

Personal identity, collective identity, the identity of science – continental versus analytic perspectives

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

allow me, by way of introduction, a personal reminiscence.

I chanced upon the work of the Frankfurt School for the first time in the early seventies, when I thought that I had found in Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* answers to the problems that had been sorely vexing during a previous degree of mine, on anthropology, at the University of the Witwatersrand, in South Africa. Problems especially of a methodological kind, to do with the way that empirical findings of paleo-anthropology were fitted (or did not fit into) the conceptions of scientific methodology that were current at the time.¹ But this is what happened: when I took Habermas' book to my sociology lecturer, he returned it with the words: sorry, I just don't understand it.

Later I realized that this in itself was really quite civil of him, because the standard response, from within the English-speaking academic world at the time, was a lot more forceful. Obscurantist, unintelligible, teutonic rubbish, unreadable were some of the more printable characterisations en vogue in those years, and in an atmosphere in which Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* was quite typical it was not uncommon to encounter dark suspicions containing words like dialectics, Moskow, agents, useful idiots, communist propaganda. Even in the late seventies a book as influential as

1 The same problems that have surfaced in recent years on epistemological issues surrounding Darwinist explanations of the fossil record. c.f. Stephen R.L. Clark: „Deconstructing Darwin“, Alan Richardson Lecture, 1999.

Leszek Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*, in its discussion of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, the familiar old tone of the Kommunistenfresser was still there: the best that Kolakowski could say about the book was that it had „an extremely intricate syntax“, which he immediately qualified with the suspicion that this „is evidently intentional“, and the remark that it was full of „Hegelian and neo-Hegelian jargon“. „The pretentious obscurity of style and the contempt that it shows for the reader might be endurable if the book were not also totally devoid of literary form“². The ‘might’ in this sentence has never ceased to fascinate me.

That this attitude – towards the followers of Kant and Hegel – was more than just the inner-academic echoes of McCarthyism, the Cold War (in Kolakowski's case) and the legacy of WWII is clear if we glance for a moment at the popular philosophy books of the sixties. Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*³, John Passmore's *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*⁴, two immensely influential books, were both based on what we would now call analytic principles, (Russell is after all a founding member of analytic philosophy), and that means that if the European, post-Kantian tradition came up at all, then invariably in the kind of superior tone which seems to have become de rigueur for analytic philosophers ever since, whenever they're speaking of the ‘continental’ tradition. It's pretty clear now, looking back, that as far as Russell was concerned, Kant and Hegel were terra incognita. He had already set the tone in his discussion of Humean scepticism, which for him – Russell – was the last word on the matter: „It is ... important to discover whether there is any answer to Hume within the framework of a philosophy that is wholly or mainly empirical. If not, there is no intellectual difference between sanity and insanity.“ (647) Where, in this doleful classification, Hegel was to be subsumed was not difficult to guess. As late as 1985 John Passmore noted, of the World Conference of Philosophy in Montreal shortly before, „that considerable segments of the participants neither understood nor wished to understand what other segments of participants were doing, or why they were doing it, even when the topics under discussion were, to judge from their titles alone, of common interest.“⁵ He too was being polite.

2 vol. 3, p. 357

3 1946. (Abbreviated below to *HoWP*).

4 1957.

5 "Recent Philosophers – A supplement to *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*.,, 1985, p. 12.

Twenty years later the situation has become radically different. Analytic Philosophy has come to debate a so-called ‘Analytic/Continental Divide’⁶, and now holds that continental philosophy is, after all, perfectly explicable on entirely analytic principles.⁷

There is the occasional hiccup when in spite of the most intense hermeneutic effort the likes of Nietzsche and Heidegger recalcitrantly refuse to sound as clear and precise as would be desirable, but this is no more than an occasional student grumble.

„Bad philosophers do not argue. They lack rigor, [they lack] clarity and precision. Hence there is no point in engaging with them because they are no philosophers. Since Nietzsche and Heidegger are not committed to argumentative clarity and precision in the analytic sense they are not philosophers. Tricky huh?“⁸

But as this congress of ours demonstrates, analytic philosophy has been triumphantly successful in its program of semantic colonization. That identity and ontology could once have had meanings quite foreign to those which they have now acquired in formal logic, in Artificial Intelligence, in those areas of software development concerned with the integration of

6 „The familiar contrast between ‘Anglo-American’ and ‘Continental’ philosophy was never, of course, geographically accurate. One had to include as ‘Anglo-American’ most Finnish philosophy, much Polish philosophy, and to remember that if ‘Anglo-American’ philosophy has roots in the British empirical tradition it owes a great deal to the German Frege, to such Austrian philosophers as the Vienna positivists, Karl Popper and, further back, Brentano. Nevertheless the contrast roughly worked. On the one side lay Franco-German-Italian philosophy, centring around Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, prophetic in style and, even when its outcome was atheistic, centrally concerned with the issues which have preoccupied theology. It allied itself with literature rather than science and claimed that to be deep, to say something genuinely new, one was forced to be obscure, calling upon the poet’s right to twist language to one’s special purposes. On the other side lay analytical Anglo-American philosophy, with clarity as its central virtue, the linguistic principles laid down by the Royal Society in the seventeenth century still its guide, sympathetic to science, devoting its attention to epistemology, mind and language, centring around Ryle, Ayer, Austin, Quine – brothers from a ‘Continental’ point of view, for all their differences.“ Passmore (1985): *Recent Philosophers*, p. 11. Stanley Cavell: (wikipedia) problem-solving versus text-interpretation.

