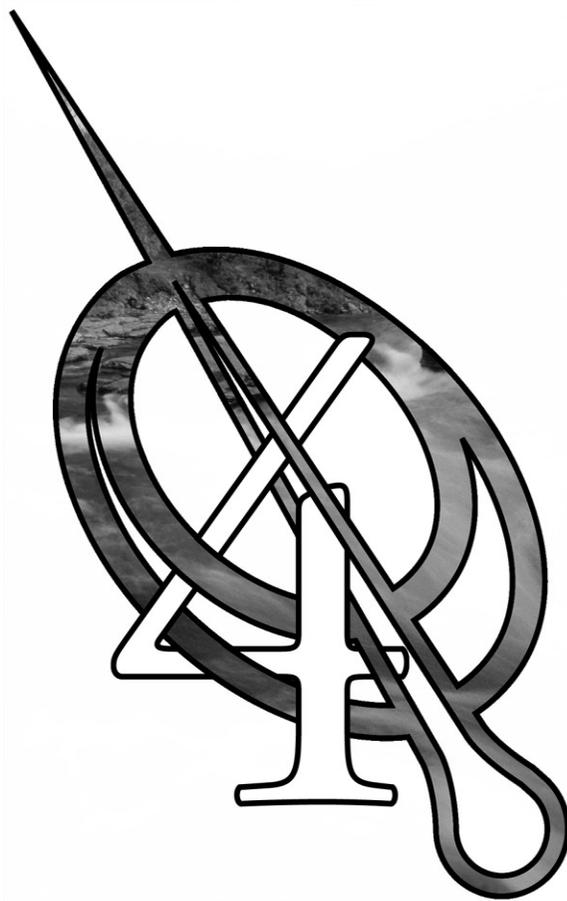


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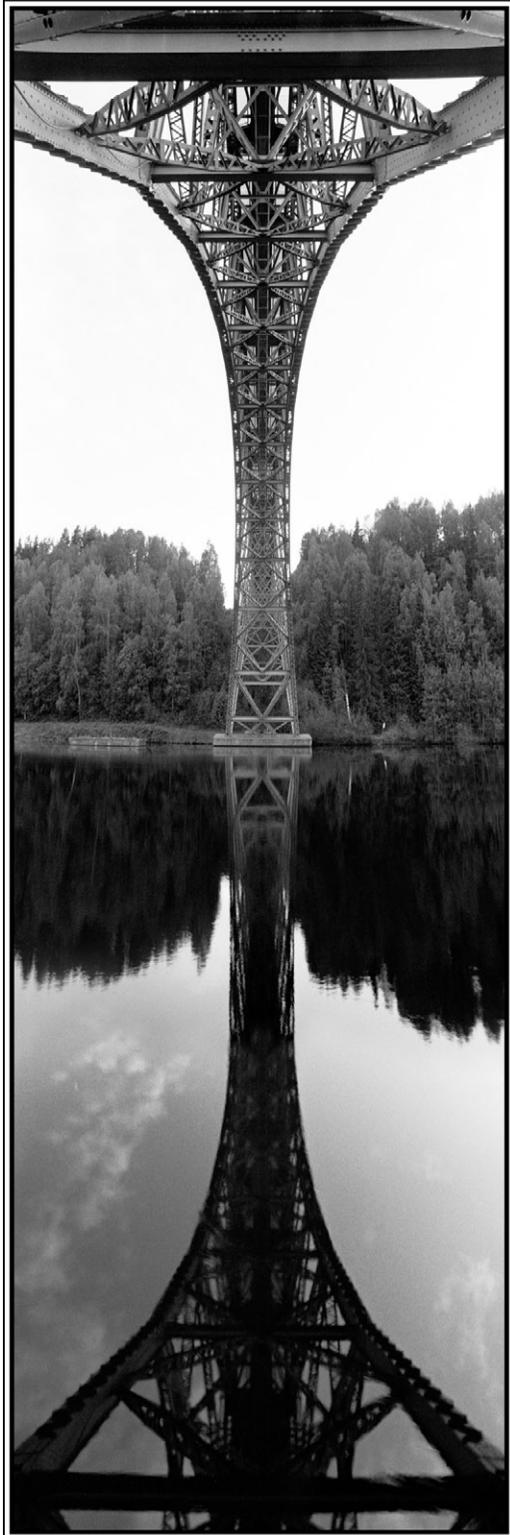


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# A Letter From the Editor:

## ANALYTIC AND CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Joshua Michael Hill

How can one learn philosophy? One either derives philosophical cognitions from the first sources of their production, i.e., from the principles of reason; or one learns them from those who have philosophized. The easiest way is the latter. But that is not properly philosophy.

Immanuel Kant,  
*Lectures on Metaphysics*, Ak 28:534.

The Meteorite staff's late-night meetings were typically succeeded (and sometimes interrupted) by philosophically broad and tangential conversations. We liberally mixed philosophical theories, arguments and ideas with social and political issues, literature, mathematics, film, physics and typography—rarely confusing imagination and irrationality—while we swallowed Great Lakes pressed through the grounds of Arabica coffee beans. We discussed hundreds of essays from students around the world, selecting the most enlightening and understandable for publication. All of this was done with intentional emphasis placed upon an absence of professional guidance. This made it easier to discuss what some of us see as a vaguely totalitarian, conspicuously anti-democratic, and dangerously nationalist atmosphere floating around our terror-stricken, war-willing nation, and more importantly, it forced us to select essays that similar-minded individuals might enjoy.

Looking back, a frequent topic of our academically divergent conversations stands out in my mind as directly relevant to the form of this journal: the distinction between analytic and Continental philosophy. A short discussion concerning this distinction therefore seems appropriate.

For anyone lacking experience with philosophy as it currently exists within the ivory towers of academia, the following quote from the Philosophical Gourmet—an online report that qualitatively ranks philosophy departments in the English-speaking world (as a “measure of faculty quality and reputation”<sup>1</sup>)—serves wonderfully to illustrate the distinction between analytic and Continental philosophy in (appropriately) professional terms:

Although it appears to be a widespread view in the humanities that “analytic” philosophy is “dead” or “dying,” the professional situation of analytic philosophy simply does not bear this out. *All* the Ivy League universities, *all* the leading state research universities, *all* the University of California campuses, most of the top liberal arts colleges, most of the flagship campuses of the second-tier state research universities boast philosophy departments that *overwhelmingly* self-identify as “analytic”: it is hard to imagine a “movement” that is more academically and professionally entrenched than analytic philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, it isn’t too difficult to guess the type of philosophy being taught in the philosophy departments of most of the outrageously expensive (oops, I mean prestigious) American institutions of higher education—public or private (as if this distinction is relevant in modern academia). The University of Michigan in Ann Arbor currently ranks fourth on the Philosophical Gourmet’s list (behind a less-than-exciting three-way tie for first). All of the departments at the top of the list *overwhelmingly* self-identify with analytic philosophy. Interestingly enough, the list is *overwhelmingly* maintained for and by analytic philosophers. Any

similarities between the Philosophical Gourmet and an *overwhelmingly* pretentious simulation of fantasy baseball are disregarded because valuable information, supposedly, is bestowed upon prospective graduate students. Such excuses, however, don't justify ranking systems of pedantic academic competition; there is no necessary correlation between name recognition and the ability to teach, and besides, diversity in philosophical thought is suffering in many institutions that hire for the sake of "academic" or "philosophical" professionalism and competition.

In contrast to the professional philosophers in prestigious, *overwhelmingly* analytic departments, academics in other departments and other disciplines that traditionally take humanity as an object of knowledge (e.g., sociology, English, comparative



literature, linguistics, anthropology, art history, women's studies, history, etcetera) have in general found analytic philosophy to lack the capacity for enlightenment or insight into the various topics of their studies. These other disciplines, most specifically (although by no means exclusively) the humanities other than philosophy, typically and frequently employ the works of non-analytic philosophers to theoretically augment an impressive variety of academic and intellectual subjects. The student of philosophy, therefore, usually has the opportunity to study non-analytic phi-

losophy in other disciplines. On the one hand this situation has a very positive consequence: students encountering philosophy in other disciplines (or at academic institutions where intellectual non-conformism is tolerated or expected) typically aren't expected to bask in the "scientific" glory of anti-interdisciplinary, formalized, conceptually hypostatized and *overwhelmingly* hypothetical human situations and relations that bear silent affinities to what can properly be called "nihilism" on individual, social and political levels. On the other hand, however, particular philosophical movements that are essential to modern intellectual thought—e.g., existentialism, phenomenology, critical theory (in a broad sense), or even Lacanian psychoanalysis—remain unnecessary for most philosophy degrees, frequently criticized without justification (e.g., as "literature," as "not containing any arguments," etcetera), and apparently even



unreasonably lumped together in the thoughts of many students (and professionals alike) as a singular and failed whole. Additionally, even the “best” departments of philosophy (that is, the *overwhelmingly* analytic departments) are given an excuse to not even offer so much as a minor that involves 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western philosophy.

Although neither tradition comes anywhere close to unanimous agreement upon philosophical issues (which alone makes each category questionable), analytic philosophers can be appropriately characterized as adopting a highly technical (“rigorous”), formalized (“logical”), and fairly homogenous style of philosophical investigation and exposition that unites them above and beyond their disparate views (quite literally through a mountainous network of footnotes). If this homogeneity of style is considered in combination with the hegemony of analytic philosophy in prestige-obsessed departments, the vocational (and therefore questionable) implication that it is better to have “training” in (the style of) analytic philosophy easily follows. This implication is questionable because it means that students of philosophy are more likely to succeed (as students and as professionals) if they adopt a particular style of doing philosophy, even though this style has no necessary relation to philosophical views beyond a convenient yet pre-critical limitation of topics and methods. *In contrast to the style of analytic philosophy*, “Continental” philosophers seem theoretically nomadic and literarily flamboyant (even though *neither* tradition comes anywhere close to unanimous agreement upon philosophical issues); the only thing homogenous about the style of investigation or exposition of Continental philosophers is that it is non-analytic. The impressive variety of incongruous traditions within “Continental” philosophy is simply too difficult to unite in any other way in opposition to analytic philosophy. As this implies, the academic category of Continental philosophy was not created by those who bear its name.

Simon Glendinning points out an analogous situation in his introduction to *The Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy*. Revealingly, he says that “It would be ridiculous to think of anyone living in mainland Europe calling their morning meal a ‘Continental breakfast.’” Glendinning theoretically elaborates upon the analogy and argues that Continental philosophy is “the defining ‘non-part’ of analytical philosophy,” something that only “emerges as a fruitfully distinguishable philosophical category from *within* the movement that calls itself ‘analytical philosophy.’”<sup>3</sup> In other words, Continental philosophy emerges as a “non-part” (a part with the primary function of defining what it is not) insofar as it consists of a different style than analytic philosophy. There is, then, an understandable difference in style between “traditions” that is taken by some to be a mark of differentiation.

## H o w e v e r ,

*this notion of defining a philosophical tradition in terms of its style (instead of its philosophical views) is only taken seriously within analytic philosophy—the overwhelmingly professional tradition that defines itself in terms of style instead of philosophical views.*

In his introduction to the Blackwell *Companion to Continental Philosophy*, Simon Critchley proposes an explanation similar to that given by Glendinning. He says that the distinction between analytic and Continental philosophy “is essentially a professional self-description, that is, it is a way that departments of philosophy seek to organize their curricula and course offerings as well as signaling their broad intellectual allegiances.”<sup>4</sup> To say that the distinction is essentially a professional self-description, by the way, still leaves room for

philosophical differences between traditions, even though these differences don't amount to unanimous agreement upon either side. The important point, once again, is that the meaning and significance of the distinction is based upon something other than philosophical views, namely, a philosophically unjustifiable professionalism that is (or at least *should* be) inadmissible in academia.

At the beginning of this letter I said that the distinction between analytic and Continental philosophy is relevant to the form of this journal. However, it should be clear by now that the distinction is only relevant to this journal insofar as a conscious decision was made by the editorial staff to ignore it for philosophical reasons when critically evaluating the philosophies of others. There are many things that degrade the quality of philosophical thought, discourse and education. Unquestioned preconceptions are at the top of the list. Recognizing this, a generation of philosophers might raise above the noise and clamor of the rest of academia by actualizing educational ideals that shouldn't be subordinated, ideals that unite philosophy with the sciences *and* the humanities (or rather, unite the sciences *and* the humanities *through philosophy*) instead of severing the ties for the sake of a very misguided façade. That won't happen until philosophy stops looking down upon the *humanities* as if the object and method of their inquiries is inherently irrational.

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<sup>1</sup> Leiter, Brian. "What the Rankings Mean." *The Philosophical Gourmet*. 2002-2004. 15 Mar. 2004. <<http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/meaningof.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> Leiter, Brian. "What the Rankings Mean." *The Philosophical Gourmet*. 2002-2004. 15 Mar. 2004. <<http://www.philosophicalgourmet.com/analytic.htm>>

<sup>3</sup> Glendinning, Simon. "What is Continental Philosophy?" *The Edinburgh Encyclopedia of Continental Philosophy*. Ed. Simon Glendinning. Chicago, Illinois: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Critchley, Simon. "Introduction: What is Continental Philosophy?" *A Companion to Continental Philosophy*. Ed. Simon Critchley. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. pp. 3-4.

Critchley's *Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) is recommended for those who desire a broad, intelligible and concise overview of Continental philosophy.

