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Revista de Estudos das Origens da Filosofia Contemporânea  
Journal of Studies on the Origins of Contemporary Philosophy

Geltung, vol. 2, n. 2, 2022, p. 1-24 | e67191

ISSN: 2764-0892

 <https://doi.org/10.23925/2764-0892.2024.v2.n2.e67191>

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**THE PARTING OF THE WAYS REVISITED ON  
THE STATUS OF ANALYTIC AND  
CONTINENTAL TODAY: A PROPOSAL FOR A  
“SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY”**

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, I deal with the phenomenon, known to today's philosophers, as the split between analytic and continental philosophy. I provide a historical-institutional explanation for this split and then propose a type of doing philosophy beyond the divide, which I call "synthetic philosophy." Synthetic philosophy should take and synthesize the best of both traditions into a new form of philosophy, which I recommend for the future.

## KEYWORDS

CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY. ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY. OVERCOMING THE SPLIT. "SYNTHETIC PHILOSOPHY". PHILOSOPHY AS INSTITUTION.

## INTRODUCTION

Nearly 25 years ago (in 2000) Stanford philosopher Michael Friedman published the now-infamous booklet *A Parting of the Ways*. It is now timely to reflect back at the effect this short, yet comparatively speaking hugely influential work had. In this book, Friedman reconstructs the 1929 Davos meeting between Heidegger and Cassirer (with Carnap in the audience) as the pivotal philosophical event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was such a landmark “happening” because, according to Friedman, it was a meeting, which made clear what the philosophical options were going to be for the next period of European philosophy: *Either* to pursue the project of “rigorous scientific” philosophy by entering into what later came to be called the “linguistic turn,” thereby fulfilling the dream of the moderns, by turning away from the focus on the subject (and its contingent, factual existence, history, its lifeworld, etc.), *or* to overturn philosophy-as-we-know-it through a radical turn to the finite subject, thus ushering in the age of existentialism and later postmodernism. Thus, the options seemed to be to follow *either* the positivistic *or* the existentialist paradigm. The former led to the so-called “analytic,” the latter to the so-called “continental” philosophy, terms which weren’t established until long after the post-war period. This split has dominated the philosophical scene since.

Whether or not it is historically correct to locate the split at the year 1929, it is uncontroversial that Carnap and Heidegger, respectively, present these opposed paradigms. The irony of Friedman’s analysis is that he presents Cassirer as a middle path between both extremes and recommends considering it, but hardly anybody has heeded his advice, including Friedman (who thinks Cassirer failed). But perhaps one can indeed come to a new synthesis, the path not taken after Cassirer but to be taken today in his spirit. To put my cards on the table, I think it is possible and *ought* to be pursued. Thus, this text is written in the spirit of what I call “synthetic philosophy,” a term not coined by myself. Indeed, what I am going to recommend as a result of my reflections here, is

“synthetic philosophy” as coined by Cutrofello & Livingston<sup>1</sup>, but for which someone like Cassirer, I think, could be a model (though not considered by these authors).

Cutrofello and Livingston themselves prefer the term “pluralist” philosophy, which would succeed “in creating a genuinely ‘pluralist’ discussion that draws equally on both sides” (ibid., p. 184), which would result in a “‘post-divide’ philosophy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (ibid., p. 185). Labels aside, “post-divide,” “pluralist” and “synthetic” here mean to indicate the way we should go, regardless of the institutional situation today.

To this end, I want to assess the significance Friedman’s thesis had on philosophical historiography and trace the impact it has had on the philosophical landscape since. Thus, I will not look back to evaluate Friedman’s analysis, but look forward to how the field has evolved since in light of this debate. Since then, many symposia and volumes (especially around the year 2000) have been produced discussing the “overcoming of the analytic-continental split.” Indeed, one might be tempted to think that the debate about how to reconcile, overcome, deal with... (add more verbs here) this split has been the most widely discussed philosophical issue since (at least within professional philosophy), an issue, moreover, which has had at least this merit of bringing people from opposed camps together. Thus for someone who would like to make the case that the importance of a book lies in its reception, there could be no more important book in the last two decades than Friedman’s, judging from the scope of the discussion and the parties involved. A less dramatic interpretation would argue that Friedman joined a bandwagon that was already on the move through the village, but thereby amplified its volume to a maximal degree.

