

PROLEGOMENA TO ANY FUTURE HISTORY OF ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract: The careful historical and metaphilosophical attention recently bestowed upon analytic philosophy has revealed that traditional ways of defining it are inadequate. In the face of this inadequacy, contemporary authors have proposed new definitions that detach analytic philosophy from its turn of the twentieth century origins. I argue that this contemporary trend in defining analytic philosophy is misguided, and that it diminishes the likelihood of our coming to an accurate historical and metaphilosophical understanding of it. This is especially unsatisfactory since such understanding is essential to finding an adequate remedy for the widely perceived ills of contemporary analytic philosophy. I suggest that a more fruitful approach to developing such understanding might begin with treating the unity of analytic philosophy as illusory.

Keywords: analytic philosophy, history of analytic philosophy, philosophical schools, philosophical unity.

[H]e who introduces a new conception into philosophy is under an obligation to invent acceptable terms to express it, and when he has done so, the duty of his fellow students is to accept those terms, and to resent any wresting of them from their original meanings, as not only a gross discourtesy to him to whom philosophy was indebted for each conception, but also as an injury to philosophy itself.

[Peirce 1982, 104]

1. Preliminary Remarks

The following analysis of recent historical work on analytic philosophy presupposes a number of controversial “meta-issues” that, because of the limitations of space and scope necessarily imposed on a journal article, cannot adequately be developed here. Nonetheless, in the interest of clarity and candor, I shall state some of the meta-opinions governing this inquiry:

1. A philosophical school is a kind of group.

2. A group is something with an “inside” and an “outside,” something to which entities may belong or from which they may be excluded.
3. Every group is a group only in relation to some set of defining criteria. Whether an entity falls within or without a given group is determined by its meeting or failing to meet the defining criteria.
4. To use “philosophical” as a differentia for a group, as in calling a group a *philosophical* school, implies that the defining criteria for that group have to do with philosophy.
5. Whatever else it may be, philosophy is a theoretical discipline—a discipline whose task it is to generate theories via rational thought. To call something philosophical is to imply that it is characterized by theorizing or by theories of this sort.
6. Thus, a philosophical school is a group whose defining criteria have to do with theory, and membership in a philosophical school has to do with the theories one accepts.

Clearly, these principles require nothing less than definition by necessary and sufficient conditions, where the “conditions” are philosophical theories. To some it will seem that these are unduly high standards for understanding the type distinctness of philosophical groups (“schools,” “movements,” or whatever). Indeed, some have suggested that a shared methodology is sufficient to ground philosophical unity. However, while it is manifestly the case that shared practices are sufficient to ground various sorts of sociological unity, I submit that a common method is at best *indicative* of philosophical unity, and then only if the commonality of method is grounded in a commonality of theoretical beliefs about the nature and purpose of philosophical inquiry, the nature of human knowledge, the nature of the human being, or some such thing. Likewise, it has been suggested to me that the unity of a philosophical school is akin to the unity of the impressionist school of painting and the works it produced. In the case of impressionism, necessary and sufficient conditions are incredibly difficult to specify, and the best most of us can do is explain the type distinctness of impressionist paintings in terms of “family resemblance” with respect to style. Philosophy and art, however, are not, to my mind, sufficiently similar to warrant this comparison. Unlike art, philosophy involves the articulation of specific theoretical views, and, in point of fact, it is around such views that philosophical schools and movements arise. Since this is so, it seems possible, at least in principle, to specify the defining characteristics of a philosophical group with much greater precision than is possible for an artistic group—one need only look at the views that provided the original impetus for the formation of the school or movement as they were articulated by the founders and early adherents. As soon as there is significant deviation from these views as originally articulated, we are confronted with *different* movements that

may be considered as more or less closely related to the “mainline” movement, depending on the degree and/or type of theoretical similarity.

Furthermore, it has been remarked to me that necessary and sufficient conditions are too much to ask of any phenomenon that would be of interest to historians and/or social scientists. While I have some sympathy for this objection, it nonetheless seems to me that there is a type of inquiry which may legitimately demand these high standards of its object. Philosophers, qua philosophers, are neither historians nor social scientists, and while they may often study the same objects as these others, they hope to achieve a different kind of understanding of them, namely, *philosophical* understanding. Just what constitutes philosophical understanding is yet another controversial meta-issue. Still, there is a long tradition in philosophy that takes adequate philosophical understanding to consist in grasping the necessary and sufficient conditions (or properties, a.k.a. the essence) of a thing, and it is with this tradition that I shall take my stand in this essay.

2. The Contemporary Trend in Defining Analytic Philosophy

2.1. *The Call for Reformation*

Analytic philosophy seems to be nearing—and perhaps has already reached—a crucial moment in its history. Some would say that it is in a state of crisis (cf. Biletzki and Matar 1998, xi). Even such eminent analytic philosophers as Hilary Putnam and Jaakko Hintikka seem to feel that something is badly wrong with its present state. Putnam, for example, has admitted to “a conviction that the present situation in [analytic] philosophy is one that calls for a revitalization, a renewal, of the subject” (1992, ix); and as recently as 1998 he was still wishing that analytic philosophy would change its course (Putnam 1998). Similarly, Hintikka has confessed: “I believe that we have to make a new start in practically all branches of philosophical studies including logic, foundations of mathematics, language theory, epistemology, and philosophical methodology” and “I strongly believe that the survival of analytic philosophy depends on philosophers’ acknowledgement and utilization of [the opportunities for *constructive* philosophy to be found in Wittgenstein’s later thought]” (1998, 260).

