



DEBUNKING ANALYTICAL LEGACY: RORTYAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Analytic philosophy as a style of philosophizing has undergone many internal transformations from its early origins in the writings of Russell and Moore and logical positivistic methodological standpoint. Sometimes, even when we follow its tortuous paths and its diverse currents from positivism to ordinary-language analysis to the philosophy of language and formal semantics; the anti-historical bias of this style of philosophizing has persisted. However, recently there are many signs of the breakup of the hegemony of analytic philosophy. Even a generation ago there seemed to be an optimistic confidence among many analytic philosophers that philosophy had finally discovered its proper subject matter, its problems and its procedures, so that genuine progress could be made in solving or dissolving philosophical problems. But even among the staunchest defenders of analytic philosophy this confidence is now seriously questioned. The characterizing features of contemporary analytic philosophy; its presuppositions, unquestioned assumptions and metaphors has been recently questioned and criticized.

Assuming an extremely discursive style of thought and writing, a grand conceptual gesture to the American and democratic tradition of pragmatism and liberalism, Richard Rorty (1934-2007) cannot but oppose itself to the rigor of the analytic genre, which is more inclined to the work of minute argumentation than to the construction of vast speculative syntheses. Rorty's debunking the claims of analytic philosophy is precisely inherent in his neo-pragmatist discourse. However, his criticism mainly focused the first orthodox phase of analyticism emanating from the Viennese logical positivism. The second generation of analytic thinkers such as Quine, Davidson and Sellars, whose proximity to pragmatism is embraced by Rorty, remains untouched by his attack.

The paper will explore the Rorty's critique of analytic philosophy while advocating his neo-pragmatism.

Keywords: Analytic Philosophy, Neo-pragmatism, Post-analytical Philosophy, Anti Foundationalism, Continental Philosophy.

Introduction

The twentieth century analytical approach to philosophy constitutes a powerful critique of classical or traditional philosophy carried out with a view to arrive at a philosophical truth that is certain, objective, universal and eternal. It is a drastic revision of the super scientific pretensions of traditional philosophy. The pioneers of philosophical analysis G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell designed a trend of doing philosophy which evolved into a radical thesis about philosophy.

The analytical approach to philosophy tries to analyze the statements, arguments, theories and systems worked out by various philosophers. It stands for fuller understanding of the role of various uses of language in the genesis of philosophical theories. Linguistic analysts are suspicious that there is something wrong at the very bottom of philosophical language. They allege that philosophers divest ordinary words of their conventional use and superimpose upon them extraordinary philosophical uses and meaning. Therefore, the entire logic of philosophical language needs to be probed and reconsidered.

Analytical philosophers' stress that the language of philosophical theories needs to be clarified with a view to resolve the perennial controversies going on in philosophy. The central contention of linguistic philosophers is that philosophical problems can be solved or dissolved either by reforming language or by understanding more about the language we use. The underlying assumption is that linguistic factors play a crucial role in the formation and continuance of philosophical disputes. In view of the same, neither empirical research nor logical deductions do help us in the resolution of philosophical problems. The only way to understand the dynamics of philosophical disagreement is to carefully analyze the discourse employed by the philosophers.

In contemporary American philosophy, Richard Rorty represents an exception, since his ideal teacher, John Dewey; the United States has not produced such an intellectual phenomenon; a well-rounded thinker in the European style, versatile, optimistic, and engaged in public debate, rather than an American-style professional philosopher. Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (1979) accorded Rorty international renown as the founder of 'neo-pragmatism'. Since then, he has amazed the philosophical community by renouncing the model of its professional training. After teaching for fifteen years in the philosophical citadel of Princeton, Rorty decided to move to an inter-disciplinary department of the University of Virginia, marked as point of departure in his style of philosophizing.

His discursive style of thought and writing, suited to the American and democratic tradition of pragmatism and liberalism, oppose itself to the rigor of the analytic genre, which is more inclined to the work of minute argumentation than to the construction of vast speculative syntheses. Rorty's debunking the claims of analytic philosophy is precisely inherent in his



neo-pragmatist discourse. However his criticism mainly focused the first orthodox phase of analyticism emanating from the Viennese logical positivism. The second generation of analytic thinkers such as Quine, Davidson and Sellars, whose proximity to pragmatism is embraced by Rorty, remains untouched by his attack. To their post-analytic reading Rorty attributes the merit of having brought the notion of logical analysis, central to the whole analytic discourse, 'to commit a slow suicide' – an operation that neo-pragmatism would have brought to completion in a historical key instead.¹

Breaching the historical gap among Analytical and Continental philosophy Rorty associated himself to the genre of (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida).

