A Dangerous or Necessary Style?

– An examination of the relevance of style in philosophy
Abstract

No form of philosophy is without literary style. This is not always appreciated and opponents of style within philosophy often seem to be unaware of the role of style. Arguments that style is bad, good, or that diversity of styles is good needs to be investigated so that the underlying presuppositions and the meaning of different literary styles becomes clear.

This thesis examines three arguments for and against style within philosophy and the relevance of literary style for the philosophical method. I investigate what arguments and fundamental assumptions about language that underlies the judgments that literary style in philosophy is either 1.) bad, 2.) good or, 3.) both bad and good (a diversity position).

An analysis of three different positions to the question of the relevance of style will be performed. The analysis focuses on the basic understandings of what language is and does and reveals the underlying presuppositions of the attitudes towards style in philosophy. Only then can the different positions and attitudes towards style be defended and examined in an interesting and relevant way. The debate about philosophical style often misses a significant point because many are unaware of the philosophical presuppositions behind the arguments, and the argumentation risks to be flawed in relation to this.

Firstly, a presentation of three different attitudes towards the relevance of style to the philosophical method is outlined. The approaches are represented by a reading of philosophers who either describe the relevance of literary style as 1.) bad, or not important for the method, 2.) important/necessary for the method, or 3.) that diversity is good for philosophy. Secondly, I examine how these three approaches are affected by the underlying philosophy of language with a focus on theories of metaphor. Depending on how one believes that language is related to reality and ourselves, one will assess style as a more, or less, relevant and contributing aspect of the philosophical work and method. The analysis shows that metaphors and other literary stylistic tools might sometimes be necessary and mediate something that cannot be expressed in another way: language can never capture the full potential of reality.

Keywords: philosophy of language, semantics, style, metaphors, analytic philosophy, Continental philosophy
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Introduction

A world without metaphor would be a world without purpose.

- Kenneth Burke

Some philosophers seem to be unaware of the fact that style is always present in the written and spoken language. There is no way to write philosophy without a literary style. The debate about style within philosophy that I will examine is the three positions: that style is bad and/or dangerous, that style is good and/or necessary or that it is good with different styles – diversity. The problem is that philosophers engaged in the debate sometimes seem to be unaware of the fact that everyone always has a style when they write and philosophize. The debate risks to become empty and to miss a significant point if one is unaware of the philosophical presuppositions behind the arguments.

In this thesis I examine how the three positions can be defended by outlining the underlying presuppositions about language behind the view that literary style in philosophy is 1.) bad, 2.) good and, 3.) that diversity is good. The purpose of this is to allow for a better understanding of the different arguments towards the role of style and to show that certain presuppositions about language exclude one or several positions in the debate about the role of style in philosophy.

I examine the different approaches towards style through an analysis that focuses on the language view behind the arguments. Theories of how language relates to truth, to ourselves, and to reality affects how we think about style and its relevance. This thesis draws a scheme and shows how different beliefs about language, logically excludes certain attitudes towards the dangers or relevance of style and logically entails that other positions (logically) ought to be embraced. The conclusion is that the arguments for the dangers or inappropriateness of style in philosophy (as presented in the thesis) is based on a naïve realistic understanding of language and, as will be explained in the analysis, risks ending in skepticism. If one wishes to avoid skepticism, the two remaining positions are available – that literary style is necessary and good or, that a diversity of literary and philosophical styles is needed – because neither of the two are compatible with a naïve semantic realist understanding of language and hence avoids the problems that follow.

To limit the scope of this thesis, I confine my discussion to authors that emerge in the analytic-Continental debate about style in philosophy. This material is especially relevant to the
main problem in the thesis because the analytic-Continental debate to a large extent discusses the benefits and problems of style in philosophy. The main question that will orient my discussion in this thesis is the following. *What arguments and more fundamental assumptions about language underlie the judgments that literary style in philosophy is either bad, good, or, the view that a diversity of styles is needed?*

The thesis has two main parts and ends with a discussion and some closing reflections. First, I outline three different attitudes towards style in philosophy. Second, I examine how these three attitudes are affected by their underlying assumptions about language and semantics. I analyze this with a focus on theories of metaphor in order to clarify the argumentation. The thesis then ends with a conclusion and a discussion of the analysis and its results.

1. Three Approaches to the Relevance of Style

The discussion of style within philosophy is not a new interest, even Aristotle writes about it and says that the discussion of style originally comes from poetry rather than rhetoric. This might explain why some philosophers argue that style has no place in philosophy and why it is common to think that style *could* be avoided. My aim in this thesis is to show what needs to be presupposed about language in order to reasonably argue that style either is bad, good, or argue for the diversity position.

Aristotle writes that the poets were the first to discuss style. He discusses its virtues and its impact and writes that style affects the clarity of the intended meaning, although to a varying degree.

> What concerns the topic of lexis, however, has some small necessary place in all teaching; for to speak in one way rather than another makes some difference in regard to clarity; although not a great difference…” *(Rhet. III.1, 1404a8–10).*

If we suppose that the purpose of speech or, perhaps even stronger, that *the purpose of philosophy*, is to make matters clear, then comprehensibility is of great importance. Without comprehensibility, persuasive arguments, how can difficult philosophical questions be made clear? Aristotle claims that the virtue of prose style depends on clarity, that clarity is the genuine

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1 Rapp, 2010
2 One need not agree with the assumption regarding the purpose of philosophy but only accept the argument as a means to make the point about *clarity* and *comprehensibility.*
and ultimate purpose of speech. But is it? Even if the answer is yes, it is not obvious how this is to be achieved. What does a clear and comprehensible language or speech consist in?

