

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

In Conversation

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

Abstract

Simon Glendinning is Professor of European Philosophy and Director of the Forum for European Philosophy in the European Institute at the London School of Economics. In this interview, we are talking about the distinction between Continental and analytic philosophy.

Hubert Walczynski (HW): If we could start with the analytic tradition in philosophy. Could you sketch a brief history of it: when and in what circumstances was it born?

Simon Glendinning (SG): I think the idea of the analytic movement really took shape in post-war Britain and America, but it traced itself back to developments that took place primarily in Britain at the end of the 19th century. At that time, so the historians of

that period will tell us, British philosophy was dominated by idealism and it thought of itself, quite self-consciously, as belonging to a post-Kantian and especially post-Hegelian development. And there were indeed a number of very important figures, notably Bradley, Green and Bosanquet, whose presence dominated British Philosophy, and whose ambitions were to bring German Idealism into the mainstream of British philosophical discourse.

Now, there is often some argument about what exactly happened in terms of a British recoil or resistance to that development. However, Russell and Moore (along with the work of the early Wittgenstein) are often represented as the first wave of a critical reaction to idealism in Britain which would turn philosophy in a new direction, producing what would become called, in the post-war context, “a revolution in philosophy”. By the 1950’s most British philosophers would have described what they did as “philosophical analysis” or “analytic philosophy”.

This is a development taking place within philosophy, but it was taking place in the wake of the second war against Germany in the 20th century, and there is undoubtedly a sort of socio-politics in the self-willing of a British departure from a German movement in British philosophy. It regarded itself as holding at bay the encroachment of “alien influences”, and specifically German influences, into British thought.

But, of course, that socio-politics is not the heart of the revolution. The heart of the revolution is the movement away from an ideal-

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

ist ambition to produce an all-encompassing philosophical system - an ambition to develop philosophy as metaphysics - and return to something like a “native” British tradition of empiricism. So the first wave of analytic philosophy as it took form in Britain is often thought of as a empiricist revival, although one now substantially informed by the developments in philosophical logic that you get from Russell But not only Russell. In fact, from Frege as well as from Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle. In other words, though it really took off in Britain it was never actually exclusively British. Some people came to call it an “Anglo-Austrian” movement, but it wasn’t even that. It was, in main part, a resistance to idealism, and a committed call to understand philosophy as having its foundations in logic, but that being understood in a tradition that was in some sense continuous with empiricism.

HW: So the founders of analytic philosophy thought of what they were doing in some kind of opposition to other philosophical currents?

SG: Yes. The revolution in philosophy was, first of all, a revolution in Britain and it would have seen itself as disentangling itself from ways of going on in philosophy that were coming from “outside” or “elsewhere” both conceptually and geographically. The word that became the name of that “outside” was the standard British word for “mainland Europe, not including the British Isles”: it was “Continental” philosophy. Britain would have been thought of as part of Europe. But when Britain has wanted to talk about the part of

Europe which it's not a part of they say "continental Europe", so they can talk about Continental philosophy too. Quite clearly it was a catch-all term for whatever was going on over there. What was thought of as going on "over there" was, at that time, thought to be the sort of thing that had been going on "over here" in the late 19th century: obscure and unintelligible metaphysics. The revolution was revolting against that. And this new formation and attitude took hold in the first half of the 20th century, and had itself become dominant in the second half. Oxford had largely displaced Cambridge as the centre of revolution - Austin and Ryle were the kings - and then later in the 1960s and 70s America becomes a sort of second home of the analytic movement, with Quine and Davidson leading the way there.

HW: Is it possible to sketch a parallel history of Continental philosophy, to assign its founders and the period when it was born?

SG: That's a really interesting question. Let's say straight off: there is no such thing as "Continental philosophy" as a way of doing philosophy. There are lots of strands of the development of philosophy in Continental Europe that have some similarly revolutionary characteristics as the analytic revolution; the extraordinary writings of Nietzsche, for example, and later the emergence of Phenomenology as a movement. But there was not one "Continental" way of doing philosophy, and any "national" shapings of that ("French" or "German" philosophy as it were) were mingling with each other in much the same way in which we could say that British analytic philosophy

