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Philosophy as Literature: The  
non-argumentative tradition in continental  
philosophy

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Being's poem, just begun, is man.  
Martin Heidegger

**Abstract** Pursuing a line from Pascal Engel's remarkable dialogue "*La Dispute*", the paper discusses the non-argumentative tradition within contemporary philosophy. The tradition encompasses some very successful and famous 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophers, like Heidegger and Derrida (and theoreticians, like Jacques Lacan in his later phase), who systematically avoid any sort of explicit argumentation in their work. Philosophizing without argument here means doing philosophy without any visible argumentation-like steps. How did the non-argumentative writing gain its place in twentieth-century philosophy? The paper proposes a philosophical account, resting on the assumption that the authors in question are following an intellectual strategy. Assuming that a-rational aspects of human existence (desire, passion, and the like) are of central interest they accept an implicit methodological principle: the cognitive style, the language, style and the method of studying an a-rational domain D should follow the language, style and the manner of D itself. In particular, for such a-rational domains, the cognitive style and the linguistic expression should minimize the use of (or perhaps completely eschew) traditional rationalist methods of enquiry and presentation.

## 1. Introduction

Pascal Engel (I shall call him in the sequel just "Pascal", as I did for decades) has been struggling for analytic philosophy, its importance and its status, in the middle of an atmosphere that has been all but friendly to it. His effort, quite successful to my knowledge, needs to be praised, and this is what I intend to do, by dedicating this paper to him.<sup>1</sup> Almost two decades ago, Pascal has produced a fine philosophical dialogue *La Dispute* (1997); two characters, Analyphron and Philoconte discuss analytic and continental philosophy, the former defending the first, and the later the second; Mésothète, a third character, tries to mediate. In the later work (Rorty and Engel, 2007), the imaginary dialogue is replaced with the actual polemic between Pascal and Rorty, to whom we shall refer often in the sequel. But let me start with *La Dispute*. Early in the book Analyphron diagnoses an important contrast between the two schools:

Là où le brio du continental se manifeste dans l'écriture littéraire, les jeux de mots et les formules, les vastes synthèses,

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<sup>1</sup> I feel honored by the invitation to contribute, so I thank the organizers for their invitation, and in particular Anne Valérie Meylan Massin for her support and patience.

le brio de l'analytique se manifeste dans la manipulation des langages logiques, mathématiques, des concepts scientifiques. (1997 :23)

Whereas the brilliance of a continental philosopher manifests itself in the literary style of writing, the play with words and formulations, joined to enormous works of synthesis, the brilliance of the analytic philosopher manifests itself in the manipulation of logical and mathematical languages and scientific concepts. (my translation)

I would like to follow Pascal's interest in this stylistic analytic-continental contrast and propose an *homage* to him, focusing on the first part of Analyphron's diagnosis and raising the question: how did continental philosophy become so prone to "the literary style of writing, the play with words and formulations"? After all, the tradition did not start in such a style, witness Hegel and post-Hegelians; and even at the time when, due to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, a literary sub-variety of continental thought has been born, the central continental figures, like the members of the Brentano school, Husserl, Dilthey and most of their immediate disciples, did write in an argumentative style, with keen interest in logic (in the wide sense, relevant here), and the desire to follow the model of science to a significant extent, rather than taking poetry as their paradigm and indulging themselves in "the play with words and formulations". I shall be talking about authors like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, or Žižek, i.e., merely about one line in continental philosophy, albeit a quite central one. (So, I leave authors like Habermas and Apel, or even Ricoeur aside for this occasion).<sup>2</sup>

Does philosophy centrally involve arguments? Many of us would like to think so, but there is a strong tradition that favors less argumentative, and often non-argumentative style. The paradigms of this tradition are the quasi-literary, ironic, stylistically rich works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Heidegger's late poetic-sounding works, like *The Experience of thinking*, Lacan's highly complex, often playful and often very opaque *Ecrits*, Derrida's experiments with language, and these paradigms are being imitated and varied by a long row of followers and pupils, whose work characterizes the post-modernist and/or deconstructionist scene. (Of course, this

<sup>2</sup> For a very different approach to the issue see also Samuel Wheeler's paper "Philosophy as Art", on his web-site.

is only one tradition within continental philosophy, not all of it; we shall return to this in a moment). Just as a reminder and an illustration, let me quote a distinguished follower of Derrida, J. L. Nancy, talking about alterity.

The alterity of the other is its being-origin. Conversely, the originarity of the origin is its being-other, but it is a being-other than every being for and in crossing through [à travers] all being. Thus, the originarity of the origin is not a property that would distinguish a being from all others, because this being would then have to be something other than itself in order to have its origin in its own turn. (2000: 11)

Who and what counts as the other? What is exactly the alterity of the other? And why would the alterity be connected, let alone be identical to "being-origin"? We might try to guess. Maybe "the other" of the eurocentric culture are us (me and my co-nationals), Slaves, or Muslims and so on. (Nancy was extremely engaged in helping us, former Yugoslav intellectuals in the difficult time of the war; I have fond memories of talking to him about our plight). But we are certainly not "origin". So, other must be something else. The important point is that no explanation is offered. Deep, or at least deep-sounding thesis of the first sentence quoted is left without any discursive support. So, back to the question of who is the other. Maybe it is God. The text point in this direction:

This is the most classic of God's aporias, and the proof of his nonexistence. In fact, this is the most immediate importance of Kant's destruction of the ontological argument, which can be deciphered in a quasi-literal manner ; the necessity of existence is given right at the existing of all existences [l'exister de tout l'existant], in its very diversity and contingency. In no way does this constitute a supplementary Being. The world has no supplement. It is supplemented in itself and, as such, is indefinitely supplemented by the origin. This follows as an essential consequence (Ibid.)

So this is how a respectable later-day continental philosopher talks about proofs and consequences. And Nancy is a serious academic, a rather strict university professor, not a poet nor a public figure seducing a wide cultured audience. The tradition we just briefly introduced is our object of study in this paper. The paper discusses a non-argumentative tradition within contemporary philosophy. Philosophizing without argument, here means doing

philosophy without any visible argumentation-like steps. Of course, some examples can be reconstructed, in fact re-interpreted in terms of argument, but the argument form is strictly avoided. Late Heidegger, and Lacan systematically avoid any sort of explicit argumentation in their work, and Derrida in some works comes close to the ideal. On the other hand, philosophy cannot do completely without argument; so when these philosopher have one, they hide it into a more poetic text.

Before moving on I want to stress that this is just one current within continental philosophy, not the whole of it. Husserl, Max Scheler and Gadamer are subtly argumentative, Foucault is passionate about historical evidence, and its role in making well-argued points about the unrecognized dark history of the last two centuries (see an interesting discussion in Smokrović, (2013)) Althusser sees philosophy as close to science, and writes in a clear argumentative manner. The mainstream Frankfurt school production has been quite argumentative, and Habermas straddles the continental-analytic divide. So, there is an argumentative, even highly and subtly argumentative tradition within the continental philosophical culture. I will be talking about the other one. (I hope that Nancy's general statement is not right about this other, non-argumentative tradition, and that "its alterity" is not its "being-origin", that its non-argumentative character and radical difference with the arguers is not the original sin of continental philosophy.) Of course, the tradition is very important, very widely read and taught, and worth studying by anyone interested in philosophical issues of argumentation.

