

Foreword by Luc Bovens

Kurt Vonnegut was already an established writer, a literary scholar thought it would be of interest to his readership to dig up his early short stories and publish them in a collected volume. Vonnegut was somewhat in disbelief since he did not find these stories quite of the quality that they would merit collecting. But after some picking and choosing and editing, he did oblige. In the introduction to the volume he laments the fact that, aside from a few exemplars, the magazines with short stories are gone – a relic of a television-and-internet free past. He reminisces about how the short stories provided for lively discussions in families and everyone would rush to get their hands on the newest edition.

As a young writer, there is no place to learn your trade anymore. In the old days you would try some of the less well known magazines and then, after some successes, work your way up the ladder. If you were greeted with one rejection after another, then you woke up and smelled the coffee – fiction writing was not a trade for you & you tried to move on hopefully to more lucrative ventures. What is a young writer supposed to do today when magazines are far and between? Move to New York and to try one's hand on the great American novel? Two years later, here is what most of them have to show for it: a few rejection letters from publishers, a wallet full of loaded credit card and a divorce to boot. Not so successful writers nowadays don't gently smell the coffee – they get their noses rubbed into a pile of coffee drench.

What I just told you stands in need of some correction. In fact, this is how

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I remembered the introduction. I couldn't remember the name of the actual book, but with some help from Wiki I learned that my inspiration came from Vonnegut's *Bagombo Snuff Box* (1999). However, there are some inaccuracies (the coffee drench being the least) and I have enhanced the story somewhat with a thread from Woody Allen's *You will meet a Tall Dark Stranger* (2010). My memory clearly played some tricks on me, but there you have it – I don't think Vonnegut would have been displeased with my continuation of his theme. Do pick it up some time – it contains some excellent advice on creative writing from the Maestro himself.

Let us carry on. Luckily analytic philosophy has travelled this route in reverse in the last fifty years. The mark of a true philosopher is no longer to have a manuscript on one's desk laying out an original *Weltanschauung* or a scoop on everything under the sun. Analytic philosophers have taken to heart Ecclesiastes 12:12: "... my son, be warned: the writing of books is endless and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body." (New American Standard Bible Translation) Instead we teach our students how to isolate crisp philosophical points and develop them into short papers.

Students will invariably kick and scream that they can't possibly say anything in say 4,000 words. I remind them of Marc Twain's "I didn't have time to write a short letter so I wrote a long one instead." I tell them point blank that it is quite unlikely that they have much more to say on the subject than 4,000 words. But of course they have their heads whirling with precious ideas! My advice is to try to make a single point and develop it properly. Doing this well is a massive improvement on ninety percent of the books written in philosophy, which fail to make a single point.

If they are en route to become professional philosophers, these single points may come to fit together and constitute a novel take on a subject some day – in due time to be published in a larger piece of work. But the edifice then becomes more like a house of blocks with each block carefully sculpted and neatly fitting

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into each other. The days of grand sculptures out of a single block of granite are gone.

What follows in this volume is a nice set of sculpted blocks of argumentation of aspiring philosophers making crisp and tightly contained points. The points were developed in response to the readings in courses and through discussions in small seminar sessions with our staff. They represent the spectrum of philosophical interests that we pride ourselves on in the LSE. There is philosophy of science with an article on probabilistic causation, philosophy and public policy with articles on affirmative action and punishment, philosophy of economics with an article on the duties of corporations, and a piece on kidney markets which is on the intersection of philosophy and public policy and philosophy of economics.

I am glad that analytic philosophy is running against the current of fiction writing. There are more and more outlets for young aspiring philosophers at all levels to try their hands on publishing concise pieces of work and to learn their trade. *Rerum Causae* was first published in 2007. The production is entirely run by a team of BSc, MSc and PhD students. This year, the editorial team thought that there was such a wealth of strong papers that we decided to publish two issues for the first time since the inception of the journal. The other issue contains the papers presented at a yearly student conference that we organize. In the last two years we have been doing so jointly with the Philosophy Department in the University of Bayreuth (Germany) which shares many of our interests. Some pictures of this year's Bayreuth-LSE conference can be found in the other issue.

Many thanks to the authors and the entire team for your excellent work!

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