Analytic philosophy started off as a way of moving from speculation to science.... 2. The notion of logical analysis turned upon itself, and committed slow suicide, in Wittgensteinian ordinary language, Quinean, Kuhnian, and Sellarsian criticism of the purportedly scientific vocabulary. ... 3. Analytic philosophy was thus left without a genealogy, a sense of mission, or a metaphilosophy. ... 4. This development hardened the split between analytic and continental philosophy by moving the study of Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, etc., out of philosophy departments.²

Critique of Western Philosophy

In 1979, Richard Rorty published his provocative book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Prior to its publication, Rorty was known primarily as a philosophy professor who had contributed immensely on the technical professional issues such as "the mind body problem", "incommensurability", and the epistemological status of "transcendental arguments". But *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is a subversive and ambitious work. Employing his analytic and rhetorical skills, Rorty sought to undermine and deconstruct what he called 'the Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian tradition' – a tradition that served as the basis for much of twentieth-century philosophy, including both Anglo-American analytic philosophy and continental phenomenology.

Rorty claims that the three most important philosophers of the twentieth century are Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein. According to Rorty, "each tried, in his early years, to find a new way of making philosophy 'foundational' – a new way of formulating an ultimate context of thought":

Each of the three came to see his earlier effort as self-deceptive; as an attempt to retain a certain conception of philosophy after the notions needed to flesh out that conception (the seventeenth century notions of knowledge and mind) had been discarded. Each of the three, in his later work, broke free of the Kantian conception of philosophy as foundational, and spent his time warning us against those very temptations to which he himself once succumbed. Thus, their later work is therapeutic rather than constructive, edifying rather than systematic, designed to make the reader question his own motives for philosophizing rather than to supply him with a new philosophical program.³

Richard Rorty is deeply sensitive of the significance of pragmatism in the transformation of philosophy. It is William James and John Dewey who play the seminal pragmatist philosopher's role for Rorty. Rorty in a complementary movement from within the tradition of analytic philosophy recognizes the kinship and stimulation offered by certain developments within continental philosophy particularly by Heidegger and Hermeneutics. Rorty is keenly appreciative of the relevance of Hegel in the present context of philosophy. In fact, Rorty holds the view, that a return to Hegel's critique of Kant holds the clue to the decisive transformation of philosophy now. Rorty believes that the linguistic turn in recent philosophy is of momentous importance in bringing about a transformation in our understanding of philosophy. Rorty also holds that the new shape of philosophy which is emerging will be based on the notion of community. Rorty also believes that the traditional posture of philosophy as a transcendental and foundational enterprise, whose unique function and competence lies in justifying the practices of culture in theory and practice and to do so in terms of necessary or a priori form of argumentation needs to be fundamentally given up. Rorty expresses this by means of his pluralism of discourses – none of them can claim to be foundational to the rest and within every one of them also, there are no privileged statements on which all the others are to be founded; for Rorty, we can distinguish 'normal' from 'abnormal' discourse, in a Kuhnian sense, but we can never single out a privileged discourse which has some kind of inside access to things themselves.⁴

Rorty used the writings of European poststructuralists and those of Dewey to argue that the whole tradition of Western philosophy, which began with Descartes and reached its complete expression in Kant, could now be dismissed since it was clear that all representational theories of knowledge had collapsed. Truth as a matter of correspondence to reality proved to be a metaphysical illusion, with mind pictured as a 'glassy essence' that could mirror the objects it sought to know. In place of traditional philosophy, Rorty called for a hermeneutical approach to knowledge that acknowledged the impossibility of discovering absolutely indubitable, universally valid, objective truth and instead confined itself to refining discussion and



interpretation. The Rortyan turn was offered as “an expression of hope that the cultural space left by the demise of epistemology will not be filled – that our culture should become one in which the demand for constraint and confrontation is no longer felt”.⁵ Philosophy could continue not as knowledge and vision but as voice and conversation, especially ‘the conversation of mankind’. The aim is not to prove what one knows but to justify what one says. “If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing conversation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood”.⁶

