

Book reviews

The Future for Philosophy, edited by Brian Leiter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, 372 pp., £25.00.

The starting-point of this anthology is the observation that philosophy, more than any other discipline, is plagued by quandaries about its nature and in what direction it ought to go. As the editor points out in his introductory essay, there was a period from the 1940s to the 1970s when philosophers were convinced that the methodology of conceptual analysis provided their discipline with all the respectability it needed. After that, philosophy's academic and social legitimacy has repeatedly been challenged.

Leiter and most other contributors to this volume emphasize two major responses to these challenges. One is the 'quietist' or Wittgensteinian response, according to which philosophy has to be silent about many of the issues that it previously made pronouncements about. This approach does not have any proponent in the present book.

The other response is the 'naturalist turn,' that is much influenced by Quine. It urges philosophers to operate in close cooperation with scientists, building philosophical knowledge that is continuous with our knowledge about nature. *The Future for Philosophy* is largely a plaidoyer for this approach. It is in fact a most effective plaidoyer, not least due its pluralism. The contributors do not form a uniform school of thought but rather a collection of scholars with certain themes, perspectives, and standpoints in common.

One of the most noticeable differences between them is their attitudes to analytic philosophy. Leiter is himself one of the most repudiative. Without much ado he declares that analytical philosophy is defunct. Others have a more positive view, for instance Timothy Williamson who says: 'Analytical philosophy at its best uses logical rigour and semantic sophistication to achieve a sharpness of philosophical vision unobtainable by other means.' Julia Annas points out that work on ancient ethics has in recent years become 'ever more 'analytical' in the sense of caring for rigour in our understanding of the ancient debates.'

At least in part, these differences seem to depend on the precise meaning that the respective authors attach to the phrase 'analytical

philosophy.’ This phrase can be used in a narrow sense to denote the view that philosophy can proceed on its own, producing knowledge based exclusively on linguistic analysis. Examples of this view can easily be found in 20th century Anglophone philosophy. Alfred Ayer maintained that philosophy should not concern itself with physical facts but only with the ways in which we speak about them. Similarly, Michael Dummett argued that the proper goal of philosophy is to analyze the structure of thought, which is best done by studying language. It is probably this language-centred form of analytical philosophy that Leiter considers to be defunct.

However, the term ‘analytical philosophy’ can also be used in a wider sense that includes philosophers, such as members of the Vienna circle and many others, who combine high demands on analytical rigour and precision with a focus on issues relevant to science. Those contributors to this volume who express appreciation of analytical philosophy seem to refer to this broader interpretation of the concept.

The future for philosophy that is foreseen in the book is a philosophy that has taken a ‘naturalistic turn’ and associates itself closely with the natural sciences. It does not identify itself as ‘analytical,’ but it shares with analytical philosophy the concern for linguistic clarity and precision. How new is this vision of philosophy? Is it a new brand of philosophy? Or is it just analytical philosophy, marketed under a new and less antagonizing name? In order to answer these questions it is instructive to consider how analytical philosophy was viewed in its heyday.

In 1936, after a year-long trip to Europe, Ernest Nagel wrote an article in which he summarized his impressions of analytical philosophy (‘Impressions and Appraisals of Analytic Philosophy in Europe,’ *Journal of Philosophy*, 33:1, 1936, pp. 5–24 and no. 2, pp. 29–53). He reported as one of the major common characteristics of analytical philosophers that ‘they take for granted a body of authentic knowledge acquired by the special sciences, and are concerned not with *adding* to it in the way research in these sciences adds to it, but with *clarifying* its meaning and implications.’ Another common feature of analytical philosophers was that they subscribe to a common-sense naturalism and ‘accept as a matter of course the mechanisms which science progressively discovers.’ According to Nagel, ‘any one brought up in the atmosphere of analytical naturalism will find himself very much at home intellectually’ in European analytical philosophy.

In terms of their conception of philosophy’s role and its relations to other disciplines, many of today’s naturalists seem to be much closer to the analytical philosophy of the 1930s than they themselves tend to emphasize. Although much is different, the basic attitude to

science seems to be the same: respect for scientific research and its outcomes, eagerness to deal philosophically with new scientific knowledge, willingness to cooperate with scientists, identification of conceptual clarity as one of the major contributions that philosophers can make in such co-operations.

The contributors to *The Future for Philosophy* seem to share the view that 'continental philosophy' is a misleading concept that unites tendencies that should preferably be treated separately. As Leiter points out, continental philosophy is a 'series of partly overlapping philosophical developments that have in common primarily that they occurred mainly in Germany and France in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.' He could have added that the designation is geopolitically dubious since it excludes philosophers who were expelled from the continent by the Nazis, including many of those whom Ernest Nagel visited on his tour to continental Europe in the nineteen thirties.

Philosophy has at least one more important continuity issue to deal with in addition to its continuity with science, namely its possible continuity with everyday reflections on human life and its conditions. This is touched upon in Thomas Hurka's and, in particular, Philip Pettit's contributions to the volume. Pettit sees philosophy's continuity with everyday thought as a limitation on its continuity with science. 'Philosophy will be continuous with the efforts of science, so far as it attempts to elaborate theory that has to be squared with scientific results, as just remarked. But it will stand apart from science in having as its remit the elaboration of a position that vindicates or can replace the views that come spontaneously to us in the ordinary course of life.'

But philosophy's two continuities need not be in mutual opposition. Science itself connects with unsystematized everyday reflections on the natural world, both in the sense of originating in them and in the sense of ceaselessly influencing them. Philosophy can be continuous, without contradiction, both with science and with unsystematized everyday experience and reflection. It can perhaps even serve to connect them better with each other.

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