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ON CONTINENTAL AND ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHIES

SERGIO CREMASCHI*

Università del Piemonte Orientale,
Dip. Studi Umanistici,
Via G. Ferraris, 109,
13100 VERCELLI
ITALY

sergio.cremaschi@lett.unipmn.it

Abstract: I discuss the way in which the cleavage between the Continental and the Anglo-American philosophies originated, the (self-) images of both philosophical worlds, the converging rediscoveries from the Seventies, as well as recent ecumenical or anti-ecumenical strategies. I argue that pragmatism provides an important counterinstance to both the familiar self-images and to fashionable ecumenical or anti-ecumenical strategies. My conclusions are: (i) Continental philosophy does not exist; (ii) less obviously, also analytic philosophy does not exist, or does not exist any longer as a current or a paradigm; what does exist is, on the one hand, philosophy of language and, on the other, philosophy of mind, that is, two disciplines; (iii) the dissolution of analytic philosophy as a school has been extremely fruitful, precisely in so far as it has left room for disciplines and research programmes; (iv) what is left, of the Anglo-American/Continental cleavage is primarily differences in styles, depending partly on intellectual traditions, partly owing to sociology, history, institutional frameworks; these differences should not be blurred by rash ecumenical; besides, theoretical differences are alive as ever, but within both camps; finally, there is indeed a lag (not a difference) in the appropriation of intellectual techniques by most schools of 'Continental' philosophy,

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and this should be overcome through appropriation of what the best 'analytic' philosophers have produced.

Key-words: *analytic philosophy; continental philosophy; pragmatism; phenomenology; hermeneutics; controversies.*

1. ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time there was Analytic Philosophy. In those times, the world of European philosophers and the world of Anglo-American philosophers were separated by an Ocean. In Anglo-America, a movement of ideas held sway, with no apparent opposition left, for which the name of Analytic Philosophy had recently been found. In Europe, what had been published in English used to be happily ignored. Nowadays, Analytic Philosophy does not exist any more. What is left is, first, the philosophy of language and, secondly, the philosophy of mind. This does not mean that these sub-disciplines have simply taken the place of Analytic Philosophy, since a sub-discipline cannot fill the room left vacant by a school. In the room left open, a number of things happened.

First, there were drastic changes within the sub-disciplines of philosophy of science and ethics. In the former, between the Fifties and the Sixties the *standard view of science* was replaced by post-empiricist philosophy of science. In ethics there was a U-turn, with the demise of non-cognitivism and the rehabilitation of normative ethics.

Secondly, there was the coming of a new leading discipline, almost a new *philosophia prima*, that is philosophy of language. This was followed by reinterpretations of the previous history of the analytic tradition, tracing it back to Frege instead of Moore or Russell or Wittgenstein, as well as by important shifts, in two opposite directions, in substantive claims on language.

Thirdly, for some time the *dernier cri* became post-analytic philosophy, an assorted company of American thinkers, ranging from Alasdair MacIntyre to Richard Rorty, *via* Richard Bernstein, Stanley Cavell, and more. They stressed the similarities between the developments that were taking place within German hermeneutics, in post-empiricist philosophy of science, in the philosophy of language after the later Wittgenstein and Quine, and between those developments and several pragmatist themes. (See Rajchman and West (1985); Cohen and Dascal (1989)).

2. A SCHOOL OR A DISCIPLINE

The second development, the birth of the philosophy of language, and the third, post-analytic philosophy, only at a first glance followed diverging paths. In fact, present-day philosophers of language are “specialists”, with a training not unlike that of other specialists, like linguists, who know too well that they are scientists, not philosophers. A very different kind of education is still imparted to any ‘traditional’ philosopher educated at any university of continental Europe, but was also the usual background of any “analytic philosopher” in the first half of the twentieth century. As I said, analytic philosophy, a philosophical *current* of the Fifties has been substituted by the philosophy of language, a philosophical *discipline* of the Nineties. It may be added that the substitution was not completely painless. An “analytic” philosopher from the Fifties, even with all his punch, was far nearer in his cast of mind to any philosopher from other philosophical currents (phenomenology, existentialism, various brands of neo-Marxism) than to present-day philosophers of language. His output included a remarkable amount of expressions of a philosophical ideology, general claims, and excommunications of opponents that are absent from the more technical

output of present-day specialists in philosophy of language. That is, analytic philosophy has shed its own skin and a core has been preserved, while throwing a coat away. This was made of claims, which turned out useless in order to carry out the original project (or its current reinterpretation). I will argue in what follows that some dross may still be found occasionally, made of misleading self-images or halos that are still being inadvertently dragged around while carrying out the 'real' job.

