

Diskussion/Discussion

Kommentare zu R. Rorty: Zur Lage der Gegenwartsphilosophie in den USA (Analyse & Kritik 1/81)

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Richard Rorty – Two Philosophers or one?

Abstract: Rorty makes a number of broadly convergent distinctions between different types of philosopher or philosophy. His own expressed view - or apparent view - that what he calls abnormal or edifying discourse is parasitically dependent on a prior acceptance of the norms of normality is fundamentally, even 'foundationally', correct. Any too reckless or too persistently sustained defiance of these norms or of this dependence is bound to involve a refusal of various orders of responsibility; including perhaps both moral and political responsibilities. There can, of course, be no straightforward proof that Rorty's texts, stimulating and fruitful as they indisputably are, involve any of these irresponsibilities; indeed, he would no doubt accept the gist of much of the argument which seeks to make them explicit. It is nevertheless worrying to find him saying the things that he does say about the allegedly unbridgeable differences between 'continental' and 'analytic' philosophy; and though he might reply that one should not here take what he says as being the expression of a view on a matter of so-called fact, the factual inaccuracies of the views that he might 'normally' be taken to be expressing here are only too likely to be more misleading than fruitful, more harmful than harmless.

Richard Rorty's work is so stimulating across so wide and important a front that within the limits of a brief article one has no choice but to be highly selective. One will do best, moreover, to concentrate on the doubts and disagreements to which one is provoked. How else, after all, should one respond to a philosopher who seeks to contribute to an ongoing and fruitful conversation rather than to erect a monument in the form of a treatise? Mere repetitive endorsement of that with which one agrees would hardly constitute participation in any sort of conversation at all.

To come at once, then, to one of the central points in Rorty's thought - the distinction that in Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature he seeks to make out in terms of what he there calls "systematic and edifying philosophers" (367 ff.). (Another central point certainly lies in his sustained and argued "commendation" of "wholehearted behaviourism, naturalism and physicalism" (373).) "Great systematic philosophers are constructive and offer arguments. Great edifying philosophers are reactive and offer satires, parodies, aphorisms." (369) In his paper 'Zur Lage der Gegenwartsphilosophie in den USA' his ruling distinction is made out in terms of a contrast between contemporary analytic philosophy and a form of philosophy which

he takes to be "paradigmatically 'Continental'" (Rorty 1981, 18). This latter contrast is drawn between those who take their "self-image" from a certain "style and quality of argumentation" and those who prefer to go in for "telling sweeping historical stories" (Rorty 1981, 19) - something which he takes himself to be doing in his paper - or "whose consciousness is dominated by a sense of the contingency of the vocabulary which they themselves are using, the sense that nature and scientific truth are largely beside the point and that history is up for grabs." (Rorty 1981, 21) These distinctions may not be identical, but they are recognizably related. Whatever reservations one may have about the particular ways in which they are made out, or about Rorty's characterisation of this philosopher, this philosophical work or that, there can be no sensible doubt that there are in some way or another, at some level or another, some such distinctions to be made.

But why does Rorty think - does he really think - that there can be hardly any worthwhile relations across the present gap between analytic and 'Continental' philosophy other than those of such "pragmatic tolerance" (Rorty 1981, 22) as we can muster? He certainly says things which suggest fairly forcefully that this is what he thinks. For example: "We should accept the fact that Continental philosophy is not likely to be read or taught by people who are especially gifted at argumentation, and that analytic philosophy is not likely to be read or taught by people who like to tell stories, weave webs of words, express visions." (Rorty 1981, 17) Or: "It follows from what I've been saying that we should not fuss about 'building bridges' between analytic and Continental philosophy, nor hope to invent something which combines the best of both." (Rorty 1981, 18) Or again: "If we put aside wistful talk of bridge-building and joining forces, we can see the analytic-Continental split as both permanent and harmless. We should not see it as tearing philosophy apart. There is no single entity called 'philosophy' which was once whole and now is sundered." (Rorty 1981, 18) And also, to return to page 18: "It is sometimes said that the two sides are attacking common problems with different 'methods'. But, in the first place, there are no such common problems ..."

