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**Braver, L., A Thing of This World. A history of Continental Anti-Realism. (2007)**

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## Introduction

Philosophy today faces a dilemma similar to the situation at the end of the eighteenth century. As we are now divided between analytic and continental branches, so philosophy was then split into rationalism and empiricism. Beginning from different assumptions and methods, the early modern schools grew farther apart as they developed. Starting from **Descartes'** commitment to a few absolutely certain innate ideas and reason's ability to determine some facts about reality a priori, **Leibniz** ended up making all ideas innate and deducing how God must have set up the universe. On the other side, Hume continued **Locke's** emptying out of the mind until there was no longer a there there, that is, not even a substantial mind to be emptied. Far from being rationally justifiable, Hume demonstrated that most of our beliefs are determined by an arational reflex, a process that has roughly the epistemological status of digestion.

Perhaps **Kant's** greatest accomplishment was reconciling these deeply heterogeneous schools, weaving a seamless system out of ideas taken from both sides. The linchpin of this synthesis was what he called his **Copernican Revolution**: the epoch-making claim that the mind actively processes or organizes experience in constructing knowledge, rather than passively reflecting an

independent reality. To speak metaphorically, the mind is more like a factory than a mirror or soft wax. It is this idea that enabled Kant to incorporate the empiricist dependence on experience into the rationalist ideal of universal and necessary knowledge. At one stroke it both authenticated empirical science as genuine knowledge and placed traditional metaphysics beyond our ken, combining rationalism's ambition to attain genuine Truth with empiricism's insistence on humbly admitting our limitations into a single remarkable system which seems to flow naturally from this idea.

The contemporary situation of warring camps is considerably worse than the one that faced early modern philosophy. Although they were opposed in their starting points, methods, and overall Weltanschauungs, the empiricists and the rationalists at least talked to each other. They read each other's works and engaged in informed debate; to cite just one example, **Leibniz** chose the title *New Essays on the Understanding* as a direct response to **Locke's** *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. For much of the twentieth century, on the other hand, the level of engagement between analytic and continental thinkers has rarely risen above mutual disinterest, uninformed dismissal, or plain insult; it is hard to imagine a major figure from either side dedicating a work to the careful analysis of a text from the other tradition. While the number of scholars who are doing work influenced by both or which defies easy categorization is growing, there is still a great deal of mutual misunderstanding, distrust, and even hostility.

**Having studied both traditions and found genuine wisdom in both, I consider this contemporary split detrimental to philosophy as a whole.**

We all specialize, but cutting oneself off a priori from an entire tradition is wasteful to the point of absurdity. Some believe that the other branch is "not really doing philosophy," thus presupposing that philosophy has an essence which is of course the sole possession of whichever tradition one happens to practice; while others justify mutual ignorance by claiming that the two branches are so divergent that they are no longer relevant to each other, if they ever were. Why put in the time and effort to understand the vocabulary and arguments of the other tradition if they have nothing to say about the issues one is interested in? **Richard Rorty**, perhaps the thinker best known for finding common ground between the traditions, has said that he expects philosophy to split into two distinct disciplines with their own names, departments, meetings, and so on, precisely because they lack sufficient common topics.

I think that completing the split is the wrong way to end the dispute. The idea that one must choose between analytic and continental philosophy should and I think will become as obsolete as what were once regarded as the urgent and inescapable decisions between rationalism or empiricism, **Augustine** or **Aquinas**, **Plato** or **Aristotle**. The better resolution of the situation is not mutual ignoring and ignorance, but a dialogue between the two branches in which each sifts through the resources of the other to find elements that can address issues of interest as well as add new topics, and each deploys its own strengths to highlight and criticize the other's unnoticed presuppositions and biases. For this situation to come about, there would have to be common topics on which both branches have produced quality work. There would also have to be a way for those working in the different traditions to recognize and understand each other, since these discussions are embedded in vocabularies, extended conversations, and references to intellectual landmarks which require a considerable background. However, if there are such shared subjects and if a commensurable vocabulary could be constructed, the payoff could be enormous: thinkers could find new insights into topics they have long studied from fresh and unexpected approaches, and could confront unthought-of challenges to views and practices that have been taken for granted.

**The project of this book is to demonstrate that there is at least one important topic shared by both analytic and continental philosophy, and to analyze it in a newly created vocabulary.** Interestingly, the topic that I believe can best initiate this twenty-first-century

rapprochement comes from the same figure who solved the parallel problem in the eighteenth century: **Immanuel Kant**. In fact, the seed for the reconciliation can be found in the very idea that forms the core of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the linchpin of its rationalist-empiricist synthesis; namely, the idea that the mind actively organizes experience.

