



Submission to the ARC

The Australasian Society of Continental Philosophy became a formally constituted organization last year after some 30 or more years of existence under various names but without an official structure. During the past two years, over 170 people have been affiliated with the society, being largely academics and graduate students from across Australasia and beyond.

The purpose of this submission is to voice the grave reservations the executive committee of the ASCP hold with regard to the general implications of the current ERA Research Outlet Ranking exercise, and more specifically, the implications of this ranking exercise for those of us working in the field of continental philosophy. In the document attached to this statement we have set down a considered response to the draft rankings document that has drawn widely upon the views of those affiliated with the society. Ultimately, however, we would dispute the methodology and the conclusions of this type of journal ranking system in the Humanities, as does the British Philosophical Association, along with the prestigious list of international philosophers who have signed up to Professor Malpas and Professor Brennan's letter of protest to the ARC. In anticipation that the ARC will be receiving many such petitions, we seek in what follows to keep our objections succinct and to focus primarily on the particular implications for continental philosophy. Notwithstanding our deep and numerous misgivings about the journal ranking exercise (as detailed below), we have attached a series of strong recommendations for changes to the current draft rankings of a range of journals in Continental Philosophy.

Context Statement

Continental philosophy may be considered as an area that is often interdisciplinary in character and one that stands outside the 'mainstream' analytical tradition. It is strongly represented in the US and UK but nonetheless draws its most significant resources from French, German and Italian philosophical traditions. The research projects conducted within continental philosophy are diverse and often very inadequately captured by ANZSCR codes. Our area is especially ill-served by these as compared with analytical philosophy, whose sub-divisions are more accurately captured by the codes. Moreover, the practices of scholarly research in our area typically differ from those in analytical philosophy, for instance, continental philosophers rarely engage in 'reply to a reply' discussions, or cite each other as much as analytic philosophers do, and in this respect are closer to other disciplines within the humanities than to the sciences. In science-oriented research, rejection and citation rates do seem to be a more accurate means of judging quality than is generally the case in humanities research. Further, there is a heavier reliance on scholarly books over journals in continental philosophy. In sum, we claim that there is a systematic bias in using these rather raw instruments to compare analytic and continental philosophers, as is implicitly done within the current ERA process.

Such are the methodological divides within the discipline of philosophy that no philosophy journal could adequately claim to be A* on the basis of a coverage of the whole field of

philosophical research. While, on the ARC description, it is possible that A* rankings apply to a 'subfield', what we in fact see in the current draft rankings is a virtual monopolisation of the elite tiers by the Analytic tradition. If 'subfields' are to be shared out (within a total of 5% of all journals) more thought needs to be given to how the ARC understands the term 'subfields' to apply within the profession and how this privilege should then be divided. This question raises enormous difficulties given that top quality journals will often be highly specialized and their very high quality will reflect that specialization. We do not see how meaningful qualitative comparisons can be made between *Mind* and *Research in Phenomenology*, for instance, given that they each reflect the best quality in distinct sub-fields. More thought needs to be given to the way in which a wide range of philosophical interests risk being seriously disadvantaged by inappropriate competition for an arbitrarily restricted category of excellence.

To summarize our particular objections to current draft ranking lists

1/ Analytic philosophy bias:

- It is an irrefutable matter of fact that in the current draft ranking lists, scholarship 'par excellence' is associated with the Analytic tradition, with the elite Analytic journals scoring the A* rankings.
- Further, many of the most esteemed Continental Philosophy journals miss out on even an A ranking.
- Many receive only a C ranking, and others are either omitted entirely or are listed but are not allocated a rank.
- If this data really was compiled on the basis of hard facts (citation rates, rejections rates, etc.), then, prima facie, this might indicate that there is something wrong with the data as a good evaluator of journals in philosophy and the humanities more generally. Further qualitative investigation would surely need to be undertaken and substantive justifications given.

2/ The whole idea of an A* rank

- On the evidence of how this elite 5% band has been deployed thus far, it should be abolished. The fact is that there are no universally recognised elite journals that are fully open to all traditions of philosophy; philosophy journals specialise in their methodologies (or pool of methodologies), and this is not a bad thing. However, it makes an adequate taxonomy of research vital to a fair process. If continental philosophy clearly suffers under the existing schema due to sheer partiality and thoroughly inadequate attention to the difficult problem of how to establish comparability between essentially diverse areas of research, we suspect that this is also true for other innovative and distinctive forms of scholarship.
- If this ERA list is preserved, something to which the ASCP is opposed, then we would suggest that the A* category should be abolished and the straight three tier approach of the European system (ERIH) be adopted, thereby allowing at least for a more representative mix of journals to receive the top ranking.

3/ Lack of academic credibility on the international stage:

- The current rankings palpably fail to live up to Minister Carr's vision whereby this ERA process should command "international recognition". It is plagued not only with basic methodological inconsistencies that have been pointed out by esteemed academic bodies

internationally, but the current drafts demonstrate a thoroughly unrepresentative and incomplete selection of journals that are ranked according to the most parochial of criteria.

- Although we have sought to do as much as possible to remedy this situation through our submission specifically addressing rankings, it remains the case that there is a certain inevitable randomness to a process that has been hurried, under-resourced and that has worked with the presumptive sense of a broad consensus. Best efforts have been made on our part to engage in a consultative process with academics working in these areas but we are all too well aware that in the end re-ranking suggestions have come down to the effort of individuals and organizations in arduously compiling data. Some respected individual scholars will simply not have bothered to contribute to this process and it remains highly probable that aspects of the ERA ranking will continue to appear absurd and parochial on the international stage.
- In the Australian context, there is the particular problem of journals in languages other than English, languages in which of course, some of the best 'continental' (French, German and Italian) philosophy will be published. On the present draft lists, they rate very poorly, a fact that merely reflects ignorance or unbecoming Anglo-centric prejudices that are entirely detrimental for philosophy as a discipline and to the claim that the ERA will bear international credibility.

4/ Stifling of local research initiative, diversity of views and interdisciplinarity:

- ERA qualitative criteria produce strong disincentives for involvement in the locally-based 'cutting-edge' research and publishing ventures that have been a real strength of Australian philosophy (particularly its Continental strand) in the last two to three decades, such as (a) the establishment of new and innovative journals, (b) the translation of novel or difficult work for which there is already scant recognition, (c) the publishing of work on philosophers not yet known or recognised in the Anglophone canon. Such scholarly activities will suffer if the venues in which such work is published and disseminated are systematically downgraded and labelled sub-standard.
- The diversity, plurality, and innovation that philosophical culture requires are severely discouraged if up-and-coming researchers are penalised for venturing beyond the already established 'international' research outlets, thereby potentially driving them away from local collaborations that might otherwise enrich our philosophical culture and, over time, offer something distinctive and significant *to* the international philosophical community.
- In part as a consequence of the inattention to adequate classification and to means of measuring quality that would be sensitive to field differences, interdisciplinary work often lacks adequate recognition and is consigned to the broad basket of "General Social Science/ Humanities", at which point it seems the very idea of ranking within a discipline would seem to become incoherent. In this way, again, innovative approaches risk being stifled and made to lack credibility simply through the application of an arbitrary system of measurement.

5/ Prejudicial against women philosophers:

- There is also significant evidence concerning the gender bias inherent within this and similar ranking processes, and this has a particular impact on Continental Philosophy

given that women are in Australia on average more highly represented here than in other traditions of philosophy.

- The Australasian Association for Philosophy's recent report on the "Participation of Women in the Philosophy Profession" demonstrates that the question of women's participation and promotion is a very serious issue in philosophy. As compared with other academic disciplines the number of women at all levels of the profession is worryingly low and startlingly so in the professoriate.
- This finding might helpfully be read in conjunction with Sally Haslanger, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)", *Hypatia*, Spring 2008. This specifically addresses the problems posed by the journal rankings system from a feminist perspective concerned to challenge the severe under-representation of women within philosophy, as compared with other academic areas. Haslanger examines data on the gender of authors of articles and discussions in several leading 'A*' analytic journals as compared with data on the percentages of women in tenured or tenure-track positions in the top 20 institutions in the US (as ranked in the Leiter report). She also examines the gender composition of their editorial boards. Some of her findings are very striking, for instance, that 95.5% of all articles published in *Mind* in the last five years were by men.

These specific issues regarding the status of continental philosophy within the ERA process lead us to raise the following more general concerns:

1) The questionable basis for determining levels 'A' 'B' etc:

- Methodological confusion: there appears to be a serious discrepancy between the 'qualitative' and descriptive rankings given in terms of "real engagement", "importance" of work etc., and a quantitative % allocation overall within the field (5% A*, 50% 'C' etc). What justifies this statistical profile? For instance, it is prima facie unclear that 50% of all journals listed fail to meet the terms of reference suggested by levels 'A' and 'B'. What is fundamentally at stake here is whether this is a genuine criterion-based process of evaluation, or simply a norm-based exercise that has determined ahead of time that 50% of all journals in philosophy are by definition third rate.
- What precise evidence is there that the kind of metrics required by the ARC provides a watertight case for assessing the quality of journals across the many traditions of philosophical scholarship? (Ignoring for the time being the issue of the notable lack of any such rigorous evidence having been presented by the ARC itself in coming up with its own journal rankings). How might metrics relate in different ways to establishing different aspects of research excellence?
- What does a ranking in any case imply? Professor Helen Beebe's question to the ARC's British counterpart is pertinent here: "Is the distinction between A rated and B rated journals a distinction based on the quality of the journal, so that a paper in an A rated journal is, in the absence of any further information, assumed to be better than one published in a B rated journal?"

2/ Concerns about the institutional consequences of such a system

- There is a well-founded suspicion that once ranked lists of journals are used by university bureaucracies and funding bodies, what is inevitably lost is a clear sense of their inherently problematic nature as they become used as a quasi-objective measure of

scholarly performance. In this way, professional judgment is downgraded in its legitimate role in determining promotions, grants and other employment opportunities. There is, moreover, a highly problematic link established between such performance indicators and 'research earnings'. A univocal system of measurement may appear fair but risks introducing seriously distorting assumptions. Moreover it works against pluralism in the field of judgment.

- Such a system also risks distorting the processes whereby scholars choose the most appropriate journal for their research output, with such decisions being affected by properly extraneous motivations such as the placement of particular journals on the rank ordering list. There is a clear threat to academic integrity here.

The Re-ranking Exercise

In what follows, then, we put forward a program to significantly correct deficiencies in the current AAP draft rankings and the ERA rankings, albeit in the light of a strong set of reservations concerning the value and integrity of this process. We argue for many continental journals to be upgraded, with other omitted journals to be ranked for the first time, and we attempt to provide evidence to support our claims. However, while being the fruit of significant discussion and consultation of late, this list of recommendations is hardly exhaustive, and herein lies another point of some significance: i.e., the unacceptable haste with which this process has been conducted. The continental philosophy community was first consulted about this initiative only a little over two months ago, and this has meant a timeframe that has precluded the possibility for the kind of rigorous and comprehensive data collection required to provide the sort of evidence the ARC has requested, evidence which – ironically – the ARC itself (or its consultative bodies) seem to have failed to have produced themselves thus far.

The recommendations document that follows has been produced through a process of consultation among many of Australia's finest philosophers working in the continental tradition, and we would urge that their judgments be respected and heeded. In addition to our main submission, we have also as an appendix a letter drafted by Professor Helen Beebee of the British Philosophy Association to the AHRC in the UK in which she outlines the BPA's clear case against the practice of rank-ordering journals, points that cohere with views put by the British Academy in their opposition to the use of metrics (such as journal rankings) in assessing academic performance¹. Clearly, we would encourage the AAP to take heed of the strong opposition taken by its British counterpart to the kinds of trends we now see taking root in Australian university policy.

We appreciate your serious consideration of the following recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr Fiona Jenkins (Australian National University)

Dr Robert Sinnerbrink (Macquarie University)

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On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Australasian Society of Continental Philosophy (ASCP)

¹ See: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/reports/peer-review/index.html>