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Philosophy and its History

Abstract: Richard Rorty argues that the present state of analytic philosophy is the result of the collapse of the logical empiricist program. But most of the characteristics of analytic philosophy which Rorty ascribes to that collapse predated logical empiricism. The historical explanation of the present state of philosophy must begin not later than with the schism between philosophy and the other disciplines in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To begin then leads to a different view of how philosophical problems are generated.

Many recent philosophers, especially perhaps those educated in some of the analytic traditions, have treated the history of philosophy either as only having marginal relevance to contemporary philosophical enquiries or as interesting only insofar as historical figures can be presented as contributors to contemporary discussions. On this latter view Descartes for example is still interesting because he provides a position for G.E.M. Anscombe to criticise, Hume because his views on causation are relevant to John Mackie's. It is therefore an occasion worthy of remark and even celebration when analytic philosophy itself is presented as drawing its significance from its place in the overall history of philosophy, as it is in Richard Rorty's Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Rorty 1979) and in a series of articles and papers which he has published before and since. The essay to which I shall be particularly addressing myself is 'Philosophy in America To-Day' (Rorty 1981), a central thesis of which is that the present state of analytical philosophy is to be explained by the disintegration of the neopositivist program of the Vienna Circle and its allies. The consequence of this disintegration, a result of the way in which "all the positivist doctrines ... were deconstructed by Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars and Kuhn", (Rorty 1981, 4) has been that analytical philosophy has lost any serious intellectual unity. It no longer can identify itself by reference to "a finite number of distinct, specifiable philosophical problems to be resolved - problems which any serious analytic philosopher would agree to be the outstanding problems." (7)

Rorty's thesis about analytic philosophy extends and completes a central thesis of Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature. For in

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that book he argued that philosophy as such had dissolved it-
self by attaining an understanding that the whole set of prob-
lems which concern the relationship of mind to realities
external to mind had been generated by a false Cartesian con-
ception of mind and the objects of knowledge. Philosophy has
in so doing lost its traditional claim to provide a kind of
understanding which was specific to its enquiries and which
gave it a right to a certain hegemony among the disciplines.
Rorty's paper spells out for analytic philosophy the implica-
tions of his general thesis about how philosophy as traditio-
nally understood has ended its history by delegitimizing itself.
Underlying both the book and the paper is an unargued thesis
about the history of philosophy, namely that traditionally
'philosophy' was always the name of one and the same distinct
and autonomous discipline which was believed to have a sub-
stantial rationale for its distinctiveness and its autonomy.
Without that presupposition the kind of contrast that Rorty
draws between philosophy and other disciplines would scarcely
make sense. And yet it is just that presupposition which only
needs to be examined in order to be rejected.

