

## Book Review

Christopher Norris, *Derrida, Badiou and the Formal Imperative*

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197+vii pages

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### I

**D**O “WE” NEED, TODAY, A RAP-  
prochement between analytic  
and “continental” philosophy?

If so, from what philosophical and critical imperatives does such a need arise, and to what kinds of actual problems, political and social as well as theoretical, should it respond? Might giving a critical response to contemporary social and political problems require remapping familiar division lines between the analytic and continental traditions, sometimes in ways that will initially appear surprising and unfamiliar to those convinced of the legitimacy of the old traditional boundaries? To what extent might this require a creative rethinking of the boundaries and structural implications of formalism and of the kind of formalizing project so characteristic of one strand of the analytic tradition? And who might be the “we” (mentioned in the first question) that could

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emerge from such a critical remapping of methodological and thematic territories, as inheritors of the legacy of both traditions in twentieth century philosophy and practitioners of a new kind of philosophy drawing on the best resources of both? These are some of the questions raised by Christopher Norris's useful and potentially important book, *Derrida, Badiou and the Formal Imperative*. In particular, Norris makes the heterodox but ultimately convincing argument that the work of two of the most important contemporary and recent "continental" philosophers, Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou, responds in both cases to a "formal" imperative by developing the implications of classical formal and logical structures to the "breaking point" of structurally inherent aporias and paradoxes. It is at this structural breaking point that the possibility of transformative structural and political change opens up, and its identification and location in strict and rigorous accordance with the canons of traditional bivalent logic and with an unflinchingly realist ontology is therefore a cardinal task for contemporary philosophy in a critical mode.

Given contemporary patterns of reception and widespread interpretative assumptions, this suggestion will seem, to many, incongruous at best. For example, those who are convinced on the basis of hearsay or misreading that Derrida's deconstruction aims simply to renounce or abandon logical rigor or formal approaches in the service of its much-cited goal of "overturning" traditional binary oppositions will find the suggestion of an underlying formal/logical register central to deconstructive methods initially hard to swallow. Similarly, those inclined to relegate Derrida's project to the extra-philosophical domain of literary criticism or to regard it (somewhat in the manner of Foucault's now-classic polemic with Derrida) as an empty and politically ineffectual practice of infinitely deferred textual "reading" will be surprised at the claim that deconstruction is in fact largely an application of the critical and philosophical implications of traditional logic. Norris provides, however, a detailed and convincing argument for both claims, citing both Derrida's own avowals

of his fidelity to the consequences of classical logic and rationality and essential internal aspects of deconstructive methods and results. For example, in his deconstructive readings of classical philosophers such as Rousseau as well as twentieth-century ones such as Saussure and Austin, Derrida is centrally concerned, as Norris shows, to apply the bivalent logic of oppositions such as those between speech and writing, syntax and semantics, and meaning and force up to the point at which the text itself suggests inherent and structurally determined aporias or incoherencies in the possible application of these concepts. In practice, this demonstration operates at specific textual sites. But it has a more general structure that can be extracted from these particular readings and is itself determined by some of the most important results of formal reflection in the twentieth century. For instance, as Graham Priest and others have argued, Derrida's important neologisms *différance* and *trace* are structurally based in formally tractable limit-structures and structurally necessary contradictions related closely to the formal/metalogical method of diagonalization.<sup>1</sup> And the central deconstructive category of the "undecidable" is itself based explicitly and directly on Gödel's formal argument for the necessary existence of undecidable sentences (i.e. well-formed sentences that cannot be either proven or refuted) in formal systems of sufficient complexity, which is at the root of his two "incompleteness" theorems.<sup>2</sup>

This link between rigorously formal reasoning in accordance with classical logic and the demonstration of inherent points of aporia and paradox which call for (and make possible) fundamental structural change is even more evident in the case of Badiou. Norris takes Badiou's project in *Being and Event* and *Logics of Worlds* as a methodological inspiration and leading example of a kind of interpretive/critical practice that,

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1 E.g. Priest, "Derrida and Self-Reference," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994), 103-111 and *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (second edition, New York: Oxford U. Press, 2002), esp. 235-246.

