new infusion.’ For Kellner, ‘reaction and retrenchment’ set in with analytic philosophy; worse still, continental philosophy has segregated itself into circles in which specific philosophers are revered as the Voice of Truth, Derrida being its most voluble spokesman. The underlying cause of the malaise is not purely philosophical. Despite the emphasis on the need for a philosophy that is ‘steeped in the real world’ (Yancy), which definitely suggests a certain optimism, there is sometimes a quiet note of something bordering on despair. Looking back at her formative years, when government grants were easily available and when tuition at Florida State was cheap, Alcoff – a ‘Latina’ from a poor background – remarks: ‘These days, I doubt if I would have made it.’ And would Yancy – born one generation away from institutionalized segregation – now make it from the despised housing projects of North Philadelphia to the philosophy department at Duquesne? Would he now make it from the street to the faculty? Like Alcoff, I somehow doubt it.

9/11 was no simulacrum. For many of the contributors it was a traumatic reminder that philosophy is embedded in the world, and cannot go on living in denial or bad faith. The echoes of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are deafening, and it is perhaps significant that so many contributors first encountered philosophy in one of its phenomenological–existentialist guises. Yancy strikes a similar note in his introduction, where he contends that philosophers have a responsibility to help create new habits of thought ‘in the service of a more pluralistic, democratic and just world culture’. He adds: ‘perhaps philosophy has a responsibility toward creating authentically rich values.’ Surely the only contentious word here is that hesitant ‘perhaps’.

David Macey

Another dogma of empiricism?


The fact/value dichotomy – the theory that statements of fact are objective and verifiable, whereas evaluative claims are mere matters of opinion and subjective – has been a fundamental tenet of a great deal of modern philosophy. It is questionable whether Putnam is right to suggest that it originates with Hume; like many analytical philosophers Putnam is somewhat casual when it comes to history. Nevertheless, Putnam is undoubtedly correct that the fact/value dichotomy has been a fundamental article of faith of Hume’s empiricist and positivist successors in the twentieth century. Perhaps, Putnam muses at one point, it should even be regarded as another ‘dogma of empiricism’.

The issue of fact and value is usually discussed in ethics, where the main concern is with the nature of values. Putnam reverses this. Most of his work over the years has been in philosophy of language, metaphysics and philosophy of mind. His main focus in this book is on the concept of a ‘fact’. This proves to be a suggestive and fruitful approach.

Putnam starts by recounting the history of attempts to distinguish logical truths from matters of fact in positivist and empiricist philosophy, culminating in Quine’s celebrated abandonment of the analytic/synthetic distinction as an untenable ‘dogma of empiricism’. On this basis, Putnam goes on to question the very notion of ‘fact’ as it has been developed in empiricist philosophy. No clear-cut separation of facts from values is possible; the two are inextricably connected in most contexts. This is true even for what are normally regarded as the ethically neutral facts of science, mathematics and logic. For even in these areas, evaluative considerations of what is ‘coherent’ or ‘rational’ play an ineliminable role in determining what is to be accepted as ‘objective’ and as ‘fact’. Indeed, following Dewey and other pragmatists, Putnam argues that ‘value and normativity permeate all experience’. But empiricist philosophers and their analytic successors have been ‘determined to shut their eyes to the fact that judgements of coherence, simplicity, beauty, naturalness, and so on, are presupposed by physical science.… Yet coherence and simplicity and the like are values.’ As Putnam puts it, ‘epistemic values are values too’.

The entanglement of facts and value is even more evident in the realm of ethics. Putnam focuses on what have come to be called ‘thick ethical concepts’, such as ‘rude’ or ‘courageous’. Concepts like these cut right across the fact/value divide. They combine both an evaluative and a descriptive aspect (in contrast to ‘thin’ concepts, such as ‘good’, ‘right’ or ‘ought’ and their opposites, where the descriptive content is minimal). With thick concepts, sometimes the descriptive aspect, sometimes the evaluative one may
be to the fore, but this sort of concept presumes a particular moral perspective and can be used only from within it. In characterizing a person’s behaviour as ‘rude’, for example, I am not simply giving a neutral and factual description of it, I presuppose a moral framework without which the concept would be incomprehensible.

These arguments raise important issues. Putnam mainly stresses their critical and negative impact, particularly on what he sees (rather narrowly) as ‘positivism’ and its legacy. Indeed, it is a symptom of the restricted range of his philosophical horizons that pretty well all his targets of criticism are rolled up under this heading. At one point even poor old Habermas gets treated as a ‘positivist’.

What Putnam is proposing as an alternative to the fact/value dichotomy is less clear. His positive account of the nature of facts and values and of the relation between them is sketchy. Dewey and other pragmatists are invoked from time to time, but what pragmatism actually means in this area is never spelled out in any detail. For his main example of an alternative and more satisfactory approach Putnam turns to the field of economics and to the ideas of Amartya Sen. Economics is a field in which the fact/value dichotomy has long ruled as orthodoxy. With the rise of neoclassical economics in the 1870s, mainstream economics abandoned any attempt to ground economic value in objective and naturalistic measures of the sort for which classical economists like Adam Smith and Marx were searching with the labour theory of value. Economic value is now regarded as a function of mere preference alone. It thus becomes subjective and arbitrary. The effect of this is to exclude any concern with ethical questions from the realm of economics. Economics is no longer supposed to have anything to do with questions of welfare or human good.

Putnam shows how the rejection of the fact/value dichotomy is fundamental to the quite different approach of welfare economics, of which Sen is a leading exponent. Sen’s area is development economics, where the conventional wisdom has been that the sole priority is to raise monetary income and economic output. Sen argues that we have wider economic goals. Sen is no revolutionary. He is arguing for what will seem common sense to most liberal-minded people: namely, that questions of welfare and equality should figure on the agenda of economic planners. Existing economic rationality, however, excludes such ethical concerns, and this is standardly justified on the basis of the fact/value dichotomy. In opposition to this, Sen maintains that ethical and economic questions are inextricably bound up together. As Putnam explains, he insists that we should think about what functionings form part of our and other cultures’ notions of a good life and to investigate just how much freedom to achieve various of those functionings various groups of people in various situations actually have. Such an approach will require us to stop compartmentalizing ‘ethics’ and ‘economics’ …

Putnam gives little more than a brief overview of Sen’s work, but this is clear and thought-provoking and it whets one’s appetite for more. For that, however, one must go to Sen’s own, highly readable, writing (for example, *On Ethics and Economics*, 1987). Putnam’s book is a collection of popular lectures and academic papers which vary considerably in quality and style. Issues tend to get dealt with in a somewhat accidental and haphazard manner; arguments are often not adequately developed and followed through. Nevertheless, the book does a good job of presenting the issues in clear and accessible terms. It contains a strong and stimulating line of argument, put forward with all the verve and flair one has come to expect from this author.

Sean Sayers

Riddling


Literature on German idealism in English mainly comprises either austere scholarly monographs on main representatives of the movement (especially Kant and Hegel) or historical and descriptive accounts of it. On rare occasions one encounters inspiring and controversial studies on Kant and Hegel, but one can hardly find similarly fruitful and challenging readings of Fichte and Schelling.

Goudeli’s book is an attempt at filling this gap, due to the original narrative it offers on Schelling, and especially on the so-called ‘middle period’ of his oeuvre. On the one hand, the work seeks to deliver itself from the spectre of Hegel and his impact on subsequent interpretations of German idealism. On the other hand, though, the attentive reader won’t fail to recognize the – often indirect – presence of Hegel, on the level of a subtle critique of Hegel’s interpretations of the thinkers considered. Goudeli attributes para-