This idea, along with its various interpretations and ramifications, forms an important thread of what has become known as anti-realism in analytic philosophy. It represents one of that tradition's central topics and has been extensively discussed by such leading lights as **Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Goodman, and Dummett**. Since **Kant's** work is the source of this idea and since he is certainly as influential on the continental tradition as on the analytic one, we should be able to find this core Kantian topic in the works of the great continental philosophers as well. If we can pierce the disparate vocabularies and styles to identify **Kant's** idea as seminal for both camps, we should be able to use it to bring about an informed dialogue and debate. To initiate such a dialogue, this book traces the history of anti-realism in continental philosophy. I will show how the greatest continental philosophers of the last two centuries have been talking about the same subject as have many of the greatest analytic philosophers of the twentieth century, though generally unbeknown to both sides, since the two traditions have worked on it with such different vocabularies, interests, and approaches. This commonality should come as no surprise to anyone who believes that philosophy is deeply historical, since both traditions trace their lineage back to **Kant**, for whose epistemology and metaphysics this anti-realist idea was the central innovation.

In order to establish a commensurable vocabulary between the two camps as well as among the continental thinkers themselves (who tend to create their own terminology), I will use a set of theses derived from prominent analytic philosophers of anti-realism (particularly **Putnam** and **Dummett**) to define realism and, by negation, to supply an initial orientation on anti-realism. The set of theses defining anti-realism will then get refined and varied as we survey the continental philosophers and examine the various ways they reject realism and modify the positions of their predecessors. I will call these sets of theses the Realism and Anti-Realism Matrices, and they will form a framework for a fine-grained analysis of the interrelations among these prominent continental thinkers as well as the foundation for a cross-divisional dialogue. The framework traces the specific ways in which **Hegel, Nietzsche**, and early **Heidegger** each modify the position and problems of their predecessors, thus highlighting the fact that, as heirs of **Kant's** revolution, the rejection of realism and the construction of a superior alternative is a central issue for their work. I will then modify the framework to analyze later **Heidegger, Foucault**, and **Derrida**, in order to show how they are still working in the wake of this issue.

**Examining continental thought through the lens of an analytic issue (though one originating with Kant), as well as discussing these works in terms of theses, may concern some.** The burden of proof, of course, rests with me to show that this topic can be found in the texts without procrustean readings and that my treatment of the texts is sensitive enough to avoid distortion. In order to establish this in detail as well as to introduce these figures to readers who might not be familiar with their work, I have quoted extensively, though I try to use the matrices to guide readers through these often difficult passages. I sprinkle many references to other works throughout the text in order to show that these themes appear throughout the thinkers' oeuvre, thereby demonstrating that these topics are present throughout the thinkers' works rather than cherry-picked from gerrymandered quotes. These copious references will also, I hope, make the book more useful for research. Throughout the book, I will mention supporting secondary literature where relevant and will direct interested readers to dissenting accounts, but extensive skirmishing is not my purpose here.

I hope to demonstrate to analytic philosophers that, once the context has been clarified and the vocabularies explained, continental philosophers have been working on topics that they can easily

recognize as philosophical and of great concern to them, as well as that they have produced powerful insights on these issues. In order to do this, I have focused on the continental figures and texts that deal most directly with the topic of anti-realism, inevitably leaving out some quite important figures and movements (for example, **Kierkegaard**, **Husserl**, **Deleuze**, **Merleau-Ponty**, **Gadamer**, the **Frankfurt school**, and **structuralism**). However, the figures I have chosen—**Kant**, **Hegel**, **Nietzsche**, **Heidegger**, **Foucault**, and **Derrida**—are widely considered the greatest thinkers of the continental tradition (with some argument over an inclusion or exclusion here or there, of course). Because anti-realism is central to their thought, this study provides an illuminating overview of the history of continental philosophy that should prove useful to analytic philosophers and students approaching continental thought for the first time, as well as to specialists.

This tradition is still close to us, still alive, which makes its structure difficult to discern; anatomy is easier to make out during an autopsy than a surgery. Furthermore, many continental thinkers are difficult writers with a propensity to invent new vocabularies rather than using an agreed-upon set of terms. I believe that there are sound reasons for this—it is not just willful obscurantism for the sake of an appearance of profundity—but it certainly makes tracing interconnections and pinning down where and how they disagree with each other hard. I have found that arraying the major thinkers of the tradition along the trajectory of their positions on anti-realism imparts a surprisingly clear and intelligible structure to the last two centuries of philosophical thought. This book traces a fairly clean developmental arc from **Kant** to **Derrida** which strongly rejects the impression that their works come out of nowhere with no discernible relations to previous or later thinkers. On my reading, these thinkers have very powerful arguments when seen in their context, in relation to those who come before and after.

