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The Rapprochement of the Anglo-American and Continental Philosophical Traditions

Introduction

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The Netherlands are located between, on the one hand, England and, on the other hand, Germany and France. That is to say, they are located between the English-speaking world and the continental one. In a sense, they form a bridge between both. Do they by the same token form a brigde between the English-speaking or Anglo-American philosophy and the continental one? Can their geographic brigde-function be translated into an intellectual bridge-function? This suggestion is not at all far-fetched since both philosophical camps are represented in the Netherlands and, to say things with a blink of the eye, the country is simply too small to ignore the other camp.

To say things more seriously: Clustered as philosophical research is in the Netherlands, one is almost forced to listen seriously to the other philosophical camp. If I look at my own field, philosophy of religion, I can say that both philosophers of religion committed to the Anglo-American tradition and those committed to the continental one must be attentive to each other. They are gathered in the same research cluster and, given the number of philosophers of religion in this country, one cannot afford the luxury of ignoring the other camp. In the long run, one would simply isolate oneself too much and become marginalized. But if that is true, one should better make a serious attempt at understanding the other tradition and not condemn it off hand.

But, obviously, taking a tradition different from one's own seriously is easier said than done. If we look into the history of the attempts to dialogue, hostility reigns. Some will e.g. remember the rather unfruitful discussions between the Habermasians and Richard Hare a couple of decades ago. Recently, however, things have changed. We find attempts to dialogue in the postmodernist strands of both traditions, i.e., in continental, esp. French postmodernism, and in Anglo-American postmodernism or neo-pragmatism (e.g. of Rorty's attempts at promoting a dialogue). Rockmore will in his paper delve into this development more deeply.

In addition, one could think of the recent political action taken by some continentals and Rorty when each of them published an article in one of the major

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German newspapers on the Gulf-War and current American politics. A strange coalition: On the one hand, the continentals with all their European seriousness concerning politics – politics being a matter of life and death there – and, on the other hand, Rorty with his American playfulness regarding moral questions—one is never quite sure how seriously his political comments are meant. Dialogues take unexpected turns at times.

The main guests at this conference, however, were intimately familiar with traditions different from their own, and succeed to resist the temptation to condemn it lightheartedly. The first, Joseph Margolis, has his roots in the Anglo-American tradition but is highly critical of certain developments it has undergone. And the revisions of the Anglo-American tradition he suggests bring him closer to its continental counterpart.[1] The other, Tom Rockmore, has his roots in the continental tradition but, working mainly in the U.S., he philosophizes so to speak in a prima facie hostile environment. For that reason alone, he is forced to take the Anglo-American tradition seriously into consideration. But, as you will see from his comparison between Carnap and Heidegger, he has also a certain sympathy for the Anglo-American tradition, even if critical at times.[2]

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1. See Joseph Margolis, 'Pragmatism's Advantage,' *Ars Disputandi* 3 (2003), [http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000126/index.html].

2. See Tom Rockmore, 'Remarks on the structure of twentieth century philosophy,' *Ars Disputandi* 3 (2003), [http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000128/index.html].