Continental vs. Analytic Philosophy and the Irrationality of this Division

Katie Lynn Spence University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

There are two main approaches to philosophy that make up philosophical discourse: continental and analytic. Analytic philosophy is concerned with true/false premises, and continental philosophy is concerned with how things came to be, without relying specifically on logic. Although philosophy started out uniformly, over time the analytic school of philosophy and the continental school of philosophy started to regard itself as being separate. This led to animosity and outright disrespect for each other. Because of this, continental and analytic philosophy have become separate playing fields where each team is trying to beat the other. But what happens when both are required? This paper focuses on the philosophy of language, particularly that of A.J. Ayer, an analytic philosopher, and Ferdinand de Saussure, a continental philosopher. It shows how Ayer's argument is defeated by its own logic, and Saussure's argument is reduced to chaos because there is no reference to ground it. The focus then shifts to Edmund Husserl, who bridges Ayer's and Saussure's philosophies of language, and thus a philosophy of language is constructed using both analytic and continental philosophy. From this, it is argued that both continental and analytic philosophy are necessary to make Philosophy relevant today and the arguments within Philosophy sound.

There are two main approaches to philosophy that make up philosophical discourse: continental and analytic. Analytic philosophy is concerned with true/false premises, and continental philosophy is concerned with how things came to be, without relying specifically on logic. Both analytic and continental philosophy have overtones of logic and how things came to be, but the divide comes from analytic's being solely focused on the logic behind the argument, and continental's concern with what is being said, and the possibility of metaphysics. Although philosophy started out uniformly, over time the analytic school of philosophy and the continental school of philosophy started to regard itself as being separate. This led to animosity and outright disrespect for each other. In other words, analytic philosophers regarded continental philosophers as "fluffy, meaningless," etc. Continental philosophers regarded analytic philosophers as "arrogant, too logical," etc. Because of this, continental and analytic philosophy have become separate playing fields where each team is trying to beat the other. But what happens when both are required? This paper focuses on the philosophy of language, particularly that of A.J. Ayer, an analytic philosopher, and Ferdinand de Saussure, a continental philosopher. It shows how Ayer's argument is defeated by its own logic, and Saussure's argument is reduced to chaos because there is no reference to ground it. The focus then shifts to Edmund Husserl, who bridges Ayer's and Saussure's philosophies of language, and thus a philosophy of language is constructed using both analytic and continental philosophy. From this, it is argued that both continental and analytic philosophy are necessary to make Philosophy relevant today and the arguments within Philosophy sound.

As an analytic philosopher, when Ayer constructed his philosophy of language, he was concerned with the truth and falsity of sentences. Because of this, he came up with the principle of verification to determine if sentences had literal meaning. He wrote:

The principle of verification is supposed to furnish a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful. A simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable (Ayer 77).

The principle of verification is a way of logically looking at a sentence to see if it can be shown to be true or false. If a sentence can be shown to be true or false, then it is verifiable according to the principle of verification. If a sentence cannot be verified, then according to Ayer, the sentence has no literal meaning. Ayer argued that *synthetic a priori* knowledge, knowledge that comes prior to experience but somehow adds to our knowledge, does not exist. Because of this, in order to know if a statement is true or false and has meaning, it has to be verified (Ayer 77).

According to Ayer, there are two kinds of verification that can be used to determine if a statement has meaning: strong verification and weak verification. Strong verification is used when a statement can be verified through experience (Ayer 80). An example would be, "this is a pen," when pointing to a pen and referring to it. Weak verification is used when it is *probable* that the statement could be verified through experience (80). An example of this would be the statement "all water is wet." It would be impossible to test all water to determine 'wetness,' but it is probable that all water is wet. Therefore, the statement "all water is wet" is verified through weak verification.

Ayer argued that all sentences must be verified, according to the principle of verification, to have meaning. Sentences that do not meet this criterion are meaningless. This led Ayer to conclude that metaphysical sentences are meaningless, although he admitted that no metaphysician would "yield to a claim of this kind" (Ayer 85).