Although my goal here is to prepare the ground for and begin a dialogue between the traditions, I am not claiming that their divergence is illusory or due only to superficial misunderstandings which, once cleared up, will reveal that we're all really saying the same thing. Besides being untrue, this would not even be desirable. Philosophy thrives on disagreement; the problem today is not that we are arguing with each other, but that we aren't, that we have not yet risen to the point of disagreeing. Philosophical debate is productive, but it requires significant mutual understanding, as well as a basic recognition (in multiple senses of the word) of what the other is doing. Rather than trying to bring peace, this book attempts to instigate fruitful debate.

My narrative describes the history of continental philosophy in two phases: the **Kantian Paradigm** and the **Heideggerian Paradigm**. Loosely following **Kuhn**, I call them paradigms because each phase takes place within a broad framework of deep, organizing, orienting presuppositions that set the starting point, basic assumptions and outlook, and the issues of relevance for the thinkers working within it. Although each thinker modifies the framework significantly—indeed, it is this process of overlapping modification that forms the continuity of the tradition—they do so against the background of these structures.

After defining realism by deriving and discussing a set of theses from prominent analytic philosophers in chapter 1, I will examine **Kant's** partial rejection of realism through the lens of the Realism Matrix in chapter 2. **Kant** is of signal importance in the history of philosophy for his profound rejection of realism and his creation of a powerful alternative that establishes a fundamentally new conception of the self, metaphysics, and epistemology. **Kant** conceives of the mind as actively organizing experience, which entails a new aspect of reality—phenomena—and a new conception of truth—intersubjective “agreement,” that is, what is necessary to experience for creatures like us. These pieces fit together to form the Kantian Paradigm, which rules over continental philosophy for the next century and a half. Although he initiates anti-realism, **Kant** retains two key elements of realism in his system. First, in order to secure the stability—that is, necessity and universality—of the knowledge organized by the subject, he has to make the experience-organizing faculties of the

subject permanent and unchanging. Although it is no substantial object like **Descartes'** thinking thing, this view still amounts to a vestigial realism of the subject. Second, in order to escape what he considers to be the incoherence of complete idealism, he posits mind-independent reality in noumena.

In chapters 3 and 4, I show how both **Hegel** and **Nietzsche** work within the Kantian Paradigm by accepting the basic anti-realist picture of the subject actively organizing experience, but chafe against the remnants of realism in Kant's thought. Both reduce **Kant's** realism of the subject by introducing multiplicity into the subject's experience-organizing faculties— for Hegel this multiplicity is historical, while **Nietzsche** views it as a matter of corporeal drives—and they also seek an escape from positing noumenal reality. Although they make significant advances and verge on breaking with the Kantian Paradigm, I will argue that neither succeeds in getting free of it. **Hegel's** historical phases of consciousness end up getting gathered into a definitive totality at the end of history, while **Nietzsche's** drives are all incarnations of will to power, both ideas imposing limitations on what the subject can be. Furthermore, their conceptions of truth—the whole for Hegel and the pragmatic increase of power for **Nietzsche**— push them back to realist remnants, since **Hegel's** notion requires that there be a determinate whole, while Nietzsche needs at least a loose definition of power and what counts as increasing or decreasing it in order to evaluate various embodiments of will to power.

**Heidegger's** thought—particularly his Kehre, or the “turning” from his early to later periods—represents the turning point in my narrative of the history of continental philosophy. Chapter 5 shows how his early (roughly before 1930) work wrestles with the Kantian Paradigm as well as with **Hegel** and **Nietzsche's** attempts to break free of it. His background in phenomenology means that he begins unburdened by a noumenal realm, a notion that **Nietzsche** flirted with and that **Hegel** laboriously worked his way through. However, **Heidegger's** notion of authenticity commits him to a univocal realist conception of subjectivity that actually represents a step backwards from **Nietzsche's** multiple selves. In addition to phenomenological ontology which completely dispenses with the noumenal realm, **Heidegger's** other early breakthrough is his conception of truth as unconcealment. Unlike **Hegel** and **Nietzsche**, **Heidegger** has a conception of truth that works with his ontology to lay the groundwork for a decisive break with the Kantian Paradigm. If truth is unconcealment, then **Heidegger** is no longer sorting out false appearances from true reality; abandoning the reality-appearance distinction marks what he calls the end of metaphysics. Unfortunately, his fidelity to a deep, true structure of the self in authenticity compromises the potential of these discoveries in his early work.

**Heidegger's** later thought marks the next major phase in continental philosophy, the first genuinely non-Kantian rather than just post-Kantian philosophy, as described in chapter 6. Here he follows through on the promise of the ideas broached in the early work—primarily Phenomenological Ontology and Unconcealment Truth—with the important addition of history. Due to the new conceptions of reality and truth, history now permeates everything, and this removes any possibility of stable, unchanging reality, including a true self. Like everything else, the essence of human nature is fundamentally different in different epochs. Nothing can serve as an anchor or explanatory arche—not independent reality as in realism, not transcendental subjectivity as in Kantian anti-realism, and not Being. Later **Heidegger** maintains the anti-realist idea that beings and knowledge are organized around something like a conceptual scheme, but now he makes these schemes multiple “understandings of Being,” removing them from the subject and claiming that they shift in history without reason or explanation.

With his later work, **Heidegger** breaks free of Kant's thought and takes his place as the unavoidable thinker for those who follow, as is shown in chapter 7 by demonstrating in detail how **Foucault's** thought works within the Heideggerian Paradigm. **Foucault** too immerses everything into history, especially the subject. He also believes that beings, knowledge, and subjectivity are organized

differently at particular times by impersonal schemes which he variously calls *epistemes*, apparatuses, or games of truth. **Foucault's** more detailed examination of history and his focus on power and institutions in his genealogical phase make the epochal shifts more intelligible than **Heidegger's** profoundly mysterious "sendings of Being," but they too quickly reach a limit of explication. **Heidegger's** influence on **Foucault**, as well as **Foucault's** criticisms of **Heidegger**, are an extremely important topic which has received considerably less attention in the secondary literature than it deserves.

Finally I turn to **Derrida**, perhaps the most controversial and important continental philosopher after **Heidegger**. **Derrida** makes the dismantling of realism, what he calls the metaphysics of presence, a cornerstone of his thought, and he takes over many Heideggerian Paradigm tools to accomplish this. However, he is also extremely sensitive to just how difficult it is to escape metaphysics; **Heidegger** himself, in his estimation, is the greatest thinker of this escape, while still being mired in metaphysics. Ironically, it is **Heidegger's** very attempt to go outside of the history of metaphysics that locks him most firmly inside of it. In this way, **Derrida's** relationship to **Heidegger** resembles **Heidegger's** relationship to **Kant**: the earlier figure opened up essential new lines of thought, but remained fatally compromised by the very movement he sought to overcome. Derrida points the way to a new paradigm by recasting the idea of conceptual schemes as deeply unstable, and paradoxically succeeds in escaping metaphysics by problematizing the very idea of escape. These views effect profound changes across many issues, making **Derrida's** work disorienting and stunningly original, while at the same time fitting quite well into the two-hundred-year-long conversation I am sketching.

Arranging the philosophers in this organization with a commensurable vocabulary drawn from analytic philosophy shows a clear developmental trajectory in the history of continental philosophy. We can see how each thinker is responding to problems bequeathed him and is working on an inherited framework from within. In particular, we learn just how long **Kant's** shadow was. In fact, we can almost say of Kant what **Nietzsche** says of God, that he "is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow" (Nietzsche, GS 108). In my reading, the century and a half following **Kant** was spent vanquishing his shadows. The major philosophers in his wake rejected his thought but still retained vestiges of it even in their attacks on it. I show how **Hegel**, **Nietzsche**, and early **Heidegger** all subscribe to important aspects of **Kant's** system while trying to surpass it.

The second lesson derived from this analysis is the significance and importance of **Heidegger's** later work. One of the most difficult and disorienting bodies of work in the canon, it has long served as a paradigm of unapproachable incomprehensibility to many. I will locate it in relation to the Kantian tradition, showing it to be the first work divested of the vestiges of Kant's thought. This shows its importance and makes its difficulty less suspect; if it is so groundbreaking—operating outside of assumptions that have guided thought for centuries—then it should appear strange to us. This history of continental anti-realism gives us a new way to understand the Kehre as the change from a thinker still fighting **Kant's** shadow to one who has broken free and taken his place, and makes **Heidegger's** enormous influence on continental thinkers understandable. It also makes him more important and, I hope, comprehensible to analytic philosophy. Although the early work of **Hegel**, **Nietzsche**, and **Heidegger** has been assimilated by analytic philosophers to varying degrees, **Heidegger's** later work remains terra incognita. If my narrative is correct, this body of work contains radically new insights into some of the basic problems of antirealism and related issues. Whether they end up agreeing with this or not, analytic philosophers working on anti-realism could benefit enormously from his thought, and continental thinkers working on **Heidegger** should have the opportunity to hear their informed criticisms and suggestions.



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