

# A Plea for Agonism between Analytic and Continental Philosophy\*

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Since the rise of analytic philosophy, a virtual Berlin wall seems to be inserted with respect to continental philosophy. If we take into account the difference between both traditions concerning the respective subject-matters, the pivotal goals, the modes of inquiry and scholarship, the semantic idioms, the methodological approaches, the ongoing discussions, the conferences and publications etc., it is hardly an overstatement to say that both traditions evolve insulated and have a conflicting relation. From a meta-philosophical stance, the common and *prima facie* reply to this split is the encouragement of merging inclinations. I argue for another strategy. Based on a discussion of the intrinsic differences and their importance, I'm inclined to conclude that unification coincides with a loss of authenticity, blurring the critical potential of both traditions. Hence, we are better off endorsing agonistic pluralism between analytic philosophy and contemporary continental philosophy. The plurality of points of view renders several opportunities for productive critiques and fruitful cross-overs between both traditions. Alas, the susceptibility for these innovations is vastly counteracted due to a widespread attitude of antipathy, ignorance and occasional vulgarisation.

*Keywords:* Agonism, Continental Philosophy, Analytic Philosophy

## Introduction

Since the rise of analytic philosophy, a virtual Berlin wall seems to be inserted with respect to continental philosophy. From a meta-philosophical stance, the common and *prima facie* reply to this split is the encouragement of merging inclinations: two should become one<sup>1</sup>. Another option is simply to deny the split based on a typical but cheap philosophical trick: the impossibility to clearly define the divide. Yet, in this paper we argue for another strategy. Since unification coincides with a loss of authenticity, blurring the critical potential of both traditions, we are better off endorsing agonistic pluralism between analytic philosophy and contemporary continental philosophy. In order to do so, a discussion of the split is needed. This, at the same time, enables us to confute attempts of denial.

In section 1, we first discuss the distinction between the two contemporary traditions focussing on problems concerning denotation. Section 2 brings a general analysis of the negative implications of unification based on a preliminary outline of the difference between the both traditions. In section 3, we elaborate on our argument against unification by taking a closer look at some characteristics of both traditions and their antagonistic nature. We show that the difference in intellectual interest and pivotal goals of research impedes unification, reducing it to an ideological misfit. Finally, we conclude that an agonistic pluralism needs to be considered as an alternative and productive

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<sup>1</sup>Today, more and more philosophers of both traditions seem to sympathise with this idea. It is, for instance, the underlying view in many of the papers in the reader: Leiter (Ed.) (2004), *The Future of Philosophy*. The good news about the rise of what I call unificationism is that both traditions are becoming more willing to take each other seriously.

strategy. As far as local cross-overs are concerned, the plurality of points of view renders several opportunities for fruitful encounters between both traditions. Alas, the susceptibility for these innovations is vastly counteracted due to a widespread mutual attitude of antipathy, ignorance and occasional vulgarisation.

Note that it is not the aim of this paper to argue in favour of one of the above mentioned traditions. Although neutrality in this matter clearly is a difficult and even a suspicious claim, we try to avoid a normative discussion as much as possible in favour of a meta-philosophical stance that allows us to understand the relation between both traditions.

Note also that this meta-philosophical enterprise implies such a general scope that simplifications and even platitudes are inevitable. Hence, no matter how accurate, the distinction between two traditions remains a facile one. Even a general distinction in terms of two "traditions" in contemporary philosophy is open to discussion. For instance, those contemporary continental philosophers that are adherents of the "multiple" and "difference" will no doubt make strong and justified reservations when their work is considered to be part of one overall tradition. In order to overcome criticism due to the disputable general scope, I suggest conceiving our talk about the two traditions as a talk about two commonplaces: both the "analytic philosopher" and the "continental philosopher" are clichéd platonic ideas that help us to fix our mind. In this way, we also want to prevent debates about the fact that some philosophers do or do not belong to either of both traditions.