Let us take a closer look at the shift from the school named "analytic philosophy" to the discipline named "philosophy of language". In the Fifties, the philosophical mainstream in the Anglo-American world resulted from an osmosis between logical empiricism and linguistic philosophy. What counted as serious philosophy was the Vienna Circle philosophy liberalised and mixed up with a blend of Ryle's, Austin's, and Wittgenstein's claims, the latter's in the somewhat reassuring version that had been popularised by his Cambridge pupils. At this stage, such an 'orthodoxy' looked, to both supporters and opponents, like a tight alignment. It was in fact less homogeneous than everybody used to believe. For example, ordinary language philosophy looked a somewhat frivolous kind of exercise to the logical empiricist philosophers of science; besides, Wittgenstein had been a much more sceptical (not to say tragic) thinker than most of his 'followers' were prepared to admit. Besides, while in Great Britain linguistic philosophy was prevailing, in the States the main legacy was apparently that of logical empiricism. Among supporters mentioning such lack of homogeneity in public would have shown lack of taste, while most critics were unable to suspect it because of sheer lack of competence.

And yet, a few of the main American heirs of logical empiricism had grafted the logical empiricist shoot on to a pragmatic log. This was the achievement of exponents of three following generations such as Clarence I. Lewis, W.V. Quine, and Richard Rorty. From time to time,

some shoot of the pragmatic log used to sprout disturbing criticism, and this was more disturbing as the criticism was coming from serious “professional” philosophers, not from “continental” outsiders. Quine’s “Two Dogmas of Empiricism” in the early Fifties, and Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in the late Seventies were two stones thrown into the mere of apparent consensus. In the Seventies, after post-empiricism, the rehabilitation of normative ethics, and post-analytic philosophy, the frequency of these stones thrown into the mere reached such a critical point that a process of self-transformation (not unlike Gramsci’s “passive revolution”) came as a response to challenges. The passive revolution was staged by analytic philosophers who had made a choice opposite to that of post-analytic runaways.

The main figures in the process of self-transformation have been Dummett and Davidson. Note that each of them chose different aspects of the “analytic” tradition to be preserved, singled out different aspects when looking for ballast to throw away, and, last but not least, compared analytic philosophy with a different current from continental philosophy: respectively phenomenology or hermeneutics. That is, Dummett’s history of analytic philosophy starts with Frege (not Wittgenstein); his re-definition of philosophy makes it co-extensive with the philosophy of language or, more precisely, with formal semantics¹. Davidson is the proponent of a theory of meaning symmetrical to Dummett’s: the theory of radical interpretation². And yet, beyond several differences, both outlooks share some traits. If one contrasts Dummett and Davidson on the one hand with the logical empiricists and of the ordinary language philosophers on the other, the shared features may become clear enough. These are: (1) the giving up of any connection between the

¹See particularly Dummett (1978); (1981).

²See particularly Davidson (1980); (1984).

program of linguistic analysis and empiricism; (2) the giving up of any general fight over ideas like the logical positivists' war on 'metaphysics'; (3) the melting away of a number of conceptual distinctions cherished by predecessors, such as that between the analytic and the synthetic³.

3. CROSS-PURPOSES

In the early twentieth century, in Brentano's and Russell's times, the German fathers of phenomenology and the British fathers of analytic philosophy had shared enemies and were able to carry out fruitful exchanges with each other. And this happened despite entrenched suspicion between both cultural areas, dating back to the times of Kant and Hegel, when the Scottish philosophers had already expressed remarkable aversion to the obscure style of their German colleagues. In our century, in the Thirties, the time of Heidegger and Carnap, an irreversible break had already taken place. Between exponents of these two cultural worlds no other choice seemed to be left than to ignore each other or to engage in disputes where the other's voice could not be heard.

There are several reasons for this break and its heavy consequences. The effects of the logical positivists' emigration to America, on both the countries they left and the one they reached,

³Also the ambivalent consequences of Quine's weakening of the idea of "ontology" may be mentioned in connection with the third point. On the one hand, this weakening contributes to making the distinction between science and philosophy just a matter of degree. This, *prima facie*, sounds like a strong positivist claim. Yet, on the other hand, this very weakening of the idea of ontology helps in making the bugbear of "metaphysics" comparatively harmless. After all, those metaphysical systems that the logical empiricist despised as heaps of meaningless sentences turn out to be harmless. They are just general ontologies – maybe somewhat misunderstood as far as their real import is concerned – but not meaningless on principle (see Quine (1969)).

deserve careful study. A reconstruction would be useful also of the political aspects of this event, which carried the perception by several protagonists of an ongoing fight between two views of mankind's future. These factors, more than specific philosophical claims, were enough to determine those ways of 'reading' each other, or taking each other as a target, or ignoring each other which prevailed until the Sixties.