7 Leiter: „We are now living in a ‘golden age’ of scholarship on Continental philosophy, almost all of which is produced by philosophers who are – again, in the stylistic sense – ‘analytic.’“ (c.f. response to this here: <http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/leiterresp.htm>)

8 Student blog comment.

large masses of unstructured data seems nowadays to interest only a few Mohicans in the history of philosophy, or in the dusty corners of literature and aesthetics departments.

In short, Analytic Philosophy has been engaged, for the last decade or two, in an immensely successful strategy of cooptation⁹, for which the triumphalism of the popular Philosopher's Gourmet Report seems quite representative: „Only analytic philosophers aspire to the level of argumentative sophistication and philosophical depth that marks the great philosophers...“¹⁰ According to Babette Babich, the attitude seems to be: „... anything continental philosophy can do, analytic philosophy can do better“.

How does one deal with this if like yours truly, you've one of these die-hards who has spent his entire philosophical career dwelling on the Frankfurt School?

In preparing for this congress I did something I haven't done for many years; I took down off from my bookshelf the first book I ever owned in Philosophy, and the book that imbued in me an abiding fascination with this subject that has stayed with me ever since. It is Bertrand Russell's His-

- 9 Babette Babich (2003): „On the Analytic-Continental Divide in Philosophy: Nietzsche's Lying Truth, Heidegger's Speaking Language, and Philosophy“, in: C.G. Prado (2003): *A house divided – comparing analytic and continental philosophy*. „...the advantage of denying any difference between modalities of philosophy is considerable because once the denial is in place, continental style philosophy can be dismissed as bad or even as 'just not' philosophy and this is needed both to justify one's inattention to the work done by scholars working in the contemporary tradition of continental philosophy and even more importantly because analytic philosophy wants to try its hand at themes formerly left to continental modes of thought. And such an annexation is securely underway. In addition to self-propounded and blatantly self-serving internet-posted claims that analytic schools offer students the best opportunities for studying continental philosophy, there are established analytic traditions of interpreting (or criticizing) Nietzsche, Heidegger, Levinas, Foucault.“
Something she doesn't mention (in Dutch there's the expression: je kan niet op alle slakke zout leggen) is the popular practice of smuggling in a couple of friends of one's own into, say, a reader on 'Continental Philosophy', so that, e.g. into the family portrait of Lukács and Horkheimer, Sartre and Habermas there are inserted, with a bit of 'Photoshop'-magic, a couple of buddies of one's own, as in: R. Kearney/M. Rainwater (eds., 1996): *The Continental Philosophy Reader*. Or a typical 'Critical Theory' website, in which Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Fromm and Marcuse are elbowed to the end of the bench, to make room for a putative 'next generation'. (*Illuminations – The Critical Theory Website*.)
- 10 Brian Leiter: „The Philosophical Gourmet Report“, <http://leiterreports.typepad.com>. Accessed 14.5.2005.

tory of Western Philosophy. After dusting it off (and winching at the copious and ridiculous marginal notes I myself had scribbled there almost forty years ago) I found in it those ideas and assumptions which inspired so many of my generation. I would like to list four of these assumptions – which I now no longer share – before teasing out the consequences for identity and ontology in these two traditions.

- The essence of philosophy lies in logic and epistemology, and the basis for epistemology lies in the enigmatic relationship of concepts and objects, theories and sense certainty, ideas and facts. Theories and concepts have something to do with the ‘real world’ (or at any rate: have something about them which is ‘objective’), and philosophy has no other and no worthier task than the study of this relationship.¹¹
- Logic and epistemology do not stand on their own – their proper context is that of science and technology.¹² Taken together, they are the only bulwark we have against two great forces for evil in human affairs: against the closed systems of theological or secular dogma (operating as the intellectual self-interpretation of authoritarian or totalitarian regimes of various kinds) and the chaos of pure subjectivism which harkens only to that inner voice which regards everything outside of itself as an „emanation of the ego.“ (*HoWP* 20)
- With this last idea, namely the political effect of philosophical doctrines, are connected two further assumptions. (i) that Philosophy – properly understood as Logic plus Science – is the guarantor of liberalism and constitutional democracy and: (ii) that the eternal battle against dogma and subjectivism (in political terms: against tyranny and anarchism) is inherent in and permanently to be fought out within philosophy.¹³

11 "... every philosophical problem," – I quote here from an influential paper of Russell published in 1914, with the title „Logic as the essence of Philosophy“ – „when it is subjected to the necessary analysis and purification, is found either to be not really philosophical at all, or else to be, in the sense in which we are using the word, logical.“ In Russell (1914): *Our Knowledge of the External World*.

