpretation. Only interpretation can provide 'good reasons' or justifications for both these kinds of possibilities.

This also comes close to Derrida's notion of deferral of meaning from signifier to signifier in the process of communication. The meaning of an utterance, for Derrida is constituted by the interpretation given to it by an addressee and the addressee is perpetually
absent in the utterance. The addressee is reconstituted as another absentee once somebody interprets the utterance. It is something like that an utterance gives itself to a number of interpretive possibilities which are not redeemable from a defined context of life, but merely divides the world in two sides between an absent addressee and a present addressee reconstituted by an utterance and its interpretations. While for Habermas, the addressees are constituted by linguistic mediation at a focal point where an utterance and its interpretation criss-cross at such a point, which is argumentatively redeemable following norm of communication. But as I argued the mere production of a division between the 'message' and the world cannot be removed in an argumentatively redeemable rules of communication because that will assume a set relationship between communication and world without various 'language-games' that keeps open the relationship between communication and world.

IV

To sum up, the problem before comparing Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida and Jurgen Habermas lies in their radical divergence in different theoretical routes. Rorty suggests an openended possibility of a practice that does
not divide the world into dual domains, but constitutes a holistic world comprising human subject and the various ways in which s/he can make the world, while Derrida envisages constant play of oppositions without any final closure. These two positions of Rorty and Derrida present that the world as a disclosure within human language in the same way that a disclosure consists of double more, calling an other and repeating the same simultaneously. This again produces a theory of the world, and a theory purports a singular comprehension by neutralizing possibilities other than what the subject is or what the subject becomes. The question that we ask here, does comparison neutralize the world into a totality or fixed meaning? Or comparison opens up a game of interpretation?

Retaining our basic probe into the nature of knowledge, we have already explored some possibilities of how it looks like. For Rorty, a view of the world, culturally united into certain forms of practices that overrule dichotomies in theories and also it is an edifying view of the world in which conversation rules the life. The possibilities of a culturally unified view of world exhibiting pluralities of cultural life displace the constraint that ties life to certain form of
metaphysical and epistemological assumptions. For Derrida, the possibility is that of certain forms of practices and most significantly a deconstructive practice of play and thereby a defiance of conceptual, metaphysical and ideological closure. For both of them the most empowering concept is the possibility of an openended interaction in language, which brings in a notion of emancipated human subject, emancipated from the closure of modernity.

For Habermas, the possibilities of critique of knowledge stems out of the social crisis and re-orientation of social life is possible only through answering the necessity of praxis in an increasingly fragmented, colonized and instrumentalizes social world, growing out of systematic intervention. This provides a context of knowledge constructive interest as well as a reconstructive possibility of universalizable, common and pragmatic frames of knowledge. Such reconstructive possibilities are finally appropriated in the dialogic and intersubjective sphere of norms available in human discourses to emerge into communicative praxis. There are basically two moves within such reconstruction of knowledge: one cognitively justified, morally right and
aesthetically good founding of human knowledge, and two enframing it within a universalizable normative theory and thereby leaving no room for interrogating its authenticity. Such a take of knowledge in an all-comprehensive manner upon the social world that incorporates and structures the normative aspects of society within itself is a configuration that links up need of various spheres of life. Within such a pragmatic construction of knowledge, which is basically a reproduction of the norms of systematically organized modern social world streamlines human thought, feelings and necessities towards some resolutions within the social world. Possibilities like misery, frustration, unfulfilment, which are human predicaments, get dissolved within such paradigmatic forms of knowledge. These get dissolved by systematic and knowledge-constructive interests that churn them in the integrated spheres of life under modernity. It can be summed up that Habermas leaves no rooms for 'derivations' of human kind that definitely includes creative impulses stretching through a herd of queer passions (passion for love, hate, crime, etc.) as mark of idiosyncrasies. Habermasian paradigm of knowledge finishes off the epistemic possibility of expression of such human predicaments.
What emerges is a choice between disclosure of the world and the construction of a social world as it emerges in Rorty and Derrida on the one hand and Habermas on the other. The possible disclosure of the world in the edification within language is a postmodern characteristic, while agreement upon 'rules' and norm of society as immanent is 'modern' in nature. The two stand as mutually incommensurable prospects. One can further distinguish these two possibilities by way of noting that postmodern possibilities emerge from an exotic use of language, while 'modern' emerges from the structuring of reality in language. 'Modern' aims at making the 'immanent' visible from within language, while 'Postmodern' aims at bringing out what is not immanent within language, if 'immanent' is constituted by the normative structures of society. 'Modern' creates this problem or dichotomy between norms and meaning by way of immanent and not immanent, an inside and an outside, which had been critiqued in Rorty and Derrida. 'Postmodern' radically displaces one side of the dichotomy into the 'other' and mere attempts at closing the difference. Further language in its own way helps the subject to negotiate in this difference. Given that under
'Modern', conception of 'immanent' lies within language, what is not immanent also arises within language and language contains within it this difference without any reconciliation. A Rortyean version of negotiating such differences would be through the criteria of practice, two-fold criteria: whether we bother about such an immanent core in our social practice and what way the linguistic practice negotiates with such social practice. Rorty denies a practice of differentiation between normative foundations of practice and the practice itself. The interior of differentiation and hierarchization with which we operate in practice, within modernity, gets modified within our linguistic practice. Therefore, Postmodernism shelves away the moral and metaphysical criterion that induces distinction between 'values' and 'facts' in our linguistic practice and linguistic practice in its own ways does not admit this criterion of distinction. As linguistic practice does not go by such criterion of distinction as available in social practice, so it either affects dissolution of such distinctions in social practice or retains it. In the first case, linguistic practice does not induce within itself the practice of 'norms' and 'facts'. In the second, it does so.
Postmodernism, therefore, does not adopt a theory of knowledge, but begins from an repudiation of theoretical distinctions and exercises like 'modern' criteria of reference, truth and knowledge. It explores the possibility of repudiation of these distinctions of modern epistemology, but takes it as it is without maintaining the practice of differentiation and hierarchization. Derrida's concept of writing further relegates this world of modernity into concept-metaphors that destructures its entangled relationship with the world and assumes synonymity or analogy with other concepts. Philosophy as a source of writing, as Rorty describes it following Derrida gives a notion of writing in signifying that 'genre' which as a law, both holds and expels its member. Philosophy, for Postmodernism, as a 'genre' holds an 'excess', an exterior that exceeds its closure of concepts:

1. Rorty holds that social practice produces beliefs about 'right' and 'wrong' about the world. Beliefs of this kind are held in concepts in language.

2. Derrida brings out the concept-metaphors as signifiers in the play of oppositions that
simultaneously contextualizes and problematizes language.

3. Habermas brings out a stable normative basis of social life organized into a coherent whole that takes precedence over the linguistic practices and enacts a foundational criterion of determination of meaning.

4. The way Rorty had presented his whole idea of 'belief' as a source of meaning and knowledge distanitate him from Derrida's notion of deconstruction, which allegedly circumvent 'belief' within culture. This premonition of self-subversive play of deconstruction, according to Rorty produces a flux that disrupts the social process of weaving and re-weaving beliefs.

5. Derrida's deconstruction questions the supposedly legitimate, justified and valid moral norms by exposing its repressive interior, how it suppresses difference and otherness. This aspect of deconstruction radically affects the domain of communication by foregrounding the deconstructive tenet that iterability of speech acts determines its context and not the other way round. Iterability here means the contextualization of already given
meanings in speech acts and contextualizing those speech acts in contrast to the linear meaning-context relationship assumed in speech acts.

6. Habermas' critique of Rorty for abandonment of the criterion of knowledge and conflation of language with ontology re-iterates the modernist critique of postmodernization. But Rorty refutes such charges by arguing that the infinite possibility of self-creation in the poetic use of language and in the possibility of establishing social justice make our common goals fulfil, what we require is only a linguistic practice that redescribes the affairs of the world in coherence with our belief of good.

7. Habermas's critique of Derrida for being monotheistic that brings the world under the unitary notion of Being is already thwarted in Derrida's deconstruction of the notion of 'Being' in a 'negative theology' that conceptualizes logos or Being as permanently absent. Such a primordial absence empties out the unitary metaphysical determination of Being and forces us to accept a notion of Being as it is juxtaposed against the non-identity of beings.
To sum up, Postmodernism prioritizes language as constitutive of the human subject and her subjectivity, which is brought out in Rorty and Derrida. For Habermas, however, language is constituted by human subject and such a constitution is intersubjective in nature, which represents a linguistic version of modern theory of knowledge.
NOTES


4. PI, No. 199.

5. Habermas does not give any significance to cultural difference or unknowability of 'core' aspects of other cultures. He reduces such differences under universalizability of some common norms of human communication.


7. Richard Rorty, *ORT*, pp. 81, 101, 84, 166 and CIS, p 5

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