Before examining anything I first have to clarify one question. What is style? Phil Donahue and Paulina Ochoa Espejo write that “A particular style of dealing with a problem concerns what happens after the problem is posed. […] So a style of dealing with problems concerns how a thinker proceeds after posing the problem.” Philosophy can be done in different styles just as there are different art-styles. According to Donahue and Espejo, two philosophers can philosophize in different ways and end up with different results. They also note that style is not to be confused with method, the same method can be performed in different styles.

In this thesis the term style is used to signify a literary style, a particular way to write and/or talk. It is also meant to be separated from method, as Donahue and Espejo writes. In some sense and in some cases the two are difficult to separate, and perhaps the two are sometimes so close that they become inseparable. However, I am assuming that different philosophical questions raised are distinct from the way in which they are written. In other words, the literary style might affect the method, but is not the same as the method. Argumentation analysis, consequential analysis, heuristics, hermeneutics and deconstruction are examples of what I take to be philosophical methods that are possible to perform in different literary styles.

These are three main positions that I want to examine. The first is the view that literary style is dangerous or bad for the method. The second is the view that style is of importance for the method. And the third is the view that style sometimes is good for the method, and sometimes not. The material I use to identify these positions comes from the contemporary debate about the differences and similarities between what is called analytic and Continental philosophy because this discussion often concerns the differences and similarities of style.

1.1. The Dangers of Style

I will now present a philosopher who argues that literary style should be limited in philosophy in order not to take up important space and attention from the philosophical content. Brand Blanshard, an American philosopher whose major works is about reason, offers this interesting

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3 Rapp, 2010
4 Donahue & Ochoa Espejo, 2016, p. 143
discussion about philosophical style and its dangers or problems. He argues that style within philosophy is not always bad and that we sometimes enjoy reading philosophers with a characteristic and personal style because it is fun and engaging. Despite this and despite the fact that style is always present in a more, or less, obvious way, Blanshard nevertheless argues that rhetoric and style should not be permitted too much room and emphasis in philosophy. When the style of writing and philosophizing gets too much focus, it jeopardizes the purpose of the whole philosophical task and purpose.

Nevertheless, in this matter of style philosophy is in a difficult position. […] Philosophizing proper is a purely intellectual enterprise. Its business is to analyze fundamental concepts, such as self, matter, mind, good, truth; to examine fundamental assumptions, such as that all events have causes; and to fit the conclusions together into a coherent view of nature and man’s place in it […] because these problems are humanly so important, plain men make a further demand on the philosopher. They want him to speak about them in such a way that they can overhear and, so far as practicable, understand.  

Blanshard emphasizes that philosophy is not here to entertain. It is not its purpose to be like literary prose or to persuade through rhetoric and hidden agendas. Its purpose, instead, is to try to get to the truth. “It is, as James said, ‘a peculiarly stubborn effort to think clearly,’ to find out by thinking what is true.” This is the purpose of philosophy according to Blanshard. He writes that reading the continental philosopher Nietzsche, although very famous and popular, caused him the urge to throw the book across the room. It does not matter how intriguing the “prejudices” of a philosopher or writer is if it is not based on proper philosophizing and argumentation.

“It is by style we are saved,” said Henry James. That is simply not true in philosophy, at any rate at the top. There have been many powerful and athletic minds who would have regarded fastidiousness in style’ as effeminacy if not narcissism, and were far too engrossed with what they were saying to give much thought to how they were saying it.

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5 Blanshard, 1954, p. 6 & 8
6 Blanshard, 1954, p. 13
7 Blanshard’s term.
8 Blanshard, 1954, pp. 14-15
9 Blanshard, 1954, p. 25 (my italics).
The point of the argument is not that style is always bad but that it needs to be used consciously and with care when it comes to philosophy. Style becomes dangerous in philosophy if it is allowed to much room and emphasis – deliberately or un-deliberately. This may sterilize a philosopher, Blanshard writes. Style is however always present; like window glass. You want to be able to look through the window and see what is outside, but you are still looking through the glass. What is important is the content and not that it is presented in a prose-like style and in any other manner. If the philosopher gets carried away and gives the style more emphasis than the philosophical content, both the philosopher and the reader will have a hard time finding out what the text actually wants to say. If the window is too dirty the attention will be drawn to the window itself rather than what is outside. The argument is that the reader of a philosophical text must be able to understand the meaning of it with the cost of minimum effort. The writer must guide the reader through abstract and often tricky arguments. The purpose is to extract and make matters clear so that the writer can show why an argument leads to this or that conclusion. According to Blanshard, that “implies thinking on their part as well as his; and thinking is hard work.” This cannot be done if the philosopher gets too involved in style according to this position. The philosopher must not get greedy; he should not try to embody his whole self in words but only his intellectual part, the ideas and their connections.

The fact that everyone has their style and that everyone is inspired by others does not contradict the view. The validity of an argument does not vary depending on the philosophers offering it. Blanshard writes that it is wrong to try to make an argument valid by stylistic means. Verbal dressing does not make the argument more valid. Metaphorical images and words that carry poetic and emotional signals makes fine and entertaining reading but have no place in philosophy.

Those who argue that style poses a problem in philosophy does (as we have seen) not necessarily claim that style should be banned. That would be impossible. Everyone has their style. Even a shopping list has a certain style. The argument is that style becomes a problem when the reader gets confused or no longer follows the line of argument because it cannot be extracted from the verbal and prose-like style. This is problematic because the purpose to “get to the truth of things” is lost when the focus becomes style. Blanshard does however end his discussion by claiming that style nevertheless reflects the philosopher’s inner self.