What Putnam and Hintikka are calling for is nothing short of a reformation of analytic philosophy. The goal of reformation—as opposed to revolution, say—is to preserve and better some system or order (an institution, a tradition, and so on) by eliminating those of its characteristics that stand in the way of its being what it ought. To do this responsibly and with any hope of success requires a careful and accurate assessment of the order to be reformed. Its essence, so to speak,

must be distinguished from its accidents, and the culpable accidents must then be distinguished from the innocent; for if we eliminate an essential feature of the order, we fail to preserve it and hence fail truly to reform it, while if we eliminate innocent accidents instead of guilty ones, we fail to achieve the aim of reformation.

Clearly, the present situation is one that calls for a careful consideration of the nature of analytic philosophy. But, since analytic philosophy is a historical phenomenon, its nature must be investigated historically. When we seek to answer the question, What is analytic philosophy? we must not limit our investigation to what now goes by that name; for analytic philosophy, considered as a recognized philosophical school or movement, has been with us for roughly a century now. We must include in our batch of samples from which we must distill, as it were, the essence of analytic philosophy not only contemporary representatives of the analytic school but also historical representatives. Thus it is not surprising that, as the need for an adequate characterization of analytic philosophy has increased, so have the number of publications on its history (for example, Corrado 1975; Baker and Hacker 1984; Cohen 1986; Hylton 1990; Charlton 1991; Coffa 1991; Griffin 1991; Dummett 1993; Clarke 1997; Føllesdal 1997; Monk 1997; Hacker 1997, 1998; Capaldi 2000; Stroll 2000; Hanna 2001; Soames 2003; and others).

2.2. Definitions of Analytic Philosophy

Perhaps the most important discovery to come out of this recent swell of research is that traditional ways of defining analytic philosophy are inadequate. These traditional ways include defining it in terms of antipsychologism in logic, the rejection of traditional metaphysics, the view that analysis, or some particular type of analysis (for example, logical analysis), is the only acceptable—or at least the preferred—method for philosophical research, and especially the view that analytic philosophy was born in the linguistic turn, which event is itself variously understood, sometimes as the adoption of logic or the philosophy of language—rather than metaphysics or epistemology—as “first philosophy,” sometimes as the view that philosophy is, from beginning to end, a linguistic enterprise, and so on. In order to show that these views fail to define analytic philosophy, one need only demonstrate, for each view, that either there is at least one philosopher who accepts it and clearly is not a member of the analytic school or there is at least one philosopher who does not accept it and clearly is a member of the analytic school. Hacker (1998, 4–14), quite successfully in my opinion, does this for all of these traditional “marks” of analytic philosophy, while others (for example, Monk 1997 and Hylton 1998) have done so for one or another of them.

In the face of the inadequacy of these traditional definitions, contemporary philosophers have proposed new ones. Cohen has suggested that the unity of analytic philosophy is to be found in the fact that the problems analytic philosophers are interested in “are all, in one way or another, normative problems about reasons and reasoning” (Cohen 1986, 10f.). But certainly interest in normative problems about reasons and reasoning is not unique to those who are commonly taken to be analytic philosophers. Cohen himself admits that, on his definition, analytic philosophy turns out to be “a strand in the total history of western philosophy from Socrates onwards rather than just a modern movement” (1986, 49).

But this is not how analytic philosophy is ordinarily understood. To the contrary, it is ordinarily understood to have originated in a decisive break with “philosophy in the great tradition” sometime around the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, by the middle of the twentieth century analytic philosophy was widely believed to have brought about a revolution in philosophy. That is to say, the birth of analytic philosophy is ordinarily thought of as being not merely the beginning of yet another philosophical school but the beginning of a new era in philosophy at large. In fact, it is sometimes remarked that philosophy has undergone two great revolutions in its history: first, the Cartesian revolution in which epistemology unseated ontology as the primary or fundamental field of philosophical inquiry and, second, the so-called linguistic turn of the early twentieth century, in which language came to be seen as the proper subject matter of philosophy, and it is generally accepted that the rise of what is now called “analytic philosophy” is closely connected with this second revolution (see, for example, Clarke 1997).

The revolutionary character of analytic philosophy was no accident; the express goal of many early analysts was to effect a fundamental change in the way philosophy was done. This revolutionary character was central to the early analysts’ self-image—as Hacker has observed, “Each phase of the analytic movement [until 1970] was motivated by a revolutionary fervor. The protagonists passionately believed that they were ridding philosophy of intellectual pretensions, clearing the Augean stables of accumulated refuse, and putting the subject on a fresh footing” (1998, 24f.). One important effect of recent scholarship is that it has enabled us to see the important differences among the “microrevolutions” within the analytic movement. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that analytic philosophy was once popularly thought to have brought about a “macrorevolution” in philosophy at large, and that the various phases of analytic philosophy were popularly taken to be phases of one and the same movement precisely because they were understood to be working within the parameters of the new regime instituted by this macrorevolution. Now this revolution, this fundamental break with the past, is usually understood to have taken place around the turn of the twentieth century.

Thus, insofar as one's topic is analytic philosophy as it is ordinarily understood, its historical reality must be seen as limited to the twentieth century and later.

Nonetheless, a number of recent authors have followed Cohen in defining analytic philosophy in ways that detach it from its turn of the twentieth century origin. Føllesdal, for example, characterizes it as philosophy with a strong commitment to argument and justification (as opposed to the kind of philosophy done by, e.g., Heidegger and Derrida, which relies mainly on rhetoric rather than clear argument) (Føllesdal 1997). He frankly admits that his definition makes, e.g., Aristotle, Descartes, and perhaps even Thomas Aquinas count as analytic philosophers.

Charlton's characterization (Charlton 1991) also ends up losing the distinctive character of analytic philosophy as a twentieth-century phenomenon. First, Charlton suggests that what unifies analytic philosophy is that analytic philosophers

go to conferences together, read and write for the same journals and examine each other's pupils. As a result, they have a consensus about what is and what is not a satisfactory treatment of a topic. They also have some agreement (though it falls short of perfect unanimity) about what topics are fit for philosophical treatment. [Charlton 1991, 5]

However, mere co-attendance at conferences and the other kinds of socioacademic interaction are not sufficient to account for the unity of analytic philosophy considered as a philosophical school. One can easily imagine, and it is not too hard to find in historical and even present reality, members of different philosophical schools involved in the kind of communal professional life that Charlton describes. These features account for a kind of sociological unity, but philosophical unity must be accounted for in terms of theoretical positions taken.

Thus, as Charlton himself seems to suggest, it is the agreement on substantive issues that constitutes the unity of analytic philosophy. The two areas of agreement Charlton mentions are: (1) agreement about what constitutes a satisfactory treatment of a topic and (2) agreement about what topics are fit for philosophical treatment. With regard to the former, it is noteworthy that Charlton does not go on to discuss, nor does he so much as state, the supposed agreed-upon criteria for satisfactory philosophical treatment. The idea of consensus on this point is left as vague as the idea of analytic philosophy itself. With regard to the latter, Charlton does have something to say. He suggests that analytic philosophers are united in their interest in the following four categories: (1) things basic to logic and mathematics, for example, existence, truth, and number; (2) things basic to physical science, for example, time, change, and causation; (3) good and evil, their varieties, and the nature of the difference between them; and (4) "mental processes, states and dispositions, especially the

most general notions of belief, desire, skill, purpose and self-awareness or consciousness.” But then he goes on to say that “history reveals a single philosophical tradition” (1991, 11), which consists in an ongoing discussion of these issues. Thus Charlton fails to explain why or how analytic philosophy is to be distinguished from other schools of philosophy, since he seems to make analytic philosophy continuous with the whole history of philosophy.

2.3. The Contemporary Trend

These examples illustrate what seems to be a growing trend in contemporary attempts to define analytic philosophy, namely, defining it in such a way that the era of analytic philosophy is made to begin well before the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. In a way, this is not new. In the heyday of analytic philosophy, a number of analytic philosophers made efforts to represent analytic philosophy as continuous with the whole history of philosophy by assimilating the history of philosophy to their movement. Gilbert Ryle, for one, claimed that “philosophical arguments have always largely, if not entirely, consisted in attempts to thrash out ‘what it means to say so and so’” (1971, 39). Arthur Pap, one of the first to attempt to analyze analytic philosophy as a unified movement or school, believed that

a history of analytic philosophy, if it should ever be written, would not have to begin with the twentieth century. It could go all the way back to Socrates, since the Socratic “dialectic” is nothing else but a method of clarifying meanings, applied primarily to moral terms. Again, much of Aristotle’s writing consists of logical analysis. . . . It is especially the so-called British empiricists, Locke, Hume, Berkeley and their descendants, who practiced philosophy primarily as an analytic method. To be sure, much of what they wrote belongs to psychology, but if that is deducted there still remains a conscientious preoccupation with questions of meaning, full of lasting contributions to analytic philosophy. [1949, vii–viii]

Still, there is a difference between this earlier trend and the contemporary one. It consists in the fact that, whereas the earlier trend made its case for continuity by assimilating the history of philosophy to analytic philosophy, the contemporary trend does so by assimilating analytic philosophy to the history of philosophy—that is, it is no longer our philosophical ancestors who are construed as being concerned, as analytic philosophers once were, with logico-linguistic issues; instead, it is analytic philosophers who are construed as being concerned, as were certain figures in the history of philosophy, with normative problems about reasons and reasoning, argument and justification, causation, good and evil, mental states, and so on. The earlier trend died out along with the linguistic philosophy whose proponents provided its motive force.

The fate of the contemporary trend, however, is yet undecided. The time is now at hand for those who would oppose it to do so. In the following section, I shall explain what I take the error of the contemporary trend to be.

3. The Problem with the Contemporary Trend

3.1. *The Ordinary Conception of Analytic Philosophy*

It was once generally accepted among analytic philosophers that one way—possibly the best or only way—to understand a concept is to examine how people actually use the term that expresses it. In this section I shall briefly examine how the term *analytic philosophy* is ordinarily used today.

Hacker has correctly observed that “the term ‘analytic philosophy’ is a fairly new one.” Concerning it, he says:

There is no point in trying to follow Wittgenstein’s advice . . . : “don’t think, but look!” (1958: 66), i.e. examine how the expression in question is in fact used. For the term does not have a well-established use that commands general consensus. Here we are free to mold the concept as we please; indeed, arguably not free, but required to do so. [1998, 14]

I disagree. It does not follow from the fact that the term does not have a well-established use that *commands* general consensus that we may mold the concept as we please. It simply reveals that, as it is ordinarily used, “analytic philosophy” is a vague term. As such, it is in need of what is sometimes called a *precising definition* (see Yagisawa 1995); and in giving a *precising definition*, far from being free to mold the vague concept as we please, we are constrained by the clear facts concerning the ordinary use of the vague term. What are the clear facts concerning the ordinary use of “analytic philosophy”?

Perhaps the first thing to note is that there are senses of “analytic philosophy” which are not vague, and do not stand in need of *precising definition*. In what may be the broadest sense of the term, “analytic philosophy” can be used as a descriptive phrase to pick out any brand of philosophy that analyzes wholes of some sort into constituents of some sort. I’ll call this the *adjectival sense* of “analytic philosophy.” It is in this sense that Shadworth Hodgson, in the first volume of *Mind*, discusses analytic as opposed to synthetic and constructive philosophy (Hodgson 1876a–c). However, it is rare in contemporary parlance to see “analytic philosophy” used in the *adjectival sense*, where “analytic” serves as a mere descriptor. Instead, “analytic” usually functions just like the words “scholastic” and “process” and “Eleatic” when they occur before “philosophy,” and the whole term functions as a proper name—the

name of a type or school of philosophy.¹ Thus Charlton, for example, describes the subject of his book as “the variety of philosophy favored by the majority of philosophers working in the English-speaking countries” (1991, 2). Used this way, the antithesis of analytic philosophy is not synthetic or constructive philosophy but Continental philosophy; and it is not uncommon to see contemporary analytic philosophy characterized by contrasting it with Continental philosophy, as Charlton indeed does, saying that the two differ mainly “in how they conceive the subject and think it should be conducted” (1991, 2f.). Thus there is a sense in which “analytic philosophy” refers to a school of philosophy, a distinctive way of doing philosophy, the way favored by most philosophers in English-speaking countries. I’ll call this the *nominative sense* of analytic philosophy. Now, it seems clear that the “crisis,” the call for reformation, and the surge of historical interest that has arisen alongside these have to do with analytic philosophy in this sense. What, then, are the clear facts concerning the use of “analytic philosophy” in its ordinary, nominative sense?

First, “analytic philosophy” is ordinarily used to refer to a school of philosophy that now exists. The fact that it is used to distinguish the way in which most *contemporary* philosophers in English-speaking countries are *now* doing philosophy from the way in which *contemporary* Continental philosophers are *now* doing philosophy is sufficient to demonstrate this. But recall also Charlton’s attempt to explain the unity of analytic philosophy in terms of shared social activities and structures. He was not there talking about some bygone form of social life, but about the present social life of analytic philosophers.

Second, “analytic philosophy” is ordinarily used to refer to a school that originated around the turn of the twentieth century. This is suggested by a number of facts. First, there simply was no school of analytic philosophy prior to the twentieth century—that is, prior to the early twentieth century, there was nothing in philosophy to which the term *analytic* applied as part of a proper name. It is difficult to determine exactly when this use of “analytic philosophy” entered the philosophical lexicon, but it is clear that it did not happen before the twentieth century. It is also clear that, when it did enter the lexicon, it was not primarily as a name for any pre-twentieth-century phenomenon. This use of “analytic philosophy” emerged in order to meet a need, namely, the need to discuss a certain sort of philosophical fervor which had been stimulated most directly by the work of Moore and Russell, and of which they too, perhaps, were part. Thus, as D. S. Clarke has observed, “the term

¹ I do not mean to commit to a “Millian” view of proper names, only to the phenomenologically obvious fact that whatever descriptive content the terms constituting a proper name may normally have, it usually plays no essential role in their function qua name. Indeed, the descriptive content may drop completely out of sight. To borrow Kripke’s example, “Dartmouth” need not, and usually does not, bring to mind *a place at the mouth of the river Dart* in order to do its work as a name (Kripke 1972, 26).

‘analytic philosophy’ seems to have been introduced in the late 1940s as a label standing for the radically new approach to philosophy then dominating discussion in Great Britain and the United States” (1997, 1).

Clarke is right about the designation of the term, but wrong about the date of its introduction. Perhaps it is true that it did not become part of the working vernacular of philosophers until the late 1940s; however, while no one has been able to say when and by whom “analytic philosophy” was first used in the ordinary, nominative sense, it is clear that it was used in approximately that sense well before the late 1940s. In 1936 we see Ernest Nagel using “analytic philosophy” to designate a set of “tendencies still in the process of development” (1936a, 5).² Among these tendencies Nagel includes a tendency toward impatience with “philosophic systems built in the traditionally grand manner,” a tendency toward treating traditional philosophical problems as pseudoproblems generated by the misuse of language, a tendency to be uninterested in the history of philosophy and, instead, to have a very focused interest in questions of logic and method, and a tendency to conceive of philosophy’s task as the clarification of meanings via an analytic method. Among the leading figures whose work embodied these tendencies Nagel includes Moore, Wittgenstein, the members of the Vienna Circle, and a group of Polish philosophers the only member of which widely known in contemporary analytic circles is Tarski. Russell is present as an instrumental background figure. Now it is noteworthy that *all* of the tendencies Nagel meant to pick out by using “analytic philosophy” are to this day associated with analytic philosophy as ordinarily understood.³ It is also noteworthy both that Nagel includes *no pre-twentieth-century figures* in his discussion of the relevant tendencies and that most of the figures he includes in his discussion are to this day ordinarily taken to have played pivotal roles in the founding and/or development of analytic philosophy. Thus there is a high degree of similarity, suggesting a historical continuity, between Nagel’s conception of analytic philosophy in 1936 and the ordinary conception of analytic philosophy in contemporary philosophical culture. There is, of course, an important difference between these two conceptions. Though Nagel uses “analytic philosophy” to pick out something far more restricted than analytic philosophy in the adjectival sense, he does not take the referent of “analytic philosophy” to be a school of philosophy in any strong sense of “school,” with the fairly rigorous ground of unity and the more-or-less deliberate cohesion

² In correspondence received after the present article had been submitted, Michael Beany brought to my attention an even earlier use of “analytic philosophy” in the nominative sense. It occurs in chapter 7 of Collingwood’s *An Essay on Philosophical Method* (1933).

³ This is not to say that analytic philosophy continues to embody all of these tendencies (though it certainly continues to embody some), only that the characteristics toward which analytic philosophers tended in 1936 are even now popularly accepted as indeed having been characteristics of analytic philosophy at some point in its history.

such a sense might imply. However, this divergence from what has become the ordinary conception of analytic philosophy is easily explained by proposing that as Nagel's mere tendencies developed, they solidified into a school—at least in the popular mind—so that by 1949 we see Arthur Pap using “analytic philosophy” to refer to a “school of thought” (1949, ix).⁴

Additionally, one cannot explain why contemporary analytic philosophy is called “analytic” unless we accept that there is a certain continuity between it and the aforementioned fervor over the work of Moore and Russell. If the contemporary way of doing philosophy which is favored in English-speaking countries and which stands opposed to Continental philosophy did not already have a name, words like “rational” and “logical” would be better than “analytic,” as Cohen's and Føllesdal's definitions suggest. But it does have a name—a name grounded in the methodological predilections and the overt terminology of these two great twentieth-century figures.

Third, with the possible exception of Frege, there is no pre-twentieth-century philosopher who is ordinarily thought of as belonging to the school of analytic philosophy. I suspect that most contemporary philosophers will be able to verify this for themselves by considering whether they can think of, say, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, or any other pre-twentieth-century philosopher (with the possible exception of Frege) as an analytic philosopher in precisely the same sense that they normally think of, say, Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, or Kripke as an analytic philosopher. But also, the fact that many analytic philosophers conceive of their school as a twentieth-century movement has been noted by others working on the history and nature of analytic philosophy. Hacker notes that there is “a broad consensus, but not uniform agreement, on who are to be deemed analytic philosophers” (1998, 4). Michael Corrado has pointed out that though analytic philosophers are generally unable to identify their school positively,

nevertheless, when analysis is opposed to other important contemporary traditions—phenomenology, for example—philosophers know pretty well who is to count as an analyst and who is not. The term *analyst* applies, in this very loose sense, to the majority of the important philosophers in the English-speaking countries, and in Scandinavia. They are philosophers who

⁴ Pap conceived of this school as reaching back beyond the twentieth century to include the British empiricists, Socrates, and Aristotle. Arguably, though, this is an illegitimate extension of the term *analytic philosophy* made on the basis of a radically misguided *linguistic* interpretation of pre-twentieth-century figures. As the revolutionary character of the setting in which analytic philosophy arose suggests, and as the evidence from Nagel's article shows, the term's primary and original use was to refer to a twentieth-century phenomenon. It seems to me that Peirce's injunction to “resent any wresting of [philosophical terms] from their original meanings,” quoted at the head of my article, would be particularly applicable here.

have been influenced by Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, the logical positivists, especially Rudolph Carnap, and American pragmatists, especially C. I. Lewis, or else they have been influenced by men who were influenced by those philosophers. [1975, xii]

Corrado's first generation of analytic influence consists entirely of twentieth-century figures. Føllesdal begins his 1997 essay by citing the customary division between analytic and Continental philosophy, and, within analytic philosophy, between "two principal traditions: one inspired by logic, of which Bolzano, Frege, and Russell are the early main protagonists, and one oriented toward ordinary language, in which G. E. Moore, the later Wittgenstein, and J. L. Austin played a central part" (1997, 1). Føllesdal's inclusion of Bolzano is unusual; apart from this, his "customary" view of analytic philosophy is quite standard.

These facts about the origin and use of "analytic philosophy" suggest that, ordinarily, what people are talking about, or what they have in mind, when they talk about analytic philosophy is at least *a school of philosophy which now exists, and which traces its roots to the turn of the twentieth century*. This is not the total content of the ordinary conception of analytic philosophy, but it nonetheless seems to be an essential part of that content. This essential component, however minimal, must not be disregarded as we investigate the history and nature of analytic philosophy.

3.2. *The Current Historical Interest in Analytic Philosophy*

That its turn of the twentieth century origin is of fundamental importance to our thinking about analytic philosophy is further supported by the fact that the contemporary historical interest in analytic philosophy is, by and large, an interest in analytic philosophy understood as a twentieth-century phenomenon. This is apparent from the fact that the majority of authors who write on the history and/or nature of the contemporary school favored in English-speaking countries, which stands opposed to Continental philosophy, and which goes by the name "analytic philosophy," do not take their research back much further than the early twentieth century. Soames begins with Moore. Corrado begins his work with the Russell of *Principia Mathematica*, and with the school of logical atomism. Dummett begins with Frege, but he acknowledges that his work is not a proper history of analytic philosophy precisely because he leaves out twentieth-century figures like Moore and Russell.

Nowhere is recognition of the limits of the current interest in analytic philosophy more apparent than in the work of P. M. S. Hacker. In a 1997 essay, after noting the difficulty of finding unifying tenets among twentieth-century analytic philosophers, Hacker advocates using "analytic philosophy" in what I have called the adjectival sense. Used this way, it captures philosophers from every era, from at least Plato onward.

However, when he goes from defining the movement to giving an exposition of its history, he limits his topic to what he calls “twentieth-century analytic philosophy” or “modern analytic philosophy”; and this, he says, begins with Russell and Moore around the turn of the century. This arbitrarily imposed historical limit reflects the limit of historical interest.

In a later essay (Hacker 1998), Hacker seems to recant his position on using “analytic philosophy” adjectivally. There, after dismissing traditional ways of characterizing analytic philosophy, he suggests that analytic philosophy is best regarded as a dynamic historical movement, divisible into various phases, each of which partly overlaps with the one before it. Using the analogy of a tapestry to illustrate his view, he says:

Most (but not all) of the threads out of which the tapestry of analytic philosophy was woven can be traced back to the more or less remote past. What is most distinctive about the tapestry are the ways in which the various threads are interwoven and the character of the designs. These altered over time, some threads being either abandoned and replaced by new ones or differently used, and others becoming more prominent in the weave than hitherto, some patterns dominating one period, but sinking into the background or disappearing altogether in later periods. [1998, 14f.]

Taken one way, this characterization fails to distinguish analytic philosophy from philosophy at large. After all, the whole history of philosophy involves the dynamic interaction of ideas across generations of philosophers, and thus can be regarded as a dynamic historical movement; and, clearly, the figure of the tapestry fits the whole history of philosophy, or any other period out of the whole history of philosophy, as well as it does the history of analytic philosophy. The question that needs to be answered is: How are we to pick out just that section of the tapestry of the whole history of philosophy which is analytic philosophy? Here, one might turn to Hacker’s mention of “the ways in which the various threads are interwoven and the character of the designs,” taking these figures to refer to intrinsic features of analytic philosophy that serve to unify its various phases and to distinguish the unified whole from other parts of the tapestry of philosophy as a whole. But then it is difficult to see what these figures could refer to besides various theoretical positions adopted by analytic philosophers, the likes of which have served as part of the *definiens* of many a failed attempt at defining analytic philosophy in terms of characteristic marks. That there are any such defining marks Hacker flatly denies; thus I do not think that this is how Hacker intends his characterization to be taken.

When Hacker speaks of analytic philosophy as a dynamic historical movement, I believe he means to characterize it not merely as a dynamic movement that took place (as all movements do) in or across history but as a dynamic movement that took place over a *specific* period in history.

Later in the same essay, after insisting contra our initial interpretation of the tapestry metaphor that “there are no defining features that characterize the Analytic movement in all its phases,” Hacker suggests that it is “most illuminating and least misleading to employ the term ‘analytic philosophy’ as the name of [the] intermingling strain of ideas distinctive of our century [that is, the twentieth century]” (1998, 24). No longer does he advocate using “analytic philosophy” in the adjectival sense, for this casts the historical net too broadly. Instead, he wants its referent to be a specifically twentieth-century phenomenon. Thus, when Hacker claims that “the unity of Analytic philosophy in the 20th century is historical” (1998, 24), what he seems to mean is that all phases of twentieth-century analytic philosophy have in common only that they occurred within the twentieth century. His view seems to be that we are to pick out analytic philosophy’s section from the tapestry of the whole history of philosophy by superimposing a time line on the tapestry and focusing only on that portion which falls within the space allotted to the twentieth century. We are then to ask ourselves what the most distinctive features of this portion of the tapestry are, as compared to any other portion; and then, certainly, things like the use of formal logic, the emphasis on language or linguistic analysis as having a primary place in philosophy, and so forth, will stand out. They will stand out as distinctive, but they are not definitive—they will not of themselves unify the movement.

Hacker’s 1998 position is, perhaps more than anything else, illustrative of the fact that the contemporary historical interest is an interest in analytic philosophy understood as a twentieth-century phenomenon, for it is a huge concession to that interest. Apart from that interest there seems to be no good reason to impose what must be, on Hacker’s view, arbitrary temporal limits on a set of ideas whose origins often are located far prior to the twentieth century.

Interest can be a rather arbitrary thing; thus, it is important to emphasize that, in the case of the current historical interest in analytic philosophy, the limits of that interest are not arbitrary. Rather, they are dictated by our precritical or unprecisified concept of analytic philosophy. This precritical concept is nothing other than the ordinary concept of analytic philosophy, with its requirement that analytic philosophy be regarded as having originated around the turn of the twentieth century. This is the governing notion of analytic philosophy among those for whom, and often among those by whom, the works I have cited were written. Take, for example, Corrado’s choice to begin his historical account of analytic philosophy with Russell. This is not an arbitrary starting point. Corrado counts Russell as one of the *founders* of what he calls “this type [that is, the analytic type] of philosophy” (1975, 3). Thus it appears that Corrado conceives of analytic philosophy as a school of philosophy founded in the early twentieth century.

3.3. *The Problem as Equivocation*

Given that there is a sense of “analytic philosophy” such as I have described, and given that the recent proliferation of work on the history of analytic philosophy has been motivated largely by an interest in analytic philosophy in that sense, so that we can understand the purpose of such work, in part at least, as the attempt to provide a precisising definition of “analytic philosophy” in the nominative sense (or the attempt to clarify the concept of analytic philosophy in that sense), I am now in a position to explain what is wrong with the contemporary trend in defining analytic philosophy.

Essentially, the error of the contemporary trend is equivocation. This equivocation takes place in the context not of an argument but of an historical investigation. The change in meaning takes place as the object of investigation changes from a twentieth-century phenomenon to a pre-twentieth-century phenomenon. The following story illustrates how this kind of equivocation functions. It used to be believed that witches caused various sorts of mischief, including disease. When plague struck, one might have gone on a witch hunt in an attempt to extinguish the plague at its source. Witches, of course, don’t exist (or if they do, they are not what they are popularly thought to be). Arguably, no one has ever had the opportunity to acquire the kind of knowledge requisite to so much as identify a witch. How, then, would a witch hunter know when he or she had found a witch? How would one judge whether the hunt had been a success or a failure? The witch hunt would immediately run aground on the shoal of Meno’s paradox but for the clear fact that witch hunters did have *some* concept of a witch. The concept was a loose and popular one—it was based not on careful study of witches but mainly upon imagination and tradition. As such, the concept is not epistemically respectable, but it is enough to get a witch hunt going.

Of course, it was eventually discovered that germs were the real culprits. Now, when germs were discovered, no one was tempted to claim that witches had been discovered, and that they were just a lot smaller than anyone had previously realized. Instead, the belief that witches caused disease was abandoned, and the belief that germs caused disease replaced it. Presumably this has something to do with the fact that germs are just too different from what the loose and popular concept of a witch required a witch to be. If it had turned out that there were people causing disease through some mystical means, but that they did not ride broomsticks, the loose and popular witch concept could have been revised and applied to them. But revising the loose and popular witch concept to fit germs is too much. There is not enough of the original concept left over to justify characterizing the new concept as a revised version of the old. It is a new concept altogether.

Curiously, though, much contemporary research into the history of analytic philosophy seems to follow a different rule. Research into analytic philosophy begins, much like a witch hunt, with a loose, precritical conception of analytic philosophy, based not on careful study but on popular opinion. Popular opinion, as we have seen, takes analytic philosophy to be a school of philosophy that now exists, and that traces its roots to the early twentieth century. This conception is quite general, and therefore vague with regard to the detailed content of the concept of analytic philosophy; but it is enough to get research into analytic philosophy going. Now, what contemporary philosophers have found is that there is no feature or set of features shared by all and only those philosophers who count as analysts on the loose and popular, or ordinary, conception of analytic philosophy. This is tantamount to finding that there are no grounds for holding that these philosophers are members of the same school, to finding that there is nothing to which the ordinary conception of analytic philosophy corresponds. The researcher into analytic philosophy is, at this point, much like the witch hunter who finds that there is nothing to which his concept of a witch corresponds, and that the real cause of disease is something altogether different. It is at this point that the witch hunter revises not his concept of witches but his belief in witches—he rejects the existence of witches and accepts the existence of germs. Contemporary historians of analytic philosophy, on the other hand, seem to retain their belief in the existence of a school of analytic philosophy, and to present themselves as merely revising the concept of it. However, as with witch and germ concepts, this involves too great a change to count as a mere revision. What we have here is an unheralded replacement of one concept with another, which gives rise to a subtle equivocation.

Michael Corrado's book gives us very good evidence for supposing that there is indeed an overlooked equivocation inherent in the contemporary trend. I have noted that Corrado conceives of the subject of his book as a type of philosophy founded by Russell, among others. This suggests that he is using "analytic philosophy" in the nominative sense, and thus that it is analytic philosophy on the ordinary conception that he intends to investigate. However, without rejecting or revising the claim that Russell was a founder of this type of philosophy, at the end of his book Corrado concludes that "analytic philosophy is, at its best, just good philosophy, and not in any deep way distinguishable from any other sort of philosophy" (1975, 128–29). Now these two claims appear to be inconsistent. If Russell is a founder of analytic philosophy, analytic philosophy could not have existed before Russell; but surely philosophy, even good philosophy, existed before Russell. And if analytic philosophy is not distinguishable in any deep way from any other sort of philosophy, what exactly did Russell found? Founding something involves bringing into being something that has not been before; thus, in order to speak of

something as being founded by a particular person at a particular time, it seems that what is founded must be distinguishable from other things that came before it. Corrado speaks of Russell as founding a type of philosophy, namely, analytic philosophy, but then he denies that analytic philosophy is distinguishable from any other kind of philosophy. This is tantamount to saying that analytic philosophy is and is not a school of philosophy that exists now and traces its roots to the early twentieth century. There is an alternative, however, to supposing that Corrado has fallen into the blatant error of self-contradiction. Instead, we may suppose that he has committed the more subtle error of equivocation.

Corrado is not alone in this. Even when a contemporary work on analytic philosophy does not contain the kind of apparent contradiction we see in Corrado's book, there is often a striking incongruity between an author's choice of scope—which, as I have pointed out, rarely extends much beyond the beginning of the twentieth century—and his or her choice of definition. Thus, with almost perfect unanimity, contemporary authors begin with a precritical notion of analytic philosophy that makes it out to be a contemporary school of philosophy that traces its roots to the early twentieth century. As they attempt to clarify the concept of analytic philosophy, they gradually coax themselves away from the original notion, ultimately breaking with it altogether and replacing it with something that does not at all fit within the parameters of the original, all the while using the same term to refer to what is given in the two incompatible notions. Clearly, this pattern is a model of equivocation.

What is ultimately at issue here is the propriety of exercising "charity" in interpretation, of choosing to regard all occurrences of the same term as at some level synonymous. The choice to be charitable in interpretation comes into play in situations where people use the same term with differing conceptions of what that term refers to. Arguably, differing conceptions of the referent could require different referents, in which case those who use the term could not be understood to be talking about the same thing. However, there are cases where it seems reasonable to regard differing conceptions as nonetheless being conceptions of the same thing. Hilary Putnam, for example, gives the case of the word *electron*: in 1900 it was believed that electrons move in trajectories around the nucleus, but by 1934 it was believed that electrons have no trajectory. Here we have a choice to regard scientists in 1900 and scientists in 1934 (or even the same scientist, for example, Bohr, in 1900 and in 1934) as talking about the same thing or different things when they used "electron." Of course, it is generally accepted without question that the difference between "electron" in 1900 and "electron" in 1934 is not a difference in reference but a difference in beliefs about or conceptions of the same referent. On the other hand, Putnam has argued that there are cases where charity is not warranted. He considers, for example, the possibility that phlogiston really does exist, that what some scientists once called "phlogiston" is

what contemporary scientists call “valence electrons.” However, as Putnam points out, “we are not prepared to say, ‘Phlogiston theorists were talking about valence electrons, but they had some of the properties wrong’” (1988, 14). To do so, he says, would require excessive charity.

It is a difficult thing to specify the conditions under which charity is warranted and those under which it is not. Nonetheless, we seem to be able to recognize warrant or lack thereof in particular cases. Putnam includes this ability among those seemingly intuitional powers that constitute Fodor’s “general intelligence.” Leaving this difficulty aside, and relying on “general intelligence,” I want to suggest that accepting the contemporary trend in defining analytic philosophy requires something like the excessive charity required to treat references to phlogiston as references to valence electrons. Indeed, defining analytic philosophy in such a way that it ends up including pre-twentieth-century philosophers is like going on a witch hunt that culminates in the discovery of germs, and claiming that the witch hunt was successful. Not only is it reasonable to feel perplexed and dissatisfied in the face of such an outcome, it would be remarkable if we did not. When the villagers send out the hunting party, they believe that success involves a witch being brought back to the village and burnt at the stake. If the hunting party returns with only a vial of liquid vaccine and a syringe, moves about the village injecting all the inhabitants, and then claims to have successfully accomplished its task, it would be very strange indeed if the villagers failed to realize that something extraordinary was afoot.

4. Concluding Remarks

The allusion to Kant’s *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* in the title of this essay is, of course, intentional. In his *Prolegomena*, Kant was attempting to salvage an opportunity for metaphysical reform and philosophical progress that was in danger of being missed. It was in danger of being missed because the full import of those insights that afforded the opportunity had not been widely perceived. We are currently in a similar situation. Contemporary work on the history and nature of analytic philosophy has made apparent that there is nothing unique to twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy capable of accounting for the unity of analytic philosophy considered as a genuinely *philosophical* detachment of some sort (for example, a school, a movement, and so forth). This would seem to indicate that there are no grounds for maintaining that there exists a philosophical school the likes of which analytic philosophy is popularly taken to be. If this possibility were taken seriously, it would stand to open new avenues not only for understanding the history of analytic philosophy but also for shaping its future.

With regard to the history of analytic philosophy, it would require that a whole new set of questions be asked. An important part of historical

work on analytic philosophy would then consist in explaining how it came to be popularly believed that Nagel's set of tendencies solidified into a monolithic philosophical school when in fact they did not, why the now obvious differences among the various figures and "subschoools" of analytic philosophy—the very differences that now prevent us from accepting traditional definitions of analytic philosophy—were not perceived, or at least were not perceived as being substantial enough to prohibit regarding these figures and groups as members of the same school, and so on. The attempt to answer such questions might lead us to investigate such issues as what, in the context of the main currents of Anglo-American philosophy in the twentieth century, was taken to be important, methodologically and/or substantively, in determining one's philosophical orientations and allegiances, and whether there were any general views (perhaps about the nature of philosophy, or philosophical knowledge, or knowledge in general) that might explain the widespread employment of a standard of appraisal capable not only of allowing but also of *leading* people to disregard or play down what we are now beginning to see as important differences. Perhaps most important of all, if there is no such thing as analytic philosophy is popularly conceived to be, we would need to ask if it still makes sense to talk about analytic philosophy at all. Of course there is still a need to distinguish among the varieties of philosophy prominent in the contemporary scene; but, as has been pointed out, "analytic philosophy" is not the most perspicuous of names for the varieties of philosophy it currently designates. Moreover, given the history of its usage, "analytic philosophy" carries with it baggage that only serves to obscure what is really at issue in the contemporary scene; so, not only is it not the most perspicuous of names, it might be one of the least perspicuous.

Clearly, this last point reveals that taking this possibility seriously could have important consequences for the future of analytic philosophy. While a growing acknowledgment of the "crisis" and need for reformation in analytic philosophy is a hopeful development insofar as it suggests that a season of change is on the horizon in those contexts where the analytic tradition is dominant, it remains to be seen whether this change will count as progress, regress, or—perhaps even worse than regress—an apparent change only, masking a deeper stagnation. Indeed, if it is reasonable to question whether it makes sense to talk about analytic philosophy on the ordinary conception as anything more than an illusion, it is also reasonable to question whether analytic philosophy is the sort of thing that can be reformed. If it is not, then any attempt to reform it will be a dead-end effort, and any belief that it has been successfully reformed will be as false as belief in the existence of the school itself.

In any case, in order to plot a clear course of progress we must have a clear view of the things that have hindered progress. Specifically, with regard to analytic philosophy, we must have a clear view of those things

which prevented what was once, in the eyes of many, a very promising philosophical program from living up to expectations, and which brought it to its current state of crisis. This is in part the task of research into the history and nature of analytic philosophy. However, the contemporary trend in defining analytic philosophy diminishes the likelihood of ever discovering the hindrances to analytic philosophy's success, since, by making analytic philosophy continuous with the whole history of philosophy, the contemporary trend detaches from the name "analytic philosophy" those features of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy which, in virtue of their revolutionary character, caused that name to become part of the philosophical lexicon. In this way it obscures the factors which brought analytic philosophy into existence, which governed its development, and which, arguably, offer the best clues as to what brought it to its current state of crisis.

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