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✓ On The Distinction Between Continental And Analytical Philosophy

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If we reflect on what really constitutes the difference between the so-called continental and analytical camps in contemporary philosophy, I think we will conclude that they are at the same time more different and less incompatible than is often supposed.

To begin with, we should note what is so unfortunate about these labels. While the term analytical may not tell us anything about any particular philosophy, since all philosophy is analysis (it's about as descriptive as the name "the Democratic Party"), the term continental tells us nothing philosophical at all. And to call contemporary European philosophy continental is not only bad philosophy, it is bad geography. But if continental philosophers are satisfied with the term because of its seeming sophistication, their counterparts ought to look askance at it, being by implication insular philosophers. Even if we take continental in the sense in which it is intended--meaning some philosophy, philosopher, or philosophical movement on the European sub-continent (or rather peninsula)--then the term is technically incorrect. Not all continental thinkers hail from or dwell in Europe, and philosophy in Europe as such is today no more continental than Europe is a continent. Meanwhile, their counterparts in the analytical camp have no exclusive relation to the Anglo-American cultural sphere. Analytical philosophy is unthinkable without Mach, Frege, and Wittgenstein; and further back, both Leibniz and Kant are often counted as early champions of its ideal of science. In short, the terms analytical and continental, lacking as they are in any reflective awareness of the principles at stake in what divides the two camps, direct our attention away from a true understanding of their characters and relation.

These camps are at the same time more different and less incompatible than we normally think because they are not strictly comparable; they are not two things of the same kind. They are not merely, as it were, different animals; one of them is an animal, the other is something else. Admittedly, both are forces that ally certain theoreticians against certain others. That is, both are communities, or forms of affiliation, that bind intellectual history together. But they differ,

not in being competing communities of the same kind. They differ rather as to what kind of community each is. The continental camp in contemporary philosophy is a community of interest; analytical philosophy, on the other hand, is an ethos community.

Thus, neither is really a school, which is also a form of intellectual association, a form however which derives its cohesiveness from the formative influence of a founder or one of his disciples. Founders or disciples sometimes cannot wield the power of the scholar (as the head of Plato's Academy was called), or do so too rigidly. The result: a movement. No scholar, no jargon; no jargon, no school. The diversity of a movement is probably good. But movements are not founded. And the spectacle of a burgeoning movement, as interesting as it is to the historiographer, is grievous to the frustrated scholar who becomes impatient to see the fruit of his labor. To participate in a movement today is considered a lofty thing; and this is understandable considering our sense of stagnation and decay (technical advancement notwithstanding). But Luther despaired when he saw the Reformation degenerate into a movement, polymorphous and out of control. Something similar happened to the Husserlian school of phenomenology, which became one of the factors in the rise of the existentialist movement. And even Heidegger, who so disappointed Husserl in this connection, later sought to disassociate himself from existentialism. But the continental and analytical communities are not movements either. Each embrace a wide variety of movements.

Analytical philosophy would be a movement in this sense if, instead of cohering merely on the basis of an ethos of scientificity, it also possessed a common theoretical interpretation of this ethos and of the practice that arises from it. Of course it does not, and this is partly why a comprehensive philosophy of science is such an urgent need in analytical circles.

But analytical philosophy is more than a mere circle; it goes further in being something of a club. Because of its ethos, its agenda is best pursued in company; and its "old boy circuit" bears comparison to a political machine. This seems natural in a community held together by a vaguely defined but, in itself, definite commitment to a scientific standard in philosophy. Radnitzky says analytical philosophy "primarily wants to articulate an ideal of science" [*Contemporary Schools of Metascience*, Chicago 1973, Regnery, p. xvi]. One finds an ethos wherever a commitment is shared. And where a commitment is shared, there the conditions exist for contempt and mockery. For mockery, opponents are not enough; one must also have friends. An analytical I met at the Hegel-Archiv asked me what we continentals do at Duquesne. "We get the impression," he said, "that some pretty fuzzy thinking goes on down there," I could see the picture forming in his mind--Duquesne students expanding their consciousness through chemistry and writing their dissertations on Kahlil Gibran.

There are continental circles too. But there is, in my opinion, no continental school, no continental movement, not even a continental ethos. The continental aggregate of circles does not find its center in a shared commitment. When viewed as a movement in this sense, it must appear especially decadent. If it were the same species of community as that exemplified by analytical thought, it would be a

disgrace to its kind. But it is a community of another type. I call it an interest community, or question community, as opposed to analytical philosophy's attitude community, commitment community, or ethos community. Continental philosophy possesses no common ethos, and does not by design. According to Derrida, only questions are capable of founding the community of philosophers [*Writing and Difference*, Chicago; 1978, University Press, pp. 79-80]. At least continental thought possesses no common ethos concerning scientific norms--not since the dissolution of phenomenology--the would-be metascience of this would-be school. What holds it together in a loose but surprisingly powerful intellectual bond is a shared agenda--a "list," that is, of topics to be queried. These topics have in common the theme of crisis in the modern world--whether social-political-economic crisis (Neo-Marxism), psychological crisis (Psycho-analysis), the spiritual crisis of European culture (Life Philosophy), or of its members as individuals (Existence Philosophy), or of its sciences (Phenomenology). As a topos community which *qua* community lacks a binding ethos, continental philosophy expresses its sense of identity and exclusivity, not in contempt, but by displaying a lack of interest--perhaps an even more effective gesture of autonomy than mockery. This is not a disinterestedness; continental thought is very "interested" in the strategic sense of the word. It employs a very interested, even tendentious, lack of interest. I have discussed this issue with a friend who considers himself a continental, but who has considerable training in analytical philosophy. I know he has pronounced his most damning judgement against analytical philosophy when he says, as he often has at the end of our discussions, "it just bores the hell out of me." This is *ennui exposé*, boredom laid bare, revealing the odium beneath (*ennui* from the Latin *in odio*).

Our distinction between the continental camp as a topos community and the analytical camp as an ethos community not only explains the immense difference between them, but it also explains their compatibility.

The continental camp in the U.S. has recently associated itself with a movement of philosophical pluralism as a means of countering the disproportionate academic power of the analytical camp in relation to its actual numbers in professional philosophy. This academic power, closely associated with the big eastern (U.S.A.) universities in the Ivy League, is viewed by some continentals as an establishment ideology, and has provoked some to conclude, incorrectly, that analytical thought is inherently conservative. By contrast, the pluralistic trend among continentals indicates that they are open in principle to dialogue with any ethos including the analytical ethos, although they oppose its oppression of other groups. This may explain in part why traffic between the camps has so far moved mostly in one direction. Nevertheless, the analytical camp is open in principle to any of the topics discussed by continentals. Accordingly, there is a trend in analytical departments to offer courses in philosophy that wander far afield from logic, language, and the philosophy of science. Many of these topics concern practical life [traditionally a hallmark of continental philosophy, according to Radnitzky (*Ibid.*, p. xx)] such as the philosophy of sex, death, work, evil, pacifism, technology--the topics which are most attractive to the typical undergraduate student of philosophy.

But what may end the hostilities between these camps more than anything else is joint membership by individual philosophers, just as inter-

marriage makes racial segregation more difficult. Thus, there is a current demand for scholars with a background in both continental and analytical philosophy. This combination usually takes the shape of an analytical looking into the foreign world of a continental theme or figure in search of grist for the mill (like the analytical working at the Hegel-Archiv), or of an open-minded continental who has gotten interested in the philosophy of science or the philosophy of language. A true synthesis is probably impossible anyway because there is no continental standpoint. But where there is a felt need for a synthesis, where there is a false dichotomy that is relatively easy to overcome, and where there is profit to be made in the attempt, such a synthesis will be the wave of the future.

There are Christians to whom analytical philosophy will always remain foreign because of its belief in the, at least relative, autonomy of theorizing. Repelled by this ethos, some will drift into the continental camp to entertain relevant issues. Other Christians gravitate toward the analytical camp, especially in the U.S., because it is congenial with the assumptions of classical Christian apologetics. Both of these trends are dangerous because they undermine a biblical ethos in philosophy, robbing us of theoretical *anakainosis*. We cannot turn our back on opportunities for Christian philosophical school formation (nor upon the schools that by the grace of God exist already) because, like Christians of the first trend, we are so anti-scholastic and open-minded that we sacrifice our principle of coherence and go to work on various unrelated points of interest; or, like the Christians of the second trend, we are so enamored with big time academic power that we disdain the necessarily small scale attempts by necessarily *outré* organizations to form a biblical alternative.

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