10 Blanshard, 1954, p. 26
11 Blanshard, 1954, p. 27
12 Blanshard, 1954, p. 27
13 Blanshard, 1954, pp. 48-64
The more perfectly one’s style fits the inner man and reveals its strength and defect, the clearer it becomes that the problem of style is not a problem of I words and sentences merely, but of being the I right kind of mind.\textsuperscript{14}

This quote summarizes the idea that the point of philosophy is to offer clear, rigorous, and precise ideas and guide others to understand and follow the arguments and thoughts in a clear and as simple way as possible. The right mind is, then, a mind who thinks and verbally expresses these clear and precise ideas.

1.2. The Importance of Style

The arguments for the importance of style outlined below can be summarized in the following way: Conventional style hinder us from thinking new thoughts, and clarity and transparent argumentation sometimes need to be expressed in a particular style. Alvin Plantinga’s famous ontological argument for the existence of God is based on philosophical modal and predicate logic and this serves Plantinga’s cause to offer a reasonable argument for the existence of God in an obvious way.\textsuperscript{15} The choice of style makes a difference for the method and for the result.

Continental philosophy is sometimes associated with critical theory.\textsuperscript{16} To be critical in this sense means many things, but it always involve a constructive and normative side and an ambition to promote self-reflexive awareness. Simon Critchley describes Continental philosophy as seeking emancipation. This cannot always be done without breaking free of normative thought patterns and a normative and conventional stylistic approach. Philosophy then needs to criticize and question the hegemonies and conceptual systems of our mind and society.

Philosophy in the Continental tradition has an emancipatory intent, and rightly. For a philosopher, I take it, the real crisis would be a situation where crisis was not recognized – ‘Crisis? What crisis?’. In such a world, philosophy would have no purpose, other than as a historical curiosity, an intellectual distraction, or a technical means of sharpening one’s common sense.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Blanshard, 1954, p. 69
\textsuperscript{15} See Plantinga, 1974
\textsuperscript{16} See Martinsson, 2018
\textsuperscript{17} Critchley, 2008, p. 358
The fact that many regard Continental philosophy as having more in common with the humanities than analytic philosophy seem to cause the perception that style is more present in the Continental tradition than in the analytical tradition.\textsuperscript{18} This is a misunderstanding since style is everywhere (at least in written or spoken words). Plato’s dialogues with Socrates is an example where the lines of thought would be very different if the dialogue were not used as a stylistic tool. Gottlob Frege is another example: had he not written his arguments about reference and truth in a predicate-logical way his philosophy would be very different and perhaps more difficult to follow and comprehend.

Critchley emphasizes that Continental philosophy criticizes scientism/objectivism in philosophy, which is not to be confused with being anti-scientific, because this tradition, according to Critchley, holds that “(i) that the procedures of the natural sciences cannot and, moreover, should not provide a model for philosophical method, and (ii) that the natural sciences do not provide our primary or most significant access to the world.”\textsuperscript{19} The argument claims that scientism, and analytic philosophy if it embraces scientism too much, fails to see that human life and the realm of nature become trapped in an instrumental and falsely conceived objectification of the world.

\textit{[S]cientism rests on the false assumption that the scientific or theoretical way of viewing things - what Heidegger calls the present-at-hand - provides the primary and most significant access to ourselves and the world.}\textsuperscript{20}

This understanding affects the \textit{style} in which philosophy is done. The critique of scientism as a model and inspiration to do philosophy in is based on the criticism of objective values, descriptions and truths. This is also what Mattias Martinsson writes about critical theory and Continental philosophy. He says that critical theory questions the idea of an objective corrective and it puts emphasize on the context which we cannot break free from.

\textit{den grundläggande politiska dimensionen hos den kritiska teorin: det finns ingen tillgång till ett objektivt korrektiv, ingen tillgång till en allmän mall för frihet som kan tillämpas överallt för att ”transformera oss själva” – för att tala med Foucault.}\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Chase & Reynolds, 2014, p. 3. See also Appendix A for an illustration of this perception.  
\textsuperscript{19} Critchley, 2008, p. 358  
\textsuperscript{20} Critchley, 2008, p. 358  
\textsuperscript{21} Martinsson, 2018, p. 5 in the chapter (unpublished book)
Translation: the basic political dimension in critical theory: there is no access to an objective corrective, no access to a universal framework for liberty to be applied everywhere to “transform ourselves” – to speak as Foucault. (My translation)

Derrida e.g., wants to uncover that which is not present or obvious in life and society. A goal is to unveil what human life can be, not only what it is. Continental philosophy is sometimes described as difficult, hard to read and understand, because of its level of abstraction (see Appendix A) but those who argue for the importance of style, e.g. philosophers like Grace Jantzen or Jacques Derrida,22 claim that we need to think and speak in new ways to open our minds to new worlds and ideas. To fall into conventional arguments and speech would hinder the mind from forming new thoughts and constructs and we would then continue to be prisoners in our conceptual and epistemic thought-system. Different literary styles might then cause the philosophical methods to evolve and expand. The purpose to create new ways to think would be defeated if the philosopher always was forced to over-simplify. The world is not simple so why should we speak and write in ways that (deliberately) cuts off aspects of it?