Not all of this seems to me to be mistaken; but much that is important does. But before trying to explain why - as a first step in trying to explain why - there is a difficulty of principle to be noted in knowing how best to proceed. When he says such things, how is one to tell whether Rorty is to be taken seriously at all? Or, if 'seriously' is an inappropriate term, is he to be taken 'literally', is he to be taken as expressing, as he himself puts it, "views on subjects of common concern"? (Rorty 1979, 372) In fact, even this may not be an adequate way of expressing the difficulty or doubt. Should I here be referring to a person called Rorty at all and to what he may or may not think or be saying? Or should I simply restrict myself to the texts that are followed or preceded by his name? Still, let us

take it that to refer to him as a person, as an author of his works, is at least an acceptable shorthand device. After all, he, like 'myself' in this sentence and its immediate predecessors, makes considerable use of the first person pronoun.

So, if he is not to be taken literally, is he, like one of those philosophers whom he says that he admires most, to be taken as offering something more in the line of "satires, parodies or aphorisms"? For if that is the 'right way' of taking him, then to treat him "as having views about how things are is not to be wrong about how things are, exactly; it is just poor taste. It puts him in a position which he does not want to be in, and in which he looks ridiculous." (Rorty 1979, 372)

The square brackets in the last sentence indicate that I have here transposed a remark of Rorty's about Wittgenstein and Heidegger into a reference back to himself. It is true that Rorty himself immediately adds "But perhaps they should look ridiculous", and, what is more, goes on to note the very difficulty with which any reader of 'his' texts is here faced. "How, then, do we know to adopt a tactful attitude and when to insist on someone's moral obligation to hold a view?" But then he suddenly goes off what I should take to be sensible view-holding rails of any sort. For he continues: "This is like asking how we know when someone's refusal to adopt our norms (of, for example, social organisation, sexual practices, or conversational manners) is morally outrageous and when it is something which we must (at least provisionally) respect." But this, if it is not tactless to treat it as the expression of a view on a subject of common concern, does not seem right at all. Certainly, a whole variety of desired or undesired effects might be produced on one audience or another by saying that to ask whether one should treat Rorty as holding a view about, say, the nature of Continental philosophy is rather like asking whether we should or should not respect his norms of sexual practice. But, first, it seems, if not impossible, at least somewhat strained to suggest that he might be under moral obligation to hold, let alone express, any views on Continental or analytic philosophy whatsoever. Our problem as readers only arises once he has actually said something which might normally be taken as the expression of a view. And, secondly, it must ultimately tend towards the breakdown of all conversation if, in the face of critical pressure, everyone was regularly to revert to denying that he was after all expressing any view, or, of he was forced to admit to holding a view, to protesting that it was nevertheless tactless, that is to say bad manners, to insist on so treating him. There seems to be no plausible parallel argument to the effect that uncertainty about other people's norms of sexual practice must tend towards a similar breakdown.

It might be suspected that I am here not so much expressing views of partial dissent from what I take to be Rorty's views as - perhaps -

seeking to show that I know how to play the game of philosophical-or-non-philosophical-take-it-or-leave-it-as-you-like conversation; or that it might at any rate be more tactful to interpret me in this way. I cannot - of course - prove the inappropriateness of any such interpretation. I can merely say that my main consciously intended point is simply to draw attention to the fact that there is a prima facie, fundamental irresponsibility involved in speaking or writing as if one was expressing a view on a subject of common concern and then refusing to admit the relevance or acceptability of critical treatment of it as such. Indeed, it is here, if anywhere, that one might more naturally speak of moral, or even political, obligation, though the irresponsibility here primarily involved may better be thought of perhaps as irresponsibility to the possibility of communication itself.

The terms 'prima facie' and 'fundamental' are here both worthy of stress. One has to agree, of course, that there is in this day and age no sensible returning to the enterprise of classical foundational epistemology; and one must agree too that it would be absurd - intellectually gauche or ill-mannered, one might say - to suggest that any theories of today, the language in which they are expressed or the concepts through which they are articulated could be guaranteed immutable historical survival into the indefinite future. But the necessity of this recognition is matched by its peculiar status as an indicator of one of the bounds of stateable knowledge. For on no seemingly possible theory of meaning - even if we are, in perhaps paradoxical consistency, bound to qualify this to read 'on no presently seemingly possible theory of meaning' - does it seem possible to conceive of a system of symbolic communication in the absence of (a) some distinction between the currently acceptable uses of a symbol and those which standardly or prima facie are not; (b) some distinction, which has to be presupposed as founding distinction (a), between any given individual use and user of a symbol and something relatively external to or independent of that individual user and his use; and (c) some distinction between the intentional and unintentional use of a symbol in any particular way in any particular context, whether that use be interpretable as standardly appropriate or not, (which is not, of course, to say that it is only the consciously intended uses that are significant).

Together these apparently indispensable distinctions provide a framework for some concept of a truth (and for another of a truthfulness) to be located, or at least constructed, somewhere in the discursively indispensable space between how things may seem at any one moment to any one speaker or observer and how in fact they may be. And to these, for any viable theory of meaning will be inseparable from some theory of communication, must be added a further distinction in expansion of distinction (b) above: namely, that between any one (actual or potential) speaker and another. Symbolic communication involves more than de facto functionally co-ordina-

ted interaction. It somehow involves, as successive speech act theorists have striven to show and in detail to make precise, the assumption by both speakers and hearers of their own and each other's ability in general to convey and to recognise their own and each other's intentions within the context of communication. But there can be not attribution of intention without some attribution of appropriate accompanying belief; and there can be no conveying of the former in a context of total uncertainty as to the latter. In any particular context mistakes or misunderstandings, or even deliberate deception, are, of course, always possible. But there could be no teaching or learning of language to or by new participants in discourse or communication, if they could not assume that in general the teachers believed what they were saying to the learners, at any rate in the context of their teaching. In short, if I can not in general assume that you do in fact hold most of the beliefs which I have learnt to attribute to you in virtue of what you do and appear to say, if I can not feel safe in exercising even that degree of charity, I am deprived of any proper basis on which to attribute to your doings and utterances any determinate meaning whatsoever. In this sense, the ability and readiness of each participant in meaningful exchange to discriminate and to acknowledge his own views on subjects of common communicational concern as being indeed his own (however provisional) views is properly fundamental - from this point of view even foundational - to the continuing possibility of meaningful communication itself.

There is by now nothing at all original (and, therefore, presumably nothing surprising) in the above remarks; the real difficulties arise in their elaboration in rigorous and systematic detail. In any case Rorty himself is once again well aware of their import. "We must first see ourselves as en-soi - as described by those statements which are objectively true in the judgement of our peers - before there is any point in seeing ourselves as pour-soi ... abnormal and 'existential' discourse is always parasitic upon normal discourse ... edification always employs materials provided by the culture of the day. To attempt abnormal discourse de novo, without being able to recognise our own abnormality, is madness in the most terrible and literal sense. ... To adopt the 'existentialist' attitude towards objectivity and rationality common to Sartre, Heidegger, and Gadamer makes sense only if we do so in a conscious departure from a well-understood norm." (Rorty 1979, 365/366) And we in turn can readily agree that the prima facie responsibility to our partners in discourse not to engage them in view-holding language unless we are prepared to acknowledge as our own the views which our language would normally be taken to convey, is and can only be but a prima facie responsibility after all. There is, inevitably, an open-ended diversity of reasons why the expectations of standard discourse may on occasion be diverted or defeated; sometimes this may be according to what are in effect equally standard rules for the making of exceptions, sometimes according to the (maybe partially or wholly hidden)

designs of the speaker, sometimes as the result of accident or confusion, sometimes in response to some indeterminate interplay between any or all of these factors. As Rorty makes clear, the success of "abnormal discourse" is always and necessarily dependent on its own non-normality, that is to say on its own status as exception to the underlying and standard observation of the norms of "the community as source of epistemic authority" (Rorty 1979, 188). As participants in communicative discourse we have a fundamental, not to say foundational, commitment to their standard observance; but in any given case there will always be points of view from which this commitment may be deemed not to hold.

So why should one hold it against Rorty that he should seem to lay claim to a point of view from which, as he writes or speaks in this context or that, he may deem himself to be justified in using standardly view-expressive language in some other and abnormal way? But this is not exactly the nub of the complaint. There are all sorts of contexts in which a non-standard employment of language is standardly recognisable as such - contexts of mock debates, contexts of 'giving views' for the sake of example, etc.; and there are others in which a failure to recognise a satire or a parody for what it is may quite convincingly be laid to the account of the listener or reader rather than to that of the satirist or parodist. But what if one is given no apparent clue at all - or if one is given contradictory clues pointing firmly and openly in opposite and incompatible directions, if one is led first one way and then another and is in the end left so dizzy that one is no longer sure of where one has been or of where one now finds oneself at all? The complaint against Rorty - be it justifiable or not - is rather of this order; for he himself seems to be trying to have it both ways at once at the risk of leaving his reader having it no way at all.

A complaint of this sort cannot, of course, be made out as constituting any sort of theoretical rebuttal of the discourse against which it is directed; indeed, it is part of the complaint that the discourse in question has abstracted itself from the range of such rebuttals as if by some sort of unfair or irresponsible trick. There are, beyond any doubt, occasions of justifiable point in deception, in evasion, in teasing, in shocking, in causing a certain disorientation or loss of hitherto existing assurance - even in the taking of serious risks with the continuity of communication itself. But it is important to recognise that the risk may indeed be serious. Who is to say that my present argument, my argument presented as such, is really designed as argument at all, that it should not rather be taken as some sort of counter-parody or satire; or not even a counter-satire, perhaps, so much as a satire in counterpoint, in disruptive alliance with those that one may think do discover in Rorty's own texts? The trouble with a parody that keeps so close to its model and victim that no one can notice the difference, is that no room or reason is left for regarding it as a parody

at all. The risks of trying to play it all possible ways at once are that all sense of point or direction may at the same time be lost and with them all possibility of the deliberate or responsible production of any one discursive effect rather than any other.

To this it may be replied that there may also be point in, precisely, the provocation of more or less random effects, or at any rate effects uncontrolled by any conscious intentionality. Of course; there may. There may be serious and responsible arguments to the effect that life is better when it not only admits but rejoices in the admission of some even unpredictable place for non-serious and non-responsible play in and with communication. And there is certainly point in the detailed patient reminder and exhibition of the ever ineliminable element of indeterminacy, of uncontrollability within the texture of any text no matter how consciously and conscientiously constructed. But this is not and can not be to say that there is nothing but uncontrollability and indeterminacy, or that play need or could be totally irresponsible. Nor, of course, is it in general the case that play is largely random or uncontrolled. We are once again brought back to the point (of common agreement) that the necessary condition for the existence of playful as of abnormal discourse lies in its fundamental dependence on that of discourse that in its central intention and standard effect is responsible or normal.

It is striking how often evaluative, and even 'morally' evaluative, terms have recurred throughout the discussion so far, and this in the quotations that I have taken from Rorty as well as in my own efforts to focus on the problems that he raises. This perhaps quaintly unfashionable phenomenon should not, so it seems to me, be simply put down to mere subjective inclination or to some incorrigible remnant of liberal ideological bias - infected by it though both I and 'my' texts must no doubt be. A basic truth embedded in verificationist theories of meaning lies in the fact that a proper understanding of any utterance or remark must include some grasp of the way in which it would be appropriate to submit it to criticism. Of course, there is a distinction to be maintained between what is said and its saying. It is one thing to criticise a statement as, for example, false, imprecise or inconsistent, and another to criticise its production as tactless, obscur-antist or deceitful, inadvertent or unself-aware; if it comes to that, the production of a statement that is in fact true may well be any of the latter. But if at this point of my argument I introduce what might 'normally' be taken as a statement to the effect that the moon is made of blue cheese, not only am I protected from the normal risks of criticism for inaccurate reporting by the evident recognition of what I am doing as the production of a philosophical example; the very nature and point of the example will depend on an equally evident recognition of the (standard) meanings of the words and sentence through the use of which my here non-stating 'statement' is made. Moreover, it is only inasmuch as this re-

cognition includes some understanding of how such a statement might normally be open to criticism that it can be so instantly recognised as false, and the point of the example be thus made and taken. It is in this sense that I, as speaker, as participant in discourse or as player of the language game, must normally expect to be taken as responsible for what I say. The meaning of any term or utterance is bound up with the presumption of each speaker's ability and readiness to answer for his use of it in the face of such criticism as his interlocutor may bring against it.

These, indeed, may be seen as among the lessons of Wittgenstein's anti-Private Language Argument: that I cannot simply create my own meanings by and for myself alone, that the very meaningfulness of the words that I use and the sentences that I utter depends on the recognisability of my own use of them as appropriate by others and that no such checking by reference to others would in principle be possible if I was not in general committed to a certain stability over time not only of my usages but also of the accounts that I am prepared to render of them. On such an understanding of the matter, the location of meaning in a never fully determinate system of symbolic interchange which is both the logically and, no doubt, temporally prior condition of any individual grasp of language, can in no way absolve individuals of all share of constitutive responsibility for its ongoing establishment and upkeep. Once again, this does not and can not mean that it is never possible or even justifiable for such responsibility to be deferred or set aside. Nor is it possible to determine in advance any precisely stateable limits to such possibilities or such justifications. But there must always come a point beyond which anyone who is sufficiently evasive as to the meanings of his terms or to the force of his utterances must start making it increasingly difficult, and at the limit impossible, for anyone, himself included, to ascribe any meaning or force to them at all. And if enough participants in any form of discourse were thus consistently evasive enough, there would, at the limit, no longer survive that discourse in and by virtue of which they might be recognisable as participants. We are all to some degree interdependent as members of the semantic as well as of the epistemic communities to which we belong. And this - to make the point in a manner perhaps at once anachronistic and provocative - is to say that we only participate in the various activities of such communities in so far as we in effect accept some indeterminable minimum measure of that transcendental responsibility towards them which, by virtue of our participation, we commit ourselves to incurring.

'Transcendental responsibility' is perhaps a fine phrase, but how and on whom and in what way might such responsibility actually be judged to bear in any 'real', or non-transcendental, situation? Any proper consideration of such matters is well beyond the scope of the present discussion. But one may make a first tentative distinction between:

(i) The prima facie responsibility of any participant in discourse to sustain, throughout whatever transformations, some relative stability of discursive meaning and force. Such a responsibility is borne by whoever would participate in it towards discourse itself. It is a responsibility with which, as it might be said, we 'always already' find ourselves saddled; to deny it would be to reject one of the very conditions upon which the possibility of discourse depends. (The argument is classic in its form; it rests on the claim that it is impossible to doubt or to deny one's commitment to X without in some way or another presupposing that very commitment.)

(ii) The more limited, and evidently more contestable, responsibility of maintaining the particular lines of communication constitutive of some particular form of discourse in which one happens to find oneself engaged. This responsibility might be compared with that of someone engaging in some recognised form of game, say football or tennis. Participation in such games is notoriously compatible both with some degree of ignorance of their deliberate flouting. But it is only those who are able and willing to accept some minimum measure of responsibility towards the rules who will be recognisable as taking part as players of such games at all; and if ever the majority, however determined, of those ostensibly taking part gave up all pretence of accepting such responsibility, then the games as we know them would simply cease to exist.

On the other hand, of course, no-one can be shown to have any general prima facie responsibility to engage in any such games in the first place. Moreover, so long as a game, or a form of sport, remains no more than that, a relatively selfcontained activity located within a much wider and less well defined set of forms of life, it is not even likely to be possible to prove any general, outside-the-context-of-the-game, prima facie responsibility not to engage in such games with the deliberate intention of then disrupting or 'deconstructing' them by defiance of their rules from the inside. (See the debate between John Searle and R.M. Hare on 'The Promising Game'.)

(iii) That aspect or modality of responsibility which one bears not simply to the rules of language, of discourse, of the game as such but, in virtue of such rules and of the expectations that they license and even enjoin, to one's actual fellow participants. It is here that responsibility ceases to be 'merely' transcendental to take on its more recognisably moral or political connotations. In all three cases - of language, of discourse, of games - the acceptance of the conditions of recognisability by one's actual or potential partners is a condition of one's own meaningful participation; so much may be argued as a matter of principle. But principle has always to seek also the forms of its practical instantiation, and in this it is inevitably caught up in all the uncertainties and controversies of 'real life' action and judgement. Occasional floutings of the very norms on which such

floutings are - by definition, as it were - parasitic are unlikely utterly to destroy them. Some even substantial failures of normal responsibility to one's partners may nevertheless be responsibly justified; in other cases one may be incapable of or uninterested in justification and yet in act be able to get away with one's irresponsibilities without any apparent disaster. But expectations too often and too sharply disappointed must lead in the end to expectation wholly destroyed. The conditions under which and the point at which such an end may be reached will obviously depend not only on the nature of the rules but also on all sorts of other personal and social, political, cultural and institutional factors. But without some element of reciprocal expectation the basic conditions for joint participation whether in game or in discourse will no longer exist; and solo undertakings in either the one sphere or the other are only available as options to those who are also capable of participating in games or discourse with partners other than themselves.