2 Paul Livingston, "Derrida and Formal Logic: Formalizing the Undecidable," *Derrida Today* 3:2 (2010), 221-39.

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in accordance with the formal results of analytic philosophy, could offer a particularly useful model for new philosophical methods in the future. In *Being and Event*, Badiou identifies ontology with mathematics in the form of the standard Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatization of set theory. The point of this bold identification for Badiou, though, is not primarily to provide a reductive metaphysics or “totalized” ontology, but rather rigorously to consider the complex relationship between such stable structure and that which contests and holds the possibility of radically transforming it. Thus Badiou applies some of the main results of twentieth-century investigation into set theory to the question of the relationship between ontology, thus conceived, and the structure and possibility of what he calls the “event,” a kind of discontinuous interruption that, when its consequences are followed out rigorously by what Badiou theorizes as the procedure of a “faithful” subject, can produce radical and fundamental changes in the organizing structure of an underlying situation. Specifically, Badiou applies the results of set theoretical consideration of the structure of the multiply infinite hierarchy of transfinite sets discovered by Cantor, including the demonstrable points of impasse and near-paradox inherent to it. By doing this, he can show, as Norris puts it, how a formal passage through these points turns “paradox into concept,” thereby creating new structures and forms of organization in a completely novel but nevertheless formally determined way. In the domain of politics, such a procedure can, as Badiou argues, lead to the phenomenal visibility of a formerly invisible or “indiscernible” subset of the existing situation. It is this work of tracing the indiscernible, which Badiou himself identifies (in a 2005 eulogy for Derrida as well as in *Logics of Worlds*) with Derrida’s deconstructive procedure, that itself can result, under particular structurally determined circumstances, in a radical transformation in the existing “transcendental” or underlying structure of a political community or situation.<sup>3</sup>

3 Badiou, “Jacques Derrida,” in *Pocket Pantheon* (London: Verso, 2008), and *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), esp. 545–46.

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As Norris argues, both Badiou and Derrida thus centrally exploit the consequences of classical formal and logical structures which, when pushed to their aporetic limits, formally demonstrate the real possibilities of transformation inherent in the actual logical structures of existing situations. Since these formal structures have been most completely and rigorously worked out within the tradition of analytic philosophy developing from Frege and Russell or by logicians and mathematicians whose work is closely related to it, it is reasonable to expect, as Norris argues, that an appreciation of the significance of formalism in the work of these two “continental” thinkers could provide a useful and appropriate “way in” to their thought for many analytics. The formal and structural basis of this demonstration in both cases, as Norris argues, turns on the actual underlying existence and real effectiveness of the relevant formalisms in structuring actual ontological and political (and not merely textual or epistemic) domains. Accordingly, it is essential to both philosophers, as Norris demonstrates, that the relevant logical structures are not constrained, in anti-realist, verificationist, conventionalist or constructivist fashion, by the contingent or empirical limits of human knowledge, conventionally structured practices, or communally determined assertibility conditions. Thus, Norris argues that both philosophers must be taken as realists in the sense of Dummett’s powerful logically based framework for discussing disputes between realism and anti-realism in various domains.<sup>4</sup> On this framework, the realist position in any particular domain is the one that upholds the unrestricted application of the principle of bivalence. According to this principle, each proposition in the domain is determinately true or false, quite independently of our ability to know or verify (or our community’s tendency to assert) its truth or falsehood. Because Badiou and Derrida both rest central aspects of their arguments on the ultimate consequences of the application of such a classical, bivalent logic, both must,

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4 “Realism” in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978), 145–165; see also Dummett’s preface to *Truth and Other Enigmas*.

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as Norris argues, be understood as applying a steadfastly realist position, and thus sharply distinguished from those thinkers, both analytic and “continental”, who have sought to reduce truth to verifiable truth, warranted assertibility, or personal-subjective evidence.

This strand of Norris’s argument provides, once more, an important and refreshing corrective against presumptive interpretations of recent continental philosophy, and of Derrida in particular, that are prevalent in analytic and continental circles alike. On the one hand, for instance, Norris convincingly disputes, on this basis, Lee Braver’s interpretation of Derrida, in his detailed *A Thing of this World*, as a leading example of what Braver sees as a nearly monolithic regime of “continental anti-realism” since Kant (p. 3).<sup>5</sup> On the other, by identifying the actual realist orientation underlying Derrida and Badiou’s projects, Norris can sharply distinguish them from various analytic philosophers (including, for example, Putnam in his “internal realist stage,” Kripke in his communitarian solution to the rule-following problem he finds in Wittgenstein, Quine in his arguments for “ontological relativity,” and Dummett himself) who have argued for anti-realist positions over the past several decades. From this perspective, quite to the contrary of the usual stereotype of the sloppiness and unclarity of continental philosophy, Derrida and Badiou are, as Norris argues, in certain respects more rigorous in their application of formal and logical structures, or at least in their tracing out of the consequences of a formally based realism, than are these paradigmatic analytic philosophers.