1. Three Possible Worlds, One of Them Actual

Imagine a possible world in which there is no discipline named
'philosophy' within the academic curriculum. The history of
this possible world is identical with that of the actual world
up to the seventeenth century and therefore in its past as in
our own 'philosophy' used to be the name for a very wide range
of loosely unified intellectual enquiries and activities. But
in that imaginary world when from the seventeenth to the nine-
teenth century a variety of disciplines seceded from philosop-
hy, and declared their independence as autonomous fields of
enquiry, each entitled to its own self-sufficient place in the
curriculum, each of these disciplines carried away with it
that part of philosophy relevant to its own concerns. In that
imaginary world when in the transition from Adam Smith to
Ricardo political economy detached itself from moral philoso-
phy, it did not leave moral philosophy behind just as it was,
but carried away with it a whole range of enquiries into the
moral presuppositions and moral characteristics of economic
activity. And when physics in the age after Newton detached
itself from natural philosophy, it defined itself so that
debate about the status of theoretical entities and the nature
of laws was as much a part of physics as thermodynamics or the
study of electricity and magnetism. Even those academic dis-
ciplines, such as history, which had not been part of philosop-
hy in the older sense, annexed the relevant parts of the
philosophy of action, explanation and narrative. And the out-
come was that, apart from logic, which became an independent
discipline, the whole of philosophy was absorbed into, was
divided up between the other subjects, without any part being
left over. Hence there were no professional philosophers, no
departments of philosophy, no philosophical journals, no
American Philosophical Association or Aristotelian Society,
and those who pursued philosophical questions always did so
in the context of some other academic discipline. Naturally
enough the point and purpose of conceptual enquiries was under-
stood in terms of their place within each specific discipline.
Imagine now a second possible world the history of which once
again is identical with that of the actual world up to the
seventeenth century, but in which 'philosophy' remains the
name of intellectual enquiry. Not only are there no acts of
secession by such subjects as physics and political economy,
but subjects such as history, which had not been part of
philosophy, are absorbed into philosophy. In the first of the
imaginary worlds nobody was a professional philosopher, in the
second imaginary world everyone engaged in the academic intell-
lectual and educational enterprise is by profession a philosoph-
er. There are indeed many different lines of specialized en-
quiry in this second world, but these lines are as likely to
cross what we in our world take to be disciplinary boundaries
as to remain within them. What this second imaginary world
shares with the first is that in it there is no separate
discipline of philosophy.
What would be the advantage and disadvantages of each of these
three modes of intellectual and academic organization, that
provided by these two imaginary worlds and that provided by
the actual world? The first would suffer from one large dis-
advantage, as compared both with the second and with the actual
world. Not only would what are substantially the same philo-
sophical questions be posed separately in a number of distinct
and different disciplinary contexts, but no discipline would
have any specific responsibility for those problems which
arise precisely at the boundaries of the autonomous disciplines,
which arise, for example, when the beliefs about human respons-
ibility which inform the moral and legal practices studied in
such disciplines as ethics and the sociology of law are con-
fronted with the beliefs about the causal determination of
human action which inform a good deal of psychology, biochem-
istry and neurophysiology. But both the first and more par-
ticularly the second imaginary world would enjoy one outstanding
advantage over actuality: the conceptual, philosophical
parts of complex intellectual enquiries would not be detached
from their context in these enquiries and grouped together
contextlessly as 'philosophy', a set of fragments lacking any
fundamental unity. Any such characterisation of philosophy in
the actual world is of course bound to encounter immediate and
strong resistance. For one central preoccupation of philosop-
chal enquiry ever since Kant in Germany and ever since Reid
in Scotland has been to identify the unity of philosophical
enquiry in some non-trivial way; and we are all of us to some
large degree the heirs of both Kant and Reid. Nonetheless one
underlying thesis of this paper is that all attempts to iden-
tify such a unity have in fact failed. Why I believe this will
emerge in part at least later in the argument. For the moment
I want to consider a second disadvantage of actuality. The
professionalised separation of philosophy from the other
disciplines has not only left philosophy without any real
unity; it has also systematically concealed from the profess-
ional practitioners of the other disciplines the extent to
which their own enquiries necessarily involve philosophy.
Nurtured in the belief that their disciplines long ago achieved
independence from philosophy, their responses to the recurrent
Comments on Rorty

discovery that their enquiries are still in part, but in key and essential part, philosophical tends to be of two different and opposed kinds. One type of response is to attempt to complete the expulsion of philosophy, to achieve now and finally what it was hoped and believed had been achieved by the founding fathers of the particular autonomous discipline, some state of empirical purity, free from all philosophical taint. Behavorialism in political science, the ideology of a certain kind of experimental psychology and the New Criticism are examples of this reaction.

A second type of reaction is to recognize the ineliminable character of the philosophical elements and concerns within a particular discipline, but to respond by claiming that part of philosophy for the particular discipline and then developing that particular discipline's own domestic brand of philosophy, one that is characteristically indulgent to the metaphysical foibles of the practitioners of the particular discipline and often largely lacking in respect for the standards of argumentation and relevance established within professional philosophy. Literary structuralism and ethnmethodology are examples of this type of response.