## Two Traditions: Denoting the Janus of Contemporary Philosophy

By way of a preliminary indication of both traditions, we can mention the following. Contemporary continental philosophy is

founded in the work German philosophers, from Kant till Heidegger, and is mainly associated with French philosophy, psychoanalysis, existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism and its deconstructivism. Recent representatives are e.g., Gilles Deleuze, Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou. Analytic philosophy, on the other hand, emerged from logical positivism and is largely dominated by logic, philosophy of science and philosophy of language. It readdresses some metaphysical questions in an Anglo-Saxon manner, mainly relying on conceptual analysis and common-sense argumentation. It particularly focuses on specific topics like e.g. colours, properties, Universals, mind/body, perception, consciousness and causation.

If we take into account the difference between both traditions concerning the respective subject-matters, the modes of inquiry and scholarship, the semantic idioms, the methodological approaches, the ongoing discussions, the conferences and publications etc., it is hardly an overstatement to say that both traditions evolve insulated and have a conflicting relation.

The fact that we have two distinguishable areas of contemporary philosophy is well-known and undisputed. Problems arise, however, when we try to pin down this distinction. In what follows, we mention some problems concerning designation in terms of “continental” and “analytical” and give reasons why such a denoting is appropriate after all.

Especially in Europe there is a tendency to gather all sorts of Anglo-Saxon philosophical research including logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, etc. in terms of “analytic” philosophy. This is less the case in the US; in the naming of departments for instance, the opposition between “philosophy” on the one hand, and “history of philosophy” is usually employed. This is quite ironic since this implies, strictly speaking, that only analytic philosophy is real philosophy because the department “philosophy” represents but analytic philosophy. Hence, continental philosophical research is already considered to be a part of history. Similarly, the prominent American Philosophical Association, APA, discusses, at least for a very long period, but analytic philosophy.

Systematically using the adjective “analytic” can avoid such sly manipulations. Moreover, this adjective properly indicates an overall feature of what is gathered under this designation, being analysis i.e. conceptual analysis. Defined in its broadest sense, conceptual analysis is the method of disclosing or working back to what is more fundamental by means of which something can be explained (which is often then exhibited in a corresponding process of synthesis)<sup>2</sup>.

Speaking in terms of a “continental” tradition, on the other hand, is less obvious for several reasons. Firstly, as already mentioned above, continental philosophy concerns a heterogeneous set of scholarship and views. For instance, while consulting dictionaries of philosophy, one gets the strong impression that “continental” stands for all the rest<sup>3</sup>, that is to say, all explicitly non-analytically oriented philosophy. Secondly, contemporary continental philosophers contest the idea that there is something like a unified continental tradition. The continental tradition rather gathers movements that often expli-

cally emphasize their mutual opposition, e.g. phenomenology versus constructivism. The declaration of such antitheses, which no doubt has an important canvassing effect, can lead to the excessive effect of denying any kinship between movements in the continental tradition. Thirdly, “continental” originally is a geographic reference (i.e. a toponym) that is outmoded. For instance, Slavoj Žižek and Richard Rorty are clearly part of the continental squad. Both write in English, the first lives in Argentina and the latter in the US. Pioneers of analytic philosophy, on the other hand, often are originally from the continent, e.g. Germany before the Second World War. Moreover, for some decades continental philosophy is quite popular in the US and nowadays analytic philosophy is mushrooming all over Europe.

Apart from these caveats about the label, “continental” is semantically striking for the very reason that contemporary continental research is in the first place a continuation of traditional continental philosophy. That is to say, contemporary continental views focus on the classical philosophical questions. They are also to be understood as repercussions on transcendental philosophy or Hegelian worldviews and they can only be comprehended in accordance with the covering discussion on the possibility the “subject”, “truth” and “objectivity”. Analytic philosophy, on the other hand, started from a radical rift and rejection of continental philosophy. The very declination operated as a reviving factor of a new tradition with the ambition to renew and even restart history of philosophy. The alliance between traditional and contemporary continental philosophy, the indispensability of the latter for the former, together with the fact that analytic philosophy forms its identity in a negative relation with the continental tradition, are sufficient reasons to use the adjective “continental” in opposition to “analytic”<sup>4</sup>.

### Why Unificationists Are Barking up the Wrong Tree

The unificationist’s dream remains also persistent in contemporary scientific thought. Besides the religious reminiscences (that are probably typically Western) we have to acknowledge that the idea of a theory of everything has an appealing feature: the possibility of one big coherent and compatible body of knowledge. However, regardless the virtue of such a goal, which generally is the underlying final aspiration of philosophical or scientific research, it often distracts us from the fact that there is a difference between the end and the means of inquiry. Aiming for unification does often have a thwarting effect on the progress of inquiry since it elicits rash genera-

<sup>2</sup>According to Jackson (1998: 31-3), the role of conceptual analysis is to make explicit our ‘folk theory’ about a given matter, elucidating our concepts by considering how individuals classify possibilities. For an interesting discussion on the conceptions of analysis in analytic philosophy, see Beaney (2003).

<sup>3</sup>A similar blurred concept seems to be a ‘continental’ breakfast.

<sup>4</sup>Critchley & Schroeder (1998: p. 4): *Although there is no consensus on the precise origin of the concept of Continental philosophy as a professional self-description, it would seem that it does not arise as a description of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in philosophy before the 1970s. [...] the term “Continental philosophy” replaced the earlier formulations, “Phenomenology” or “Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy.” [...] The reason why “Phenomenology” is replaced with “Continental Philosophy” is not absolutely clear, but it would seem that it was introduced to take account of the various so-called poststructuralist Francophone movements of thought that were increasingly distant from and often hostile towards phenomenology: to a lesser extent Lacan, Derrida, and Lyotard, and to a greater extent Deleuze and Foucault.*

lisations and melting pots. In short, unification can restrain the creative power of disagreement and the (occasional) critical disclosure while facing odds.

In order to support this claim against unification, we will argue that the difference between both traditions is definitely not restricted to formal aspects or uses of language. Starting from a historical approach, we will elaborate on two general metaphysical mechanisms. These mechanisms learn us how to comprehend the difference between both traditions.

Another approach than denotation to investigate the distinction between the two traditions is the historical one. There is a bulk of literature that introduces (and at the same time wants to endorse<sup>5</sup>) analytic philosophy by way of describing its origination. Here we often find a focus on historical delineation that is meant to serve as an etiological explanation. Usually, one takes Brentano's linguistic analyses of intentionality as a starting point, due to its significant impulse for the development of philosophy of language. Others will refer to Carnap's influential anti-metaphysical treatises. According to Carnap, ontological talk results from an inaccurate use of statements in the material (or real) mode rather than the formal (or linguistic) mode. Still others emphasize Russell's well-known defences of logicism and his radical anti-historicism. These influences obviously contributed to the success of analytic philosophy. However, it is nonsensical to dispute their impact or predominance since such debates rest on the false belief that there only is one real cause that brought analytic philosophy into being. History of philosophy is full of evolutions that are significant for the origination of analytic philosophy. Even if we are sympathetic to the idea of a single innovating event, why then not travel back further into history and consider, for instance, the impact of the transcendental turn? Is it an anachronism to call Kant the first analytic philosopher? And what about Aristotle?... And Socrates?

For a proper understanding of the rise of analytic philosophy it is more beneficial to gather different instructive traces rather than trying to pin down one crucial historical shift. Another important trace which is often left out of scope is the role of the emancipation of the (natural) sciences. The success of the sciences which led to its liberation from philosophy, clearly provoked opposite reorientations within philosophy. Continental philosophy took the challenge to provide in a full and alternative project (albeit pseudo-scientific). Analytic philosophy tries to find a valuable position on the right side of the sciences (with the risk of turning into pseudo-philosophy).

### The Pendulum

In order to understand the split in contemporary philosophy, we can also take a step further than just scouting history. From a hermeneutical point of view, we can mention at least two interesting jointed mechanisms that enable us to map the two traditions.

The first mechanism is what we can call *the pendulum between dogmatism and scepticism that sways the history of philosophy*. It is the quest for truth, so to speak, together with the dissident attitude of each new generation that resulted in a succession of reactive lines of thoughts generating a rotating flux of dogma and scepticism. When we now turn to the boom of Modern philosophy, being a summit of dogmatism, we can notice

two complex reactions instead of one single reaction of plain scepticism. Nevertheless both traditions tend to be subject to occasional dogmatic scepticism.

The first reaction: within the continental tradition, scepticism occurs under the form of deconstruction and post-structuralism. This scepticism is vital for contemporary continental philosophy, it is a reactive generating force. This so-called "postmodernism" encompasses a new phase of Enlightenment which aims at the unmasking of the illusionary confidence of modernity (with respect to knowledge, ethics and society) and its false consciousness. In its vulgar version, alas endorsed by many analytic philosophers, postmodernism is a barbarious relativism that sometimes also is held responsible for the lack of Enlightenment or that fact that it stays away.

The second reaction: the analytical tradition, on the other hand, is characterized by a rift rather than an extension. It initiated with a radical scepticism towards Modern philosophy as a whole. At first, metaphysics was dispensed with entirely in favour of methodological and linguistic inquiries. Logical positivism is endorsed, so to speak, in order to prevent a dreaded slippery slope into hazy and woolly contemplations. Later on, when it became clear that the neopositivist's empiricism is overly severe, analytic metaphysics emerged under the form of naturalism and pragmatism, especially stimulated by the criticisms of Goodman, Quine and Putnam. Due to the evolution of hedged central discussions on topics like (mental)causation, laws of nature and intentionality, these ontological positions came under strong attack. As a result, recent analytic metaphysics is an interesting but fragmented plurality of conflicting and partial views.

In sum, analytic philosophy starts with a rejection of Modern philosophy which is almost instantly replaced with a new dogmatism that disintegrated eventually. With some delay, distrust disappeared and metaphysical discussions resumed in a new and optimistic fashion. However, like contemporary continental philosophers, analytic philosophers finally might derive similar metaphysical scepticism as a result, this scepticism is not viewed as a methodological presumption. On the contrary, it is the recognition of the lack of a proper methodology of metaphysics that springs scepticism. Nonetheless, the final aim for analytic philosophy remains to eliminate or resolve the traditional questions of philosophy.

### Taking Turns

Our second mechanism concerns *escaping a metaphysical deadlock by means of a jump to a new intellectual order*. That is to say, in order to prevent stagnation, often a "turn" is made in the position towards the being of the ground of truth. Bluntly put, this "ground" is to be understood as the rock of wisdom, the foundation that is supposed to generate a truly philosophical worldview. Taking a "turn" towards the being of the ground, subsequently, does not simply mean the replacement of one particular, assumed ground for another, but a shift in opinion on the possibility and general characteristics of such a ground.

As for contemporary continental philosophy, it often takes the impossibility of a single, identifying ground as a starting point. However, this doesn't necessarily lead to the melancholic conclusion that philosophy is a vain endeavour. As for Deleuze, for instance, in his *What is philosophy?*, the philosophical challenge becomes to deterritorialize, that is, to break loose from

<sup>5</sup>See for instance Dummett (1994) or Gloch (Ed.) (1997).

any fixed ground. Philosophy has to create and reinvent concepts, embracing the Multiple instead of the One, Becoming instead of Being, Difference rather than Identity. Deleuze thus takes an affirmative and vitalist stance in which the impossibility or the absence of a single ground is turned into a positive metaphysical condition: free your mind! Apart from Deleuze's plea for nomadism, also other representatives of contemporary continental philosophy clearly took this "turn to difference", albeit in an affirmative or a negative manner.

The analytical tradition, on the other hand, took a "turn to methodology". Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* probably is the most representative example in this respect. For Wittgenstein, as for many other analytic philosophers, philosophy basically consists in clarifying how language can be used. The hope is that when language is used clearly, we have a proper method that enables us to dissolve philosophical problems. The obverse of this view is that the limits of formal language are to be understood as the limits of our world.

Therefore, Wittgenstein argues for the installation of a prohibition on philosophical inquiry due to the lack of proper method. Without such a method, no (reliable) argumentation, hence no certain knowledge. Note that, following Wittgenstein, analytic philosophy does not assume the impossibility of a single ground but starts from the perception that adequate formal instruments to form or find a such a ground are (still) absent. That is why a limit is imposed. Transgressing it leads to a loss of rationality. As analytic philosophy progresses, boundaries might be moved, shedding light of reason on new topics<sup>6</sup>.