The very fact that figures like Heidegger and Carnap were assumed for decades to be the paramount spokesmen of both camps is telling. Others, say, Wittgenstein, Peirce, Austin, Husserl, might have been less easy to classify. And yet, both Heidegger and Carnap were German; they were divided by opposed allegiances in the German political conflict; and obviously, neither of them was the spokesman of an Anglo-Saxon and a German tradition; in more detail, Carnap was a follower of Frege, who had been one of the sources of Husserl's phenomenology, a typically Continental current; Heidegger, in turn, far from being the heir of any typically Continental tradition, was a runaway from the movement founded by Husserl, which had the same roots as the ones founded by Wittgenstein and Vienna Circle.

And yet, from the Thirties to the end of the Sixties, the division between the two opposed camps was waterproof, and the kind of 'exchange' that was possible among the divide is enlightening. Let us adopt the typology of kinds of polemical exchange proposed by Marcelo Dascal⁴. In this typology, discussion, that is an exchange on a well-defined topic which admits of a solution by correcting some mistake through some decision procedure, is distinguished from controversy, an exchange which begins with a specific problem and then spreads to other problems and reveals profound divergences not leaving shared room for decision procedures, and dispute, an exchange where no shared

⁴See Dascal (1995); (2001), p. 62

definition of the divergence is accepted, since the opposition is rooted in different attitudes, feelings, and preferences. In the light of this typology, the few confrontations between the two camps between the Thirties and the Sixties fall unavoidably within the field of disputes. One example is Carnap's attack of 1930 on Heidegger's lecture *Was ist Metaphysik*⁵. In this example the time, place and circumstances may account fairly well for differences in attitudes, feelings, and preferences, since both authors may have felt that their philosophical divergences corresponded to opposing choices of alignment in a war about the destiny of human civilisation which went well beyond the boundaries of philosophy as an academic discipline.

But another less obvious example is provided by Horkheimer's and Marcuse's attack on pragmatism and logical empiricism. Both had been on the same side as Carnap against Heidegger in their political allegiances; they had even left Europe for the United States after the coming of the Nazi regime, as Carnap had done. And yet, in *Eclipse of Reason* Horkheimer took pragmatism as his target and Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man* attacked logical empiricism⁶. In both cases the attack does not leave any room for a reply, since the attacked position is assumed to be based on attitudes that make for inability to argue rationally (in Carnap's case), or to think critically (in Horkheimer's and Marcuse's cases).

Something coming closer to the controversy case started to take place only sometimes later, in a phase when through the waterproof division between the analytic and the continental camp much had already percolated. In fact, Habermas and Apel, who have continued the project of the Frankfurt School in many aspects, had found inspiration in

⁵See Heidegger ([1929] (1976)); Carnap ([1931] (1959)).

⁶See Horkheimer (1947), pp. 59-61; Marcuse (1964).

'analytic' or quasi-analytic authors such as Peirce, Wittgenstein and Austin, and a bugbear for professional philosophers such as Derrida, often taken to be the paramount expression of continental lack of rigour in philosophy, owes much of what he has been able to say precisely to Austin. Habermas and Derrida have been involved in a couple of controversies with American philosophers, respectively Rorty and Searle, that are what comes closer to a controversy between continental and analytic philosophers. Actually, Rorty in the exchange with Habermas, defended many of the traditional continental philosophers' points, such as a defence of historicism and relativism⁷. And Searle in his exchange with Derrida, fought harshly for 'property rights' on Austin's work, while Derrida claimed to have a better interpretation of what Austin's theory means⁸. At least these were real controversies, since on both sides there were attempts at redefining the issues at stake and at arguing reasons for one's claims. But ironically, these controversies were carried out by actors who were not faithful representatives of their own alleged field. Thus, one may suspect that, once some exchange has begun to take place, the definition of both camps has become variable, and yet the need for belonging to one camp has been kept as alive as ever.

⁷See Nizkin, Sanders (1996).

⁸See Searle (1977), (1983); Derrida (1988); for detailed reconstruction and discussion see Dascal (2001).

