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After Philosophy: End or Transformation?

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Author bio

As with any academic discipline, philosophy consists of many sub-fields and schools of thought. The concerns of, say, a philosopher of law and a formal logician are quite distinct, though there are points of overlap. Consequently, what is considered a ground-breaking work in one field is often ignored by philosophers working in some other area. Rarely is there a work that commands the attention of the vast majority of the philosophical community, a work that is read and discussed discipline-wide. There have been such works, but they are few and far between. During the decade of the 1950s, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, was such a work. During the 1960s, it was Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and – less widely known outside of philosophy – Willard Quine’s *Word and Object*. John Rawls brought political philosophy back to the forefront of philosophical focus with his 1971 publication, *A Theory of Justice*, and the decade of the 1970s ended with Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a work that both compelled and repelled philosophers across the intellectual spectrum.

While there has not been a single volume to appear in the past couple of decades to rival the notoriety of Rorty’s book (or of the others mentioned above), an edited volume was published in the late 1980s containing essays by more than a dozen of the world’s leading philosophers reflecting on the nature of philosophy. This volume, *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?*, edited by Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy (MIT Press) consists of essays by Donald Davidson, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Alasdair MacIntyre, Hilary Putnam, Paul Ricouer, Charles Taylor, and others (a philosophical dream team!). They provide a turn-of-the-century look at what professional philosophers understand their tasks to be and where their discipline is heading.

Philosophy focused on language throughout much of the 20th century, both fueling and fueled by
a formal, logical approach in the works of people like Bertrand Russell, Gottlob Frege, and the logical positivists, as well as ordinary language analysis in the works of Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, and speech act theory. This attention to language carried over to other schools of thought, such as Martin Heidegger’s late existentialist works, Han-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics, and the postmodernists’s focus on narratives. The emphases of these latter philosophers was more on the sociality and politics of language, as opposed to the analytic concerns among the former philosophers to clear up philosophical confusions and dead-end questions. During the past several decades, the hope of linguistic philosophy to resolve traditional and new problems has waned. It is the acknowledgement of this and the question of “what now?” that informs the collection of essays in After Philosophy.

For an overall broad sweep of recent work on the nature and project of philosophy as a discipline, then, After Philosophy is an excellent volume. As for what philosophical folks are doing “in the trenches,” however, it’s not very enlightening. For example, as the focus on language has shifted in recent years more to a focus on mind and consciousness, various works across the spectrum of the philosophy of mind have taken more of a center stage. One such work that explores the treatment of consciousness from the perspective of neuroscience and information theory is Patricia Churchland’s Neurophilosophy (MIT Press), which is somewhat technical, but accessible to non-specialists. An alternative approach, one is that critical of reducing consciousness to neuroscience is David Chalmers’s The Conscious Mind (Oxford University Press). Another recent important and influential work, this in the area of political philosophy, is Michael Sandel’s Democracy’s Discontent (Harvard University Press), a communitarian response to what he sees as the classical liberalism of Rawls’s writings.

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2 THOUGHTS ON “AFTER PHILOSOPHY: END OR TRANSFORMATION?”

Dean Revier
on February 2, 2014 at 5:15 AM said:

Sono nuovo di questo forum. Ho costruito diversi personalizzato costruisce nel corso degli ultimi anni, sono forse intenzione di costruire un nuovo impianto di questa estate (credit crunch in corso) Quindi sarà chiedere un sacco di domande stupide e probabilmente facile. Ma anche cercare di commentare e di aiutare gli altri pure. Heres per l’inizio di un grande forum di apprendimento e divertimento.

Trenton Bechtel
Il suffit de dire salut, bon comme le forum 😊