

# Rorty on Analytic Philosophy

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## **Philosophy as a Discipline**

- Philosophy departments that are primarily “analytic” have dissociated themselves from the humanities.
- They think of their work as more closely allied with the natural sciences.
- The work of literary critics and historians is thought to be the realm of opinion.
- Philosophy, done analytically, is supposed to “add bricks to the edifice of knowledge.”
- Within philosophy itself, the analytic philosophers consider themselves as “techies” while the non-analytic philosophers are regarded as “fuzzies.”

## **Analytic Philosophy**

- Analytic philosophy can be defined, crudely, as the confluence of two tendencies:
  - A turn away from a discussion of experience and toward a discussion of language,
  - An attempt to professionalize philosophy by making it more scientific.
- Many non-analytic philosophers, e.g. Heidegger and Derrida, focused on language.
- Analytic philosophers use symbolic logic as a tool for doing philosophy linguistically, with the hope of co-operatively producing philosophical knowledge.

## **Continental Philosophy**

- Husserl had tried to make philosophy scientific prior to the linguistic turn.
- But his phenomenological method was turned in a different direction by his student Heidegger.
- Heidegger transformed the more literary output of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche into something that looked more professional.

- In so doing, he attracted the interest of literary intellectuals in a way that “scientific philosophy” would frown upon.
- Analytic philosophers still harbor deep suspicions about any philosopher who would attract such interest by “humanists.”

### **Analytic Philosophy in America**

- Philosophy departments in America, through the influence of emigrés like Carnap and Hempel, became analytic by 1960.
- Before this, American departments, like their European counterparts, mainly taught history of philosophy.
- Philosophy was considered one of the humanities.
- Their chief goal was to “stich together” canonical texts in new ways.
- In the newly analytic departments, the goal was to engage in the most recent disputes in journal articles.
- Led by Carnap and Quine, departments became openly anti-historical.

### **Continental vs. Analytic Philosophy**

- The skill of the continental philosopher is to apply the grand histories told by Hegel and Heidegger with other stories told about literature and social and political institutions.
- The skill of the analytic philosopher is in argumentation “of the sort typical of forensic litigators.”
- This disparity explains the lack of communication between the two groups, and it makes any rapprochement seem unlikely.

### **History of Philosophy**

- History of philosophy is tolerated by analytic philosophers, so long as it is properly done.
- To be avoided are:
  - Sweeping historical syntheses in the manner of Hegel or Heidegger,
  - Drawing morals with implications for culture at large.
- Instead, focus is on particular problems in particular philosophers or short periods of philosophy.
- The results of the historians’ research are generally regarded as not contributing the ediface of knowledge being built by the analytic philosophers.
- “The historians of philosophy in American philosophy departments are, so the speak, ‘analytic’ only by courtesy.”

### **Moral and Political Philosophy**

- The same story can be told for moral and political philosophy.
- The methods used by moral and political philosophers are the traditional ones from the history of philosophy.
- They make no contribution to the scientific pursuit of knowledge.
- Both history and theory of value are consigned to the margins of philosophy.
- The “core” that remains is:
  - Metaphysics,
  - Epistemology,
  - Philosophy of language,
  - Philosophy of mind.

### **Two Cultures**

- The divide between analytic and non-analytic philosophy is reminiscent of C. P. Snow’s *The Two Cultures*.
- Snow contrasted the scientific and literary cultures and claimed that there is a yawning communication gap between them.
- Those called “continental philosophers” by the analytic philosophers make no clear distinction between philosophy and other intellectual endeavors.
- With Heidegger, they view the “hard sciences” emulated by analytic philosophy as in the thrall of technology.
- With Nietzsche, they view the arts as central to human life, with the sciences as providing means to aesthetic ends.
- With Kierkegaard, they view the aim of philosophy as that of transforming the “existing individual.”

### **Transformations**

- Most books in the humanities do not bring about existential transformations.
- The aim in humanities education is for students to produce their own stories about how human self-definition has changed.
- It is hoped that this will help them bring about some existential transformations of their own.
- What the students are doing conforms to one of Hegel’s definitions of philosophy: “holding one’s time in thought.”

- This activity is, to the humanist, what solving puzzles is to the scientist.
- In the case of the great thinkers in both science and humanities, new ways are found to show how things “hang together.”

### **David Lewis: Analytic Philosopher**

- David Lewis explicitly attempts only to systematize our pre-philosophical opinions.
- There is no element of self-transformation here.
- Lewis builds beautiful systems, but from the standpoint of non-analytic philosophers, these systems have only aesthetic value.
- Transformative philosophy, such as that of Heidegger, seeks to sweep away pre-philosophical opinions.
- Analytic philosophy depends on fixed meanings and therefore rejects the historicist view that every opinion is “up for grabs.”

### **The Value of Analytic Philosophy**

- Ironically, analytic philosophy is its own worst enemy.
- Criticisms from outside its sphere are not nearly as devastating as those made from within.
- Analytic philosophers explain most clearly “why clarity and rigor are relative to cultural circumstance.”
- The fragmentation of analytic philosophy into schools is the result of its insulation from other disciplines.
- What is happening is that each school is playing its own “language game.”
- This realization came from analytic philosophers such as Wittgenstein, and this is the lasting legacy of analytic philosophy.