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

was mingling with other movements outside Britain; developments in Austria above all, but not only there. As I say, there was a fairly continuous strain of interest in Nietzsche, an extremely powerful thinker who was in his own way recoiling against Kant, against Hegel, against idealism. And Phenomenology was also being developed against the background of the collapse of German Idealism, and produced one of the most fertile new movements of philosophy in Europe as a result. It is conventionally represented as a largely German (Husserl/Heidegger) and then French (Sartre/Merleau-Ponty) thing. But it was influential across Europe, and I include Britain in that. It is very interesting that Michael Dummett, for example, when he came to write a book about the analytic movement, was struck by the incredible closeness of Frege and Husserl. For whatever reason, Dummett was still totally caught up in the idea that there was this “wide gulf” between analytic and Continental philosophy. So when he was struck by the similarities between Frege and Husserl he had a new puzzle in view: how the “two traditions” parted company when they had been so close at the start. In my view, the idea of them being so far apart has always been a sort of projection. It’s certainly true that the movement of Phenomenology which develops from Husserl deviates from Husserl massively: it’s not a “school” in a strong sense. And as I have mentioned there is a line of development of Phenomenology in continental Europe moving from Germany to France. What was happening there was being regarded by Dummett as splitting off in a direction a million miles from the path being taken in Britain. But it is not so simple. At the same time as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were working, J.

L. Austin called his work “linguistic phenomenology”; Wittgenstein at the same time said “You can think of what I’m doing as phenomenology”; and Ryle said that *The Concept of Mind* can be read as “an essay in phenomenology”. We’re looking at a movement in post-Kantian philosophy which wasn’t just transforming “continental” ways of going on but philosophy right across Europe, including Britain - although in Britain those developments also wanted to see everything through the prism of the analytic/Continental contrast. It’s really quite a mess.

Conceptually speaking, it needn’t have been so. You could imagine a Ryle with a different personality, philosophically speaking, who, when he said you could see his major work as an essay in phenomenology, he could have made that point the centerpiece of his way of framing things - and seen differences as important but not in terms of an all-consuming “gulf”. But the actual Ryle didn’t want to see things that way, and neither did Austin. In my view, however, Phenomenology is the big wave of development in philosophy in Europe, including Britain, in the 20th century. And in the rolling of that wave the analytic movement goes through its own self-transformation. It changes from being a primarily “empiricist” development to a more clearly “post-Kantian” one. The Vienna Circle must be understood as itself a post-Kantian movement, but it was post-Kantian in an almost pre-critical way: its empiricism was always not Kantian. But what happens in the post-war development of analytic philosophy, as it moves from Cambridge to Oxford, is that it becomes post-Kantian in a much richer sense. This is es-

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

pecially visible in the widespread attack on the “myth of the given”, a very Kantian critique of empiricism. These developments only became more explicit in America where the “myth of the given” idea is criticised in Sellars’ work, and then, later, in Davidson’s. Having made its way to America from Britain, it made its way back in its post-Kantian garb most radically with Davidson. He was a massive influence in Britain in the 70s, and people still talk about the “Davidsonic boom” of that time. Along with Rorty, Davidson’s influence is crucial to the formation of English philosophers like John McDowell.

Here’s the picture then. You can follow a path of historical development beginning with the recoil against idealism in Britain, the emergence of a sort of logical empiricism, and then a second wave which in some ways brings Britain back into contact with developments going on in mainland Europe, especially in phenomenology. With McDowell you’re now seeing a British thinker who recognizes that his work has a relationship not only with Kant but with Hegel too. (Sellars had already seen this, by the way.) When McDowell says “the conceptual is unbounded, there is nothing outside it”, this is explicitly understood as a kind of Hegelian thesis.

And yet it’s also - though I don’t want to push this too hard, because it’s such difficult territory - it’s also a Derridean thing. When Derrida says *il n’y a pas de hors texte* - “there’s no outside text” it’s basically the same thought expressed, as it were, in Derridean words: it affirms a kind of “inscribed inhabitation” of our being-in-

the-world, to use a phenomenological formulation. All being-in-the-world is an inscribed inhabitation, always already “in a text”. And there is no “outside text”, the text is, as it were, “unbounded”, there is no outside. Derrida gets to this via a Heideggerian formation. In McDowell, in contrast, this return to Hegel passes more clearly via the later Wittgenstein. You can see the two side-by-side. McDowell on one side, coming back to Hegel in a post-Kantian trajectory that he gets to through Wittgenstein. And then you have Derrida in France, working through a Heideggerian form of post-Kantian and post-Hegelian thinking. On one side it is Wittgenstein, on the other it is Heidegger - the two giants of 20th century philosophy, two giants about whom one cannot say there is this abyssal gulf between them. There has been a lot of work done on their relationship. And it isn't best seen as work attempting to “bridge the gulf between analytic and Continental philosophy”. Really, it calls into question the very idea of that distinction, and that gulf.

