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The Two Cultures in Philosophy

Abstract:

In this paper I revisit the debate concerning the distinction, which is sometimes made between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. I look at the historical context in which the distinction came to prominence in the twentieth century, the reasons why it subsequently declined in popularity, and eventually had begun to be undermined. I argue that the distinction possesses intuitive content, which the recent attempts at exposing it as conceptually flawed fail to account for. I suggest that the intuitive content of the distinction provides us with resources to usefully define two different ways philosophical reflection has been approached during the course of the twentieth century. I conclude by suggesting that we can bring these two ways of approaching philosophy into focus by appealing to the idea of philosophical temperament.

Keywords:

analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, temperament, philosophical culture, dialogue, conflict

In his famous 1959 Rede Lecture entitled *The Two Cultures* C.P. Snow claimed that the culture of the developed West is split in two.¹ On the one hand, according to Snow, there is the “scientific culture,” steeped in optimism, and with its eyes on the future, on the other the “literary culture,” pessimistic, and backward looking. Although

1) This paper presents a revised, and enlarged version of the argument I develop in the essay “The Distinction in Question: The Analytic/Continental Divide in Philosophy” forthcoming in *Phenomenology as a Guide to Metaphysics*. See Snow, *The Two Cultures*.

Snow seems to favor the scientific culture, he believes the detrimental effects of the split are due mainly to the fact that there is either no communication between the two cultures, or, in many cases, open hostility. *The Two Cultures* managed to touch a nerve, and received a great deal of criticism, some of it very fierce, however in its general outlook the lecture captured what many felt at the time to be an accurate characterization of the intellectual culture of the West, and what in many respects continues to be the case today.

In what follows I will argue that a similar split to the one diagnosed by Snow in the wider culture can be discerned in philosophy. This is the divide between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy. Like the one proposed by Snow, this distinction is well known but its precise meaning is hard to establish and continues to be a source controversy. I begin by looking at developments in twentieth century philosophy, which have shaped how the notions of “continental” and “analytic” are understood, and at how the relations between philosophers aligning themselves with each camp evolved. I will show how the attempts to cash out the distinction have produced problematic results, and how this has led many to dismiss it as muddled and unhelpful. I will then suggest a more plausible account of the distinction in question, and argue that the existing criticism does not threaten it. In conclusion, I claim that if the distinction between analytic and continental philosophy is discarded something important is lost from our understanding of the discipline as a whole. My position is therefore in some respects analogous, and in some disanalogous to Snow’s: although, like Snow, I believe there is much need for more communication between the two cultures in philosophy, I do not think that we should strive to overcome the divide and achieve greater unification in the discipline. Philosophy, I posit, is not just one thing.

The Dialogue of the Deaf

Snow argues that the lack of understanding between representatives of the two cultures he identifies is due to severe specialization in the modern educational system.² He compares the inability of intellectuals on either side to talk or even understand one another to tone-deafness, and suggests that in this particular case the impairment was brought about by lack of training.³ Restating his position four years after the original lecture, he writes: “Persons educated with the greatest intensity we know can no longer communicate with each other on the plain of their major intellectual concern.”⁴

Instead of communication and “fellow feeling,” he adds, there is “something like hostility.”⁵ It is difficult not to see the similarity between the condition described by Snow, and the attitudes, which prevailed throughout most of the twentieth century amongst philosophers at least inasmuch as the discipline is understood in the academic context. Snow gives the term “culture” two senses: firstly, he appeals to its dictionary definition, and takes it to be an “intellectual development, development of the mind.”⁶ He means by this a form of personal improvement, and cultivation of excellence in a given field. Secondly he appeals to a more technical meaning derived from anthropology, and takes it to denote “a group of persons living in the same environment, linked by common habits, common assumptions, a common way of life.”⁷ In the context of his discussion he takes the common basis for the formation of habits, assumptions, and, ultimately, a way of life

2) Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 29–40.

3) *Ibid.*, 14.

4) *Ibid.*, 60.

5) *Ibid.*, 61.

6) *Ibid.*, 62.

7) *Ibid.*, 64.

to be the shared mastery of a given field. I suggest the divide in philosophy analogous to Snow's two cultures, and which bears out the senses of "culture" Snow refers to, is that between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy. Roughly at the turn of the last century the specialization in academic disciplines Snow traces back to the industrial revolution begins to manifest itself in academic philosophy. Although there are of course many more fine distinctions to be drawn, the divide between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy defined the two broadest "trade union" categories within the discipline in the twentieth century, and continues to do so today. It seems right to use the word "divide" as the gap it implies has translated into divisions between and within university departments, and occasioned animosities, mutual denigration, and suspicion between researchers identifying with each faction.

In the context of university departments the distinction corresponds, very generally, to that between the "Anglo-American" style curriculum, and a "European" style curriculum.⁸ The "Anglo-American" style curriculum in philosophy is associated with the "analytic" tradition, and is usually characterized as emphasizing argumentative rigor and clarity while being mostly ahistorical and largely unconcerned with the cultural or sociological ramifications of discussed issues. The "European" style curriculum in philosophy is associated with the "continental" tradition, and is usually understood, by contrast, as having a more speculative character, and as interrogating the broader historical and social context as an inescapable and crucial frame of reference.⁹ Each has produced its own distinct style of debate, type of academic journal, and more recently even warranted separate textbooks giving an overview of key figures and issues representative of the approach exemplified by each tradition.¹⁰ By loose association we might say that the "analytic" tradition in philosophy is analogous, or alike in spirit, with the scientific culture Snow defends – focused on facts, systematic, and oriented toward discrete problems. The "continental" tradition would be more akin to the literary, or traditional culture – focused on ideas, speculative, and oriented toward all-embracing narratives. However, it is less the positive characterization of each camp that bares out the analogy as the negative view each side has of the other: the scientific culture, and "analytic" philosophy see the other camp as not only un-rigorous in their thinking, but guilty of pursuing phantasms, and dealing in fictions. The traditional culture, and "continental" philosophy see their opponents as narrow minded technicians at best, and at worst philistines antagonistic to the human spirit.¹¹ It is by appeal to such caricatures that the tension between the two cultures distinguished by Snow, and the divide between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy is most often understood, and the conflict advanced.

