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POST-CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY.
NOSOLOGICAL NOTES*

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Born 80 years ago, Continental Philosophy is on its last legs. Its extraordinary career has been helped along by an almost total absence of interest on the part of analytic or other exact philosophers in what the Australian philosopher David Stove calls "the nosology of philosophy"¹, the exploration of the manifold forms taken by bad philosophy. Stove points out that such an enterprise involves doing history. A nosology of Continental Philosophy is, at least in the first instance, inseparable from the history of this strand in twentieth century philosophy, a history which would make clear the relations, philosophical and historical, between it and exact philosophy. Rorty is quite right to point to the absence of such a historical perspective:

Analytic philosophy has pretty well closed itself off from contact with non-analytic philosophy and lives in its own world. The scientific approach to philosophy which Husserl shared with Carnap lives on, forming a tacit presupposition of the work of analytic philosophers. Even though analytic philosophy now describes itself as post-positivistic, the idea that philosophy "analyses" or "describes" some ahistorical formal "structures" - an idea common to Husserl, Russell, Carnap and Ryle - persists. However, there is little explicit metaphilosophical defense or development of this

* This essay complements Mulligan 1990 & 1991 and summarizes a series of lectures, Superficialities and other Holes: Analytic vs Continental Philosophy (the Agnes Cumings Lectures), given at University College, Dublin, in May 1992. I am grateful to Dermot Moran, Richard Kearney and others in Dublin for their comments. Thanks also to Jack Smart for putting me right about the correct Australian line on nosology and to Paul Mullen. On the topic of this essay, see the papers in Mulligan (ed.) 1991.

¹ Stove 1991, 188. Stove emphasizes that "we have as yet scarcely the glimmerings of...a nosology of human thought" (187) although identification of examples of the pathology of human thought is so easy. He is also concerned to show how such examples can be found even in the writings of very good philosophers.

claim. Analytic philosophers are not much interested in either defining or defending the presuppositions of their work. Indeed the gap between "analytic" and "non-analytic" philosophy nowadays coincides pretty closely with the division between philosophers who are not interested in historico-metaphilosophical reflections on their own activity and philosophers who are...²

I should like in this essay to furnish some of the connections between nosology and history that will enable us to understand how Continental Philosophy came to occupy the position it did and what we may now look forward to.

§1 An Analysis

By "Continental philosophy" (CP) I mean the sort of philosophy produced by or in the wake of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Adorno, Habermas and Apel, Sartre and Levinas, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, Lyotard, Deleuze and Derrida, Severino and Vattimo. Skew to such a characterisation in terms of proper names there is also the possibility of characterising CP in terms of movements and tendencies such as "Critical Theory", "Deconstructionism", "Structuralism", "Neo-Structuralism", "Feeble philosophy" (*filosofia debole*), many varieties of feminist and marxist thought and "Theory" *tout court*, pregnant like the Irish bull, widespread and proudly unqualified.

CP is in many ways an Anglo-American creation. It is by no means identical with philosophy on the continent, analytic or non-analytic, continental philosophy. Nor is the term much used or understood on the continent. But it is true that since an enormous proportion of philosophers on the continent are actually historians of philosophy the figures mentioned would have to figure prominently in any account of philosophy done on the continent.

The contrasts between the way CP has been done and the way Analytic Philosophy is done are familiar. Analytic philosophy is first and foremost the culture of the argument, of the objection, of the distinction, of description, examples and counter-examples, even of theory construction. Whatever an analytic philosopher's actual views about philosophy and science his practise almost invariably exemplifies a severely theoretical attitude.

CP, on the other hand, is melodramatic. The melodrama begins with the strident oppositions between organic Kultur and dead Zivilisation in Germany in the twenties. Heidegger accuses the entire Western tradition of failing to see that the meaning of Being involves more than mere presence. Derrida's version of this

² Rorty 1991, II, 21. But see Skorupski 1991.

melodrama is slightly more precise: the special case of the ideology of presence he denounces with great eloquence is the privilege accorded to speech and the "repression" of writing. Ethnocentrism and logocentrism "control" the concept of writing: writing is seen as a "contamination"; it is "subversive", "feared". And in general the philosopher who sees through one or another of these great illusions requires above all great courage.

CP contains few examples of the pursuit of a thesis, of an increase in the understanding of a position. It is very rare to find a claim that has been modified as the result of discussion by a number of philosophers. Positions are elaborated and then jettisoned. This lack of any continuing dialectics in CP may be held to count in favour of the view that it is a spurious entity, a product perhaps of the North American job market. But this would be to underestimate the extent to which there really is disagreement and opposition within CP - think of Sartre vs Lévi-Strauss and Foucault, Gadamer vs Habermas or Deleuze and Guattari vs Lacan. The trappings of disagreement are there. But there is very little precise controversy. This is due, amongst other things, to another feature of CP.

CP contains few examples, and less arguments. Positions are under-described and under-argued, that is, under-determined. Again and again one finds that the meaning of key terms remains vague because they are not introduced with the help of lower order examples. A fortiori, the notion of a counter-example remains unknown. It is often held that detailed criticism is completely beside the point. This feature of CP goes together with another one.

CP is problem free. Positions that are systematically underdetermined can never achieve the sort of focus that comes from pursuing a particular problem throughout the twists and turns of the different arguments for and against different solutions. This type of underdetermination is quite compatible with another feature of CP which lends to its texts and positions what determination they do have.

CP is done by doing the History of Philosophy. A Continental Philosopher typically elaborates his views in the form of a commentary on, criticism or application of the views of one or more of the great philosophers of the tradition³.

CP is syncretic. Thus a handful of ideas from semiology and structuralism have been combined with a variety of philosophical positions. Lacan managed to yoke together

structuralist ideas, Hegelian anthropology and Freud. Habermas and Apel combine certain traditional moves within transcendental philosophy with bits and pieces of analytic philosophy, particularly ideas from that part of the philosophy of language that deals with pragmatics. "Quelle salade !", Sartre rightly noted, might well be the reaction to *Being and Nothingness*.

"Syncretism", in one of its senses, is a pejorative term. But of course the fact that a philosopher combines two or more ideas, however distinct their provenance, is never by itself a bad thing. It is completely unimportant where a good idea comes from. Syncretic philosophy is bad philosophy only when it is combined with the illness I called under-determination: in particular, it is only when the links between philosophemes from very different traditions or heterogenous sources - eg topology and Freud - are not made out that we get the characteristically Continental variety of free association of ideas.

CP almost invariably has politically progressive allures. It is often politically melodramatic. This is obviously the case for the more directly political philosophies within CP such as the anarchisms of Deleuze and Lyotard, the Marxism of Althusser or the connexions between hermeneutical philosophy and emancipation in Habermas' philosophy. More surprising is the way in which feminists have taken seriously what they see as the political potential, progressive or not, of Lacan, and the way deconstruction has been taken to provide the means to bring out the reactionary nature of this or that canon. But argued, rationalist, left-wing political philosophy remains, alas, a rarity.

One example must suffice to illustrate these claims. Consider the history of the concept of structure within French CP. I refer to its use by avowed structuralists such as Lévi-Strauss in his philosophical moments, its rôle in the criticisms of structuralism by for example Sartre and also to its rôle within Lacan's system and in the quite different alternatives to structuralism that go under the heading of post-structuralism and, for example, to its use by Derrida. In nearly all these cases it appears that the philosophers in question not only did not know what a structure is but, a point almost as important, did not seem to be really interested in finding out. One finds simply the obligatory and cursory references back to Jakobson and to Lévi-Strauss' applications of mathematical structures. Now the concept of a linguistic or non-linguistic structure suggests all sorts of philosophical questions: What sort of relation holds between the members of a contrast class and the sentence frame or frames that yields the class? Is it an internal relation? If so, what sort of internal relation? What are the differences between the terms of linguistic structures and the terms of non-linguistic

³ On the background to this, see Smith 1991.

structures ? In the case of a linguistic structure, what is the relation between the properties a term has qua term of a structure and the semantic properties it has qua part of a sentence ? If structures are said to structure what we say and do, what is the relation between structural explanation and causal explanation ? How, if at all, do structures predetermine the distinctions we make, given the fact that distinctions that are not marked lexically in a given language can be made in the same language at the level of sentences ? And so on.

These and related questions all have this in common. They are rarely discussed in those parts of CP in which concepts like that of structure loom large⁴; all we find is a gaping hole.

Trivial and uncontroversial as are the above characterisations of how CP was done, they are dictated by what Rorty calls a "scientistic" approach to philosophy, or, more accurately, by a perspective on philosophy as a theoretical enterprise. But is this the perspective CP had ? Before considering this question it will be useful to bear in mind a number of philosophical options that are as common within CP as the methodological traits I have mentioned.

CP unanimously takes seriously a very strong version of the disunity of the sciences. It is anti-realist. It more often than not takes transcendental philosophy of a Kantian or of a Husserlian variety seriously. Even more important than these connected traits is its concentration on a distinctive range of philosophical questions. Much of what was taken to be vital in CP belonged to a philosophy of life, to philosophical anthropology and to a philosophy of or indeed view of history and politics. These labels would of course, in some cases, be vehemently rejected. But this is of little importance in the light of the fact that the strands of recent thought that I have in mind are quite clearly the successors of approaches that only a short time ago happily bore such labels as *Lebensphilosophie*. What counts as vitally important are in fact questions on a continuum. At one end there are questions to which edifying comments on our historical situation, under capitalism, in advanced technological societies, as members of minorities etc are supposed to provide answers. A little further along the continuum there are reflections that would count as belonging to the philosophy of history and politics. Much further along there are questions that used to be described as

⁴ In the clearest and most explicit account of structuralism within CP that I have come across, Deleuze (1976), a number of structural similarities between different uses of "structure" are noted. But when Deleuze tries to analyse the concept he introduces some of his key terms by giving literary examples. He also simply tells us that structuralism requires the existence of virtual entities.

belonging to philosophical anthropology. The label and such questions as "What is life (about) ?", "What is man ?" bring only a sneer to the lips of the sophisticated post-modernist but that is only because he is confusing the questions with a set of answers he rejects. The question "What is life ?" is of course closely connected with one of the most important philosophical questions "How should we live ?" although many Continental philosophers attempt to avoid using explicitly evaluative vocabulary.

This continuum of questions can be reformulated using all the senses of "History": What does the history of an individual, his life, consist in ?, What is its relation to its terminus, his death ? What is its relation to his historical circumstances ? What is the relation of these circumstances to their history ? What is the relation of this history to the philosophy of history ? etc. I shall refer in what follows to the history end and the anthropology end of this continuum.

Heidegger's account of *Dasein's* relation to its possibilities and in particular to death provide answers to questions at one end of the continuum. His interest in the category of life as a whole (cf. *Sein und Zeit* §10) was due in part to one of the grandfathers of CP, Dilthey, whose use of "life as a whole" had been the object of criticisms by Brentano as early as 1884. And in 1948 Heidegger was to write in a letter that in 1933 he had expected of National Socialism "a spiritual renewal of life in its entirety"⁵. His eloquent descriptions of the differences between authentic and inauthentic possibilities of *Dasein*, between the pregnant silences of the resolute proto-nazi and chatter, would count as answers to the question how we should live had he not carefully avoided all explicitly evaluative language as tainted by metaphysics. His later pronouncements on technological society and on thought(s absence) in science belong nearer to the other end of the continuum.

Derrida's development of Heidegger's version of life and death leads to him to an account of sign-use according to which to use a sign is to stand in a very intimate relation to one's death. And philosophies of the sign that fail to take this seriously are one and all supposed to be guilty of repressing this fact. Derrida's deconstructions of pervasive ways of reading and the mythology that is taken to subtend them, of Meanings present to an almost wholly imaginary Subject, acquired an existential importance not just because reading and aesthetic experience were held - quite rightly - to be supremely important matters, not just because of the consequences that Theory is supposed to have for the politics of curricula. But rather because his inflated notion

⁵ On Brentano and Dilthey, cf. Mulligan 1991, 119. The English translation of part of Heidegger's (unpublished) letter (to Marcuse) is given by Wolin (ed.) 1991, 162.

of "reading" was held to be at one and the same time a revolutionary "intervention" in the humanities and an "articulation" of "post-modern" ways of what used to be called living.

Freud, read literally, reworked, completely transformed, or mixed in with whatever you fancy provided the starting point for a large number of Continental anthropologies. Thus Lacan's synthesis of Freud, Hegel and structuralism was often held to contain deep truths about the nature of desire in general and the way women live, or have lived, should or should not live in particular.

A quite different speculative anthropology from that of Heidegger's and from that of Lacan is provided by Deleuze and Guattari who paint a fascinating picture of life as at root a schizophrenic flight and combine this anthropological claim with a philosophy of what used to be called history in which our schizophrenic nature - which of course is not really a nature, nor anything so merely vulgarly psychologistic as the life of a real schizophrenic - comes into its own in market capitalism. Deleuze's anthropology is determined in large part by opposition to Freudian anthropologies which neglected schizophrenia and Hegelian anthropologies whether with or - as in Lacan's case - without syntheses.

The fact that there has been this concentration on this continuum of questions goes some way towards furnishing a real difference between the types of question that have been at the centre of exact and inexact philosophies during this century and towards providing an answer to a sociological puzzle.

The spheres of interest of Analytic philosophy began to widen out in the late fifties and there are now few philosophical questions which have not fallen within its purview. Perhaps more work on metaphysics goes on today under the heading of analytic metaphysics than in any other tradition. There is analytic Marxism, analytic phenomenology and even Freud has been analysed. But the type of question to be found on the Continental agenda has not yet, as far as I can see, become the object of the steadily increasing appetite of analytic philosophers. Neither political philosophy and ethics at their thickest nor the different historical turns, announced or taken, have yielded anything like the Continental mix of philosophy of history and (anti-)anthropology. One reason for this is perhaps that it is part and parcel of such a mix that it slides imperceptibly into substantive political comment and "interventions" in the media - phenomena which are almost entirely absent from the analytic scene - or into the genres of literature or the essay. The analytical philosopher qua *Zeitkritiker* or "critic of life" has been an almost non-existent species since Russell. Where analytic

philosophy has impinged on public life, as for example in discussions of applied ethics, the "interventions" - in contrast to their continental counterparts - are not based on substantive philosophies of what used to be called history. Another reason is that the step from the philosophy of mind to the perspective on "life as a whole", and from there to life in these or those determinate circumstances has not been taken, except here and there, for example by philosophers such as A. Macintyre or C. Taylor.

I said that the perception that CP addresses vital questions provides an answer to a puzzle. The puzzle is this. The humanities in the English-speaking world were invaded by CP in the late 1960's and 1970's; Departments of Literature and of Sociology began to take very seriously French accounts of language and criticisms of various myths about the subject. Now the curious feature of this invasion is that it took place above all in a country, the US, in which a number of distinguished philosophers had not only developed the philosophy of language to new levels of sophistication but in which powerful defences of extreme versions of naturalism had been much discussed. Within the context of these naturalisms there was little place for any sort of subject or Subjectivity, empirical, cartesian, transcendental or otherwise, and even less place for Meanings, and a fortiori for Meanings present to a subject. Nevertheless, many of those concerned to understand the foundations of their approaches to the humanities and to the study of literature seem to have felt that only Gallic versions of the materiality of the sign and the death of the subject would do, not the home-grown versions. How should we explain the intensity of the exchanges between the descendants of Thaumaste and Panurge⁶ if not in terms of their conviction of the vital importance of a spectacle in which nothing was actually said ?

§2 A History

The Gallic gallimaufrey and and galimatias alluded to in §1 are symptoms of sickness from the point of view of philosophy as a theoretical enterprise. But, as I suggested, there may well be another possible perspective on them. Before turning to this question it will be useful, following the suggestions of Stove and Rorty, to take the history of recent philosophy seriously.

Where did CP come from ?

It is in large measure the product of nineteenth century German philosophy and/or Transcendental Phenomenology. "And/or"

⁶ Pantagruel II xvii-xx.

because one important part of CP was relatively free of Transcendental Phenomenology. Thus, Adorno and Habermas draw on German Idealism and Marx, Foucault on Nietzsche etc. But behind Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Derrida - not to mention the signs of life in theological phenomenology in Continental (Lévinas) and continental philosophy, what D. Janicaud has recently described as "le tournant théologique dans la phénoménologie" - we find Husserl. But not Husserl alone. Rather, the heady mixture of Transcendental Phenomenology together with those aspects of German Idealism that Dilthey had succeeded in reviving and making respectable.

The genealogy of analytic philosophy is well-known, as is its total independence of the traditions that culminated in the contemporary philosophies that take seriously Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. At most, traces of Kantian influence, for example on Frege and Carnap, have been suspected.

But if, following Rorty, we are to take History seriously then, I suggest, a third genealogy must be added to this familiar couple. To the *German* family tree and its Parisian avatars and the *British* family tree which, building on the greatest German philosopher since Leibniz, quickly developed into contemporary Australian, British, American and continental analytic philosophy, we should add an *Austrian* family tree. This Alpha team, unlike the better known Beta and Gamma teams, enjoys only a low profile in received accounts of how philosophy acquired its present shape. But then this is only to be expected from Continental - indeed from many continental - histories of philosophy, and indeed from analytic philosophers who are, quite rightly, uninterested in history⁷. A continuous Austrian and south German tradition begins with Bolzano, continues with Brentano and his pupils such as Meinong, Husserl, Ehrenfels, Marty and Twardowski and survives into the thirties with their pupils and, for example, the work of the Gestalt psychologist-philosophers. Among the many other Austrian thinkers who, like those in the Bolzano-Brentano line, exemplify all the philosophical virtues so conspicuously lacking in the traditions that culminated in CP are Mach, Boltzmann, Menger, Fleck, Polany and Hayek⁸.

The connections between Austrian thought and analytic philosophy are numerous - from early Austro-Cambridge connexions⁹, Wittgenstein, Twardowski's single-handed creation of analytic philosophy in Poland¹⁰, to the collaboration between

⁷ But see Dummett 1988.

⁸ Cf. Bauer 1966, Nyiri (ed.) 1986, Simons 1992.

⁹ Cf. Simons 1986.

¹⁰ Cf. Wolenski 1988.

two Germans, Schlick and Carnap, and the Austrian, Neurath, in Vienna.

More important for present purposes is the fact that Austrian philosophy stands to analytic philosophy as German philosophy does to recent CP. But whereas the relations between analytic philosophy and CP were characterised by almost complete silence, Austrian philosophy displayed a consistent and energetic interest in the nosology of philosophy. The remarkable *Anti-Kants* of Bolzano and Brentano were continued by many of their gifted heirs. Indeed the genre of vigorous polemics against philosophies that were held to be inexact in principle, against *Geschwätz*, became distinctively Austrian and continued with the publication of anti-Diltheys, anti-Heideggers, anti-Spenglers and anti-Freuds into the twenties and thirties.

A further striking contrast between analytic philosophy and its Austrian prototype is the fact that when Brentano preached scientific philosophy, the gospel of exactness and the unity of science in Vienna some 30 years before the Vienna Circle started, he took great care to transmit to his pupils a very detailed philosophy of the history of philosophy at the centre of which stands a nosology of the discipline¹¹. Brentano's classification of the diseases to which philosophy is subject has the merit of referring *only* to the *way* bad philosophy is done and to the role played by the primacy of the practical attitude in engendering bad philosophy, and not to any substantive philosophical positions. His descriptions of what he called, in Vienna in 1895, philosophical "Decadence" turn out to employ just the characterisations given above of CP. Indeed Plotinus, Nicholas of Cusa, Fichte and Hegel turn out to be proto-Continental philosophers. In his *Carnets* (227f.) Sartre (unwittingly?) confirms both Brentano's nosology and its applicability: just as the Athenians after the death of Alexander turned away from Aristotelian science to the doctrines of the Stoics and Epicureans, "who taught them to live", so too Sartre turned towards Heidegger in 1938 for much the same reason.

In a monograph that provides one of the very few counterexamples to Rorty's claim about the lack of historical reflexion by analytic philosophers, "Le développement du Cercle de Vienne", Neurath suggested that one reason for the intense Austrian preoccupation with scientific philosophy and the philosophy of science was the fact that Austria had been spared what he called the "Kantian entr'acte". (It is perhaps worth noting that this wonderful piece of history was produced during one of the few melodramatic moments in analytic philosophy.)

¹¹ Cf. Brentano 1929. Cf. Mulligan 1993.

But, as we know, the anti-transcendental, anti-egological, realist, often naturalist and towards the end even physicalist traits of Austro-German philosophies left no mark on philosophy on the continent. Indeed it is sobering to reflect on the philosophical questions that were discussed by Husserl, his pupils and other heirs of Brentano before the first World War: the nature of the non-descriptive singular reference effected by proper names and demonstratives, the consequences for mentalist and Platonic theories of meaning of twin-earth fantasies, the structure of speech acts such as promises, the relation between psychologism and the theory of formal concepts, the nature of perceptual content, the role of suppositions or make-believe in logic and aesthetics, the internal relations between perception and action, cognitivism vs non-cognitivism and thin deontological vs thick axiological concepts in ethics, the nature of the normative component in rationality etc. We know where these topics received the extensive and illuminating discussion they merited, discussions that constitute some of the more enduring achievements of philosophy in the twentieth century. Not within CP.

Husserl, it will have been noted, figures in both the Austrian and the German family trees. The Husserl of the *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891), the *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) and (in most) of the 1907 lectures *Ding und Raum* was an Austrian, untranscendental, anti-egological, realist. But the German philosopher of *Ideas* (1913) was an egological idealist well on the way to his later transcendentalism. More importantly, the arguments and descriptions of his earlier work gave way to an increasingly programmatic and speculative way of doing philosophy and Husserl's increasingly global vision of philosophy came to resemble some of the programmes within German Idealism. Thus it was that Husserl's pupil, Heidegger, was able to effect a quite remarkable reorientation of phenomenology in 1927 in spite of the fact that nearly all of Husserl's original and most gifted pupils remained realists and indeed adherents of the gospel of exactness. It is a reorientation that, among so many others, often goes unnoticed: he took Hegel seriously (SZ, §82). More generally, Heidegger fused the concerns of recent and earlier philosophical anthropologies with Husserl's idealist Transcendental Phenomenology, making it vastly less bloodless than it had been in Husserl's hands, and so determining the preoccupations of many Continental Philosophers. These two syncretic achievements were to be the first of many within CP.

Although many Continental Philosophers were to continue drawing on phenomenology, it is a striking fact that they rarely advance the state the discussion had reached within early phenomenology, even when they are not primarily concerned to reject what they take to be the presuppositions of their predecessors. This is true, I suggest, of Heidegger on truth; of

Sartre's four monographs on descriptive psychology; of the relation between Merleau-Ponty's books on behaviour and perception, on the one hand, and the descriptive psychology of Husserl and the Gestaltists he drew on, on the other hand; and of Derrida's use of the notion of a "structural law". Nevertheless, the more a Continental philosopher draws on phenomenology, the closer he is to it, and indeed the earlier the phenomenology employed, the more rewarding he is to read.

It seems quite likely that criticisms of Heidegger and French CP because of alleged fallings away from the standards of philosophy conceived of as a theoretical enterprise, however modestly or grandiosely this is characterised, are beside the point. If they are justified, the criticisms do at least explain why the short lived suspicion that there was something of theoretical interest there has now dissolved. Similarly, my brief historical remarks might then help to explain how this suspicion could have come about.

But we should take seriously the view that, after all, Heidegger and Derrida (but not, say, Habermas) stand outside the theoretical attitude and language-game. Much that they (seem to) say points in this direction. Since hardly a single French philosopher tried to say what a structure is, it is at least a reasonable hypothesis that the philosophers who bandied the term around - condemning, promoting or subverting it - were not interested in the question, that their reflections on humanism, discourse, power, history etc. did not require any answer to questions of this sort. The activities of "subverting" a discourse, demasking yet another instance of the ideology of Presence, "welcoming", "repeating" this or that philosophical question, even "creating concepts" cannot be identified with the activities of analysing, dissecting, arguing that, or objecting to, p.

Rorty has urged just such a perspective¹². Whether or not his arguments against taking CP seriously as a theoretical enterprise convince its surviving epigones, his view of non-analytic philosophies as continuous with literature or politics or both¹³ is attractive and plausible. Not least because his verdict coincides with Brentano's analysis of "decadent" philosophy. Rorty's account of CP's past and what he takes to be its future is of course also a function of his views about the success of N. American pragmatism, in particular its success in reducing what he is said to have called the number of "real live metaphysical prigs" who still "believe in truth and "reality"¹⁴.

¹² Rorty 1991, II, 119-128.

¹³ Rorty 1991, II, 24.

¹⁴ Cf. Himmelfarb 1992, 13. For a persuasive "central European"

What, then, should a metaphysical prig think of philosophy that is continuous with the vital questions of literature and politics ?

\$3 An Example: Musil, not Dewey.

The great Austrian analyst Robert Musil reflected at length on the relations between exact thought, scientific and philosophical, and ways of writing that engage with the vital questions on the continuum of concerns already described that goes from philosophical anthropology to the philosophy of history and history itself. But his answers and his practise, in his essays and his novel, differ sharply from the solutions Rorty finds in CP. It is Musil, I suggest, who can help us to understand the bankruptcy of CP, Musil rather than Dewey who indicates what form Post-Continental philosophy in Europe could take¹⁵.

Musil's conviction that, in art, life and politics, what was needed was more rather than less thought and that the pervasiveness of philosophical blethering was a major vice of the age, together with his position within the history of Austro-German thought make him a unique figure in the history of the relations between exact and inexact philosophy. Trained in the Brentanian tradition of descriptive psychology (like Kafka and Freud), Musil was the last thinker of a distinguished line to have taken seriously the task of denouncing nonsense. He stands at the end of the line of the great Austrian philosophical polemicists and nosologists, the line that begins with the Anti-Kants of Bolzano, Brentano and their heirs. There is a fundamental difference between the attitude of Musil and that of the Vienna Circle: Carnap, Schlick and Neurath merely announced the coming of scientific philosophy and got on with doing it. They wasted very little time on criticism. This attitude, as I have already suggested, became the norm and, indeed, a handful of exceptions apart (Bouveresse, Searle, Tugendhat), is still the norm.

The targets of Musil's extensive polemics are Spengler, Klages, Rathenau and, less extensively, Freud and nietzschean currents of thought. More generally, his target is irrationalist philosophies of life. The two pervasive features of his critical writings are, first, his already mentioned concern to show in detail why such philosophies deserve the epithet "inexact", and,

perspective on and criticism of pragmatism as a Weltanschauung and of its relation to philosophical pragmatism, see Gellner 1979.

¹⁵ It is no accident that Jacques Bouveresse, in his unique and subtle deconstructions of Parisian philosophy, draws repeatedly on Musil. Cf. Bouveresse 1984, 1984a.

secondly, the fact that he takes very seriously just the questions dealt with in these philosophies.

Thus his "Geist und Erfahrung. Anmerkungen für Leser, welche dem *Untergang des Abendlandes* entronnen sind" (1921) examines and attacks Spengler as typical of a certain sort of free-floating philosophy, unconstrained either by logic or facts. His descriptions of this philosophy will have occurred to many readers of recent French philosophy. "[T]here is", writes Musil,

a favourable prejudice concerning infractions against mathematics, logic and exactness; they are willingly counted as belonging to those offences against the mind that are politically honourable, where the public accuser really comes to occupy the rôle of the accused. Let us therefore be generous. Spengler quasi means what he says, he works with analogies and in such a case one can always, in some sense, be right (*Essays*, 1043)

Musil notes of his long list of errors of fact in Spengler's book that

There are men who answer this with a shrug of their shoulders: empiricist philosophy ! A philosophical current, therefore, that is just one among others and not particularly privileged in being in possession of the truth. Spengler would patiently dismiss the insistence on facts as a symptom of western civilisation. The choir of fighters for Geist and of the full souls...unanimously intuited a long time ago: there is nothing more wretched than empiricism (1047)

Spengler says: There is no reality. Nature is supposed to be a function of culture. Cultures are supposed to be the last reality available to us. The scepticism of our last phase must, he says, be historical (1045)

Of Spengler's extreme anti-realism Musil notes that it is free of any attempt to pursue the difficult task of separating out subjective and objective cognitive factors, the task of the theory of knowledge, but one that "Spengler has dispensed with because it is quite definitely an obstacle to the free flight of thought" (1045).

Musil's criticisms, in particular his use of that favourite Austrian detergent, *Sprachkritik*, resemble those of Neurath and the Brentanian Oskar Kraus in their *Anti-Spenglers* (1921, 1924). But throughout all his extensive criticisms of Spengler and others there is one respect in which Musil differs from his Austrian predecessors and from his positivist and other analytic successors. Musil is acutely aware of the fact that what his

philosophical enemies are talking about are genuine philosophical problems. That is one of his reasons for devoting so much energy to them. Indeed one of the striking features of Musil's anatomy in his great novel of different bad solutions to the question "How should we live?" is his concern to bring out as far as possible how close some bad solutions come to being good solutions.

Musil's term for the vital questions that cannot be adequately or fully answered in the theoretical modes of science and exact philosophy is "the non-ratoid realm". In his reflections on how to write about such questions he insists on certain conditions that must be met. Literature, the essay and the aphorism must have a content, typically the sort of metaphorical content Rorty likes to insist on, that is inseparable from the mode of expression employed. This is a familiar point and is closely related to things that Wittgenstein was to say about secondary meaning. Yet it frequently gets lost in the baffling and mystifying free-associations that surrounded the concepts of open, incomplete, fragmentary "discourse" until quite recently.

But Musil's second condition has rarely been met as fully as he himself met it in his novel and essays. We might call it "Musil's constraint". Non-ratoid illumination of a vital question depends on a mastery of all available "ratoid" illumination. Successful atheoretical enterprises go beyond what any parallel theoretical enterprises can do and differ essentially from these. But they do not fall theoretically short of the latter. Musil arrives at this constraint as a result of reflections on the ramifications of a certain philosophy of mind: in his development of the cognitive theory of emotions - thoughts and emotions, and hence values, depend on one another - and in his use of the category of a Gestalt to understand what is individual or less or more than law-like in social and cultural phenomena¹⁶.

As Musil puts it, "Literature does not convey knowledge...Literature uses knowledge, of the inner world as of the outer world" (*Essays*, II, 967). In his anatomies of the fiction of character, of nationalism and of particular unique ethical constellations Musil first exhausts what can be said of, what is known of, the type of phenomenon under examination. The metaphors and similes that make it possible to seize something in its individuality within philosophy-as-literature (or indeed literature-as-philosophy) only become appropriate at that point. Before a person's motives can be evaluated the causes of his behaviour must be investigated. When Musil explores pathological behaviour he turns first to medical psychiatry, not to Freud, for help. First go to the end of the trampoline of science, he says, and only then jump off (*Essays*, 1347).

¹⁶ On this, see Mulligan 1993a.

Now CP, the suggestion went, belonged to no theoretical enterprise. But the wealth of novel philosophical vocabulary and metaphors it introduced, and which Rorty finds so stimulating, does not satisfy Musil's constraint on non-theoretical enterprises. For either it is not based on any theoretical enterprise at all - is for example deliberately "debole" - or the theoretical enterprises it latched onto were far from being the best that was thought and said even at the time - structuralist linguistics, Freud, Husserl's philosophy of language, *Transzendentalphilosophie* etc. *Ein Denker* may be *umso denkender desto dichtender er ist* but only if he has made some effort to absorb the best thoughts available¹⁷. Rorty himself, if only in his writings on literature and politics, is a good example of a thinker who does satisfy just this condition. (Perhaps this is why he often endorses positions like those of Musil; perhaps, too, both Musil and Rorty have learnt from Emerson).

Musil's constraint provides us with a clue as to the direction Post-Continental philosophy might take. So long as the N. American epigones of Continental Philosophers continue to draw on dying Continental traditions it seems likely that they will share their fate. Another possibility is that, as in the case of recent New Historicisms, non-analytic N. American "theorists" will simply rediscover almost forgotten parts of CP's past such as Dilthey's Old Historicism. In Europe the increasing prominence of analytic and other exact traditions is such that future attempts to answer the vital questions dealt with by CP are likely to be laughed out of court unless they satisfy, at the very least, Musil's constraint.

Irony is one of three goods Rorty commends, the others being Dewey and pragmatism. "Ironists who are inclined to philosophize", he writes, "see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply as playing the new off against the old"¹⁸. Musil accorded priority to the second of these. Of the ironies that pervade all his writings - essayistic, fictional and polemical - he says that they are not the expression of superiority but of a struggle or combat¹⁹. The absence of any such combative attitude after the

¹⁷ Cf. the remark attributed to Wittgenstein, "About a don who criticized Blake he [Wittgenstein] said, "He can't understand philosophy; how could you expect him to understand a thing like poetry?" (Gasking & Jackson 1967).

¹⁸ Rorty 1989, 73.

¹⁹ On pragmatism as a *Weltanschauung* and historicism, see Musil's "Das hilflose Europa", in his *Essays*.

Second World War goes some way to explaining why European philosophy furnished for so long such a helpless spectacle²⁰.

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²⁰ Some recent recommendations of Dewey and pragmatism have sounded a nationalist note hitherto rare in analytic philosophy. The use of "Austrian" above has, of course, no such connotation; it is merely an abbreviation for *Kakamien*, its predecessors and successors. Or for Lvov, Prague, Budapest, Vienna and Milan.

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