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INTRODUCTION: THE ANALYTIC ENGAGEMENT WITH CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

This Special Issue of the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* originates from ‘A Dangerous Liaison? The Analytic Engagement with Continental Philosophy’, a conference held at the University of York on 9th December 2011 courtesy of the support of The Mind Association, the Aristotelian Society, and the Humanities Research Centre. There were four invited speakers, each with a respondent, and two graduate speakers, with papers presented by four of the six article authors in this volume. The aim of the conference was to promote cross-pollination between the two traditions of philosophy, with the emphasis on what analytic philosophers could gain from engaging with phenomenology and hermeneutics. The conference was bookended by two excellent broadcasts on the relationship under scrutiny: Stephen Mulhall, Béatrice Han-Pile, and Hans-Johann Glock were interviewed on BBC Radio 4 in a programme of *In Our Time* entitled ‘The Continental-Analytic Split’ on 10th November; and the *Philosophy Bites* podcast for 18th December was ‘Brian Leiter on The Analytic/Continental Distinction’.

As all four of the interviewees point out, the terms ‘Anglo-American’ and ‘Continental’ are misnomers and the ‘divide’ itself an over-simplification, ‘the culture of two cultures’ in Simon Glendenning’s terms.¹ There are nonetheless different styles of doing philosophy, and the distinction between approaches derived from Hegel, Nietzsche, and Husserl on the one hand and Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein on the other provides – at the very least – a starting point for inquiries into the recent history of philosophy. Furthermore, regardless of

the grounds of the distinction, it remains the cause of not only resistance but open hostility.

The inspiration behind the conference is illustrated by the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic*, particularly the following:

But, in any case, after we'd agreed that justice is virtue and that injustice is vice and ignorance, I said: All right, let's take that as established. But we also said that injustice is powerful, or don't you remember that, Thrasymachus? I remember, but I'm not satisfied with what you're now saying. I could make a speech about it, but if I did, I know that you'd accuse me of engaging in oratory. So either allow me to speak, or, if you want to ask questions, go ahead, and I'll say "All right," and nod yes and no, as one does to old wives' tales.²

What is so depressing about this exchange is the refusal by each to engage with the other's philosophy on the basis of its style alone. There has been no philosophical impasse; the problem is that Thrasymachus sees no value in elenchus and that Socrates rejects rhetoric. As a result, Thrasymachus refuses to take Socrates' questions seriously, and there is no meaningful discussion between the two. Regrettably, this refusal to engage – a refusal to regard the opposing approach to philosophy as worthy of critique or criticisms as worthy of responses – remains all too common.

The most well-known exchanges of the twentieth century were characterised by *ad hominem* accusations and political objections rather than philosophical argument. Several Continental philosophers made easy targets for their Analytic opponents: Nietzsche's philosophy was appropriated by the National Socialist German Workers' Party, Heidegger failed to explain or apologise for his membership of that party from 1933 to 1945, and Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Bergson were popular with Afrikaner intellectuals during the *apartheid* era. Within this dialogue, the clash between Anglo-American philosophy and critical theory has been

especially vehement, and the controversies surrounding Paul de Man's wartime journalism (1987) and Alan Sokal's publishing hoax (1996) served only to fuel further discord. A promising and ultimately lengthy dialogue between Jacques Derrida and John Searle from 1972 to 1994 resulted in an unproductive methodological critique which failed to illuminate issues in the philosophy of language. As the century drew to a close, Derrida became the focus of Analytic assaults, and was accused of being an 'intellectual charlatan' when he was nominated for an honorary degree at Cambridge in 1992.³ Controversy dogged Derrida post-mortem, as the title of Derek Attridge and Thomas Baldwin's obituary suggests: 'Jacques Derrida: deep thinker or truth-thief?'⁴ Jonathan Kandell's 'Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74' was not as sympathetic.⁵

The opposition to Derrida's legacy of deconstructive criticism shows no signs of abating. Richard Gaskin, for example, reserves two thirds of his rigorous and comprehensive monograph on the cognitive value of literature, *Language, Truth, and Literature: A Defence of Literary Humanism* (2013), for a critique of critical theory, the lion's share of which is directed at Derrida. One might wonder why Gaskin devotes so much space and energy to deconstruction when 'the death of deconstruction' was commented on at least as early as 1994,⁶ but if deconstruction had lost some of its initial glamour by the mid-nineties, the 'ethical turn' was very much in its heyday – and is still apparently fighting fit. Last year alone there were dozens of publications applying Derrida's writings to subjects as diverse as the relationship between humans and animals, language and meaning in law, leadership in education, and the relationship between humans and technology. Of these, Kelly Oliver's *Technologies of Life and Death: From Cloning to Capital Punishment* (2013) offers an example of what Analytic philosophers stand to lose by failing to engage with deconstructive criticism in particular, and the Continental tradition in general.

