

Beyond a Division: Giulio Preti and the Dispute between Analytic and Continental Philosophy

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In the field of philosophical studies you often find polarity between two directions, two programme lines, two traditions, two styles, which is expressed by the distinction between 'analytical' and 'continental' philosophers. To put it very bluntly we have on the *analytical* side, with its more recent offshoots, logicians and philosophers of science, philosophers of language who work on the analysis of semantic structures, authors who appeal to developments in neuroscience and artificial intelligence, Kantian moral philosophers, utilitarians, neo-contractualists, as well as defenders of a new 'practical philosophy' harking back to Aristotle. On the *continental* side we have philosophers of culture and history, authors claiming to be from the tradition of Nietzsche or Heidegger, defenders of hermeneutics, theorists of post-modernism, believers in *minimal* historicism or adherents of 'weak thought'.

The Continentals accuse the Analyticals of being scientific, reductionist, in favour of an extreme technicization of philosophy; of losing their way in empty subtleties, being unable to see the wood for the trees, still being at the stage of the late Enlightenment, being dogmatically attached to 'modernity', blinded now by the metaphysical project of a coherent, universal subjectivity, now by another one, just as universal, concerning the flattening of the ego and values compared to *things*. As for the Analyticals, they accuse the Continentals of pretentious obscurantism, logical incompetence, using emotion and allusive discourse rather than rational argument.

In 1968 the Italian philosopher Giulio Preti (1911–72) brought out a book the title of which, *Rhetoric and Logic*, was intended to deplore a polarization in many ways comparable to the one between Continentals and Analyticals (Preti, 1968).¹ Having already expressed some doubts arising from the rigid and non-exhaustive nature of that opposition (Peruzzi, 1998), I shall try to show synthetically that the terms of the dispute are not very different from those Preti found almost 40 years back, except on the topic of 'the end of philosophy' and the role of pragmatism. By referring to his

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suggestions we shall be able to examine that opposition from a much broader and also more rigorous perspective. His position still has a lot to teach us.

One of the Continentals' favourite targets is connected with the triad of scientism, 'criterial' conception of rationality (methodologism) and dogmatic separation between subject and object; and logical empiricism is the paradigmatic example of that triad. Thus the crisis of logical empiricism is said to represent the just nemesis for those three unforgivable sins.

We can start with the disappearance of the subject. It is generally accepted that in the 20th century the analytical tradition excluded, even denied, any intervention of the subject in the 'constitution' of the object. Frege's anti-psychologism is cited as the canonical reference for cancelling out a 'constituent' ego, and it can be seen that the recuperation of the subject occurred alongside the crisis of naturalistic scientism. However, classical epistemology, from Locke to Kant, remains a reference point for Analyticals, more than is often thought. Psychologism is a form of naturalism: we know about the difficulties Hume encountered in making his sceptical arguments rest on an appeal to human nature. We also know, in addition, that the transcendental method was to base the need for certain principles on a structure of the subject that could not be the contingent one of the empirical subject. Kant and Poincaré were not anti-scientistic but they vigorously emphasized the role of the subject. The conventionalism and the relativity of the a priori concept that sat alongside it were the cornerstone of logical empiricism. As a consequence the theme of subjectivity was enriched while 'analytical' instruments were used to tackle issues connected with the structure of the mind. It split apart as well. Analytic philosophers such as Herbert Feigl, Gilbert Ryle and John Chisholm came to far more divergent positions than those that are supposed to distinguish Analyticals and Continentals. Which does not stop us agreeing with Dilthey when he points out that 'in the veins of Locke, Hume and Kant's knowing subject genuine blood does not circulate'. Preti's first book *Phenomenology of Value* shows how much he had felt that dramatic deficiency (Preti, 1942).

Some people attribute to Heidegger the merit of having proclaimed the failure of an epistemology centred around the subject. In opposition to that judgement Preti came up with a (selective) rereading of Hegel and a neo-Kantian conception of the subject thought of as a network of structures. The tension between these two poles led to a 'phenomenological' diversity. Preti had understood that the ego is not monolithic; but all the same that did not lead him to state that the ego is therefore dissolved: it should be seen rather as a system of categorial functions that form and break up in accordance with a dynamic which sometimes succeeds and sometimes does not and which should be analysed via the cultural forms in which it is laid down. When an intersubjective medium (empirical or transcendental) is not rooted in subjects but is itself the One Subject, it is not an intersubjectivity. And there is no sense in attributing the predicates of a person to something that is not a subject. Here we already find in Preti the thread connecting a certain nominalist vein to the pages of his last essay, *Humanism and Structuralism*, which was left unfinished and published posthumously by Ermanno Migliorini (in Preti, 1973).