In addition, there seems to be a misunderstanding concerning the word simple or simplification. In the discussion about philosophy, it often seems to be regarded as something good – something desirable. But to “make clear” and “to simplify” is not the same thing. There are aspects of the world that are difficult and hard to understand, but that cannot be simplified without losing important aspects of it. Quantum mechanics, for instance, is notoriously difficult. If a quantum mechanics scientist tried to explain to me what her research is about, she would need to simplify it immensely. This does not mean that she has explained her research to a full extent or that quantum mechanics is simple. In fact, it is the quite the opposite. Simplification implies that the more tricky and difficult aspects have either been left out, or that they have been immensely reduced. The purpose of philosophy can never be to simplify. Even if you believe that the purpose is to make things clear, it does not follow that simplification is a good thing.

1.3. The Diversity Position

Philosophy has always been expressed in a manifold of different literary forms. Almost all the major genres of literary forms are found in the history of philosophical writing. In Jon Stewart’s words: “There are the provocative aphorisms of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Wittgenstein,

the private meditations of Descartes and Montaigne, and the letters and correspondences of Seneca and Leibniz.”

Philosophers arguing for what is here called “The Diversity Position” claim that this is no longer so in the field of academic philosophy. Nick Trakakis and Jon Stewart both write that the academic philosophy of today is homogenized and downplays the role and importance of a rich diversity of philosophical styles. Philosophy is writing – it is a literary process, and the fact that the literariness and style are often ignored is a problem. Trakakis argues that there are significant differences between analytic and Continental philosophy and that this must not be ignored or downplayed as has often been done. The difference tells us something that should not be neglected.

Divergences in style, it is assumed, pale into insignificance in comparison with disagreements on a more fundamental level that have to do with doctrine, goals and methodology, and perhaps agreement on the fundamentals can be reached without attending to style: one can shed a style as easily as one changes one’s clothes, but the body or content of one’s worldview cannot be displaced or shaken off so quickly and easily.

Trakakis here insist on the fact that style is not something merely superficial. It cannot be stripped of the philosopher. Even if one would wish for a neutral style, this is impossible. Neutral, normative, uncommon or provocative are all descriptions applied on styles, and they are always relative to that which is perceived as the common and normative (often hegemonic) style. Trakakis writes that the resistance to acknowledge one’s style or to criticize the style of one’s own tradition, is found in both analytic and Continental philosophy. Method has become more important, and it is quite acceptable to be self-reflective about the method used, but to do the same concerning style has become unimportant. The focus on method has created an illusory absence of style in much of philosophy. This has led many to become philosophically blind about style, both when it comes to one’s own philosophical work and in others. Trakakis adds that the style-less academic atmosphere of today leads to “a flat and colorless way of writing, a kind of ‘literary wasteland’.” I believe that he is confusing what he thinks is a dominating philosophical style of today with the idea that it is “style-free”. It is not. What he ought to say

23 Stewart, 2013, p. 1
24 Trakakis, 2012, p. 920
25 Trakakis, 2012, p. 920
26 Trakakis, 2012, p. 922
27 Trakakis, 2012, p. 922
is that he calls for more and different styles in today’s philosophical climate – not that we have a style-less academic atmosphere.

If philosophy as an academic field continues to promote a deceptive and illusory style-free philosophy, this will lead to disaster (according to this view). Not only would it be self-deception (there is no such thing as a style-less philosophy), it would be a narrowing of the mind. The scope of what counts as philosophy, as proper lines of thought and aims, would be confined to a small and ignorant field. What once was counted as legitimate forms of philosophy would be discarded, and only one type of philosophy and one style would be permitted to flourish.²⁸

Stewart explains that A. J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth and Logic* and Rudolf Carnap’s “The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language” shaped the idea of a “style-less” philosophy and they influenced the hegemonic understanding of how philosophy should be written. Ayer and Carnap argued that metaphysical statements, in fact, were empty and devoid of meaning and they thought that thinkers like Hegel and Heidegger failed to be intelligible and failed to make meaningful statements.²⁹ Heidegger created a new verb – to nothing (*nichten*) – which Carnap regarded as pure nonsense.

Ayer’s and Carnap’s views rest on a kind of positivism which presumes philosophical or scientific language is trying to mirror a nonlinguistic empirical reality that is freely available to everyone. The all-important criterion of empirical verifiability implies a common ground of experience against which linguistic utterances can be compared and tested. Writing is presumed to be meaningful only insofar as it is able to describe and communicate clearly what is the case about the empirically verifiable world.³⁰

The most striking example of what this conformist approach towards philosophical styles has resulted in is the divide between analytic and Continental philosophy. One danger of this institutionalized conformity, Stewart writes, is that philosophers lose the skills of reading canonical philosophers of the past. Philosophers need training to understand difficult and confusing philosophical texts, and newly written texts are not always the best. Stewart even goes so far as to say that we risk turning philosophy into an analphabetic discipline if the diversity of styles continues to be un-promoted and ignored.³¹

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²⁸ Stewart, 2013, p. 5
²⁹ Stewart, 2013, p. 6
³⁰ Stewart, 2013, p. 7
³¹ Stewart, 2013, p. 9
The point is that it is ignorant to believe that the new stylistic approach promoted in the academic field (often misunderstood as “free of style”) would be the only, or the best way, to do philosophy in. The form and the style of philosophical writing have varied immensely through history, and it seems problematic to assume that only one of these would serve as the genuine or proper one.

The question that must be raised is how philosophy as a discipline is served by this uniformity of expression. Can everything that is philosophically meaningful and interesting be spoken in the language of the current philosophical discourse? [...] By disregarding and denigrating other forms of philosophical expression, one overlooks an important connection between the content of a philosophical theory and the literary form that the philosopher employs to express it.32

What is needed is diversity. Diversity of style and diversity of thought. Only then can we try to speak of the things we find philosophically meaningful and interesting to a full and honest extent without excluding aspects and ways to express it in.