4. TWO LINGUISTIC TURNS

In fact, what was actually going on in both camps even in the decades of disputes without controversies, is different from received images. In the decades between the Thirties and the Fifties, two parallel linguistic turns went almost unnoticed. In Great Britain, Wittgenstein turned his own *Tractatus* upside down, abandoning the pictorial theory of meaning and the idea of an ideal language while replacing them with the idea of language game. Austin was doing something similar, giving birth to the philosophy of ordinary language and the idea of “doing things with words”. In Germany, Husserl’s earlier phenomenology was being turned upside down by Husserl himself with the *Crisis of the European Sciences*, and Heidegger was transforming his own philosophy, from an “analytic of existence” into a “hermeneutic ontology”. The idea of hermeneutic ontology was resumed by one of Heidegger’s pupils, Hans-Georg Gadamer, but dropping Heidegger’s musing on the destiny of the West and on “Metaphysics” as forgetfulness of Being. For Gadamer, starting with the idea that truth cannot be expressed in a univocal or ideal language, but only in a language that cannot be reduced to the various historically given languages, the interpretation of texts became the philosopher’s job (Gadamer (1960), part iii, ch. 3, sect. (a)).

The path leading from the earlier Husserl to Gadamer, *via* the *Crisis* and the later Heidegger, runs parallel to the path leading from the earlier to the later Wittgenstein. In Ricoeurs’s words,

Husserl and Wittgenstein allow a certain amount of comparison, thanks to the parallelism of their development – that is, from a position in which ordinary language is measured on a model of ideal language to a description of language as it functions, as everyday language or as language of the *Lebenswelt*. (Ricoeur (1976), p. 87).

Also Gadamer acknowledged some similarity between his own views on knowledge as interpretation presented in *Truth and Method* and those of the later Wittgenstein on language games. For example, in the Preface to the second edition of *Truth and Method* he wrote: “Wittgenstein’s concept of *Sprachspiele*, with which I became familiar in the meantime, seems to me to be wholly legitimate”⁹.

5. TWO REDISCOVERIES

A symptom of what had been really going on is the twin rediscoveries of hermeneutics and phenomenology by American philosophers and of Wittgenstein and the philosophy of ordinary language by European philosophers. These events took place from the Seventies.

I already mentioned that in the Seventies, as a follow-up to the crisis of the *standard view* and of Quine’s criticism of the “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, there was the birth of the heterogeneous movement of “post-analytic philosophy”. This current heaped up such disparate fellows as the former analytic philosophers Rorty and MacIntyre, the pragmatist Richard Bernstein, and the ‘orthodox’ Wittgensteinian Stanley Cavell. All of them shared an interest in what the continental schools, particularly hermeneutics, had been producing, and for Rorty and Bernstein the discovery of the European tradition of hermeneutics went with a vindication of the legacy of the most typically American philosophical current, pragmatism¹⁰.

The discovery of analytic philosophy by European philosophers is less known. The phenomenon involved first Germany between the Sixties and the Seventies, and France with a remarkable delay.

⁹Gadamer (1980), p. 446, fn.128; (1963), pp. 1-45, particularly pp. 37 ff.

¹⁰See Rorty (1979); MacIntyre (1981); Cavell (1979); Bernstein (1983).

Philosophers with different backgrounds (a Heideggerian one in the case of Tugendhat, Gadamer for Apel, Adorno for Habermas, the reflexive philosophy of Jean Nabert and Husserlian phenomenology for Ricoeur) found answers to open questions of their research traditions in motives from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. While Tugendhat made a U-turn opposite to those of Rorty and MacIntyre, from Heidegger to analytic philosophy, Apel, Habermas, and Ricoeur were content with various combinations of the legacy of hermeneutics and phenomenology with Wittgenstein, Peirce, and Austin¹¹.

6. AN EXCLUDED MIDDLE

Pragmatism shows up more than once in both stories I have told: important figures of the first generation of the American analytic tradition, such as Clarence I. Lewis, were actually pragmatists. One leading figure of the second generation, Quine, inherited a few of his main claims from the pragmatic tradition. The spokesman of the post-analytic turn, Richard Rorty, formerly a respectable analytic philosopher, the author of irksome studies on the mind-body problem, had been, together with Bernstein, a student of the last pragmatists. After the post-analytic turn, he redefined himself as a disciple of one of the founding fathers of pragmatism, first Peirce, then Dewey, and finally James (with a gradual shift towards less rationalism and more relativism). I mentioned also that, ironically, Horkheimer had stigmatised pragmatism as an expression of the activist and business-minded American mind, and that, a couple of decades after, Apel discovered the importance of the pragmatic dimension of language starting with Peirce.

