
EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY
CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

STUDIES IN CONTINENTAL THOUGHT

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PREFACE

The Four Conceptual Features

The book you are about to read concerns early twentieth-century continental philosophy, that is, French and German philosophy from 1903, the original publication date of Bergson's "Introduction to Metaphysics," to 1966, the original publication date of Foucault's "The Thought of the Outside." This book aims to be a general introduction to "continental philosophy." It should enable one to study, with insight, not only the figures covered here (Bergson, Freud, Husserl, early Heidegger, later Heidegger, later Merleau-Ponty, and early Foucault), but also most of the central texts written after the 1950s by Derrida, Deleuze, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Lacan, Levinas, Lyotard, Gadamer, and the so-called "French feminists" such as Irigaray and Kristeva. Although one strain of European thought has usually defined "continental philosophy," that is, phenomenology (both its German and French versions)—and we shall spend a significant amount of time discussing phenomenology—we shall consider three other strains: Bergsonism, psychoanalysis, and then finally what is commonly called "structuralism" (although we shall not use the word "structuralism" below).

In a survey of early twentieth-century continental philosophy, more could be said here; we could have included a discussion of "the Frankfurt school" (Adorno, for example), Levinas, or Sartre. These exclusions indicate that there is an idiosyncratic reason for the selection of the figures examined here. It seems to me that the specific figures selected set up what I have called "the great French philosophy of the Sixties."¹

1. Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

Therefore the book is laid out in a series of readings of specific texts (arranged chronologically by the original publication date of the texts). Each chapter provides first what I am calling a “Summary-Commentary,” that is, a relatively traditional and linear exposition of the text under consideration. But then second, each chapter provides an “Interpretation.” While influenced by the readings Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault (and others) have provided of these figures, each “Interpretation” pushes to the side their well-known criticisms: Derrida’s criticism of Husserl and Heidegger, Deleuze’s criticism of phenomenology, Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of Freud, Foucault’s distancing himself from Bergson, Freud, and Merleau-Ponty. Each “Interpretation” aims to take up a creative relation to the text being considered and thereby produce a positive history of this period. More precisely, by suppressing some ideas and exaggerating others, each chapter’s “Interpretation” attempts to assemble and systematize the four conceptual features that animate “the great French philosophy of the Sixties.” The four features are: (1) the starting point in immanence (where immanence is understood first as internal, subjective experience, but then, due to the universality of the epoché, immanence is understood as ungrounded experience); (2) difference (where difference gives way to multiplicity, itself emancipated from an absolute origin and an absolute purpose; being so emancipated, multiplicity itself becomes the absolute); (3) thought (where thought is understood as language liberated from the constraints of logic, and language is understood solely in terms of its own being, as indefinite continuous variation); and (4) the overcoming of metaphysics (where metaphysics is understood as a mode of thinking based in presence, and overcoming is understood as the passage to a new mode of thought, a new people, and a new land). Through the phrase “the overcoming of metaphysics,” the fourth feature in particular indicates the central role that Heidegger plays in this book. It is Heidegger who shows, in 1929, that we can understand thought only when we suspend its object, when it is the thought of the nothing. It is Heidegger, in 1950, who shows that “language is language”; he shows that, grounded in nothing but itself, language opens out over an abyss, a void, an outside. It is Heidegger who inspires Foucault’s title “The Thought of the Outside.” Therefore, this book aims at demonstrating a movement from Bergson, through Freud, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, toward what Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze have called “the outside.” For “the great French philosophers of the Sixties,” Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault, the outside is conceived in

two ways, which overlap and intersect. On the one hand, the outside is the external as opposed to the internal; for example, the unconscious as opposed to consciousness. On the other, the outside is the difference between oppositions such as the conscious and the unconscious, psychological consciousness and transcendental consciousness, being and beings, the visible and the invisible. In this sense, the “between” is a fold, a gap, a minuscule hiatus, “*un écart infime*” (MC: 351/OT: 340). The minuscule hiatus joins as it disjoins events and repetitions; below the difference therefore a multiplicity of traits swarms. We must not underestimate the importance of this comment from Deleuze’s 1968 *Difference and Repetition*:

There is a crucial experience of difference and a corresponding experiment: every time we find ourselves confronted or bound by a limitation or an opposition, we should ask what such a situation presupposes. It presupposes a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences, a properly differential and original space and time, all of which persist across the simplification of limitation and opposition.²

Or this one, ten years later, from Foucault’s 1978 course “Security, Territory, Population”:

Must intelligibility arise in no other way than through the search for the one that splits into two or produces the two? Could we not, for example, start not from the unity, and not even from [the] nature-state duality, but from the multiplicity of extraordinarily diverse processes?³

Or finally, this one, more than twenty years later, from Derrida’s 2001 course “The Beast and the Sovereign”:

Every time one puts an oppositional limit in question, far from concluding that there is identity, we must on the contrary multiply attention to differences, refine the analysis in a restructured field.⁴

2. Gilles Deleuze, *Différence et répétition* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), p. 71, English translation by Paul Patton as *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 50.

3. Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population. Cours au Collège de France, 1977–1978* (Paris: Hautes Études Gallimard Seuil, 2004), p. 244, English translation by Graham Burchell as *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 238.

4. Jacques Derrida, *Séminaire. La bête et le souverain. Volume I (2001–2002)* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), p. 36, English translation by Geoff Bennington as *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 16.

Derrida and Foucault would call these untamed differences “a murmur”; Deleuze says “clamor.” Thought—or philosophy—therefore consists in listening to this clamoring murmur. Late in his career, in his 1984 “What Is Enlightenment?” essay, Foucault laid out a project for philosophizing: “to separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.” He called this transformative project “the indefinite work of freedom.” That the work of freedom is indefinite means that it is always incomplete, that freedom is always still to come, that the work always raises further questions. It is these further questions that define and drive, that must drive, still today, what we call continental philosophy.

The fact that Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault are no longer with us should make us consider the condition of what we call “continental philosophy.” The immense popularity of the term cannot be denied, and yet, as so many recent attempts have demonstrated, it seems virtually undefinable. Or at best it is defined as a catchall phrase for all the kinds of philosophy that analytic philosophy does not welcome, from mystical discourse to race theory. At worst, it refers to the exposition of the ideas of French and German philosophers, most of whom, like Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault, are now dead. What future can there be for continental philosophy when it is nothing more than exposition? What future can a hodgepodge of ideas have? Is it possible to determine something like a project for continental philosophy? *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* attempts to answer this question. Indeed, the selection of the figures discussed in this book arose from the attempt, my attempt, to conceive continental philosophy as a philosophical project (or a philosophical research agenda). In other words, if it is true that the great diversity of texts and authors usually associated with continental philosophy seems not to constitute anything remotely like a tradition, then by selecting certain philosophers (and not others) I am attempting to show that a tradition can be constituted. *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* argues that a continuous working out of an impulse unifies, at the least, these philosophers. The impulse is an attempt to open up an experience that makes us think, that transforms who we are. In this regard, *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* functions as a kind of “prequel” for my earlier *Thinking through French Philosophy*. Or, while *Thinking through French Philosophy* attempts to determine a “diffraction” of

philosophical positions, *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* attempts to determine the “light” that is being diffracted. *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* therefore is the reverse of *Thinking through French Philosophy*. Yet whether we are concerned with the reverse or obverse, the aim remains the same. This work aims at the renewal of the impulse of twentieth-century continental philosophy for the future. More modestly, however, in light of the feeling that the times, just since the death of Derrida, have already changed—the recent past seeing at once the re-emergence of naturalism and a call for a “return to Plato”—it aims at preserving the memory (the potentiality) of this way of thinking, a way of thinking that is paradoxical. We know we have come across continental philosophy when we find a mode of thinking that always “repudiates easiness” (CENT: 1328/CM: 87).

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ABBREVIATIONS

Reference is always made first to the original French or German, then to the English translation. I have frequently modified the English translations.

- CENT/CM Henri Bergson. *La pensée et le mouvant*, in *Œuvres*, Édition du Centenaire. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959. English translation by Mabelle L. Andison as *The Creative Mind*. New York: The Citadel Press, 1992 (1946). *The Creative Mind* contains “Introduction to Metaphysics” (its chapter VI), which is the focus of the first chapter. There is also an updated version of Andison’s translation of “Introduction to Metaphysics” revised by John Mullarkey as *Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- GW X /SE XIV Sigmund Freud. “Das Unbewusste,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Zehnter Band, Werke aus den Jahren 1913–1917*. London: Imago Publishing Company, 1949, pp. 263–303. English translation by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, and assisted by Alex Strachey and Alan Tyson as “The Unconscious,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914–1916)*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1957, pp. 159–204.

French translation by Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis as “L’inconscient,” in *Métapsychologie*. Paris: Gallimard, 1968, pp. 65–123. There is an additional English translation by Cecil M. Baines as “The Unconscious,” in *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, pp. 116–50.

HUA IX/CH

Edmund Husserl. “A. Abhandlungen. Der Encyclopaedia Britannica Artikel,” in *Phänomenologische Psychologie*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968, pp. 277–301. English translation by Richard E. Palmer as “Phenomenology,” *Encyclopedia Britannica* article. Draft D, in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–1931)*, translated and edited by Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997, pp. 159–79.

GA 9/PM

Martin Heidegger. *Gesamtausgabe. 1. Abteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910–1976. Band 9. Wegmarken*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004. English translation edited by William McNeil as *Pathmarks*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998. This volume contains “What Is Metaphysics?” pp. 82–96; “Postscript to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” pp. 231–38; and “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” pp. 277–90.

GA 12/OWL
OR PLT

Martin Heidegger. In *Gesamtausgabe, Band 12, Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976. Partial English translation by Peter D. Hertz as *On the Way to Language*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971. The abbreviation OWL refers to *On the Way to Language*. The essay “Die Sprache” has been translated into English by Albert Hofstadter as “Language,” in

Poetry, Language, Thought. New York: Harper Collins, 2001, pp. 185–208. The abbreviation PLT refers to *Poetry, Language, Thought*.

- OE/MPR Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *L'Œil et l'esprit*. Paris: Gallimard, 1964. English translation by Michael B. Smith as “Eye and Mind,” in *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, ed. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007, pp. 351–78.
- DE I/EWF 2 Michel Foucault. “La pensée du dehors,” in *Dits et écrits I, 1954–1975*. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 2001, pp. 546–67. English translation by Brian Massumi as “The Thought of the Outside,” in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, volume 2: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, Paul Rabinow, series editor. New York: The New Press, 1998, pp. 147–69.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR OTHER TEXTS DISCUSSED

- CENT/DI Henri Bergson. *Les données immédiates de la conscience*, in *Œuvres*, Édition du Centenaire, pp. 1–157; English translation by F. L. Pogson as *Time and Free Will*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publishing Company, 2001.
- CENT/EC Henri Bergson. *L'Évolution créatrice*, in *Œuvres*, Édition du Centenaire, pp. 487–809. English translation by Arthur Mitchell as *Creative Evolution*. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998 (1911).
- HUA VI/CR Edmund Husserl. *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaft und die Transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Husserliana VI*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976. English translation by David Carr as *The Crisis of European Sciences*

- and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- SZ/BT Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1979. English translation by Joan Stambaugh (revised and with a foreword by Dennis J. Schmidt) as *Being and Time* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2010).
- NC 59–61 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours 1959–1961*. Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1996. There is no English translation of this volume. All translations are my own.
- VIF/VIE Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*. Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1964. English translation by Alphonso Lingis as *The Visible and the Invisible*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- MC/OT Michel Foucault, *Les mots et les choses*. Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1966. Anonymous English translation as *The Order of Things*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- AS/AK Michel Foucault, *l'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1969. English translation by A. M. Sheridan Smith as *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1972.

EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY
CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

Structure and Genesis of Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy

In order to define “continental philosophy” (and perhaps philosophy in general), we must say, without any equivocation, that there is one and only one driving question. The question is given to us by Heidegger, and, in his book on Foucault, Deleuze calls this question “the arrow shot by Heidegger, the arrow par excellence.”¹ The driving question of continental philosophy is the question of thinking: what is called or what calls for thinking. Continental philosophy amounts to a kind of project, which remains incomplete today, and perhaps like all great philosophical questions remains essentially incomplete. It is possible, however, to construct four formulas that define continental philosophy, four formulas for the structure that defines the kind of thinking that the phrase “continental philosophy” designates. Here are the four formulas.²

1. What continental philosophy wants is a renewal of thinking.
2. Thinking happens in the moment.
3. The moment is the experience of the conditions of experience.
4. Continental philosophy constantly moves back and forth across a small step between metaphysical and abstract issues and ethical or political and concrete issues.

Structure in Four Formulas

Continental philosophy is paradoxical, because the very matter of thinking is paradox. The matter of thinking brings us to the first formula. The first formula concerns what we might call the “project” of continental philosophy, what continental philosophy wants (as in desire, love, or friendship, as in *philo-sophia*). What continental philosophy wants is a renewal of thinking. In other words, it wants to think otherwise and in new ways, and produce new ways of being. The renewal of thought implies that continental philosophy does not consist in a justification of common opinions. Instead, it concerns the transgression of common opinions. And in this regard, while continental philosophy has deep affinities with the tradition of transcendental philosophy, it breaks with it over the idea that conditions of possibility are supposed to justify beliefs. This break can be seen in all the philosophers associated with continental philosophy: the anti-Platonism of Bergson, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Deleuze, and Foucault, for instance. It is important to recognize that thinking, in these philosophers, is not an abstract endeavor. It always concerns concrete situations; thinking occurs in action. Thinking happens to you, and thus insofar as it happens to you, thinking, according to continental philosophy, originates, as Freud showed, in the unconscious.³ The idea that thinking happens to you implies that thinking is not a natural ability. It occurs under the pressure of extreme experiences and experimentation. Because thinking happens in an experience, continental philosophy is always interested in the experience of death, madness, and blindness. All of these experiences concern disorientation in time. Here continental philosophy recalls Aristotle’s claim that all thinking begins with wonder. A general way of defining thinking in continental philosophy is the following: Under the pressure of a concrete and extreme experience such as blindness, a concrete experience that disorients time, thinking happens as an event, an event in which something new, a work, a concept, a way of life, is invented.

No one has gone farther than Deleuze in his 1968 *Difference and Repetition* to define what thinking is. Following Heidegger, Deleuze criticizes Kant’s critical project. He criticizes Kant’s critical project because, according to Deleuze, Kant “copied” (*décalqué*: copied like a decal) the categories of possible experience off common experiences, so that the categories are

no more than the expression of common sense.⁴ The copying off of experience, for Deleuze, is especially evident in the second critique, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, where the foundation or groundwork of morality is copied off commonsense moral values. The problem with copying concepts off common sense, as Kant seems to do, is that it changes nothing; it merely justifies common sense. Copying concepts off common sense turns philosophy into an image with an original, a repetition of the identical, with the result that philosophy creates no new differences or new concepts. We know we are dealing with common sense when someone says, “everybody knows” or “they say.” For Deleuze, what “everybody knows” refers to the belief that there is in everyone a natural capacity for thinking. Here we need think only of Descartes, for whom what properly defines us is thinking. Common sense means that what everyone has in common is thinking. To say that thinking is a natural faculty distributed to everyone equally rests on an old saying: People are prepared to complain of not having a good memory or of not being very imaginative, or not being able to hear well, but they always believe that they are smart and are able to think. Everybody naturally thinks that everybody is supposed to know implicitly what it means to think. The natural capacity for thinking means not only that everyone has a talent for truth, but also that everyone wants the truth. Deleuze calls these two aspects of the natural faculty of thinking the rightness of thinking and the goodwill of the thinker, or, more precisely, the natural faculty consists in common sense and good sense.⁵ The natural capacity to think, to want the truth (good sense) and to be able to get it (common sense), provides us with what Deleuze calls “a natural image of thought”: an affinity with the truth and a desire for the truth. With Kant again, philosophy starts with this natural image, as if philosophical thinking were nothing more than a more sophisticated version, a conceptualized version of this image.

When we speak of this natural thought, the model is, according to Deleuze, recognition. Recognition is the harmony between a mental representation and the way things are. It is a relation of copying. So we should note immediately how this word “re-cognition” resembles “re-petition”: with recognition there is always the same and no difference. The model of recognition implies that the only questions we ever ask are questions like the following: Is this Frank or Richard? Is this a bird or a fish? If I say “Frank” and it turns out to be Richard, then I have made a mistake,

an error. But this error can be corrected, since there is a correct answer: "It's Richard." If the model for all questions is one of recognition, then the most difficult questions we can encounter are those that have an answer. The model of recognition means that the actual model for questioning and thinking is the schoolteacher, who asks students only questions to which the teacher already knows the answer. We can wonder then if thinking ever takes place in the classroom, if anything new is ever invented there. According to Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, this mode of questioning maintains a hierarchy of parent-child; the student is treated like a child and therefore controlled or, better, disciplined.⁶ Foucault showed in his 1975 *Discipline and Punish* that the technique of discipline practiced in the classroom in the early nineteenth century will be imported into the prisons by the end of the century.⁷ The prison then becomes more humane, but also the prison becomes more efficient, more efficiently controlling the behavior and thinking of the prisoners in the same way that children are controlled in the classroom. In other words, and more generally, this model of questioning based in re-cognition results in no liberation: the answer the student gives must correspond to the answer that the teacher already knows.

Now, in order to understand common sense, we started with the well-known fact that people never complain about their ability to think, but they do complain about having bad memories or of being unimaginative. Deleuze asks, why should thinking be any different from these other faculties? Is it not the case that, in fact, humans think rarely, and more often only under the impulse of shock? Do humans really possess a taste for thinking from the start? Thinking, as I already indicated (but this claim is true for all continental philosophy), begins only under a constraint, under force, which breaks up the habits we have formed. So thinking, instead of involving a "goodwill," is based in ill will, even violence.⁸ The person asking the question is not a teacher, but someone who is unpleasant and angry; this person does not already know the answer to the question. This person does not want a common opinion, an opinion that "everybody knows." This person says, "I don't know what everybody knows." But if we take the model of recognition at the heart of the natural image of thought as the model for philosophical thinking, then this model can only be the model of right or correct belief. The Greek word for "belief" is "*doxa*," which also means opinion. Can such a model of common sense, belief,

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