2. Semantic Approaches

In this chapter I analyze what presuppositions about language that needs to be accepted in order to reasonably argue for the three positions towards the role of style in philosophy. This is needed since there often seem to be confusion as to what style is and where to find it. One example that I have mentioned earlier is the fact that Continental philosophy often is described as having “more style” than analytic philosophy. This is obviously not true, and the result is a debate that is confused and misses the point. Instead we need to identify the reasons behind the arguments for, and, against, style.

I will now analyze the underlying language views behind the arguments and present four understandings to how language relates to reality and ourselves. The four language-positions presented are semantic realism, semantic anti-realism, modest semantic realism and modest semantic anti-realism. I will then outline which of these semantic understandings that matches the argument that style is bad, that style is good, or, that diversity of styles is needed. The purpose of this is to offer a better understanding of the arguments for and against the relevance of style and to illuminate those who are unaware of their semantic presuppositions. I use the

32 Stewart, 2013, p.10
area of metaphors to exemplify the realism/anti-realism positions to make them clearer and offer literal examples. It will be shown that the arguments for The Dangers of Style only is compatible with naïve semantic realism, which makes it reasonable only if you accept naïve realism.

2.1. Semantic realism

Realism is not easy to define. The realism/anti-realism debate has a long history that naturally leads to many different understandings and definitions of the concepts. A generic and broad definition is that realism about a specific domain is the position that (1) there are facts or distinct entities within that domain, and (2) those facts or entities exist in an objective or mind-independent way. We find realism in many different domains and degrees. For the purpose and topic of this thesis, I focus on what we can call semantic realism. More specifically, the first position can be called naïve semantic realism (a more nuanced and modest semantic realism will be presented below).

Metaphysical realism is the view that the physical world exists independently of us, our culture, our language or understanding. This is not to say that social constructions exist independently of us, but that the physical world does. The physical reality is in a certain way, and that is that. Naïve semantic realism is related to this view but applied to the domain of language – semantics. If something X is true according to semantic naïve realism, X is true because it provides a true description of reality. In Paul Horwich words:

A semantic realist about microphysics is someone who believes that there is a body of facts concerning the microscopic structure of the world and that the object of microphysics is to discover this structure – to formulate theories and acquire evidence which will justify the belief that those theories provide a true description of that aspect of reality. (...) and do not depend upon our methodology.

Naïve semantic realism can be defined as the view that: Truth is expressed with, and through, language. The truths expressed are true independently of us and is true because it corresponds to reality. Hence there can be truths about the world that we are unaware of because we cannot verify them.

33 Brock & Mares, 2014, p. 2
34 Horwich, 1982, p. 182. See also van Inwagen & Sullivan, 2016, about metaphysical realism.
35 Horwich, 1982, p. 182
36 Miller, 2016
A theory of metaphors based on this sort of realism does not seem to be able to handle every kind of simile expression and metaphors that language can produce. Soskice and Tyrell write that naïve realism is not able to examine the truth value of statements like “He laughs like an irresponsible foetus.”37 How could it be either true or false and how should we examine it? A theory of metaphors based on naïve realism regards every metaphor as either a literally true, or literally false description, but we cannot always know which answer it is. Only metaphors that are literally false in an obvious way are clear to us. A naïve theory of metaphors accepts the possibility of literally true metaphors, but that can only be applied on cases where we have no way of controlling the truth value of the metaphor. A more nuanced theory of metaphors is based on a modest realist position. It will help us understand what presuppositions underlie the three different approaches to the relevance of style.

2.2. Semantic anti-realism

Anti-realism, as the name indicates, is a negation of the realist position. Above, realism was described as the position that \( a, b \) and \( c \) exist with certain properties and attributes, independently of us. Anti-realism denies that \( a, b \) and \( c \) exist with certain properties and attributes, independently of us.38 A generic and broad definition that most philosophers will agree on is that realism about a specific domain is the position that (1) there are no facts or distinct entities within that domain, and (2) nothing within that domain exist in an objective or mind-independent way.

A more extreme version of semantic anti-realism could be called radical semantic anti-realism. It denies all that naïve semantic realism took to be the case. Radical semantic realism can then be defined as the view that that claims that objective or mind-independent truth cannot be expressed with and through language at all. The truths expressed are never true independently of us. An expression or proposition is taken to be true (or false) \textit{to us}, but has nothing outside of our language system that makes it true. Hence there can be no mind-independent truths that we never would be able to verify.39

A theory of metaphors based on this kind of anti-realism would claim that every metaphor is possibly true since we create reality and what we regard as truth and falsehood. “Everything is man made” according to the anti-realist Don Cupitt.40

37 Soskice, 1985, pp. 342–349
38 Miller, 2016
39 Miller, 2016. For reading about evidence transcendent truths, see Johannesson, 2002. See also Jonsson, 2004
40 See Cupitt, 1994
The problem with such a theory, however, is that we have no way to determine what – if anything – is false. If every metaphor and every statement is regarded as true (or at least potentially true), we seem to end up with an inflation of truth and a skepticism that does not work productively.

With these two rather extreme positions of realism and anti-realism presented, it is time to investigate two more modest versions. The two extreme positions mentioned (naïve semantic realism and radical semantic anti-realism), are not very common and most philosophers tend to embrace a position in between. I call these versions modest semantic realism, and modest semantic anti-realism, starting with the modest semantic realist position.