The literary character of the tradition has been remarked by authors very sympathetic to it. Richard Rorty goes as far as classifying it as non-philosophical, which is a compliment in his jargon: philosophy itself is moving "from a philosophical to a literary culture" since the time after the death of Kant. And his diagnosis is a bit dramatic, although he is very optimistic about it:

In the literary culture which has been emerging during the last two hundred years, the question "Is it true?" has yielded to the question "What's new?" (2007:91-2).

And here are the consequences for redefining philosophy, this time in terms of "philosophy as a kind of writing" as the title of one essay in (2007) suggests:

All that "philosophy" as a name for a sector of culture means is "talk about Plato, Augustine, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Frege, Russell . . . and that lot." Philosophy is best seen as a kind of writing.

It is delimited, as is any literary genre, not by form or matter, but by tradition (...), (2007:143).

Note a subtle ambiguity. On the one hand, almost any intellectual activity involves writing, and even mathematics can be described as manipulation of a certain kind of written symbols, as formalist have been eager to do. In this sense, philosophy is unproblematically a kind of writing, in this very wide and non-dramatic sense. On the other hand, Rorty probably means much more; namely that philosophy is close to literary writing, and that this is central to it. Let me mention another author, Michael Weston. In his book on *Kierkegaard and modern continental philosophy* (1994) notes the following:

Post-metaphysical thought in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida shows certain central characteristics which have their parallels in Kierkegaard: a 'style' of writing at variance with that of the metaphysical tradition which has its rationale in the 'situatedness' of the thought whose intention is, not the representation of 'the truth', but an 'intervention' into that situation. (1994:136).

His examples are very well chosen: "Nietzsche's use of aphorisms, stories, poems, the fictional character of Zarathustra, Heidegger's 'etymologies' and 'poetic' thinking, Derrida's 'double-reading' (Ibid.). He notes that all this continued and strengthened today in some of the mainstream continental work, in cultural studies, continental feminist philosophy. Why are these non-argumentative moves important for the thinkers mentioned? In his judgment these " are strategies of writing demanded by the essentially 'situated' character of their thought. "(136). I don't see why one cannot be essentially situated and still arguing, but I leave it at that. But mere "situatedness" explains little; why would one use etymologies merely because one is situated? If the answer is that the use of etymologies is dictated by our situatedness in time, then why not use General theory of relativity, given our situatedness in space-time?

So, there is a strong non-argumentative tradition in continental philosophy, and it is worth being analyzed. In this paper I want to address three questions: how is the non-argumentative discourse typically structured? I shall do it very, very briefly in the next section. Next, where did it all come from in the nineteenth and how it developed in the twentieth century? This will take most of the space, and still will be done quite sketchily, given the huge material available, in section III. Finally, in the conclusion I summarize the main findings, and briefly address the question of what one should do assuming that one is into argumentative style.

## 2. Depicting the non-argumentative tradition: the allusive philosophising

Let us start with a passage from the central continental thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Heidegger:

But what is it that touches us directly out of the widest orbit? What is it that remains blocked off, withdrawn from us by ourselves in our ordinary willing to objectify the world? It is the other draft: Death. Death is what touches mortals in their nature, and so sets them on their way to the other side of life, and so into the whole of the pure draft. Death thus gathers into the whole of what is already posited, into the posited of the whole draft. As this gathering of positing, death is the laying-down, the Law, just as the mountain chain is the gathering of the mountains into the whole of its cabin. (1971:123).

If you were a discourse analyst and were given the quotation as homework what would you first notice? First, pronounced literary form, and none or very few indicators of any kind of arguing (“so”, “therefore” and the like). Second, the text is seriously polysemous (without indications about decoding). You might miss a central point if you don’t look at the German original: the word “draft” stands for German “Entwurf”, and the etymology of *Entwurf* has to do with “werfen”, to throw; so the innocently looking “draft”, is in fact a way in which one’s existence is “thrown” into the world and history. So, the original gives you “Entwurf” which is both simple “draft” and “the thrown”; the translator has opted for one, and lost the other. Thirdly, we have central use of poetic figures, the use of “Entwurf” pointing to a philosophically wide-reaching metaphor. Again, the reader is not told how to interpret the metaphor, so that even the translator, at the end of the day, chose not even to suggest it to the reader; the translation “draft” makes life easy for the reader, but misses the main point of the author.

What about the pragmatics of the paragraph? Well, an important, if not the most important, goal seems to be suggesting and evoking. Mentioning death is by itself significant, but death is being characterized in a deeply suggestive and passionate way: “It is the other draft: Death. Death is what touches mortals in their nature, and so sets them on their way to the other side of life, and so into the whole of the pure draft.” “Taking a way on the other side of life” is not a usual matter; how many of us think that there is a way “on the other side

of life"? We are being invited to imagine a journey; personally I was reminded of a beautiful journey of the soul of the hero in the Russian movie "Cuckoo" ((Kukushka) by Rogozhkin); his soul takes "a way on the other side of life", but is called back by the women in love in an immensely poetic sequence. But what about the philosophy in the passage? There seems not much left of any argumentative point. It is rather an invitation to thinking following the poetic figures.

In fact, the text is typical. Very often the following features will be easily spotted. First, as to form, there is no explicit argument-form; and often one finds pronounced literary form. Second, as to semantics, one encounters a seriously multiply ambiguous text without clear indications how to disambiguate it. Given a long tradition of the search for definitions in philosophy, from Socrates and Aristotle, through Leibniz and Kant to Frege and the analytical philosophers (or at least search of either necessary or sufficient conditions for something to fall under the given concept) the contrast is quite dramatic. What or who is exactly "the other"? Maybe the philosopher has five meanings in mind, maybe only three. But he does not tell us; at best we might get a discreet indication. Derrida is explicit about polysemy: first, any text is polysemous, second, polysemy is indefinite, not to be captured by making distinctions, third, this is a very positive state of affairs, repressed by the logocentric metaphysical tradition, and fourth, philosopher-writer should multiply meanings way beyond necessity.<sup>3</sup> Even more importantly, we encounter massive and central use of poetic figures without indication about decoding.