HW: So if there is so much common ground, why do you think are we still talking about this distinction, and why is it still so prevalent, especially in the UK? Why do we have separate departments for continental and analytic philosophy?

SG: We don't have separate departments. We have almost no departments in Britain where “Continental philosophy” is the main interest. When I first came into professional philosophy in Britain, in the 1990's, there were little outposts, little centres or holdouts, where the majority of faculty had research interests that were marked by

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

a non-analytic formation. And, in fact, those departments may well have said about themselves “We’re doing Continental philosophy”. Continental philosophy became a title that people took up for themselves. I’ve always found that a bit paradoxical, but it just means that these are people who are reading and writing about texts that the analytic philosophers just weren’t reading and regarded as material it was best not to read, and even which ought-not-to-be-read.

The analytic movement may have been marked by the desire to “expel” “alien influences” as Geoffrey Warnock boldly put it in 1958, but it never did, and I’ve given some indication of that already. However, beyond what might be called the general phenomenological turn, it is important also to note that there were people in Britain who continued reading works from mainland Europe, in its various distinctive forms, even as analytic philosophy rose to dominance. They were not reading one distinctively different kind of philosophy, “Continental philosophy”. But it wasn’t a meaningless gesture for them to say that they were doing Continental philosophy: they were declaring their commitment to reading, researching, and teaching on the kinds of things that really were being excluded from analytic philosophy, and precisely under that title. But they were few in number, very few. There were odd individuals in majority analytic departments, and there were particular places where there were concentrations of academics working outside the dominant analytic mainstream. It is hard to overestimate what a minority this was. By the late 1950s, long before my time, Geoffrey Warnock had said: “the war was over”, the battle with this Continental “other”

was over by 1948. They essentially cleansed British philosophy departments of non-analytic faculty.

So by the time I was a student in the 1980s British philosophy was almost exclusively analytic and there were just these little pockets of survival of non-analytic traditions, non-analytic formations of philosophy. Those places probably didn't have the sort of hostility to analytic philosophy that was being heaped against them, although they have been pretty resentful of its massive dominance. They would have been people who themselves would have been quite content to read work of analytic philosophy if it looked interesting to them, and that despite the fact that it so regularly and incoherently railed with visceral fury against this "other" that they were trying to expel and more or less successfully expelling.

But things have changed: I don't think that red-hot resistance in analytic philosophy is anywhere near as vigorous today as it was when I was a student. In fact even when I was a student it was already beginning to wane. For example, I was in an analytic department, but we had a course offered on Sartre. And when I was a graduate student, a young lecturer came in who had done her PhD on Heidegger. I already felt then that there was a sort of softening. I remember giving a talk in London quite soon after I got my first job, about the history of the division between analytic and Continental philosophy, and I found the audience incredibly receptive to the thought that perhaps analytic philosophy had been founded on a sort of constitutive illusion, that it was built on a projection of

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

a Continental “other”, which didn’t really exist. It was, I argued, simply the negation of its own identity. So if analytic philosophy was to pride itself on various characteristics - logical rigour, conceptual analysis, scientific spirit - any list you want, then negate them and that’s “Continental philosophy”. But there’s no such thing as Continental philosophy, no “Continental philosophers” in the sense that was being given. What you can find are people who don’t figure in the analytic collection, and you can present any one of them as a “Continental philosopher” in the disparaging sense. But if you select any individual text as representative, and say “Continental philosophy is work in philosophy like that”, then there will be so many other things that will go missing in your understanding of what goes on outside analytic philosophy. If you put Nietzsche at the centre of what you want to call “Continental philosophy”, for example, then someone like Husserl suddenly looks like an analytic philosopher. Conversely, if you put Husserl at the centre, then actually Nietzsche they may look more like an analytic philosopher too. In the end: there is an infinite number of ways of not being something.