Richard Rorty has been among the most significant contemporary voices proclaiming the demise of central Enlightenment assumptions and their implications for philosophical pursuit. Rorty has proposed a view of philosophy that no longer seeks absolute truth or certain knowledge but is now one of the voices, one set of social practices among others in our historicized world. Rorty’s work is defined by a clear bias against realist ontologies that assume that the world or reality not only exists independently of humans but that it has a definite nature or essence that can be identified and known by humans. While Rorty has little doubt that the world is ‘out there’, that is, “that most things in space and time are the effect of causes which do not include human mental states”, he nonetheless rejects all claims that we have access to that world in a direct or neutral manner that provides us with a means of assessing our ideas and their correspondence to the way things really are.⁷

Critique of Analytical philosophy

In Rorty’s view, the analytic philosophers have fostered deep-seated anti-historicist prejudices resulting into (1) the denial of any historical perspective of their work; and (2) the demonization of continental philosophy stretching from Hegel’s idealist turn through several developments in continental philosophy to Freud, Nietzsche, and Heidegger – which developments have been interpreted as dark and metaphysical ways of thought, not to mention a nihilistic threat to scientific reason. Yet, it is precisely in this line that Rorty finds the only prospect for resurrecting the philosophical project or, at least, for inserting into it what, in *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (1984) he defines as “post-analytical culture”. This line of thought, according to Rorty, is directly or indirectly, supported by American pragmatists and later Wittgenstein as well.

Rorty holds that although the linguistic turn displaced the centre of attention from consciousness to language understood as the medium of conceptual thought, yet it did not in its first phase, fundamentally overcome the transcendental persuasion itself. Instead what happened was the attempt to identify first philosophy with the conceptual and logical clarification of statements by the analysis of language. But in the later phase of analytic philosophy in the work of the later Wittgenstein and particularly in the critique of the ‘analytic-synthetic’ distinction by Quine and the critique of the ‘myth of the given’ by Sellars, there occurred the first significant attempt to ‘de-transcendentalise’ philosophy.

Traditionally analytic philosophy is associated with empiricism and scientism and often opposed to transcendental philosophy. For Rorty it seems seriously misleading, he argues that it will be more helpful if we see the approach of analytic philosophy from Russell to Sellars and Davidson as describing the same trajectory as that of Pragmatism from Pierce to Dewey, Wittgenstein’s thought from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, and that of Heidegger from the project of fundamental ontology to his later phase. In all these cases the trajectory is marked by what Rorty calls ‘de-transcendentalization’.⁸

Rorty means by ‘linguistic philosophy’ that the view philosophical problems are either solved or dissolved by reforming language or by understanding more precisely about the language we use. Many proponents of this view considered it to be the most important philosophical discovery of our time and indeed of the ages.

A philosopher who takes this line will therefore have to swallow the conclusion that philosophical problems are made, not found. If he does so, he will have to explain why he constructs such problems, and justify his no-longer – disguised proposals on the basis of a claim that we need these problems. He will have to say that if ordinary beliefs do not raise them, then so much the worse for ordinary beliefs. A few philosophers have consciously taken this road – notably Heidegger, in his discussion of *Seinsvergessenheit*, its cause and cure. But one who takes it is committed to the view that philosophy is not a subject in which agreement may be reached by argument. Clearly, there is no point in arguing with such a philosopher about whether his is the correct view of philosophy, nor is there any need to do so. The reaction against the notion of philosophy as a discipline attempted the solution of certain traditional problems, the problems apparently generated by certain commonsense beliefs was the main focus of the linguistic turn in philosophy.⁹

Over the last thirty years the linguistic philosophy has succeeded to put the whole philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Descartes and from Hume to Bradley and Whitehead on the defensive. It adopted a method of careful and thorough scrutiny of the ways traditional philosophers used language in the formulation of their problems. Consequently this period is placed among the great ages of the history of philosophy.



In his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty argues that logical positivism and, more generally, the entire 'kind of philosophy which stems from Russell and Frege'—analytic philosophy; was not a revolutionary mode of thought, but a reactionary movement.