Oliver is determined to avoid charges of deliberate obscurantism and ineffability, to take Anglo-American philosophy on at its own game, and her first paragraph ends with a sentence beginning “In this book, I” – the paradigm of the purposefully unimaginative opening characteristic of the tradition focused firmly on analysis.⁷ She makes two such statements of intent in rapid succession: to examine the relationship between technology and ethics with particular attention to the processes of life and death, and to employ Derrida’s *The Beast and the Sovereign* to reconceptualise debates concerning life and death.⁸ There are several analyses of great insight, at least one of which is sufficient to dispel the claims that deconstructive criticism has nothing to offer philosophy. Oliver interprets Levinas’ emphasis on responsibility and the priority of the other over the self (*hyperbolic ethics*) in terms of Kant’s maxim of *ought implies can*. For Kant, one has no duty to save a drowning child if one is not capable of saving the child, for example if one cannot swim. Oliver asks: ‘What if *ought implies cannot*? What if our obligations always outstrip our intentions?’⁹ The idea is that there are an infinite number of obligations an individual ought to meet and that not only does the individual’s finite life prevent her from meeting these obligations, but that meeting one obligation (such as donating money to a charity) often precludes meeting another (donating that money to a different, but equally worthy, charity). Oliver conceives of Derrida as negotiating a path between Kant and Levinas, but unfortunately her own thesis is not fully developed in the work.¹⁰

Both Gaskin and Oliver have much to offer philosophy and yet neither recognises value in the approach employed by the other, in much the same way as Socrates and Thrasymachus above. Gaskin is an analytic philosopher with a great love for, and knowledge of, literature. Oliver is a deconstructive critic with an astute grasp of philosophy and its practical

application. They both make cogent arguments and present fascinating insights. Although he would disagree, Gaskin's linguistic idealism, his claim that 'the structure of reality has its origin in the meanings of words' comes perilously close to Derrida's anti-realism.¹¹ Oliver at times employs a seamless blend of analysis and interpretation. There is an overlap between the two which neither will admit, a failure which gives the appearance of an insurmountable barrier to dialogue. Their approaches should not, however, be considered mutually exclusive and all six articles in this volume look beyond the antagonism between philosophy and theory, between the Analytic and Continental traditions, to a mutually beneficial – if adversarial – exchange.

The papers and responses reflect a variety of perspectives on this exchange. Ray Monk discusses the relationship between Wittgenstein and Husserl, arguing against the alleged affinities between Wittgenstein and the phenomenological tradition. This is followed by Christopher Norris, from the other side of the divide, who argues that while Russell was the last great philosopher in the Analytic tradition, both Derrida and Badiou are worthy of comparison to philosophers such as Plato, Leibniz, and Hegel. Simon Skempton contrasts two responses to the problem of Hegel's conception of infinity, one from Badiou and the other from Graham Priest, discussing the work of Georg Cantor and Russell in his defence of Hegel. The remaining three papers are by philosophers working in the Anglo-American tradition who bridge the divide in their engagement with Continental philosophy. Joel Smith draws on both Kant and Merleau-Ponty in evaluating the case for Act-Space. Donnchadh O Conaill explores the common ground among Merleau-Ponty, Hubert Dreyfus, and John McDowell in his examination of the space of reasons. Joshua Tepley presents an analytic interpretation of 'being' in an attempt to illuminate one of Heidegger's most opaque

concepts. All three demonstrate precisely why dialogue is productive and why Analytic philosophers cannot afford to ignore the Continental tradition.

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- ² Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube & C.D.C. Reeve (Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 1992), 350: d3-e3.
- ³ Thomas Baldwin, 'Presence, truth, and authenticity,' in Simon Glendenning & Robert Eaglestone (eds.), *Derrida's Legacies* (London: Routledge, 2008), 107-117: 107.

⁴ ‘Jacques Derrida: deep thinker or truth-thief?’ *The Guardian*, 11 October, 2004, accessed 25 February, 2010, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2004/oct/11/guardianobituaries.france>>.

⁵ ‘Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74,’ *The New York Times*, 10 October, 2004, accessed 8 June, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/10/obituaries/10derrida.html?_r=1&pagewanted=print&position=>>.

⁶ Mitchell Stephens, ‘Jacques Derrida and Deconstruction,’ *New York Times*, 23 January, 1994, accessed 15 October, 2013, <<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/Jacques%20Derrida%20-%20NYT%20-%20page.htm>>.

⁷ Kelly Oliver, *Technologies of Life and Death: From Cloning to Capital Punishment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 2.

⁸ *The Beast and the Sovereign* is the title of Derrida’s last two Paris seminars, held from 2001 to 2002 and 2002 to 2003, but only recently translated into English (two volumes in 2009 and 2011 respectively).

⁹ *Technologies of Life and Death*, 190.

¹⁰ I discuss this criticism in my review of Oliver (*Journal of Applied Philosophy* 31 [2014], forthcoming).

¹¹ *Language, Truth, and Literature: A Defence of Literary Humanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 333. I explain this point in my review of Gaskin (*British Journal of Aesthetics* 54 [2014], forthcoming).