HW: So do you think we should get rid of the term “Continental philosophy”? Maybe that’s a performative term and the more we talk about it the more people see it as distinct, valid category that really exists.

SG: In a culture that has been dominated by analytic philosophy, there is one way it can become a new sort of category, although not altogether “valid”. When I got my first teaching job, I was

brought in on the understanding that I would be able to provide our students with a course in (what I already didn't call) "Continental philosophy". I called it "Modern European Philosophy", and it was largely a course in the movement of Phenomenology, because that's what I knew something about, and could teach. I hoped too that what I taught might provide an opening for my students to other ways of going on in philosophy other than analytic philosophy. Giving me a job to do that was completely deliberate on the part of the department that hired me: they wanted to bring the total hegemony of analytic philosophy in Britain to an end. I might have been a bit mad, but I thought that ambition would become increasingly common. I didn't really like this idea, but I thought that it would become normal: that just as you have courses in Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Science, you would also increasingly have among them a course that doesn't really fit there, but would be made to fit in there, a course in Continental Philosophy or European Philosophy. Now that's totally ill-fitting, because it's not a branch of philosophy like a Philosophy of Mind can be a branch of philosophy, but I thought it would become a sort of normalisation of the situation, or at least an opening-up or breaking down of the hegemony: there'd be something like a growing receptivity or acceptance that a well-rounded education in philosophy would include some non-analytic forms of philosophy, and that people like me who are able to teach students courses in such things would be hired more frequently. I'm not a hundred percent sure whether that happened (it has a bit) or whether, in other ways, it became unnecessary. One way it could become unnecessary is that ana-

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

lytic philosophers had themselves opened up beyond themselves. So you had analytic philosophers reading Hegel, analytic philosophers reading Kant, analytic philosophers reading Merleau-Ponty, reading Sartre, reading Heidegger, and so on. So you didn't need a special person because they were doing it themselves, they were themselves opening up their formation and interests, and I think that's happened a bit too, and is continuing to happen. Equally, I also think it's true that, quite often, departments now will have somebody who can teach non-analytic forms in philosophy, just as now, increasingly, there may be people who teach non-Western thought. I'm not sure I would go so far as to say that the old analytic/Continental distinction is breaking down but I don't think it has the sort of structural role in the life and formation of academic philosophers in Britain today that it did when I was young, and really did the generation before.

HW: Is there anything specific in the method of analytic philosophy which made it so distinct and made it so sharply distinguish itself from other traditions of philosophy like phenomenology or structuralism?

SG: It's not that it was necessarily somehow distinct from, but wanted somehow distinguish itself from. So there was a sort of performative dimension that you were mentioning a moment ago: producing itself in opposition. There was definitely some sociology in this too. I've indicated already that something about having gone through two world wars against Germany in the 20th century was

important. But that's not all. There was also the internal development of universities in the course of the 19th and 20th century in Britain (not only in Britain). A transition out of the old formation of university institutions - where what had been central was providing clerical training for people to become priests - into a sort of industrial-age university, where people were being prepared to work in the civil services, industry, management, and (in Britain's case) in imperial offices, foreign offices across the empire, and so on. Meeting the requirements of the new industrial economy fell in part to the universities. From a starting point where very few people went to universities, and their purpose was basically theological, we saw through the 19th and 20th centuries a massive expansion of universities, especially in technical and scientific disciplines. And there was a serious question of philosophy's place in the modern university, an institutional conversation and debate going on about the place of philosophy in the modern university. And I think one of the things that the analytic movement felt was that it was a properly constituted academic discipline, properly suited to the modern university: it was itself rigorous, scientific and logical. These were going to be its grounds, its *raison d'être* to the modern university. So there was a certain kind of recoil against the ambitions of Hegelian idealism from that side of things too. Idealism was increasingly conceived as something like speculative theology. And that had no place in modern universities. That was part of the sociology too, and there's no doubt that philosophy's success in British universities was in part due to the fact that it could present itself as having a properly scientific spirit.

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

This self-understanding had a further interesting consequence. It meant that those other ways of doing philosophy, philosophy that didn't think of itself as having its foundations in logic and logical analysis, first came into British universities from outside philosophy departments, in the other humanities departments, in departments of literature especially. The theoretical humanities remained interested in other ways of doing philosophy - and became increasingly less interested in what was going on in English-speaking philosophy departments. That's breaking down too today: it's not just that British philosophy is opening itself to other ways of doing philosophy. Philosophy is opening itself to what is going on in other departments in the theoretical humanities. And that's interesting too.

