

# ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND COGNITIVE NORMS

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## 1. A “difference without a distinction”?

Is there any point in defending today “analytic” philosophy against “continental” philosophy? Many people are doubtful about this, just because of the very use of quotation marks surrounding these names in the previous sentence. For what is “analytic philosophy”? At the time of Frege, Russell and Moore, or at the time of the positivists, and even in the late sixties, it may have been possible to find a set of criteria which could allow us to sort out the doctrines, concepts, methods and style of analytic philosophers from those of “continental” philosophers. Today it is much less easy to draw the distinction. This feeling is shared both by those ecumenists coming from the “continental” camp who find that, for instance, Habermas and Rawls, Derrida and Quine, Gadamer and Davidson, or Heidegger and Wittgenstein, share a lot of themes and doctrines in spite of superficial differences of style, and by a number of writers who would have been considered, some decades ago, as typical analytic philosophers”, but who do not have today this sense of their typicality. Bernard Williams, for instance, writes that

“The contrast between “analytic” philosophy and “continental” philosophy means neither an opposition in terms of content, of interest, or even of style. Indeed, there are some differences, some of which are important, between typical examples of philosophical writing to which these terms could be applied, but these differences do not rest upon any significant basic principles. It could even be said that these terms mark a difference without a distinction.”<sup>1</sup>

According to this line of thought, it may have been useful, in the Cambridge of the twenties, in the Vienna of the thirties, or in the Harvard of the fifties, to emphasize the differences between the rising movement of analytic philosophy as against the British Hegelians, the German irrationalists, or the American pragmatists, but it is useless, and the mark of a peculiar form of dogmatism, to try to draw sharp boundaries where there are none. Thus Putnam writes:

“From my point of view, the only legitimate function for “movements” in philosophy, is to gain attention and recognition for ideas not yet being received or which have been neglected or marginalized. Analytic philosophy has been around for a long time, and it is certainly one of the dominant currents of world philosophy. Making it into a “movement” is not necessary, and it only preserves the features that I have deplored. Just as we can learn from Kant without calling ourselves Kantians, and from James and Dewey without calling ourselves

pragmatists, and from Wittgenstein without calling ourselves Wittgensteinians, so we can learn from Frege and Russell and Carnap and Quine and Davidson without calling ourselves “analytic philosophers”. Why can we not just be “philosophers” without an adjective?<sup>ii</sup>

I do not share Williams’ nor Putnam’s feelings. The fact that the criteria by which we classify today a philosopher as “analytic” or “continental” are often fuzzy does not imply that there are no criteria at all, and that they do not mark any real distinctions. The fact that it seems to be worthless and irrelevant to try to reinstate, in the context of today’s world philosophy, the voluntaristic gestures by which the early analytic philosophers attempted to draw attention to the specificity of their movement, does not mean that we do not need to draw attention to this specificity in some contexts. If Williams and Putnam had occupied regular teaching posts in France, Germany or Italy, they probably would not have felt that their style marked “a difference without a distinction” in the context of Continental Europe<sup>iii</sup>. More importantly, even if the analytic style in philosophy had become so dominant in all countries that we could drop the adjectives “analytic” or “continental”, we would still need to explain what philosophy “without an adjective” is, what we can expect from it, and why it is worth pursuing. And this would amount to providing some adjectives for characterizing the kind of philosophical practice that we aim to pursue. Philosophy is not a bare particular: it is precisely because there is no real consensus about what a philosophical inquiry is that we are drawn to attach adjectives to the word “philosophy”. The main problem to define our adjectives.

This does not mean that the challenge raised by those who doubt that any distinctive definition of analytic philosophy can be given is not a serious one. We run the risk of begging all sorts of questions. I believe, however, that some criteria of what analytic philosophy is, or tends to be, can be provided, and that they can be justified. My claim will be that any kind of inquiry must conform itself to certain cognitive norms, that these norms are, in an important sense, objective, and that a kind of philosophical inquiry which respects these norms will bear most of the characteristics of what is generally called “analytic philosophy”, whereas other forms of philosophical practice, currently called “continental”, do not bear these characteristics.

## **2. What is “continental philosophy”?**

The lack of a distinctive sense of what analytic philosophy (henceforth AP) is is often reinforced by the fact that there is no distinctive sense of what “continental” philosophy (CP) is either. But we can try to describe it. As these labels are used today, we can distinguish broadly two senses of CP, one broad, and one narrow, which nevertheless possess many common characteristics.

a) In the broad sense, CP is the kind of philosophy to which the early analytic philosophers, such as Frege, Russell and Moore (but a number of Austrian philosophers too)

where opposed: German post-Kantian and neo-Kantian idealism in Germany, neo-Hegelianism in Great Britain. Later, when neo-Kantianism in Germany was overcome by Husserlian phenomenology, and in particular by various versions of existential phenomenology, such as Scheler's or Heidegger's, CP was incarnated in these versions, together with some irrationalistic trends to which the Viennese positivists were opposed, such as *Lebensphilosophie*. In France or in Italy, these doctrines were not assimilated before the thirties, but the influence of phenomenology and Hegelianism was no less important. What C philosophers in the broad sense have in common, nevertheless, are not some much specific doctrines than a certain way of dealing with philosophical problems. Their style is mainly historical: a philosophical thesis is very seldom examined and discussed in itself or systematically, but through its "inscription" in texts, or set of texts of Great Philosophers of the Past.<sup>iv</sup> A philosophical reasoning or a philosophical concept is rarely analysed independently of its incarnation in the writings of philosophers of the past. Ask a C philosopher what he is working on: he will mention names. This method is backed by the Hegelian feeling that philosophy is "over", and that "everything has been said"; the only alternatives left seem to be the repetition of past doctrines, or the infinite commentary upon these doctrines. There are indeed various ways of doing the history of philosophy in this sense, some of which more objective than the others, but this historical attitude is at the origin of the basic reaction of C philosophers to A philosopher's attempts at dealing with philosophical problems: the latter's approach is felt to be "naïve".

b) In a narrower sense, CP is a form of radicalization of various phenomenological and hermeneutical doctrines, which takes its inspiration mainly in Nietzsche and Heidegger. One of its main characteristics is that it dramatizes its opposition to the whole Western tradition in philosophy, by denouncing science, reason and metaphysics as based upon various kinds of illusions, upon a desire for power and domination. Its discourse, in spite of its philosophical technicity, has an ideological and quasi-political tone: it takes itself to be a sort liberation war against various forms of colonization by Western thought of the forces of poetry, of difference or of creativity which have been under the oppression of the tyranny of "Presence", of "Logos" or of "Identity". Hence its emphasis upon the culture of "difference", of minorities against majorities, and in general upon cultural relativism. One of the features of CP in this narrow sense is that it does not pertain only to philosophy, but also to literary criticism, psychiatry (especially psychoanalytic), art and architecture. Some of its names are typically negative ("Critical theory", "Deconstructionism") or suggest the closing of an Old Age and the advent of a New one ("Post-structuralism", "Post-modernism").

CP is largely the creation of analytic philosophers, and few philosophers working in Continental Europe would recognize themselves as such: they believe that they are just doing philosophy "without an adjective". Only those philosophers working in analytic departments in the English-speaking world who do not feel themselves attracted by analytic philosophy may be willing to grant the epithet. Nevertheless, it seems quite clear that there is a kind of

philosophy, which deserves the general label of CP, which is practiced in a number of places (which are not, today, necessarily on the Old Continent) and which shares the following characteristics, in contrast to the characteristics of another kind of philosophy, which deserves the label of AP.<sup>v</sup>

AP is the tradition of philosophical argument, of objections, of descriptions, examples and counterexamples. It mimics the scientific style of inquiry, which proposes hypotheses and theories, tests them in the light of datas, and aims at widespread discussion and control by the peers. It believes in the possibility of progress through criticism, which is made possible only if its formulations are clear, and aim at coherence, through the respect of usual logical standards of argument. It aims to solve particular problems, puzzles and paradoxes, and to built theories in answer to them. It prefers to work upon details and particular analyses, rather than to produce general syntheses. For these reasons, it is scornful of unnecessary abstractions, and close to common sense. Its style could be characterized as “enlightened” or “critical” common sense.

In contrast, CP is problem free. It is done, as I said above, through the history of philosophy, and it seldom discusses a particular problem or philosophical argument in isolation. Problems, if there are any, are dealt with through their embodiment within texts, discourses, or systems of texts and discourses. CP takes the form of the commentary or the exegesis. It is therefore difficult to find in CP any single thesis, which would be formulated explicitly and modified as the result of a common discussion between a number of philosophers. The style of argument in CP, if there is any, is very often analogical, drawing on similarities between particular words and concepts, moving from quotation to quotation, rather than by developping the implications of a particular view. It is often difficult to find where the premisses and the conclusions are. Positions are systematically underdetermined, because they are never isolated and discussed for themselves, but systemetically fused into others, in a syncretic way. As a result, it is very often difficult to criticize any particular thesis in CP, and indeed its practitioners do not understand the usual practice of criticism among AP. Criticisms are often taken to reveal some form of bad will or nasty polemics.<sup>vi</sup> No wonder that CP’s style is often obscure, even when it does not indulge in systematic obscurity. Just as the AP style takes its model from the straight line, the CP style takes its model on the circle: one does not go from one position to another through some sort of continuous progress, but one often comes back to already known positions encountered before. This has to do with the hermeneutical and historical style of CP’s kind of writing. This feeling of closure creates two corollary impressions: the impression that there is nothing new under the sun, that philosophy is a form of eternal return, and the impression that we could break out of the circle only through some sort of transgression, of radical move into some new space or new era of thought. Hence the melodramatic style that radicalized CP often takes, and the form of political-philosophical messianism that it indulges into.

### 3. Is analytic philosophy a matter of “style”?

As I have characterized it above, the contrast between CP and AP is essentially a matter of method and style, not a matter of doctrines or theses. Although early analytic philosophers had in common certain set of doctrines, such as various forms of platonism and realism with Frege, Russell and Moore, or various forms of empiricism and verificationism, it is no longer the case today, in spite of the popular images which are still attached to A philosophers as “positivists” in many circles. The AP house contains many mansions: from the beginning of the tradition, a number of philosophical theses have been espoused, discussed and rejected, and there are today metaphysical realists, idealists, Kantians, Marxists, even Hegelians and phenomenologists among A philosophers. It is often said, too, that a distinctive thesis of early AP was atomism, as opposed to holism, and that the widespread acceptance of holism by an number of contemporary analytic philosophers has, to a large extent, changed the subject. Or it is said that the loss of the belief that the philosophy of language is more or less the central part of philosophy has completely reshaped the understanding that A philosophers have of their practice. But it does not seem, for instance, that a philosopher like Jerry Fodor, who advocates both atomism and the priority of the philosophy of mind over the philosophy of language, could be both an “analytic” through the former commitment, and not an analytic through the second. What seems to individuate A philosophers are not their theses, but their practices, their style, and their way of dealing with philosophical problems. The same indeed seems to be true of CP: although it obviously bears its Kantian, Hegelian and phenomenological origins and has in general little sympathy for empiricist doctrines, it would be false to suggest that writers in this tradition are simply post-German idealists. The CP house contains even more mansions, which, unsurprisingly, are better individuated by names: there are Marxists, Freudians, Nietzscheans, Heideggerians, Habermassians, etc., and all sorts of neo-Xians from the previous set. The ecumenists mentioned above even suggest that some analytic doctrines, such as Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of translation, or Davidson’s views on interpretation, or certain set of views, such as Wittgenstein’s, are shared, in a different form, by a number of C philosophers such as Derrida, Gadamer, or Heidegger. The extent to which one can understand the phrase “in a different form” depends upon whether we can translate or not the relevant AP theses into CP theses. But either way, this reinforces the claim that AP and CP are a matter of style: for if the theses can be translated, it purports to show that both traditions are able of conveying similar contents in spite of differences of form or style, and if the theses cannot be so translated, it purports to show that these obstacles to translation are due to differences of style, not to differences in content.

We reach here an interesting feature of current debates about the differences between AP and CP: the feeling that these differences are essentially a matter of style is invoked *both* by those “post-analytic” ecumenists

who invite us to minimize the doctrinal differences and to reduce the conflict between the two kinds of philosophy to “mere” stylistic differences, which are not so important (it’s was you say that counts, no the way you say it) *and* by those “rigorists” analytic philosophers who want to emphasize the importance of these stylistic differences in order to single out their practice. In the first camp, we find people like Putnam, who points out that David Lewis is not harder, nor easier, to understand than Derrida (what is clear or not is, he suggests, a matter of convention), or Rorty, who grants the incommensurability of the AP and CP style, but who nevertheless believes that philosophy is a matter of circulation of ideas or of “conversation” between traditions. In the second camp, we find people like the French analytic philosopher François Récanati, who says:

“There is a difference between the theory and the practice of analytic philosophers; and what characterizes analytic philosophy is a certain practice, not a certain theory. It may well be that an analytic philosopher, criticizing its own tradition, declares that he himself is a partisan of the continental manner in philosophy; thus Hilary Putnam...has recently held that the *views* of a philosopher count more than the rigor of his arguments, and that philosophy is closer to art than to science. Through this kind of position, Putnam no doubt is closer *theoretically* to the continental philosophers, but in his practice he remains fully an analytic philosopher: he has not rejected, in his practice, the ideals of analytic philosophy...(clarity, precision, arguments, etc.) and it is the only thing that counts. Going further, on can, it seems to me, imagine without contradiction an analytic philosopher who would declare himself openly hostile to the ideals of analytic philosophy: a philosopher who would say that he prefers slogans to arguments, fuzziness to precision, opacity to transparency, metaphors to concepts, etc.. I do not believe that such a philosopher would *ipso facto* cease to be an analytic philosopher: he would cease to be one if he did put his theories into practice.”<sup>vii</sup>

I myself used to agree with this sort of distinction between theory and practice and with this diagnosis of the difference between AP and CP as a matter of style and not a matter of doctrines<sup>viii</sup>. But there is obviously something fishy in Récanati’s claim that an A philosopher who would theorize the advantages of vagueness and obscurity over clarity, metaphor against concepts, slogans over arguments, etc., but who would not put his theories into practice, would remain an A philosopher. For such a philosopher would, sooner or later, either be obliged to revise his theory in the light of his practice, or to withdraw his practice to make it consistent with his theory. Putnam, for one, has never been in such a predicament, for he never theorized such things. And he could not have theorized them because *the very practice of AP already involves certain theoretical commitments*. In other words, although the analytic style is indeed compatible with a number of theoretical views in the logical space of the theses that a philosopher can reasonably hold, it is not compatible with views which reject some of the minimal assumptions upon which this style rests upon. To see that, run a small thought experiment. Suppose that Derrida, for instance, intended to maintain his well-known views that philosophy is a kind of literary writing, that metaphor and concept are so necessarily intermingled that we cannot distinguish between the two, that reason and *logos* involve a

tyranny of sameness against “différance”, and that we cannot really criticize rationally philosophers, but only “deconstruct” their views through some sort of textual exegesis which would reveal “symptoms” of their commitments to fascinating metaphors-philosophemes, etc.; now suppose also that he had decided to convey these views through rigorous and precise philosophical arguments, refusing to extrapolate sweeping conclusions from perverse readings of particular texts, using the most plausible theories of metaphor and of fictional discourse, and the apparatus of distinctions that analytic philosophy of language currently use, etc. Could he still maintain his theories while changing his practice? He could, but at the price of some form of self deception.<sup>ix</sup> At some point there would be a clash between his explicit theoretical commitments and the implicit commitments of his newly acquired practice. I want to suggest that, in this respect, AP is not merely a matter of style, and that the implicit commitments in question are commitments to distinctive cognitive norms which govern philosophical discourse.

#### 4. Cognitive norms

I have characterized above AP as a form of “enlightened” or “critical” common sense. The phrase comes from C.S. Peirce.<sup>x</sup> It does not mean that philosophical claims and theories are no better than common sense beliefs, but that the standards by which we evaluate our philosophical beliefs should not be different from the standards by which we evaluate our common sense beliefs. Common sense incorporates implicit norms which go with the very use of such notions as “belief”, “knowledge” or “judgment”. One of the tasks of philosophy is to assess these norms in an explicit and reflexive way, and to evaluate our common sense beliefs in the light of these norms. The evaluation may lead to revisions of our common sense scheme, and the formulation of more sophisticated and theoretical beliefs. But even when we reach these new beliefs, there are no other norms by which we can assess them than those which were implicit in our ordinary practice of forming and evaluating common sense beliefs.

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What are these norms? As I said, they are largely contained in the unreflexive use of our cognitive concepts, such as “belief”. They consist, in Peacocke’s phrase, in the “normative commitments” of such concepts. The concept of belief, in particular, contains at least two such commitments.<sup>xii</sup> First to believe something is to believe that it is *true*. This is why, for instance, it is odd to assert that *p* and that one believes that *not p* (“Moore’s paradox”). Let us call this the *truth commitment* of belief: a belief is typically something for which the question of its truth arises (or, as it is often said, which “aims at truth”). Second to believe something is to be prepared to answer the question whether what one believes is *justified*. Some beliefs are unjustified, some are less justified than others, and some are more justified than others, in which case they may count as knowledge. But whatever can be our account of this justification, a belief is something for which the question of its justification arises. Let us call

this the *justification commitment* of belief. There are indeed, notoriously, various diverging accounts of the real nature of this commitment, and what justification really amounts to is a matter of philosophical controversy. But one requirement of our ordinary concept of justification is that our beliefs are justified in the light of *evidence* for them, and that a person who fails to account for all the evidence in favour of his belief in some sense fails to justify it, or is less than rational. Let us call these commitments *cognitive norms*. It is also a matter of philosophical controversy whether these norms form an autonomous set, and what their relation is with other sorts of norms, in particular practical or ethical norms. Thus many people doubt that there is a distinctive “ethics of belief” in the sense that cognitive norms could in some way overlap with, or depend upon practical ones. It is not the place here to deal with this issue, but I shall assume that there is a least some overlap between cognitive and practical norms: cognitive norms are not simply present in our use of cognitive concepts, but also *worthy of being followed* or obeyed. They are not only norms, but genuine *virtues*.<sup>xiii</sup>

How can we apply these remarks about our common sense cognitive commitments to more sophisticated kinds of beliefs, such as those instantiated in philosophical theories and arguments? Can they be simply transferred from the former to the latter? Obviously not, for philosophy, in its attempt to give a reflexive account of these norms, usually provides us with conflicting analyses. Philosophers diverge about what the concept of truth amounts to, or about whether justification is a matter of coherence or reliability, for instance. And there is the familiar figure of the skeptic, who doubts that our beliefs could ever be true or justified. But, as it often remarked, even the skeptic must grant that there is a *minimal understanding* and sharing of the above cognitive norms governing belief without which he could not even raise his skeptical doubts. Now could there be some other kind of skeptic, which would not bear on the truth and justification or our ordinary beliefs, but on the very cognitive norms by which we assess them (and which we could call a *meta-skeptic*)? Obviously there are such meta-skeptics. In fact most of what I have called CP in the narrow sense illustrates this form of skepticism. For instance a number of French Nietzschean post-structuralists, such as Foucault or Deleuze, not only deny that there is an such thing as the truth or the justification of our beliefs, and espouse some form of relativism or perspectivism, but also explicitly reject the idea that truth and justification could be norms<sup>xiv</sup>. This does not mean that they do not believe in other kinds of norms, such as for instance “creativity”, “desire” or “life”, but what they have in common is the rejection of the idea that there are genuine cognitive norms, which could in some sense regulate our philosophical discourse. Similar claims are put forward, in a somewhat different form, by Rorty’s “neo-pragmatism”, when he proposes the replacement of the ideal of “objectivity” by that of “solidarity”.

Such views, admittedly, are situated at the most extreme end of the spectrum of views which has received the name of “continental philosophy”. They could also be situated at the most extreme end of the spectrum of “analytical” views, if one allows, as we saw above, that a philosopher could hold views which are distinctively anti-analytical, while remaining faithful

to analytic practice. Rorty, at least in *Philosophy and the Mirror of nature*, could be such a philosopher, or Putnam, or Cavell in some of their (in my opinion worst) moments<sup>xv</sup>. There are indeed writers who fall more or less in between these extremes, and there may even be C philosophers who stand closer to the middle of the spectrum, such as Ricoeur. It is largely a matter of degree. But I want to suggest that *the more a philosopher is prepared to accept consciously the cognitive norms of truth and justification that he follows in his practice, the closer he is to the theoretical and practical commitments of analytic philosophy*. The reason why AP is distinct from CP is this explicit and implicit acknowledgement of the basic cognitive norms of ordinary and philosophical discourse. This involves a distinctive theoretical commitment, contrary to what is adduced by those who claim that the difference is only a matter of style. But given that the cognitive norms in questions are norms governing the general practice of philosophical inquiry, it is not surprising that they have been confused with merely practical or stylistic commitments.

This provides us with a clearer criterion for distinguishing AP from CP, but it still does not justify it, nor does it show that it is in some sense better to follow these cognitive norms than to follow other norms, or no norms at all, and to practice AP rather than CP. In other words, I have not answered the claims of the meta-skeptic.

## **5. Minimal truth and the minimal analytic ideal**

As well known, it is not easy to answer skeptics, even less meta-skeptics. The only way I know of rebutting their claims is first to point out that the commitments which they find questionable are not as strong and unacceptable as they are said to be, and, second, to point out that they lead to self-refuting views.

On the first score, the skeptic about the cognitive virtues of AP generally objects that the cognitive norms adduced above rest upon very heavy theoretical commitments which no philosopher today would accept: that truth is the end of inquiry, that it is a form of correspondence with the way things are, that knowledge— and even some sort of philosophical knowledge— can be achieved, and that there are context-free standards of justification. In fact these commitments are precisely those that “post-analytic” philosophers such as Putnam or Rorty have found unacceptable and obsolete in the analytic tradition. They claim that the blindness of this tradition to the fragility of these presuppositions is responsible for the forms of scientism and absolutism about truth that it typically manifests. The usual antipathy of C philosophers of many persuasions for the “analytic ideal” in philosophy seems due to the suspicion that A philosophers still entertain such naive beliefs about a *philosophia perennis* or about the dissolution of philosophy into science. It may well be the case that a number of A philosophers are still in the grip of such ideals. But many others do not— or if they do, they do not think that these views about truth and knowledge can be so simply entertained without argument. Indeed there has been a lot of argument in recent and less recent

analytic philosophy about the nature of truth and knowledge. One could even say that these questions are among the basic topics in today's A journals and university courses. In fact the discussion of the nature of cognitive norms has been present in A philosophy from its very start. Frege, Russell and Moore rejected the reduction of cognitive and ethical norms to natural facts, and they proposed various versions — most often platonistic— of what we may call the thesis of the autonomy of norms. The Viennese positivists attempted to reduce these norms to linguistic conventions. Wittgenstein and the ordinary language philosophers tried also to trace their linguistic origins, but were more tempted into thinking that they rested upon natural “forms of life”. The contemporary materialists and naturalists attempt to locate their origin in psychological and biological facts. And the anti-reductionists resist this by affirming again the autonomy of normativity.<sup>xvi</sup> Analytic philosophers, therefore, have always been conscious of the conflict between cognitive norms, and between these and other norms. They have long ago realized that it was not obvious to talk of truth as “correspondance to the facts” or of knowledge as justified belief of an independent reality. But they have never been tempted into thinking that the difficulty of defining these notions were enough to make us renounce the notions themselves and the norms which they involved? Why?

Because A philosophers do not share the typical kind of (melodramatic) *modus tollens* inference of C philosophers, when they reason in this way: “If philosophical norms of inquiry, therefore truth, knowledge, reality, etc. No truth, knowledge, etc.. Hence no philosophical norms of inquiry, no philosophy”. For the fact that we cannot give satisfactory definitions of truth in terms of correspondence to an external reality and of knowledge as knowledge of truth does not imply that there is no satisfactory notion of truth or knowledge to be had, that we should reject these notions altogether, and side for “deconstruction”, “conversation”, “le différend” or some form of what Rorty aptly calls “edificatory” discourse. The topic of truth is, contrary to what many C philosophers (who are scornful of details) seem to believe, a matter of some delicacy. To simplify outrageously, according to many contemporary discussions, there are two kinds of views of truth: a) “substantial” views, according to which the notion of truth can be defined through some sort of “thick” concept, such as correspondence, coherence, warranted assertibility, etc., and b) “deflationary” views, according to which there is no more (and especially metaphysically no more) to truth than the “thin” equivalence *that p is true = p*.<sup>xvii</sup> Rorty, and a number of neo-pragmatists, side with the deflationary view. They claim that it is precisely because there is no more to truth than its logical use that it is useless to base any sort of norm upon it. Truth is a mere assertoric device, which registers the fact that the members of a community have accepted certain assertions. But the deflationary view of truth is false. The fact that we assert certain things as true is not equivalent to the fact that we assert them, period. We also assert them as true because we think that they *are* true, and because we believe that we are *justified* in doing so. (It is, indeed, one of the norms of assertion). In that respect, we can keep a *minimalist* notion of truth, which preserves the main fonctional or logical features of the truth predicate, but which grants that there is more to truth than these

logical features: truth as a form of convergence in our inquiries, as something to which our statements answer, which can be justified. Such a concept need not imply the more substantial notion of correspondence. In many ways it can be equated to assertability in ideal conditions.<sup>xviii</sup> I suggest that not only our cognitive norm of truth is based on this minimalist concept, but that it is the kind of concept that is appropriate for characterizing the cognitive commitments of a philosophical inquiry. So the A philosopher takes the preceding inference to be *modus ponens* : “If philosophical inquiry, therefore truth, knowledge, etc. But minimal truth, knowledge, etc. Hence philosophical norms of inquiry.” From the fact that the ordinary definitions of truth or knowledge do not succeed, it does not follow that we have to side with the *negation* of the cognitive norms of philosophical discourse, and not even with some form of agnosticism about them. The crisis of cognitive norms, just as the crisis of ethical norms, does not show that everything is permitted or than anything goes.<sup>xix</sup> The A philosopher detaches, while the C philosopher contraposes. This is another illustration of the fact that a philosopher’s *modus tollens* is another philosopher’s *modus ponens*.

The other half of the argument against our meta-sceptic would have to show that his refusal to grant minimal cognitive norms will lead him to self-refuting views. At least it will lead him, as I have suggested above in the case of an “analytic” Derridian, to some sort of pragmatic contradiction or of self deceptory practice. Unless the C philosopher defends here squarely relativistic views about truth, against which there are familiar arguments in the self-refuting style, it will be less easy, given the ordinary elusive way of arguing of C philosophers, to pin down points where they have accepted explicitly theoretical commitments against cognitive norms, which they would have to deny elsewhere. But we can get a feeling of the sort of predicament in which they tend to put themselves by looking at their practice of the history of philosophy. A number of C philosophers do not like the way A philosophers deal with the history of philosophy: they reject the idea that one could discuss theses of philosophers from the past in abstraction from their context, by trying to evaluate them as true or false, or by using them in other contexts. They typically believe that the “truth” of philosophical theses is, so to say, purely *internal* and context-bound. But if this is so how can one pretend, in explaining these views and placing them into various contexts, to do the *history of philosophy* ? If they grant that their work is merely a form of interpretation, which could not be assessed by other scholars, they would have no right to claim that their historical analyses are better than the others. If they do not grant this, they would have to conform to some cognitive standards. Another familiar claim of C historians of philosophy is that it is wrong to try, as many A philosophers do, to examine the views of philosophers of the past on such canonical philosophical problems as “the problem of universals”. For, on their view, there is no such problem, but a motley of views, all located in various doctrinal contexts, which we cannot abstract from their historical succession. But the very attempt to show that “there is no such thing as the problem of universals” (in the sense of a recurrent problem for philosophers of the past, say in the Middle Ages) implies that one is able to *state* what this

problem consists in, and hence to grant that it can be understood at least in part in abstraction from its various doctrinal contexts. In general some sense of what kinds of philosophical problems philosophers from the past were trying to solve must be presupposed, in order to understand the claims of these philosophers. And to understand them means at least being able to share with them some minimal understanding of the problems they were dealing with.<sup>xx</sup>

My aim in this paper has not been to suggest that all C philosophers reject the cognitive norms which I have described as distinctive of A philosophy, and thus run into these self-deceptive strategies. For not all of them reject these norms, either in theory or in practice. To that extent, they are closer to AP than they generally believe themselves to be, and on that point the ecumenists are right. Be it as it may, AP is the kind of philosophy which conforms most closely, both explicitly and implicitly, to the minimal cognitive norms which govern, and should govern, philosophical inquiry. Like the stylistic criterion, this one is compatible with a wide variety of theses and methods, but the core commitments of analytic philosophy lie here. It allows us to drop the quotation marks which usually surround the words “analytic” and “continental”, but these norms are accepted and applied on both sides, it hardly allows us to speak of philosophy “without an adjective”.

## NOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Bernard Williams, Preface to the French translation of his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Fontana, Collins, 198 ), *L'éthique et les limites de la philosophie*, tr. M. Lescourret, Paris, Gallimard, 1990, p. V.

<sup>ii</sup> H. Putnam, “A Half Century of Philosophy”, *Daedalus*, 1997, p.203

<sup>iii</sup> To mention only one example with which I am familiar: in France today, the teaching of logic is confined to a one year course at the undergraduate level in the universities (but not in the *concours* examinations for the “Grandes Ecoles”); many teachers and students do not see its use and ask for its suppression; very few courses in analytic philosophy exist in curricula; when they exist, they are mainly historical; and *concours* examinations such as the “agrégation” emphasize mainly historical competences and rhetorical skills. Even at the graduate level, it is still impossible to teach a course dealing with what are considered as the standard topics in the philosophy of language, of mind, of logic, or ethics in an Anglo-American department, and the number of doctoral theses bearing on analytic topics is ridiculously small. No professional journal is devoted to analytic philosophy. Moreover, in France, unlike in America or in Great Britain, philosophy is a popular subject, which is often the object of appropriation by “high-brow intellectuals” in the medias. Their feeling about what philosophy is quite different from the concept of it which is currently entertained by professionals. Do all these characteristics, which are instantiated in many European countries, mark “a difference without a distinction”?

<sup>iv</sup> I borrow this term from Joelle Proust, “Nouvelles frontières”, introduction to J. Proust, ed. “La philosophie continentale vue par la philosophie analytique”, *Philosophie*, 35, 1992, Editions de Minuit, Paris, p.11

<sup>v</sup> For similar accounts of these differences, see Proust, op cit, and K. Mulligan “Post-Continental philosophy, some nosological notes”, in P.Engel, ed. “The analytic-continental divide”, *Stanford French Review*, , 17, 2-3, 1993, pp.150

<sup>vi</sup> a celebrated example of this is Derrida’s famous polemics against Searle.

<sup>vii</sup> François Récanati, “Pour la philosophie analytique”, *Critique*, 444, Mai 1984, p.369. See also, Récanati, “La philosophie analytique est-elle dépassée?”, in Proust, ed. op.cit. p.55-64.

<sup>viii</sup> See for instance P. Engel, “French and American Philosophical Dispositions”, *Stanford French Review*, 15, 2, 1991, 165-181, and my introduction to Engel 1993 (ed.) op.cit.

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<sup>ix</sup> This may not be simply a thought experiment, but also an actual possibility, which Derrida himself may feel, and try to cope with through some form of irony pervading his whole metaphilosophical claims.

<sup>x</sup> Peirce, ref.

<sup>xi</sup> In this respect, I am committed to some form of “reflexive equilibrium” view of the assessment of norms.

<sup>xii</sup> C. Peacocke, *A Study of concepts*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1992. Peacocke discerns other commitments of the concept of belief, but they do not concern us here.

<sup>xiii</sup> This commits me to some sort of “virtue epistemology” in the sense of E. Sosa. See his *Knowledge in Perspective*, But I cannot argue for this here.

<sup>xiv</sup> See Engel, “The Decline and Fall of French Nietzscheo-Structuralism”, in B. Smith, ed, *European Philosophy and the American Academy*, The Hegeler Institute, Monist Library of Philosophy, La Salle, Ill. p.21-41.

<sup>xv</sup> In a sense, S. Stich’s “pragmatism”, in his *The fragmentation of Reason*, Cambridge Mass, 1990, could count as such an analytical defense of the common C doctrine of relativism, in particular about cognitive norms.

<sup>xvi</sup> for an account of the analytic tradition as based upon these changing views about norms, see John Skorupski, *english language philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford university Press, 1993, and P. Engel, *La dispute, une introduction à la philosophie analytique*, Paris, Minuit 1997.

<sup>xvii</sup> This blurs the usual distinction between redundancy and disquotation, but it is not useful for my purposes here.

<sup>xviii</sup> I am here following C. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1993. See also P.Engel, *La vérité, réflexion sur quelques truismes*, Paris, Hatier 1998. Putnam himself defends one version of the equation of truth with ideal assertibility.

<sup>xix</sup> I take it that it is in part the same conclusion as E. Sosa, in his paper “Serious Philosophy and the Freedom of Spirit”, *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXXIV, 12, 707-726.

<sup>xx</sup> This is much too sketchy. For a better account, see P.Engel, “La philosophie analytique doit-elle prendre un tournant historique” in J. Vienne, ed. *Philosophie analytique et histoire de la philosophie*, Paris, Vrin 1997