12 Locke: the enlightened philosopher must be an „underlabourer“ to the empirical scientist.

13 "Throughout this long development, from 600 B.C. to the present day, philosophers have been divided into those who wished to tighten social bonds and those who wished to relax them. With this difference others have been associated. The disciplinarians have advocated some system of dogma, either old or new, and have therefore been compelled to be, in a greater or less degree, hostile to science, since their dogmas could not be

- The history of philosophy and the history of analytic philosophy ‘are one’. (Less charitably: the history of philosophy is bunk; philosophy is about problem-solving and technological progress, and not about history.)¹⁴

proved empirically. ... The libertarians, on the other hand, with the exception of the extreme anarchists, have tended to be scientific, utilitarian, rationalistic, hostile to violent passion, and enemies of all the more profound forms of religion." (21/22) (Or to put it in the terminology of Karl Popper, at about the same time: the defence of logic and science is also the defence of the ‘Open Society’ against its enemies.)

- 14 c.f. what Herman Philipse calls ‘The View’ („Analytici & Continentali – Bridging the Analytic-Continental Divide“; Tel-Aviv 1999.) „Most philosopher-scientists of the scientific revolution took the modern image of nature very seriously: they considered it as the true image, while hylemorphism and many assumptions inherent in common sense were deemed to be mistaken. As a consequence, these philosopher-scientists had to argue that the mental aspect of human beings either does not belong to (material) nature at all (Cartesian dualism) or is somehow reducible to something that at first sight seems to exclude it (materialism a la Hobbes or La Mettrie).“ ... "It will be argued that bridging the divide is less urgent than it seems, since at neither side of the gulf is there sufficiently solid ground to build a bridge upon." <http://xoomer.virgilio.it/flamusa/aviv.htm>, accessed 14.5.2005. This is a kind of ‘ideal type’ of Analytic Philosophy’s conception of its own history. It goes something like this. Problems in modern philosophy of mind originated during the rise of modern science in the seventeenth century, a period of history in the course of which the older, Aristotelian view of nature came to be replaced by a much clearer conception of the ‘external world’. The philosopher-scientists were the first to recognize the modern image of nature for what it is: the basis for everything else, and hence also the only basis for a study of Mind. One could regard Mind – so goes the argument – as something separate from what the natural sciences tell us about the natural world (the dualism of Descartes and his followers) or one could try to show that Mind is part of this natural world, as the followers of Hobbes and the advocates of ‘unified science’ have done; but that’s then the end of it: those are the only alternatives. The natural sciences are the only possible basis for a rational approach to the ‘problem of Mind’.

Another way of putting it: the continental/analytic divide is also (perhaps even primarily) a matter of dealing with competing and mutually irreconcilable historiographies of philosophy.

Not that this dualism remained unchallenged. For the analytic tradition, the acceptance of the illocutionary aspects of language was the grudging recognition of arguments – going back to Wittgenstein II – which showed the indissoluble link between logic and language on the one hand, between sense certainty and its necessary communication via a symbol system on the other. After Wittgenstein’s *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, barriers between formal logic and empirical descriptions, between ‘mind’ and ‘matter’, between theory and subjective states, began to break down. Theories of truth going back to Frege and Russell, themselves Cartesian in their categoric separation of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, seemed less certain. Epistemologies which held that every question of meaning is in principle translatable into the language either of formal logic or into the description of objects and processes (the old Russell/Moore/Carnap/Schlicht line) did not suddenly die out, but since Austin and Searle there was widespread agreement, at least amongst professional philosophers, that such reductionisms were untenable. Truth and objectivity could be reduced neither to formal logic nor to pure descriptions devoid

Now these four points are there in Russell's thinking during WWII (the time of writing of his *History*) and they still define, in essence, Analytic Philosophy more than sixty years later. They are, at the same time, the four points on which Continental Philosophy begs to differ. A general comment first.

Russell stylized the history of philosophy as both 'universal history' and as the history of his own Cartesianism, and in the process tends to reduce everything else to either dogma or subjectivism. In doing so he misses that part of the Judaic/Christian tradition which expressed a utopianism (in the sense of modelling an ideal society) and a political idealism which he himself, in his political work, did so much to embody. That the empirical world of objects and processes (and the symbol systems we've evolved to manipulate them: formal logic, experimentation, a methodic approach to the construction of theories) is simply unacceptable as the last word on the human condition is a conviction which has sustained the Christian Church (building on both Jewish and Greek antecedents) for more than two millennia. The Jewish insistence on ethical values and just laws, the classical Greek distinction between 'thesis' and 'physis', the Christian rejection of the *adaequatio rei et intellectus*¹⁵ are recognizably present in the works of the

of the symbolism of a natural language. No 'p' without someone, a human subject, proclaiming, at least implicitly, that 'p' was true. From the point of view of what came after, this abandonment of logical atomism and logical positivism in the sense of Russell and Moore did not mean the abandonment of the positivist program as such – if by this one means to say that only science and technology, backed up by a careful analysis of language use, can be a basis for truth and objectivity. It merely meant that formal logic and natural science was enriched by linguistics and neurophysiology (sometimes even evolutionary psychology) on the way to the Cognitive Science of today. In this perspective, an analysis of speech acts – i.e. of the illocutinary aspects of language use – forced the incorporation of fields far removed from logic and mathematics, but did nothing to shake the underlying dualism between facts/values, cognitions/emotions.

15 "Wie der platonische Idealismus sieht Augustinus in der Negation sinnlicher Neigungen den einzigen und darum wahren Weg zur Anschauung des reinen Seins. Negation des Wandelbaren wird für ihn zur notwendigen Voraussetzung einer jeden Beschäftigung mit Gott und seiner Offenbarung in Natur und Geschichte. Menschliches Denken soll den Sinn göttlicher Manifestationen erst dann verstehen können, wenn es durch Katharsis sich zur *veritas aeterna* erhoben hat." Karl-Heinz Haag, „Warum das mittelalterliche Universalienproblem nicht lösbar war“, in: *Der Fortschritt in der Philosophie*, p. 37.

Also Walter Schulz: „Für den christlichen Glauben ist die Welt ein Faktum: als geschaffene wird sie vorübergehen. Die Welt gilt also nicht als eine ewige in sich gültige Ordnung. Dementsprechend bestimmt sich der Weltbezug. Das ursprüngliche christliche Weltverhalten ist durch eine eigentümliche Gebrochenheit geprägt. Man nimmt Teil, und man darf teilnehmen an dem Geschehen dieser Welt. Aber man soll sein Herz nicht an die Welt hängen. Der Mensch bleibt der Welt gegenüber ein

canonic authors in which we now study the origins of modernity a millennium and a half later: Spinoza and Descartes, Kant and Hegel.¹⁶ Not one of whom would have, in their turn, accepted for even a moment the now conventional wisdom that important philosophical propositions are analytic truths, and that analytic truths are linguistic tautologies. Not that these authors were not confronted, like everyone else, by the eclipse of the Feudal order and the beginnings of the world which Max Weber would later term our ‘iron cage’: Science and ‘The Market’, national pride and foreign conquest, Democracy and Secularism, individual human rights and social anomie. But the extreme nominalism which characterizes analytic philosophy today – the idea that the only philosophy of any consequence is that of ‘conceptual analysis’ – would have been foreign to them; it dates from Russell and Moore’s attack on the Idealist tradition in British philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century,¹⁷ and can be projected onto an earlier age only at the cost of doing procrustian violence to the history of philosophy itself.¹⁸

Fremdling. Paulus bringt dies dialektische Verhältnis in der Formulierung des “Habens, als hätte man nicht” zum Ausdruck.’ Das Grundgeschehen, das den Menschen wirklich angeht und angehen soll, ist die Geschichte, in der Gott die Glaubenden aus der Welt heraufruft. Diese Geschichte ist für den einzelnen nur dann wirklich, wenn er für sich selbst diese Heilstat Gottes ergreift, das heißt, anerkennt, daß Gott durch Christus die Umkehr von der Haltung der Weltverlorenheit zu einem neuen Sein erwirkt hat, für das nun der Bezug von Gott und Mensch allein wesentlich ist.“ („Die Dialektik von Gott, Welt und Mensch im frühen Christentum“, in: *Philosophie in der veränderten Welt*, p. 253.)

- 16 Not the worst approach to a study of Kant would be to seek the purpose behind the *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* a defense, in the face of modern rationalism and empiricism, of precisely that ‘otherworldly’ noumenal sphere the definition of which is that it is not rational, not empirical, not logical, not unambiguous, not formal, and not clear – at least not on a first reading. c.f. Jonathan Israel: „Germany: The Radical Aufklärung“ in: *Radical Enlightenment – Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, p. 628.
- 17 R.H. Lotze, F.H. Bradley, T.H. Green, Andrew Seth, J.E.M. McTaggart, B. Bosanquet.
- 18 Jonathan Israel: Philosophy was radical; what’s really going on here is the ‘structural change’ in philosophy, even more so than the public sphere. „... the new Bible criticism and radical philosophy could easily be welded to a sweeping revolutionary agenda.“ (Israel 631). Spinoza was the ‘bolshivist’ of his time, and he was this on the basis of his bible criticism and nominalism. On ‘nominalism’ c.f. Jerry Fodor: „A revisionist account of the philosophical enterprise came into fashion just after World War Two. Whereas it used to be said that philosophy is about, for example, Goodness or Existence or Reality or How the Mind Works, or whether there is a Cat on the Mat, it appears, in retrospect, that that was just a loose way of talking. Strictly speaking, philosophy consists (or consists largely, or ought to consist largely) of the analysis of our concepts and/or of the analysis of the ‘ordinary language’ locutions that we use to express them. It’s not the Good, the True or the Beautiful that a philosopher tries to understand, it’s the corresponding concepts of ‘good’ ‘beautiful’ and ‘true’.“ (Jerry Fodor, 2004: „Wa-

But so much now for background. Let me turn now to the four axioms to trace out their effect on the discussion about identity, and collective identity, ontology.

Axiom 1

Logic is the essence of philosophy and ‘the problem of induction’ is the essence of logic.

What in Analytic Philosophy¹⁹ is called the problem of induction²⁰ is discussed, in Kant and Hegel, and then through to Critical Theory, under the heading of reflection. The difference between these two concepts is crucial for an understanding of the difference between identity and ontology in the two traditions.

Induction („a large and difficult subject“, as Russell calls it²¹) is the problem of how we reach true and reliable knowledge. If we can doubt neither

ter’s water everywhere“ in: *London Review of Books*, 26, nr. 20, 21 Oct. 2004.)

c.f. also Ray Monk: „Was Russell an Analytic Philosopher?“ in Hans-Johann Glock (ed., 1977) *The Rise of Analytic Philosophy*, p. 35.

19 For purposes of discussion I define Analytic Philosophy as that broad program, variously called Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Mind, Cognitive Science, Artificial Intelligence, whose basic premise is that Philosophy in the traditional sense (‘Continental Philosophy’) has been and can be replaced by the Natural Sciences and its methods. (Formal logic, mathematics, statistics.)

c.f. Michael Dummett’s *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, in which philosophy is defined in terms of „the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained.“ (p.4.) The tension with Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* („The world is everything that is the case... The world divides into facts“) [quoted by Horkheimer: mh_ct p. 143] is the old tension between empiricism and rationalism.

c.f. Carnap: „... the whole of Science becomes Physics“, quoted in Horkheimer.

20 c.f. A.J. Ayer (1968): „The justification of Induction“, in, *ibid*, *Origins of Pragmatism*. „The main objection ... to Peirce’s attempt to explain the meaning of signs in terms of their objects as well as their interpretants is that it involves him in a vicious circle. For ... he maintains, correctly, that a sign stands for something only in virtue of being so interpreted. ... Peirce tries to escape from this circle by giving the interpretant a twofold object.“ 171. In the continental approach this circle is not regarded as such a problem at all, since ‘reflection’ is as much an internal, psychological process as it corresponds to events in the ‘objective’ world of causes and process.

One gets the impression that it is just these kinds of difficulties which Ayers here discusses – of trying to define truth as something to do with the ‘parallelism’ of sign systems on the one hand, objects and processes on the other, which moved Popper at about the same time to abandon the notion of a strict ‘adaequatio’ altogether, as he did in his exchange with Adorno. For Habermas, ‘objectivism’ is an attribute of human subjects; it constitutes the ‘external’ world just as much as the ‘moral-practical’ stance does.

21 *HoWP* 641

the evidence of our senses nor the validity of the theories on which the undeniable progress within science and technology seems to be based, then the question arises: how do we get from the one to the other, from sense data to true theory, from ‘particulars’ to ‘universals’. If we live in a ‘Tractatus’ world, then what is the status of the theories that we formulated about that world. What Hume had proved, according to Russell, was „that induction is an independent logical principle, incapable of being inferred either from experience or from other logical principles, and that without this principle science is impossible“. (647) That is, Hume’s scepticism about ‘natural laws’ and all versions of Platonic/Aristotelian logic disturbed Russell as much as it had Kant a century earlier. He carries on, from the sanity/insanity quote, above, to add, famously: „The lunatic who believes that he is a poached egg is to be condemned solely on the ground that he is in a minority... This is a desperate point of view, and it must be hoped that there is some way of escaping from it.“ (ibid.)²²

Now Russell himself – who was as aware as anyone else about the unresolved tension between the rationalistic and sensualistic poles within empiricism, between phenomenalism and phenomenology, to use a distinction of Bruce Wilshire²³ – seems to have advocated his restrictive conception of philosophy (‘logical atomism’) for much the same reason that on the Continent Max Weber had insisted on the fact/value dichotomy in his „Wissenschaft-als-Beruf“-lecture at about the same time²⁴: here at least, in an uncertain and increasingly war-torn world, was an area in which, even on contentious issues, consensus seemed at least in principle possible. Dualism was the price Russell, like Weber, was prepared to pay for a modicum of consensus in at least in this one area of human endeavour, namely the technical-scientific.²⁵

But for those who followed in his footsteps – just like German Idealism after Kant – this dualism was deemed not acceptable, and analytic philosophy today looks back on a history in which this dualism gets challenged in a number of wellknown steps – from Wittgenstein’s extension of logic and mathematics into the area of language, to Quine’s attack on the distinction

22 c.f. also Russell: „On the relations of universals and particulars“ in: *Logic and Knowledge*, 1956. Also: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* online entry: „Inductive Logic.“

23 Bruce Wilshire (2002): *Fashionable Nihilism*.

24 http://www.textlog.de/weber_wissen_beruf.html

25 Conceivable that the currently modish characterisation of analytic philosophy as being a specific ‘style’ reflects, once again, a widely shared conviction that a consensus on anything substantive is impossible – least of all on the ‘large’ questions looming so threateningly on the horizon.

between analytic and empirical knowledge²⁶, to Austin, to Searle's and Pearce's thematisation of the pragmatics of logic and language use²⁷ and the rejection of 'sense certainty' as an incorrigible foundation of knowledge.

I turn now to the effect of this on our understanding of

Identity

One has to recall that in the history of philosophy the concept of identity has been used in three quite separate ways, and even in Kant they are not kept all that analytically distinct:²⁸

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- 26 W.V. Quine (1953:), „Two Dogmas of Empiricism“. [Fodor, op. cit.: „Easily the most influential paper of the generation, its reverberations continue to be felt whenever philosophers discuss the nature of their enterprise. In a nutshell, Quine argued that there is no (intelligible, unquestion-begging) distinction between ‘analytic’ (linguistic/conceptual) truth and truth about matters of fact (synthetic/contingent truth). In particular, there are no a priori, necessary propositions (except, perhaps, for those of logic and mathematics). Quine’s target was mainly the empiricist tradition in epistemology, but his conclusions were patently germane to the agenda of analytical philosophy. If there are no conceptual truths, there are no conceptual analyses either. If there are no conceptual analyses, analytic philosophers are in jeopardy of methodological unemployment.“] The ancient stoicism contained therein. Perhaps also: scepticism about the utility of naming the ‘big’ issues; a fear of having them cheapened and soiled: fear, death, despair, humiliation – versus love, solidarity, creation, purpose, intelligibility. In a media world in which everything is trivialized and exploited, these too are dragged through the dirt, become stock formulae for commercial tear-jerkers.
- 27 Passmore: „Austin hoped to destroy two doctrines: the first, that what we ‘directly perceive’ are sense-data and the second that propositions about sense-data serve as the incorrigible foundations of knowledge.“ (p. 453)
- 28 *Negative Dialektik (ND)*: „Das Wort Identität war in der Geschichte der neueren Philosophie mehrsinnig. Einmal designierte es die Einheit persönlichen Bewußtseins: daß ein Ich in all seinen Erfahrungen als dasselbe sich erhalte. Das meinte das Kantische ‘Ich denke, das alle meine Vorstellungen soll begleiten können’. Dann wieder sollte Identität das in allen vernunftbegabten Wesen gesetzlich Gleiche sein, Denken als logische Allgemeinheit; weiter die Sichselbstgleichheit eines jeglichen Denkgegenstandes, das einfache $A=A$. Schließlich, erkenntnistheoretisch: daß Subjekt und Objekt, wie immer auch vermittelt, zusammenfallen. Die beiden ersten Bedeutungsschichten werden auch von Kant keineswegs strikt auseinander gehalten. Das ist nicht Schuld eines laxen Sprachgebrauchs. Vielmehr bezeichnet Identität den Indifferenzpunkt des psychologischen und logischen Moments im Idealismus. Logische Allgemeinheit als die von Denken ist gebunden an die individuelle Identität, ohne welche sie nicht zustande käme, weil sonst kein Vergangenes in einem Gegenwärtigen, damit überhaupt nichts als Gleiches festgehalten würde. Der Rekurs darauf wieder setzt logische Allgemeinheit voraus, ist einer von Denken. Das Kantische ‘Ich denke’, das individuelle Einheitsmoment, erfordert immer auch das überindividuelle Allgemeine. Das Einzel-Ich ist Eines nur vermöge der Allgemeinheit des numerischen

- identity as a logical relationship: $A=A$ (law of the excluded middle; tertium non datur);
- identity as a psychological relationship: that of a human subject with attributes of will, volition, memory, perception – able to maintain a more or less constant self-conception over time;
- identity as the ‘identity of subject and object’ i.e. as a thematisation of macrohistorical processes, at the level of ‘universal history’. (The relationship between wholes and parts, between the ‘totality’ of things and its components.)

Just how peculiar the results are of a fusion of especially 1) and 2) becomes apparent if one looks at the way the entry ‘personal identity’ is handled on the widely consulted, online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Personal identity is analysed according to separate components, and each component is examined for clarity and consistency.

„What is necessary, and what is sufficient, for some past or future being to be you?“

Then comes a list of individual themes from the literature: the ‘persistence’ question, the problem of the ‘thinking animal’, the ‘psychological’ approach, the ‘somatic’ approach. The rhetorical questions are typical for this line of argumentation:

„What am I? What sort of things, metaphysically speaking, are you and I and other human people? What metaphysical category, if you like, do we fall under? For instance, are we material or immaterial? Are we substances, attributes, events, or something different still? Are we made of matter, or of thoughts and experiences, or of nothing at all?“

It is the discovery of the limits of this logical atomism and rationalism (of this „hypostatization of logos“, as Horkheimer called it), when applied to ‘mind’, which lies at the heart of Critical Theory’s treatment of the same subject.²⁹ For the young Adorno, 24 years of age in 1927, trying to navigate

Einheitsprinzips; die Einheit des Bewußtseins selber Reflexionsform der logischen Identität. Daß ein individuelles Bewußtsein Eines sei, gilt nur unter der logischen Voraussetzung vom ausgeschlossenen Dritten: daß es nicht ein Anderes soll sein können. Insofern ist seine Singularität, um nur möglich zu sein, überindividuell. Keines der beiden Momente hat Priorität vorm anderen. Wäre kein identisches Bewußtsein, keine Identität der Besonderung, es wäre so wenig ein Allgemeines wie umgekehrt. So legitimiert erkenntnistheoretisch sich die dialektische Auffassung von Besonderem und Allgemeinem.“ (Suhrkamp 1970, footnote to p. 143.)

29 "[s]uch a hypostatization of Logos as reality is also a camouflaged utopia. In fact however, the self-knowledge of present-day man is not a mathematical knowledge of nature

his way between the shoals of positivism, transcendental idealism, Husserlian phenomenology and Hegel-Marxism³⁰, the discovery of this limitation was a formative experience. The following quote is worth bringing in full, since it marks the difference between the analytic and Critical Theory approaches to ‘mind’ with great clarity:

„It is this fact of neglecting the internal aspects of consciousness as the constitutive condition of all experience which brings Freud to a critique of Psychiatry and hence to the inauguration of the psychoanalytic method in the first place. Psychiatry, a byproduct of experimental Psychology ... was entirely atomistic: and this in an area where the atomistic mode of thinking was quite unable to deal with the problems with which it was confronted. With regard to those mental diseases whose physical causes are not obvious, for instance the paralyses, it knew no other – and today still knows no other – way of proceeding than to name symptoms and then to classify and collect these as observations; which it then seeks to unify, but whose relatedness to the unity of personal consciousness escapes it completely. The symptoms, taken in the way that Psychiatry treats them, are meaningless and isolated. The Psychiatrist is indeed able to confront the symptoms with the external world and then to classify them according to the way in which they are related to this external reality; he can, for instance, speak of illusions whenever he meets, in his patients, ideas which are not internally contradictory (but which need to be rejected on the basis of experience) but he is never able to contradict these illusory ideas by recurring to the patient, even if he [the psychiatrist] is quite prepared to understand them. With that however the explanatory power of conventional psychiatry is exhausted. The question: why, when the illusions have no substrate in the material world, they should exist at all; why they should exist in this particular way and not in an entirely arbitrary way, the Psychiatrist cannot answer. ... Since there is no knowledge of the conditions on which the symptoms are based, it is not possible for a law-like expectation of future changes to derive from a description of the clinical facts, and the prospect of successful treatment is already hopeless on this basis. The psychiatrist [here Adorno is quoting Freud:] ‘has to content himself with the diagnosis’ (i.e. a classification of the symptoms) ‘and a most uncertain prognosis regarding further development’, (since it’s based on vague analogies) despite a great deal of experience.’ Here ‘Psychoanalysis can do more. It proceeds on the assumption that psychic phenomena have a meaning...’³¹

which claims to be the eternal Logos, but a critical theory of society as it is, a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life." Max Horkheimer (1972): „Traditional and Critical Theory“ in: *Critical Theory*, p. 198.

30 He was writing his Habilitation, *Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der transzendentalen Seelenlehre*, at the time, – 1927 – which Hans Cornelius advised him not to submit.

31 *GS* 1, 229 ff. Written in 1927, published posthumously. [own translation]

Not bad for a young musicologist, anticipating by decades Charles Taylor's *The Explanation of Behaviour*, and Georg Henrik von Wright's *Explanation and Understanding*..

Within Critical Theory this early appreciation of psychoanalysis (and not behaviourism or experimental psychology) as the proper point of departure for a study of the empirical side of the human psyche was the start of an influential area of study, linking Psychology to Sociology, which produced such famous names as Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas – and of course Adorno himself.³² It is no coincidence that psychoanalysis, one of the most influential bodies of thought of the last hundred years, had its very first university presence at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität in Frankfurt, under the aegis of Max Horkheimer and the Institut für Sozialforschung. Many feel that if it had not been for the repression of Psychoanalysis by the Nazis our understanding of 'mind' and the psyche would be vastly more advanced than it is today.

In short: the analytic approach to identity – in the view of Critical Theory – is atomistic, rationalistic, unempirical, unrealistic. It is typical for what the leading Belgian psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe, following Lacan, calls a 'university discourse'³³. In this the university specialist is speaking to the uninitiated layman, laying bare his/her logical fallacies and brow-beating him/her into acceptance of a presumptive universal personal pronoun: 'we', 'they', 'you'. This treatment of the problem follows the procedure of 'logical atomism', meaning that it names a number of 'factors' or elements which are said to be essential for an 'analysis' of the problem at hand. The listener or reader is then cajoled into accepting the implicit normative assumptions of the speaker. Whereas for Critical Theory, there are areas of our experience where it is not so much the analytic as the hermeneutic which is the key.³⁴

32 Adorno et al (1950): *The Authoritarian Personality*.

33 2003: *Over normaliteit en andere afwijkingen*.

34 c.f. Karl-Otto Apel 1979: *Die Erklären-Verstehen-Kontroverse in transzendental-pragmatischer Sicht*. This is a book-length treatment of his „Causal Explanation, Motivational Explanation, and Hermeneutical understanding: Remarks on the recent stage of the Explanation-Understanding-Controversy“ in: G. Ryle (ed.) *Contemporary Aspects of Philosophy*, 1976. In this context a formulation that I personally had on my pinboard for years: „For Hegel, as for Aristotle, the idea of law is primarily that of an intrinsic connection to be grasped through reflective understanding, not that of an inductive generalization established by experiment ... For both philosophers, explanation consists in making phenomena teleologically intelligible rather than predictable from knowledge of their efficient causes.“ (G.H. von Wright [1971]: *Explanation and Understanding*.)

What now about the third of the meanings of the concept identity, that I referred to above. I refer to that ominous and much-maligned ‘dialectic’ of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ in history, which played such a prominent role in the thinking of Georg Lukács and the Left-Hegelians after WWI, and is such a demonstrable influence in the work of the Frankfurt School right through to Habermas’ *Theory of Communicative Action*. Here also, the first task of the Frankfurt School has been to thematize and make explicit those Aristotelian and Cartesian habits of thought which permeate the University system of the Western world, and which Analytic Philosophy has turned – in this view – into a set of cognitive and epistemological blinkers. From Horkheimer’s „Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie“, to Adorno’s *Negative Dialektik*, to Habermas’ *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, the ‘critique of instrumental reason’ has revolved around the phenomenological ‘raising to consciousness’ of the technocratic and manipulative cast of mind which industrialisation, science and technology, as well as the mass media have left on public discourse, and the ominous implications this has for decision-making processes in politics.

How this ‘dialectics’ works is not as unintelligible as the older terminology may make it sound. To do so it is necessary to say something about the Frankfurt School’s attitude towards the mass media.

Horkheimer and Adorno recorded, during their exile years in the US, and especially during their time in Los Angeles and Hollywood, the beginnings of a now global of news- entertainment- music- television- and public-relations industry (in recent years extended by the internet) which has become the sole source of information, political opinion, personal attitudes for an ever-increasing proportion of the human race. Whoever nowadays opens a newspaper, switches on the television, answers his or her e-mails, speaks on the phone, has no choice but to be pushed into the role of a consumer of products of a ‘culture industry’ over which they have not the least control. What’s so problematic about this?

A reminder of the origins of Critical Theory helps. For the European intellectuals who, like the Horkheimer group, analysed the world with the categories of Left-Hegelianism, the great crises of modernity – the first World War, the Russian Revolution, the Wall Street crash of 1929 – were seen as the result of political decision-making processes operating under specific constraints: the constraints of the market. They saw these crises in other words as the result of too little democracy. As long as it is the market

that has decisive influences over political decision-making processes, the bourgeois world is condemned to an endless series of crises. Crises and wars which have their real cause in the way in which essential aspects of our lives – education, the environment, health, and above all: peace in international relations – is not adequately served by market mechanisms.

It is this view of things which allow Horkheimer and Adorno, in the middle of WWII, to diagnose the beginning of something which really became obvious to everyone else only long after their death: the omnipresence of modern mass media, increasingly beyond anything that looks like democratic control. Put differently: education, commerce, technology, information, advertising and propaganda are interconnected in a way which is unprecedented for the human race, and could just become fatal in its consequences. A fatality which, from the perspective of Horkheimer and Adorno, had to do with their analysis of the Weimar Republic, in which a highly efficient Ministry of Propaganda, by means of the media, had shown how easy it was to create and manipulate xenophobic and racist prejudices in the entire population. The fear was: this was a model which others could emulate. This explains why, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the chapter on the „Culture Industry“ is followed by a chapter on Antisemitism. The diagnosis of a ‘dialectic’ between mass media content on the one hand, conformist-authoritarian attitudes amongst voters on the other hand was specific to the Frankfurt School. This ‘causal relationship’ of conformist-authoritarian attitudes amongst the public and the mass media – the latter both strengthening and exploiting these attitudes commercially and politically – was, according to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the ‘totality’ in which we find ourselves. In it is to be found that „false identity of universal and particular“ which is specific for modern mass culture.

„Fun is a bath of steel. The entertainment industry commands it incessantly. Laughter becomes, in its hands, a betrayal of happiness .. In the phoney society of today laughter has become a kind of ailment that has befallen happiness, pulling it down into its degrading totality. Laughter has become ridicule, and the life which there, following Berson, is supposed to break through its own limitations, is in fact the beginning of barbarism, the self-assertiveness which sees in every social gathering the opportunity to celebrate its emancipation from scruple. The collective of the laughing public is a parody of humanity.“ (DA 167)

In the „Culture Industry“ chapter of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in other words, written during the War, one reads about something which now, in the view of many, has materialised. On the one hand the tendency towards trivialisation, ‘dumbing down’, pornography and violence, just

waiting to get transformed „into the quality of organised brutality“ (165), and which is such a bane for parents and schoolteachers; on the other hand something one sees when one studies the effect of the media upon disasters like ‘9/11’. Such images, which surround the globe within minutes, which are seen by countless millions of people in almost ‘real time’, have a shock effect which makes rational analyses of political and economic relations almost impossible. Just how easily the anger and fear released by such visions of horror in millions of people at the same time can be a fertile ground for political instrumentalisation is something that we have seen in recent years.

Let me now, by way of conclusion, and as a way of getting into the discussion, repeat my opening thesis:

- 1) There is a ‘dialectic’ between individual and collective identity which is real, which is ominous, and which needs to be grasped if the human race is to survive.
- 2) The study of this real dialectic is impeded by the long history of Aristotelianism and Cartesianism in Western thought, which projects onto the objects of cognition methods and principles which are appropriate and fitting for the manipulation of objects, but not for the guidance of public affairs or for the understanding of the human soul.