HW: So you are saying a lot about the social or political background of this split, but could we say that analytic philosophy is in its method just much further from any of the "continental" movements, than they are from each other? Would that be true? You've mentioned examples like phenomenology and analytic philosophy, which are in many respects close, but nevertheless, the only major dichotomy in modern philosophy is the analytic- Continental split.

SG: As I have been saying, it could almost forge itself as such. But today it is increasingly un-forging itself as such. Take another example from phenomenology. Heidegger spent a decade struggling to come to terms with Nietzsche. At that time no comparable struggle was going on in Britain with Nietzsche. But today it is. An-

alytic philosophers today, especially those doing moral philosophy, do make contact with Nietzsche in serious ways. Bernard Williams's interest in Nietzsche was totally genuine. It wasn't all-consuming, but it was nevertheless deeply formative. Williams's whole outlook about philosophy about the limits of philosophy, about what was possible in moral philosophy, and also his later writings in politics and his attempt to distance political thought from moralism, all of this emerges through his engagement with Nietzsche. It's not about closeness in any essential way. It's about what you read and don't read. If important figures on the Continent are regarded as closer to each other than they are to analytic philosophers, that's because they were reading each other's work.

HW: There was more dialogue between them.

Much more dialogue, and there was a much looser sense of tradition, maybe except perhaps the sense of belonging to a strongly post-Kantian heritage. And while I probably emphasize it too much, or risk doing so, I still think it is basically true that all the major movements of modern philosophy in Europe, including Britain, are post-Kantian. As I have mentioned, one of the odd things about the analytic movement in its early formation was that it was a revival of empiricism. It was, at least, more empiricist than Kantian in its self-understanding. But in its own history, it moved out of that, there was as it were a mutation within the movement of analytic philosophy, and it became more Kantian or post-Kantian. This history is not over, and it may well be that analytic philosophy is itself

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

waning in any strong methodological or programmatic sense. Moreover, there is a revival of metaphysics beyond Kant, a movement which doesn't follow that post-Kantian line of skepticism about the possibility of metaphysics. But in the 20th century, most of it did. What's happening today... I don't think anybody has written much or knows much about what's happening today in analytic philosophy. There was certainly a time not long ago when some people started saying: "We should stop calling it analytic philosophy because we're not really doing what used to be called analytic philosophy." There are lots of things going on and there's nothing like "conceptual analysis" as a ruling methodology, a methodology which held analytic philosophy together as a movement in the second half of the 20th century.

And I am not sure, I genuinely don't know, let me ask you - Does analytic philosophy today have a commitment to something like a method?

HW: I am certainly not competent to answer that question, as I am still a freshman in analytic philosophy, and I don't know much about modern analytic philosophy either. But there is still an emphasis on formal argumentation and on logic. And this is something which I believe still marks some difference.

SG: Perhaps. I don't know. But if you look at some parts of analytic philosophy you would have to say that formal logic does not play a big role in it. That's just obvious. That doesn't mean that there is a new desire to have a non-logical method. I wouldn't say

that at all. But formal logic? We're here and we are speaking at the London School of Economics. And within what was already a pretty narrow tradition of analytic philosophy, the Philosophy Department at the LSE, for a long time, produced itself as something narrow within the narrow, with its emphasis on science and scientific method. In fact, the Philosophy Department at the LSE is not even called the Philosophy Department, it is called the Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method. So it's actually producing itself as something else again. But if you look across the world of analytic philosophy, or at least people who in some way self-identify as analytic philosophers, I don't think you'd find anything that would unite them in a very strong way. Perhaps there is still some kind of idea of an opposition that would be articulated by saying "We don't do that Continental stuff". That's still there, it has not gone. Indeed, to a certain extent, it can't do without it, it's simply a part of its fabric, and there will be some self-ambition or ambition for itself to have standards of rigour and clarity that they see as lacking elsewhere.