¹¹See Apel (1997); Habermas, (1975); (1976); Tugendhat (1970); [1976] (1982); Ricoeur (1969) 1974.

In fact pragmatism as a whole can hardly be forced into the current dichotomy between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. This research tradition shares motives with both the analytic tradition and a few continental schools. Peirce, as early as 1878, had already brought a number of conundrums into focus that were to become the central themes of post-empiricism, post-analytic philosophy, and also post-structuralism and hermeneutics. The main points of Peirce’s “pragmaticist” program were the following:

(1) the critique of intuition and immediateness: many data that are apparently immediate turn out to be in fact mediated; we must conclude that cognition is always mediated, that it is always determined by some other previous cognition and that also the most immediate cognitive activity always incorporates inferences;

(2) there is accordingly no absolute starting-point or, in today’s language, no “foundationalism”, including the Cartesian *cogito*, Locke’s simple ideas, the empiricists’ *sense-data*; besides, hyperbolic doubt does not make any sense, since it is impossible to doubt our own most deeply rooted assumptions;

(3) also talk of a mind, consciousness, or Cartesian subject does not make any sense, since introspection is impossible; we have no need to presuppose intuitive self-awareness, in so far as self-awareness may easily be shown to be the result of an inference, where what we know of our “inner life” is inferred from “external” facts, and the activity of thinking cannot be conceived of without “signs”;

(4) the claims of nominalism, an unavoidable outcome for modern post-Cartesian thought, are untenable; at the root of these claims there is the assumption that, in the real world, relations are mediated, and atomic data, on the contrary, are immediate; but such an assumption

heavily depends on something that is far from obvious, namely the Cartesian criterion of clarity and distinction¹².

7. A SCHOOL, A PARADIGM, OR A STYLE?

Most of the recent discussion on the cleavage between analytic and continental philosophy is at cross-purposes, first of all because there is no previous agreement not so much on *what* analytic philosophy is, but instead on *what kind of thing* it is. On the *extension* of the term there is no major quarrel: we know who are the philosophers belonging to the analytic tradition; at most, we might raise the question whether and to what extent a few important American analytic philosophers were instead pragmatists. There is some confusion instead on the *intension*, that is, on the question: what are the relevant traits that make for a contribution to analytic philosophy?

Most of the time, the opponents have tried to reduce analytic philosophy to a philosophical *school*, understood in a traditional sense. In these cases, at the root of misunderstanding there was a need to frame an image of analytic philosophy fitting the standard picture of a philosophical school. This implied finding a set of claims formulated by a founder and then partly reworked and amended on non-essential points by his followers. This approach fails in accounting for the existence of theoretical oppositions, even of a radical kind, between philosophers who are generally believed to belong to this research tradition, including its founding fathers Russell, Moore, and Wittgenstein.

A slightly more useful category could be that of “paradigm” (in one of Kuhn’s senses, paradigm as “exemplar”). Under certain aspects

¹²See Peirce (1878a); (1878b); (1878c); see also Bernstein (1972), ch. 3; (1991); Okrent (1989); also Apel (1997) claims that pragmatism resists reduction into familiar dichotomies.

the identity of the analytic tradition might result from the recognition of a few philosophical works as typical examples of the discovery of meaningful problems with an attempt at solving them. The trouble is that for analytic philosophers the paradigmatic example is plural, being identified either with Russell, or Moore, or Wittgenstein, or Frege, or Austin, and that between such examples the differences are remarkable¹³.

A third idea that could shed more light on the issue is the idea of *style*: a style involves a congruence between a number of factors that relate to each other not so much in a relationship of logical implication, but in the vaguer relationship of “family resemblance”. If we are content with such a comparatively weak criterion, we may perhaps account in a persuasive way for what is shared by Russell and Austin or by Dummett and Davidson. Once we shift to such a requirement, much of the continental-analytic confrontation would boil down to a train of misunderstandings; more than a controversy on specific claims, it would look like a controversy about the best language in which claims should be formulated.

But not even the idea of a style is fully convincing. In order to adopt it, we have to pay the price of admitting that there is no theoretical common ground at the root of the analytic tradition, and this not only contrasts with the programs formulated by the founding fathers of analytic philosophy, but also dissolves the very problem we set about to solve. In this case, we could drop the very name “analytic philosophy”, and talk instead of the really existing mainstream in Anglo-Saxon philosophy.