In fact, we should distinguish between weakly and strongly non-argumentative style. The strongly non-argumentative style eschews any argument form, proliferates meanings, sometimes very vague and allusive ones, and straddles into poetry. It is a deeply allusive philosophy. The weakly non-argumentative style hides the arguments it uses. Typically, in the Heideggerian tradition, the philosopher would appeal to the authority of some great predecessor, e.g. a Pre-Socratic. But, the appeal would not be done in the form of explicit *argumentum ad verecundiam*. The pre-Socratic would be quoted, with a suggestion

<sup>3</sup>Here is how Derrida expresses his view that a non-figurative treatment of metaphor is impossible:

I am obliged to speak of [metaphor] more metaphoric, to it in its own manner. I cannot treat it (entraiter) without dealing with it (sans traïter avec elle) ... I do not succeed in producing a treatise (une traïte) on metaphor which is not treated with (traïte avec) metaphor which suddenly appears intractable (intraïtable). (1998:102–3).



that his quote is extremely important, and carries a deep message. Then, some erudition and some poetic temper would be brought to the deciphering of the quote, resulting in a meaning quite surprising to the novice. The strong suggestion is that the meaning is deep, and true in a deep way.

Thirdly, on the side of pragmatics, in the strongly non-argumentative line the main goal is suggesting, often by non-rational, evocative means. The text is often just invitation to thinking following the poetic figures. In the weakly non-argumentative variant, suggestion and evocation is a goal, not always the main one, and the reader is given a bit more clear indication in which direction to go on thinking.

While we are at the pragmatic, it is worth while mentioning an important additional strategy for subverting the argumentative, namely the judicious use of pseudonyms. You read Kierkegaard on Abraham, the *Fear and Trembling*, and you recognize a pleading in favor of Abraham and his forming the intention of killing his son. The pleading is not merely emotional; it contains interesting arguments, for instance from the transcendence of God. Naively, you start agreeing with Kierkegaard, like many of my students routinely did. But a sophisticated interpreter, like Stephen Mulhall and Geoffrey A. Hale will immediately tell you that it is not at all clear that this is what Kierkegaard meant, in contrast to what Johannes de Sylentio, the pseudonymous author meant (I witnessed such a discussion between Professor Mulhall and a young interpreter of Kierkegaard Bojan Blagojević in a Budapest conference).

Let me conclude very quickly with another example of allusive philosophizing or theorizing, this time from a text that is not poetic, and that attempts some kind of arguing. It is the famous "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious", by Lacan:

Is the place that I occupy as subject of the signifier concentric or eccentric in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified?  
That is the question.

The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak. (2006: 430)

In other places Lacan even apologizes for being allusive « je m'excuse d'être aussi allusive » (1973:21); I will argue that allusiveness is essential for the whole tradition. Let us return to his question. It is indeed reasonable enough. Lacan will be proposing a negative answer; no, when I speak of myself, I am not the same as the self of whom I speak. A naïve reader would be probably

shocked; taken in a literary way, the answer suggests that I can never refer to myself. Heraclitus and Buddhism come to one's mind. So, how does Lacan refer to himself? How does he refer to his patients when he builds a theory about them? One would expect these kinds of concern, in the passage introducing his answer. Instead of which, one is offered the following:

And there is no reason not to bring in the term "thought" here. For Freud uses the term to designate the elements at stake in the unconscious, that is, in the signifying mechanisms I just pointed to there. It is nonetheless true that the philosophical cogito is at the center of the mirage that renders modern man so sure of being himself in his uncertainties about himself, and even in the distrust he has long since learned to exercise regarding the pitfalls of pride. (2006: 430).

Notice that the primarily theoretical question about referring to oneself is placed into a much more emotional content: the self-certainty of the "modern man", hunted by his "uncertainties about himself", but sure of being himself. Which is "a mirage"; we are not told why. The simple way out is of course to say that I know who I am, but my uncertainties concern my plans, wishes, abilities, and so on. I am not sure whether I really want to criticize continental philosophy, really want to jog in the cold winter day, and the like. This is compatible with, and even requiring that I know who I am in the minimal sense needed for the first-person reference (and the problem does not have much to do with specifically "modern" man, heaving bothered ancient skeptics, as well as Hindu and Buddhist thinkers). Lacan does not address these simple worries and simple proposals. He continues thus:

Now if, turning the weapon of metonymy against the nostalgia that it serves I stop myself from seeking any meaning beyond tautology, and if, in the name of "war is war" and "a penny's a penny," I resolve to be only what I am, how can I escape here from the obvious fact that I am in this very act? *Ibid.*

And a few lines later, Lacan changes the topic. No serious question of identity has been raised, even less, answered. Instead, we hear that metonymy is a weapon that serves nostalgia. Why? How? Note that this is one of the founding texts of the Lacanian doctrine, not an essayistic sketch. So, this is an example of what I mean by "weakly non-argumentative" line: mixing the poetic, emotional and historical, all in three lines, without explanation, but

with some reasonable sounding questions and attempts to offer a suggestive semi-answers to them.

So much for general characterization, which I share with Pascal. I am aware that it is too brief, and that many readers will find the conclusions over-hasty, and the examples too few and/or not enough compelling. I hope some of these flaws can be remedied in the sequel, "with the positum of the whole draft" (as Heidegger would no doubt put it), with some new examples, which, I hope, conform to our brief and all too sketchy portrait of the tradition.

### 3. Where did it all come from?

#### Manifesting the a-rational: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and the Exemplification constraint

A tradition is a practice extended in history; so, one is curious about its origin and forces that have kept it alive and going. How did it all happen is a central question, and I want to address its philosophical aspects, leaving aside social history and similar, in themselves highly interesting concerns. It did happen "shortly after Kant" as Rorty put it. He sees it, I think rightly, as a reaction to Hegel (in the passage from which we have already quoted the last sentence):

The transition from a philosophical to a literary culture began shortly after Kant, about the time that Hegel warned us that philosophy paints its gray on gray only when a form of life has grown old. That remark helped the generation of Kierkegaard and Marx realize that philosophy was never going to fill the redemptive role that Hegel himself had claimed for it. Hegel's supremely ambitious claims for philosophy were counter-productive. His System was no sooner published than it began to be read as a *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain form of intellectual life. Since Hegel's time, the intellectuals have been losing faith in philosophy. This amounts to losing faith in the idea that redemption can come in the form of true beliefs. In the literary culture which has been emerging during the last two hundred years, the question "Is it true?" has yielded to the question "What's new?" (2007:91-2)

But even if we accept the "What's new?" turn, it is unclear why it would be inimical to argument. His surmise that it is the giving up on truth sounds better, but Heidegger is a prime counterexample; Heidegger wants a deeper

truth, not untruth, or indifference to truth. So, we need much more detail. First, if there is a reaction to Hegel, and indirectly to Kant, what aspects of the huge philosophical projects of the two are its target? If we agree that it is Kierkegaard and Nietzsche who are the purest examples of the tradition we are reconstructing, we shall also notice that a central target of their reaction is the domination of the Reason, and the rational in general. Rorty, coming from a pragmatist tradition, ignores it.

However, will, desire and affect, with specifications like will to power, sexuality, and the like, play a central role in the whole continental tradition. So, I would propose that the first component in the change that led to the birth of its non-argumentative wing is the (re-)discovery of the a-rational, or even irrational (as contrary to rational) as a central topic for philosophy. (I am using more neutral "a-rationalist" for views that just set aside the rationality, "irrationalist" for explicit enemies of it). The two did play a role before, but in a more tame fashion. Humean desire is a relatively homely matter, and the human passions in Pascal, La Rochefoucauld and other French Enlightenment authors lack a cosmic dimension, which they receive only within the post-Kantian tradition. How does this happen? Let us state the central a-rationalist thesis about the forces at work in human mind:

**(A-RAT-mind)** The central element of human mind is a-rational, it is either will, desire or affect.

This a-rationalizing might take several forms. Typically it involves setting aside pure cognitive (epistemic) rationality. Often one ends up by replacing it with practical one, for instance in some Marxist, Pragmatist (Rorty) and neo-Heideggerian authors (like Dreyfuss). Hume and Rousseau would have subscribed to **(A-RAT-mind)** as would later Schopenhauer and Maine de Biran.

Let me just mention the transformations of the A-RAT in the French and French-inspired philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Let me mention its three main avatars. The first is the appeal to emotions interpreted as modes of existence; it is probably inspired by Heidegger's very strong claim that all interpretation and understanding is founded in and guided by "mood" and "attunement" (*Stimmung* and *Gestimmtheit*, in *Being and time*, §31-32, for a fine discussion see Hatzimoysis 2009). Sartre stresses the role of emotion in apprehending the world; his "*Nausea*" vividly illustrates how the affective state discloses to us (through his character, Roquentin) the deep meaning of the very being-in-itself. The second avatar, also to be found rather early, in Sartre, is the "body"

as the seat of affection and desire. Husserlian phenomenology of the "Leib", the experienced body, with early Merleau-Ponty on the French side, has been stressing the bodily activity and its cognitive role; the more a-rationalistic approach is to stress the bodily aspects of affective states, the force of hunger and sexual desire, and has made the appeal to "corps" practically synonymous with appeal to affect and drive. The third avatar comes with the deployment of psychoanalysis: desire, modeled on sexual desire, becomes the crucial human trait, responsible for understanding of the whole of human thinking and acting. In Lacan it is "jouissance" (enjoyment, with connotations of sexual enjoyment and orgasm), in Deleuze it is "the desiring body" that become fundamental for the whole of what we would call anthropology and metaphysics. Žižek and others (including Deleuze and Guattari) have transferred this model to politics; leftist emancipator politics is defined in terms of desire and "jouissance".

Let us return two centuries back. In the wake of German idealism, the a-rationalist thesis is combined with general anti-realism. Human mind creates or co-creates reality, and the geography of the human mind is at the same time the cosmography of the whole of being. If not the human mind, then an absolute, mind-like entity, Geist, or Absolute. But, if mind creates reality, and the mind is a-rational, then a-rational forces create reality. If the human and historical are directly ontological, then the fierce passions ruling our heart and our political conflicts govern, or co-govern the very Being itself, or are just identical to it. The world is the will, as Schopenhauer proclaimed, it is an artifact of the will-to-power, as Nietzsche claimed. Let me encapsulate the idea and give it a name:

**(A-RAT-world)** The basic reality of the world is akin to the a-rational element of human mind.

After Schopenhauer, with the late Schelling (A-RAT-mind) and (A-RAT-world) enter the scene of the late German Idealism, in the three initial decades of the nineteenth century. (German historicans of philosophy and culture have dug out interesting connections with the peak of German romanticism, but we cannot enter the topic here). According to the new creed, the central element of human mind is a drive; more importantly, a basic element of reality (including, in the first place God) is a-rational.

Be it as it may, the important ontological turn did not affect the style. Schelling's style is close to Hegel's, as Schopenhauer's is to Kant's. They argue for the primacy of the will, in the rational framework of their targets,

Hegel and Kant. The third interesting author, their less known French counterpart Maine de Biran argues against French naturalistic philosophers-scientists (*les Ideologues*), with their own rational, argumentative and even naturalistic weapons. The style of our a-rationalists fits the rational style of their opponents; no change is introduced.

One can understand the emergence of the non-argumentative tradition if one compares these early a-rationalists with later-day ones like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Indeed, things have drastically changed in the middle of the nineteenth century. With Kierkegaard the affect enters the scene of post-Hegelian thinking (maybe anticipated a few decades earlier by German romanticists, Schlegel brothers and their circle). Kierkegaard has indeed been taken as the thinker of the passion, as opposed to reason, and has influenced the later development precisely in this direction.

Some authors argue it is not the final contrast in Kierkegaard, e.g. Norman Lillegard (2002:251-273): "The passion of his Knight of faith transcend rational understanding „(...) I can understand the tragic hero but cannot understand Abraham, though in a certain crazy sense I admire him more than all other men." Both Vilhelm in *Either-Or* and Abraham in *Fear and Trembling* challenge Kantian and Hegelian moral rationality. Vilhelm by insisting of a kind of absolute choice of oneself, Abraham by his action that is to be condemned within a normal rational framework.<sup>4</sup> But there is more. The crucial point is the publication of his *Either-or* in 1843. There, the passionate is at least *prima facie* contrasted with the rational, but this is no surprise; the true revolution happens with the style. The writer John Updike notices the analogy with the fiction writer:

Soren Kierkegaard's method, dictated by his volatile and provocative temperament resembles that of a fiction writer: he engages in multiple impersonations, assuming various poses and voices with an impartial vivacity (1987: vii).

Kierkegaard's a-rationalism brings with itself a revolutionary change of style. The first book manifesting it is his "*Either-or*", published in 1843. Famously, three viewpoints are presented there, none of them too rationalistic (although the second one can be related to Kant. These are the hedonistic, moral and

<sup>4</sup> My colleague Majda Trobok asked at this juncture: is it consistent rationally to explain A's action and to claim that it is to be condemned within rational framework, and see oneself as going against the rational? Well, Kierkegaard does not himself see his own account of Abraham's decisions a belonging to rational explanation.

the religious one presented by a seducer, a moralist and a preacher character respectively. But the additional and sensational news is the style of thinking and of writing. The hedonistic viewpoint is presented through the diary of the seducer, the moral one through advice of the elder moralist, Vilhelm, writing very much like Seneca: it is the sincerity of the writer that counts as much as the cogency of the standpoint itself. The moralist speaks in a tone of advisory tracts, not in the cold abstract style of Kant. The final redemption brought by the religious viewpoint is presented through a sermon of a pastor from Jutland. "Either-Or" is the grand monument of domain-adapted style of thinking and writing, as MacIntyre has pointed out in Chapter Four of his *After Virtue*. There are no philosophical comments from external, neutral standpoint: the editor character, Victor Eremita, limits himself to factual, archivist information. The characters write in the manner inspired by the domain and topic: the aesthetic attitude is embodied in the seducer's diary, rather than being coldly dissected. Much more importantly, the two more "serious" standpoints are not presented in an argumentative manner at all. The brilliant stylistic exercise anticipates a fundamental turn. The idea is, in the form of a slogan: If you write about passion, write passionately.<sup>5</sup>

Nietzsche contributes to the trend by switching to literary style: aphorism, play with words, etc.. act against traditional (early modern) argumentative style. With "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", the idea becomes an implicit norm for the author. The norm is interesting.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>My colleague Nenad Smokrovic objected that Kierkegaard writes in a non-philosophical style. But this is precisely the point, since he is a philosopher and is regarded as one.

*Either-Or* stands at the beginning of a revolution in philosophical style that has profoundly marked continental philosophy and is responsible for its present profile. It suggests that if you write about a Don Juan, you should do a diary of seduction, if you write about morals you should be moralizing, and if about religion, then preaching. We have already quoted Michael Weston in his book on *Kierkegaard and modern continental philosophy* (1994) who notes the following:

Post-metaphysical thought in Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida shows certain central characteristics which have their parallels in Kierkegaard: a 'style' of writing at variance with that of the metaphysical tradition which has its rationale in the 'situatedness' of the thought whose intention is, not the representation of 'the truth', but an 'intervention' into that situation. (1994: 136).

<sup>6</sup>A recent work on Nietzsche by Rogério Miranda de Almeida carries the consequences to the extreme. Nietzsche should be read as a paradoxical writer, says the Preface:

Our proposal here is, rather, to focus on paradox, or the paradoxes that Nietzsche expresses through his writing, and thus through the great diversity of perspectives and rereadings operative in the domains of art, science, religion, morality, philosophy, and culture in general. (2006: ix)

But how does one discuss Nietzsche once it is agreed that the meanings are subject to “constant play” of renewals and reevaluations? Every proposal can be turned into its contrary by the “constant play”, so that the danger lurks that Nietzsche turns out as saying nothing by saying too much. This might be the price of wanting to write a-rationally about the non-rational.<sup>7</sup> If you write about poetry, write poetically, if you care for the future of the mankind, write as prophets did. If you care about the a-rational, banish rationality from your style. (Political activism also helps: if you write about politics, write manifestoes!). Both the writer and the prospective reader are passionate beings, since all humans are; and the passionate style plays at the deepest cords of their hearts. But, and this is philosophically central, the deep cords of the heart are in unison with the deepest chords of reality: *the passionate, aphoristic, literary style is at the same time deeply philosophical, since it manifests the deepest reality of the world.*

Of course, the turn to non-argumentative style (or at least to the style less argumentative than the style of Descartes, Locke, Leibniz and Hume) has been prepared by predecessors. By his enormous authority Kant made the idea that philosophy may and should be very difficult to read and understand compelling to the academic audience of the next generation; it is the depth that

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It is wrong, de Almeida claims, to try to clean Nietzsche’s text from contradictions:

To be sure, the traditional commentators on Nietzsche are unanimous in admitting that his oeuvre contains “contradictions” and ambiguities. But these contradictions invoke, as often as not, “apparent contradictions” in the sense that they would be—unknown to Nietzsche himself—a logical thread carrying these texts to a coherent and continuous whole. (Ibid.)

Being contradictory and literally paradoxical is the main virtue of Nietzsche, and it is linked to his understanding of poetry and fiction:

As a matter of fact, the principal themes of the Nietzschean oeuvre that we develop—that is, the will to power, the relation of forces, nihilism, and the eternal return—are extremely problematic and subject to diverse interpretations. And this is the case because Nietzsche himself continually reiterates, rereads, and creates new perspectives on the art of poetry, fiction, invention, interpretation, and construction. But the art of construction presupposes the force of destruction and imposes a new meaning. This is why a thought that moves in and from one relation of forces, and that is itself force, can only be expressed through the writing of paradox, that is, through the constant play of inclusions, exclusions, ruptures, renewals, and reevaluations. (2006:x)

<sup>7</sup> For a contrasting analytic reading of Nietzsche see Leiter’s enjoyable paper (Leiter, 2004) on how to recover Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud for analytic philosophy: present them as would-be naturalists, looking for explanation rather than for a “deconstruction” or “subversion” in a post-modernist vein.



counts and not the shallow formal logic (Kant's difficult style is probably the result of a historical and biographical accident, on the one hand, Kant's creativity that brought him new ideas as he wrote, on the other, his need to force the rich flow of ideas into a complicated and rigid patterns of classification, and perhaps even his fears, having to do with religiously provocative and politically challenging ideas; notice how the politically innocent necessary illusions of pure reason are just called mistakes, though in a Latinate terminology, whereas the chapter about the illusion about the provability of God's existence bears the charming title of "Ideal of pure reason"). German idealism continues the line: for it, commonsense is irrelevant (Hegel) and formal logic is alienated and plainly wrong, so, traditional logical tools (from definition to nicely sequenced arguments, with premises and conclusions detailed in full) is out of question.<sup>8</sup> In German idealism, especially in the work of Hegel, holism adds to it: one understands and evaluates parts only by somehow grasping the whole. In Hegel's aftermath, such holism combined with anti-commonsense and anti-scientific attitude, favoring depth over understanding, and religious and poetic influence, the grasping of the whole becomes less and less transparent; this projects on the parts as well. But now, if commonsense is irrelevant, where do you start? Natural science is seen as alienated, so scientific style is not welcome. One alternatives is provided by links to religion and mysticism (German romantics, Schelling), another by poetry. (Holism here becomes less relevant).

It seems that the basic line is that the style should follow the domain. Since Kierkegaard, as we noted, the a-rationalist program becomes methodologically demanding: philosophy should *manifest* the will, desire, the unconscious, i.e. the irrational, and not only think and talk about it. Let me put it in a formula. In particular, since a-rational domains are philosophically central, the style of philosophy should come closer to the reality of the a-rational. Here is the idea generalized and put in a nutshell. Let me call it Exemplification Constraint, EC for short:

(EC) The cognitive style, the language-style and the method of studying a domain D should exemplify and manifest the nature of D itself, by following the language-style and the manner of D in its spontaneous manifestation. In particular, for a-rational domains, the cognitive style and the linguistic expression should minimize the use of (or perhaps completely eschew) traditional rationalist methods of enquiry and presentation.

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<sup>8</sup> Thanks go to Urška Mavrić for this point.

How about rational domains, I was asked by my colleague Kati Farkas. In the more radical branches of continental thought, they are disposed with in the following way: the rational is in fact seemingly rational. Logic is just expression of the will to power. Formal logic is part of the alienated, technological world, more recently of the male dominated world: logo-centrism goes with phallocentrism. Of course, not all contemporary continentals follow this lead. But many, and the most vociferous ones do.

The main consequence of EC is that if D is non-cognitive, a-rational, irrational (e.g. the unconscious, will-for-power, desire, poetic language...), then the discourse about D inherits its characteristics, at least as much as it is possible within a professional philosophical discourse.

Consider now how EC interacts with the two principles of a-rationalism (A-RAT-mind) and (A-RAT-world) and AHO. Let me put in a series of three steps.

First, by the a-rationalist assumption (A-RAT-mind) the a-rational or irrational domains— the unconscious, will-for-power, desire— are anthropologically central. Logocentrism is bad, it is the treason of the deepest human reality.

Second, the a-rational is also ontologically central, and we get (A-RAT-world). So, the unconscious, will-for-power and desire should play a central role within ontology as well.

Third, since they are non-rational, they demands non-rational presentation, by EC. Therefore, a central ontological domain has to be presented in a non-rational, non-argumentative way. The whole of philosophical discourse— and most importantly, ontology and epistemology— itself should be passionate, poetic, aphoristic, in short, non-argumentative, at least to some extent.

This moves into the very heart of philosophy since non rational domains are central since Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Marx and Freud. Marxism has been since its beginnings oscillating between its Hegelian origin and the idea of scientific understanding of social reality and the “scientific socialism” as the alternative to mere utopia: early Marx vs. *Das Kapital*, Korsch and Bloch vs. dialectical-cum-historical materialism, Heideggerian Marxism vs. Althusser. And the style has been following the characterization of the domain: objective historical development vs. suffering in alienation and appeal to the forces of revolutionary subjectivity and authenticity. On the more popular side, feminism has contributed to a political denigration of the rational as phallogentric and patriarchal; not all feminists claim this, but those that claim have attracted most attention. (Again, I apologize for brevity and generalizations, but I need to paint a big picture on a small canvas. In the next section I mention ???

The crucial role of EC lies in explaining the non-argumentative, poetic and sometimes logic-unfriendly style of a lot of mainstream continental writing. The style is not just the style of writing, it is a matter of the way of thinking. Analytic colleagues get nervous about it, and the malicious among them see it a symptom of craziness. In contrast, EC presents it as a principled choice, far from craziness. Since poetry and literature in general has been traditionally the medium of passion and affectivity, EC will naturally favor a turn to literally culture away from the scientific one. Of course, once the EC has become a norm, it will tend to recruit authors with literary talent, and the circle (virtuous or vicious, depending on the taste) will form itself. Of course, EC is not always followed *a la lettre* but its pressure often results in a discourse that is geared at least in part to exemplifying the passionate, non-rational. This is the heritage of the nineteenth century great a-rationalists. The next act happens in the twentieth century, beginning sometime in the late twenties, early thirties, in the troubled, disoriented Germany, poised for a dangerous adventure, that will lead it into a catastrophe.

### **The thinker as poet: from phenomenology to Heidegger and to the post-heideggerian scene**

PHILOCONTE: Qui irait croire la déclaration ridicule de Carnap quand il dit que le métaphysicien est un artiste raté? Heidegger au contraire nous a montré qu'entre le penseur et le poète il y a des liens si profonds que l'on ne peut plus penser, comme Platon, en termes d'un partage entre ceux qui cherchent la vérité et les producteurs d'apparence.

Engel (1997 :16)

Who would believe in the ridiculous statement of Carnap that the metaphysician is nothing but an unsuccessful artist? Quite the opposite: Heidegger has shown us that there are deep ties between the thinker and the poet, such that one cannot, like Plato, think in terms of the division between those who search for truth and producers of appearance. (my translation)

We now think of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as extremely significant authors, but one should bear in mind that they were marginal on the academic scene of their countries. The first never made an academic career, the second started it and abandoned it. Their work was influential, but the academic life was moving in the more boring tracks of neo-Kantianism, until phenomenology

was born; but the phenomenology itself was highly abstract and theoretical, initially geared to answering the same questions that neo-Kantians were addressing, and produced in a very dry, non-emotional, academic Germanic style. It is only with Heidegger that situation changes. How it happened is a matter for historians, but his institutional academic philosophical success was certainly to a large extent due to his erudite investigations into history of philosophy, especially ancient Greek and modern German, that preserved for him the aura of traditional university professor of philosophy, in contrast to outsiders like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. On the other hand, his daring and original non-traditional ideas have procured to him a talented and responsive audience thirsting for good philosophy in dark times of Nazi Germany; his own survival in the circumstances being, infamously, due to less than impressive political moves of his.

It was Heidegger who turned phenomenological investigation into an analysis of the existential relation between Dasein and Sein, and then into a poetic-hermeneutic investigation into human destiny. He started in *Being and Time* with the idea of human involvement with the world, as an antidote to skepticism. (One route from there is the pragmatist one, taken by many of his American interpreters). In later works the involvement is characterized as "living poetically"(dichterisch). Our motto, "Being's poem, just begun, is man.", taken from his *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* combines all the elements we were talking about. First, the idea that human being belongs to the very ground of being, that it is ontologically most intimately connected to it. Second, that the relationship between the two is primarily poetic, as opposed to say, epistemic, or logic. Man is the poem, *Gedicht* of Sein. Which reminds us of the idea that "poetically dwells the mean on the Earth", taken from Hölderlin, and philosophically developed by our philosopher. And of course, the philosopher is expressing this in a poetic way, not in cold theory, nor in a sequence of arguments. Just in case one might think it is an isolated fragment, let me give its context:

When the early morning light quietly grows above the mountains.

. . . /

The world's darkening never reaches to the light of Being./

We are too late for the gods and too early for Being. Being's poem,  
just begun, is man. /

To head toward a star—this only. /To think is to confine yourself to  
a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's

sky. (1971:4.)

Albert Hofstadter, the translator of *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* has entitled it "The Thinker As Poet", because, in his opinion, here "the thinker does what a poet does—dichtet.(Ibid. xi)." Ironically, given his change of the title, he then continues:

"Heidegger's original title for this piece was "*Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*—"From the Experience of Thinking"—and one should read it as such, as the uttering of realizations that have come out of a long life of discovery of a way of thinking that belongs to life in its fullness as genuinely human.(Ibid., xii).

So, how did this development from Husserlian phenomenology to the poetic style of the late Heidegger take place. Let us start from phenomenology. Note that the *phenomenological description* was meant as a report on the given, not as any kind of non-argumentative procedure. In the more careful use, it provides evidence for further philosophizing and arguing. But on the more risky side, it offers opportunity for smuggling substantial philosophical views into "pure" describing (analogous to "theory-laden" perception in the debates of philosophy of science). Phenomenology has been promoting a "neutral" description of our experience. However, in Husserl and then in Sartre, the presumed descriptions are very much colored by philosophical theory. Unfortunately, since they are presented as descriptions, this presentation apparently frees the philosopher from the obligation to argue; he is just "presenting evidence" in the form of presumably neutral description. This dogmatism of presumed description is strengthened with increasingly difficult style, acceptable (and perhaps even demanded) in an academic climate formed by Kantian tradition of heavy, convoluted style. The convoluted style of "Being and nothingness" nicely illustrates the danger: a clear line between describing on the one hand and argumentative theorizing is never drawn.

In Heidegger the dogmatism of presumed description encounters EC and the gap widens. In Sartre, it appears in *L'Être et le néant*, and then meshes with his litteral project. Existentialism continues with linking philosophical writing with (very successful) literature; as Roberto Bernasconi nicely pointed out in a talk, most people have got their first impression of existentialism from *Nausea*, and the novel played the crucial role in its history.

