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After Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature

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Abstract: Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* hoped that the profession of philosophy would collapse, that philosophy's style of reasoning would be transformed, and that analytic philosophy would be overturned. This essay looks at the 40 years since the book's publication, and argues that the discipline has become more professionalized, that its style of reasoning is the same, and that analysis still flourishes.

Keywords: Rorty, analytic philosophy, professionalism, pragmatism

1 Introduction

In 1979 Richard Rorty published his much-anticipated *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The book undermined the claims of analytic philosophy to contribute to logical understanding of the world. Rorty was anxious to question the significance of the philosophy of language, of which he had been a major proponent, but he also used analysis to do so. He denied that a philosophy bristling with technical symbols could provide a foundation for knowledge, and argued for a pragmatism based not only in the views of John Dewey, who later figured as a hero for Rorty, but more in the anti-traditional thinking of a variety of Europeans—Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Habermas. Instead of philosophers engaged in the scientific grounding of thought, Rorty wanted them to lead 'the conversation of the west'.

The attempt to bring the reigning philosophy down by its own boot-straps had repercussions in American philosophy and, indeed, everywhere that US-based thinkers were read. At the end of 1979, at a critical meeting of the premier professional body, the American Philosophical Association or APA, Rorty aided a 'pluralist' movement, and 'the pluralists' reordered the organization. They argued against the elitism of major departments, and spoke for Continental and Roman Catholic opinion, for those interested in the history of American thought, and for contingents of philosophy PhDs concerned with 'fringe areas' like feminism or African-American studies. Pluralists, moreover, had some success in emphasizing moral and political philosophy over epistemology and the philosophy of science.

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Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature also assisted other developments. One, within analytic philosophy, proposed that thinkers move on to something called ‘post-analytic’ philosophy. This vague program was sort of a counter-reformation: it would remodel analysis without giving it up. Another was the endorsement of ‘theory’ outside of philosophy. If philosophy, as Rorty held, was best seen as a form of enlightenment, then why not encourage intelligent practitioners in other disciplines to try their hands at such instruction, instead of relying on faux experts in philosophy? Professional schools of business, law, and medicine favored courses in business, legal, or medical ethics, and budding professionals in those areas taught them. Finally, Rorty gave new life to the ideal of philosophy in the United States as a handmaid to culture. In one version of its history, America heralded Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Dewey as public intellectuals who passed their acumen on to a democratic people; they eschewed the professionalism that defined Harvard’s W. V. O. Quine, to take the most pertinent example. Philosophy, for Rorty, would once again become a guide to life; wide-ranging commentaries would replace truth with illumination.

The promotion of this ideal was possibly the most striking dimension of Rorty’s vision, since it was embodied in his own career. Rorty taught at Princeton, arguably the first-place department of philosophy in the United States, when he was there. He left it in 1982 for a professorship in the humanities at the University of Virginia, and then went to Stanford in 1998 in Comparative Literature. No learned tomes were written after *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Instead, Rorty wrote more loosely organized volumes and polemical essays. In 1998 he turned to politics with a short book, *Achieving Our Country* and, before his death in 2007, to literary criticism and poetry to inculcate insight.

An aspect of Rorty’s ‘social hope’ was that a *profession* of philosophy would be weakened. He wrote that the field was “a jungle of competing research programs [...] that seem to have a shorter and shorter half-life as the years go by” (Rorty 1982, 187). Rather, worldly experience and concern for community might transform philosophy. The authority of high analytic thought would vanish as the discipline changed to civilizing criticism in multiple areas of inquiry.

In looking at the history of American thought over the half-century since Rorty came upon the scene, I see three factors that make for continuity rather than change. The continuity belies Rorty’s hope. What stands out over the last 50 years is (1) the rootedness of professional thinking and its growth in the university;

(2) the fixed abstract training of philosophers and their disregard of what goes on in the world; and (3) the enduring clout of analysis.¹

2 The Profession

Undoubtedly the most potent factor is the unrelenting enlargement of a university occupation of philosophy. Rorty had traced this development back to late-18th-century Germany, and its institutionalization in 19th-century Germany. He detested it, as his own career demonstrated, and wished for a future in which ‘the profession’ would disintegrate as seers such as himself went off the reservation. His wish was not realized.

Higher education in the United States had matured only slowly after the ‘founding’ of 1870–1910. Then, after World War Two, it boomed, in part to meet the needs of tens of thousands of returning servicemen, in part to respond to the federal government, which began to fund training deemed essential to the nation’s defense in the period of Cold War with the old Soviet Union. Despite this increase, the earlier status edifice remained intact and indeed became sturdier. The ‘Harvard model’ became standard. Even establishments that served regional needs or catered to specialized groups of students downgraded service and teaching, and hired and promoted faculty based on credentials beginning with the doctoral degree and eventuating in productivity evidenced by writing. In philosophy, Harvard kept its distinctive, easily commanding rank, and leadership flowed to its fellow members of the Ivy League; to other fortunate private institutions on the East Coast, such as Johns Hopkins; to the great state organizations of the Midwest and to the University of Chicago; to select liberal arts colleges; and to a few large places on the west coast—Stanford, Berkeley, and UCLA.