The Continentals criticize technico-scientific rationality for its inability to achieve a global vision and for not comprehending what makes us different from stones,

automata (natural or artificial) or angels. Scholar-philosophers are failing in their task of directing us in this vale of tears while at the same time they aspire to hegemony over every form of thought. What should we think of a universal-formal logic that is unable to subscribe to the singularity of existential situations? With these criticisms of 'technico-scientific rationality' we find ourselves in a *Weltanschauung* that is not a million miles from early 20th-century philosophies of life. The 'twilight', the disenchantment with nature and the feeling of strangeness regarding a culture in which the more reason claims to adhere to historically differentiated contexts the more it betrays its requirement for unity. From his earliest writings in the 1930s Preti had set himself the problem of how to bring together these two demands of reason. In the final pages of *Idealism and Positivism* (Preti, 1943) he had attempted a response to this theoretical difficulty; and, apart from a few contingent infelicities of style, it still seems to me to be one of the best the 20th century has left us.

Nietzsche advocated an active nihilism against any nostalgic feeling. For him the end of values was only an accident that had to be turned into an opportunity: for a new high noon for humanity full of 'the din of free spirits'. So is there a line of continuity between Nietzsche and Poincaré? No. It is enough for one of Poincaré's conventions to start to function for Nietzsche immediately to want to free himself from it and leave only the din.

A first element distinguishes the philosophical landscape Preti faced from the current situation. Nowadays, when the dichotomy between the natural sciences and the cognitive sciences is not given any legitimacy, more often than not an objective completely the reverse of reductionism is pursued. Material things are seen as cultural symbols. The book of nature no longer has an author: God is dead and humans are weary of their attempts to replace him; thus visions of the world multiply and these visions, together in all their multiplicity, are the book itself. Saying that humans (insofar as they participate in Being) inhabit language is an eloquent metaphor. But saying that humans inhabit *verbal* language and that we are living among nouns and verbs is false. Houses are not nouns. There is an important mode through which cultural reality 'speaks' to us: we are defined through the *ethos* in which we have grown up, we are situated within a tradition. It is basic Hegelian semantics. However, Preti claimed the right-duty to think in the first person, 'with his own brain', rather than as a simple pawn manipulated by a Mind turned Structure: he would never have accepted that he felt at fault, guilty of *hybris* in relation to the horizon that tradition has already marked out for us. The passive convenient metaphor which says we are spoken rather than speaking would have reminded him of the most crude and menacing forms of sociologism. Tradition may very well supply a problem's terms and suggest the tools for solving it or make it insoluble; but a tradition that 'lives' in minds which do not try to think for themselves is in the process of committing suicide.

This claim to speculative autonomy has a methodological corollary. Kevin Mulligan observed that if you ask analytical philosophers what topic they are working on they will reply by formulating a problem, whereas continental philosophers will answer with a proper noun. It seems that reports of the opposite are getting increasingly frequent. But in the concrete life of research both types of answer are in fact never separate – and this is so for all disciplines. However, a number of

analytically inclined papers lack historical perspective and Preti was the first person in Italy to concern himself with the difficulties that implies. But in the context of a philosophical argument the requirement to take account of historical elements is not an end in itself. Development of a historical-critical consciousness – a properly philosophical aim – can be achieved only through the care with which the different hypotheses are compared, an effort is made to verify deductions, theories are clearly defended and motivated. The whole of Preti's method bears witness to the fact that the rhetoric/logic polarity *does not coincide* with the history/theory polarity, that philosophy can neither claim to be a science nor follow in the footsteps of literature – at the very most it would in all likelihood be a poor-quality literary critic.

The chief point of convergence between Analyticals and Continentals lies in the central place they both give to language. There is nothing wrong in that pre-eminence since language has been an object of study as long as philosophy has existed. The problem is that at a certain moment the 20th century became, or rather was presented as, the century of language. The Analyticals ended up saying *de facto* that philosophical research was simply a series of grammatical exercises, or methodological style, in a historical vacuum. For Preti philosophy comes *after* methodological reflection (without that *before* it does not even start). It cannot end, *a fortiori*, with analysis of language. And even the late Preti maintained the philosopher's *critical* function in respect of cultural reality: a *guide* who could transform it in accordance with a certain model of rationality. Otherwise it would be a betrayal of the desacralizing, creative task of a βίος θεωρητικός. That dual task cannot be resolved in analysis. Even analytical philosophy's founding fathers refused to see analysis of language as an end in itself. For Preti it served to unmask the ideological use of everyday language (as the supposed Paradise of spontaneity) and formal languages (as supposed epiphanies of the Platonic reign of ideas); it had an orienting function, leading us towards more precise and powerful theoretical systems, and it served philosophical thinking but did not exhaust it.

An *organon* is not a metaphysics. But with Preti can we talk about metaphysics? Yes and no. Preti was not a systematic philosopher. He was viscerally suspicious of 'system' and, conscious as he was of the parable of Hegelianism, he feared the risks of closing in upon himself inherent in any globalizing, univocally structured system. On the other hand, if the system becomes an open medium, light, fluid as for some neo-Kantians (and in Italy for Antonio Banfi's rationalism), Preti criticized its abstract, indefinite, un-'analytical' character. He could seem to be a mere essayist (and at the end of his life he had fun letting people think so) and yet his attraction to a dynamic integration of the relations between nature and culture never left him. It is nevertheless true that his confidence in the positive effectiveness of this conception gradually waned, leading him towards a kind of stoic pessimism. Was it then perhaps an anticipation of that 'weak thought' which has been written about so much in Italy? Not really. Preti did not wish to break finally with reason by calling a halt to the hunt for false witches (irrationalism). He knew well that feeling and the entirely human anguish it created; to illustrate it the names he could quote went from Kierkegaard to Simmel, to whom he referred to find a phenomenology of mind which among its 'moments' also included the lost soul. Isolated from that phenomenology, 'weak thought' may have appeared to him as the *n*th rebirth of a decadent

rhetoric, unable to choose poetry (Carnap would have said music) as a mode of expression. We only have to think of one of his short articles evoking the lost charm of the moon after the first human being set foot on it (see 'Poesia e scienza', in Preti, 1973: 139–45). Today we could add many other desacralizations caused by science, starting with those that are shattering the mysteries of our interiority.

In short, Preti was well aware of the 'crisis of values' and the strength of the socio-cultural bonds that individuals feel increasingly crushed by. He thought scientific knowledge would not be enough to resolve it. If we feel disorientated, if we no longer recognize ourselves in a world that is too big, too fast, chaotic, disturbing, that does not mean reason has failed definitively and all we have left is a 'contextual' compassionate scepticism. It is said that the postmoderns' nihilism is the conscious loss of Truth, the final brave acceptance of the 'death of God', but without any romanticism. In the end the greatness of those who cancel themselves out in nihilism brings us back to an anthropocentric image of the world. The 'crisis of values' was a topic the young Preti had tackled head on. He did not imagine there could still be any who would turn their feeling of failure into a universal reality, the pastoral acceptance of the being thrust into the world. The late Preti tackled head on the '68 Student Movement regarding everything that was part of 'constituted reality', denunciation of the disasters following on from the *instauratio magna humani imperii*, the syndrome of conspiracies and occult persuasion (by 1968 the *trahison des clercs* had already been forgotten). His profound defence of *Wertfreiheit* was deeply imbued with values.

When reason is more than a regulating idea, it is a *plural reason* in its way of determining itself historically. On this point it seems that Analyticals and Continentals converge. But that convergence is not very deep: people think that a plural reason is synonymous with relativism and that this is the result of the failure of the neo-positivist programme. Two errors in one. First, even if there are innumerable forms and degrees of relativism, the common denominator in objections to relativism is not an Absolute (be it substantialist or blowing over an abyss of interpretations); Einstein, for instance, in denying the absolute nature of simultaneity, introduces no relativism into his theory of relativity. Second, logical empiricism could not have theorized a logical absolute, given that 'in logic there is no morality' was one of Carnap's ideas. Anyone remembering this will avoid saying that epistemology inspired by logical empiricism confines the plurality of criteria to non-rigorous – 'humanistic' – disciplines, and those who wish to talk about relativism should first take account of Reichenbach's arguments on the relationship between conventionality and objectivity. The various interpretations of the theory of relativity (and quantum mechanics) are a more effective testbed than so many fine speeches about 'ontological relativity'.

For hermeneutics the concept of truth arises out of the to-and-fro of interpretation being created and dismantled; it is relative and transitory. This is a point on which Preti remains close to a basic thesis of Gadamer's. Is there a non-linguistic experience? Gadamer says no: every experience is structured linguistically. Did he demonstrate it? No. Is the tactile experience of the apple verbal? Is the eye's anticipation of an object's trajectory, which occurs in early infancy, already a verbal semiosis? Preti accepted that there is a vital-existential level which is never totally assimilated into

the categorial framework of language. As for the spiral of interpretations, if on one hand truth is no longer defined as a correspondence between word and thing, between statement and fact, but rather as a progressive *ἀλήθεια*, it is nonetheless *interpretable as a correspondence*. If everything we can refer to is in turn interpretation, what point is there in saying truth is interpretation? Furthermore, the concept of truth from Tarski's semantics relates to such relative things that it has kept only very little of its original meaning, 'intuitive', ill-defined but nonetheless essential. A number of logicians forget that the fact of linking truth to a formal apparatus (which we might call 'superstructural') presupposes something that continues to circulate within that apparatus: understanding of the meaning of 'true'. In *Idealism and Positivism* Preti had argued for a 'cascade theory' that could still function if it was made to depend on the group of kinaesthetic schemas where language and perception meet (Peruzzi, 2000).

This legacy from one of the greatest of 20th-century philosophers, who is penalized by the fact that he wrote solely in Italian, may be received in various ways. But there is no doubt that this legacy leads to the essential far more than the mass of visions of the world which a certain neo-medieval side of analytical philosophy has propagated. It can open an even more radical perspective because it transcends the *static* opposition between rhetoric and logic as well as their 'pragmatic' symbiosis.

Instead of this recognition, what do we see? If God is dead, the need for theology should be too; however, we find a rise in a theology of the Relative, relying on a symbiosis between analysis and interpretation. And this symbiosis (see Davidson's criticism of the schema/content opposition) simply brings us back to the *threshold* of Husserl's project. Shall we be forced once more to repeat the whole process? With the importance attributed to Quine by the theology of the Relative, his arguments around the indeterminate nature of translation and the inscrutability of reference would merit fresh examination in order to compare them with the phenomenological theories on the Life-World. And here we are once again following Preti.

Being aware of seeing things from a particular perspective does not imply the end of objectivity. Relativity does not mean relativism. When objectivity is conceived as coherent integration, open and intersubjective, it does not imply relativism with its individual, historical or ethnological barriers. That brings us to a second element of difference as regards the cultural situation Preti faced: today we make a great to-do about the *end of philosophy*. End because of the withering away of grand metaphysical projects, end because of a compartmentalization of thought, specialization and technicization. But in the first place there have always been technical and specialized aspects in philosophical thinking. And, second, what does it mean for philosophy to be dismantled? When has it ever been one and undivided? Have mathematics and physics not divided up and reunified many times? In all fields daring initiatives have been undertaken which have upset the existing framework and laborious constructions. That is how the world of research advances. Let us raise a more precise question: does the place taken over by logic in analysis accelerate the end of philosophy? Does technicization augur the disappearance of philosophy's trend towards unification, or even of its 'spiritual' function? Since Boole, Frege, Russell, Hilbert, has logic finally been purified of philosophical viruses as well as any interference by content or any link with thought mechanisms? In fact the mathematiciza-

tion of logic has generated a whole series of philosophical studies and led to unexpected instances of unification. Arising within mathematical logic, computability theory has generated models of the mind based on the processing of information and has provided cognitive science with a unitary framework. Was it not Hume who theorized a new fundamental science of human nature which was destined to become the first chapter of philosophy? In philosophy the division of labour has been no less massive than in physics, psychology, etc.

Is our era truly one of nihilism, the one that sets the seal on the end of certainties and the reduction of reality to a bazaar of technological gadgets? In suggesting a move from a boring, academic metareflection to civil 'conversation' Richard Rorty was thinking of a 'post-philosophy philosophy'. What we might fear is that it is only *his idea* of philosophy which follows the idea of philosophy *he attributed to others*. Musil wrote that 'philosophers are violent people who, since they have no army, take over the world by enclosing it in a system'. But Rorty tells us that, after the apotheosis of the System, philosophy can no longer be anything but an ironical analysis. As for Dummett, he believes in a *systematic* analytical philosophy. Rorty thinks such a project is based on a contradiction. And he refuses to demonstrate it, since the very fact of trying to do so would be proof of falling back into the 'nature's mirror' syndrome. In fact *philosophical activity* has sometimes been part of scientific progress, but sometimes it has remained just a 'stylistic exercise'; it has made it possible to see directions in a maze of current research, it has shown the ideal path of an even more rigorous science than all existing sciences but it has also failed in that dark task. We must examine case by case: already irony conceals a negative overall prejudice.

However, what Preti did not clarify is *the fact* that, in the context of the most varied disciplines, the progress of consciousness had to include thematization of principles, methods, possible systematic errors and partial solutions. In fact, studies in the field and meta-studies feed into one another. Preti did not clarify this *fact* but he had grasped it. The fact that meta-morality ends up having moral implications, even if they are neither direct nor obvious, was a topic dear to his heart: he did not see that as either a defect or a virtue but a sign of the interpenetration that unites theory and praxis. Maybe he would have appreciated Douglas Hofstadter's *I am a Strange Loop*. Unfortunately, and precisely because of his respect for the hierarchy of types (of both beings and languages), he could not explain how to avoid regression to the infinite in meta-reflection. In the area of ethics others have managed it – and here I refer to John Rawls – showing that it is possible to retain the analytical lesson and go beyond analysis. In the field of epistemology Ian Hacking has developed arguments that allow a critique of Husserl's image of the naïve savant immersed in his ingenuous objectivism and needing assistance from a phenomenologist father.

The *mise en abîme* of meta-theories is strictly connected to the *myth of language*. This mythicization has a complicated genealogy and this is not the place to trace it back. A way of interrupting this proliferation might come from those who emphasize the Austrian and German origins of the analytical movement. Preti was aware of the kinship; but he thought Bolzano's 'logical realism', and later Frege's, in order to avoid the dangers of psychologism, was forced to return to premodern philosophical positions. Anticipating recent studies (such as Michael Friedman's), Preti had understood that analytical philosophy, even with its logical empiricist side, could

not be propagated as a reaction to Kant. He accepted that analysis was a tool capable of constructing semantically transparent languages, but rejected the idea that the normative power of a formal system's laws might rest on the conviction that they pinned down an Ideal Reality. He saw that as an inverted variant of the naturalist phallacy, which prevented an assessment of the essential function of the a priori synthesis as a dynamic process of correlation between value and norm.

Even though it is not necessary to take in all of Wittgenstein or Heidegger, it is a fact that those two *monstres sacrés* are seen as a compulsory reference for anyone who wishes to defuse relations between Analyticals and Continentals – and particularly to react to the expansionist objectives of the cognitive sciences and artificial intelligence. Preti did not feel any special inclination towards those two emblematic figures. The importance accorded to Heidegger and Wittgenstein, supported by a worldwide publicity campaign, came after Preti's death in 1972. Had he really underestimated the two idols? I think something important had passed him by, just as many other things merited with importance by the modest Preti had passed many people by.

Regarding Wittgenstein, Preti provided a rather reductive reading of the *Tractatus* and was unacquainted with a whole list of texts that subsequently made it possible to grasp the complexity of the road travelled by Wittgenstein after the *Tractatus*. As far as Heidegger is concerned, the image Preti had of him was not very different from the one Husserl held back from revealing. It may be that his reading, influenced as it was by the existentialist climate of the period, led him to think he could find all the interest Heidegger's analysis had to offer in the philosophy of life in American pragmatism or more simply in Husserl's themes around *Lebenswelt* and the *crisis in the sciences*. Rather than the inspired enthusiasm of Wittgenstein he preferred the grace of Moore; rather than Heidegger's tones imbued with sacredness, Simmel's lucid sentences. He was also inspired by Perelman's *New Rhetoric*, which he knew well and which foreshadowed the pragmatics of communicative contexts, currently dominant, even though the book did not mention speech acts or conversational implicatures. He appreciated it too as an analysis of 'persuasive' discourse.

Analytical philosophers err because of their abstract formalism, the Continentals because of generic abstractions. The first have accepted a little corner of meta-linguistics, the second have achieved a more panoramic vision; but they have all largely given up *open-air* research. The dialectics between the genesis of structures and the structures of genesis, between descriptive and normative, between objectivity and self-reference, can be examined through both the analytical microscope and the continental telescope. The greatness of modern thought, from Galileo to Poincaré and from Leibniz to Gödel, also lies in the general scope of the ideas that are defended with the greatest possible rigour, even if they are ideas that accept the existence of impassable limits in the possibility of definitions. In every field of research the emergence of an innovative problem ends up causing an explosion of critical literature which, the more it focuses on points of detail, the more it runs the risk of making us deaf to fundamental issues. That said, it is wrong to assert that analytic philosophers never tackle the big questions and that Continentals never stoop to fine detail. More often than not they go up and down different scales. In philosophy there are no iron curtains.

The young Preti was not confronted with the dismissive attitude of many an anglophone philosopher to the historico-cultural dimension of philosophy. He did have to cope with Italian historicists and spiritualists. At the same time he did not forget, right from his 1936 article on the principle of immanence, those who persisted in asking themselves questions about Being. He had not had the time to realize the possible convergence between Being as Language by which we are *spoken*, and the range of languages as the ultimate horizon of philosophical activity. He thought there was an uncrossable hiatus between life as lived and thought about life; and the synthesis, a thought life, was a guiding idea; speaking this plus-language required us to pass through a more-than-language and not to have forgotten that one had gone through it again and again forever (hence his allusions to *notitia quinque sensuum* and the basic emotions). It is less a question of stressing the vitalist vein running through Preti's thought than suggesting that, when faced with the existence of something indefinable (in a language) or even inexpressible (in any language), there are different ways of reacting. In contemporary logic the limits to the possibility of definition are made explicit, in particular those that are inherent in semantic notions; nevertheless these clarifications have a well-defined meaning. In order to understand the resulting interpenetration it is necessary to take into account the requirement for mediation, so dear to Preti, between semantic levels and categorial functions – either in a hierarchical form or in parallel (Hartmann's supraformations and regional ontologies) – which *weave* culture in its starting out from nature and returning to nature.

In 1953 Preti formulated this need for mediation in the form of a connection between common language and scientific languages, and by stressing the crucial role of technologies and their respective languages. While linking the ideal language of logic with formal ontology, Preti was not interested in a *characteristica universalis* or a precise inventory of the range of languages. He wished to describe the changing texture of their interrelationships connected to an experimental basis which was *a fact*, even if it was opaque. Above all he had realized that the distinction, for analytic philosophers, between those who privileged the descriptive moment (compared with 'common' language) and those who privileged the normative moment, associated with the construction of abstract logical formalisms, was ignoring the existence of an extremely colourful intermediate texture: technical languages.

I have never managed to understand why the greatness of this little idea has never been seen for what it is. Was it leaning towards 'pragmatics'? Preti was among the first in Europe to take an interest in Morris's semiotics and the 'communicative/persuasive context' dimension at the heart of Stevenson's work. But it did not all stop there. His 'radical rationalism' could not forget what syntactic-semantic rigour, mathematical intuition and verificationism required. To be precise, any normative project emerges from practical demands and in order to satisfy them has to move away from them. The 'pragmatic turn' that is being emphasized so much nowadays could only come in the wake of those demands. The therapeutic effectiveness that claims to exclude the meaning dimension (*Sinn*) in order better to stress the dimension of use is questionable because use requires prior conditions. To communicate something specific I have to understand what I am communicating and know how to express it: whence Preti's emphasis on the First of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*.

Today those who are most open to the diversity of human experience are happy to admit to being pragmatists. Pragmatism appears in very varied shapes, which are widespread among both the heirs to the logical empiricists and their continental rivals. By according primacy to the area of communication Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel have acted as conciliators between Analyticals and Continentals and have tried to show that the demands of each group were compatible. Thus, long after the pragmatic semioticians appreciated by Preti, Habermas took on the task of identifying the universals of the communicative act which govern the diversity of linguistic interplay. The semiotic transformation of Kantianism, which was given shape by Apel, makes the structures of *common* language the possibility condition for experience. In fact this is an idea that has already run out of steam insofar as its most interesting results have been reappropriated or obtained afresh by the first cognitivists; and it seems that those results are not able to feed into the transcendental primacy of communication. Preti would not have failed to underline the ambiguity of this sort of attempt: on one hand these universals should be the a priori principles of the interaction that governs the effective use of language, and on the other they should make possible the critique of prevailing conventions – which requires an exit from common language. Preti's position in turn was subtly ambivalent, wavering between recuperation of the transcendental principles of experience and a conception – like Putnam's today – which rejects any 'critical' idea of rationality while maintaining the reasons for a 'critical' realism. This manoeuvring around the a priori recalls a certain early 20th-century neo-criticism, one of the great traditions of European thought.

Something does not work in the distinction between Analyticals and Continentals: on which side do we put phenomenology, neo-criticism and structuralism? On the narrow band separating Frege, Russell and Carnap from Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer? If we wish to cite names, where do we put Husserl, Cassirer or Piaget? Rather than a band it is more like a hedge as thick as the areas it separates. We could reverse the cartographic relationships and say that the intermediate band is a crowded area where the richest idea can be expressed, and that the two big fields on either side of the hedge are simply the consequence of mechanisms that impoverish the crowded area. We hear from several sources nowadays that the distinction between Analyticals and Continentals is in the process of being transcended; previous considerations seem to argue in favour of these declarations, but I fear that this transcending may be more akin to a passing fashion than a genuine development. And so it only remains for us to accept this distinction for as long as it is useful to nourish a serious confrontation, seeing it as an idealized filter, provided we do not play the weaknesses of one side off against those of the other and refrain from calling convergences the issues that are still unsolved in both camps. We should set the strong points of one side against those of the other side and see where that may take us.

When I took on the job of editing the last two of Preti's lecture series (Preti, 1984, 1986), I thought many significant aspects of his philosophical ideas could be found in Putnam's 'internal realism', which tried to avoid both metaphysical hypostases, seen as unnecessary to form a robust notion of reality, and traditional forms of relativism, seen as inadequate to the same goal. Putnam denies ending up by those means in a pure coherentism and rightly stresses that there is a kind of transcen-

dence immanent in the *criteria* of rationality: a crucial point for epistemology which Preti had already identified in his first book. Personally I would incline towards great prudence regarding that rapprochement except on one point, which is in fact one of the basic issues left unsolved by both Analyticals and Continentals, as well as by Preti and Putnam. I mean the fact that it is not clear where those criteria come from, since they cannot be reduced to intersubjective agreement, or be like bees' honey, because first of all bees are not real only within a chosen linguistic framework and, second, from the *quid facti* to the *quid juris* there can be no *inferentia*. A good part of the responsibility for this aporetic result comes precisely from that appeal in favour of pragmatism. It is the case that at that time Preti claimed to follow Dewey whereas Putnam claims to follow James.

The starting-point for Preti's philosophy was the recognition that between *rhetoric* and *logic* there is an irremediable opposition that shapes western culture. For that reason he did not move from the linguistic and epistemological dimensions to the properly axiological one, because ethics of science and rationality of morality show, once again, an interpenetration more than a complementarity. Far from the syncretism he was accused of, which today is advocated in order to go beyond the opposition between Analyticals and Continentals, Preti sought the pure lines of a positive theoretical activity beyond the metaphysical residue that survives in positivism, idealism and so many other -isms. Among the first in Europe he had been trying, since the late 1930s, to pinpoint the internal articulation of logical empiricism by selecting the most stable contribution in order to situate it within a context that was both wider and more precise.

He had said he defended 'an empirical viewpoint' but also claimed to be a neo-Kantian. He based himself on Hartmann and Dewey. He appreciated values that related to the flesh and theorized a stoical defence of the values of the mind. And yet there is a profound unity that links these many references. His analysis was set out on a razor's edge which remains among the sharpest in 20th-century philosophy – and among the least discussed (even before being able to be appreciated). He disputed the idea that analytical philosophy, focusing on the logical analysis of language, could present itself as a rigorous science, since he perceived the same defect as in Husserl's phenomenology, the protoscience of the *Erlebnis*. All the same he did not give up on the prime role the analysis of language *ought* to have within this 'honest profession' that is philosophy. Preti was not satisfied with clarification alone: he gave analytical activity such a great historical and cultural importance that in his view it opened the path to a systematic ideal and a profound social commitment. Far removed from postmodernism, his recognition of the plurality of values and their irreducible dialectic nature encourages us to exercise a theoretical and moral responsibility based on what we claim and our life choices.

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Note

1. Preti's writings have been translated into French in Preti (2002); see also Scarantino (2004, 2007).

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