Perhaps the most famous example of professional conflict arising from the "analytic"/"continental" division is the coup instituted by neo-Hegelians and Pragmatists at a 1978 meeting of the American Philosophical

8) This correspondence is complicated, however, by the broad curriculum of liberal arts colleges in the USA, and the prevalence of logic and logical semiotics at some European institutions.

9) This way of framing the distinction in the academic context is roughly the way Brian Leiter characterises it in an interview with Nigel Warburton, see Leiter, "On the Analytic." On his influential blog, when commenting on academic culture in philosophy Leiter describes three types of departments: the "MIT model," the "Princeton model," and the "Naturalist model." The first and last together correspond loosely to what an "analytic" department might look like, while the "Princeton model" roughly corresponds to the kind of "pluralist" department formed after the coup discussed below, see Leiter, "The Growing Mismatch." Leiter also says elsewhere that the distinction framed in those terms is "interesting today from a sociological point of view, since it allows graduate programs in philosophy to define spheres of permissible ignorance for their students" (See interview by Richard Marshall). Beyond this pragmatic aspect, Leiter believes the distinction is bogus. This is interesting, given that he is himself the editor of the 2007 *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*. I will comment on the almost unanimous rejection of the coherence of the distinction by English speaking experts on continental philosophy later on.

10) See for example Leiter, *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*; Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy a Critical Approach*; Martinich and Sosa, *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy*; Beaney, *Analytic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*.

11) See Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 11–15.

Association. A “Committee for Pluralism” was established to overthrow the perceived monopoly the “analytic” philosophers possessed within the structures of the APA. This monopoly was felt to give “analytic” philosophers control over appointment and accreditation procedures, as well as the review process of academic papers and books, effectively marginalizing anyone they identified as “continental.” The coup was a success and changed the way the APA elects boards and committees making them representative of the diverse philosophical groups present in North American higher education.¹² The effects of these events are clearly visible today. Only a small minority of graduate programs remain exclusively analytic in orientation, and most publishers in the discipline accept papers from across the spectrum of philosophical schools.¹³ Even more importantly however from the point of view of the distinction itself, and somewhat ironically, these events helped solidify the view that contemporary academic philosophers can be sorted, more or less crudely, into the “analytic” and “continental” camps.

It should be fairly uncontroversial that there exist pragmatic reasons for employing the “analytic”/“continental” distinction in the academic setting, ranging from varied standards of assessment to diversity in the field. However, this distinction is also frequently associated with a more fundamental difference not only in how degree programs are organized, but in how the very nature of philosophy is to be understood. As with Snow’s two cultures, it is often claimed that this “deeper” understanding of the distinction goes back to the first half of the twentieth century before the formation of modern university departments, and is rooted in the rise of the positivist/scientific philosophical conception of the world on the one hand, and the resistance to this conception on the other. The former is rightly associated with the Vienna Circle, and their vision of philosophy as the underlaborer of science. This vision was bluntly articulated by Otto Neurath who advocated restricting philosophy’s remit to “removing the metaphysical and theological debris” from a unified “scientific world-conception.”¹⁴ The latter is often traced back to Heidegger, who argues that metaphysics cannot possibly be displaced by science or logical analysis, and in his famous 1929 lecture “What is Metaphysics?” sets out a program for the fundamental study of being, which is in direct conflict with the conception of philosophy as clarifying the propositions of empirical science.¹⁵

Whilst this general picture is a familiar one, the meaning of the “analytic”–“continental” distinction at this fundamental level is far less clear than the distinction between academic curricular, and there exists no consensus on how to understand it. And yet, the hostility between philosophers, regarding this fundamental difference in approaches, is no less intense than that concerning the content of university curriculum and gives rise to evaluative and comparative claims concerning the two traditions that are considerably more radical than the lack of clarity and consensus seems to warrant. These claims may broadly be taken to fall into one of two categories: the claims to exclusivity, and the claims to primacy. Those who claim exclusivity of their philosophical tradition deny the name to the other. Those who claim primacy of their philosophical tradition admit only a secondary, or supplementary role to the other.

The claim to exclusivity was first made on the part of “analytic” philosophy when roughly in the mid-twentieth century Oxford philosophers in the circle of Gilbert Ryle began using the term “continental” to signify everything that analytic philosophy *is not*. French phenomenologists responded by claiming that what the “analytic” philosophers denounce is precisely what philosophy *really is*. The claims of primacy became prominent toward the end of the twentieth century when philosophers in both traditions had been humbled

12) See Hoekema, review of *Fashionable Nihilism: A Critique of Analytic Philosophy*, by Bruce Wilshire.

13) Again Brian Leiter has an interesting view of the “pluralistic” model of the philosophy department: see Leiter, “On Pluralism in Philosophy Departments.”

14) Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology*, 316–17.

15) Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 93–110.

by the failure of either tradition to deliver results to match its early aspirations, and the growing sense on either side that the favored approach might be missing something.

The boldness with which the claim to exclusivity was stated in mid-twentieth century Oxford was inherited from Carnap who, in his 1931 essay “Overcoming Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language,” ridicules Heidegger’s defense of metaphysics as consisting of “pseudo-statements,” and therefore being literal “nonsense.”¹⁶ Carnap was an early, and powerful influence on Ryle, and despite Ryle’s later rejection of Carnap’s philosophical program the denigrating attitude of Carnap’s attack on Heidegger is clearly recognizable in Ryle’s own portrayal of the “wide gulf” between Anglo-Saxon “philosophical analysis” and philosophy on “the Continent” which he put forward at the fourth Royaumont Abbey colloquium in 1958 entitled “La Philosophie Analytique.”¹⁷ In his address, Ryle attacked Husserl with the same disdain Carnap extended to Heidegger almost three decades before. Maurice Merleau-Ponty is said to have responded to Ryle’s scathing admonitions asking in a reconciliatory vein “notre programme n’est-il pas le même?” to which Ryle’s curt reply was simply “J’espère que non.”¹⁸

Apart from Ryle and Merleau-Ponty the colloquium was attended by some of the foremost representatives of both the “continental” and “analytic” traditions including Ferdinand Alquié, Leo Apostel, John L. Austin, Alfred J. Ayer, Gaston Berger, Richard M. Hare, Chaïm Perelman, Willard Van Orman Quine, Peter F. Strawson, Charles Taylor, Herman Léo Van Breda, Jean Wahl, Éric Weil, and Bernard Williams. However, despite high expectations for a meeting of the traditions the exchange between Ryle and Merleau-Ponty was symptomatic of the atmosphere in which the interactions took place generally, and which Charles Taylor later referred to as the “dialogue of the deaf.”¹⁹ This atmosphere was of course in no small part the consequence of the fact that in Britain “continental” had already become a term of abuse used to denigrate everything considered to be philosophically bankrupt, that nonetheless fraudulently pretends to the name.

The attitude “analytic” philosophers at the time took toward their “continental” colleagues may seem at times not to be this one sided of course. This is true even of Ryle himself, who famously authored, of all things, a very positive review of Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.²⁰ However, even such seemingly ringing endorsements are difficult to take completely in earnest. Ryle praises the “boldness and originality” of Heidegger’s “special undertaking,” but he also admits he could only partly follow “this difficult work,” and where he did his conclusion was that it is “heading for bankruptcy and disaster.”²¹ By the time of the colloquium at Royaumont Abbey he did not even go as far as praising the size of margins and quality of printing in “continental” works, which was famously his summary of Heidegger’s magnum opus.²²

Interestingly, it is by comparison much harder to point to examples of attacks or even retaliation on the part of “continental” philosophers. Indeed there are examples of dissidents from the “analytic” camp like Berlin or Collingwood, but even Heidegger does not directly engage with either Carnap, Ryle or the other “analytic”

16) Carnap, “Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache,” 60–81. See particularly section 5 “Metaphysical Pseudo-statements,” and 6 “Meaninglessness of all Metaphysics” devoted to ridiculing Heidegger’s essay. Carnap did not just single out Heidegger as the purveyor of nonsense. He thought that generally “meaningful metaphysical sentences are impossible.” He argued that this “follows from the task which metaphysics sets itself: to discover and formulate a kind of knowledge which is not accessible to empirical science.”

17) See Vrahimis, “‘La Philosophie Analytique’ at Royaumont: Gilbert Ryle’s Ambivalent Phenomenology,” 110–59.

18) See Critchley, *Continental Philosophy*, 35.

19) Taylor, “La Philosophie analytique, Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie,” 132–35.

20) Ryle, “Martin Heidegger: ‘Sein Und Zeit,’” 3–13.

21) See *ibid.*

22) Ryle rounds off his review with “*Sein und Zeit*, it is worth mentioning, is most beautifully printed and the pages have generous margins.” See *ibid.*, 13.

critics of his approach.²³ Nonetheless a sense of the shallowness and inadequacy of the “analytic” approach seems to be present amongst “continental” philosophers. A telling testament to this is the encounter between Georges Bataille and A.J. Ayer, which took place after a lecture entitled “The Idea of Truth and Contemporary Logic” delivered by the latter in Paris in the fifties. The late night discussion in a Parisian café which ensued brought Bataille to a realization that “there exists [an abyss] between English and French philosophers.”²⁴ Bataille expressed this in a lecture, which he delivered a day after Ayer’s, and where he strongly implied that the assuredness with which English philosophers treat the scientific picture of the world is that of childlike naivety, and claimed that by comparison one is closer to truth when pursuing “un-knowing.”²⁵ These tensions translate in later decades into the familiar status quo whereby from the analytic perspective, the distinction is understood to separate good philosophy from the incantations of charlatans and cranks. From the continental perspective, in turn, “analytic philosophy” came to acquire the connotation of dreary, inconsequential, hair-splitting, which succeeds only in arousing the geeky interest of pale nerds.

Reluctant Concessions

These attitudes prevailed even when the claims of exclusivity were no longer tenable. This is probably because it became untenable to proclaim exclusivity not because of the recognition of mutual value between the warring factions, but rather because of the humbling failures of the ambitious philosophical programs postulated on either side.

From the beginning of the twentieth century the rise of each new movement signals a collapse of at least one other. Bertrand Russell, who is often named as the father of “analytic” philosophy, effectively ended British Idealism by attacking what he saw as an excess of metaphysics, and postulating formal logic, and natural science as the fundamental tools of philosophy. Logical Positivism can be seen as an even more radical alternative to Russell’s rebellion against British Idealism. Logical Positivism was in turn undermined by ordinary language philosophy in the UK, and by Quine’s revival of American pragmatism in his *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* in the USA.²⁶ These developments led even A.J. Ayer himself to an admission that the greatest defect of Logical Positivism was that “nearly all of it was false.”²⁷ Quinean pragmatism and ordinary language philosophy were in turn eroded away by a rekindling of interest in metaphysics which begun with Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*.²⁸ This precipitated a broadening of interests of “analytic” philosophy more generally and gave rise to analytic engagements with philosophy of culture, phenomenology, feminism and race. However as much as these developments were responsible for introducing into the “analytic” framework elements which were previously associated with “continental” philosophy they also opened it up to attacks from the post-modernist, and post-structuralist movements, which arguably stole the show at the turn of the last century.

On the “continental” side too, post-structuralism, and post-modernism, being programmatically anti-foundational and relativistic advocating deep skepticism toward such notions as “truth” or “reason,”

23) See Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 118–72; Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*. For the Heidegger and Carnap controversy see Vrahimis, “Questioning Metaphysics in Weimar Germany: Carnap, Heidegger, Nonsense,” 31–87.

24) See Vrahimis “‘Was There a Sun Before Men Existed?’ A.J. Ayer and French Philosophy in the Fifties.”

25) See Bataille, “Un-knowing and Its Consequences,” 80–85.

26) Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” 20–43.

27) See interview with Bryan Magee for the television series *Men of Ideas*, 1978.

28) Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.

proved particularly destructive with regard to earlier movements in philosophy.²⁹ Before the advent of these movements, proponents of the most influential “continental” traditions; phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism; succeeded one another more as attempts at fixing the problems inherited from their predecessors than attempts at blowing them up. Post-structuralism defined itself in opposition to structuralism rejecting its main tenant of universal, unconscious rules governing all mental operations (which was the ground of the structuralist criticisms of Logical Positivism).³⁰ The *locus classicus* here is Jacques Derrida’s lecture “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” delivered at a conference at John Hopkins University in 1966, which was seen as a decisive blow to the structuralist project.³¹ Post-structuralists dismissed the hermeneutic claim that organic unity is necessary for understanding, and asserted that any attempt at revealing meaning is doomed from the start. They crippled phenomenology by pointing out its failure to provide a ground for the subject whose perspective it necessarily presupposes, and thus to establish the validity of its conclusions. Post-structuralists postulated instead that there is no possible vantage point, or transcendental position which could in principle guarantee such validity by escaping the endless chain of reference. Post-structuralists also undermined the existentialist project by proclaiming the “death of the subject” and attacking existentialism for its humanism, and individualism. Post-modernists rejected the possibility of any systematic philosophy including the neo-Hegelian and the neo-Marxist paradigm based on historical dialectics. They criticized the absolutist ambitions of the dialectician, and the presuppositions of a teleological orientation of history, and of the fundamental logic of its development, claiming these to be no more than possible descriptions, often based on implausible generalizations. Post-modernists also challenged the Freudian assumption of an ideal coherent selfhood, and defended the value of schizoid experience, thus undermining the prospects for a structured study of human consciousness.

These devastating conquests were possible because the movements being attacked were all already suffused with self-doubt with their proponents often jumping ship at the first sign of a fight rather than defending their claims. The philosophical programs to be challenged and suppressed began to run out however, and so both post-structuralism, and post-modernism, like their predecessors, lost their initial impetus, and with it any sense of identity or purpose. Amidst this wreckage of all former philosophical projects Richard Rorty declared the enterprise to be at its end.³² He believed that the attempts of philosophers to ground knowledge or truth have been shown futile, and advanced neo-pragmatism as an inevitable replacement. The only tasks which remained to philosophy on this view were either a history of ideas aimed at subverting earlier misconceptions, or the analysis of the post-philosophical condition.³³ Many saw this move as the last lifeboat left afloat, and leapt at the opportunity to relegate philosophy to the rubbish heap of history along with religion, art, and history itself.

29) See for example Snipp-Walmsley, “Postmodernism, post-structuralism, and neo-pragmatism,” 411–13. The distinction between post-structuralism, and post-modernism, as Snipp-Walmsley asserts, is hard to pinpoint with representatives of the latter movement claiming that “it is possible to declare, with any degree of confidence, only that Postmodernism is a site of conflict, negotiation, and debate.” Indeed one of the few points of consensus within the movement is that “any attempt to define postmodernism immediately undermines and betrays its values, principles, and practices.” Nonetheless what seems to be the defining common feature is the suspicion of any and all generalising claims, or forms of appeal to objectivity as expressions of “narratives” driven by power structures which the oppressors use to keep the oppressed in their place. Post-structuralism by comparison may be seen as a more specific and defined part of post-modernism, or a parallel movement which applies this scepticism to epistemology, and the privileged place of the subject.

30) See Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy a Critical Approach*, x–xvii, and 243–91.

31) “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” later published in Derrida, *L’écriture et la différence*.

32) See Rorty, “Pragmatism and Philosophy,” xii–xlvii.

33) This current too produced its textbooks, the most famous of which is possibly Baynes, Bohman and McCarthy, *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?*

However, this approach also turned out too Hegelian in spirit, and too dogmatic to be universally accepted. So philosophy continued, although more cautiously, and the claims of exclusivity were suppressed to the undercurrents of philosophical debate while claims to primacy took their place. In the academic world this meant that although departments ceased mostly to proclaim a single identity as “analytic” or “continental,” many retained a slant in one or other direction of varying degrees. In the practice of philosophy as an intellectual discipline this meant that with some notable exceptions philosophers in both camps largely ceased to professionally engage with each other’s work, and replaced open hostility with passive aggressive silence.

Two of the notable exceptions to this new attitude include John Searle. Both are telling insofar as firstly they expose that the ceasefire was only apparent, and secondly they show how the terms of the conflict evolved. The first exception is Searle’s skirmish with Derrida, the second is his attempt to run a joint seminar, and subsequent falling out with Dreyfus.³⁴ The argument with Derrida, and the responses it attracted clearly shows that animosity has not been put to bed despite the humbling failures to vindicate the ambitious projects proposed on both sides of the divide. The encounter with Dreyfus on the other hand is an example of how the rhetoric of the debate had shifted from the claims to exclusivity to claims of primacy. Both of these exchanges concern intentionality, and take place in the seventies and eighties.

Searle’s debate with Derrida begins with his response to an article in which Derrida criticizes J.L. Austin’s account of speech acts.³⁵ Searle came to Austin’s defense accusing Derrida of failing to understand the type-token distinction, and added insult to injury by asserting that “it would be a mistake . . . to regard Derrida’s discussion of Austin as a confrontation between two prominent philosophical traditions.”³⁶ This is not to say, that Searle rejects the existence of two traditions, “continental” and “analytic.” Indeed, Searle’s aim (which is expressed in his title) was to “reiterate the differences” setting them apart. Rather, in Searle’s view there is not a serious *confrontation* between the two, because Derrida fails to engage with arguments, and instead misrepresents the positions of analytic thinkers, thus merely tricking his readers into believing he has come to insightful conclusions. Derrida in his summary of the debate suggests that Searle has the traditions the wrong way round, and that it is Derrida who is closer to Austin, while Searle, by ignoring the “continental” tradition, remains “blindly imprisoned in it, repeating its most problematic gestures,” like the uncritical assumption of Husserl’s account of intentionality.³⁷ In the end the debate amounted to little more than Searle condemning Derrida’s “obscurantism” and Derrida mocking Searle’s “superficiality.” The obvious mutual hostility notwithstanding, it is important to notice that firstly, although reminiscent of the claims made only three decades earlier in similar confrontations, neither philosopher goes as far as to deem the other’s position nonsensical; and secondly that the whole argument revolves around the relation, and the rules of engagement between the traditions, which are tacitly assumed to represent, all things being equal, valid philosophical outlooks.

Searle’s confrontation with Dreyfus begins from a sincere attempt to address the topic of intentionality in a way which includes insights from both the “analytic” and “continental” perspectives. To that effect Dreyfus and Searle undertook a collaboration on a series of seminars which took place at Berkeley, California in the late seventies. The venture was a success with both philosophers reading and discussing each other’s papers in an approach to the topic which fruitfully included and respected both traditions. The series developed into a “summer institute” at UC Berkeley called “Phenomenology and Existentialism: Continental and Analytic Perspectives on Intentionality.” The institute brought together, arguably for the first time on this scale, some of

34) See subsequent footnotes.

35) Derrida, “Signature Event Context.”

36) Searle, “Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida,” 198–208.

37) Derrida, “Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion,” 130–31.

the biggest names in both traditions in North America, to engage cooperatively on a clearly defined topic: Arthur Danto, Albert Hofstadter, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Wilfrid Sellars, Charles Taylor, and of course Dreyfus and Searle among others.³⁸ But in Dreyfus's own words, in his dialogue with Searle, "what looked like an illuminating disagreement about the phenomena turned into a debate about the value of phenomenology" in which both sides reproduced, rather than transcended the antagonism between the two traditions.³⁹ The debate unfolds in a series of polemical articles with telling titles beginning with Dreyfus's "Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality,"⁴⁰ to which Searle replied with "The Limits of Phenomenology."⁴¹ The already tense dialogue began breaking down when Dreyfus attacked Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality*⁴² with "Phenomenological Description versus Rational Reconstruction,"⁴³ and Searle came back with "Neither Phenomenological Description nor Rational Reconstruction."⁴⁴ In this reply Searle declares that he was always engaged in logical analysis, which "goes far beyond phenomenology," and speculates that Dreyfus is critical of this approach, and the "analytic" method more generally because he senses its superiority.⁴⁵ Before the skirmish is broken off Dreyfus reverses this accusation in "The Primacy of Phenomenology over Logical Analysis."⁴⁶

The Distinction in Question

Now although the shift from claims of exclusivity to claims of primacy opened up the possibility of dialogue, it had also reinforced a sense that there is a rift within philosophy itself, which requires dialogue to be overcome. As often turns out in such cases, the more dialogue there is the wider the gap which the parties are attempting to talk over seems. The claim to exclusivity commits its proponent to a more unified conception of philosophy whereby anything that does not fit the right profile falls outside of the bounds of the discipline, and therefore need not be engaged with in a spirit of cooperation *or* hostility. The more militant proponents of this claim understood themselves to be protecting these bounds from being wiped away, and so also this unified conception from being lost. In moving from claims of exclusivity to claims of primacy, the proponents of either tradition may be seen as having given up on this conception. The resulting fragmented view of philosophy incited not only a growing interest in what one tradition could offer to the other, but also in the terms in which the distinction between "analytic" and "continental" philosophy is to be understood in the first place.

The first of these interests resulted in a great deal of incredibly worthwhile work both intended to bring the two traditions into dialogue on the most germane contemporary issues, and aimed at overcoming the gap between them by introducing insights from one tradition to the other. Apart from the seminar, and "summer institute" already mentioned, Dreyfus is perhaps best known for his work on Heidegger and Foucault, which greatly contributed to these thinkers being noticed and discussed by English speaking philosophers.⁴⁷ It is unsurprising

38) See Yoshimi, Tolley and Woodruff Smith, "California Phenomenology," 376–77.

39) Dreyfus, "The Primacy of Phenomenology Over Logical Analysis," 146.

40) Dreyfus, "Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality," 17–38.

41) Searle, "The Limits of Phenomenology," 71–92.

42) Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*.

43) Dreyfus, "Phenomenological Description versus Rational Reconstruction," 181–196.

44) Searle, "Neither Phenomenological Description nor Rational Reconstruction: Reply to Dreyfus," 277–84.

45) See *ibid.*

46) Dreyfus, "The Primacy of Phenomenology over Logical Analysis," 146–67.

47) See Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*; and Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*.

that such efforts would put pressure on the more superficial ways of couching the analytic-continental distinction resulting in an increase in a related interest: that of getting a precise purchase on what the distinction consists in. However as much as the gap between the “analytic” and “continental” traditions may have seemed all the wider for the efforts at talking across it, those attempting to get to the bottom of it found themselves in a Winnie-the-Pooh predicament in that the deeper they looked, the emptier the distinction turned out to be. Thus the second interest eventually led many philosophers to doubt that the “analytic”/“continental” distinction is a good one.

One of the results of this is that the authors of the most prominent works on “continental” philosophy in the English language tend to argue that the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy is misguided. Simon Glendinning in his seminal volume *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* declares that the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy is “at best problematic,” and suggests that this is partly due to the fact that “there is no such thing as a tradition of continental philosophy.”⁴⁸ Likewise David West, in his *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy* claims that the idea of “continental” philosophy as a unified enterprise is “contentious or even perverse.”⁴⁹ Simon Critchley, author of the *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* is likewise critical of the “analytic”/“continental” distinction suggesting it is a “necessary – but perhaps transitory – evil of the professionalization of the discipline,” and one which he follows Rorty in denouncing as “tiresome.”⁵⁰ Writing for *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* Bernard Williams points out the obvious fact that the distinction appears to rest on a category error and confuses geographical and methodological predicates.⁵¹ For Williams the distinction is not only muddled, but a red herring which obfuscates more profound and interesting questions about the identity of the discipline of philosophy as a whole. In his article for the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* Stephen Priest goes perhaps the furthest in putting pressure on the idea of the divide, and criticizes the possibility of coherently drawing the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy in methodological, geographical, political or historical terms.⁵² These criticisms have been accepted by many as devastating, and the distinction itself as a misunderstanding of the past. The original distinction has as a result been in some measure replaced, and in some measure supplemented by a new one: between those who believe the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy is coherent and meaningful, and those who do not. Indeed, this is the main line the criticism of C.P. Snow’s lecture took. Perhaps most notably (and notoriously for how personal the attack seemed) F.R. Leavis argued against Snow’s analysis of the predicament of contemporary intellectual culture by stressing that the comparison Snow makes rests on a category error – there is no equivalent of the laws of thermodynamics in the “literary culture,” and no equivalent of Shakespeare’s works in the scientific world view.⁵³ Rather these things form distinct and incommensurate parts of one culture Leavis maintained.

Redrawing the Line

The arguments are hard to refute: the deeper we dig the more hopeless the attempts of cashing out the “analytic”/“continental” distinction seem, and the more superficial it turns out to be. Yet it is hard to deny that the concepts “analytic” and “continental” possess certain intuitive content which allows anyone familiar enough with the

48) Glendinning, *The Idea of Continental Philosophy*, 7.

49) West, *An Introduction to Continental Philosophy*, 2.

50) Critchley, *Continental Philosophy*, 48, 126.

51) See Williams, “Contemporary Philosophy: A Second Look,” 23–34.

52) See Priest, “continental” and “analytic.”

53) See Leavis, *The Two Cultures?*

discipline to group philosophers and ideas by reference to those categories. What is more, for all the contention regarding the nature of the division there seems to be remarkably little disagreement as to what is to be considered “analytic” and what “continental.” Nobody has ever mistaken Gilbert Ryle’s work for “continental” philosophy, or Georges Bataille’s for “analytic.” In a sense, providing counterexamples for each distinct way of drawing the line only reinforces rather than weakens the underlying intuition. To point out that Frege was a German philosopher is to point to an “analytic” philosopher from continental Europe. For example, to say that Russell was a liberal, while Heidegger was anti-liberal is to say “here is an ‘analytic’ liberal philosopher, and a ‘continental’ anti-liberal philosopher.” To claim that Husserl, like the Logical Positivists, believed that philosophy should have the rigor of science to the exclusion of metaphysics is to claim that a “continental” philosopher shared methodological presuppositions with an “analytic” school. The ability to identify a good counter example presupposes an intuitive grasp of what the distinction amounts to, and how it can be usefully applied. This of course is one of the ways to make sense of the expression “the exception proves the rule”: one has to understand the rule to identify an exception. It seems therefore that there seem to be patent asymmetries between the two traditions, which seem to support the intuition that there is a genuine difference.

It seems therefore that as much as the “analytical”/“continental” distinction cannot be successfully cashed out in the geographical, historical, political, or methodological terms he considers, there is nonetheless reason to think that there might be an illuminating distinction that can be drawn here. There seem to be patent asymmetries between the two traditions, which support the intuition that there is a genuine difference. It seems too that there is at least some intuitively plausible content in the attacks launched across the divide. On the one hand it seems clear what is being criticized in the practice of philosophy when it is accused of uncritical reductionism, and obsession with technical minutiae, and there is little doubt who the usual suspects might be. On the other it is equally obvious what it is that we hold against the purported culprits when they are being condemned for counterfeiting profundity, and pulling wool over our eyes with fashionable gibberish. In particular cases the accusations might be unfair, or even turn out to be wrong, but it seems to me hard to deny that the intuitive picture of what the “analytic”/“continental” divide amounts to does trace genuine characteristics which give a good, if a very general sense of what we might expect from philosophers grouped under each category. And if this is true for the vices of either tradition, it is reasonable to suppose that it is true of their virtues too.

Now of course the *terms* “analytic” and “continental” are dubious descriptions of the opposing phenomena when taken literally. It is for this reason that some attempts have been made to express the intuitive content of the distinction in a different way. Most commonly perhaps “analytic” is replaced with “Anglo-American” in an attempt to give both sides a geographic label.⁵⁴ Substitutes for “continental” on the other hand include “synthetic” or simply “non-analytic.”⁵⁵ In Oxford all the lectures on “continental” philosophers are grouped as “Post-Kantian Philosophy” modules, while “analytic” philosophy modules are referred to by their subject matter as “philosophy of mind,” “philosophical logic,” and so forth.⁵⁶ But whilst these alternatives avoid some problems created by the ordinary terminology, they make others more pronounced. For example, as a result of moving away from the methodological connotation the geographical is emphasized and vice versa. I suggest therefore that we should simply ignore the descriptive content of “analytic” and “continental,” and treat them

54) See for example Schroeder, *Continental Philosophy a Critical Approach*.

55) The Institute of Philosophy at the University of Warsaw for example, in an attempt to give both traditions an even footing changed the name of the compulsory core course from Continental Philosophy, first to Synthetic Philosophy and later to Non-Analytic Philosophy, which it remains to this day.

56) See current lecture list available on the Faculty website: <https://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/files/lecturescheme2019-2030augpdf>.

as proper names. Once we have done this we might become more open to the intuitive content I believe these terms are properly intended to capture. To signify this, from here on I will use Continental and Analytic without the scare quotes, and capitalized.

The Intuitive View

What could this intuitive content of the distinction be if, as argued by its critics, the attempts of framing it geographically, politically, historically, and methodologically all fail? Firstly, it seems that the distinction has to be non-superficial in the sense that it picks out philosophically relevant features both of Continental and Analytic philosophy. It seems that if the distinction was superficial, for example if the intuitive content behind it turned out to be reducible to the presence or absence of a moustache on a given philosopher, then the intensity of the debate over it would be hard to understand. Part of the intuition behind the distinction, we are therefore drawn to assume, is that there is some *philosophically* important difference between Analytic and Continental philosophy. The difference must be sufficiently important to explain the fact that some of the greatest minds of the twentieth century have become deeply exercised about it. Secondly it seems that the difference implied by the distinction has to be pragmatically important, in the sense that it has significant consequences for the practice of philosophy. If the difference was of no consequence the association of professional interests and intellectual integrity with belonging to one camp or the other would be hard to explain. A further characteristic of the intuition behind the distinction, we might assume, is that the difference between Analytic and Continental philosophy is large. It is so large that one approach might on occasion look barely like philosophy at all from the point of view of the other. Fourthly we might suppose that the difference is difficult if not impossible to cash out by appeal to a single easily identifiable feature. If the distinction was possible to cash out by appeal to a single feature it would be baffling how this feature could have remained so elusive given that it must be the source of the intuition in question. Likewise, we can assume that the distinction might not be sharp, in the sense that the concepts of Analytic and Continental philosophy could turn out to admit of liminal cases or crossbreeds. Finally, it seems likely that the two kinds of philosophy will be incommensurate in the sense that in drawing the distinction we might not be able to avoid comparing apples and pears – there might not be any single measure by which we could adjudge the two. But as with the proverbial fruit the fact that two kinds of thing elude easy comparison does not entail there is no difference. Conversely, if the distinction was sharp, and the concepts being compared were commensurate, the amount of confusion surrounding the debates about it would be difficult to comprehend.

So, the intuitive distinction between Analytical and Continental philosophy seems to be deep rather than superficial, practically important rather than inconsequential, large rather than small, broad rather than narrow, and vague rather than sharp, and the compared traditions incommensurate, rather than commensurate. These observations give us an outline but they are obviously far from pinpointing the answer. This leaves our appetites unsatisfied, but this just might be due to the nature of the intuition. Nonetheless I make the following suggestion. All these features are reflected when we consider what one might call *philosophical temperament*. Differences in temperament are rarely sharp, and the traits that temperament expresses itself in are often incommensurate, like for example in the case of being easy going and pessimistic, or patient and talkative. Moreover, temperaments are usually taken to be mostly independent of external influences, such as learning, cultural background or experience. Yet temperaments are extremely important if not definitive parts of our character, and they have deep consequences for how we comport ourselves, and shape the attitudes we are likely to take in a given situation. A philosophical temperament expresses itself in the attitudes taken toward philosophical problems.

What kinds of attitude could we identify as being expressive of the philosophical temperaments that define the Analytic and Continental approaches to philosophy? We might not be able to get a clear purchase on this but, as I suggested, we do already possess an intuitive grasp of what it is we are referring to. This grasp often comes to the fore when the attempts to draw the distinction rigidly are abandoned. For example, after dispatching with the distinction on the grounds that it is muddled Bernard Williams claims that the identity of philosophy is best expressed by the Analytic tradition because of its “workmanlike truthfulness” – an attitude which Bataille associated with a “childlike naiveté.”⁵⁷ Critchley, though skeptical of the distinction, identifies two attitudes to philosophy he associates with knowledge, and wisdom – the search for philosophical truth and the search for existential meaning. He does not suggest simply that Analytic philosophers are interested in truth, Continental philosophers in existential meaning. Instead he speculates that something like an Analytic temperament can be attributed to those trying to draw these interests apart and focus on knowledge only, while a Continental temperament brings them together.⁵⁸ Critchley adapts this idea from John Stewart Mill, whose writing is probably the source of the distinction represented in the terms we know today. Mill associates the two fundamental attitudes to philosophy with Bentham and Coleridge respectively. He believes that these attitudes are exhaustive of the discipline and form two opposing tendencies in how ideas are approached: one expressed by asking “is it true?” the other “what is the meaning of it?”⁵⁹

Now there are strong intuitive grounds to suppose that each kind of temperament will have a certain coherent set of characteristics. This is what Mill asserts with respect to Bentham and Coleridge as representatives of contrasting philosophical attitudes. So we might plausibly infer that a temperament which emphasizes meaning over truth, and aims to combine knowledge with wisdom, rather than aiming solely for the former may be associated with a preoccupation with the big picture, and ambition to identify what really matters, but which are offset by impatience, or contempt for detail. On the other hand, the temperament that satisfies itself with pursuing truth, and favors knowledge over wisdom is likely to be less ambitious, and skeptical of attempts to map-out the big picture, while being intellectually scrupulous, and preoccupied with details.

I think it is fairly uncontroversial that these are traits that are commonly associated with Continental and Analytic philosophy respectively, and represent the advantages and disadvantages often identified with each of these. If this association is right, and I think that it is, it would explain why there is an asymmetry in translation: there are many extremely worthwhile attempts by analytic philosophers of making the ideas of classic continental philosophers more accessible and clear. However, it is conspicuous that there have been virtually no parallel attempts to translate “analytic” philosophers into the “continental” idiom, or idioms. In pursuing the big game Continental philosophers tend to sacrifice clarity, rigor, and sometimes literal truth: when trying to tackle what really matters they might get impatient with details, or feel that getting bogged down in nitpicking does not do their topic justice. Conversely the narrower focus of the Analytic philosopher is congenial to exercising precisely those qualities, which the Continental philosopher neglects. Naturally this leaves room for the analytic philosopher to iron out the creases and fill in the gaps in the Continental philosopher’s big-picture outlook. Reproducing Analytic arguments in Continental idioms, on the other hand, would seem to amount to gratuitous sacrifice of rigor for little or no gain elsewhere, and to some might even seem

57) Bataille, “Un-knowing and Its Consequences.”

58) See Critchley, *Continental Philosophy*, 7–11. Readers of virtue epistemology might be ready to object that in recent years there have been an increasing number of unambiguously analytical philosophers taking an interest in wisdom. However, if one reads the relevant texts closely, one finds that they focus (perhaps out of habit rather than intent) more or less exclusively on the task of acquiring knowledge about wisdom (e.g. defining “wisdom” etc.) and not on pursuing wisdom itself.

59) See Ryan, *Mill and Bentham, Utilitarianism and Other Essays*.

like a grotesque inflation of mundane or merely technical concerns to an unwarranted status of profundity – something perhaps suspected of Continental philosophy as a whole by those Analytic philosophers who believe the discipline can simply be reduced to such concerns. What *might* be a fruitful enterprise in similar vein is an attempt at a synthesis of Analytic works from a Continental perspective to yield a big picture view of a surveyed area in philosophy, which would go beyond a collection of arbitrary truths (which is the essence of what Derrida attempted to do with Austin's insights). Of course it is not the case that Analytic philosophers are necessarily incapable of this themselves, just as it is not true that there are no Continental philosophers capable of clarity and rigor of thought. The distinction is not a sharp one, and there might not be any perfectly isolated examples of either temperament.

The two types of philosophical temperament can of course be expressed in many different ways, and by appeal to different traits of character or attitudes. The above insights into the nature of these temperaments offered by Williams, Bataille, Critchley, and Mill, even if not exhaustive, correctly identify some features we tend to associate with Analytic and Continental philosophers. I believe these, and many similar claims, reflect the same basic difference in temperaments, and that this observation may inform our understanding of philosophy in important ways. For example, it is likely we will take little or nothing away from reading Hegel if it is rigor of thought that we are looking for. Conversely, we might be needlessly disappointed if we are searching for metaphysical imagination in Frege. Like C.P. Snow with regard to the wider culture, I believe the divide between Analytic and Continental philosophy is a real one. Unlike Snow however I do not think it is down merely to the narrowing of interests enforced by the overspecialization in the educational system of the West. Rather I think the difference is rooted in the different kind of response we may have to the problems we face. These different responses, I argue, are at the heart of what I have called the two types of philosophical temperament.

If these two types of philosophical temperament are such basic ways of responding to ideas, we might be surprised if the division between the approaches that they encourage were an exclusively modern phenomenon, which is what most authors writing on the topic assert. Anthony Quinton for example comments in his article for the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* that throughout the middle ages and the renaissance philosophy displayed a unity, which extended far into the enlightenment. While of course we might recognize the reasons why the two temperaments might have been driven apart beginning with the enlightenment, but I think we can find traces of the modern bifurcation in earlier divisions. One might point to the two-hundred-year quarrel between rationalism and empiricism, or the tension between Scholasticism and Mysticism in medieval philosophy, or even to the disagreement between Parmenides and Heraclitus in pre-Socratic thought to make the case. Perhaps the earliest case of this division on record is the "old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" attested to in Plato's *Republic*.⁶⁰ There is of course much that is distinctive about philosophy after the Enlightenment. Most importantly it displays a growing degree of tension between the different breeds of hostility toward metaphysics. However, this hostility is what they have in common, and not what is distinctive in them. The differences between post-Kantian schools of philosophy, whether under the Analytic or the Continental umbrella, merely express themselves against this common background – as in the age of metaphysics, so in the age of anti-metaphysical nihilism. Philosophy it seems is not just one thing.

In the essay I quoted at the start of this paper C.P. Snow laments the fact that the two cultures are in conflict. He is well aware, however, that every conflict must begin with identifying the enemy: "The number two is a dangerous number. That is why the dialectic is a dangerous process," he writes at the start of his lecture.⁶¹ Indeed this is the nub of the objections to Snow's analysis of Western culture deployed by critics like Leavis

60) Plato, *Republic*, book X, 607b–d. See also: book II, 377b–382d, and book III, 387e–395d.

61) Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 9.

– by postulating an opposition where there is not one we create tensions which threaten to impoverish, and fragment the intellectual culture we share. However, if the opposition is real there is an equal threat of impoverishment, and fragmentation of our intellectual culture if we ignore it – we can only understand, and accept difference when we first recognize it. Snow was aware of this when advocating the broadening of curricula on all levels of education, which he saw, after Coleridge, as necessary for the “cultivation of those qualities and faculties which make us human.”⁶² Neither for Coleridge or Snow is this slogan an expression of naïve utopianism. Snow is clear that the ultimate goal is one none of us can manage.⁶³ However, the very attempt can make all the difference when it comes to understanding one another, and being able to communicate ideas as part of one intellectual enterprise. As much as I believe Snow was correct to think this is needed in the wider culture, the same is just as urgently true of philosophy.

By way of an afterthought I would like to draw attention to an interesting if tangential fact: the distinction between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy, although almost universally regarded as demeaning in spirit toward the latter, has come under attack mostly from Analytic philosophers. Naturally the arguments levelled against it are therefore Analytic in temperament. It is possible to see this as a tactical maneuver in the Analytic campaign to rid the world of Continental philosophy. One might wonder whether having failed to relegate Continental thinkers beyond the boundaries of philosophy by emphasizing the distinction between the two traditions, the Analytic philosopher changed tack, and now insists that the distinction does not exist, to deny Continental philosophers the right to operate under their own standards, and conventions. One further observation we might make is that although we owe it to the Analytic philosopher, on account of its fuzziness, sensitivity to the big picture and claim to profundity the analytic-continental distinction looks like it was produced by the Continental temperament – this too might account for the fact that it is now being disowned by the Analytic temperament.

62) *Ibid.*, 62.

63) *Ibid.*

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