2.3 Modest middle-ground

The position of modest semantic realism comes from the more nuanced view of critical realism. Ian Barbour is a main character in the development of critical realism who writes that [critical realism] "must acknowledge both the creativity of man’s mind, and the existence of patterns in events that are not created by man’s mind. Critical realism acknowledges the indirectness of reference and the realistic intent of language as used in the scientific community." In order to clarify what separates modest semantic realism from naïve semantic realism, I examine what the critical aspect of the modest version consists in:

1. There is an ontological component: at least a part of reality is ontologically independent of (human) minds.
2. There is a realistic component: truth consists in correspondence between language and reality.
3. There is a critical/pessimistic component: truth is not always easily accessible. We may fail to get true knowledge of the world and reality.
4. There is a realistic/optimistic component: truth is nevertheless accessible. We can make rational statements, have rational beliefs about reality and express true statements and propositions.
5. Based on 1-4 we are justified in believing certain scientific theories to be true.

From this, modest semantic realism can be defined in the following way: it is the view that language can express truths about the independently (of us) existing world and offer true descriptions of it, but it is likely that we at least sometimes, do not get it right. It is likely that

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41 Barbour, 1966, p. 72
42 Losch, 2009, p. 9
our language cannot to a full extent explain always how the world is constituted etc. Nevertheless, we are rational to believe that we, through language, can offer true descriptions of reality and are hence rational in believing certain scientific theories.

Modest semantic anti-realism is a negation of this statement. It is an anti-realist position and agrees with its more extreme version (radical semantic anti-realism) that truth can never be objective or mind-independent. What makes the modest version modest, however, is that it embraces that propositions and statements can be true, but only within our conceptual language scheme. Truth is seen as consensus rather than correspondence with an outside reality. If a proposition is true, it is so only in a pragmatic sense because it is seen as true within the present conceptual scheme. It is true for us, but not in any mind-independent way.43

2.4 Modest Theories of Metaphors

Some theories of metaphors argue that the metaphor only is an ornamental and poetic euphemism for something literal. A theory like that says that most metaphors are false and only trivially true. The metaphor “She was a sparkling diamond” is literally false and only “trivially” (in our conceptual and cultural understanding) true. We understand what it means, but it is actually false. This theory of metaphors says that it is the obvious falsehood of the metaphor that makes us understand that it is a metaphor and not intended to be understood literally.44

A contrasting theory of metaphor based on modest realism claims that the metaphor expresses something that cannot be translated into a simplified literal language. The point of the metaphor is to express something that we did not know and could not express in another way. If the metaphor is translated into a more literal speech, then the meaning is lost. A metaphor expresses that which can be expressed in no other way according to this theory.45 This means that a philosophical text containing metaphors needs the metaphor and if you tried to remove it or change it to a more literal and precise language, something essential will be lost. If you held a modest realist theory of metaphors to be true, it seems to indicate that meaning and truth sometimes needs to be expressed in this way (given that the metaphor actually expresses something true or important).

One theory of metaphor, called the conceptual theory, is based on modest anti-realism and holds that we depend on metaphors: We base our lives and our understanding of reality on

43 Glanzberg, 2016. See also Putnam, 1990, pp. 96-114
44 Scott, 2013, p. 160
45 Soskice, 1985
metaphors in the sense that the metaphors create reality by being the base on which we conceive our conceptual systems. Metaphors shape the way we understand, talk, and conceive reality and since the anti-realism they base the theory on does not separate “the real” world from “the conceived” world the two are the same.

Lakoff and Johnson explains this with the help of the metaphor “Argumentation is a war”. This metaphor is not just a creative way to explain argumentation as a phenomenon; it creates how we, in this culture, think and conceive what argumentation is. This metaphor creates a reality where argumentation is about a fight; you are defensive or offensive, you kill the opponent’s arguments, you retreat or oppose. This shapes the whole conception and understanding of what argumentation actually is. If we had another metaphor that said that argumentation is like dancing, we would understand and approach it in a very different way.46

A theory like Lakoff and Johnson’s says that metaphors create reality, but they also hide reality from us. When something is described with a metaphor, certain aspects of it emerges and shapes reality and our conception of it, but it also hides other aspects of it, that might have been true and important. Lakoff and Johnson writes that to know whether a metaphor expresses something true or false we have to look to our internal conceptual understanding. ”[Truth] it is a matter of human projection and human judgement, relative to certain purposes.”47 Metaphors like “Argumentation is a dance”, or “The fog hung low around the foot of the mountain” could be true according to this theory because we experience and conceive reality through exactly these kinds of conceptual metaphors.48

This indicates that a philosophical text containing metaphors use the metaphors to describe reality as we conceive it because we always conceive reality through conceptual schemes and metaphors. The danger is that it is easy to use the same familiar metaphors we always do instead of trying to break new ground. The danger of using conceptual metaphors in this reality-creating-manner is the high chance of contributing to the continuing of unequal and otherwise unwanted positions of power in society.

The following chapter links the semantic views to the approaches towards style and outlines the logical relations between them to show that certain semantic positions logically entails and excludes one or more attitudes towards style.

46 Lakoff & Johnson, 1980
47 Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 167
48 Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, pp. 171-179
3. Analysis
3.1. Effects of language-views

In this section I will combine the three approaches towards style with the four different semantic understandings. A scheme will be presented that shows which semantic understanding are compatible with the different approaches towards style.