There are of course autonomous disciplines in which the identification of ineliminable philosophical issues has led instead to establishing a fruitful and argumentatively compelling relationship with academic philosophy. Physics and medicine both provide examples. But it is not going too far to suggest that by and large the end-product of the original separation of philosophy from the other disciplines has been not only the kind of professional crisis that now exists within philosophy, but also a series of parallel crises in other disciplines. The conflict between analysts and pluralists in the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association is matched, for example, by the recent equally distressing and mismanaged conflict within the English Faculty at Cambridge University as to the place of theory in the teaching of literature. And where such conflicts have not emerged, it is often because of the political weakness of one of the potentially contending parties: consider for example the tensions in many political science departments between the self-proclaimed empirical political scientists and the political theorists. These tensions are the symptoms of a largely unacknowledged crisis in the discipline. And if what I am arguing is correct, we can expect such crises and conflicts to multiply in academia.

Two preliminary conclusions now emerge. The first is that philosophy is necessarily to some degree deformed in two out of the three possible worlds that I have imagined; it is only in that possible world where 'philosophy' remained or became the name for the whole intellectual enterprise that it could escape such deformation. But that possible world of course is and was an impossible world and for a very obvious reason. The bureaucratic organisation of academic work which the modern university requires and the type of division of labor which it entails are quite incompatible with any state of affairs in which 'philosophy' is not treated as the name of
one discipline among others. Professionalisation with all its
drawing of boundary lines and its invocation of sanctions
against those who cross them, its conceptions of what is cen-
tral to 'the' discipline and what is marginal, is the inevi-
table accompaniment of bureaucratisation. Hence there is at
least a tension between the professionalisation of philosophy
and its flourishing, except of course as technique and idiom.
For professionalisation is always favorable to the flourish-
ing of technique and to making narrowly technical proficien-
cies the badge of the fully licensed professional; and it is
equally favorable to the development of idiosyncratic idiom,
an idiom by which professionals recognize one another and for
the lack of which they stigmatise outsiders. It is not diffi-
cult to find examples of these phenomena in recent and con-
temporary American philosophy.

A second preliminary conclusion is that the present condition
of philosophy and the causes of that condition will be mis-
understood if we look for those causes only or primarily in
the internal history of philosophy conceived of as a separate
and distinct discipline. It is instead from an examination
of the nature and influence of the separation of philosophy
from the other disciplines that we are likely to draw an
understanding of contemporary philosophy. Philosophy today
draws a great deal of its vitality from such books as Syn-
tactic Structures, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,
and Brainstorms. But what the relationship of philosophy is
or ought to be to linguistics, the history of science and
the study of artificial intelligence still remains far from
clear. And perhaps this is because our conception of 'phi-
losophy' as such, of philosophy as a separate discipline, is
itself very unclear. What is clear however is that such unity
as philosophy has not only derives from its history, but from
that period in its history when the three possible worlds
which I have described were indiscernible because they were
identical. The identity of philosophy today, that is, is in-
explicable, perhaps unintelligible, unless we recognize that
we have not - happily have not - been able to avoid reliance
on those continuities which derive from the reading and re-
reading of Plato and Aristotle. And that is to say any his-
torical account of philosophy's unity which begins, as Rorty
effectively does in his book, with Descartes - let alone with
Reichenbach, with whom his history of analytical philosophy
begins - is likely to be misleading.

How then should we write the history of philosophy? If phi-
losophy as practiced professionally today lacks any syste-
matic unity - and on this at least Rorty and I do agree - this
is itself now a central philosophical problem. The next sec-
tion of my paper is therefore entitled

2. The History of What?

We all too often project back on to thinkers of the past modes
of classification and distinction which are ours and not
theirs. So we teach the history of something that we call
'philosophy', tearing from their contexts works that were
never intended to be read in separation from other works that
we now call 'science' or 'social science'. Adam Smith never
realized that by publishing both *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *The Wealth of Nations* he contributed to two different disciplines; Locke in his epistemology wrote only for those who would also be students of Newton; and Descartes who believed that "The whole of philosophy is like a tree, whose roots are metaphysics, whose trunk is physics and whose branches are all the other sciences ..." has been the victim of all those who believe that you can study roots without trunks or branches or vice versa, but to whom the notion that it is the true theory of the proper unity to study is largely unfamiliar. More particularly he has been the victim of those who forget that the Discourse was a preface to the Dioptric, Meteors and Geometry and who ignore the content of most of the Principles of Philosophy.

To forget and ignore in these ways is to be condemned to write a history of philosophy in which the past becomes a mere prolegomenon not the present. 'Philosophy' is what we take it to be now and only that in the past which points towards us here now genuinely belongs to the history of philosophy. To the history of philosophy thus defined it would be quite comprehensible if philosophers themselves were dismissive; why be interested in mere precursors instead of engaging in the contemporary enterprise? The history of philosophy could be safely handed over to a certain sort of intellectual historian without loss to philosophy itself. And this is clearly the attitude that many modern American philosophers have taken from the time of Ralph Barton Perry's insistence upon "the separation of philosophical research from the study of the history of philosophy". What has been lost by reason of this separation and of the tendencies which initially gave rise to it and still sustain it?

First we have lost, or rather we have never acquired, an adequate conception of philosophical theories as themselves historical entities comparable to that which we have at least begun to develop of theories in the natural sciences. The kinetic theory of gases, for example, or the theory of the evolution of species by natural selection have the form that they have now because of the way that they have emerged from a variety of challenges and encounters. The credentials of such theories derive from the degree of their success or failure in surviving such challenges and encounters. But so it is also with philosophical theories such as Kantianism or utilitarianism or logical empiricism. They too are historical entities which confront us in the present in a condition which is the outcome of the challenges and encounters that they have survived or failed to survive. To write the history of a theory is on this view one and the same task as to evaluate it. The gap between philosophy and the history of philosophy disappear. But it is therefore crucial on this view not only to write true history (rather than Lakatosian rational reconstructions), but history which does not begin too late.

For if we begin our history only after the decisive events and encounters which shaped some particular body of theory and determined its future success or failure have already occurred, we shall not know how to characterize, let alone to evaluate what is going on.
Secondly the loss of an adequate view of the relationship of philosophy to its history, and therefore of the consequences of the separation of philosophy from the other disciplines is bound to produce a false view of how philosophical problems are generated. On this false view it is within philosophy itself and by philosophers that the central problems of philosophy are generated. Descartes confronts the generalized challenge of philosophical scepticism and not the particular problems of someone with an Augustinian education who aspires to do optics and geometry. Locke denies the Cartesian epistemology and founds his own, the references to Boyle and Newton being treated as of marginal interest. This is the history of philosophy as founded by Reid, Stewart and their heir Victor Cousin on the one hand, and by Kant in the last four pages of the Critique of Pure Reason and his heir Gottlieb Tenne mann on the other. What kind of consideration is it to which this version of the history of philosophy is apt to make us blind?

Consider how the problems that cluster round the issue of modern scientific realism were in fact generated. They have at least three different kinds of source. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the relationship of physics and astronomy to theology cannot be explored in any depth without raising the issue of realism versus instrumentalism, as both Osiander and Bellarmine clearly understood. Even before that the instrumentalism of some late medieval science had raised kindred issues. Secondly the emergence of the distinction between astronomy and astrology (and subsequent conflicts between bad sciences and good ones) posed questions which could not be answered without taking up a position on the issue of realism. And thirdly within various sciences the truth or falsity of particular bodies of theory has turned on whether or not a realistic interpretation was or was not warranted: consider the disputes between energetics and atomists in late nineteenth century physics, for example. The questions of epistemology are thus not external philosophical questions raised only by those working outside the sciences in philosophy; they are questions which arise primarily and unavoidably within scientific activity itself. And it is just this which Richard Rorty systematically fails to recognize, both in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature and in his present paper.