I am not immune to that experience. However, there is one feature of the development of philosophy outside the analytic movement, which I think analytic philosophy, with its history and developing self-understanding is only now beginning to catch up with: namely, history itself. I don't mean a specific interest in the past, but an interest in our own time as belonging to and as having a history. This historical awareness is a central feature of Hegel's work of course, but it was already there in Kant. It is a question of thought thinking its

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

time. Of course, analytic philosophy has never denied that it has a history, but it has rarely made the task of trying to come to terms with our own time a theme for itself as a philosophical task - one that is not sloughed off to sociology or psychology or history. There's a brilliant essay by Isaiah Berlin, written in 1958, *Two Concepts of Liberty* which addresses this issue. The first two pages are a quite stunning attack on analytic philosophy or philosophy as it was being done in Britain and America. He says that you would think we are living in some kind of utopia for all the interest that is shown to politics in philosophy. He thought that is extremely dangerous. And at that time he was alone, massively alone as a voice in Britain, not just for political philosophy, but for philosophy which hadn't immunised itself to thinking about its own position in history, and to have an eye on the political. I think it is less and less the case now. Analytic philosophers are, I think, increasingly alive to the fact of their own situatedness, their own presence in a society which is not a utopia. So I think there's a sort of moderate "repoliticisation" of philosophy in the analytic tradition which again will be a kind of catching up with something that would have been more continuous outside it.

HW: That's interesting. As far as I remember it was Wittgenstein who wrote that if aliens would visit Oxford University, go to the Philosophy lecture and look at what we are debating about, they would say that we must be the happiest species living in the absolutely perfect world.

SG: No. That was Berlin. But Wittgenstein is an absolutely massive case in all of this. One of the most extraordinary achievements of his works is their complete withdrawal of philosophy from the political or the ethical. And yet Wittgenstein is such a paradoxical case because I think he thought of that achievement as itself ethical. He criticised some of his students for being naive about politics, suggesting they were learning nothing from him. So, bizarrely, the most exemplary case of a thinker who seemed to have removed every trace of the political and the ethical from his philosophy thought of his own work in a certain way as ethical, and probably also political in some way. He said “We’re making propaganda for another way of thinking” and the way of thinking he was making propaganda against was one which he said “disgusted” him. It was the domination of our thinking by science, which he thought permeated everything, including our politics. I don’t think that has gone away. Nevertheless, in the last ten to twenty years the situation that Isaiah Berlin saw in the late 50s is less true: the interest in ethics, politics, and in the ethics and politics of everything you do in philosophy, whether it is philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, all of that is something we are no longer dead to. That there is a politics inside all these things, this is something that philosophers today are more and more likely to discuss. And as a result they are also starting to read Foucault, Habermas, the Frankfurt School, Critical Theory, Nietzsche...

HW: That’s a thing that struck me when I started studying at the LSE, that those political or language-related problems which emerge

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

when you think deeply enough in almost any problem in philosophy, is what analytical philosophers, at least those which I am familiar with, often isolate. They want to concentrate on a problem itself, perhaps assuming that there is no significant impact of politics or language on our thinking about this problem. And at the same time, this thing that analytic thinkers put outside of the problem, is often precisely the problem that so-called continentals focus on. Like Foucault with his power relations.

SG: Funnily enough, analytic philosophy has provided new tools for finding ways into those problems. I remember being at a conference where Derrida said that the most important contribution to thinking about language in the 20th century was J. L. Austin's work on the performative. Not just fact-stating but this sort of event-producing event of speech. Derrida thought it an enormous contribution, and Judith Butler has drawn on it in extremely influential ways. So those people who were, in a certain way, drawing away from the political nevertheless provided resources for thinking politically. Austin often. Austin's own Chair at Oxford was the White's Professor of Moral Philosophy, and there is a strange subterranean continuing "doing ethics" in Austin's work too. Anyway, the fact is that today these efforts to get away from the social and the political and the ethical, the idea that ethics will just be meta-ethics, are less prominent than they once were. Things are changing. I don't want to say that it's changing means that it is becoming "more Continental". It means though that stuff that was already happening in kinds of work that was just not being read much in the English-speaking world, will be-

come increasingly available and accessible to an analytic philosopher today in a way which it simply wasn't in the past.

There's a remarkable effect here, which can seem mysterious, but which is undeniable. I have no interest in theorising mystery, but when Sartre's work first appeared to a British philosophical public, for example, he was almost universally regarded as totally unreadable. He was thought as so completely obscure as to be not even worthy of serious engagement, and certainly not worthy of argued dissent. That really is how it appeared. By the 1970s and 1980s, however, the text had somehow altered in its appearing: British philosophical readers could now read the text, and said: "Oh, it's not so difficult, I think I do understand what's going on here". It was a movement of becoming-legible of a text. It began to arrive. As I mentioned earlier, when I was a student, we were given a course on Sartre. It was taken by a really great teacher, Marie McGinn, probably the main influence on me when I was younger. She decided to teach an option unit on Sartre, where we were reading closely just as we were reading analytic texts, and we tried to work out what he was saying. And we did. It wasn't impenetrable, it wasn't impossible. So Sartre could arrive, and there was a great book by Gregory McCulloch called *Using Sartre: An Analytical Introduction* where a self-consciously analytic philosopher tried to explain why he was finding it interesting, thought-provoking and helpful to read Sartre. And the same is true today with Merleau Ponty., The same is true today even of Heidegger, particularly *Being and Time*. So you have this kind of transformation of texts, from something completely ob-

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

scure, illegible, unreadable, to-be-banished, slowly becoming readable. This seems to belong to the history of philosophical texts (and I'm sure not only philosophical texts): that they have this movement of becoming legible. And the same would be true of many of the texts of analytic philosophy itself. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* would have gone through several generations of reading, where its opacity has transformed into a kind of readability. The same is true of the *Investigations*, which would have been largely thought, if a work of analytic philosophy at all, only so because you could extract arguments or something like that. But I think now people can read it without wanting to do that, to try and see what else it's doing. Of course, there is another part of this, which is that Wittgenstein's influence is far less significant than it was in the 70s, 80s or 90s. And Heidegger's position as the sort of master thinker of the 20th century outside analytic philosophy has waned as well. We are seeing a very interesting sort of self-transforming condition in both analytic philosophy, which is no longer anywhere near so centred on Wittgenstein, and non-analytic movements of various kinds, which are no longer so close to Heidegger, or indeed to phenomenology. You know, you just have other waves of generations of readers and writers, who are doing what they think of as committing themselves to writing in the name of philosophy, not in the name of analytic philosophy, not in the name of Continental philosophy, but people who feel that there's nothing but an obligation to write, and to be able to say: "This is what I want to call Philosophy". People still trying to go on with the subject that has called itself "Philosophy".

It is a very enigmatic subject. It has no portion of reality that is its “proper” domain and which limits it internally. It produces itself out of itself. It is very hard to say what philosophy is independently of what has ever been produced as philosophy, and in its name. And what has been produced in its name will also have been produced in opposition to itself. Hume wanted to cast certain things to the flames as “sophistry and illusion”. From the beginning, Plato identified the sophist as “the other”, the proper other, of philosophy proper. Philosophy’s own other. And its history is at least partially constituted in this movement of its self-production in relation to some other of that kind. I believe that Continental philosophy belongs to that formation too: as “the other” of the analytic philosophy, as inheriting the status, as it were, of the sophist, which has to be excluded, if philosophy is to go on properly. So there’s a completely non-sociological, and in some sense deeply philosophical motivation for analytic philosophy wanting to expel this other, because it represented philosophy’s own other. It’s not that it was other to philosophy (as say history or sociology is): it was philosophy’s own other. And philosophy will never be rid of that.

HW: Could you explain a concept that you’ve presented in your book *The Idea of Continental Philosophy* about writing in Philosophy and writing on Philosophy?

SG: It’s about reading and doing Philosophy. There’s a kind of aspiration for a philosopher to do philosophy, which goes on without reading philosophy. And, of course, that’s true of all sorts of works

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

on philosophy too. But in the former case, as more obviously in the latter case, there's always something like reading going on. There is this relation to the heritage, to the tradition, which is being read and it's like: This is what doing philosophy is. Writing philosophy simply cannot not pass through a relation to its history in that moment. It's going on with what has called itself, and called itself to be, "philosophy".

HW: According to different notions and ideas of what philosophy is, do you think there is a significant difference in a social reception of philosophy and philosophers in the UK and in, let's say, France or Germany?

SG: That's a great question. In my lifetime, Germany was sort of in the doldrums philosophically. There was the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory, but that had mostly left Germany. It is my impression that there wasn't anything being produced that was in a certain way producing itself as German Philosophy. France perhaps more self-consciously was thinking about traditions of French Philosophy and there are essays from the 1960s where French philosophers ask themselves "Where is France regarding Philosophy?" Germany would have suffered in this respect in part through its own history: that the development of German Nationalism and National Socialism wasn't entirely separate from, couldn't be entirely separated from, the major movements of German philosophy. French philosophy, by contrast, could think of itself more proudly in a revolutionary tradition, and in the tradition of a certain kind of universalism. So

whereas there's a sort of self-rooting in the tradition of German Philosophy, there is a much more immediately available cosmopolitan universalism in France. And Britain was doing its analytic thing. But the question you've asked is also about the relationship between not just national philosophical formations, but the way in which nations themselves occupy themselves, or interest themselves with philosophy. And in France there was a general sense in which philosophy and its forms of questioning had permeated the wider general culture: one finds philosophical discussions in the press, on TV and on the radio, and you have thousands of people turning out on the streets at Sartre's funeral. So philosophers as public intellectuals has been part of a general French cultural shaping, and 1968 was as much a philosophical event as it would have been a political one. Britain has had a very different formation in terms of its general culture with philosophy. Philosophers have never not appeared in the course of the 20th century in media, or on the TV or radio. But they've never really been significant public figures. One who was close to being so was Bertrand Russell, he was a great pacifist and anti-nuclear campaigner. A. J. Ayer also made public announcements politically. But there was something like a discontinuity between their work in philosophy and their work as public thinkers. Nevertheless, philosophy also appears on television. There was a TV series by Bryan Magee called *The Great Philosophers*; there was one hosted by John Searle called *The Trouble with Truth*; there was one led by Michael Ignatieff too, called *Voices*, which I really liked as a boy. Intellectual conversation, what's called "talking heads": when you have people sitting on sofas just talking about

with Prof. Simon Glendinning

ideas - that's been present, and quite popular. But philosophy has never had the sort of central cultural position in Britain that it has had in France. The charity that I am Director of, the Forum for European Philosophy, which has its offices here at the LSE, has always had one of its ambitions to try to take philosophy out of universities, taking it to the wider general public or publics. And I think it's been pretty successful in that. We've gone from a situation in the early 1990s or mid-90s where we've put on events, not very good events to be honest, which were philosophy for a general public audience and we'd occasionally have a hundred people there, and that was amazing. But now we regularly have four hundred coming to our events, and British philosophers of whatever formation are perfectly competent at playing this role of public speaker, not just as a university or academic speaker. Obviously I don't want to overplay the role or achievement that the Forum for European Philosophy has had in this development, but it has gone along with a more general development that I was talking about earlier: that philosophers in Britain, including analytic philosophers, are far more comfortable with engaging with our time than they were when Isaiah Berlin gave his inaugural lecture in 1958. Troubled by our time and interested in thinking about it, and relating ideas to a general public audience: this is no longer for the British a peculiarly "French" philosophical thing. And you will hear more philosophical voices in the media than perhaps one did in the past in a relatively pervasive way. There are still perhaps only a few people who make a wide impact. A. C. Grayling is one of the few who regularly makes a philosophical contribution to national debates. But there are others. Roger Scru-

ton has always allied his interest in philosophy to a wider social and political culture. John Gray is another. Mary Warnock and Onora O'Neill have both been more officially involved too. And there are many others. There are many more people now who engage philosophically with issues in a public way than when I was younger, and in ways that might have been thought beyond philosophy - especially beyond analytic philosophy - twenty years ago.

HW: Are there any books you could recommend for people who will read this interview? We have mentioned your book *The Idea of Continental Philosophy*, Isaiah Berlin's *Four Essays on Liberty*, what else is there that you could recommend?

SG: To get a sense of what it was like in the past, it is worth reading Geoffrey Warnock's book *English Philosophy since 1900*¹. Also worth reading are Gilbert Ryle's essays on phenomenology², and his review of Heidegger's *Being and Time*³. Another thing to look at is the debate between Derrida and Searle over a text by J.L. Austin - which both of them (rather differently) really liked.⁴⁵ Above all, however, you should let yourself read widely - and discover for yourself what is on its way to becoming-legible as philosophy in our time.

¹ G. J. Warnock, *English Philosophy since 1900*

² G. Ryle, *Critical Essays*

³ G. Ryle, *Critical Essays*

⁴ J. Derrida, *Limited Inc*

⁵ J. Searle, *Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida*