

Richard Rorty (LRB, 20, January) begins his provocative discussion of my two volumes on analytic philosophy with an amusing fable about a department chair facing the daunting task of convincing the Dean to hire a philosopher working on vagueness. Not to worry. As Rorty himself ends up implicitly acknowledging, the imagined job candidate is not striving to become an expert on the composition of heaps, with the idea of solving practical problems perplexing civil engineers, but of illuminating the rules of our logic and language, and their application to the world. This enterprise is one of several in which analytic philosophers are forging ahead by replacing Rorty's metaphorical question -- *Are the sentences we use to describe the world maps of an independent reality?* -- with more specific, nonmetaphorical questions on which real progress can be made. Rorty's failure to register this is, I believe, connected to a broader failure of perspective arising from his disengagement from analytic philosophy in the last 25 years.

A case in point is Rorty's query about the significance of Ryle's ignorance of the necessary *a posteriori* for his behavioristic construal of the mental. Rorty can answer his own question by rereading my discussion of Ryle's arguments that perception is not a brain process, and that belief and desire cannot be seen as causally efficacious internal states unless one is willing to embrace the idea of a Cartesian ghost in the machine. In Volume 2, I show how these arguments depend on the faulty assumption that since our knowledge of the connection between the mental (e.g. seeing something red) and the physical (e.g. the brain processes by which this takes place) is *a posteriori*, or empirical, the two are not necessarily connected, and so cannot be identified.

What explains Rorty's blindness to points such as this? As I see it, his weary skepticism is less the result of wise Olympian detachment, than the disappointment of a true believer. The analytic philosophy that both captures and limits his imagination is that of its middle period – from the early 20s to the late 60s – when different incarnations of the brilliant, but flawed, dream of starting philosophy anew, by identifying it with the rigorous analysis of language, competed with one another for the honor of making the subject respectable to the modern mind. Having succumbed to this dream, and then rejected it for the wrong Quinean and Wittgensteinian reasons, Rorty cannot understand the Kripkean achievement of expanding the philosophical conception of necessity beyond the confines of the purely linguistic. As a result, he shows little appreciation of the invigorating Moorean common sense and the groundbreaking Russellian logical innovation of the tradition's early years, and little awareness of post-Kripkean advances in metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of mind and language.

Finally, Rorty's distrust of specialization and desire for a grand synthesis ignore the quality and quantity of what there is to synthesize. The value of specialization is that it increases the chances of getting things right in each of the areas to be synthesized – something that great philosophers from Plato to Descartes, Hume, and Kant have always recognized. Then there is the matter of quantity. In earlier eras, when it was not obvious that the scope of human knowledge far exceeded what could be encompassed by a single mind, the challenge of explaining how everything hung together was not transparently unmanageable. Today – when single minds cannot encompass substantial sub areas of any established discipline – it is. The solution is not to do badly what cannot be done, but to do well what can – to construct a series of limited, but accurate and overlapping, syntheses that together illuminate reality as we know it. This, I argue, is what we should ask of analytic philosophy.

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