So where do we stand now? While some want to retain this split and see their philosophical identities in peril if it becomes moot, others attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cutrofello and Livingston for a list of publications on this topic, which the authors call “a bewildering variety of analyses of the definite characteristics of the two traditions and/or the divide between them” (CUTROFELLO; LIVINGSTON, 2015, p. 182).

philosophize in the spirit of synthesis or plurality and see those hanging on to the split on either side as hopelessly outdated. But here one notices a stark contrast: No matter how much one declares the split “dead” or “overcome,” it is nonetheless curious that it still informs self-proclaimed identities of entire Philosophy Departments and retains a strong institutional stronghold. And there is no indication that it is waning; indeed, in countries that are lagging behind in this development (as, e.g., in Germany), it is becoming stronger. Thus, apart from the philosophical merits of this distinction, to assess it also involves a lesson in the sociology of trends and fashions that take place even in a field that allegedly is out to seek timeless Truth. And indeed, my assessment is that the split is less a properly philosophical issue, than rather one involving the sociology of the institution. Therefore, to understand it, one must study this sociology to a certain extent. In the first part of this talk, thus, I shall assess some sociological and institutional aspects of this “parting” two and half decades after Friedman. In the second, I shall reassess the split in light of the state of contemporary philosophy and offer some *philosophical* reflections on how we ought to, in my mind, deal with the split today and moving forward into the future of, hopefully, synthetic philosophy. So while the first part of this talk might appear somewhat depressing, I hope to strike a more hopeful tone in the second.

#### I. A BRIEF SOCIOLOGY OF THE DISCIPLINE: ANALYTIC AND CONTINENTAL TODAY

I cannot recount the history of this division and the reason for its alleged demise, but want to offer some reflections on the situation as it is now. Friedman’s book of 2000 was not the first to offer a narrative on the history of the split, though his locating it in Davos in 1929 was perhaps a bit sensational and provocative. Already as of the 1990s, there had been voices who claimed, from different sides, essentially four things:

First, many from within the analytic camp claimed that analytic philosophy, in terms of a foundational doctrine that would define it, had come to an end already with Quine. Hence there was more the focus on *method or style*: contrasting sharp arguments and clearly defined concepts, thus scientificity, on the analytic side, with wishy-washy style and sloppy argumentation, more akin to poetry, on the continental side. This focus on method and style made the distinction murkier than ever before.

Secondly, from within the continental camp some claimed that continental philosophy, in the form it had reached at the point—post-modernism in its excessive forms—was more or less dead as well. The death of Derrida in 2004 and his generation of (mostly French) thinkers as well as the other big names in the US, esp. Rorty (died in 2007), and the absence of a strong generation following them (strong in the sense of reaching the same level of pop-culture, “rock star” popularity) led to a sense that this line of thought had been exhausted.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, there came along a new generation of continental philosophers who no longer wanted to be seen in a camp with postmodernism and sought contact with those on the other side. Whereas SPEP (Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy) was the largest venue world-wide of such postmodern tendencies, there were also continental philosophers who explicitly avoided SPEP, since they did not approve of “continental philosophy” as it was done there. As a friend of that persuasion once told me: “I’m an APA continentalist, not a SPEP continentalist.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In this context it is interesting to note that, while Derrida’s star seems to have completely faded, Rorty’s has proved to have more staying power, esp. given the attention paid to him in the wake of the election of Trump in 2016, when many people cited his auspicious words of his work *Achieving Our Country*. Then, in 2021, the publication of his last book *Pragmatism as Anti-Authoritarianism* caused many people to return to his work, including those who seemed to have left him behind, such as his former student Robert Brandom.

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that at this point, SPEP no longer has anything to do with Continental philosophy in the sense described above. It has turned to Postmodern identity politics and social-political philosophy entirely. Perhaps this is the necessary path “unhinged” Continental philosophy was bound to go.

Fourthly, within the “fort” of analytic philosophy, cracks began to appear, with people such as Rorty “subverting” the analytic tradition from within, but also Brandom, McDowell (both in their ways close to Rorty and whose big works both appeared in 1994) bridging the gap and focusing on classical “continental” figures, such as Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, the latter two being prime and vilified exemplars of murky, vague, and imprecise “continental style.” The members of this group—to which I also count Friedman—saw in the split an unfortunate event and something to be overcome or seen as passé. Hence, Friedman’s systematic locus in this story is that he (and others) saw the way to overcome the split in a reconstruction of its origins. To this group also belong Michael Dummett and Gottfried Gabriel.

In the first decade of the new millennium, in light of a new level of discussion reached through Friedman’s book and a certain closure of the discussion, a number of conferences were held to discuss “the analytic-continental split” or “overcoming” it. The conference proceedings and special volumes would be too numerous to list here, not to mention blog entries and their plethora of comments. It appears that, by now, all arguments have been brought forth and discussed thoroughly, such that *in philosophical terms* it appears that the discussion can be put to rest, shelved, and one could move on. Let us assume this is indeed correct *in a philosophical register*. This would mean that there is really nothing new and substantial to add (with the exception of further historical reconstructions, which can serve in giving us a richer image of the scene and which are, for that reason, welcome). To repeat, contrast this *philosophical* assessment with the *institutional* power of analytic philosophy world-wide.

Indeed, this putative philosophical consensus is outweighed by far by the political reality, that is, by the sociological fact that in the vast majority of the English-speaking world of philosophy (and increasingly in other linguistic communities), analytic philosophy in its core themes—philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, formal disciplines—in a more or less traditional form has

not in the least lost its stronghold when it comes to the way philosophy is done at conferences (including the imperial dominance of the English language), the way departments are structured, and the manner in which job ads are formulated, and hence how philosophy departments are populated. With the exception of ethics and its numerous applied fields, which is rather indifferent to the current debate, the vast majority of job ads are in core fields of analytic philosophy, although the label is not always used (that is, when an ad lists the AOS as “metaphysics or epistemology,” no continentalist need apply). And most of the famous philosophy departments in the English-speaking world are dominated by what is now referred to as “core areas” of analytic philosophy, although the term arguably hides the fact that there is no agreed-upon canon of analytic philosophy. But this *philosophical* observation is – that is precisely what I claim – entirely beside the point when it comes to the *institutional* dominance of analytic philosophy, whatever one may exactly denote by it.

Thus the contrast I want to point to is that between the state of *philosophy as an academic field* when it comes to the *philosophical* debate between analytic and continental philosophers, and the state of the *discipline as an institution* when it comes to *sociological* factors, such as distribution of funds, organization of individual (i.e., departmental) and national organizations, such as the APA. I said earlier that this tendency is less so or delayed in other linguistic groups, but just as an example, the German society for philosophy (DGPhil), has more or less been taken over by the GAP (German society for analytic philosophy), which has merged in part with the former, effectively staffing the main positions with self-avowed analytic philosophers, or in any case, the direction it has taken has clearly gone analytic. A case in point: When it came to the biennial conference a few years ago, it was initially not planned to have a thematic slot in “phenomenology” (which existed in the past as a matter of course), and only the intervention on the part of the German Society for Phenomenological Research moved the organizers of the conference to concede



a slot to this (now marginalized) sub-field, which was once a core field of German philosophy *tout court*.

So speaking strictly in sociological terms, what are we to make of this stark discrepancy between the philosophical and the sociological assessment? Are we called upon to harmonize, synthesize and overcome it? Or are there reasons we should leave things as they are? Is anybody served by either strategy? And what serves the discipline best in terms of its standing within the academe writ large?

So a couple of reflections of a more sociological sort, which may help us adequately understand the current situation. In other words, what I mean with “adequate assessment” is only in part, I argue, a philosophical discussion.

In terms of the institutional dominance of one of the forms of the discipline, one needs to acknowledge the fact that in all of this a lot of money is involved. Here one enters the world of departmental chairs, deans, provosts and, in general, administrators. In universities, which are (the US is no longer an exception) increasingly run like businesses, everything depends on the allocation of funds, and the criteria used to make the decision who gets money and who doesn't (and hence faces budget cuts) are dependent on things that administrators (think they can) judge “objectively,” such as rankings and external reviews—anything that can be represented in numbers.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, their decision-making processes depend on trends, fashions and what is called “best practices,” and here it depends on who are the trendsetters of these practices, which are for the most part, and world-wide, the big and extremely wealthy research universities in the US. Hardly anyone can escape chasing the newest trends and fashions, and the same goes for the intra-departmental discussions, the results of which as a consequence then go to the administration requesting certain specializations when asking for new lines or replacing old ones. And these discussions are, for the most part, between the modernizers

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<sup>4</sup> This text was originally written before the pandemic. It is clear that the drastic cuts in university funding have only exacerbated this tendency.

and the conservationists, and here the latter almost always lose out. One sociological observation as a footnote, analytic philosophers, who construe their work more as “science” continuous with other sciences and on the trajectory of unstoppable progress, have always been better at organizing themselves, as opposed to the continentalists, who oftentimes celebrate the ideal of the philosophical “lone wolf” with his or her own “system” “radically incommensurate with everything else.” (Cassirer would be an example of someone rejecting this ideal.)

Back to the inner-departmental struggles which are carried out in various constellations, but, I would argue, at bottom always between the ones looking backward, the others ahead. Here one party cries “decline of the West,” while the other celebrates the implementation of the newest innovations, from new personnel to new teaching methods to newest technology. Another reason analytic philosophy has held such a stronghold in this scheme is that it is typically affiliated with modernist, progressivist tendencies, whereas continental philosophers are oftentimes seen as conservative or even explicitly anti-modern (if one thinks of Heidegger). And it is a clear fact that today’s universities, who try to outdo each other in modern innovativeness, like the modernizers more than the former group.

One of the current trends is, as everyone knows, diversity<sup>5</sup>, and whoever can cater to this trend, will be showered with money, which is cashed out in lines for hiring, admission of graduate students, and the like, things that make a department function smoothly, depending on the system. It is interesting to see how universities which are religiously or otherwise affiliated (“traditional black colleges,” for instance), deal with this trend, since they are increasingly torn between following the (secular) mainstream and maintaining their (for the most part conservative) religious or otherwise ideological bent. This leads,

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<sup>5</sup> The tendency to evaluate what I wrote in 2017 in light of the present (2024) is tempting, so I will restrict myself. I will only say that the term that stood for “diversity” was originally “interdisciplinarity.” Diversity is a replacement term, pushing the former term’s core meaning to identity politics.

inadvertently, to quite a cynical stance, since it cannot only be about maintaining the *doctrina pura* but also about the fear of turning off potential donors, who tend to be quite conservative. Striking the right balance between innovativeness and beholdenness to the tradition informing the university on this level is thus also a delicate balancing act.

One can enumerate several other trends emerging in this wake, such as the increasing focus on oppressed minorities and the various issues coming with it: people of color, people who do not fit into the traditional gender schemes and the heterosexual paradigm, or those beneath the US-Mexico border (all of these examples are taken from the US and have to do with the history of this country, but other countries are following this trend in accordance with their histories). To be open to all of the topics and themes which might fall under the label of “wokeness” are meant to show all the more the flexibility on the part of many administrations, who are taking measures to attract more students and be perceived as “trend-setters,” “leaders” that others will hopefully follow. Thus, there is competition as to who are the ones *instituting* the “best practices.”

Now the point of recounting these trends is that they have profound impacts on the makeup of the discipline itself. To stay within philosophy, the many applications of ethics, as mentioned (medicine, business, healthcare, sports, real estate, etc.), have already had a vast effect on what used to be called “moral” or “practical philosophy” existing alongside theoretical philosophy and the history of philosophy (and perhaps aesthetics, which been almost completely marginalized). Another example for a momentous change in philosophy is what is now called “socio-political philosophy” and which covers areas such as Africana philosophy, Latino or post-colonial philosophy, feminism in its many guises, queer theory, and so on (all of them meant to contribute to “wokeness”). And if one looks at where the big names in these fields teach, one will discover that many of them are not housed in philosophy departments, but departments of political theory, linguistics, literature theory, if

not departments entirely devoted to one of these sub-disciplines, which have emancipated themselves from philosophy (very much like a discipline such as psychology has emancipated itself from philosophy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). The point is, to repeat (and especially with a look back at the century of emancipation, the 19<sup>th</sup>), that these administrative decisions have had, perhaps in the last decade more than ever in the history of our discipline, a profound impact on the discipline itself, such that philosophy departments themselves are changing rapidly and vastly and that what is discussed under the heading of philosophy is factually carried out in other departments and that, vice versa, many topics, which are discussed today by philosophers, would not have been considered philosophical at all! This tendency is certainly dominant in the US, the UK, Canada and Australia, and less so on the European continent, perhaps because the dominant language is not English.

Back to the distinction between analytic and continental. Probably due to the latter's turn to postmodernism, this general "dissolution" of the discipline has afflicted for the most part continental philosophy. But if it happened there, it is an open question whether or not this will happen to analytic philosophy as well. And if that last bastion goes, what will happen to philosophy as a discipline within the canon of the university, within a classical liberal arts college? I think one will have to seriously consider that something like a philosophy department in the "traditional" sense, i.e., with faculty working in the classical core areas – theoretical philosophy, practical philosophy, history of philosophy and perhaps aesthetics – will be a thing of the past in the not too distant future. It is quite likely that there will be departments of "general intellectual history," somewhat like "great books" programs, where faculty will discuss Kant next to Shakespeare and Newton, and next to these, departments devoted to formal disciplines, such as logic, mathematics (and their applications), and next to these departments concerned with anthropological, social, and political questions. It is quite likely that given this general state of

dissolution, future administrators will find it quite unnecessary to continue having a philosophy department in the old sense.

There are a number of ways one can react to this reality, and it seems to me that this is what is currently playing itself out within the discipline. One can lament this state of affairs and wish it wouldn't happen and try to resist it at all costs – which I would call the “conservative” reaction. Part of this stance is to continue doing philosophy the way it has been done before and to ignore the current trends. One can do so, presumably, under the banner of *philosophía perennis*, i.e., the search for Truth (with a capital T), which is indifferent to fads and fashions. This only enforces the impression among administrators that the representatives of this group have “checked out” from the current debate. The best way to make oneself obsolete is to remain in this stance.

Another is to embrace the current reality, the “progressive” reaction. It is a triumphant call to action on the part of those who, rightfully, have felt left out of the glistening halls of the heterosexual-white-male-dominated academe. They wish to see traditional philosophy-as-we-know-it go or be downsized and ultimately done away with, and actively contribute to this demise. And by “philosophy” they mean continental and analytic philosophy alike, though the former is closer to their heart, for some of the authors of continental philosophy have made inroads to overcoming and “subverting” the dominance of white maledom (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault). Yet this victory comes at a cost. Insofar as their stance is parasitic upon that which they want to subvert, they fulfil the classical Nietzschean-Schelerian definition of resentment and have thus been called (by Rorty, following Bloom), and not without some justification, “the school of resentment.” In turn, it breeds a similar form of resentment on the other side, and here one can see an interesting parallel between the latter and those who back the former US president-and-Republican contender (those who resent the resenterers).

It seems to me that yet another stance is possible, which one could call pragmatic. If one follows Rorty in his metaphilosophical analysis of the

discipline, one should not be concerned with maintaining one paradigm (“ontotheology”) but acknowledge that the discipline will change, such that perhaps something like “continental – analytic” will have a vague ring to people 100 years hence, just as much as the idea of discrete philosophy departments next to History, English, Theology will ring quaint. But Rorty’s famous prediction, at the end of *The Mirror of Nature*, deserves to be quoted here:

Whatever happens, however, there is no danger of philosophy’s ‘coming to an end’. Religion did not come to an end in the Enlightenment, nor painting in Impressionism. Even if the period from Plato to Nietzsche is encapsulated and ‘distanced’ in the way Heidegger suggests, and even if 20th-century philosophy comes to seem a stage of awkward transitional backing and filling ..., there will be something called ‘philosophy’ on the other side. For even if problems about representation look as obsolete to our descendants as problems about hylomorphism look to us, people will still read Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. What role these men will play in our descendants’ conversation, no one knows. (RORTY, 1988, p. 394)

His point seems to be that philosophical thought will continue, though it is entirely possible that the name of the discipline, and university departments studying it, will change and even vanish completely, or that philosophy will continue under different titles and be practiced in different departments. Following this prediction, one cannot judge this to be a good or a bad thing, since such a judgment would require a Hegelian absolute stance. If we embrace or shun it, depends on the stance we choose to have now, and nobody can force us into a stance other than ourselves or university administrators who threaten to cut our positions!

I am not sure that I endorse this stance, but is this pragmatic lesson perhaps the best one to learn from, that is, that one should not be concerned with maintaining either of these sides of the division, and let things go their course? Should one not be concerned with the demise of philosophy in academia, let alone society as a whole? Or should both sides join forces against

their imminent decline and eventual obsolescence? This would, of course, presuppose a minimal common denominator upon which both parties could agree on. This brings me back to the *philosophical* discussion about how the distinction in question matters philosophically and how we, as professional philosophers, should move forward. Thus I move from the descriptive to the normative part.

## II. "WE SHALL OVERCOME" OR "WE SHALL DIG IN"? PHILOSOPHY BEYOND THE DIVIDE

The philosophical (and perhaps more interesting) question to ask is, what kind of philosophy can be practiced once we have acknowledged that the split has been overcome. But in order to answer this question, it is firstly necessary to address the issue whether we should indeed overcome or not rather dig in our heels in the fortress we happen to be in. But this point can be addressed, rather quickly, I think, from what has been said, in a pragmatic spirit: to dig in and continue one's own project in the way one has before, depending on the side of the divide one is on, is the almost certain death of the discipline. Continuing the Cold War between both camps is the best argument we can possibly place into administrators' laps to cut us completely, for one reason routinely used to cut funds in a department (or, more radically, to scrap it altogether) is infighting within a department. So we *must* overcome; but how?

My rather trivial thesis is, to repeat: if we want philosophy to continue as a recognizable discipline, we *need* to overcome. Yet I cannot predict that, even if heeding my advice, philosophy will continue, nor am I arguing that it *ought to*, for perhaps in the grand scheme of things, it will be better to put scarce resources into research that explores a comprehensive cure for cancer or into finding living space on other planets in the face of the menacing ecological crisis. We need to keep in mind that everything we are doing here is luxury above the physical needs and in principle, hence, dispensable.

But here are a few proposals for philosophy that has overcome the split. I am structuring them following some classical oppositions, which we should, I believe, overcome. I am not claiming that they fall into either above-discussed camp neatly, but they are oppositions that, I think, persist unfortunately and that should be *aufgehoben* (in a Hegelian spirit) into what one might call “synthetic philosophy.” I cannot develop these points at length, but will make rather bold theses. I will emphasize, however, that I think Friedman was right to call Cassirer’s sketch of a philosophy of culture a middle path between extremes. Thus what I am recommending here has its historical predecessor. Of many points one could make, I will mention only five.

#### A. SYSTEMATIC - HISTORICAL

This opposition is indeed one of the ways one has characterized the difference between analytic and continental philosophy, at least in its original standoff; that is, between an aversion to the history of the discipline, on the one hand, and the sense of being steeped in the history, on the other. Now both can take extreme forms; on the one hand, the refusal to read any of the allegedly “antediluvian” authors; on the other, to mistake historical research for philosophical arguments. I believe philosophy in the spirit of overcoming should be sensitive to both. On the one hand, one cannot ignore the history of one’s discipline and be it for the very simple reason that problems and questions have their history, and thus the answers given at a certain time, and satisfactory then, deserve to be revisited and perhaps revised or discarded altogether. Thus not for the sake of a fair assessment of the past, but for the sake of revisiting old answers that we still give today, should we cultivate a historical sensibility. That is, conventional wisdom, if such a thing exists in philosophy, should be put to the test periodically.

On the other hand, a new trend emerging for a while now is philosophers with analytic training turning to figures in the history of philosophy, not in the



naïve hope of getting answers to contemporary questions (one of the biggest naïvetés), but bringing fresh light to these figures, which were locked up in glass bookshelves and not taken seriously for too much adulation or for the sake of being systematically overlooked (e.g., women). One synthetic way of bringing both tendencies together is, positively put, crystal clear prose and historical sensitivity. This clear prose is necessary because philosophical styles have changed, and so has the language. Dated texts need to be appropriated in new ways for the present. With historical sensitivity I mean being attuned to the tradition in that sense in which the repetition of arguments is noticed and hence avoided. To give an example in the field of Husserl scholarship: already now I see younger scholars repeat arguments made in the 1960 and 70s by people such as Gadamer and Held, in texts (in German), which young scholars are clearly not capable of reading (thus part of historical sensitivity entails knowing languages other than English). The good historian can thus also be a good scorekeeper to flag old wine in new skins.

#### B. A PRIORI - EMPIRICAL (OR ARMCHAIR - VS. FIELD WORK)

It is a bad thing for philosophy, I believe, to separate out a space for it and it alone versus empirical research, and to keep both mutually separated. Thus that there could arise the schizophrenic situation that we have armchair philosophizing on the one hand and the many fields of research on the other, is a misunderstanding of scientific inquiry altogether (in the original sense of *episteme*). Both types of searches for a priori truths as in Kant's search for necessary and universal forms of thought and the philosophers' of language dream of conceptual analysis of existing and constructions of ideal languages have not held up. On the other hand, the idea of dissolving philosophy into empirical questions and leaving the traditional philosophical questions to experts in their fields have resulted in an impoverishment of the level of questions that can be asked *and* in an undue overburdening of scientists, who

are for the most part, after all, not trained in the sort of philosophical reflection professional philosophers are used to on a daily basis. Philosophy without experience is blind; science without philosophy is dumb.

Thus, there is a time for the armchair—for concentrated yet free and freed-up musing—and time for the field, for getting one's hands dirty in various ways. Neither should rule out the other, neither should view itself in competition with the other. In the best thinkers both directions of research on a single, yet two-directional line of inquiry have been straddled in equal measure and fairness. My heroes in this sense are thinkers such as Leibniz and Cassirer. A high ideal, to be sure, but an ideal to strive after, I believe.

### C. TIMELESS - EPHEMERAL/CULTURAL

The opposition I mean here is between construing philosophy as either trying to reach timeless truths (about the world, about the human being) or as an attempt to offer timely diagnoses of the current cultural status quo, to see philosophy rather as a “doctor of culture” in the Nietzschean sense, offering critiques of the way things are going, either being a partial sceptic who sits on the fence of the public arena, refusing to join it and simply calling things out that find critique worthy, or, more radically, being involved and an activist furthering and promoting what one holds dear. Now this dialectical opposition has, of course, already been thoroughly discussed by Hegel himself, when he speaks of philosophy as the owl of Minerva or as nothing but its time conceived in thought, despite him composing a *Logic* from the absolute standpoint and prior to God's creation of the world. Of course it is both, because philosophers are immersed in their time, but since they reflect on this, they can only do so from a position that is no longer immersed in it (not wanting to follow Hegel in claiming this necessarily requires an “absolute” stance). The opposition between searching for truth and realizing our time-bound existence is, I believe, a false alternative.

Moreover, I would like to add a slightly different point: what if philosophy is itself bound to fads and fashions like any other science and, moreover, any other cultural movement? The split I am discussing here then seems like a terrific case in point! What if the split between analytic and continental is merely another fashion just like the current attempt to overcome it? What if philosophy, too, is nothing but a continual scientific endeavor that is bound to paradigms, in an endless cycle of upheaval, revolution, establishment of a new “normal science” and so on? I am not sure I am prepared to make the claim that this is so, at least not in the way ordinary sciences behave. But I do suggest that we consider that it *might* well be so. That need not mean that we should stop what we are doing, but lead us high-browed philosophers to a certain humility. This humility would result in an acknowledgment that everything we do might be considered overcome, quaint, and “so yesterday” by following generations. It is quite possible that future generations will shake their heads over what we today fight over passionately, not because they occupy a higher moral ground, but because the wheel of time has so moved that they face other problems that vex them more. It is as simple as that; no philosopher is the lord over time. But for us contemporaries it does not mean that we shouldn't keep on working hard on what is the issue at hand, and the most important one seems to me, to repeat, to keep the discipline going. Philosophy will never be completely synthetic the way I envision (as a Kantian idea), just as little as humans will ever be free, or men and women perfectly equal (nor will we ever be completely clear on what gender equality ultimately is). But, for that reason, stop trying?

#### D. IVORY TOWER VS. SOCIAL CHANGE

The distinction I mean with these terms is somewhat parallel to the previous ones, but not quite identical. With that I mean that a lot of professional philosophy has made, and continues to make, the mistake of locking itself up in

an ivory tower. It is as if the items of reflection and the results reached are as far away from human daily reality as rocket science. It seems plausible to respond that some things, such as formal logic, surely *cannot possibly* have a broad dissemination and an effect on the human race. And yet one should keep in mind the *social* dimension that drove especially the philosophers of the Vienna Circle, who were instrumental in founding analytic philosophy. Their impetus was not to chart new territories in the landscape of the formal disciplines, or at least not as an end in itself. Rather, they did so with the intention of creating a set of formal laws and principles that would bring together humanity as a whole on this basis, to eradicate differences and tensions that arise when language is not used correctly; this is one reason for the generation of conflicts leading to social upheaval up to a breakdown of communication in wartime. Thus it was in the same vein that someone like Carnap enthusiastically practiced and attempted to further Esperanto, a language that would rise above natural languages and their inherent chauvinisms and make one important contribution to world peace.

Again, the other extreme is the stance of doing philosophy for the sake of social change *alone*. This is the extreme of using philosophy, and anything else for that matter, as a tool to further one's cause. It then becomes instrumentalized (even weaponized) and ideologized. There is nothing wrong with using philosophical arguments to identify and critique injustice where one encounters it; but it is not acceptable to reduce philosophy to ideology. Of course a Marx-inspired critique could object that there is no such thing as pure theory versus practice and that the very distinction, and the attempts to uphold it, are bourgeois devices meant to keep the proletariat at bay. Fair enough. But to these people I reply: If they use arguments to critique injustice and oppression, and if they invoke ideals such as equality, justice, and freedom to bolster this critique, then they do so on the basis of philosophical ideals discovered (or invented) in Western philosophy. Any discriminatory or chauvinistic method of thought or oppressive legislation should be critiqued.

But those critics denouncing the Western, male, heterosexual, and white supremacy, and rightfully insofar as this has led to oppression, bloodshed and countless deaths, must realize that they practice this critique on the very basis of Western thought. They are effectively furthering the ideals of the European Enlightenment. This should not lead them to removing the very grounds on which they stand, but they should at least be aware of the performative contradiction. Let everyone live!

#### E. RESEARCH VS. "MESEARCH"

There exists in the Western tradition a sense in which philosophy, as every other serious science, requires a certain distance from one's subject matter, the position of the disinterested spectator. This person never sees the need to make any attempt to make her research known or popular. It is important by virtue of the subject matter, and any personal involvement is to be avoided. This certainly is one extreme, but there is an opposite one; and the other extreme is the type of person who might be called, in a perhaps scornful way, driven by "mesearch." This person is typically a representative of a certain underrepresented or previously oppressed group within society and, out of attachment to and identification with this group, this person investigates her personal existence and uses this as a basis for doing philosophy while, and here lies the extreme, nothing else counts in the discipline for such a person. This person works exclusively in this special field and reduces everything else to this. This person will, after talks, ask the "my guy" or "my gal" question, where everyone knowing her will sigh and whisper to her neighbor: "here comes X with her question how all this relates to Y."

As I say, both are extremes that can be overcome in a higher synthesis. To the person doing "mesearch," I would like to say: it's wonderful that you found a passion for your field of research based on your personal involvement in it (because you yourself are "fill in the blank"). It's great to have this passion

and keep it going. But do not reduce everything else in the discipline to it, and do not dismiss other research and acknowledge that it might have *nothing* to do with your field of research, and that it is worthwhile nonetheless (even if you can't see why).

To the detached researcher, I say: It is not wrong to find passion in what one is doing. Existential involvement is the necessary starting point for any question that has *ever* been investigated scientifically. You are not tearing down your discipline by making it popular, by conveying to the stranger in the elevator your passion for what you are doing and make the honest attempt to explain it to her. This goes especially for philosophy. Being serious and sober-minded in your research is important, but do not deny that it is the existential involvement that gets any research going.

#### CONCLUSION: SHOULD PHILOSOPHY SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH?

I pose this question, in conclusion, because after all of this, the “big” issue seems to be that searching for truth defines philosophy in the traditional sense, and given the changed climate in the profession (not to mention the planet!), we might wonder whether or not we should uphold this ideal or discard it altogether in a new wave of philosophy we are facing.

Both this way of questioning and my answer to this final question are pragmatic. There is more to philosophy than figuring out what the truth is. I am not saying that it can get by as a free-for-all. Philosophy cannot be done *without* arguments, but it is ultimately not *about* arguments. Nothing can replace rational and deliberate reflection on subject matters; but there is more philosophy is about. What is it to be about, then? Is it about truth? For sure, but in this it does not differ from other sciences. Is there something that makes philosophy special, then? I do think so, but I reject that it lies in its subject matter, which would be unique and distinct from all other scientific inquiries. Instead, I believe philosophy is about visions and insights, about exploring

vistas; such vistas, however, cannot open up by themselves. They can only open up once blinders of all sorts have been removed, religious dogma, ideological one-sidedness, false and dangerous prejudices, ignorance (historical and otherwise), fake news, and ultimately the prejudice against prejudices itself. To pursue these vistas is, indeed, a luxury that can only be afforded to humans, once all other needs have been met, food, shelter, and yes, also education, though the latter should perhaps focus more on meeting these needs rather than idle reflection. This might be, perhaps and after all, an argument to radically cut funding to philosophy and restrict it to a handful of scholars who should either have the role of advisors to politicians or be in the stance of the free mind, who can intervene from the Ivory Tower precisely because she has nothing at stake. One might rightfully question the logic of the “knowledge industry” as it is currently practiced, esp. in the US, where everything falls on the chopping block of utilitarianism and cash value. Perhaps those who have fallen in love with philosophy and are not in the privileged position that it supports a decent life should be shown concrete ways to channel this energy into something that can get them gainful employment, rather than lingering on as exploited and underpaid adjuncts.

It is clear that these vistas can only be enjoyed on the proverbial shoulders of giants. That means, to repeat, philosophizing free-style and from the armchair should be strictly forbidden, and conversely, no philosopher of serious training should be allowed to practice her profession without at least one empirical science to rest on, even if this science leads “merely” to critical editions of “the mighty dead.” Philosophers, well-versed in the written and spoken word, should be sufficiently equipped in spelling out these visions of a better future or a better society. Having these visions in mind, they should from there look at their present and find a voice in critiquing what is not right in light of these visions. They should do this in a way that educated readers can comprehend. Models for such interveners are figures such as Sartre, Ortega or Habermas, who, while writing books of highest difficulty, never felt themselves

too aloof to intervene in daily politics in their respective countries. In a pragmatic spirit, these outreach activities should not be done to get us closer to the Truth or the perfect society, but to identify and attack injustice and violence where and when it occurs. If people then have the health, wealth, and leisure to read philosophical books and listen to philosophers bring forth their arguments, we philosophers have achieved everything we could possibly wish for.

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*[Received: June 19<sup>th</sup> 2024. Editorial decision: July 16<sup>th</sup> 2024]*