However, before sliding into poetry in late Heidegger, the style went through a very important phase: *non-argumentative hermeneutical reconstruction* of classical sources. It is usually characterized by two features: First, what is re-

constructed are not particular arguments of the classics; in the best case it is a general orientation of arguing, but even this is mostly left implicit. Second, the reconstruction is full of highly suggestive, never explicitly argumentative, and often clearly non-argumentative moves. The reconstructed items are in the good case meaning of their main theses, in somewhat less good case, simply meanings of crucial terms, but the reasons for accepting (or rejecting) a view are in the rule not made explicit. The appeals to authority of the great philosophers or thinker in general of the past (ranging from Presocratics, through Plato, to Kant or Hegel) are rarely presented as such, but are masked as invocations of great truths with almost mystical appeal, with no rational explanation of why we should trust, say, Heraclitus rather than Chrysipus, or Plato rather than Aristotle. In all this development, the a-rational is firmly affirmed:

Thinking begins only when we have come to know that Reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stubborn adversary of thought. (2002:199).

Finally, we get the poetic glaze. Poetry joins philosophy, as illustrated by our motto. Indeed, for Heidegger the traditional forms of rationality are all on the side of the fallen humanity: classical logic, scientific thinking, technological intelligence and rational planning. In contrast, the authentic forms of *Dasein* are famously given in the early work through existential, emotionally colored attitudes, above all the attitude of care. In later work a crucial role will be played by art, and in particular poetry, and the language of philosophy will tend to imitate the poetic language. Here is, for instance, how Heidegger formulates his suggestion about the end of philosophy:

The old meaning of the word "end" means the same as place: "from one end to the other" means from one place to the other. *The end of philosophy is the place*, that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in *its most extreme possibility*. End as completion means this gathering (1978:375).

As we would expect, it is seriously multiply ambiguous text; the main term, "end" can mean – finish, goal, place, and the suggestion comes as a surprise: the end of philosophy is the place. Next, we have massive use of poetic figures, with the use of evocative appeals to thing like "*extreme possibility*".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Here is the wider context of the claim:

If we try to reconstruct the deeply hidden argument, we obtain the following:

1. The old meaning of the word "end" means the same as place therefore,
2. *The end of philosophy is the place,*
- (3. *Place is the place of gathering*).
- therefore
4. The end of philosophy is that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in *its most extreme possibility*. (End as completion means this gathering.)

But how does 2. follow from 1. ? Only because "the old meaning of the word "end" means the same as place"; but the old meaning of the word "silly" is blessed, and nobody would accept this as final evidence that it is a fine thing to be silly. It seems that there is no point in reconstructing Heidegger's thinking in such an argumentative way. Either the reader gets the poetic suggestion, or the labor is lost. In short, what started in 1843 as an experiment in style, has ended in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a transformation of central philosophical disciplines.

Let me briefly further illustrate the working of the same thought through the issue of conceptualizing, conceptual understanding and theory-building

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Throughout the whole history of philosophy, Plato's thinking remains decisive in changing forms. Metaphysics is Platonism. Nietzsche characterizes his philosophy as reversed Platonism. With the reversal of metaphysics which was already accomplished by Karl Marx, the most extreme possibility of philosophy is attained. It has entered its final stage. To the extent that philosophical thinking is still attempted, it manages only to attain an epigonal renaissance and variations of that renaissance. Is not then the end of philosophy after all a cessation of its way of thinking? To conclude this would be premature.

As a completion, an end is the gathering into the most extreme possibilities. We think in too limited a fashion as long as we expect only a development of recent philosophies of the previous style. We forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of sciences within the field which philosophy opened up. The development of the sciences is at the same time their separation from philosophy and the establishment of their independence. This process belongs to the completion of philosophy. Its development is in full swing today in all regions of beings. This development looks like the mere dissolution of philosophy, and in truth is precisely its completion. (1978: 375)

in matters of art. Our source is Gadamer, who is the most pro-argumentative of all Heideggerians.<sup>10</sup> In a recent paper the Canadian philosopher Jean Grondin interpreting Gadamer claims “that it is not possible to grasp conceptually the play of art. What we can do is to play along, to participate and to take part in the play” (web:27). Let me call it Impossibility thesis. “When we hear music, we instinctively start singing and dancing.” (Ibid.), continues Grondin. If the thesis were taken seriously, as it merits to be taken, it would entail that there is no way to write about the play of art in a distanced, non-playful and non-artistic way, in the manner that is usual for the analytic approaches to art. If one writes about the play of art one should write playfully and artistically, one should “participate and (...) take part in the play”. The Impossibility thesis, very much in line with EC, fits nicely with Gadamer’s fundamental thesis, according to which is it the play itself, in this case the play of the work of art, that guides our involvement, rather than our subjectivity playing the leading role. If we extend this fundamental thesis to the meta-level of theorizing about art, we get the view that it is the playful nature of the work itself that should guide the way of theorizing about it (although Gadamer himself does not write in playful fashion, and is very much in love with arguments). Moreover, if successful, the work of art changes us, and the change must re-appear in the manner in which we think of it; the manner must bear a stamp of the experienced work itself. And this change is then normally thought of pervading our understanding and our manner of thinking. This is not how many serious philosophers of art, from Kant to Levinson, have proceeded. They have sought precisely conceptual understanding, and their writing is not playful at all. On the other hand, the Impossibility thesis seems to capture nicely a lot of practice in contemporary continental philosophical writing about art and literature, and also shows its bite in the non-philosophical theoretical writings (literary theory, art theory), in which theoretician’s often, write in a literary fashion, re-enacting, so to speak, the works of art they are talking about. It fits Derrida’s idea of philosophy as *écriture*; what has started in his early work on Husserl, as an examination of the semiotics of the voice as opposed to the letter or writing (the literary sense of “*écriture*”; Derrida would love the pun), has become an invitation to philosophers to pass to *écriture* in the sense of fiction, to become “*écrivains*”; and the followers, have of course, obliged.

Let me conclude this brief sampling by noting the radical variant of the A-RAT and exemplification, to be found in Lacan who, as already mentioned,

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<sup>10</sup> thanks go to Darjana Nastić whose thesis introduced me to this debate.



combines the play of words derived from the Freudian tradition of the study of slips of tongue with poetic variations on it, unexpectedly enriched by mathematical looking formulae and diagrams, which, however, in their interpretation offer a wide space to freedom, multiple ambiguity and other typical poetical virtues. What is the link with EC? First, I find Lacan's famous dictum: There is no metalanguage! to be a fine variant on EC. If there is no metalanguage, there is no neutral, rationally controlled, dispassionate point of view from which we can think, speak and write about the non-rational domains (it is not the only reading of the dictum, but it is hopefully a plausible one).

