"Why Analytic Philosophy of History Still Matters: Justification, Narrative, and the Legacy of the Linguistic Turn."

An Interview with Paul A. Roth

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Abstract

This interview with Paul A. Roth explores the ongoing significance of analytic philosophy of history in the wake of the linguistic turn. Roth reflects on the distinction between theory of history and philosophy of history, emphasizing the enduring problem of justification in historical explanation. Drawing on Rorty, Toews, Hayden White, and Kuhn, he argues that the linguistic turn was not merely about representation but about raising meta-questions of rational evaluation and self-consciousness in historical practice. The conversation addresses the persistent tension between art and science in both philosophy and history, the challenge of narrative evaluation, and what Roth calls the "positivist trap." Roth also elaborates on the therapeutic role of philosophy in freeing us from constraining frameworks, and on why the analytic approach—broadly understood as concerns with justification—remains vital to contemporary debates in philosophy of history.

Keywords: Paul A. Roth; analytic philosophy of history; linguistic turn; justification; narrative explanation; art and science; Hayden White; Richard Rorty; meta-history; philosophy as therapy

Mariana Ímaz: Let's start with the first question, if that's okay, to open up the floor. What do you think are the main issues, questions, and perspectives that have guided the field after the linguistic turn?

Paul Roth: Even before I had received this invitation, I had started to try and think a bit about the difference between theory of history and philosophy of history. Because there's a lot that passes in the theory of history that I just don't think of as philosophy. It's not to say it's bad or anything, it just seemed to me, *prima facie*, that there's some sort of distinction to be drawn here and I wasn't clear in my own mind how to articulate that. Then, what I did was to go back to both Rorty's 1967 anthology, *The Linguistic Turn*, and then to this very famous essay by John Toews.[1] Even though Rorty's 1967 anthology isn't cited in Toews's essay, what really popped out to me is that, I thought, the fundamental themes were deeply related. And the relationship gets closer and deeper when you look at how Toews from the outset frames his essay. But at any rate, before I get too much into the weeds, let me try and directly answer.

What I'm going to claim is that the issue being raised by Toews was really a meta-issue, in the same way that—and this is one of the many links to Rorty's anthology—Rorty was interested in metaphilosophy and in linguistic philosophy. In some ways, the only relationship between the people he collects in that volume is that they all appear in Rorty's volume. But the connecting thread, from Rorty's perspective at that moment, is that they all have a new conception, or what they think of as a new conception, of how philosophy ought to be done. I mean, not just like a new *theory*, like feminism, or subaltern studies, or something like

[1] Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* (University of Chicago Press, 1967); John E. Toews, "Intellectual History After the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience," *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987): 879-907, https://doi.org/10.2307/1863950

that, but a whole way of reconceiving how you justify and make explicit the claims.

Let me just read to you the beginning of my essay and I think you'll see the drift of what I'm putting it on. I take this quote from Rorty that appears in his introductory essay. Rorty wrote: "ever since Plato invented the subject, philosophers have been in a state of tension, produced by a pull of the arts on one side and the pull of sciences on the other. The linguistic turn has not lessened this tension, although it has enabled us to be considerably more self-conscious about it. The chief value of the metaphilosophical discussions—Rorty writes—included in this volume is that they serve to highlight this self-consciousness."[2] Then what I say is, "Look, we can understand what's going on in Toews's volume." I thought, I'm going to just rewrite Rorty's quote and here's how I rewrite it: "But ever since Herodotus invented the subject, historians have been in a state of tension, produced by the pull of the arts on the one side and the pull of the sciences on the other. The linguistic turn has not lessened this tension, although it has enabled historians to be considerably more self-conscious about it. The chief value of the metahistorical discussions included in this journal is that they serve to heighten this self-consciousness."

Linguistic turn wasn't just another theory. Yes, it invited people to think about meaning and the production of meaning, and that's also a connected thread. But above and beyond that, it was really a way of saying, "Here's how we move from the art side to the science side." What's at issue in both these quotes is the fact that both philosophy and history live burdened with this claim that they're more on the art side than the science side.

When I teach history of analytic, one of the essays I use is an early essay by Russell called "Logic as the Essence of Philosophy."[3] This is then a theme that gets picked up by Carnap and

[2] Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, 38.

[3] Bertrand Russell, "Logic as the Essence of Philosophy." In *Our Knowledge of*

the positivists and everything. Philosophy is finally concentrated on the road to being a science. Why? Because, goddammit, we have logic! And this shows that we're really tough-minded and serious-minded and know what a proof is, etc.

When framing his essay, Toews first talks about William Bowsma, who's a historian, and then about an essay by Martin Jay, which is about the Habermas-Gadamer debate.[4] But Jay in his essay goes through all forms of linguistic philosophy, including the Anglo-American tradition. The Habermas-Gadamer debate is precisely about whether you fully historicize reason, which was Gadamer's position, or if you like, Habermas famously tried to do, try and hang on to some notion of reason that resists full historicization, full historicizing.

Rorty's position becomes increasingly more skeptical after 1967. Then, by 1979, he publishes *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, which Toews does discuss, because he discusses David Hollinger's work, which features Rorty's work very prominently.[5] And, of course, Rorty winds up on sort of the Gadamerian side. Rorty, too, had a whole series of debates with Habermas on precisely this issue, on whether reason gets fully historicized and so forth.

I'm going to conclude the essay by saying, "Look, I ran through some people, and a lot of them have just missed the point." Either they think the linguistic turn was about representation, or about whether we have facts or not, but that's kind of a sidelight. [The main point] is about how you justify things, and whether you do justify things. And bringing to self-consciousness why you

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the External World As a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy (George Allen & Unwin, 1914), 33-62.

[4] Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (University of California Press, 1984).

[5] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press, 1979); David Hollinger, *In the American Province. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Indiana University Press, 1985).

actually think something's better than the other. I think this is where I've always been trying to push you about your own work [Mariana].

I think the connection with aesthetics here is very important, because aesthetics was originally stuck in the realm of the non-cognitive. You move it out of the non-cognitive by saying, "Look, we don't have to talk about absolute truth in aesthetics, but we can still make arguments about better and worse." You don't need some metaphysical foundation in order to justify an opinion about the goodness of a work and historical context and all that.

Going forward, one of the things I want to say is "Okay, we're done with positivism, but we're still left with the issue of how to talk about better and worse." The fact that positivism, so to speak, has gone away doesn't solve the problem that they were complaining about, namely, how do you turn these into rational forms of discourse? I want to say that, at least from my perspective, a key philosophical question still remains on the table, and people have kind of missed it.

I found a very interesting piece by Carolyn Dean, who's an intellectual historian at Yale. It was like on the 40th anniversary of the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory*, and what she complains about, very correctly I think, is about how historians kind of domesticate would-be rebels.[6] They take on Foucault, or they take on White, but, she says, it just becomes one more form of professional consensus. No one's talking about how this really works to justify anything. They just say, "We're all feminists now, or we're all Foucauldians now." And you think to yourself, "Great, you're in the club, now go do whatever the hell you want." This is why I start with the paraphrase on Rorty, because I say, "Look,

[6] Carolyn Dean, "*Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, by Hayden White," *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 4 (Oct., 2019): 1337-1350.

this is the question: art or science?" This is the question philosophy and history have faced pretty much from the beginning.

The question's still on the table and no one really wants to deal with it. We're not past the linguistic turn, we haven't started to deal with the issues that were really raised by the turn.

Hans Kellner, who was, I think, Hayden's first PhD student at Rochester, once said to me in conversation, "Well, you know, logic is just one more trope." He also says that in history we just tell stories, that this positivism is just one more trope. He said in print what he said to me,[7] and I'm going to quote this in the paper, of course. I say, "Now, of course, there are people who are completely untroubled by this," and then I footnote Kellner. But everyone else is troubled with the source of what I call narrative anxiety.

I then focus on this article from about 2013, by intellectual historian Surkis.[8] Basically, she says that the linguistic turn was just trying to narrow our focus, that it's politically constraining. I disagree, but I think she gives voice to a way a lot of the people think about it.

They've missed the point. It's not just in Rorty. Toews is clearly worried about the representation problem as well, but he's also explicitly worried about this problem of justification. He gives a lot of space over to discussing David Hollinger, an intellectual historian at Berkeley who wrote a lot about Kuhn and Rorty. I think that when a lot of people now read his essay, all they focus on are the issues about representation, and completely miss the issues about justification. So that's what I'm going to highlight.

MI: Let me unpack a bunch of things that you just said. We could start to sort of clarify what we mean by history. Because there's kind of a root there. If you mean telling a story, then the question of art-science is pushing you in a certain way. If you're

[7] Hans Kellner, "The Return of Rhetoric" in *The SAGE Handbook of Historical Theory*, Nancy Partner and Sarah Foot (eds.) (Sage, 2013), 148-161.
[8] Judith Surkis, "When Was the Linguistic Turn? A Genealogy". *American Historical Review* Vol. 117, no. 3 (June 2012), 700–722.

telling a story, then you're in the arts; giving an argument, then that means that you're a science, right?

PR: That's right.

MI: In your work, you really sort of defend the narrative part, but you don't bring it back to aesthetics or to art, right? What's the move there?

PR: I don't think the aesthetic element isn't there. I completely accept what Hayden White said, what you say, and everything. I don't have any dispute with that. But I do think, as I say in this other paper that's forthcoming, that Hayden fell into the positivist trap, as I call it.

I don't see you doing that at all. But it's always what you have to be careful about, because I think people still think in those terms, i.e. that if you highlight the aesthetic dimensions, in some way you're downplaying or saying that the rational dimensions aren't there, or that they're secondary or something. I don't see that as what you're saying, for example, at all; rather, it's just saying, "All right, you've now framed it in a certain way, but now you can discuss the value and the merits of this framing." The two aren't incompatible, but the default is to treat them as if they were. I hope I'm not putting words in your mouth or anything, but that's always how I've read you.

In the paper that I'm now trying to finish up, I say, "Look, the only weight I put on the notion of science is the notion that there's some way of discussing it as a means of rational justification, that it's just not whim or what you happen to like at the moment." It's not scientism. The notion of science is just the notion that it's a rationally organized way of coming at the world, or it can be. You can talk about it in those terms. I still see—and this is just sort of a comment on my mindset at the moment—people being very much in the grip of the positivist trap, even though no one has to talk about positivism anymore. That division of course predates positivism, but what the positivists did was really crystallizing a certain way of articulating the distinction, and that remains in the

background. I think it remains very alive in the background and it's trying to force people to say, "Look, just because there are certain forms of theoretical approaches that have been, so to speak, normalized, it doesn't mean we've answered the question about how we discern better and worse."

MI: Let's dig a little bit into evaluation. I think this is one of the big questions right now in the field of philosophy of history. How can we evaluate? How can we say something is better than something else, especially in terms of narratives or historiographical constructions? I remember you saying that Hayden White in a private conversation said that this was never going to get solved in the field of aesthetics. Like, if you're reading literary criticism, there's no way that they can give you standards or a norm.

PR: Yes, White said to me, narrative theorists can tell you everything about narrative, except what makes a story good.

MI: Maybe a first question is, do you think that's true? What are some of your thoughts on that? And then the second question is, how have you responded to this issue of evaluation?

PR: I answered the first part very straightforwardly. I think that what Hayden said is correct. I mean, he certainly knew the ins and outs of narrative theory much better than I do. I take his comment as authoritative here. I don't think I made a lot of progress. I have one piece, "Hearts of Darkness," where I really sort of dig into two competing accounts and try and say why I think one's better than the other.[9]

But I actually think it's very hard, which is also why I think a lot of people haven't really attempted to do it. What I provide in my book is not a guide for research, but sort of once historians has completed their work, they can then think about it in terms of what I call an essentially narrative explanation. It's a way of making explicit how the argument should be reconstructed.

[9] Paul Roth, "Hearts of Darkness: 'Perpetrator History' and Why There is No Why," *History of the Human Sciences* 17, no. 2-3 (2004): 211-251.

This may sound like going back to sort of a distinction between context of discovery and context of justification. People say, "Well, how can you show that wasn't correct?" What Kuhn showed, I think, was that the two can vary and change in a number of ways, but that within, so to speak, the context of normal science or normal history, the distinction is still quite operative. I do think it would advance discussion if people thought more about exactly how their own developmental sequences are working, where the gaps might be, and so forth. The questions of framing and so forth, these are all going to be, I think, on the context of discovery.

So, you can still have arguments about whether so-and-so is a more innovative artist or historian than someone else and give reasons why. I don't think that removes it yet from the realm of rational discussion. But I do think, in the end, that these discussions are always going to be comparative and themselves framed within a certain historical context. I'm perfectly comfortable with that. You don't need absolutes in order to have these sorts of rational discussions.

MI: Let me go back to something. Do you think this division art-science is a 19th century framework and we need to just rethink that completely? Or is it giving us sort of a guide to think through certain disciplines and where do they fall? Or should we just get rid of the question altogether?

PR: I actually talk a lot about this in my first book.[10] Commentators of Plato's *Apology* have long noted that one of the charges that's brought against Socrates is that he makes the weaker argument appear the stronger. And he never responds directly to that. There's an article by a fellow named Alexander Sesonske that addresses this question and that made a big impression on me.[11]

[10] Paul Roth, *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences (*Cornell University Press, 1987).

[11] Alexander Sesonske, "To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6, no. 3 (1968): 217-231.

He points out that Plato's writing the *Apology* at a very important point in Greek history. It's the point at which writing has been introduced, it's a new technology. There's a lot of literature on this, about the shifts from societies that are based on oral traditions to written traditions, and one of the real factors in this shift is that, once something is written, it's open to public view, that is, everyone can have an opinion about it. It's not just the Council of Elders that gets to decide or to keep.

There's a lot of interesting work that argues that what really makes the Reformation possible is the printing press, because, of course, the first book that was printed was the Bible. And what it did was to break the church's monopoly on the Bible. Of course, literacy wasn't so common, but now it wasn't just that the word of God was held close by a literal priesthood. This, the argument goes, and I find it very persuasive, really helped make Reformation possible. It gave others the possibility of interpreting scripture as well.

I think we're at an interesting historical moment about trying to assess ways in which maybe reading is becoming secondary and how that impacts how people are thinking and what they take for forms of justification, and so forth. I don't myself yet believe it's been displaced, but this idea of by what criteria we're recognizing the weaker argument as opposed to the stronger one, this resonates very deeply with me. The fact that Plato was worried about it and aware of it, it's there at the beginning, so to speak, of philosophical concerns.

I don't expect final answers to these questions, but I think awareness of them is absolutely critical to anything I consider at the heart of the philosophical enterprise and, more generally, anything where we think we're accepting something for good reasons, as opposed to other sorts.

MI: This actually connects to something else that I wanted to ask you. A very interesting move that you sort of inherited from Kuhn is making science realize that they're using narratives

to explain. This is, I think, a move that gets to this question of art-science. What is justification? I think that move is really important in your work, and it brings about a particular aspect of narrative explanations that hasn't really been foregrounded, except, I think, in Kuhn. Can you talk a little bit more about that move that you make? How that gets to the question of art, science, and all of this.

PR: I think there's kind of a default assumption that if you go a full historicizing route, you lose a grip on justification. And I just don't happen to think that's true. It's like people who say, "Well, you can't have a moral code unless you have God." You need an absolute, or something like that. I always thought Mill had the perfect response: we have the whole history of the human race to help us judge about what allows people to thrive and prosper and under what conditions they don't.

It doesn't settle matters once and for all, but there's just plenty of evidence without having a need for metaphysical absolutes to help people make a case about why, for instance, discrimination is bad for everyone, or why gross inequalities are bad for everyone. Somehow people think it's sort of anti-science if you make things move and say, "Well, who gets voted in and who gets voted out of the community depends on these factors that are social as much as anything else." But in the background is what sort of forms of inquiry you think are going to help us advance in understanding and which aren't. That's how you make your case, and, of course, you can always be wrong, and the cases will be imperfect, and so on and so forth. But, hey, that's life.

Perfection isn't the relevant standard. You're not doing deductive proofs here. I don't see that you lose a grip on justification by acknowledging the historicizing influences that are just inevitably and invariably cranking away in the background. You know, we're doing the best we can, and I'm sorry if people aren't satisfied with that answer, but I don't see that we have a better one.

MI: Talking, for example, about Jouni-Matti Kuukaanen's

work, the fact that he really wants to separate the idea of just telling a story versus constructing an argument.[12] What would you respond to that?

PR: He has this book coming out on pragmatism. My concern is, sight unseen, that pragmatism is a term like naturalism and so forth: it's very, very hard to nail down. If he wants to say criteria are pragmatic, I'll just have to wait and see how he tries to cash this out. I confess up front to being sort of more than a little skeptical about whether one can successfully do that. I've had to spend a lot of time and effort myself trying to narrow down how I want to use the term naturalism.

Sellars has this great metaphor at the beginning of his wonderful essay, "Philosophy and the scientific image of Man," where he writes that philosophy is about how things in the most general sense of the term hang together in the most general sense of the term.[13] Then, he says, you look at the different areas where we have knowledge and you're just trying to figure out how they're connected. Because, somehow, they should be connected, not in a reductionist way, but at least understanding why we see them as being part of the same landscape. I really admit, it's a very weak notion of naturalism or science or anything. I don't see that we help ourselves by trying to look for something more. The positivists spent a lot of time and effort trying to do that and they failed. I think one of the chief lessons from their failure is just how we need to retrench in terms of our own intellectual ambitions, insofar as our ability to make sense of things.

A final thing about the Kuhn point. I do take seriously the idea that Kuhn, in some respects, if not flips the relationship, at least showed that it's pointless to try and talk about the authority of science independently of the authority of history. I don't want

[12] Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015).
[13] Wilfrid S. Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man". In Robert Colodny (ed.), *Science, Perception, and Reality* (Humanities Press, 1963), 35-78.

to say that he showed history to be more authoritative; I'm content to say that he showed its folly to treat the two as if they're not connected, because they're intimately connected. Once we appreciate that, this should help us get over this art or science stance.

Danto has this line in "Narrative Sentences".[14] He asks, "Is history an art or a science? Is it an either-or question?" He says the answer is neither; it's related to both. But it has differences from both as well.

This maybe isn't the best term, but I'll use it: there's no essence to history, the historical method or what history is. This is why I think that our notion of logic needs to include narrative and just try to come to terms with what we are doing. Almost a Kantian type of question, what is it we're doing when we structure something as a narrative?

I forget if I read this in Mink, or if he said it in lectures or something, but another point that has always deeply impressed me is, you tell kids stories and children love stories. But you don't have to teach a child how to follow a story. I don't think people take that seriously enough. I'm perfectly willing to say that this may be an evolutionary heritage of some sort. But it's not just the ability to construct stories. It's that we seem to have a natural propensity to be able to follow a story. Your daughter asks you at age three, "Mom, what's a story?" You don't give them Scholes and Kellogg, or the narrative theory.[15] And she'll never ask that question, right? This, I think, is part and parcel with just the whole mystery that's tied up with acquiring and using a language.

One of my favorite examples from Wittgenstein is the question, how do you know when someone knows how to read? Well, they know how to go on. Of course, you teach people how to sound things out, all that. But once they know how to read, they

[14] Arthur C. Danto, "Narrative Sentences," *History and Theory* 2, no. 2 (1962): 146-179.
[15] Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

can pick something up and just do it. That's really kind of mind blowing when you think about it. It maybe seems "natural" to us—I don't mean to use that term as mystery-mongering—, but the ability to follow a story doesn't seem to be itself something we're taught. And I think we need to take that very seriously.

MI: Let me just ask you very bluntly this question: Is analytic philosophy dead? And if not, why?

PR: I missed the obituary if it's passed on. The covering law model is dead, okay, yeah, that's not news. But [analytic philosophy is] certainly not in the sense that we were talking about at the beginning, where it's a concern for justification. People have just tuned out to the basic issues that were behind the call for the linguistic turn in the first place. This is why I want to end my own paper discussing Dean's comments. I'm saying, "Okay, historians have just now domesticated certain questions, and it's now okay to do history in this way, call yourself a feminist or a Foucauldian or whatever, whatever label you want to self-applaud." But all that means is that we're not asking you the hard questions, we don't expect you to answer the same hard questions that we can't answer, namely, how we're justifying any of this. At least that's how I read her essay, her complaint about how Hayden White has been domesticated.

Of course, White had this theory of tropes and everything, but maybe it was Gabrielle Spiegel who said that people read the introduction and the conclusion to *Metahistory* and miss all the rest. Hayden said that *Metahistory* was the product of a certain moment, when his own thought was structuralist and everything. That's true. And Hayden himself stopped talking about tropes after a while. But the larger question that it raised, namely, what is it that makes these stories seem so natural to us, the sense in which we find them plausible, and so forth, just like linguists, that's one of the questions he's raising. And it's independent of the theory of tropes. I mean, the theory of tropes is a specific attempt to answer that question. If you say no, that's too formalist

or something like that, you reject the answer, but the question remains on the table.

White is in the background of all these discussions. People have read *Metahistory*, and they're thinking about it. And they're thinking about it from the standpoint of the larger question, I believe, of how we are justifying what we do. What's the background structure that's making this work? And so, in that sense, I think the questions that Hayden put on the table remain blind.

I don't know that the term "analytic" carries a whole lot of weight, that it tells you much about an approach. I hang on to it pretty much for the same reason I hang on to the term "narrative." As opposed to Jouni-Matti, who wanted to say that we can't talk about that, because it's gotten too muddy, I hang on to it because there's already a tradition that worries about justification, and worries about it in terms of certain structural features that use that term. In my own half-baked way, I see myself as connected or coming out of this tradition, and if you don't like the term, fine, don't use it, it doesn't change the question.

MI: Let me sort of try to unpack something that has been used throughout this conversation, and that's the idea of the rational depth of historical explanations, because it gets to the question of why analytic philosophy is still important and alive. Let's unpack that, the idea that narratives are or have a rational component, what do you mean by that?

PR: Here's where it kind of ties back to my very sort of generic notion of rationalism, where I think a narrative is offering a developmental sequence, and, of course, it's not a formal logical proof. There's not going to be a tight connection between every step in the sequence, but you try and show that the steps do lend credibility to why we find the outcome that we do, even though typically we only see in retrospect how the steps got us there. You know the examples I always use in class: people say, "Oh, Mariana, how did you wind up in Seattle?" If you sit back and you think about it, you'll say, "Well, it's funny, I decided to go to grad-

uate school here, and because I was a graduate student here, I met this person, etc., etc., and lo and behold, I'm in Seattle." But only in retrospect you can give a sequence of steps. If someone said, "But why Andrew, as opposed to someone else?" Well, maybe you can't answer that, but you can always try and narrow the steps, so to speak. Sometimes we can, and sometimes we can't. That's just how it turned out. But that doesn't mean you can't give—and here one could object—a rational sequence that led you to where you were. Nothing magical happened: This is how you see, in retrospect, how things unfolded. And I'm perfectly comfortable calling that rational. I don't know what else to call it.

MI: That's perfect. Let's start wrapping this up. Let me just go back to the idea of the positivist trap, because I think it's a very clever term. One of the things that I ask myself when you talk about this is why is it so compelling to fall into the trap and say there are just these two options: history is either art or a science, and we need to choose? Why do we still take that bait?

PR: I think the positivists really crystallized the issues and created a discomfort intellectuals still experience. We have in mind a certain notion of what logic is. I think Wittgenstein is railing against this when he moves from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*. We have in mind a certain idea of what logic is, and if we can't make something fit, we just have to put it aside. In doing that, we just miss the diversity of our own thoughts. Wittgenstein is not trying to say we're irrational in our use of terms and everything. What's irrational is to think that all aspects of our linguistic life fit the same mold. That's the craziness.

I do think people remain, as it were, caught in the trap because they are operating with a certain constricted idea of what it means to be rational or what it means to be logical. And they feel kind of defenseless or uncomfortable if they can't put whatever they're trying to explain in those terms. A lot of my work is really to try to push back on that. It's nice when you can set things up as a deductive argument, I have no objection to that. But we shouldn't

imagine that this is the only way of accounting for how what we're doing can be described as rational.

I think we need to treat the term with care, but at the same time we need to expand our sense of what the legitimate ways of applying it are. I can continue to wrestle with this question of the weaker argument and the stronger. It's always the thought of why you feel something is justified or appropriate. But there are a variety of ways to do that, which we, I think, implicitly recognize. We just have to be more self-conscious about what we're doing.

MI: Something that you also talk about is how we can break free from this trap. You use a term that I really like, that is, the idea of a philosophical therapy. Can you unpack that a little bit? What is that?

PR: One way of thinking about therapy is to press a person about why they think their behavior is constrained in a certain way, or why they feel unable to act in certain ways. And sometimes in talking that through, you see that the restriction, the limitations, are more self-imposed than mandated by the environment, which is not always necessarily immediately obvious.

I have a paper called "The Cure of Stories."[16] There's a psychoanalytic theorist, Roy Schafer, who I've talked with. His is a very Hayden White-ish approach to therapy. It's about re-implotting. You don't change certain facts about your life; those are facts in some sense of the term. But the story you compose on their basis and, most importantly, the types of behaviors you then see as possible based on that story, can shift. I think that's the important point: that hopefully therapy opens up possibilities of how to engage in the world that one didn't see as possible before that.

[16] Paul Roth, "The Cure of Stories. Self-Deception, Danger Situations, and the Critical Role of Narratives in Roy Shafer's Psychoanalytic Theory." In *Psychoanalytic Versions of the Human Condition. Philosophies of Life and Their Impact on Practice*, edited by Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg (New York University Press, 1998).

It becomes hopefully more fulfilling or less painful to have the alternative forms of behavior available to them.

MI: Would you be comfortable calling it also narrative therapy?

PR: Sure, absolutely.

MI: Do you think one of the main tasks of philosophy is uncovering the story to sort of free us from the constraints that we have imposed on ourselves?

PR: I try to pose questions for myself in Wittgenstein terms. It's like, why do you think this is a problem? What makes it into a problem? It's therapy in the sense that the person who is experiencing something as a problem, or sees themselves as limited in some ways, that's the person who has to really, so to speak, talk it through in a guided way, to have someone listening, and to raise the sort of questions, about why are you saying this rather than that? What makes you think it has to be framed in this way?

MI: Paul, I feel like we should have four hours. Because now you're making me think about the audience of history, and then all of the ethical implications. But we can leave that for another time.

PR: Cavell has this wonderful piece called "An Audience for Philosophy."[17] It's the introduction to his early collection of essays, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, which was the title of one essay, but it's also the title of the collection. Like Rorty, he has a real interest in metaphilosophical questions. And it's not long at all.

It was very appropriate the way you used it, I mean, who is philosophy's audience? Cavell goes back again to Plato, and he says, "If you look at the Platonic dialogues, who's the audience?" It's people who find the conversation of interest who are engaged with these questions. Otherwise, what is justice, what is…, argh, don't bother me. But there are people for whom these are questions and that's your audience.

[17] Stanley Cavell, "Foreword: An Audience for Philosophy." In *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), xxx-xl.

You don't know who that audience is, so to speak, until you start to speak and engage people. It's like telling someone to go into therapy; it's generally a futile move. But when people get to the psychological point where they feel they need therapy, it's right because they feel they've hit a wall, or they're just repeating certain things, and they're looking for an alternative to their own behaviors, which they somehow don't understand.

And there's your audience. But first it has to come as a felt question. You as the teacher or whomever can't do that for other people; they have to be open to hearing it. One of the hard things about teaching philosophy right from the start is how do you get people to engage with the questions.

MI: To understand what's the problem here.

PR: Yeah, exactly. If people don't see the problem, you get nowhere with them. We all know this as teachers; it's hopeless.

MI: Let me just ask you this last question and we can finish off with this one, because I think it's important. Some people treat fields or frames as mutually exclusive, like the analytics on one side and then on the other the fields that have been emerging in philosophy of history, like the Anthropocene, questions about time, etc. How do you see these fields as not mutually exclusive?

PR: I just want to say that I see these as theoretical questions, as, so to speak, a step below the metaquestions. Whether you see the Anthropocene as a fundamental shift or not, that's to be argued for separately. I am trying to make the case that to treat the linguistic turn as just one more theoretical move on a par with these others, is to miss something critical that was at stake in these debates.

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