Case One: The Dangers of Style

The position that style is bad and ought to be avoided in philosophy that I have examined here is best understood as based on a naïve semantic realist view. The arguments for this position can be defended if they are based on the understanding that the truth value of an expression is constituted by its correspondence with the real world – to the real situation. The truth or falsity in the description of this real situation is attainable for us, and the truth can be expressed with, and through language. If it is true “that A”, then the proposition that A is true regardless if we have no method to verify it, according to this semantic naïve realism. Applied to the question of literary style in philosophy, this means that so-called verbal dressing and prose-like style with metaphors and other literary ornaments are not necessarily false or wrong descriptions of reality, but verbal dressing in this way is problematic because we can have no way of verifying the meaning behind it. It would defeat the purpose to create clear, comprehensible arguments and thoughts since much of the literary style contributes to utterances that we cannot verify or comprehend. A metaphor could very well express something literally true but the fact that this semantic understanding claims that we sometimes are unable to know if it is true or false leads to the conclusion that metaphors and other stylistic distractions ought to be avoided if the purpose is to offer clear arguments and points.

The earlier simile with the window glass can serve as an example: The “danger-position” does not deny the window existences (that we use language to think and describe reality) but argue that the purpose and task of philosophy is to minimize the effort required for understanding, i.e., “the clearer the glass the better the view.”

The position that too much literary style is bad for the philosophical method is not compatible with any other language understanding than a naïve semantic understanding of language. The modest form of semantic realism claimed that language sometimes fails to offer true depictions of reality but that we still are rational in believing that we get things right most of the time. The danger-position claims that literary style is bad in philosophy because it puts us off track from what is true and essential.
If the sentence “Silence is necessary for the brain’s recovery” is true, then it is wrong (and hence bad) to say that “The empty spaces in the sheet music is what creatively fulfills the piece.” The latter might be regarded as metaphorically true, but it does not help clarity, and it does not minimize the effort required for understanding the meaning. If the danger-position were to accept modest semantic realism, it would have to accept that the two sentences above could be equally true, but the danger-position does not think that they are equally likely to be true descriptions of the actual case. Hence, the position that too much (as Blanshard argued) literary style is bad for philosophy is based on the view that there is one correct way to describe reality. The fact that everyone has a literary style does not change the goal to try to verbalize the truth through the right language-use according to this position. It is, however, an impossible and utopian dream that unfortunately excludes and discriminates different forms of expression that are not deemed acceptable.

Radical semantic anti-realism is easily discarded as interesting for the “danger-position” since the radical anti-realism claims that everything is created by us and true statements does not correspond to an externally and independently existing world. But if that were true, then there would be no need to criticize different styles, metaphors or other verbal dressing within philosophy.

Case Two: The Importance of Style

The position that style is good and necessary for the philosophical method is either based on a modest semantic realist or a modest anti-realist understanding. The arguments for the necessity of style is based on a critique of objective values, a critique of the idea of an objective truth, and that there is only one way in which to describe reality. If style has nothing to do with truth, then one ought to embrace the attitude that style is bad or dangerous for the philosophical method. But those arguing in favor of style in philosophy claim that style is needed to make us aware of aspects that had otherwise not been emphasized. The argument is that different ways to use language either creates reality or at least shows us reality from a new and different angle that is equally true. The view that different linguistic styles are necessary does not mean that constructivism needs to be defended. A semantic modest anti-realism containing constructivism is compatible with the “importance-position”. This becomes clear when we consider the anti-realist conceptual theory of metaphors which claims that the metaphors can create reality and how we conceive it.
The “importance-position” is not restricted to a modest semantic anti-realist understanding but is also compatible with a modest realist understanding. The modest realist position is open to the claim that true descriptions are not easily attained and should be open to the possibility that different styles are good since they could offer important and true insights.

Those arguing for the importance of style cannot at the same time defend a naïve semantic realism because then only one way to describe reality is the correct and desired one. They could embrace a radical semantic anti-realism, but then the role of style in philosophy would not be of great importance; it rather leads to the view that it does not matter how the philosophical text is written. Radical semantic anti-realism claims that objective or mind-independent truth is never expressed with, and through language. The truths expressed are never true independently of us and an expression or proposition is only taken to be true (or false) for us, but it has nothing outside of our language that makes it true. This radical semantic understanding leads to anarchy in styles because no style or no one way to express could be regarded as better or closer to the true fact of the matter.

Case Three. The Diversity Position

The position that diversity of style is a good thing is defended by arguing that there cannot be only one proper and intelligible way to do philosophy in. Not only is this position concerned with the protection of different ways of expression in order to prevent that certain philosophers are silenced, but the argument also shares the immanent constructivism that is used to defend the importance-position. Much emphasis is drawn to the fact that philosophers of today need to be equipped with the right tools to understand canonical philosophers from the past or philosophical texts from a different tradition. The same argument is used by those arguing for the necessity of style, but they emphasize the need to understand and acknowledge new ways of thinking rather than old, but the argument is the same.

The diversity position cannot be combined with naïve semantic realism, but is compatible with every other semantic position. The defenders of a diversity position ought to regard true statements and propositions to be either (1) possible to attain in different ways – by different stylistic means (a modest semantic anti-realism) or (2) attainable through only one way of thought – by using only one stylistic means, but since we cannot know which one it is every

style, and philosophical approach are equally likely to offer true descriptions of the world (a modest semantic anti-realism).

Table 1. Semantic presuppositions compatible with the attitude that style in philosophy is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad/dangerous</th>
<th>Good/necessary</th>
<th>The diversity position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naïve semantic realism</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>(Radical semantic anti-realism)</td>
<td>Radical semantic anti-realism</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>Modest semantic realism</td>
<td>Modest semantic realism</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Modest semantic anti-realism</td>
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4. Discussion

What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the three approaches towards the dangers or importance concerning style in philosophy? Firstly, arguing that literary style is bad and should be avoided in philosophy is a utopian desire impossible to accomplish. Everyone has style, and even if one has a desire to be as clear and precise as possible this in itself is followed by style. The discussion has instead focused on the fact that literary styles can be more or less obvious and outstanding. Clarity, as we have seen, is not something that can be claimed only by those who regard metaphors, poetry or another ornamental verbal dressing as bad and superfluous. The question of what constitutes clarity is a question of what language can do. One could argue that analogies, metaphors, rhymes etc. helps the clarity of the text. Or, one could argue that they confuse and hinder the reader to understand the meaning behind. Secondly, arguments for the importance of metaphors and other literary, poetic, stylistic tools in language hold that those tools are important to our understanding of reality and point to the fact that they sometimes are necessary. To strip a metaphor down to something more literal would make it lose its meaning. The result would not be clarity, but quite the opposite.

The schema outlined above shows that by arguing that style in philosophy is bad presupposes a naïve realistic semantic understanding. Any other semantic understanding should force the person to change his mind about the role of style in philosophy.

By arguing that style is good and necessary one could embrace a modest realistic semantic understanding or a modest anti-realistic semantic understanding. One could also hold a radical semantic anti-realism to be true, but the reason to argue for the necessity of style then becomes
more unclear. That position is compatible with the view that style is necessary but has no clear profits and seem to be unmotivated.

By arguing that we need diversity of literary styles within philosophy one could either embrace a radical anti-realistic semantic understanding, a modest realist-, or a modest anti-realist semantic understanding.

The arguments why different styles are needed and why that is a good thing differ, but the arguments for the avoidance of style (that style is a bad thing) are not persuasive and can only be rationally defended if one holds a naïve realistic understanding of language. Naïve realism is not a very common way to understand the world, since it leads to trouble when trying to explain how knowledge is to be attained. It easily leads to skepticism since the distance between the objects in the world and ourselves as subjects of knowledge is so vast that it becomes impossible to bridge. How can I as a subject have any knowledge of the so-called “real world” if the real world is not connected to me, that is, if there is no relation between me as a knowing subject and the objects I try to have knowledge about? Naïve realism puts me in a position where I am in the world but at the same time so far from it that I cannot have any knowledge of it at all.

If naïve realism is excluded because we want to avoid skepticism we also need to exclude the view that literary style is dangerous or bad for philosophy. Knowledge is the primary goal for many philosophers, and since naïve realism risks putting us in a position where knowledge becomes impossible, it must be rejected as a non-productive and unreasonable position. We are left with the alternatives that literary style either has something internal and important imbedded in it or that diversity is good because it is open to this idea or the fact that it is humble and acknowledges that truths and knowledge may be conveyed differently – that there might be different ways in which to describe reality and human life.

5. Conclusions and remarks

The analysis indicates that the attitudes that literary style is either good in itself or, that it is good because it leads to diversity of philosophical styles (and lines of thought) could bridge the divide between the analytic and Continental philosophical traditions. Regardless how the difference in literary style manifests itself this analysis shows that both analytic and Continental philosophy is needed because the diversity of styles within the traditions as well as between the
traditions point to different aspects and insights of reality, life, moral, religious experience, and so on.

The research question for this thesis was: *What arguments and more fundamental assumptions about language underlie the judgments that literary style in philosophy is either bad, good, or, the view that a diversity of styles is needed?* This has been answered by an analysis of three positions towards literary style and I have outlined what underlying semantic understanding needs to be held in order to reasonably argue for the positions.

Further research about style in philosophy, its merits and disadvantages and other implications can, of course, be done. This thesis examined the area from a “semantic perspective”, but other aspects are important and interesting as well. Further examination could expand the research beyond the analytic-Continental debate to highlight different aspects and perhaps different arguments or focus on the political aspects behind the different attitudes and arguments.

The analysis in this thesis shows that the arguments for the dangers or inappropriateness of literary style in philosophy is based on a problematic naïve realistic understanding of language that meets problems it cannot answer. 50 It seems that this position is in danger of ending in skepticism and the arguments for the danger or inappropriateness of style is weak just by the fact that everyone always has a style – it is unavoidable.

The two remaining positions: that literary style is necessary and good or, that diversity of literary and philosophical styles is needed are not compatible with a naïve semantic realist understanding of language and hence avoids the problems following it. The fact that we understand many things in life through metaphors (i.e. *argumentation* as a battle that you can win or loose) speaks on behalf of a more, or less, modest anti-realist understanding of language.

What is a life? Whether you approach this question from a chemical, biological, religious or physical way, you *experience* what life is. How do you experience this? One theory, which I find hard to dismiss, tells us that conceptual metaphors like “Life is a journey” constitutes our understanding of what it *means* to live a life. Even if the metaphor hides other aspects if what it *could* mean, it is still an important part of what constitutes reality for us; It implies that we end up somewhere new, that we have experience from the journey, that we have changed, that time has passed, that we can speak of it and remember it, i.e. The good thing is that we can shape and create new ways of understanding and, perhaps, even change the world. Language

50 Of course, if one accepts skepticism everything is in order.
can never capture the full potential of reality. One example pertains to the old Egyptian god Ra. The sense of Ra differs from that of the sun, and the sense of the sun differs from that of Ra. Neither exists without the other and none are more real than the other. To speak of the sun but not of Ra was to emphasize *that* aspect without denying the other aspect – Ra – equally real; equally true. Perhaps the insights or utterances about Ra offered knowledge about the sun unattainable without that very conception?
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Appendix A “The Postmodernists” by Existential Comics

http://existentialcomics.com/comic/224 (2018-03-23) Permission to use as appendix granted by Corey Mohler 2018-03-14. Contact at existentialcomics@gmail.com
Philosophers in this comic: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard.