

REVIEW ARTICLE

James Chase and Jack Reynolds, *Analytic versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy*, Durham 2011

Paul Redding

With their *Analytic versus Continental: Arguments on the Methods and Value of Philosophy*, James Chase (an analytic philosopher) and Jack Reynolds (a continental philosopher) have co-written a stimulating and valuable book. Combined, the authors possess an extraordinary command of a complex and messy period of philosophical history, and working together in this way has allowed them to illuminate many issues. It is a unique and much needed contribution to contemporary philosophical culture, and the reader can only emerge from it both more informed and more reflective about the two traditions it compares.

After an introductory chapter the book is divided into three parts. The first of these examines key encounters (both virtual and historical) between major figures within each of these two traditions. Not surprisingly the first is between Frege and Husserl, who from the present perspective might be looked back upon as the two movements' founding fathers. This is followed by chapters on Russell and Bergson, Carnap and Heidegger, a three-way engagement between Frankfurt School thinkers, the logical positivists and Popper; an historical encounter at Royaumont between Ryle and Hare and various continental European philosophers, and the last on the exchanges between Derrida and Searle. All these chapters are illuminating and helpful for getting an initial grip on the different orientations able to be taken within the analytic and continental traditions.

Part II, the largest of the sections, is specifically devoted to the issue of *philosophical method* as applied within each tradition. After an introductory chapter, the next two analytic-leaning chapters deal with the methodological issues surrounding the roles of intuition pumps and thought experiments, and the notion of reflective equilibrium. The next chapter, chapter 10, looks at the idea of transcendental reasoning from both analytic and continental perspectives while the next two look at phenomenology (Chapter 11) and genealogy, hermeneutics and deconstruction (Chapter 12) as distinct philosophical methods. These three chapters, understandably, have a more continental focus, although Daniel Dennett's cognitive science based critique of phenomenology is examined and "post-analytic" figures like Donald Davidson and Charles Taylor are considered in relation to hermeneutics. Chapters 13 and 14 examine the different attitudes to issues of style and clarity and to the place of philosophy in relation to the sciences and the arts.

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In Part III, the six chapters examine in turn six thematic topics: ontology and metaphysics; truth, objectivity and realism; time; mind, body and the debate over representation; ethics and politics; and other minds. The book finishes with a short conclusion.

The decision to have three different takes on the core material allows diverse features of this complex terrain to come into view. And of course, these features can only come into view because of the complementary skills of the two authors with their differing basic allegiances. Here there is none of those blunders and misunderstandings that are all-too-commonly encountered when philosophers start generalising about intellectual traditions which, at best, they only know from the outside. Chase and Reynolds describe the path they plot as an attempt to steer between the traps of “essentialist” and “deflationary” conceptions of each of the opposing traditions. As they point out, it is easy enough to set up purportedly prototypical instances of the two traditions: that continental philosophy engages in a critique of modernity, that it “embraces” the historicity of thought, say, whereas analytic philosophy adopts norms of argument constrained by formal logic or probability theory and is more science-focused than oriented to history and politics, are familiar commonplaces. But such “essentialist” approaches typically ignore the internal diversity characterising each tradition, while “deflationism” too easily plays down genuine differences and results in a bland ecumenism that fails to account for the deeply felt sense of difference found in philosophers on both sides of the divide. It is for these reasons that rather than attempt to list some necessary and sufficient conditions for each style of philosophising, the authors have opted for an approach that focuses on the *core methodologies* adopted by each side, and contextualised these within an overall attempt to capture something like the pragmatic relations operative within each intellectual tradition.

I read this approach to limning the structure of each intellectual tradition in a broadly Peircean fashion, and as attempting to capture something about the way that beliefs become “fixed” in each. Here there seem to be resonances with overtly pragmatic approaches to reason found in the likes of Habermas and Brandom, as well as the more historical orientation to science found, say, in the work of Thomas Kuhn. On this account, the analytic tradition is, importantly, a *tradition*, and its participants are influenced in, I take it, causal ways by past members of the tradition. And like all traditions, it achieves a type of communal self-consciousness in terms of the boundaries by which it marks itself off from others. Analytic philosophers communicate with other analytic philosophers of their time, and presumably have causal influences on their successors, if they are successful. But, more than this, it is said that “their communications are in part designed to bring out the inferential connections between pieces of philosophical work produced by different philosophers” (p. 5). But this model, I suspect, results in criteria that reflect the (apparently) more homogeneous and professionalised analytic community that embodies “a kind of interactivity ... that is not extended to philosophical outsiders (including members of the putative continental tradition)” (p. 4). This analytic group of inquirers is described as promoting “a certain kind of ‘inferential connectivity’ without employing the kinds of structuring devices that are found in the sciences (such as explicitly hierarchical authority relations based purely on area of expertise, or explicit research agendas)” (p. 5).

This focus on inferential connections leads one to ask about the *sources* of the claims that the inferential connections are meant to hold between. The obvious question that raises its head here will be a consequence of the obvious fact that the differences between the philosophical language community and the scientific community are of course not *limited* to those listed above. For the most part, scientists have labs, philosophers do not. (Some analytic philosophers want to rectify this by *having labs*, but I don’t think that this is as yet more than a minority movement.) So where do the claims that are to be inferentially unified come from?

On my reading of the book, the answer given to the question of the “origin” of the as yet *to-be* inferentially unified contents within the analytic community is linked to the role played by *intuition* within thought experiments (discussed in Ch 8), with *reflective equilibrium* (discussed in Ch 9) securing the balance between the evidence of intuition on the one hand and coherence with other beliefs on the other. It is acknowledged, of course, that intuition here plays nothing like a *foundational* role, but that intuition plays *any* serious role in the making of philosophical claims is found to be a worry by some members of *both* traditions. Deleuze’s concerns about

a philosophy that relies so heavily on intuition or common sense are raised (pp. 68–70), but within analytic philosophy itself, similar critiques of the role of intuition can be found in Richard Rorty,¹ as well as advocates of a radical naturalism in metaphysics such as James Ladyman and the co-authors of the recent book *Every Thing Must Go*.²

As Chase and Reynolds point out, continental philosophers are much more likely to incorporate a type of historicist element into their thinking. They are more likely to see intuitions more as “prejudices” in Gadamer’s sense—prejudgments that in some sense form the conditions for explicit judgments and that cannot simply be reflected on at will (although they may not share what they see as Gadamer’s traditionalist *stance* towards them). In any case, this will be linked to the greater relevance that *history* has for the continental philosopher, who is likely to turn to it—both the history of philosophy and history more broadly—in order to both bring into focus by way of contrast the *particularity* of the intuitions we have, and to look for the causes responsible for them. Chase and Reynolds fully acknowledge the differences between the two traditions on this count, but do so by predominantly treating the historical dimension of continental philosophy as a contrastive *methodological* feature. Thus commenting on the suggestion of Michael Dummett that it will be “only by going back to the roots of the divide [that we can] now hope to establish communication between the traditions,” they note “we see no reason to think that this is the *only* way ... to approach the divide. Our preference is to seek an informed understanding of the limits and possibilities of the methods employed in each tradition.” (p. 6). But in its tendency to bypass the history of the genesis of these two movements, the book reflects a stance that is more typical of analytic philosophy, than that of philosophy practiced in the continental mode. I will end by mentioning one small symptom of this—the topic of time as treated in chapter 17.

It is certainly the case that writings from the continental tradition treat time differently to those standardly found in the analytic tradition. As Chase and Reynolds point out, the attitude towards time in the analytic tradition was largely fought out over McTaggart’s famous distinction between the “A-series” and the “B-series” conceptions of time. To think of time according to the A-series is to think of events as ordered according to the *present-centred* categories of past, present and future. In contrast, in terms of the B-series one thinks of events as being related by relations of before and after or simultaneous with. Roughly, the A-series is conceived from *within* time, while the B-series is, as it were, conceived from some point outside of time. In analytic philosophy, the B-series has become the default way to think of time, but continental philosophers seem attracted to the A-series. Chase and Reynolds treat this as the “temporal turn” of continental philosophy (p. 190), but to describe this as resulting from a “temporal turn” is to regard the analytic embrace of the “B-series” as something like a default position. Might not the difference be equally described as the result of analytic philosophy having taken an “atemporal turn”? And if so, we might ask, what were the historical conditions and consequences of this turn?

In ancient logic and medieval logic, as Arthur Prior pointed out in his Locke Lectures from 1955-6, “it was taken for granted that ... what is true at one time is in many cases false at another time, and vice versa.”³ Most of the beliefs we have in everyday life, beliefs such as “Christmas is only a few weeks away,” are not timelessly true. It was only in the Renaissance that the idea of timelessly true or false propositions started to get a grip, and, according to Prior they only became dominant in the nineteenth century, and *even then* major logical thinkers like Boole, Mill, and Peirce all resisted the trend to divorce logic from issues of tense. Only at the very *end* of the century did the modern “timeless” view of the proposition become the standard view with the approaches of Keynes, Venn, Johnson and, especially, Russell.

The “timeless” view of the proposition was, of course, crucial for the types of projects that were taken to be core projects within the early decades of analysis, projects such as the attempt to give a logical foundation to arithmetic, and the extension of this approach to provide a symbolic framework for the physical sciences. These were important intellectual achievements, but that such a picture of time bound up with these projects should be thought of as *the default conception* for trying to think about *everything else* can seem odd indeed. From the ensuing intellectual perspective of mainstream analytic philosophy, continental philosophers like Heidegger have looked like they were obsessed with an odd picture of time, but it may have *just been the old one*, and perhaps

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a more *appropriate* one for thinking about a whole range of phenomena *other than* the very particular issues with which analytic philosophy in its early decades had been concerned.

Chase and Reynolds give us an intricate account of how conceptions of time and history play different roles in the two philosophical methodologies, but we may still feel the need for a philosophical account that incorporates an historical understanding of the establishment of these particular methodologies themselves.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy" in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). Rorty would typically argue that individuals only acquired the intuitions that analytic philosophers appeal to after having taken their first undergraduate course in philosophy.
2. James Ladyman and Don Ross with David Spurrett and John Collier, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
3. A. N. Prior, *Time and Modality: Being the John Locke Lectures for 1955-6 delivered in the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 104.