Moreover, as Norris demonstrates, the faithful development of these consequences provides powerful arguments against the kinds of communitarian, conventionalist or anthropologicistic assumptions that are arguably in many ways characteristic of widespread culturally dominant practices and

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5 Braver, *A Thing of This World: A History of Continental Anti-Realism* (Northwestern U. Press, 2007). Braver has since discussed what he calls “transgressive realism” in continental philosophy in “A Brief History of Continental Realism,” *Continental Philosophy Review*, 45:2 (2012), 261-289.

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conceptions of collective life and behavior today.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Badiou, in particular, the development of the implications of a rigorous bivalent logic provides a far-ranging critique of contemporary liberal-democratic practices and forms of social organization, and of the usually presumed forms of “ethical” thought and behavior that routinely accompany them. This is not only because, as Badiou argues and Norris emphasizes, the official rhetoric of democracy and human rights often operates as a “smokescreen” (p.62) for the massive structural inequalities and disparities of wealth and power that characterize the actual contemporary global situation, but also in that the liberal-democratic legitimation of this situation often turns on a limitative pragmatism or culturalist communitarianism that sees linguistically shaped and conventionally determined “social practices” as the ultimate horizon of social reality. Against this, Badiou points the way to a transformed politics capable of resisting what he calls, in the opening pages of *Logics of Worlds*, the “axiomatic” of prevailing contemporary belief, according to which “there are only bodies and languages,” and opens up the possibility of an alternative set of transformative subjective practices suspended, as Badiou argues, from the structurally demonstrable point of the possibility of verification-transcendent and culturally independent truths.<sup>7</sup>

## II

Over the past 30 years or more, there have been many attempts of different varieties to bring representatives of analytic and continental philosophy closer together. These attempts are laudable, since there is no good philosophical or methodological motivation for the division between (what are treated as) the two “types” of philosophy to begin with, and since there is no major area of philosophical concern that has not been deeply and illuminatingly discussed by figures

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<sup>6</sup> See especially chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Logics of Worlds*, 2-8.

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on both sides of the divide in the twentieth century. Today there is plentiful evidence that the attitudes of many have changed since the “bad old days” of the 1960s when partisans of each side routinely dismissed the other without argument, and that the attitudes and assumptions underlying divisive episodes such as Carnap’s attack on Heidegger’s discussion of the Nothing in “What is Metaphysics?” and the problematic polemic between Searle and Derrida in the early 1970s no longer characterize the state of the discussion between the two sides.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the division persists as a deeply entrenched sociological fact of life in academic philosophy departments in the U.S. and elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> Especially in view of what some have seen as the contemporary exhaustion of the original projects and philosophical motivations of the project of analytic philosophy, it is reasonable to think that a successful revitalization of philosophy in the twenty-first century will depend largely upon the development of new modes of analysis, interpretation and argumentation that recognizably continue important strands of both traditions as they have been practiced in the twentieth century. But if the hope for a genuine overcoming of the divide is to be motivated by more than a bland ecumenicalism or a general preference for unity over dissent, it will also have to develop what are identifiable as genuine rather than merely “academic” areas of critical philosophical concern. These plausibly include, among other things, those actual problems of a “social,” “ideological,” or “political” nature that most deeply characterize the organization of intersubjective life and practices around the planet today.

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8 For a vivid portrayal of the marginalization of continental philosophy and themes in these “bad old days” see, e.g., Hubert Dreyfus’s recent Dewey lecture, “Standing up to Analytic Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence at MIT in the Sixties,” delivered at the Pacific Division APA meeting on March 28, 2013.

9 For a convincing argument that the divide between analytic and continental philosophy as it exists today is merely sociological in character, see William Blattner, “Some Thoughts About ‘Analytic’ and ‘Continental’ Philosophy,” on-line at: <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/blattnew/contanalytic.html>.

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Early in his book, Norris points to the need to preserve a sense of unresolved problems in projects that attempt jointly to inherit the best outcomes of the two twentieth-century “traditions”:

My argument here is that the analytic/continental ‘dialogue’ - if that is the right term, with its somewhat too placid or emollient character - had best keep a sense of those unresolved issues that still have the power to strike sparks in any mooted convergence of the twain. It stands to benefit less through an outlook of benign ecumenism or a flattening-out of troublesome differences than by focusing on just those points where a meeting of the two philosophical cultures can be seen to generate conflicts or at any rate symptomatic tensions of precept and practice. (p. 2)

From this perspective, such contemporary divide-crossing interpretive projects as “California” Heideggerianism or “Pittsburgh” neo-Hegelianism, though certainly steps in the right direction, may be seen (though Norris does not say so explicitly) as not going far enough. For although they often suggest grounds of convergence on purported results of theory between pairs of figures such as Heidegger and Davidson, or Sellars and Hegel, these projects do not always foreground the equally deep aspects of tension and downright aporia that also characterize the projects of all of these philosophers, both individually and in relation to one another. More obviously, projects in the spirit of Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatist attempts at synthesis, and other “postmodernist” or “end of philosophy” positions that see philosophical problems as illusory remnants of a classical tradition to be surpassed or left behind rather than engaged, seem unlikely to produce anything like a viable joint continuation of analytic and continental philosophy in their critical modalities. This is where, as Norris argues, the kind of formal approach represented, in different ways, by both Badiou and Derrida could prove especially useful. For the rigorous application of formalism that both philosophers make does not amount simply to the imposition of a pre-determined logical framework or a

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forcing of philosophical issues into the procrustean bed of a single, pre-existing type of analysis. Rather, in both cases, the application of formalism elicits and demonstrates the essential problems and paradoxes of the application of formalism at its own limits, including to the constitutive tensions and aporias that structure and run through the landscape of philosophical thought and argument today.

One of the immediate and salutary results of this application of reflective formal reasoning, as I have argued elsewhere, is to provide general terms in which large-scale and widely shared positions in recent philosophical thought, cross-cutting the usual analytic/continental divide, can be recognized and compared.<sup>10</sup> This allows, in particular, for these positions to be elicited in their formal structure with respect to their most basic ontological or metaphysical commitments, and for widely shared orientations with respect to the underlying relation between thought and being to be identified and discussed. A useful model for this kind of work is provided, in particular, by Badiou's identification, in *Being and Event* and in *Briefings on Existence*, of what he identifies as three large-scale "orientations of thought".<sup>11</sup> Each orientation represents a specific position with respect to the underlying relation of thought and being, and the three can further be distinguished as positions with respect to the thinkability of the totality of the universe. Whereas the transcendent or onto-theological orientation sees the consistent thinkability of the whole as guaranteed by a transcendent absolute inaccessible to human cognition, constructivism is characterized by the attempt to delimit the totality from an accessible position simply outside it, and thereby to trace or delimit the boundaries of the thinkable in a regulative fashion. Both are to be sharply distinguished from Badiou's own "generic" orientation, which, applying the lessons of

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10 See my *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism*, especially chapters 1 and 10.

11 Badiou, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*. Trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006), esp. 52–55, and *Being and Event*, 282–85.

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set-theoretical exploration of Cantor's transfinite hierarchy, points (as we have seen) to the actual possibility for thought and action, under determined conditions, to break through any determined configuration of normative practice and belief by a subjective operation of force dependent upon a situation-transcendent truth.

Badiou's rigorous formally based identification and criticism of the constructivist orientation in *Being and Event*, though it is misleading in some respects (see section III below), provides, as Norris points out, useful terms for the discussion and critique of widely held contemporary commitments in both analytic and continental philosophy. In particular, recognizing the constructivist orientation as the one occupied by thinkers as diversely located as Kant, Russell, Rorty, Carnap, and Foucault allows the positions of these diverse thinkers of both "analytic" and "continental" persuasions to be identified on the level of the real point of their underlying and shared ontological commitment to a limitative or regulative use of the forms and categories of language and logic in demarcating the boundaries of knowledge and sense. This provides (as I have argued elsewhere) a useful corrective to currently popular but vague discussions of "correlationism" as an attitude privileging a kind of relationality of subjects and objects, or denying the possibility of thought having "access" to reality as it is "in itself."<sup>12</sup> By contrast with this, as Badiou demonstrates in *Being and Event*, the constructivist orientation can be rigorously modeled by reference to Gödel's development of a specific kind of model for the set-theoretical universe,  $V$ , in which the existence of power sets is strictly regulated by their submission to the boundaries of what can be named in a regularly defined (non-impredicative) language. As a formal consequence of this restriction, the generalized continuum hypothesis is demonstrably true in such a model, and the very existence of a "generic procedure" capable of transforming the situation by identifying what was formerly indiscernible is rendered structurally impossible.

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12 Livingston, "Realism and the Infinite", *Speculations IV*, 99-107.

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By reference to these formally based facts, Badiou can thus argue rigorously that partisans of constructivism and (more broadly) critical anti-realists of various descriptions leave no room for the possibility of structural transformation in this sense, and thus that the various constructivist projects which have allied themselves to projects of sociopolitical critique and liberation since Kant will fail in these goals, given their inability to acknowledge that constitutive dimension of the universal (and the possibility of progress toward it) that Badiou calls “truths”. Just as importantly, however, it verifies that the answer to the political deadlock of the various forms of anti-realist, social-constructivist, anthropological, culturalist, “correlationist” and humanist thought which seem capable only of replicating the structure as well as the inherent contradictions of the dominant regime of liberal democratic capitalism is not to be found (as has been suggested) in the retreat to a pre-critical realism, for instance in the return to a Cartesian conception of mathematicized space as absolute, or in a mystifying Humean skepticism that affirms “pure contingency”.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it is to be found in the kind of reflexive intensification of the critical problematic, beyond constructivism’s regulative strictures, which results when the structures of formalism are subjected immanent critique at the point of their own structurally inherent limits, and to which the methods of both deconstruction and Badiou’s own generic orientation rigorously point.

For these reasons and others, it appears that a development of the consequences of the “formal imperative” that Norris rightly identifies in Derrida and Badiou could prove uniquely useful in overcoming the continental/analytic divide and leading to a future practice (or set of practices) of philosophy more genuinely capable of addressing the real structural problems of the contemporary situation. But will it, in fact, do so, given the continued and frustratingly entrenched sociological reality of the analytic/continental distinction in academic

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13 For both suggestions, see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).

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philosophy, and the apparent persistence kinds of mutual prejudice and stereotyping that continue to hold in place? As Norris trenchantly argues, given his extensive and accurate development of mathematical and set-theoretical results, Badiou is a philosopher who can easily be read by analytics, and given the way that his arguments offer to reconfigure key debates within the analytic tradition (including that between realism and anti-realism), he certainly should be. Whether Badiou will, in fact, be read by a significant number of analytic philosophers is, of course, a different question. The actual reception of Badiou's work in the U.S. over the last decade, it must be said, does not appear to offer much hope: since it began to be systematically translated into English (in the late 1990s) Badiou's work has in fact been almost exclusively received in the U.S. context by self-identified continentals rather than analytics. As Norris notes, this may result, not only from analytic philosophers' characteristic resistance to new and "radical" movements of thought, but also from the presumptive judgment that the kind of application that Badiou makes of formal results and structures to political and social questions is an obvious nonstarter or a category mistake at the outset. And the reception of Derrida in the "analytic" context is, of course, even more complex and vexed; though there are a few notable exceptions (such as Graham Priest and A. W. Moore, both of whom give clear, illuminating and sympathetic readings), most philosophers who identify as "analytic" are still content to dismiss deconstruction, without much reading or argument, as obscurantism, irrationalism, or worse. In view of these continued problematic facts of reception, it is probably too much to hope that a greater appreciation of the formal imperative in Derrida and Badiou by analytic philosophers can lead to anything like a general and widespread reconciliation of analytic and continental philosophy as such, at least anytime soon. Nevertheless, what may for the first time be possible, as is attested in clear and suggestive fashion by Norris's argument, is a practice of philosophy that, though it may certainly be marginal at first, is for the first time in decades genuinely and appropriately "pluralistic" – that is, a practice that recognizably continues,

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equally, the best methodological and thematic outcomes of both analytic and continental philosophy, and that systematically develops new methods and vocabularies for clarifying and pursuing the deep and unresolved problems that are common to both.

### III

If there is going to be (as I have argued) a genuinely useful future practice (or practices) of philosophy that inherit the best outcomes of both twentieth-century traditions, the motivation of this practice will have to be, for obvious reasons, two-sided. Rather than simply appropriating or assimilating elements of one tradition to the other, it will be necessary to create genuinely new languages and methods that draw on the major outcomes of both. In this respect, it is probably necessary at this point to go beyond the idea of “bridge building” between the traditions and to employ a different metaphor: not so much the building of bridges between two distinct territories, but a confluence of streams that have run apart but in parallel for much of the twentieth century and could run together again.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, it will be necessary not only for analytic philosophers to appreciate the formal dimensions of the projects of thinkers such as Derrida and Badiou, but also for continental philosophers to appreciate the deep problems that the analytic tradition itself bequeaths to a philosophical future. As I shall argue briefly in this final

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Dummett’s metaphor, in *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, for the relationship of Frege and Husserl: “Frege was the grandfather of analytical philosophy, Husserl the founder of the phenomenological school, two radically different philosophical movements. In 1903, say, how would they have appeared to any German student of philosophy who knew the work of both? Not, certainly, as two deeply opposed thinkers: rather as remarkably close in orientation, despite some divergence of interests. They may be compared with the Rhine and the Danube, which rise quite close to one another and for a time pursue roughly parallel courses only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas.” Dummett, *The Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1996), 26.

section, these problems are not limited (as one widespread stereotype holds) to dull, scholastic disputes, linguistic recreations, empty technical devices, or mere “logic-chopping.” Rather, they point, just as much as do the relevant “continental” problematics, to the deeply unresolved issues of sense, intelligibility, regularity, formalism and realism that characterize (and also problematize) collective social, political and economic practice around the world today.

It is here, however, that in many respects Norris’s treatment falls short, tending unfortunately to replicate stereotypical and sometimes misleading characterizations of the analytic tradition and its results. On Norris’s telling, in particular, several important strands of the analytic tradition running through its history, including (he says) “purebred logico-semantic analysis in the Frege-Russell line of descent;” “Wittgenstein-sanctioned deference to the problem-solving wisdom enshrined in ‘ordinary language;’” and “the appeal to ... thought-experiment as affording access to truth or knowledge through the witness of ‘straightforward’ (rational or common sense) intuition” all have in common “the tendency – indeed the fixed determination – to prop up the existing conceptual and institutional status quo against any too drastic departure from its own governing norms.” (p. 15). This tendency to conceptual conservatism, according to Norris, itself has its root in the analytic tradition’s systematic aspiration to the kind of “logical self-evidence” purportedly embodied by analytic sentences, truths or judgments (in Kant’s sense of “analytic”). Furthermore, Norris argues that it entangles the tradition’s methods in a “generalized version” of the “paradox of analysis” first pointed out by G.E. Moore, according to which any logical analysis of a sentence, if correct, cannot be informative (since it can only replicate what was originally meant by the sentence to begin with). This leads, Norris suggests, to a recurrent constitutive commitment on the part of analytic philosophers to projects that can ultimately yield only “a somewhat more perspicuous (logically accountable) rendition of existing ideas or idioms” and is to be sharply contrasted with the position, which

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Norris associates paradigmatically with Deleuze, according to which the “philosopher’s task [is] one of ‘creating concepts’ rather than subjecting ready-made concepts to analysis on likewise ready-made terms.” (p. 16). Relevantly to the larger argument concerning the formal imperative, Norris also identifies Derrida as a philosopher allied with Deleuze, in this respect, against the main lines of the analytic tradition, in that he, like Deleuze, centrally maintains “the power to invent or create new concepts whereby to challenge received habits of thought.” (p. 15).

The view according to which various strands of the analytic tradition must be politically conservative in that they systematically lack the capability or ambition to challenge established aspects of language, usage, or practice has relatively deep roots in recognizably ‘continental’ thought. Though it may have other sources, it goes back (at least) to Marcuse’s critique of Wittgenstein and other analytic philosophers in *One-Dimensional Man*.<sup>15</sup> In more recent discussions, critical theorists including Habermas have accused the analytic tradition of an empty scholasticism and a general incapability to deal critically with socio-political problems, and John McCumber has argued that the dominance quickly achieved by the analytic tradition in the U.S. after World War II owed largely to its apolitical and hence “safe” status in a political climate dominated by McCarthyism.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Badiou himself, in *Being and Event*, associates “positivism” with the constructivist project of “the measurable fine-tuning of languages” and with a “statist” politics that “protects people, in times of order,” from recognizing those potential resources for change and transformation that exceed the scope of what can be said in a particular existing language.<sup>17</sup>

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15 “The Triumph of Positive Thinking: One-Dimensional Thinking” in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Societies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

16 See, e.g., Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, (London: Heineman, 1979) and John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Northwestern U. Press, 2001).

17 *Being and Event*, 292–93.

To all of these claims, it should be pointed out not only that the analytic tradition is in fact historically founded in the strongly progressivist project of the Vienna Circle whose aim was much more to reconfigure social relations and construct a new society than simply to protect or reflect established social patterns and usages, but also that explicitly critical reflection on existing usage and practices has remained an essential feature of analytic methodologies ever since.<sup>18</sup> This is the case not only when this critical reflection has been explicitly marked as “ethical” or “political” (for instance in philosophers like Rawls and those who have developed political philosophy in an explicitly “analytic” way) but, more profoundly if less obviously, in many of the wide varieties of analytic projects that have taken up in one way or another the question of the structure of language and linguistic meaning and sense as it figures in, and bears on, our lives and practices. These projects, including Quine’s investigation of the consequences of radical translation, Sellars’ “pure pragmatics,” Austin’s penetrating analysis of performativity, and (in exemplary fashion) the later Wittgenstein’s profound re-examination of the ordinarily assumed conceptual foundations of subjective privacy and of (what is called) following a rule, all point in direct ways to deep and genuine problems, paradoxes, and aporias about the linguistic foundations of ordinary intersubjective practices.<sup>19</sup> In a direct and fairly obvious sense, these problems matter to collective conceptions of the foundations of widely shared collective practices, ideologies, and motivations for action, and their further development can underwrite significantly the development of critical thought in all of these domains. In light of their existence and endurance, to simply presume the generalizing caricature of analytic philosophy and philosophers as conservative and protective of existing situations

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18 For a useful corrective discussion of the political roots and ongoing ethical and political implications of analytic methods, see Hans-Johann Glock, *What is Analytic Philosophy?* (Cambridge U. Press, 2008), chapter 7 (“Ethics and Politics”).

19 Cf. my *Philosophy and the Vision of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2008), especially chapters 1 and 9.

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or prejudices is to risk ignoring some of the best and most important outcomes of the tradition. One may thus come to feel that Norris's argument would have benefitted from a clearer and more developed sense of these outcomes, and that with respect to their critical implications in particular, the stark alternative he sets up between essentially conservative and regulative analysis and bold concept-creation in the Deleuzian mold may represent (at least) one alternative too few.

Although Norris's focus is not primarily on the history of analytic philosophy (but rather on Badiou and Derrida), these significant omissions and mischaracterizations thus pose problems in the context of a book which has as one of its major stated aims to bring analytic and continental philosophy closer together. Indeed, one can feel that their consequence in the course of Norris' argument is to render his argument for the overall thesis - that there can be a useful rapprochement between analytic and continental philosophy on the (at least partial) basis of formal considerations - significantly less convincing than it might otherwise have been. If, in particular, Norris can convincingly argue that the various logical-structural aporias involved in our relation to the structure of language demonstrated by Derrida have both a rigorously formal determination and a set of radical "political" implications, it is disheartening to see discussion of the structurally and formally very similar aporetic position reached by Wittgenstein in his consideration of rule-following described repeatedly, in the same pages, as "humdrum and conceptually undemanding" (p. 7); "sterile or doldrum-prone" (p. 99); as having the main purpose of restoring "a communally sanctioned sense of what constitutes apt or proper usage" (p. 31) or, again, as involving commitment to the view that "there is simply no way that thinking can get some critical, diagnostic, or corrective purchase on language." (p. 13)

With respect to Wittgenstein, Norris may be guided in his interpretation, in part, by interpreters such as Kripke and Rorty, who have read Wittgenstein as a "communitarian" or an anti-realist thinker of the primacy of "social practices."

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This interpretation is opposed, however, by commentators such as Cavell, who emphasizes the ways in which Wittgenstein, in his inquiries into private language and rule-following, can and should be read as a critical “philosopher of culture,” as well as those, like Diamond and Putnam, who have emphasized (what is actually) the strongly realist orientation of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy.<sup>20</sup> More generally, one proximal cause of this tendency to misread and underestimate the formal depth of the aporias involved in central projects of analytic philosophy in the wake of the linguistic turn is Norris’s tendency simply to identify the linguistic turn as such with the types of constructivist, social-pragmatist, anti-realist, and communitarian positions that he joins Badiou and Derrida resolutely in opposing. This identification is itself suggested in various ways by Badiou, and Norris goes along with it for the most part, although as he himself notes it makes for serious difficulties in the interpretation of Derrida himself, who most certainly stands within (some version of) the linguistic turn. In fact, this tension between Derrida’s embracing of the linguistic turn and Badiou’s rejection of it poses *prima facie* problems for Norris’s attempts to characterize the two philosophers as invoking a unitary or similar “formal imperative” in their different projects, suggesting at any rate the necessity of a more exhaustive analysis of the ways in which the structure of language itself might (or might not) be thought to reflect a deep and unavoidable formal dimension of life and practices whose analysis and interpretation can benefit the aims of a critical and potentially transformative analysis of existing situations.<sup>21</sup>

This possibility, however, only comes into view if one is

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20 See, e.g. Cavell, “Declining Decline: Wittgenstein as a Philosopher of Culture” in *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989); Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991) and Hilary Putnam, “Was Wittgenstein Really an Anti-Realist About Mathematics?” in *Philosophy in an Age of Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 2012).

21 Cf. my “Badiou contra Derrida” in *The Politics of Logic*, 219–224.

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prepared to consider that language and logic are not simply conventionally instituted and contingent “social practices”; and Norris unfortunately tends, following Badiou and other interpreters, simply to assume that analytic philosophers in the wake of the linguistic turn must make this assimilation. The element of truth in this is presumably the fact that some analytic philosophers who have identified with the thematic and methodological legacy of the linguistic turn (e.g. Carnap) are aptly characterized as holding the regulative and restrictive position formally identified by Badiou as constructivism. But as Badiou himself recognizes, the constructivist orientation cross-cuts the analytic and continental traditions, and so cannot simply be identified with either; and conversely, as I have argued, many of the most important and most problematic results of the analytic tradition’s sustained investigation of the structure of language do not fit comfortably within its ambit. More generally, it seems apparent that if it is to be possible for analytic and continental philosophers, at some future date, to recognize themselves as joint inheritors of a common set of socio-politically relevant and pressing problems, it just will not do to continue to rely on the prevalent stereotypes in either direction. It is therefore to be hoped that careful analyses, such as Norris’s, that aim to make “continental” philosophers more accessible to analytics will also be balanced by equally clear analyses of historical and contemporary analytic methods and results that evince their real significance for the kinds of critical projects and problems that most matter today.

Though it is, at times, repetitive, and there are a couple of regrettable errors in the presentation of formal results, Norris’s book is, overall, clearly written and argued, and will doubtless make some of the important formally based aspects of Badiou’s and Derrida’s arguments accessible to readers who otherwise would have remained ignorant of them.<sup>22</sup> And

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22 On p. 89, Gödel’s incompleteness theorem is described as showing that “any formal system of sufficient complexity to generate the axioms of (say) elementary arithmetic or first-order logic could be shown to contain at least one axiom which could not be proved within that system or by

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as I have suggested, his careful analysis of the significance of formal themes and results in Derrida and Badiou could contribute significantly to helping shape a philosophical future in which the longstanding divide between analytic and continental philosophy is finally significantly overcome. One of the further salutary features of Norris's book is, as we have seen, the way it outlines the real possibility that such an overcoming could also amount to a substantial overcoming of the anti-realist, social-constructivist, and relativist positions that are so broadly characteristic of contemporary widespread belief and practice, and of the contemporary deadlock of critical thought and transformative practice. It remains to be seen, of course, whether this joint overcoming of the analytic/continental divide and of the deeply held axiomatics of contemporary ideology at the level of philosophical thought and action will, in fact, take place; but it is heartening that philosophers such as Norris have begun to envision it as a possible outcome of the most significant critical and formal imperatives discernible in philosophical thought today.

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using its own logical-conceptual resources." What Gödel's first theorem shows is, rather, that for any system sufficient to axiomatize arithmetic there is some sentence which is (by Gödel's argument) true (if the system is consistent) but cannot be proven by that system. On p. 106, a power set is described as a "set that comprises all those subsets that are members (and whose members are members) of some given set"; in fact, a power set is simply the set of all subsets of the given set.