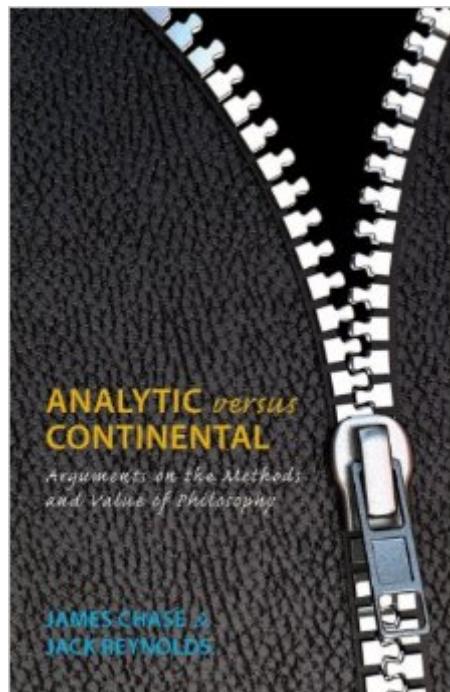


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Analytic Versus Continental: Arguments On The Methods And Value Of Philosophy



Synopsis

Throughout much of the twentieth century, the relationship between the disciplines of analytic and continental philosophy has been one of disinterest, caution, or hostility. Recent debates in philosophy have highlighted some of the similarities between the two approaches and even envisaged a post-continental and post-analytic philosophy. Opening with a history of key encounters between philosophers of opposing camps since the late-nineteenth century - from Frege and Husserl to Derrida and Searle - Analytic versus Continental goes on to explore in detail the main methodological differences between the two approaches.

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Customer Reviews

This book is the result of a discourse and a friendship of many years. James Chase and Jack Reynolds live and work on opposite sides of the great divide in contemporary Western philosophy; the so-called Analytic-Continental divide. James Chase is on the analytic side of the fence (researching things like "epistemic normativity" and the "paraconsistent analyses of vagueness"). Jack Reynolds represents the continental side of the divide. Most of his publications seem to be centered on the different methodologies used by the two sides of the divide and how those methodologies effect their philosophical results. Together they have created a useful and thoughtful guide to the divide that is full of insights and resists easy resolutions of the differences. The organization of the book is key. Their introductory session is a brief history of the growing divide between the (largely Anglo-American) analytic tradition and the (largely French and

German)continental tradition. They organize this history around a series of philosophical spats that occurred between individual philosophers. Frege versus Husserl, Russell versus Bergson, Adorno versus Popper and Derrida versus Searle are some of the debates discusses. It is easy to see that early on there was already a great deal of talking past each other. There is Russell complaining that Bergson doesn't understand or appreciate argumentation because "assemble premises to deductively back a conclusion" (p.25) and Derrida chiding Searle because he does not recognize the emotive content and the local particularity of any speech act (p.39).The second section is even better. It is an exploration of the different methodologies employed by the two traditions. There is a good chapter on intuition pumps and thought experiments (although I would have been much more critical on the use of thought experiments), on transcendental arguments, on writing style and also on the self-perception of the two traditions.I really enjoyed the insights into the latter subject. Chase and Reynolds believe that the analytic tradition sees itself almost as a Lakatosian research program (the use of Lakatos is mine not theirs). They see themselves as slowly amassing results, working and reworking shared data/results (such as the classic thought experiments like Searle's Chinese Room). Theirs is a communal problematic wherein one's work should smoothly fit in with the work of another analytic philosopher bee. This has an dampening effect on any sort of individualistic style (p. 147).The continentalist (my word, sorry) sees their work as more individualistic or at least more avant-garde. They tend to write more monographs than articles and tend more toward ontology than epistemology especially as practiced by the analytical tradition.The continentalist will tend toward more iconoclastic writing frequently experiment with their texts in an attempt to make some of their thought more graspable.The third section explores how these methodological differences play out and effect the thought of the two traditions in a variety of classic philosophy sub-fields, e.g., the problem of other minds, ontology, ethics and political thought. This is probably the strongest part of the book. We are introduced to a wide variety of figures and ideas. Everything is very clearly and very fairly presented. I mentioned above that they resist an easy resolution of the differences. Indeed, we are almost always left with the idea it will be hard to breach the divide, say, in the philosophy of mind. The differences in methods and interests run usually a little too deep. Their general conclusion is what they call a weak meta-philosophical agnosticism, which concludes that given the state of the evidence that is no good reason for an analytician to turn continentalist nor for a continentalist to turn analytician (p.254). They do argue that conversation and debate should continue if only to keep each other on our philosophical toes.I would argue that this book is itself a good argument for that conversation and that debate. These two authors understand each other, they trust each other and they have listened to each other. They obviously have come to know the

otherside of the divide and to value some of the insights and, more importantly, their conversation. We are lucky they have given us the current state of their debate. The bottom line is that all philosophy undergrads should read this book at some point and most of their profs as well.

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