For Lacan's favorite area, the unconscious, the morals is clear: write in the style of the discourse on and around psychoanalyst's sofa, use play of words, form of words inspired by free associations, slip of tongue and similar sources, rather than in the dry, quasi-scientific original Freudian style. Shoshana Felman I think rightly speaks of Lacan's "poetic" rejection of concept(s) and knowledge (where in her writing "poetic" implies "inclusion of madness into the very style of writing").(2003, passim).<sup>11</sup>

The crucial role of EC lies in explaining the non-argumentative, poetic and sometimes logic. Thanks to EC, continental philosophy has been vastly more successful in catering to the immediate and pressing concerns of arts and humanities than its analytic rival. Its readiness to tolerate, if not to encourage essayistic style, in particular a mixture of literary and philosophical manner of writing, its constant reference to matters cultural and artistic, its willingness to give up the truth-directedness, the goal of clarity and elimination of ambiguity in the interest of other goals (artistic finesse, political militancy or provocation and the like) has made it much more acceptable to the departments of English, cultural studies or film theory.

Finally an illustration from Derrida. In his *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, he sets himself to investigate the paradoxes of exchange, gift and giving. A

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<sup>11</sup>The usual reading of the dictum (from the *Seminar* of November 1966, and repeated for instance, in the preface to the pocket edition of *Écrits*, and often in *Autres Écrits*, Seuil, 2001, e.g. at p. 18) stresses that there is not Archimedean point outside of a given discourse, from which one could talk about that discourse. This reading does suggest what we call EC below: if you want to talk about some discourse D (of passion, of politics, of religious exaltation), your own talk will not be "outside" D, less metaphorically, will have characteristics of D. The *Compendium of Lacanian term* (2001: 202) appeals to the following alleged comment that Lacan gives himself:

'Any statement of authority has no other guarantee than its very enunciation, and it is pointless for it to seek it in another signifier, which could not appear outside this locus [of the signifier] in any way' (2006: 310).

I was not able to locate the reference, neither in the French original nor in Fink's translation.

In *Autres Écrits* Lacan comments the slogan with "there is no Other of Other" (325).

real present, a "true" gift should be accompanied by no expectation of return, and accepted with no checking and doubt. But gifts are at the same time caught in expectations of reciprocity, so the true gift is paradoxical and impossible. So, there is an element of madness in giving and reciprocating, the "madness of economic reason" as Derrida characterizes it in the title of the chapter. (The chapter is on Marcel Mauss and his classical book on the gift.) Immediately, EC shows its teeth: Theory, i.e. the distanced, non-mad reflection about gift is powerless (1994:30), in this "sleepwalk at the limit of the impossible". So, thinking about the gift means entering the "destructive circle" of the transcendental illusion. (1994:35). It involves giving "gages", not just tokens of faith, but guarantees, acts of taking "personal risks", and this intellectual "sleepwalk" will reflect on and in the style of writing: „the discourse on madness appears to go mad in its turn, alogos and atopos". (1994:35).

In a way this is the farthest point that a serious non-argumentative strategy could reach apparently following the lead of EC: if you write about madness write (at least a bit) madly. More than that would destroy any seriousness. So much about our main hypothesis, that the (A-Rat) and EC offers a good reconstruction and partial explanation of the birth and success of non-argumentative tradition in philosophy in the last two centuries. Further explanations should be historical and sociological, telling us about the external circumstances that made it so successful. Let me just add that no simple-minded explanation in terms of political affiliation is going to work. Some authors (e.g. Emmanuel Faye, 2005) have been offering explanations pointing to Heidegger's extreme right wing sympathies and engagements, others (e.g. D. Eribon, 1992) have mused about the sociology of French a-rationalist scene pointing to the involvements with communism; if we put them together, we see the common mistake of connecting a-rationalism with a particular political agenda. Obviously, the a-rationalist tradition is not politically tied to any particular segment of the extremely wide political spectrum, ranging in its political choices all the way from Hitler through religious center-right and atheist center-left to Lenin, Mao and Gandhi.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Honoring Pascal's work on the continental-analytic contrast, this paper discusses the non-argumentative tradition in continental philosophy; it is one

of its central traditions, but not the only one. From Brentano and Husserl to Habermas there have been other lines of thought, bristling with argumentation, but they are not the topic of the paper. Let me first summarize our proposal for understanding the non-argumentative tradition in continental philosophy. The more extreme works in this tradition are sometimes criticized by more argumentatively-minded philosophers as non-philosophy, fiction, or simply as nonsense. In contrast, we have tried to show here that the story is more complex, and have tried to find principled explanation of why good philosophers would turn to a way of writing that is consciously using procedures typical of literary and poetic style, involving, and even praising multiple ambiguity (without indications about disambiguating), massive and central use of poetic figures (again without clear advice about decoding them), blocking reconstruction in argumentative style, and, when using arguments, as all philosophers at the end of the day have to do, hiding it deeply in the poetic text. (Again, I am not claiming that most of continental philosophy just became literature, this would be a caricature.)

The proposal of explanation has three steps. First, it reverts to the importance of the a-rational element in the tradition, say, desire, will to power or drive, which is highly valued and taken to be central for human psychological life. Second, it points to the elements of anti-realism or at least flirtation with it in the main authors: they tend to transfer the diagnosis about the importance of the a-rational element from the mind to the world. Finally, it seems natural that at least some philosophers who made the first two steps, would also have reservations about rational, explicitly argumentative methods of investigating and presenting the central elements and structure of the mind and world as they see it. If the world (or at least our world) is constituted by drive and will to power, if our mind is not only lead by them, but constituted by them, wouldn't a philosopher betray his or her insight by presenting all this in a cold, rational manner? Rather, the style should follow the domain of investigation, the style of philosophy should come closer to the deep reality of the a-rational by exemplifying and manifesting it. If man is the "poem of Being", then the essence of both of them should be expressed poetically. The cognitive style and the linguistic expression should minimize the use of (or perhaps completely eschew) traditional rationalist methods of enquiry and presentation. This is valid for the central authors, whose short quotes we used as our examples (too few, unfortunately, but the space is limited). This way of doing philosophy can lead to caricature, and we have avoided the worse exemplars, often imitators of more serious philosophers. But it can also be used in a more moderate fashion, like for instance, in Adorno and Foucault, where

stylistic brilliance did not destroy the argumentative scaffolding. Most continental philosophers still argue with the reader and with their predecessors and opponents, but arguments tend to be less explicit, and are often being immersed in the medium of non-argumentative style, ranging from poetic flights to political invective. Let me reiterate my main hypothesis: the combination of the preference for the a-rational, and the idea that the style of thinking and presentation should mimic the a-rational domain and exemplify and manifest its characteristics offers a good reconstruction and partial explanation of the genesis and success of the non-argumentative tradition in continental philosophy.

Finally, assuming that we, contributors to the volume, prefer the argumentative style, what can we learn from the non-argumentative tradition and its success? Well, that if you want to persuade a wider audience, it is sometimes best to hide the rigor of one's philosophical argument and add some literary flavor. On the other hand, if there is to be a successful dialogue between analytic and continental philosophy, it is more likely to happen between the analytic philosophers and the more argumentative among their continental colleagues. The dialogue might look as an optimistic continuation of Engel's *La Dispute*; but this is for the moment just a hope.

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