In the late 1960s analytic philosophy and the system in which it flourished came under attack, undermined by a further explosion of higher education. Prosperity and the desire to open higher learning to everyone multiplied the number of institutions and thus eventually the number of ‘thinkers’ in Departments of Philosophy. These alterations shaped Rorty’s views in the 1970s and 1980s, and he

¹ This essay depends on various non-published sources, obvious from the context. They include the website of the *American Philosophical Association* (only available to members); the websites of various universities, of their Departments of Philosophy, and of their individual philosophers; useful email from various APA officials; the *Philosophical Gourmet Report*, sometimes known as the *Leiter Report*, also on-line; and personal communications, electronic and otherwise, from Richard Rorty and Robert Brandom. The blog *Against Professional Philosophy* both reflects and comments on the dilemmas of professional philosophy.

believed they would lead to the death of ‘school’ philosophy. Instead, the alterations exaggerated the bureaucracy of a metastasizing profession.

In the first half of the 20th century the United States, Britain and Canada initiated 30 philosophy journals. 15 more were added between 1950 and 1960, and 44 in the 1960s—as many as in the previous 60 years—and then about 120 in the next 20 years of Rorty’s prime. By the early-21st century between 250 and 300 existed, depending on who did the arithmetic and at what moment. The rise of electronic publishing spread the number of journals beyond accurate counting, and such journals did not just emanate in the United States. European universities attempted to become global enterprises by making English the language of choice in instruction and writing. To become more than provincial, universities in both eastern and western Europe promoted new English-language internet magazines of which philosophers had and have their fair share. These periodicals specialize in giving voice to non-native speakers who write imperfect English, and who are unable to circulate their views in more acceptable venues. Because Europeans followed Americans in making publication a chief criterion of academic advance, a huge output of philosophical thought now adds almost unintelligible grammar and style to the inherent difficulties of philosophy written in mother-tongue English.

By early in the 20th century, university philosophers had founded the APA. Its membership was about 260 in 1920; 1540 in 1950; 5125 in 1980; 10,470 in 2000; and 9000 in 2016. That is, the total approximately doubled from Rorty’s hey-day to the present. While the American people grew over the almost 100-year period of the Association, the APA itself grew much more quickly. In 1920 there was one member for every 407,000 Americans; in the 1980s one member for every 44,000. In the 2000s, a high point was reached with a philosopher for every 27,000 Americans. With the troubles in graduate school enrollments over the last 10 years, the figures appear to have stabilized with about one APA adherent for every 36,000 people in the late 2010s.

The APA provided many services for those who belonged, but two were crucial. Philosophers could deliver papers on their research at its annual meetings. The meetings were also gathering places for departments in search of philosophers; and philosophers desiring employment or a change of employer could go to ‘the job market’.

By the time of Rorty’s death, philosophers wanting to ‘present’ in a way that would appear in the official program, would submit papers, and panels of experts would vet them. By 2018 the Association additionally listed 189 affiliated groups that might hold meetings in conjunction with the main organization and offer programs of their own. There were, for example, collectivities for Arab, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, and Tibetan philosophers or philosophies; a so-

ciety for editors of philosophical journals; another on philosophy and food; and one on philosophy and animal minds. The list of 189 did not include another 18 groups that seemed to pick out distinctive character traits rather than interests: a number of people interested in Rethinking the Canon; Disabled Philosophers; individuals interested in Policing and Philosophy.

The APA offered its supporters statistics on gender, race/ethnicity, LGBT status, and type of service and tenure. It adopted 6 policies, such as on advertising and gift acceptance. It disseminated Official Statements on 26 issues including electronic communications, valuing public philosophy, and outcomes assessment. The role of the Association's meetings in hiring was universally acknowledged. At Rorty's death 'Jobs for Philosophers', part of a printed pamphlet, was the 'industry standard', as the APA put it, for advertising positions; later 'Jobs' was folded into a wider on-line set of procedures. One Official Statement concerned the ethics of 'hotel room job interviews'. The Association offered information on the distinction between such interviews and those in hotel 'suites' or at 'tables' in large rooms set up for the purpose—commonly known as 'the meat market'.

Proclamation of one's ideas at the meetings and gainful employment acquired at them were connected to graduate training. You could not get a job without a PhD, and you learned what to proclaim in doctoral seminars. During Rorty's *floruit*, the number of PhD-granting institutions went up. By 2000 close to 90 institutions in the United States awarded students the doctoral degree in philosophy; in 2018 there were another 35, for a total of 125—up over 38% in under 20 years.

In 1994, the Board of Officers of the APA deplored attempts at the ranking of philosophy departments. Such rankings had many purposes, but one was the use by prospective post-baccalaureate students. Where should they go to be mentored by the learned? Who might best prepare them for the life of the mind? On the one hand, the APA conceded that departmental esteem and reputation were not 'utterly undeserved'. On the other hand, the organization questioned the 'justice' of 'impressions' of esteem and reputation. The APA argued that no polling of philosophers could generate a reasonable ranking; that quantitative measures based on survey data were untrustworthy; and that the very idea of rankings might be 'fundamentally unreliable'. In 2003 the same position was re-iterated in an Official Statement and updated in 2009: the Association would not rank, and did not endorse or sponsor rankings compiled by anyone else.