One may sum up the matter as follows. A total irregularity and hence unpredictability of response will make it cognitively impossible for any meaning to be attributed to one's gestures or actions; total irregularity provides no basis for any one interpretation in preference to any other. Partial irregularity leaves open the possibility of interpretation, however uncertain; but it may in practice so undermine trust as to cause all actual attempts at interpretation to be abandoned. There can be no purely a priori way of determining the point at which or the conditions under which individual or social trust in the regularity or reliability of the other or others will be irretrievably lost. But, depending on one's knowledge and understanding of the relevant contexts, one can make more or less informed estimates of the risks. One may also have to make some moral or political judgement as to how much and what kind of uncertainty and tension is to be regarded as tolerable or justifiable when experienced by those concerned, not only in terms of the effective outcome but also in terms of the quality of life as they live it. The responsibilities incumbent on participants in differing forms of discourse or simply in discourse as such are never simply deducible with respect to their embodiment in any given situation; but neither can they ever be argued altogether away.

There is, of course, no reason whatsoever to suppose that in so far as he might enter into the terms of this argument as argument Rorty would disagree with the substance of any of this. Some of it, indeed, and as we have already noted, he explicitly acknowledges. He is firm in stating the dependence of 'abnormal' on 'normal' discourse for its own status as discourse of any sort at all. Moreover, he provides plenty of open warning that the discourse of his book and paper is, broadly speaking, of the parasitically abnormal kind. So what, we come back to the question, can properly be held in complaint against him?

In fact I have already made one attempt at formulating an answer to this question, namely that "he himself seems to be trying to have it both ways at once at the risk of leaving it no way at all." It had at once to be conceded, however, that there may well be times and contexts at and in which even such enterprises as this may turn out to have their fully justifiable point. There is no way of proving in advance and in the abstract that even the most extensive use of what is presented in the guise of argument or as apparently factual report or comment may not be justifiable in terms quite other than those of accuracy of comment or report or of validity of argument. But, to return at last, by way now of example, to the particular questions raised at the beginning of this paper, given that Rorty's own book contains a very considerable proportion of what certainly appears to be argument, what are we to make of that assertion that "We should accept the fact that Continental philosophy is not likely to be read or taught by people who are especially gifted at argumentation, and that analytic philosophy is not likely to be read or taught by people who like to tell stories, weave webs of word, express visions." (Rorty 1981, 17) For he himself, after all, quite explicitly claims to regard himself as belonging to the class of those who like to tell "sweeping historical stories". But just in case it should be suggested, as it very reasonably might be - indeed, it is impossible to see how on 'strictly' Rortyan grounds the suggestion could in principle be excluded, that there is no incontestable reason why one might not seek to combine that two genres or activities, we must remember that he has also argued, (if it is in fact to be taken as an argument), that "we should not fuss about 'building bridges' between analytic and Continental philosophy, nor hope to invent something which combines the best of both." (Rorty 1981, 18)

The worrying thing about this is, however, not merely that one is left uncertain when or whether it is both fair and relevant, relevant but unfair or ill-mannered, or simply irrelevant to take Rorty's own 'arguments' and his 'factual assessments' as factual assessments. Whatever the status of the arguments or non-arguments that it contains or the formal coherence or incoherence of its own self-representation, it is indisputable that his work has proved itself to be a source of widespread and remarkable stimulus. Nor need we in turn fuss about the question of whether or not it itself succeeds, however paradoxically, and officially in spite of itself, in constituting precisely a first step in the building after all of one kind of bridge between analytic and Continental philosophy, or in combining at any rate something of the best of them both. (Arguably, indeed, such a feat could only be achieved at the price of a certain encounter with paradox.) The more serious worry lies in the risk that readers who lack Rorty's own familiarity with the writings of Continental philosophers, may be led into taking the alleged "fact that Continental philosophy is not likely to be read or taught by people who are especially gifted at argumentation" as being straight forwardly of the order of fact. This is worrying for taken, as it

is apparently offered, as simple report, its inaccuracy is likely to be more misleading than fruitful, more productive of misunderstanding than of renewal of vision.