As a continental philosopher, Saussure was concerned first with how things came to be structured, then the truth or falsity of sentences. Because of this, he developed his philosophy of language based on language as a structure. Saussure wrote that language is a formal system made up of differential elements, and part of the structure system of language is the system of signs. A sign, according to Saussure, is a concept plus a sound. A concept is the signified, and the sound is the signifier. An example of a sign would be saying "Arbor" because it carries the concept "tree" (Saussure 66-67). Saussure argued that in order for language to exist, there must be a speaker and a listener, a concept and a sound. Additionally, Saussure argued that the bond between the concept and sound is arbitrary. This makes the sign arbitrary. He wrote, "The link

between signal and signification is arbitrary. Since we are treating a sign as the combination in which a signal is associated with a signification, we can express this more simply as: *the linguistic sign is arbitrary*." (67). Saussure's argument is that language was developed by society to allow for communication, and because there are no pre-existing ideas, any relationship between the concept and the sound is arbitrary. Because of this, society is what gives meaning and value in the context of language. However, once the concept and the sound have established a relationship that makes a sign, change is almost impossible.

Both Ayer's and Saussure's philosophy of language seem plausible; however, upon further investigation, there are holes in both. Ayer based his philosophy of language on the logic of the principle of verification, and this is his downfall. His argument is that all sentences must be verified by using either strong or weak verification, to have meaning. However, the principle of verification itself cannot be verified by either strong or weak verification. Therefore the principle of verification does not have meaning, and Ayer's argument, that all sentences must be verified according to the principle of verification, is self-defeating.

Saussure's problem comes from a lack of reference in his argument. According to Saussure, there are no pre-existing ideas before language, which is why the linguistic sign is arbitrary. His argument is that society developed language to allow for communication, and society is what gives meaning and value in language. This is problematic because there is never any way to know that one person means the same thing another does when she or he says "tree." There is no external reference that grounds Saussure's language, thus allowing for everyone to mean something completely different when applying the word "tree" to a sentence. Take for example, two people who speak English and are engaging in a discussion about trees. Person One points to a tree and says, "That tree is beautiful." Her/his idea of "tree" is the leaves of the tree. Person Two hears person one's statement, but her/his idea of "tree" is the trunk of the tree. So when Person One points to the tree and says the tree is beautiful, Person Two agrees, but not on the same thing. Since Person One and Person Two are communicating with different ideas of the word "tree," they are failing to actually communicate. If society developed language without pre-existing ideas, then it is possible that each person has developed her/his own language based on her/his own concepts of things, thus making it impossible to actually communicate ideas and meanings.

It appears that what Ayer and Saussure are trying to do with their philosophies of language is defeat Rene Descartes' skepticism by explaining how each person understands the world, is conscious of the world, and has knowledge of the world. Descartes brought to light the problem of skepticism by his *cogito* "I think therefore I am." The problem being, Descartes did not bracket his ego, thus never proving that it was himself doing the thinking. Ergo, it is possible that something else was doing the thinking for him, and his existence was still unsubstantiated. In skepticism, it is believed that a person cannot have knowledge because she/he can never know that she/he knows. She/he could be dreaming, being deceived by an evil demon, etc. (Descartes 10). Ayer argued that a person can know if something is true or false by relying on logic, thus she/he can have knowledge of the world around her/himself, then that person can know that she/he exists, and Descartes' problem of skepticism is defeated. Saussure argued that language was developed to allow for communication, and that before language, there were no pre-existing

ideas. Thus, language creates ideas and expresses each person's consciousness of the world around her/himself. However, because both Ayer's and Saussure's philosophies have holes, Descartes' skepticism is not overcome. This brings us to Husserl.

Husserl finds that through reflection, a person can see subjective experiences as they appear. Appearances are phenomena, and a phenomenon is consciousness of an object. He wrote:

The perception of a cube, for example, reveals a multiple and synthesized intention: a continuous variety in the 'appearance' of the cube, according to differences in the points of view from which it is seen, and corresponding differences in 'perspective,' and all the difference between the 'front side' actually seen at the moment and the 'backside' which is not seen, and which remains, therefore, relatively "indeterminate," and yet is supposed equally to be existent. Observation of this 'stream' of 'appearance-aspects' and of the manner of their synthesis, shows that every phase and interval is already in itself a 'consciousness-of' something, yet in such a way that with the constant entry of new phases the total consciousness, at any moment, lacks not synthetic unity, and is, in fact, a consciousness of one and the same object. The intentional structure of the train of a perception must conform to a certain type, if any physical object is to be perceived as there! (Kockelmans 659)

Husserl's argument is that the world of appearances, or sense, originates in people, and reference belongs to the natural attitude. In other words, the objective world is bracketed, and what a person is left with is a sense of what is.

Husserl argued that there are different states of consciousness that the mind can pass between, and these states of consciousness can be varied and reduced through phenomenological reductionism to arrive at a state of consciousness that is invariant. Husserl wrote:

Pure consciousness is a genuine temporal field, a field of 'phenomenological' time. [...] For if we abstract from the attitude, surely artificial, toward pure consciousness, toward this residuum of the various reductions, then we constantly slip, quite effortlessly, from one attitude into another, from the naturalistic into the *personalistic*, and as to the respective sciences, from the natural sciences into the *human sciences*. (Husserl 189-90)

According to Husserl, to arrive at a state of pure consciousness, everything must be reduced. What is left is a state of pure consciousness, and "what is" is revealed.

What Husserl seems to be saying by combining both arguments, is that the world of appearances is subjective, and the world that each person perceives is based on her/his sense, which originates in each person. However, there is an invariant that each sense or appearance is based on. This objective invariant can be seen by varying all the different states of consciousness to arrive at that which is invariant. This invariant is reference.

It is here that the gap between Ayer and Saussure needs to be bridged. What is brilliant about Ayer's argument is the logic. The logic is structured in such a way as to be irrefutable, which is

why the logic of the argument defeats the principle of verification. The beauty of Saussure's argument is the language structure. He explained succinctly why a sign is the combination of a signified and a signifier. Logically, language must be based on an external reference to avoid problems behind meaning and sense. However, if language is based solely on logic, there is no way to explain how language originated or how it can allow for knowledge. By combining Ayer's logic, Saussure's structure of language, and Husserl's idea of bracketing the world and reference, a sound philosophy of language can be constructed.

It should be argued that language is based on external references that transcend the world of appearances and sense. Logically, it is unreasonable to argue that everything needs to be verifiable. There comes a point where logic reaches an end, and it must be admitted that things exist that cannot be reduced or explained logically. There is no way to step outside selfexperience to explain one's self-experience. People are trapped within their physical bodies and perceptions. However, if it is acknowledged that there is a limit to logic, the world of metaphysics opens up. That is not to say that people do not continually strive to explain the unexplainable, but it is accepted that there are things outside of human understanding that cannot be confined to the limits of the human brain. It is here that the limits of logic must be realized. A person should use logic until it cannot take her/him further, and once that point is reached, she/he must argue that logic allows, and even dictates, that since it is confined to the finite, to look outside logic for answers is the only logical solution. In regards to language, language must have reference, and the reference cannot originate within language. Let it be assumed that the linguistic sign is made up of a signified and a signifier, but instead of being a construct of society without pre-existing ideas, society constructed language based on each person's senses, which, as based on an objective reference, are different aspects of the same thing. This allows for a synthesis of meaning, as well as a logical structure to the argument. As for answering the problem of skepticism, skepticism is arrived at when a person only looks at logic without allowing the limits of logic and human understanding to play a factor. If a person strictly follows logic, then she/he must admit that it is logical to conclude that there is a limit to logic. If she/he cannot admit this, then it should be argued that she/he is not being logical anyway and her/his arrival at skepticism is from a lack of logical ability. Therefore, the downward spiral to skepticism is not from relying on pure logic, but from the illogical use of logic.

In conclusion, both analytic and continental philosophy plays a necessary role in explaining the world of sense and reference. Logic alone cannot explain sense and reference, and constructing a system of language without using logic in the argument results in a structure that is reducible to chaos. If analytic and continental philosophies continue to regard each other as being on opposite sides of the playing field, neither will benefit from what the other has to offer. It is because of this that it is irrational and destructive to both sides to separate analytic and continental philosophy.

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