To an outsider, this verbiage sounds like nonsense. However, if the foremost professional group found it intellectually defensible that philosophers could not make basic distinctions about sagacity and its lack, about the good and the bad, and about sophistry versus wisdom, what did that portend about the nature of philosophy itself? If the APA could not advise would-be thinkers where to sit at the feet of genius, who could? In the age of the internet, the answer to the second

question was easy: a plethora of bloggers, entrepreneurs, and networkers with access to computers and an interest in academic departments of philosophy. Easily the most famous, sophisticated, and authoritative of these was The Philosophical Gourmet Report. The Report originated in 1996. Brian Leiter, a philosopher at the University of Texas who moved to Chicago in 2008, oversaw it. In 2014, he agreed to turn editorship of subsequent versions over to others after accusations of a ‘derogatory and intimidating’ e-mail he sent to someone who had attacked him. ‘The Leiter Report’ lost its colloquial title.

The Report dispensed testimony about the activities of professional philosophers; gave up-to-the-minute news on departmental acquisitions, hiring, and firing; and floated gossip of all sorts. It had detailed information about the quality of instruction at all English-speaking universities. Graduate training in Britain, Australia, and Canada—as well as the United States—was evaluated; and global standings of English-language philosophy departments compared the excellences of philosophy in many countries. The Report is helpful and amusing; it is also staggeringly self-satisfied, which makes it sometimes hilarious, again to an outsider. But many on-line websites and discussion assemblies have attacked it viciously, and argued—for varied reasons—that its grading is flawed and prejudiced.

The volcanic eruption in the number of philosophers, graduate students, and departments led to a radical re-ordering of the older explicit and implicit hierarchy. This re-shuffling was at least partially reflected in the Leiter Report, whether or not sanctioned by the APA. The ‘Harvard model’ of status persisted, but the age of Harvard—the long period in which it easily ruled the profession—was over. Cambridge, Massachusetts, dropped precipitously in the measures of quality, and Princeton, which had briefly taken its place, did not survive with a number one place, as graduate programs popped up like mushrooms elsewhere. Many institutions gathered together academics leaning to common research projects of high profile—the sorts that Rorty anticipated to be like the grass. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California at Irvine, New York University, and Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, for example, became distinctive centers that altered the old network of prestige. Especially noteworthy was the rise of schools that individual states funded. Florida, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin, for example, enlarged the number of such universities under their purview, and others—Michigan and California were outstanding—added another tier of institutions, ‘state colleges’. For the first time in American history, southern learning became nationally prominent in philosophy—Virginia, Duke, the University of North Carolina. Sectarian institutions, which had refused the secular revolution of the late-19th century and had been written off the map of higher education since that time, made a modest comeback as places like Calvin College of Michigan and Wheaton College of Illinois attracted capable scholars.

More important, Roman Catholic universities were at last recognized as part of the philosophical scene. For years, such schools pursued the study of medieval or Thomistic thought, and commented on American thought as if from a foreign country. Now Fordham, Catholic University, Georgetown, and Notre Dame drew noteworthy philosophers with a Catholic perspective, and placed their doctoral students in non-Catholic institutions.

Several variables made competition among graduate programs for students and position complex. One was the struggle to construct an acceptable faculty, which turned not just on doctrine and personality, as it had done when white males were the only figures in the academy, but also on gender, race, and sexual preference. The growing diversity of academia served women, people of color, and those who were not hetero-normative, as they achieved employment in philosophy. The APA published a directory of over 1000 people in 'Under Represented Groups in Philosophy'; they were divided into 15 categories.

Another variable was more money in the system. Dollars meant that many universities could offer enormous salaries and perquisites to philosophers they wanted. Research budgets, reduced teaching loads, obliging assistants, frequent leaves of absence, and subventions for travel became available. Universities created research centers to make their schools attractive to outsiders, and business-minded philosophers might find it desirable to run such centers or to use them to hire more people in their fields. Like most other academics, philosophers did not resist the many advantages their profession offered, and—protests to the contrary—gave societal engagement a low priority.

Greater mobility resulted from the infusion of money. Prior to World War Two philosophers of originality might be 'called' to professorships in institutions more desirable than the ones from which they came. A quarter century after the war, philosophers were more peripatetic—witness Rorty's peregrinations. The common use of the jet plane made geographic locus less important than it previously was. The California schools, for example, benefited from coast-to-coast air travel. Philosophers might also re-locate because of climate or a promised life-style—in addition to schools in California, for example, those in Florida and Arizona were more sought-after than they had previously been.

These transformations took place in an environment in which there was a contrast between wealthy colleges and poor ones, and an even more dramatic contrast between philosophers who had tenure and those who did not. Philosophy was stuffed with graduate-student underlings, an army of adjunct teachers, and lecturers of various sorts with short-term contracts.

What does this barrage of information tell us? When Yale College was the chief place to learn philosophical theology in the 18th century and much of the 19th, the theologian or philosopher had a lofty role in society, and he may have

been a repository of special truths. From the end of the 19th and much of the 20th century, Harvard had taken over from Yale. There was a new universe of philosophizing from 1890 to 1970, but a case can be made that the vocation demanded a distinctive mental prowess.

It is hard to make the same argument for 8975 or so of the 9000 who taught philosophy in the early-21st century. It is difficult to see, for example, how a historian of ancient philosophy at a branch of a state college or a logician at a liberal arts school might be regarded as a moral compass, or even an intellectual of interest. It is a nice question, which the intellectual historian cannot discount, of how a social practice that comes into being via a few exceptional minds is altered when enlarged by many thousands of more ordinary minds. I call the transformation *mass professionalization*. It came into existence as Rorty rose in fame and continued *unabated* after he died. His view that the profession might vanish was a fantasy.

3 Abstract Training

The second defining factor is the stability in philosophical training that stresses cogitation. Despite claims to master practices and to embrace the worldly, philosophy remained meditative. Reasoning, thinking, and talking held pride of place at the expense of empirical exploration. Three sets of examples illustrate this occupational hazard among 21st-century philosophers. The first is about how philosophers have written about their recent past; the second about how they have intellectualized the treatment of women; and the third about how they have understood morals and politics.

How have philosophers generated usable pasts for their respective communities? This, in part, was what *Philosophy and the Mirror Nature* did in criticizing the extant tradition, and in suggesting alternatives to sustain a philosophy of edification. Rorty also intimated that the future would produce philosophers who would nurture his prophetic history. It is instructive to compare the narrative of the Continental academic, John McCumber, who has tried to sully analysis, with that of analyst Scott Soames, who has tried to show analytic philosophy's progress. Both men have composed many texts elaborating their views of the past.

McCumber has authored four books arguing that analytic philosophy reflected a peculiar era in American history. The high point of this era was the American red scare of the late 1940s and early 1950s, usually known as McCarthyism, named after Joseph McCarthy, Republican Senator from Wisconsin. During this time, a rabid anti-communism constricted political conversation, and people

in all walks of life—including scholars in universities—were accused of disloyalty and punished for it. According to McCumber, analytic philosophy achieved its ascendancy at this time as scientific learning that had no political ramifications; a safe way of thinking triumphed because it preserved status and jobs within the Ivory Tower. This speculative era was ‘time in the ditch’, as the name of one of McCumber’s books announces. The ugly period in national politics was equaled in the university, the time of ‘the philosophy scare’, as another of McCumber’s books is titled. Just as McCarthy debased politics, so analysis debased philosophy.

How does McCumber prove his point? “Political pressure [...] turned people into certain kinds of philosophers”; “relations of force imping/ed/ upon [...] forms of knowledge”. But “direct evidence” of this causal relationship is “for the most part lacking” (McCumber 2016, 8–13). Therefore, McCumber proceeds by a ‘differential’ method. Various social forces, as near as I can make out, are identified as having different strengths, and they are juxtaposed to various sets of ideas—paradigms of knowledge, ‘dispositives’, or ‘discourses’. McCumber draws inferences from the existence of the Red Scare—the putative cause—to the putative effect—the coming into being of certain kinds of knowledge. The inferences are warranted if evidence shows that the victorious ideas comport with the stronger forces. McCumber’s evidence consists of an examination of the catalogues of the UCLA Department of Philosophy from 1947 to 1960, and the book of one of its members, Hans Reichenbach’s *Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (1951). UCLA was then not a backwater, but certainly not a major player in philosophy. It had between 5 and 10 members. McCumber finds that as McCarthyism gained ascendancy, so a style of analysis, positivistic empiricism, entrenched itself in Los Angeles, with Reichenbach’s book the chief example. McCumber then generalizes from California to the United States (The APA at this time had some 1,400 members). The philosophy scare produced analysis as ‘the operating philosophy of the United States’.

Analysis then ceased to be an effect of McCarthyism and became itself a cause. Analytic philosophers embodied anti-communist tendencies of the worst sort and were agents in pushing to the fringe more engaged ideas. For McCumber this socially relevant thought is Continental deliberation. It did not get a purchase in the United States until Vietnam and other post-1960s movements discredited anti-communism and, says McCumber, the hegemony of analysis. But analytic philosophy was not entirely overturned. In addition to having a nefarious “role in the global struggle of the early Cold War”, this “theory of mind”, “brutally enforced on academia”, contributed to “many of the problems faced by the United States” in the early-21st century (McCumber 2016, 112; 114).

McCumber—formerly of Northwestern—teaches at UCLA, and just around the corner is the University of Southern California, where Scott Soames—formerly of Princeton—has produced multiple histories of analytic philosophy. Soames’s

books by and large cover the same ground as those of McCumber—anglophone philosophy in the 20th century. Nonetheless, the two authors occupy alternative universes.

Philosophy, or at least analytic philosophy, for Soames, does more than evolve. He identifies ‘the founding giants’, G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell in England. But they and their successors don’t just shout timelessly across mountain tops. They rather stand on one another’s shoulders, each one correcting the errors of his predecessors, each in turn found wanting. Since World War Two, these thinkers have lived in the United States where analytic philosophy has held sway without interruption from that period to the present. Unlike McCumber, Soames ignores context and dismisses Continental philosophers by not even mentioning them. Heroes for McCumber like Rorty and Thomas Kuhn in America don’t exist for Soames, and neither do European influences such as Heidegger and Foucault. So, in charting major shifts from giant to giant in his cosmos, Soames writes, for example, that in 1951, “with [...] his celebrated article, ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, [Quine] became the dominant philosopher in America, which he remained until January of 1970 when Saul Kripke [...] gave [...] three lectures at Princeton. [...] The baton of leadership had been passed.” (Soames 2003a, 353) This was, incidentally, the moment that McCumber says analytic philosophy was overthrown.

Soames defends himself against ‘presentism’ or ‘Whig History’. Historians sometimes chastise those who do not look at yesterday in its own terms, and who rather write as if what happened in the past has led progressively to an ever-improving present. Whig History, says Soames, is a real enemy only in areas where there is no progress. For Soames this would include the study of political or social life where today cannot be the measure of the correctness of what went on in olden times. Presentism is a correct approach, however, in domains such as the hard sciences or logic, where there is progress, and where it is appropriate to track forward-movement (Soames 2006a, 606; 2006b; 2007, 467). But Soames has a constricted notion of forward-movement. Trace the footnotes in his books, or peruse the bibliographies designed for further study or a list of Soames’s writings themselves. The prominent figures in his history, or the critical problems examined, are those that Soames or his friends have written about. That is, Soames’ volumes summarize past work important to Soames; the road to progress goes through him.

In commenting on even the giants whose treatises he has reviewed, he says: “How ironic, and what a pity” that Moore “didn’t follow his own method in ethics”. One of Russell’s troubles was “to replace one philosophical problem with an even more difficult one”. Of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*: “It is hard, from today’s perspective, to ignore the flaws at its core.” Quine’s philosophy

“should be regarded as virtually empty” (Soames 2003a, 70, 181, 405; 2003b, 60). Yet there is progress. These men all contributed to the working out of ideas that have received a more correct exposition in Kripke and commentators on Kripke such as Soames. One imagines Moore, Bertie, Ludwig, and Van in some heavenly school of higher learning, notebooks in hand, taking instruction from Professor Soames.

Soames’ strategy in writing intellectual history is that you put the books significant to you in rough chronological order and then recapitulate what each thinker says in turn, with due regard to who you believe was right and how the arguments can be best interpreted, but basically with only your knowledge of contemporary philosophical English in mind.

Although McCumber and Soames contradict each other about the history of the philosophical disciplines in the age of Rorty, their disagreements are not of interest to me. For all I know, one of them may be correct, and I would not dispute the substance of their histories. What they have in common is key. They each write about the past using little evidence. Soames believes that careful reading of a pile of books will tell him about the history of thinking; McCumber judges that he can uncover the connection of thinking to society by making surmises about a few facts that he believes produce thought. The two treat the history of Anglophone philosophy from an armchair, indeed as the rationalist Rene Descartes treated his famous piece of wax in the *Meditations*. That is perhaps why they come to such different conclusions about their topic, although I would not here even suggest that their similar method may be faulty.

A second example of the supremacy of the apriori comes from a different place, the concern of women philosophers with harassment by their male colleagues. In Rorty’s time, white men dominated philosophy as they did in almost every other discipline, and the belittling of women in philosophy regularly occurred. Rorty himself would joke about his first wife’s position on the American Philosophical Association’s Committee on Women; he regularly called it ‘apacow’. By the second decade of the 21st century, such jokes were impermissible, as women ‘came forward’ to protest ‘sexual misconduct’ and to expose leading philosophers. Two cases stand out—those of Colin McGinn and John Searle.

McGinn left a stellar job at Oxford University to go to Rutgers, and from New Brunswick to a less prestigious position in Florida. Known for his work on the nature of mind, he disliked the pomposity of his fellows, whose writing he would ruthlessly criticize. In Florida, McGinn hit up on a more or less unwilling graduate student, and exposure occurred when McGinn’s sexist maltreatment came to light, from 2012 to 2014. He tried to circumvent his troubles with some fine linguistic distinctions. He interpreted as harmless his incriminating emails by using—believe it or not—the work of analytic philosopher H. G. Grice on ‘conversational

implicature'. The University of Miami was also accused of complicity in McGinn's dalliance, and a settlement was reached in 2016, although McGinn had resigned three years before.

Searle was a renowned thinker at Berkeley in California, but at age 84 in 2017 he was accused of intimidating a young female employee at the John Searle Center for Social Ontology. As other women reported, it was credibly alleged that Searle 'had sexual relationships with his students and others in the past in exchange for academic, monetary or other benefits' and that the University had covered up his flirtations. The onset of dementia tied to some of Searle's lecherous conduct complicated this case; perhaps he was not entirely responsible for the exhibition of extreme behavior.

Women in philosophy—and their own organized group in the APA now named the Women in Philosophy Taskforce—believed that the cases exemplified the prejudicial treatment of women and their debased position in the field. Thoughtful internet blogs worried about what was seen as the historically retrograde ideas of philosophy in regard to women, ideas traced back to Socrates and Plato. Finally, there were apprehensions about the failure of contemporary social norms to penetrate this narrowly brainy discipline in the university.

The discussions, however, lacked empirical warrant. Older men in philosophy and in other disciplines regularly marry younger women, often students. Even more often, professors (usually male and senior) have affairs with (usually youthful female) students. So common is this in the academic world that it hardly bears notice. In a department of history with which I am acquainted I find 6 variations on this theme among 35 faculty members. Indeed, deans and presidents are often kept busy trying to figure out how to satisfy the demands of aging erudite men to do something for their 'trailing spouses'. This is routine, if deplorable. Hundreds of cases like McGinn's and Searle's exist. How does it happen that teachers and pupils so often hook up? Well, that is how the world works. You meet people on the job. To effectuate the connection a lot of 'sexual banter', as the euphemism goes, must be taking place. And unless we believe that all these relationships are produced by male aggression and abuse of power, the flirting in many cases must be acceptable to the women. Then, as we find so frequently in matters of the heart, the possibility of mis-adventure and mis-communication is always present—as Grice had pointed out in his studies of conversational implicature. So while professional women have zeroed in on the sins of McGinn and Searle as instances of exceptionally despicable breakdowns of ethical compass, the accusers are not strictly fair. It happens all the time, in all parts of the scholarly world (and the world at large), and in an assortment of configurations.

For my examination there is one troubling feature of these mis-fortunes. Philosophers have avowed the exceptional nature of their area of inquiry: more

hostility to women has occurred in the past than in other areas of inquiry; there is more degradation of women now; philosophy uniquely emphasizes a forbidding debating style, which disadvantages females who are differently socialized; and so on. In this scenario, McGinn and Searle represent the distinctive failures and immorality of the discipline.

The only historical or empirical reasoning in these discussions cites studies showing that philosophy has the lowest percentage of women practitioners among ‘the Humanities’ (Hutchinson/Jenkins 2013, 1–20). But many philosophers identify with Psychology or Cognitive Science. Other philosophers ally themselves with Mathematics. The MIT Department of Philosophy, one of the most highly regarded, is explicitly categorized as *not* a ‘Humanity’. It makes a difference if you compare Philosophy to English; or to Political Science or Mathematics. Little is known about the ecological niche into which professional philosophers have fit in the American academy over the last 100 years. We know even less about peculiarities in the discrimination against women in American philosophy in its past. We have no support for the view that philosophy is a singular arena that might predispose it to produce a McGinn or a Searle.

Philosophers have explained the harassment cases, and issued their judgment of dishonor, based on their belief that philosophy is an extraordinary academic discipline with an idiosyncratic character. I would not necessarily dispute this claim, but rather point out that it has been made with almost no verification. That is, the reactions of the philosophers reflect their disciplinary bias—that truth can be uncovered merely by introspection. They think they can figure out what happened employing only their unusual mental powers. Just as McCumber and Soames write conjectural history, so anti-harassers analyze social problems by supposition. A similar pattern is found in my last example of political theory, where I look at two writers.

The first person to be conjured with here is John Rawls, whose *A Theory of Justice* of 1971 reached the height of its influence as Rorty came of age. Rorty praised the volume as exemplary of what philosophy could accomplish, but also denied that it owed anything to analysis. To unpack the concept of justice, Rawls conducted a thought experiment for his readers. Imagine a group of rational intelligences founding a society; they could not be actual people for they had no idea beforehand what role they themselves would play—young or old, rich or poor, male or female, white or black. This was ‘the original position’ in which creatures acted from ‘a veil of ignorance’. The philosopher considered what rules they would draw up. Rawls argued that members of this putative society would behave so that a modicum of benefits might accrue to the least advantaged. A rational mind would be guided by the thought: under the veil of ignorance, I could be one of the least advantaged. Justice *meant* being fair.

Rawls was uninterested in the history of political economy and the attempts of politicians in critical periods to build a just state. The American Fathers of the 1780s, the French Revolutionaries of a decade later, and the Bolshevik leaders of the early-20th century meant little to Rawls. To talk about justice, he created a scenario that could not possibly involve human beings; he was modeling some kind of rationality, and discarded the collective experience of real politics. In mortal life, ignorance of cultural locus—our sex, age, social status, and race—would disqualify us from political participation, if not from claims to be human; Rawls made such ignorance the *sine qua non* of acceptable civic participation.

This sort of reasoning remained intact at the other end of our 50-year period, and here, as an example, we can look at Jason Stanley's well-regarded book of 2015, *How Propaganda Works*. *How Propaganda Works* was written in the tradition of Rawls, but with a twist. A philosopher at Yale, Stanley was energized into producing this volume by having to sort through part of the library of his deceased father, a sociologist at Syracuse University with an interest in Africa some thirty years before. A tranche of Dad's old books served as the source of inspiration for the son.

Stanley investigated how propaganda undermined democracy. Democracy's ideals of liberty and equality allow propaganda, which is the use of democratic language for anti-democratic ends. In a democracy, therefore, demagogues can employ democratic language to mask an anti-democratic standpoint, to assert anti-democratic license, or even to over-turn democracy itself. Stanley asked whether the United States is a democracy in name only. He gave examples in which instead of valuing liberty, Americans promoted efficiency, the hallmark of a managerial state, and not a democratic one. According to Stanley, propaganda assisted politicians in forwarding managerialism over liberty. Elites in the US 'invariably' acquired a flawed ideology to explain their possession of an unjust amount of society's goods. Through propaganda, they tried to instill that ideology on others, usually with success.

Like Rawls, Stanley was not concerned with much that has really happened in the US but in philosophical ideas about what a democracy should be, and how propaganda could undermine it. In understanding how polities functioned and how they were to be classified, Stanley relied on recent normative political theory but even more on Plato and Aristotle and their definitions of state-forms. There is only one page on the American Founders. This page concerns Madison's 10th Federalist, and claims that Madison supported a representative democracy. But Madison does not write about representative democracy: over and over, he describes what he wants as republican, or popular government. Indeed, he argues that the favored sort of republican government is better when representatives have more people to represent than fewer; that is, we want only a modicum of representa-

tion. The crucial idea for Madison, however, is that only citizens get to choose, and this means women, African Americans, Native Americans, and even some white Protestant men with property do not vote. Republicanism differs from representative democracy, as most historians have recognized for well over 100 years. The Founders deeply worried about democratic government of whatever sort. The basis of the Constitution was something different; the United States did not come into existence as a representative democracy. Stanley could easily have learned this had he read anything about the Founding, or even read *Federalist 10* without having on the blinders of recent political philosophy.

At the same time, his father's library, filled with half-century old scholarship, played a role in the argument about propaganda's ability to undermine democracy. Stanley offered several examples of propaganda's victories, intending to show that the problem exists in the United States and elsewhere. When the issue of the defense of slavery is broached, Stanley cited the historical writing of W. E. B. Du Bois from 1903, 1926, and 1935. In one place Stanley did mention the work of David Blight, a colleague of his at Yale and contemporary historian of the slave South, but Stanley quoted Blight from an article written by a journalist. Stanley also analyzed how American democratic educators lost out in the 1920s, so that "the curricula in American high schools in the twentieth century" were "dominated by a patriarchal ideology no different than the one churches promulgated in the Middle Ages." The three books cited here were 53, 46, and 43 years old at the time of the release of *How Propaganda Works*. When the National Socialists of Hitler's Germany were taken up, the case was made by citing the diaries of one anti-Nazi. Another example pertaining to colonialism in Africa, drew on the book of Stanley's father, and two other African history books, 46 and 50 years old (Stanley 2015, 13, 20, 27, 77, 79, 299, 269).

Stanley has no idea of how a scholar like his father might grasp the politics of propaganda in the United States, but along with some filial piety displayed a trained incapacity, like Rawls, to think in non-theoretical terms—which is not to say that either one is wrong about justice in the world.

In ventures into history, social problems, and political science, philosophers in the post-Rorty period exhibit the same disciplinary conventions that were at work before Rorty wrote. Philosophers may be correct in their history, their societal priorities, and their politics; but their working knowledge is based on the kind of education they have received, and this education has not changed since Rorty was schooled at Yale. Philosophers make their points through thought experiments—deciding to have a runaway trolley kill one good person or five not-so-good persons; brains in a vat hooked up to think they are perceiving the world; a parable about a Twin Earth; a man in Barn Façade Country; what it is like to be a bat; and a tree struck by lightning but reconstructed as a philosopher.

Philosophers did not take seriously the prerogatives of history, social thought, or politics to generate insights that guesswork alone could not provide. Philosophers favored the hypothetical over the factual, the nonconcrete over data.

4 Analytic Philosophy

The continued preeminence of analytic philosophy is the third factor undermining Rorty's hopes. By such preeminence I do not mean that the most exalted philosophy is impenetrable even to readers with PhDs; or even to those with doctorates in philosophy if they are not in the one connoisseur field into which a piece of writing can be pigeon-holed. The reader should examine recent essays in any of the leading philosophical journals. Try the *Journal of Philosophy*, *The Monist*, *Philosophical Review*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, or *Review of Metaphysics*. Only a tiny number of specialists can access any given article. This holds true whether the author is a latter-day analyst, a Continental philosopher, or a historian of American philosophy; or whether the topic is about the metaphysics of perception, a Foucaultian account of time, or Charles Peirce's concept of phanerescopy.

I do mean by ascendancy the recognition and elevation of certain philosophers. Here I have chosen Robert Brandom of the University of Pittsburgh, who was heralded by Rorty as his greatest student. He shared with Rorty a great respect for the difficult analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars, and (again like Rorty) pledged allegiance to American pragmatism.

Brandom's distinction as a chaired American professor came when he published *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (1994), which elaborated his architectonic 'inferentialism'. But Brandom's prolonged impact for four decades has made him internationally illustrious. In the United States, he has received a \$1.5 million grant to pursue his ideas, but he also has keen readers in South America, Britain, the Scandinavian countries, and on the continent. *Between Saying & Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (2008) unequivocally placed Brandom among the pragmatists, an affiliation he had tacitly adopted for thirty years. His 2011 *Perspectives on Pragmatism* deepened this affirmation with a series of historical papers, which took up themes from an earlier title on forerunners, *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (2002). In 2015, *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars*, furthered Brandom's self-conscious bid to locate himself in the history of western philosophy.

This master expounds his pragmatism most thoroughly in *Between Saying & Doing*. He tells us that pragmatism has often conflicted with analytic philosophy. Early in the 20th century Russell and Moore attacked pragmatism; pragmatists like James and Dewey were critics of early analytic philosophy. Logical positivism, for a while the most significant bearer of analysis, was a form of representationalism. According to Brandom, positivism argued that a scientific clarification of sense experience—the foundation—could tell us how the world was, how reality was *represented*. On the contrary, for James and Dewey, we cannot reach any reality except that to which we contribute through our actions. Claiming to walk in the footsteps of James and Dewey, people like Rorty ultimately declared the ‘ism’ of foundational-ism mythic, and re-introduced a measure of subjectivism and cultural constructivism to the late-20th century.

Brandom does not dispute that Rorty, Brandom’s doctoral advisor at Princeton, dismissed foundationalism. Nonetheless, taking a path alternative to his mentor, Brandom argues that Rorty’s initial loyalty was to linguistic philosophy, the nucleus of analysis in the 20th century. Rorty used his *au courant* ideas about language to endorse pragmatism and to pull the rug out from under the tradition of Russell and Moore. Brandom deviates from Rorty by defending what he names ‘analytic pragmatism’, a pragmatism buttressed by attention to the constitution of language.

A good case can be made that, for Rorty, we have no world out there for language to mirror. Brandom, however, begins with practices. These undertakings set out to achieve certain goals, coordinated endeavors fundamental to our membership in the human community. Brandom denies any original division between mind and world. World and mind become dimensions of practices, the starting point. For Brandom, to put matters profitably for non-philosophers like myself, the basic supposition of cognizant-human-beings-acting-in-the-world makes for pragmatism. Then, analytic philosophy uncovers the rule-like regularities by which we talk about practices. We can get matters right (or wrong) when we describe, evaluate, reform, or appreciate our purposeful pastimes. The analytic pragmatist looks at how linguistic conventions illuminate practices.

For Brandom, the analytic project in its most general terms specifies the meaning embedded in one vocabulary by reference to another. So, in one important example, naturalists use the vocabulary of physics to talk about physical objects or morality. Analysis is a program for reduction. The naturalist exploits analysis to show how we can get our world of things or of ethical deliberation when we assume that the hard sciences are privileged knowledge. Or take Brandom’s other major example of empiricism. Empiricists regard an observational vocabulary as elementary. They maintain that it provides the wherewithal, correctly understood, to legitimate talk of possibility and necessity, which Brandom—

along with many philosophers—calls ‘modal’. Empiricists locate for us a world of facts that just *are*. But these thinkers will insist that from what there is, they can construe what is potential, or what must be.

The pragmatists, Brandom explains, may at first have challenged analysis—the pragmatist in Rorty may have questioned representationalism in the philosophy of language—but times have changed. Emphasis on practices take us away from fretting over how speech or writing mimics the external, and makes us concentrate on deeds. Linguistic analysis can make a version of pragmatism succeed. Pragmatism does not serve as a relativistic critique of analysis, as it does for Rorty. Instead, analysis strengthens pragmatism. Analytic philosophy contrives to bolster pragmatism.

Much of *Between Saying & Doing* sets out the apparatus that accomplishes this bolstering. Brandom lays out these efforts in symbolic logic. He holds, if I may drastically abbreviate him, that you can never shrink, for example, a modal vocabulary to a classical empiricist one. You cannot contract the possible or necessary to what is actual. But you can vocalize in the empiricist’s language what you must do to have a conversation about possibility and necessity. This extended ‘saying’ about how we perform if we speak in modal terms yields a ‘pragmatic metavocabulary’ (Brandom 2008). Brandom later declared that the position of *Between Saying & Doing* implied a new philosophy of logic, what he calls ‘logical expressivism’. His ‘valedictory’ would be a ‘book of hard logic (lots of proofs of new theorems)’.

Rorty wished that his legacy would be a world of *philosophes*, the French word that, used in English, connotes wide-ranging intellectual and social endeavor. But this world did not come into being. English-speaking philosophy became more professional; instruction continued to be anti-empirical; and his finest student practiced the analytic philosophy that Rorty derided.

5 Coda

In January of 2018, Johns Hopkins University announced that its philosophy department had received a gift of \$75 million from a super-wealthy donor, William Miller. Miller had been a graduate student in philosophy at Hopkins but had dropped out and gone into the investment world. He recalled that he had left Hopkins as an ABD (‘all but dissertation’) because of the slim prospects of finding a job in a philosophy department in the 1970s. A huge financial success, Miller had been mocked as a pompous fool in the movie *The Big Short* (2015) about the 2008 Wall Street debacle. He claimed, however, that his graduate work had

facilitated more clear and rigorous thinking; he ‘was pleased to be making an investment in the infrastructure of the philosophy profession’.

University finances are fungible, and undoubtedly Hopkins would do what it could to transfer the money to more general uses. But Hopkins’ president said that the grant would allow the newly-named Miller Department of Philosophy to provide more support for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, and new courses for undergraduates. The number of professorial appointments would nearly double in size to twenty-two full-time faculty members. Eight new professorial chairs would be created, and the head of the department would automatically have an endowed professorship. Mr. Miller said he wanted to ‘change the trajectory’ of philosophy.

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