The implications of this sort of inaccuracy may work themselves out at a number of different levels. In the first place, it constitutes a substantial misrepresentation of the capacities of some of the most gifted and important of just those Continental philosophers to whom Rorty may most naturally be taken to be referring. There is neither space nor call to enter here into the naming of names or the citing of texts, into prolonged protest or detailed rebuttal. For present purposes we may rest content with the mere counter-affirmation that it is simply not true of many Continental philosophers that they are not "especially gifted at argumentation". (What use they may actually make or refrain from making of argumentative procedures in this text or that, and how wide the range of style of such procedures may properly be, are, no doubt, other matters.)

Secondly, and more importantly, there is a risk, in establishing too sharp and sweeping an opposition between argument and edification, of forgetting that the contemporary and, presumably, typically Continental enterprises of edification and deconstruction, together with the whole evolution of philosophy into apparently non-argumentative, non-cognitive, non-truth-seeking forms of discourse, are themselves rooted in a long history of argument. The development of these arguments, from one philosopher to another and across a whole only partly patterned series of texts, calls for the telling of a sweeping historical story of its own. Rorty himself, indeed, provides many of the elements of just such a story. One may or may not agree with the detail or even with the main thematisation of his particular way of telling it; but, as he would be the first to insist, such stories are always, and in principle, open to more than one telling. In any case, however, the texts are there to set limits to the ways in which they may be told, each of them providing, as it were, a sort of 'hors texte' to each other. If it is true that many - not all - contemporary Continental philosophers have been more concerned in their recent work with other things than the construction of argument, this is because they believe themselves to have very good arguments for this shift of focus.

But, thirdly, it is by no means evident that even from within the terms of reference of this sort of Continental philosophy there could in principle be any stable or lasting hierarchical ordering of concerns with these 'other things' and with the values of argumentation itself. Rorty himself, as we have seen, stresses the dependence of edifying discourse in relation to that of a more 'normal', argumentative nature. But there is again something misleading in the suggestion that once 'normal' discourse is given, once edifying discourse is assured, so to speak, of its underlying support, it is then free to go on to do something completely different. For ultimately ed-

ifying philosophy will always be bound to show itself 'aware' - whether 'subjectively' or 'textually' - that its founding dependence on normality is still contained within itself as one of its own inescapable possibilities; just as indeed, edification or play has been shown to be always contained within the discourse of normality as one of its own inescapable, if hidden, possibilities. To insist on the existence of some great divide across which the building of no bridge should be attempted or could be achieved is to misjudge the nature of the duality, the paradox, to which great edifying discourse must be committed - indeed, not edifying discourse alone but in the last resort, and in whichever of its changing forms, philosophy itself. This, one might say, is why great edifying philosophers will always turn out to be masters of certain forms of argument as well.

It thus seems to me to be mistaken (and actually out of accord with much of Rorty's own argument) to treat the differences between analytic and Continental types of philosophy as connected in any serious way with differences of personal gift, aptitude or taste. There may indeed be point in speaking of the distinction between the two as being "both permanent and harmless" - permanent in the sense that neither argument nor play could ever be definitely eliminated in favour of the other, and harmless in the back-to-front sense that to try too hard to achieve either elimination may very well lead to harm. But there is distortion involved in representing the distinction as a split between philosophers who, on either side of the gap, could indefinitely go on each in their own wholly unrelated way. It might be better to speak even of a necessity for bridge-building as being in its own way both permanent and harmless - permanent in the sense that there will always be a call for bridges to be rebuilt across a gap that is there constantly to be renewed, and harmless, again in a back-to-front sense, in that the need for a constant reconstruction of bridges may be taken to represent the endless openness to renewal of philosophy and of discourse itself.

Rorty's work is indeed a contribution towards a stimulus to just such a renewal. But let care also be taken to take certain aspects of what he says with just a pinch or two of salt.

Bibliography

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