¹³On this point see Strauss (1997); Lorenz (1997).

8. THE ANALYTIC ARCHIPELAGO AND THE CONTINENTAL DRIFT

The developments within the “analytic” tradition that have been described in previous sections may be interpreted in various ways. The optimists view these changes as the overcoming of prejudices and the coming closer of analytic and continental currents, allowing at last for discussion of the true philosophical problems. The disillusioned believe that the growing specialisation of analytic philosophy has turned it into a ‘scientific’ discipline, different in kind from continental philosophy, which is still nearer to humanities. The wary ecumenical ones see in the ongoing changes, on the one hand, dangers of further cleavages as by-products of a process of specialisation, but, on the other hand, also new chances of exchange and dialogue¹⁴. I will review a few typical diagnoses.

(1) A Panglossian ecumenical: Hector-Neri Castañeda, in one of his last writings, expressed an enthusiastic appraisal of the state of philosophy in the Eighties. His impression was that philosophy was a discipline in crisis, but in a growth-crisis; there had been an expansion of the fields of discourse accepted in the discipline, and this was good; as a whole there had been an enormous change in comparison with the philosophical atmosphere of the Fifties in the English-speaking world. He wrote:

in the long run the richness of topics and methods has altered the institution of philosophy, and in the short run the narrow domains of problems and methodology of the Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy has been surpassed, and a healthy rapprochement between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy has taken place. Nevertheless, the

¹⁴The topic of the analytic/continental divide, after having been the battleground of the fight over “philosophical pluralism” in the United States during the Eighties, has become hot also in Europe in the Nineties: see Engel (1993); Mulligan (1991).

major pattern of philosophizing and the core of themes and problems remain, even if surrounded by new ones. (Castañeda (1989), pp. 35-36).

(2) An ironic defeatist: Richard Rorty, writing for the same anthology as Castañeda, contended that the core of problems to which Castañeda entrusted the continuity between traditional philosophy and today's philosophy, and between Anglo-American and continental philosophy is an empty core of ill-posed problems. His impression was that the gap between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, far from having been filled, is more unbridgeable than ever; the former trespasses into linguistic and cognitive sciences, the latter identifies itself more and more with literature. Thus,

the philosophical profession is divided into two institutionalized traditions which have little contact. Analytic philosophy, in so far as it takes notice of its rival, views it as an aestheticized and historicized form of idealism. The 'continental' tradition, by contrast, views the 'analytic' tradition as escaping from history into a dogmatic and outworn realism, but it too takes little notice of the opposition...

My hunch is that these traditions will persist side-by-side indefinitely. I cannot see any possibility of compromise, and I suspect that the most likely scenario is an increasing indifference of each school to the existence of the other. In time it may seem merely a quaint historical accident that both institutions bear the same name. (Rorty (1989), p. 26).

Rorty adds that the problems arise only because of the fact that both traditions aspire to use the honorific title "philosophy". Eventually somebody "will resolve this entirely verbal issue" by hitting upon just the right names for two sorts of disciplines, which will peacefully coexist like "classics departments and departments of modern literature" Rorty (1989), p. 32, fn. 36.

(3) A wary ecumenical: Richard Bernstein, in his 1988 Presidential Address to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, reviewed the state of philosophy in the United States and

that cleavage between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy which had been at the root of the *Streit* over “pluralism” in the Eighties. He argued that the ideological struggles distinctive of the first phase of the reception of the analytic tradition in America did not make sense any more and that it was high time to “heal the wounds of these ideological battles”. He added that it was both unenlightening and unfruitful to think in terms of an Anglo-American/Continental split, since “the philosophic interminglings” that were taking place escaped any such simplistic dichotomy. “Philosophy has been decentered. There is no single paradigm, research program, or orientation that dominates philosophy” (Bernstein (1989), pp. 297-98); we live in a “pluralist” situation; this could mean “fragmentation”, something welcome to Rorty but undesirable to Bernstein, but it could also mean “breaking down of boundaries”, “dialogical encounters where we reasonably explore our differences and conflicts” (Bernstein (1989), p. 297). Bernstein ended by pointing to the ethos of the founding fathers of pragmatism, Peirce and Dewey, focusing on anti-foundationalism, fallibilism, the social character of the self, the regulative ideals of a critical community, of contingency, of pluralism. He concluded that the controversistic spirit that has been brought from the analytic tradition into philosophy has a few advantages, in so far as it “is never content with vague claims, helps in fixing disputed issues, can reveal difficulties that require to be faced”, but has carried also dangers, in so far as “being preoccupied firstly to detect weaknesses, to show the nonsense in what we believe mistaken, we may be blind to what the other is saying” (Bernstein (1989), p. 296).

9. REWRITING STORIES

Bernstein started with a Chinese maxim: “sometimes in order to understand the present we need to study the past”. In fact, our decision

on what is happening in the philosophical world on this and the other side of the Channel and the Atlantic depends on a (far from obvious) interpretation of both ongoing events and the history of the last century. In the English-speaking world, it is not clear to everybody, between both groupies and slanderers, that continental philosophy is not made only of Heideggerian staple¹⁵. On the European Continent, ecumenical optimists seem often to be able to see only the Davidsonian trend, and are dazzled by its assonance with hermeneutics, or even believe that Rorty has somehow become the spokesman of English-speaking philosophy as a whole.

But any decision on what is going on depends also on our interpretation of the previous history of philosophy. Dummett has rewritten the history of the analytic tradition stressing the role of Frege¹⁶. But there are other ways of writing and rewriting the history of this tradition. The greater or lesser role given to Wittgenstein – beyond lip service paid to his figure – is one of the main choices making for different interpretations. The choice of privileging some phase or aspect of his thinking also contributes in drawing some particular picture of the analytic tradition¹⁷.

¹⁵Not to mention Lacan, who is hardly a philosopher of any kind, and yet this is precisely the picture of continental philosophy given in Mulligan (1991), where a whole paper is dedicated to Lacan.

¹⁶See Dummett (1988).

¹⁷See Strauss (1997), pp. 23-48; Apel (1997); Habermas (1975).

10. TWO KINDS OF INSULARITY

In an attempt to substitute – in Russell’s words – “articulate hesitation for inarticulate certainty” I will conclude with a few claims.

(1) Analytic philosophy does not exist; or better, it does not exist any longer. It was still a philosophical school in the Fifties, that is, while it was able to keep some amount of unity thanks to a few apparently shared philosophical claims. Each of these claims has been questioned, to the point that there is no longer one shared legacy. Besides, they proved not to be indispensable for the implementation of that project of a rigorous philosophical inquiry which was after all the most genuine inspiration of this school.

(2) Today, instead of the school of “analytic philosophy”, there are two interwoven and partly competing philosophical disciplines: the philosophy of language and the philosophy of mind. Both disciplines indeed aspire to the role of a new “first philosophy”. But the existence of one more discipline, even if it is a candidate for the role of the leading discipline is a lesser trouble than the existence of two mutually exclusive philosophical paradigms. As far as the issue verges on disciplines, their function, and the more or less basic character *vis-à-vis* other disciplines, the confrontation may be carried out by argument, and no one’s arguments are excluded on principle. Instead, what was disrupting in the Fifties was the existence of a school or paradigm that denied any point of contact with other schools and their shared paradigm; and this, *pace* Rorty, is precisely what has disappeared.

(3) There are, now more than ever, analytic philosophers, and they may be recognised at first sight as easily as one recognises a whale; but whales too are mammals like squirrels, no less than cognitive semantics derives from the same disciplinary matrix from which phenomenology and hermeneutics derive. In other words, analytic philosophy as a school

or paradigm has dissolved; the symptom of its dissolution is precisely the fact of the autonomous existence of its hardest splinters, the best organised sub-disciplines, that are increasingly less traditional 'philosophical' disciplines and more and more borderline disciplines, organised in ways similar to those of typical scientific disciplines¹⁸. Such a dissolution may be fruitful, no less than the decomposition of seeds that must die in order to yield a crop. It has brought new disciplines and new research programs, and in every genuine inquiry very little of what there was in the original program is left unchanged.

(4) In one sense, however, the conclusions reached by analytic philosophers on the relevance of language to philosophy, on the relevance of logic to any philosophical discourse, on the role of the definition of meanings and use of terms and statements in order to dissolve, settle, or reformulate traditional philosophical questions, are final results. I would say that even the thesis of Dummett and Tugendhat that the task of philosophy is the analysis of meaning is one of such results. In this sense (am I paraphrasing the historicist philosopher Benedetto Croce on Christianity) "we cannot avoid defining ourselves as analytic philosophers".

(5) Continental philosophy on the contrary never existed; it was a distorting pattern used in order to describe an unfamiliar and complex world as a unified whole; but the very term used denounces the mirror-like character of the description; for some time, beyond the Channel and the Atlantic, both opponents and sympathisers mirrored themselves in such a distorting mirror; but such a speculative-geographical monster is no more than a fictional entity. In other words: Derrida, unlike what

¹⁸It seems to me unclear why such a feature may be by itself a matter of pride, unless it is assumed that "science" is a good thing, and therefore philosophy should try to imitate it; sensible remarks on scientific rhetoric in philosophy are to be found in Rosen (1980), particularly pp. 234-235.

American academics believe, is *not* the most typical exponent of twentieth-century European thought; Wittgenstein and Carnap did stand, for an important part of their lives, with both feet on the Continent; Frege and Brentano shared quite a lot of things with each other as well as with Russell. The actual history of philosophy resists reduction into dichotomies, and even more into dichotomies between heterogeneous terms.

(6) If we take ‘really existing’ philosophies into account, what is left is a difference in ‘styles’. A style consists of a web of conventions verging on language and the patterns of communication, in their turn reflecting peculiar institutional contexts and peculiar ways of life of philosophical communities¹⁹. Styles derive from traditions to which we belong and that are constitutive of ourselves to such a point that it is impossible to tear ourselves away from them. The prevailing philosophical style in the Anglo-Saxon world is made of an empiricist tradition dating back to Locke with the addition of concepts and programs exported from Austria and Germany to Great Britain and the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century, and grafted on the tradition of empiricism.

Thus, facing wishes of a reconstruction – here and now – of a world-wide philosophical community, caution is in order²⁰; both

¹⁹On sociological reasons that may account for the French philosophical style, see Engel (1993b); Bubner (1990) discusses the sociological bases of the German and the Anglo-American styles; a reconstruction of the role played by the genre “commentary” in various philosophical subcultures with a discussion of differences between Analytic and Continental philosophers is to be found in Smith (1991); Scharfstein (1997) discusses the comparative parochialism of both European and Anglo-American philosophy, when compared with non-Western philosophical styles.

²⁰For a similar point see Engel (1991); on the same point, but from an optimistic ecumenical point of view, see Castañeda (1989) and Bubner (1990).

differences in style and differences in substantive claims are no danger for philosophy. Moreover, differences in style do not yield incommensurability among kinds of discourse, but yield at most family similarities among partly different and partly overlapping kinds of discourse.

(7) If, on the contrary, we look at philosophies in terms of programs, my claims about really existing philosophies should be turned upside down. I try to clarify this alternative way of looking at philosophies by quoting Tugendhat:

What language-analytical philosophy is, is not written somewhere. If we sought to reach some definition of 'language-analytical philosophy' by a process of induction and abstraction from the existing philosophical literature which is described as language-analytical, then we would achieve at best an empty characterisation; and this would be of no use as a basis for any kind of philosophising [...] A philosophy is only constituted in philosophizing. (Tugendhat [1976] (1982), p. 4.)

If – as claimed elsewhere by Tugendhat himself – the defining claim of analytic philosophy is that the subject matter of philosophy is the analysis of meaning, this is perhaps one of those authentic philosophical theses that Wittgenstein believed to be formulated quite seldom but that, once formulated, sound so convincing as to force everybody to say that it is just what he had always meant. Following Tugendhat, we can understand the tradition of Aristotelian metaphysics and then modern rationalism and empiricism in terms of partial examples of that wider program of analysis of meaning in which philosophy consists. Thus, on the one hand, we cannot avoid defining ourselves as analytic philosophers, and, on the other hand, several exponents of the really existing analytic philosophy are still under the spell of dogmas that have little to share with the analytic program, first of all “the traditional view, still widespread also in analytic philosophy,

according to which an individual term's reference to its object should be understood in terms of ascription". (Tugendhat (1989), p. 6.)

I would add to what Tugendhat says that formal semantics could also be treated in the same way that he treats Aristotelian metaphysics. That is, following Austin and his successors, formal semantics might be reduced to a particular instance of the wider discipline of pragmatics. In fact, making use of statements in isolation is a limiting case, since language is originally located within the framework of communicative action between speakers, and semantic interpretation is in principle incomplete, requiring pragmatic interpretation as its own framework²¹. Thus, the inter-subjective understanding though language is "the new universal theoretical framework" and the analytic program "when framed in such general terms [...] is the same program as that of hermeneutics". (Tugendhat (1970)).

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²¹On pragmatic interpretation see Dascal (1989); on the more encompassing character of pragmatics *vis-à-vis* semantics see Habermas [1981] 1985, vol. I, ch. 3.

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