In the book he does seem to approach some recognition of this at least in his discussion of Galileo and Bellarmine (Rorty 1979, 328-331). That discussion however not only is brief and cryptic, but culminates in what seems very like an emotivist theory of beliefs about science. ("We are the heirs of three hundred years of rhetoric about the importance of distinguishing sharply between science and religion ... But to proclaim our loyalty to these distinctions is not to say that there are 'objective' or 'rational' standards for adopting them." (330-331)). This emotivism is a natural enough sequel to a history of the rise and fall of epistemology recounted earlier in the book in which Descartes and Locke generate epistemology out of a series of philosophical errors and in which none of the three sources of the controversies on realism that I have identified plays any significant part at all.
At perhaps its most fundamental level I can state the dis-
agreement between Rorty and myself in the following way. His
dismissal of 'objective' or 'rational' standards emerges from
the writing of genealogical history, as do all the most com-
pelling of such dismissals - Nietzsche's for example. But at
once the question arises of whether he has written a history
that is in fact true; and to investigate that question, so I
should want to argue, is to discover that the practice of
writing true history requires implicit or explicit references
to standards of objectivity and rationality of just the kind
that the initial genealogical history was designed to dis-
credit. Indeed when Rorty invites us to assent to the version
of the history of philosophy which he has presented both in
his book and in his paper he is surely not merely trying to
elicit our agreement in the light of presently socially accep-
ted standards of work, within philosophy and history. For he
is - as philosophers characteristically are - himself engaged
in advancing a philosophical theory about the nature of such
standards. And this theory he presumably takes to be true, in
the same sense as that in which realists understand that pre-
dicate. But fortunately I do not need to engage with this
fundamental disagreement in order to criticise the particular
theses of "Philosophy in America Today". For that immediate
purpose the argument of the first two sections of this paper
is sufficient to provide me with premises.

3. From Reichenbach to Rorty or When Prophecy Fails

My criticisms of 'Philosophy in America To-Day' fall under
four heads. The first is that Rorty has failed to write true
history and that this failure partly derives from the fact
that his history begins too late. For Rorty seeks to explain
the present condition of analytic philosophy as the outcome
of the breakdown of the logical positivist or empiricist pro-
gram. Analytic philosophers are all to be classified together,
on his view, as ex-., neo-., or post-positivists. But of course
analytic philosophy antedated logical empiricism by quite a
number of years and from the outset it exhibited just that
variety, heterogeneity and instability which Rorty sees as
characteristic only of its present post-positivist state.
Consider the range of views expressed at different times by
G.E. Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, F.P. Ramsey, Karl Popper,
C.I. Lewis, Henry Sheffer, Ryle and J.L. Austin. Every one
of them had a program for philosophy, some of them more than
one and these programs were and are to a large degree mutually
incompatible. Compared with this variety German neoKantianism
of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century seems al-
most intolerably monotone. Yet many of these analytic phi-
osophers were only marginally influenced by logical empiricism
or positivism and some of them not at all.

The disunity and heterogeneity of analytical philosophy can-
not then be explained as the after-effect of the disintegra-
tion of the logical empiricist program. It is much more plau-
sible to see the logical empiricist program as just one more
in the by now rather long series of programs which have sprung
up among analytic philosophers as an attempt to impose some
systematic unity on the heterogeneity and variety of activities and theories which claim the name ‘analytic philosophy’. What Rorty takes to be a cause was in fact an effect.

If we look for what unity there is in analytic philosophy in spite of the heterogeneity and variety, it turns out to be of two different kinds. What makes all the different types of analytic philosophy analytic is their common preoccupation with meanings; what makes them all philosophy is the historical continuity of the way these preoccupations are embodied. Cause, personal identity, the nature of belief, and what goodness is are topics that continually recur in the context of discussions of speech-acts, logical form and extensionality. If we say that David Lewis is a remarkable philosopher — to use one of Rorty’s examples — what makes him remarkable is his own, what makes him a philosopher is the relationship of his work to Leibniz’s.

Secondly in all these respects what is striking are not the differences — which Rorty stresses — but the resemblances between modern Anglo-Saxon philosophy on the one hand and, say, modern French philosophy on the other. Vincent Descombes’s narrative account of that philosophy exhibits the same rapid succession of programmes and the same historical continuity of preoccupations. Cause, personal identity, the nature of belief, and what goodness is are topics that continually recur in the context of discussions of intentionality, structures and perspectives. If we say that Derrida is a remarkable philosopher, what makes him remarkable is his own, what makes him a philosopher is the relationship of his work to Husserl’s and beyond that to Descartes’s. Of course there are crucial differences in rhetorical mode, but even here the resemblances are perhaps as striking as the differences. Both tend to stress the value of intellectual subversion: “The able philosopher” says Rorty, praising the intellectual style of analytical philosophy, “should be able to spot flaws in any argument he hears”. (Rorty 1981, 11) Neither perhaps puts enough emphasis on first being able to hear what argument precisely it is which is being proposed for evaluation. One of the things that makes conversation with some analytic philosophers so engaging is their ability to find the flaws in one’s argument before one has actually managed to finish stating it. Hence the fashionable antithesis which Rorty describes — it is not entirely clear whether or not he endorses it — between what he calls “skill at argumentation” and what he calls a liking for reading Plato, Spinoza and Hegel. Yet without an ability to give a close reading of such texts our knowledge of the range of possible arguments and assertions whose inferential connections it is the philosopher’s task to evaluate will be severely limited. Argumentative skill without an ability to read texts accurately, that is, historically is likely finally to be valued for much the same kinds of reason that speed-reading is.

It will by now be clear that I take it that the image of continental philosophy projected by many analytic philosophers and the image of analytic philosophy projected by many continental philosophers are part of a mythology even if a
very powerful one. Rorty not only seems to endorse, but even to reinforce this mythology, in 'Philosophy in America To-
Day', although he himself quarrels with it in 'Philosophy and
the Mirror of Nature'. Yet in the paper both Rorty's account
of the present state of analytic philosophy and his view of
the division between analytic philosophy and continental
philosophy suffer from the same kind of distortion. He tries
to locate the cause of the present state of analytic philosophy
within its own internal history and consequently does not see
it as what it is, a consequence of the existence of philosophy
as a separate discipline. Hence he also does not see that the
heterogeneity and variety of continental philosophy are of the
same kind and have the same cause. Notice of course that even
so good a historian of modern French philosophy as Vincent
Descombes writes the history of that philosophy in a parallel
way to that which Rorty writes the history of modern American
philosophy. That is, he locates the causes of the present
state of French philosophy within the internal history of that
philosophy and in a parallel way ignores the effects of the
initial segregation of philosophy as a separate discipline.

Thirdly it is not surprising therefore that Rorty pays no
attention - even less than Descombes does - to the extent to
which philosophy's flourishing depends on its active rela-
tionship to other disciplines. I mentioned earlier in this
respect linguistics, the history of science and the study of
artificial intelligence. A number of other items could easily
be added to this list. What is crucial is to understand that
such relationships are misdescribed if they are characterised
as interdisciplinary, except at the level of academic organ-
isation and professional training. A philosopher who works
on the issues raised by linguistics or the history of science
or artificial intelligence or sociobiology or whatever is not
doing philosophy and something else. The destruction of any
substantial version of the analytic-synthetic distinction also
involves the destruction of the notion that there is some
clear line of demarcation which such a philosopher has crossed
or partly crossed. And as I noted earlier the history of
philosophy too makes it clear that the existence of such a
line of demarcation is implausible.

But, as I also noted earlier, such philosophers have to learn
and relearn that the "other" disciplines to which they relate
always in fact turn out to already have philosophical dimen-
sions. It was this that logical empiricism centrally failed to
understand, and Reichenbach, whose interpretation of the
history of philosophy Rorty cites in order to praise, pro-
vides an excellent example of such a failure. For what is
quite absent in Reichenbach's historical account of phi-
losophy's rise to the condition of a discipline able to use
"the tools provided by science" in a manner approximating to
that of science itself is any sense that the science to which
he refers was not science-as-it-is but science-interpreted-
in-logical-empiricist-terms. It is scarcely surprising that
logical-empiricism turns out to be the philosophy vindicated
by science thus interpreted. The mistake underlying this
narrow circularity was that of supposing that there is indeed
such a thing as science innocent of philosophical preconcep-
tions, an illusion against which Reichenbach's own work on quantum mechanics could be cited. Reichenbach indeed was one of a long line of philosopher-physicists in a succession which includes both Boltzmann and Mach. The history of that line of succession could not be written within a framework imposed by The Rise of Scientific Philosophy, a book to which Rorty in his paper assigns a canonical status in defining the history of analytic philosophy. It is therefore in some sense a secondary and not very important point to remark of Reichenbach's history what bad history it is. The account of Hegel, for example, to which Rorty alludes specifically with apparent approval, has about the same degree of verisimilitude as the account of Trotsky in A Short History of the C.P.S.U. (B) by J.V. Stalin and others. And since Reichenbach, unlike Stalin, was an admirable person with an obvious love of truth, it is perhaps right and certainly charitable to treat the Rise of Scientific Philosophy not as history at all, but as a mythological table. In so understanding it I reach my final point of disagreement with Rorty.

What The Rise of Scientific Philosophy in fact testifies to is not so much analytic philosophy's manifest relationship to natural science as its latent and unacknowledged realtionship to religion. For Reichenbach in that book at least, as Rorty's account well brings out, was an authentic millenarian, announcing that the end was at hand, that the problems of philosophy were now finally soluble. This apocalyptic note was not unique to Reichenbach. It was there at the very beginning of analytic philosophy with G.E. Moore's proclamation in the preface to Principia Ethica, in Wittgenstein's quiet assertion in the preface to the Tractatus that 'the truth of the thoughts communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I am, therefore, of the opinion that the problems have in essentials been finally solved' and in Schlick's announcement in the first number of Erkenntnis 'that an end has come to the fruitless conflict of systems'. That an imminent final solution to the problems of philosophy and therefore an imminent end to philosophy has been prophesied almost as often in this century as the imminent end of the world used to be only increases the suggestiveness of the parallel.

The millenarian predecessors of Reichenbach, Moore, Wittgenstein, and Ayer (in the chapter of Language, Truth and Logic entitled 'Solution of Outstanding Philosophical Disputes') and others are of course Comte and Condorcet. Analytic philosophers often enough are, not at all surprisingly, heirs of the ideology of the Enlightenment, that deeply religious substitute for religion. But this religious strain in their thought ought not to be taken too seriously. In so far of course as some analytic philosophers still take it seriously themselves they are apt by now to be disappointed disillusioned millenarians, anxious to explain what does not in fact need explanation, why the end of philosophy did not after all occur as prophesied. Sociologists and historians of religion have identified a number of strategies characteristic of such disappointed millenarians. One is to explain that the end did indeed occur, but in a way very different from that in which the original hearers of the prophecy had understood. And this
is perhaps the service that Rorty performs for Reichenbach. The end of systematic philosophy has indeed come about - the prophecy did come true - even if not in the way in which it was understood by Reichenbach’s original audience. If I am right in interpreting the first section of Rorty’s paper in this way, that is as a work of millenarian consolation, then we have one more piece of evidence for the view that the history of analytic philosophy will only be finally demythologised when it is placed in the context of the larger history of philosophy.

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