Methodology takes such a central stage, however, that it often occupies the place of the ground, eclipsing it, becoming an methodism. When argumentation itself becomes an ultimate goal, there obviously is the risk of neglecting some important subject-matters or theoretical perspectives. Consequently, there is the risk of the enforcement of a zero-tolerance towards unsupported or underdeveloped ideas regardless how innovative or useful they are or can be.

The difference in turn between the two traditions also generates a very different attitude towards truth. Contemporary continental philosophy reflects on the consequences of the absence of a single ground and guards for lapses due to our persisting desire for objectivity and a firm ground. Truth (with capital "T") is to be approached in a therapeutic manner. Even the assumption that all philosophers face (canonical) universal philosophical problems, as it is the case in the discussions in analytic philosophy, is considered to be suspicious. Unlike analytic philosophers, conflicting information is not necessarily a contradiction that we need to overcome or dispense with. Contemporary continental philosophers endorse a completely different attitude towards inconsistencies. An inconsistency can possibly be transformed into a paradox that opens up new creative perspectives and that somehow enables us to speak the impossible.

### Mapping both Traditions While Stressing Differences

In this section, we elaborate on our metaphysic remarks.

<sup>6</sup>For this reason, Žižek (1991: p. 173) states that analytical philosophy does not "take itself serious enough" since it still believes in a "mysterious X" that always breaks away, without realising, according to Žižek that it already found what there is to be found and what it is looking for its own paradoxes.

While discussing the relation of both traditions with respect to history and to the sciences, we can uncover several differences between both traditions. This brings us to the importance of intellectual agonism. Of course, agonism is not a universal merit. But in the case of contemporary philosophy, where attempts to unification runs the risk of losing the "soul" of one or both traditions, we can emphasize the importance of agonism. Less unification can be more.

### (No) Vacation from History?

As we have said before, for a proper understanding of contemporary continental philosophy we should take into account its relation with the history of philosophy. In our view, it is not just an extension of, and a reflection on history. Especially the (ontological) differences throughout history get primary attention. Historicism with respect to truth and the human way of being is, in a way, the sceptical core of contemporary continental philosophy. Campbell (2001) brings an appealing elaboration on this issue. He defends the idea of a covert metaphysical difference that propels the clash between analytic and continental philosophy. According to Campbell (2001: p. 343), Analytic philosophers are latter-day Platonists, for whom the way out of confusions and error is to insist that the content of genuine knowledge both can and must be cast in sentences of proper logico-linguistic form. For continental philosophers, on the other hand, precisely what has bedevilled Western philosophy is its being an extended series of footnotes to Plato. Rather, philosophy must turn to history in order to see how its conceptual necessities have themselves arisen under particular historical and cultural conditions.

In the case of analytical philosophy, on the other hand, the absence of references to history of philosophy is striking. For instance, the reader of Sorell & Rogers (Eds.) (2005) revolves around the following 'controversial' question: can history of philosophy be relevant for analytic philosophy, given its anti-historical and unhistorical nature? The fact that such readers are published by Oxford University Press confirms the historical ignorance of analytic philosophy. Of course, there are historical links. For instance, consider so-called Platonism in the philosophy of mathematics, or the so-called Cartesian view in the philosophy of mind. But even when such references occur, they only serve as tags for a (controversial) opinion and in such cases there certainly is no genuine interest in an exegesis or elaboration of the philosophy of Plato or Descartes. Analytic philosophy, so it seems, wants to write its own history.

The different relation of both traditions toward history of philosophy does reveal a different underlying attitude<sup>7</sup>. In general terms, we can state that contemporary continental philosophy wants to question and critically analyse any given thought. Unlike analytic philosophy, there is a tendency to continuously readdress the classical philosophical questions, not with the intention to find a final answer, but to generate new insights and to learn about the cultural, social and historical relativity of our knowledge. This also explains the vast interest in history of

<sup>7</sup>For an interesting interpretation of both traditions towards truth, see Reynolds (2006). He tries to encompass the difference between both traditions starting from the difference in structure of sadistic and masochistic symptomatology. Reynolds argues that the analytical tradition evinces the more sadistic tendencies and the continental tradition the more masochistic tendencies, based on their relation to the law in terms of truth.

philosophy. Following this line of thought, it is no exaggeration to state that, according to contemporary continental philosophy, the task of philosophy is to unfold opinions, examine presuppositions as well as possible consequences. To search, not for truth whatsoever, but for interesting and critical views even if they are disputable.

According to Deleuze (1990: p. 196), for instance, doing philosophy is creating and reinventing concepts. Furthermore, creating is not just communicating opinions. It requires a resistance to comply with common sense, resisting to pretend and to be confident. This attitude, in comparison with analytic philosophy, results in the opposition between interpretation rather than discussion, displacement rather than argumentation, subversion rather than legitimization and creation rather than definition. This attitude alas also entails an excess with respect to the continental strand: the cult of the oeuvre of canonical figures, the uncritical preoccupation and exaltation of idolized intellectuals, the overexpose of a conceptual language, the seduction of controversial but obscure aspirations, the overly heralding the impossibility of knowledge together with the importance of difference as difference, etc.

### **Pseudoscience Vs. Pseudophilosophy?**

In 2.2, we discussed that analytic philosophy took a turn to methodology. While doing so, natural science is a primary subject-matter and at the same time it fulfils an exquisite exemplary role. Contemporary continental philosophy, on the other hand, rather has focus on literature and art, due to their interest in particular and symbolic stories. There are some references to natural science, of course, but most of them go wrong when they are meant to legitimize the scientific quality of a theory. In most of these cases however, and this remark is often overlooked by analytic philosophers, such references do not serve as a legitimization but as a exemplification. In these cases, it is the metaphorical value that counts.

For similar reasons, Rorty (2004: pp. 21-23) sees analytic philosophy as a kind of conceptual handmaiden of science that “wants to get things right”, while contemporary continental philosophy aims for (cultural) critique. Although analytic philosophy seems to have a virtuous intention, Rorty is pessimistic about its future. Briefly put, his argument is this: “getting things right” presupposes something that is constant and stable. However, if concepts change with changes in culture, there is no getting things right in conceptual analysis. Hence, analytic philosophical discussions are arcane, contingent and scholastic practices.

Rorty’s scepticism is disputable because it relies on a rather logical positivist interpretation of analytical philosophy. It also shows that the contempt that many analytic philosophers bear to contemporary continental philosophy easily can be returned. The primacy of accuracy of analytic philosophy no doubt is significant. Contemporary analytic philosophy freed itself from the narrow positivist stance. Nevertheless, there is a headstrong optimism with respect to method and there are reasons to believe that this optimism is overrated. Methodological chaos, or opportunism even, is not an exception in the discussions of analytic philosophy. A diversity of methodological tools is customary concerning criteria of legitimacy (e.g. thriftiness, simplicity, robustness, compatibility with sciences, completeness, plausibility) as well as concerning instruments for ar-

gumentation (e.g. conceptual analysis, generalisations based on paradigmatic examples, intuitive constructs, scientific findings, thought experiments). This diversity is not *in se* a problem. Rather, the problem is that there is no consensus on which methods are (contextually) appropriate. Metaphysicians often criticize their opponents on methodological grounds. But while doing so, they often only discuss those criteria which are in their own advantage, using different standards depending on the topic at hand.

Compared with contemporary continental philosophy, analytic philosophy has a quite opposite philosophical attitude. In general terms, we can state that analytic philosophy preferably wants find answers to philosophical problems rather than investigate the same questions over and over. It has a strong believe in common sense and aims for standard discussions that are meant to be accessible and conveniently arranged. Also, while analytic philosophers believe that methodologically they can work unproblematically with abstract ideas and their relationships, continental philosophers share the belief that thought cannot be abstracted away from historical, social, psychological and ontological preconditions. Philosophy must struggle with this impossibility.

In its turn, this underlying attitude can entail excesses. For instance, due to the preoccupation with their own familiar methods, analytic philosophers sometimes share the false belief that (contemporary) continental philosophers do not bother for any argumentation and that they do not apply any method. In this way, a large tradition of philosophical engineering is neglected, e.g. Descartes sceptical method, Kants transcendental method Hegels dialectic method, Nietzsche’s genealogical method, Foucaults archaeological method, Derrida’s deconstructivist method, etc. Also the merits of methodological instruments like, metaphors, aphorisms, and anecdotic references are completely ignored.

Secondly, the emphasis on method can bring about sly distortions. For instance, there often is tendency to insert some kind of pidgin-logic in order to formalize the discussed theses. Such insertions can evoke the illusion of simplicity and clarity while masking the complexity of the respective subject-matter. As an example, take the increasing presence of mathematical models in the theory of causation which diverts the discussion from a philosophical/conceptual one to a pseudo-scientific/technical one. In other cases, doing philosophy sometimes is reduced to the instrumental task of testing theories to their coherence and framing new ones for testing. As regards content, significance gets ignored in favour of a simplistic right/wrong mentality. Finally, based on this mentality, philosophical inquiry that does not fit the same standards is hastily rejected and unfairly excluded. In sum, the distress to reassure by means of a self-imposed clarity can have narrowing and offensive effects.

### **Conclusion: Some Truths Only Come with a Split Tongue**

Based on our previous findings, it seems that pluralism is here to stay. Depending on our conception of pluralism however, this conclusion can be a constructive one. In order to elucidate this claim, we refer to an ongoing opposition in political philosophy between agonistic pluralists on the one hand and so-called consociational and deliberative democrats on the

other. Agonism implies providing the opportunity to express disagreements. It does not assume that conflicts are harmful by definition and that every conflict can be eliminated given sufficient time for deliberation and rational agreement. In other words, it does assume that conflicts can have a non-rational or emotional component which should not be neglected and that they can have a productive contribution in the long run. Hence, agonism is opposed to aspects of consociational theories because the latter wants to mute conflict through elite consensus and it is also opposed to deliberative theories because the latter relies on an overly rationalist picture of the aspirations of democracy.

Both respective aspects are important with respect to a radical pluralism in contemporary philosophy between the two traditions. Like consociational democrats, unificationists unilaterally aim for consensus and for a compatibility all the way down. While doing so, they neglect the negative effects of such expectancies on the production of inquiry as well as the accuracy and the revealing power of philosophical views. Like deliberative democrats, on the other hand, unificationists easily tend to forget that competing views or theories often are accompanied with psychological tensions or (hidden) political agitations that represent important relational elements. Masking them, pretending that they are negligible, often is in itself a severe form of abuse of power or authority.

For these reasons, an agonistic pluralism is no doubt a productive strategy within contemporary philosophy. Note that agonism is not simply the celebration of antagonism. Agonism is to be situated in between mutual reciprocity and hostile controversy. The Greek “agon” refers to an athletic contest oriented not merely toward victory or defeat, but emphasizing that struggle cannot exist without the opponent. Victory through forfeit or default, or over an unworthy opponent, comes up short compared to a defeat at the hands of a worthy opponent. Hence an agonist discourse is not just a conflict, it acquires respect and concern.

In our view, desirable agonist interactions come in two sorts. Firstly, there are constructive critiques that shed a different light on commonly accepted lines of reasoning, their presuppositions and their deficits. By way of example we can refer to the bulk of critiques, inspired by a Heideggerian point of view, on (early) discussions in cognitive science and philosophy, with respect to artificial intelligence. These critiques attacked the naïve beliefs concerning computational mental processes and rational awareness. A similar example: the criticisms on philosophy of mind or the theory of action with respect to the na-

ïve beliefs concerning the notion of a subject, an actor, and (rational) intentionality.

Secondly, we have the transferences of ideas and analyses between theoretical discussions in order to extend the ongoing debate. The most representative example in this respect is the rise of pragmatism in analytic metaphysics, which is influenced by the ongoing debates in continental philosophy some decades ago. For some smaller-scale and more actual examples, see the Prado (2003). The central theme of *A House Divided*, is to examine the cross-influences between pivotal thinkers of both traditions. In spite of Babel’s confusion, this reader contains several interesting discussions of connections between e.g. Carnap and Nietzsche, Quine and Heidegger, Searle and Foucault.

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