

publication of Hegel's first book; page 153 (a "philosophical" page) repeats these details almost verbatim before discussing its content in more depth. This irritating redundancy recurs throughout the text. Second, within a purely "philosophical" chapter, Pinkard will drop a personal detail (such as the birth of Hegel's illegitimate son, page 192) with which the biography has not yet dealt, thus spoiling any drama the subsequent biographical chapter may hold. Pinkard, for all his abilities, is not a skilled storyteller. Third, while a biographical chapter will discuss the influence of, say, Kantian or Schellingian thought on Hegel's development, it will not say what this thought was: the philosophical content is either missing or greatly reduced, only to be reprised in a later "skippable" philosophical chapter, with the attendant redundancy already noted. But if we are to read an intellectual biography, surely the intellectual content ought to be foremost; given Pinkard's ability to convey these ideas clearly, it is mystifying that he would choose to separate his historical and philosophical accounts. What can be gathered from the text as a whole is that the intellectual milieu in which Hegel lived was vitally important to the development of his system: would any reader want to miss this?

Significant rearrangement of the volume to make these sections cohere would have resulted in a text of more approachable length, eliminate needless repetition, maintain dramatic thrust, and move the philosophical material to the forefront where it belongs. Terry Pinkard surely has the skill to pull this off. In the meantime, I eagerly await his next philosophical volume.

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Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction

SIMON CRITCHLEY

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; 160 pages.

Continental philosophy, regarded in some analytic circles as an indulgence in what Stanley Rosen calls "wool-gathering and bathos," has often had a bad rap. In the respectable, if somewhat analytic, *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, we learn that existentialism, structuralism, and critical theory all "rely on dramatic, if not melodramatic, utterance rather than sustained, rational argument" (161), and that structuralism in particular has shot off "into intellectual outer space" with Derrida, whose deconstruction amounts to nothing less than "a *reductio ad absurdum* of philosophy" (162). The entry concludes that "there is really no perceptible convergence between the two philosophical worlds" (161), and intimates that this is all for the best.

In the face of such dismissal, it would be unsurprising if an English-language introduction to continental thought were to begin with a "set the record straight"

exculpatory agenda or somewhat defensive posture. But this is not the case with Simon Critchley's lovely little book. Critchley undertakes to explain why continental thought is itself an "area of dispute." While he argues that it nevertheless "constitutes a distinct set of philosophical traditions and practices ... too often ignored" (x) by analytic philosophers, he accomplishes this in a commendably even-handed and intelligent manner. Critchley writes of the dispute between continental and analytic schools of thought in a spirit of, if not reconciliation, at least mutual consideration and attention, unafraid to address what he sees as the weaknesses of each. His prose style is clear and engaging even when tackling complex ideas or presenting rigorous arguments. It is also touched by humor ("Heidegger and Derrida are great philosophers, but there is absolutely no point writing like them in English" [49]), which makes this book as inviting to those trained in philosophy as it is accessible to those who are not.

Critchley seeks to redraw the continental/analytic distinction along five thematic lines. Briefly, they are: (1) a genealogy of continental philosophy as emerging out of the German Idealist reception of Kant's critical project; (2) the centrality of the problem of nihilism and the theme of crisis; (3) a focus on the concepts of critique, emancipation, and praxis; (4) the notions of history and tradition as profoundly influencing argument and interpretation; and (5) an explanation and justification of antiscientism. These themes appear interwoven throughout the narrative of this volume, and it is impressive that Critchley manages to do them justice in such a short work.

The book characterizes continental thought as the two hundred year period from Kant to the present day. In Chapter 2, Critchley argues that an exclusive focus on the first *Critique* has led to a reading of Kant's major contributions as belonging to epistemology and "by implication" the philosophy of science. This reading, he claims, has "dominated the Anglo-American reception of Kant" (19). A shift to the third *Critique* brings with it a focus on the Kantian system as a whole, especially the relation between nature and freedom, theory and practice, and is the route followed by German Idealism and continental philosophy. This claim seems too easy when one considers the development of the idea of aesthetic autonomy from the *Critique of Judgment* and its centrality in analytic aesthetics through to the present day. But Critchley's point is not that the third *Critique* itself ushered in continental thought, but rather that a reading of all three *Critiques* leads to a sensitivity toward the systematic goals of the Kantian project, and these goals taken together have had a major influence on subsequent movements.

Critchley expands his argument by considering the reception of Kant's work and its criticism by such contemporaries as Hamann, Jacobi, and Fichte. The criticism was directed against the universality of reason—namely, that if reason can criticize all things, there must also be a metacritique of reason itself. But such a metacritique can lead to radical skepticism, nihilism, and doubt about everything, including the existence of God. This growing nihilism, Critchley

contends, is the idea that "best permits one to distinguish analytic and continental philosophy" (22).

Chapter 5 picks up this thread and attempts to demonstrate that recognition of the subject's freedom (inherited from Kant) goes hand in hand with that of the cognitive meaninglessness of the speculative claims of metaphysics and the collapse of moral certainty. But nihilism, as exemplified in Nietzsche's work, is "accompanied by the demand for" (84) its overcoming, and leads Critchley to examine both the theme of crisis and the centrality of the concepts of critique, emancipation, and praxis. Critchley argues that continental thought begins from an understanding of nihilism and the crisis of meaning; the response to this crisis is the "substantive problematic" (87) of continental philosophy.

Critchley enumerates various attempts to describe our existential predicament, from a crisis of faith (Kierkegaard) or the forgetfulness of Being (Heidegger) to a crisis of the sciences (Husserl and later Foucault) and the hegemony of instrumental rationality (Adorno and Horkheimer). He argues that these critiques led to the exploration of *non-philosophical* practices—Heidegger delved into poetic creation, Adorno into high modernist art, while Marx turned to political economy and Freud to the couch. It is indicative of continental thought, he concludes, that it "is concerned with relations to non-philosophy" (87). This contention is an oversimplification, however; Schopenhauer, for one, offered no emancipatory strategy, Nietzsche's could best be considered a two-edged sword, and nothing at all is said of Foucault or Derrida in this connection. Critchley at times sacrifices subtlety for the sake of painting a comprehensive picture of the whole. He should not be faulted for this, however. The role of an introduction is to encompass diverse thinkers and movements within the sweep of philosophical history and make seemingly disparate ideas cohere. Critchley excels at this task.

The goal of discussing nihilism is to return the reader to Chapter 1 (on the gap between knowledge and wisdom), and to prepare them for the final argument of Chapter 9 (on the marriage between theory and practice and the need for answers to the meaning of life within a scientific world). Critchley's concern is that "more than our personal peace of mind is at stake" (122) if we allow these gaps to grow, and that closing these gaps is the first step in any attempted meeting of the two philosophical worlds. Critchley's hope is that "philosophy might form an essential part of the life of a culture" (126), as it did for the ancients, and that achieving this requires dialogue and understanding between the disputatious realms of analytic and continental thought. This is a laudatory goal and it is executed with finesse. The present volume can serve as staple reading for students, and may equally serve as an intriguing model on which to design an introductory course in this area.

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