

**andreas vrahimis, *encounters
between analytic and
continental philosophy*
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In recent times there has been a plethora of writing on the analytic-continental ‘divide’, whether with a view to building bridges, calling forth a plague upon both houses, or transcending this sectarian seen towards a post-analytic and meta-continental horizon. Another trajectory, albeit one that should also accompany any of the above strategies, is those that seek to problematize and critique the very idea of analytic or continental philosophy, and hence any putative contrast between philosophical types; a sort of sceptical project that attempts to cause us to rethink these clichés and stereotypes. Andreas Vrahimis’ *Encounters Between Analytic and Continental Philosophy* is one of the best books in this latter genre, complementing Simon Glendinning’s *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* (2007), and Aaron Preston’s *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (2006).

To give a short précis of the book, Vrahimis re-reads some of the historically important encounters and debates between ostensible analytic and continental philosophers (i.e. those retrospectively claimed as such) with a view to a quasi-debunking of the reception of such debates. I call it a quasi-debunking, since I am not sure we get a sufficiently detailed explanation regarding both the origin and persistence of this ‘divide’ for it to count as a fully-fledged debunking. It is, however, a book that is characterised by some impressively detailed scholarship, and one of Vrahimis’ central claims is that subsequent generations of philosophers have misunderstood what was at stake in the initial famous encounters, say

between Heidegger and Carnap, or Husserl and Frege, and in so doing have hence themselves created the “rotten scene” characteristic of philosophy since the 1960s, albeit with some signs of increasing pluralism today. As Vrahimis says, “... these encounters have often been the subject of misinterpretation and over-inflation, as well as elementary errors in scholarship in some cases. The institution of the divide was, to a great extent founded upon such supposedly failed attempts at communication, which were often mistakenly considered to be precedents of the divide” (2). To gloss, then, for Vrahimis our talk about our failed history has been largely erroneous, and has served to performatively found a ‘divide’ that wasn’t really there prior to those errors or misinterpretations, or at least not in the way that had been assumed. Vrahimis, then, basically offers an error theory about the ‘divide’, in which there is no object, or set of objects, that corresponds to our talk of such objects.

This is certainly part of the story, fitting nicely with the fact that the label ‘continental’ was initially a projection by Anglophone philosophers upon their neighbours the other side of the *chunnel*, and one that was no doubt an over-simplification at best. But if the analytic-continental ‘divide’ talk is a series of mistakes, it seems to me that we are owed an explanation for the pervasiveness and apparent intransigence of such mistakes (just as an error theorist must provide one concerning why we continue to believe in morality, say). Those who think, as I do, that there is a complex and messy philosophical and methodological reality to the idea of a ‘divide’ have an explanations of sorts (albeit one that is not alone sufficient) for key dimensions of the history of philosophy in the twentieth century. Now is not the place for me to consider the array of non-essentialist options one can pursue in this regard, other than to note that some have seen time as central (Reynolds, *Chronopathologies*, 2012), others have seen realism/anti-realism as central (cf. Braver, *A Thing of This World*, 2007), and some argue for the significance of overlapping methodological preferences and “no go” zones that are characteristic of most (but not necessarily all) philosophers associated with either camp (Chase and Reynolds, *Analytic versus Continental*, 2011). But if the ‘divide’ has no real philosophical significance as Vrahimis argues, and if we tend to egregiously misunderstand our own history of philosophy, one needs to account for those mistakes. What, then, is the motivation for this repetition? In the end, I am not sure that Vrahimis fully answers this question, but he does draw our attention to extra-philosophical factors that have too often been ignored. Unlike almost all of the other writing upon the analytic-continental ‘divide’ (including my own), as well as each considered in isolation, Vrahimis gives

some serious historical attention to the impact of the Great War, for example, as well as the dispute about psychologism and the European philosophical profession's attempt to preserve Chairs for philosophers rather than experimental psychologists. In this case, Vrahimis notes that this is *both* a philosophical dispute and also one over-determined by extra-philosophical factors (cf. 30). I think that is right, and that it might also be extended to the idea of the 'divide' more generally. Vrahimis does not, however. In conclusion, Vrahimis simply says: "philosophers have committed these mistakes because they were seeking some justification for this image of itself that philosophy had conjured" (183). This circularity does not look like an explanation to me. It just defers the question that needs an answer, which remains one regarding why and how this image was conjured. Surely some mistakes in scholarship are not sufficient to have caused the hostility and silence (and on his view near univocal misunderstanding) typical of the twentieth century? Perhaps anticipating such remarks, Vrahimis adds, "in the attempts to shout across the gulf, one might have expected to find an explanation for the prevailing silence. But perhaps such efforts precluded looking closely enough in order to see the flawed nature of the object of their inquiry" (183). He also suggests that, "*extra-philosophical factors cause such misinterpretations*" (182, my italics). What extra-philosophical factors exactly? While these are not specified again in the conclusion, some of them have been sketched out in the rest of the book, and they include the world wars, institutional and professional matters to do with the preservation of philosophy's place in the academy, and, borrowing from Glendinning, a desire to immunise one's philosophical methods against the possibility of failure by projecting them on to a continental other. Vrahimis' book suggests that these were all involved, and undoubtedly they all were, but the one-way causal claim here (see above italicised quote) seems to me to be stronger than is warranted. I don't see that his complicated and extra-philosophical account of the genesis of the 'divide' establishes that there might not also be a complicated philosophical reality to that story. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is only if we accept this that we can begin to make sense of why so many philosophers have conceived of themselves and their work within these binary terms.