Rorty argues, it is-

like classical Husserlian phenomenology, simply one more attempt to put philosophy in the position which Kant wished it to have – that of judging other areas of culture on the basis of its special knowledge of the 'foundations' of these areas. 'Analytic' philosophy is one more variant of Kantian philosophy, a variant marked principally by thinking of representation as linguistic rather than mental, and of philosophy of language rather than 'transcendental critique', or psychology, as the discipline which exhibits the 'foundations of knowledge'.¹⁰

Rorty argues, although the emphasis on language is important in itself, essentially does not change the Cartesian-Kantian problematic, and so it does not give philosophy a new self-image. Consequently the analytic philosophy still committed the construction of a perennial, neutral framework of inquiry for all cultures. And it is just this idea, the idea that there are a-historical conditions of any possible historical developments and an attempt to escape from history, that it entails that gives analytic philosophy a historical irrelevancy. As Dewey says, we must recognize that philosophers are parts of history, caught in its movement, creators perhaps in some measure of its future, but also assuredly creatures of its past.¹¹

Rorty, who was educated within the Analytic tradition, rebelled against his old philosophical community. Criticizing the philosophers of the 'linguistic turn' Rorty says:

The relatively pessimistic conclusions reached in the preceding sections entail that linguistic philosophers' attempts to turn philosophy into a "strict science" must fail. How far does this pessimism carry? If linguistic philosophy cannot be a strict science, if it has a merely critical essentially dialectical functions, then what of the future?¹²

In Rorty's first main work, "Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy", we observe the expert philosopher of the Linguistic Turn, where he writes in the introduction: "The history of philosophy is punctuated by revolts against the practice of previous philosophers". This revolt marked with the use of new methods by the rebellious philosophers, such as in the case of Descartes, Kant, Marx, Husserl and Wittgenstein. But these new methods presuppose some metaphysical or epistemological theses, which Rorty calls meta-philosophical 'criteria', and only after the acceptance of these theses the method obtained validity. Consequently, one falls into 'circularity':

Since philosophical method is in itself a philosophical criterion... every philosophical revolutionary is open to the charge of circularity or to the charge of having begged the question.¹³

For Rorty, even the great philosophers fall into same naivete:

What is particularly interesting is to see why those philosophers who lead methodological revolts think that they have, at last, succeeded in becoming presuppositionless, and why their opponents think that they have not.¹⁴

Similarly, Rorty says that linguistic/analytical philosophy lacks metaphilosophical criteria, whether who proposed an ideal language or ordinary language or philosophy of empirical linguistics (like Carnap, Later Wittgenstein, Chomsky). They all have failed because they could not define intersubjectively valid criteria of knowing. Rorty debunks the presupposed criteria one by one and achieved the position of a radical skepticism. He pulverized the 'dogmas' recognized valid by early generations (Locke, Ayer, Carnap) taking a cue from the writings of Quine, Sellars, Davidson, Kuhn and Putnam. In order to align with methodological or critical contextualism, neo-pragmatism and historicism Rorty distanced him from analytical philosophers and came closer towards the later Heidegger, Derrida and the postmoderns.

Thus, Rorty concludes:

I should wish to argue that the most important thing that has happened in philosophy during the last thirty years is not the linguistic turn itself, but rather the beginning of a thoroughgoing rethinking of certain epistemological difficulties which have troubled philosophers since Plato and Aristotle.¹⁵



Conclusion

Putting forward his end of analytic philosophy argument, Rorty presents a 'therapeutic' philosophy, the sort of philosophy which thinks that our canonical 'problems of philosophy' are to be set aside rather than solved theoretically. While Rorty acknowledges indebtedness to therapists like Wittgenstein and Austin, he differs from them in the emphasis he placed on the historical origins of philosophical problems. Philosophical problems are not perennial for Rorty. They are not perennial even if they are pseudoproblems. Rather our current 'problems of philosophy' are artifacts of a historically contingent, constellation of ideas. Prominent among these are certain conceptions of knowledge, representation and truth. The great virtue of the analytic movement is to have subjected these ideas to devastating criticism. In effect by undermining its own most fundamental presuppositions, analytic philosophy has transcended and canceled itself.

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